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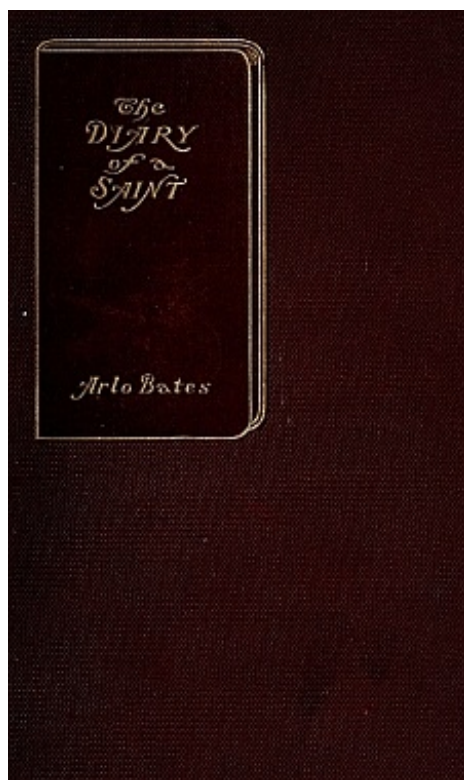
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THE DIARY OF A SAINT

BY

ARLO BATES

For many saints have lived and died, be sure,
Yet known no name for God.

FAITH'S TRAGEDY



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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I

JANUARY

January 1. How beautiful the world is! I might go on to say, and how commonplace this seems written down in a diary; but it is the thing I have been thinking. I have been standing ever so long at the window, and now that the curtains are shut I can see everything still. The moon is shining over the wide white sheets of snow, and the low meadows look far off and enchanted. The outline of the hills is clear against the sky, and the cedars on the lawn are almost green against the whiteness of the ground and the deep, blue-black sky. It is all so lovely that it somehow makes one feel happy and humble both at once.

It is a beautiful world, indeed, and yet last night—

But last night was another year, and the new begins in a better mood. I have shaken off the idiotic mawkishness of last night, and am more like what Father used to tell me to be when I was a mite of a girl: "A cheerful Ruth Privet, as right as a trivet." Though to be sure I do not know what being as right as a trivet is, any more than I did then. Last night, it is true, there were alleviating circumstances that might have been urged. For a week it had been drizzly, unseasonable weather that took all the snap out of a body's mental fibre; Mother had had one of her bad days, when the pain seemed too dreadful to bear, patient angel that she is; Kathie Thurston had been in one of her most despairing fits; and the Old Year looked so dreary behind, the New Year loomed so hopeless before, that there was some excuse for a girl who was tired to the bone with watching and worry if she did not feel exactly cheerful. I cannot allow, though, that it justified her in crying like a watering-pot, and smudging the pages of her diary until the whole thing was blurred like a composition written with tears in a primary school. I certainly cannot let this sort of thing happen again, and I am thoroughly ashamed that it happened once. I will remember that the last day Father lived he said he could trust me to be brave both for Mother and myself; and that I promised,—I promised.

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So last night may go, and be forgotten as soon as I can manage to forget it. To-night things are different. There has been a beautiful snow-fall, and the air is so crisp that when I went for a walk at sunset it seemed impossible ever to be sentimentally weak-kneed again; Mother is wonderfully comfortable; and the New Year began with a letter to say that George will be at home to-morrow. Mother is asleep like a child, the fire is in the best of spirits, and does the purring for itself and for Peter, who is napping with content expressed by every hair to the tip of his fluffy white tail. Even Hannah is singing in the kitchen a hymn that she thinks is cheerful, about

"Sa-a-a-acred, high, e-ter-er-er-nal noon."

It is evident that there is every opportunity to take a fresh start, and to conduct myself in the coming year with more self-respect.

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So much for New Year resolutions. I do not remember that I ever made one before; and very likely I shall never make one again. Now I must decide something about Kathie. I tried to talk with Mother about her, but Mother got so excited that I saw it would not do, and felt I must work the problem out with pen and paper as if it were a sum in arithmetic. It is not my business to attend to the theological education of the minister's daughter, especially as it is the Methodist minister's daughter, and he, with his whole congregation, thinks it rather doubtful whether it is not sinful for Kathie even to know so dangerous an unbeliever. I sometimes doubt whether my good neighbors in Tuskamuck would regard Tom Paine himself, who, Father used to say, lingers as the arch-heretic for all rural New England, with greater theological horror than they do me. It is fortunate that they do not dislike me personally, and they all loved Father in spite of his heresies. In this case I am not clear, on the other hand, that it is my duty to stand passive and see, without at least protesting, a sensitive, imaginative, delicate child driven to despair by the misery and terror of a creed. If Kathie had not come to me it would be different; but she has come. Time after time this poor little, precocious, morbid creature has run to me in such terror of hell-fire that I verily feared she would end by going frantic. Ten years old, and separate with conviction of original sin; and this so near the end of the nineteenth century, so-called of grace! Thus far I have contented myself with taking her into my arms, and just loving her into calmness; but she is getting beyond that. She is finding being petted so delightful that she is sure it must be a sin. She is like what I can fancy the most imaginative of the Puritan grandmothers to have been in their passionate childhood, in the days when the only recognized office of the imagination was to picture the terrors of hell. I so long for Father. If he were alive to talk to her, he could say the right word, and settle things. The Bible is very touching in its phrase, "as one whom his mother comforteth," but to me "whom his father comforteth" would have seemed to go even deeper; but then, there is Kathie's father, whose tenderness is killing her. I don't in the least doubt that he suffers as much as she does; but he loves her too much to risk damage to what he calls "her immortal soul." There is always a ring of triumph in his voice when he pronounces the phrase, as if he already were a disembodied spirit dilating in eternal and infinite glory. There is something finely noble in such a superstition.

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All this, however, does not bring me nearer to the end of my sum, for the answer of that ought to be what I shall do with Kathie. It would never do to push her into a struggle with the creeds, or to set her to arguing out the impossibility of her theology. She is too young and too morbid, and would end by supposing that in reasoning at all on the matter she had committed the unpardonable sin. Her father would not let her read stories unless they were Sunday-school books. Perhaps she might be allowed some of the more entertaining volumes of history; but she is too young for most of them. She should be reading about Red Riding-hood, and the White Cat, and the whole company of dear creatures immortal in fairy stories. I will look in the library, and see what there may be that would pass the conscientiously searching ordeal of her father's eye. If she can be given anything which will take her mind off of her spiritual condition for a while, that is all that may be done at present. I'll hunt up my old skates for her, too. A little more exercise in the open air will do a good deal for her humanly, and perhaps blow away some of the theology.

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Later. Hannah has been in to make her annual attack on my soul. I had almost forgotten her yearly missionary effort, so that when she appeared I said with the utmost cheerfulness and unconcern, "What is it, Hannah?" supposing that she wanted to know something about breakfast. I could see by the instant change in her expression that she regarded this as deliberate levity. She was so full of what she had come to say that it could not occur to her that I did not perceive it too.

Dear old Hannah! her face has always so droll an expression of mingled shyness and determination when, as she once said, she clears her skirts of blood-guiltiness concerning me. She stands in the doorway twisting her apron, and her formula is always the same:—

"Miss Ruth, I thought I'd take the liberty to say a word to you on this New Year's day."

"Yes, Hannah," I always respond, as if we had rehearsed the dialogue. "What is it?"

"It's another year, Miss Ruth, and your peace not made with God."

To me there is something touching in the fidelity with which she clings to the self-imposed performance of this evidently painful duty. She is distressfully shy about it,—she who is never shy about anything else in the world, so far as I can see. She feels that it is a "cross for her to bear," as she told me once, and I honor her for not shirking it. She thinks I regard it far more than I do. She judges my discomfort by her own, whereas in truth I am only uncomfortable for her. I never could understand why people are generally so afraid to speak of religious things, or why they dislike so to be spoken to about them. I mind Hannah's talking about my soul no more than I should mind her talking about my nose or my fingers; indeed, the little flavor of personality which would make that unpleasant is lacking when it comes to discussion about intangible things like the spirit, and so on the whole I mind the soul-talk less. I suppose really the shyness is part of the general reticence all we New Englanders have that makes it so hard to speak of anything which is deeply felt. Father used to say, I remember, that it was because folk usually have a great deal of sentiment about religion and very few ideas, and thus the difficulty of bringing their expression up to their feelings necessarily embarrasses them.

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I assured Hannah I appreciated all her interest in my welfare, and that I would try to live as good a life during the coming year as I could; and then she withdrew with the audible sigh of relief that the heavy duty was done with for another twelvemonth. She assured me she should still pray for me, and if I do not suppose that there is any great efficacy in her petition, I am at least glad that she should feel like doing her best in my behalf. Mother declares that she is always offended when a person offers to pray for her. She looks at it as dreadfully condescending and patronizing, as if the petitioner had an intimate personal hold upon the Almighty, and was willing to exert his influence in your behalf. But I hardly think she means it. She never fails to see when a thing is kindly meant, even if she has a keen sense of the ludicrous. At any rate, it does us no harm that kindly petitions are offered for us, even if they may go out into an unregarding void; and I am not sure that they do.

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January 2. Kathie is delighted with the skates, and she does not think that her father will object to her having them; so there is at least one point gained.

We have had such a lovely sunset! I do not see how there can be a doubter in a world where there are so many beautiful things. The whole west, through the leafless branches of the elms on the south lawn, was one gorgeous mass of splendid color. I hope George saw it. It is almost time for him to be here, and I have caught myself humming over and over his favorite tunes as I waited. Mother has had a day of uneasiness, so that I could not leave her much, but rubbing her side for an hour or two relieved her. It has cramped my fingers a little, so that I write a funny, stiff hand. Poor Mother! It made me ashamed to be so glad in my heart as I saw how brave and quiet she was, with the lines of pain round her dear mouth.

Later. "How long is it that we have been engaged?"

That is what George asked me, and out of all the long talk we had this evening this is the one thing which I keep hearing over and over. Why should it tease me so? It is certainly a simple question, and when two persons have been engaged six years there need no longer be any false sensitiveness about things of this sort. About what sort? Do I mean that the time has come when

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George would not mind hurting my feelings? It may as well come out. As Father used to say: "You cannot balance the books until the account is set down in full." Well, then, I mean that there is a frankness about a long engagement which may not be in a short one, so that when George and I meet after a separation it is natural that almost the first question should be,—

"How long is it that we have been engaged?"

The question is certainly an innocent one,—although one would think George might have answered it himself. How much did the fact that he talked afterward so eagerly about the Miss West he met while at his aunt's, and of how pretty she is, have to do with the pain which the question gave me? At my age one might think that I was beyond the jealousies of a school-girl.

We have been engaged six years and four months and five days. It is not half the time that Jacob served for Rachel, although it is almost the time he bowed his neck to the yoke for Leah, and I am afraid lest I am nearer to being like the latter than the former. I always pitied Leah, for she must have understood she had not her husband's love; any woman would perceive that. Six years—and life is so short! Poor George, it has not been easy for him! He has not even been able to wish that the obstacle between us was removed, since that obstacle is Mother. Surely she is my first duty; and since she needs me day and night, I cannot divide my life; but I do pity George. He is wearing out his youth with that old frump of a housekeeper, who makes him uncomfortable with an ingenuity that seems to show intellectual force not to be suspected from anything else. But she is a faithful old soul, and it is not kind to abuse her.

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"How long is it that we have been engaged?"

I have a tendency to keep on writing that over and over all down the page as if this were the copy-book of a child at school. How Tom used to admire my writing-books in our school-days! His were always smudged and blotted. He is too big-souled and manly to niggle over little things; and he laughed at the pains I took, turning every corner with absurd care. He was so strong and splendid on the ice when we went skating over on Getchell's Pond; and how often and often he has drawn me all the way home on my sled!

But all that was ages and ages ago, and long before I even knew George. It never occurred to me until to-night, but I am really growing old. The birthdays that Tom remembered, and on which he sent me little bunches of Mayflowers, have not in the least troubled me or seemed too many. I have not thought much of birthdays of late years, but to-night I realize that I am twenty-nine, and that George has asked me,—

"How long is it that we have been engaged?"

January 7. Sackcloth and ashes have been my portion for days, and if I could by tearing from my diary the last leaves blot out of remembrance the foolish things I have written, it would be quickly done. My New Year's resolutions were even less lasting than are those in the jokes of the comic papers; and I am ashamed all through and through. I have tried to reason myself into something resembling common sense, but I am much afraid I have not yet entirely accomplished it. I have said to myself over and over that it would be the best thing for George if he did fall in love with that girl he saw at Franklin, and go his way without wasting more time waiting for me. He has wasted years enough, and it is time for him to be happy. But then—has he not been happy? Or is it that I have been so happy myself I have not realized how the long engagement was wearying him? He must have wearied, or he could never have asked me—

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No, I will not write it!

January 8. George came over last night, and was so loving and tender that I was thoroughly ashamed of all the wicked suspicions I have had. After all, what was there to suspect? I almost confessed to him what a miserable little doubter I had been; but I knew that confession would only be relieving my soul at the expense of making him uncomfortable. I hated to have him think me better than I am; but this, I suppose, is part of the penalty I ought to pay for having been so weak.

Besides,—probably it was only my weakness in another form, the petty jealousy of a small soul and a morbid fancy,—he seemed somehow more remote than I have ever known him, and I could not have told him if I would. We did not seem to be entirely frank with each other, but as if each were trying to make the other feel at ease when it was not really possible. Of course I was only attributing my own feelings to him, for he was dearly good.

He told me more about his visit to Franklin, and he seems to have seen Miss West a good deal. She is a sort of cousin of the Watsons, he says, and so they had a common ground. When she found that he lived so near to the Watsons she asked him all kinds of questions. She has never seen them, having lived in the West most of her life, and was naturally much interested in hearing about her relatives. I found myself leading him on to talk of her. I cannot see why I should care about this stranger. Generally I deal very little in gossip. Father trained me to be interested in real things, and meaningless details about people never attracted me. Yet this girl sticks in my mind, and I am tormented to know all about her. It cannot be anything he said; though he did say that she is very pretty. Perhaps it was the way in which he said it. He seemed to my sick fancy to like to talk of her. She must be a charming creature.

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January 9. Why should he not like to talk of a pretty girl? I hope I am not of the women who cannot bear to have a man use his eyes except to see their graces. It is pitiful to be so small and mean. I certainly want George to admire goodness and beauty, and to be by his very affection for me the more sensitive to whatever is admirable in others. If I am to be worthy of being his wife, I must be noble enough to be glad at whatever there is for him to rejoice in because of its

loveliness: and yet as I write down all these fine sentiments I feel my heart like lead! Oh, I am so ashamed of myself!

January 10. Miss Charlotte came in this afternoon, looking so thin, and cold, and tall, that I have been rather sober ever since.

"I wish I had on shoes with higher heels," I said to her as we shook hands; "then perhaps I shouldn't feel so insignificant down here." [Pg 12]

She looked down at me, laughing that rich, throaty laugh of hers.

"Mother always used to say she knew the Kendalls couldn't have been drowned in the Flood," she answered, "for they must all have been tall enough to wade to Mt. Ararat."

"You know the genealogy so far back that you must be able to tell whether she was right."

"I don't go quite so far as that," she said, sitting down by the fire, "but I know that my great-great-grandfather married a Privet, so that I always considered Judge Privet a cousin."

"If Father was a cousin, I must be one too," said I.

"You are the same relation to me on one side," Miss Charlotte went on, "that Deacon Webbe is on the other. It's about fortieth cousin, you see, so that I can count it or not, as I please."

"I am flattered that you choose to count us in," I told her, smiling; "and I am sure also you must be willing to count in anybody so good as Deacon Webbe."

"Yes, Deacon Webbe is worth holding on to, though he's so weak that he'd let the shadow of a mosquito bully him. The answer to the question in the New England Primer, 'Who is the meekest man?' ought to be 'Deacon Webbe.' He used up all the meekness there was in the whole family, though."

"I confess that I never heard Mrs. Webbe called meek," I assented.

"Meek!" sniffed Miss Charlotte; "I should think not. A wasp is a Sunday-school picnic beside her. While as for Tom"—

She pursed up her lips with an expression of disapproval so very marked I was afraid at once that Tom Webbe must have been doing something dreadful again, and my heart sank for his father. [Pg 13]

"But Tom has been doing better," I said. "This winter he"—

"This winter!" she exclaimed. "Why, just now he is worse than ever."

"Oh, dear," I asked, "what is it now? His father has been so unhappy about him."

"If he'd made Tom unhappy it would have been more to the purpose. Tom's making himself the town talk with that Brownrig girl."

"What Brownrig girl?"

"Don't you know about the Brownrigs that live in that little red house on the Rim Road?"

"I know the red house, and now that you say the name, I remember I have heard that such a family have moved in there. Where did they come from?"

"Oh, where do such trash come from ever?" demanded Miss Charlotte. "I'm afraid nobody but the Old Nick could tell you. They're a set of drunken, disreputable vagabonds, that turned up here last year. They were probably driven out of some town or other. Tom's been"—

But I did not wish to hear of Tom's misdeeds, and I said so. Miss Charlotte laughed, as usual.

"You never take any interest in wickedness, Ruth," she said good-naturedly. "That's about the only fault I have to find with you."

Poor Deacon Webbe! Tom has made him miserable indeed in these years since he came from college. The bitterness of seeing one we love go wrong must be unbearable, and when we believe that the consequences of wrong are to be eternal—I should go mad if I believed in such a creed. I would try to train myself to hate instead of to love; or, if I could not do this—But I could not believe anything so horrible, so that I need not speculate. Deacon Daniel is a saint, though of course he does not dream of such a thing. A saint would not be a saint, I suppose, who was aware of his beatitude, and the deacon's meekness is one of his most marked attributes of sanctity. I wonder whether, in the development of the race, saintliness will ever come to be compatible with a sense of humor. A saint with that persuasively human quality would be a wonderfully compelling power for good. Deacon Daniel is a fine influence by his goodness, but he somehow enhances the desirability of virtue in the abstract rather than brings home personally the idea that his example is to be followed; and all because he is so hopelessly without a perception of the humorous side of existence. But why do I go on writing this, when the thought uppermost in my mind is the grief he will have if Tom has started again on one of his wild times. I do hope that Miss Charlotte is mistaken! So small a thing will sometimes set folk to talking, especially about Tom, who is at heart so good, though he has been wild enough to get a bad name.

January 11. Things work out strangely in this world; so that it is no wonder all sorts of fanciful beliefs are made out of them. There could hardly be a web more closely woven than human life. To-day, when I had not seen Tom for months, and when the gossip of last night made me want to talk with him, chance brought us face to face.

Mother was so comfortable that I went out for an hour. The day was delightful, cold enough so that the walking was dry and the snow firm, but the air not sharp to the cheek. The sun was [Pg 15]

warm and cheery, and the shadows on the white fields had a lovely softness. I went on in a sort of dream, it was so good to be alive and out of doors in such wonderful weather. I turned to go down the Rim Road, and it was not until I came in sight of the red house that I remembered what Miss Charlotte said last night. Then I began to think about Tom. Tom and I have always been such good friends. I used to understand Tom better in the old school-days than the others did, and he was always ready to tell me what he thought and felt. Nowadays I hardly ever see him. Since I became engaged he has almost never come to the house, though he used to be here so much. I meet him only once or twice a year, and then I think he tries to avoid me. I am so sorry to have an old friendship broken off like that. The red house made me think of Tom with a sore heart, of all the talk his wild ways have caused, the sorrow of his father, and the good that is being lost when a fellow with a heart so big as Tom's goes wrong.

Suddenly Tom himself appeared before my very eyes, as if my thought had conjured him up. He came so unexpectedly that at first I could hardly realize how he came. Then it flashed across me that he must have walked round the red house. I suppose he must have come out of a back door somewhere, like one of the family; such folk never use their front doors. He walked along the road toward me, at first so preoccupied that he did not recognize me. When he saw my face, he half hesitated, as if he had almost a mind to turn back, and his whole face turned red. He came on, however, and was going past me with a scant salutation, when I stopped him. I stood still and put out my hand, so that he could not go by without speaking.

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"Good-afternoon, Tom," I said. "Isn't it a glorious day?"

He looked about him with a strange air as if he had not noticed, and I saw how heavy and weary his eyes were.

"Yes," he answered, "it is a fine day."

"Where do you keep yourself, Tom?" I went on, hardly knowing what I said, but trying to think what it was best to say. "I never see you, and we used to be such good friends."

He looked away, and moved his lips as if he muttered something; but when I asked what he said, he turned to me defiantly.

"Look here, Ruth, what's the good of pretending? You know I don't go to see you because you're engaged to George Weston. You chose between us, and there's the end of that. What's more, you know that nowadays I'm not fit to go to see anybody that's decent."

"Then it is time that you were," was my answer. "Let me walk along with you. I want to say something."

I turned, and we walked together toward the village. I could see that his face hardened.

"It's no sort of use to preach to me, Ruth," he said, "though your preaching powers are pretty good. I've had so much preaching in my life that I'm not to be rounded up by piety."

I smiled as well as I could, though it made me want to cry to hear the hard bravado of his tone.

"I'm not generally credited with overmuch piety, Tom. The whole town thinks all the Privets heathen, you know."

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"Humph! It's a pity there weren't a few more of 'em."

I laughed, and thanked him for the compliment, and then we went on in silence for a little way. I had to ignore what he said about George, but it did not make it easier to begin. I was puzzled what to say, but the time was short that we should be walking together, and I had to do something.

"Tom," I began, "you may not be very sensitive about old friendships, but I am loyal; and it hurts me that those I care for should be talked against."

"Oh, in a place like Tuskamuck," he returned, at once, I could see, on the defensive, "they'll talk about anybody."

"Will they? Then I suppose they talk about me. I'm sorry, Tom, for it must make you uncomfortable to hear it; unless, that is, you don't count me for a friend any longer."

He threw back his head in the way he has always had. I used to tell him it was like a colt's shaking back its mane.

"What nonsense! Of course they don't talk about you. You don't give folks any chance."

"And you do," I added as quietly as I could.

He looked angry for just the briefest instant, and then he burst into a hard laugh.

"Caught, by Jupiter! Ruth, you were always too clever for me to deal with. Well, then, I do give the gossips plenty to talk about. They would talk just the same if I didn't, so I may as well have the game as the name."

"Does that mean that your life is regulated by the gossips? I supposed that you had more independence, Tom."

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He flushed, and stooped down to pick up a stick. With this he began viciously to strike the bushes by the roadside and the dry stalks of yarrow sticking up through the snow. He set his lips together with a grim determination which brought out in his face the look I like least, the resemblance to his mother when she means to carry a point.

"Look here, Ruth," he said after a moment; "I'm not going to talk to you about myself or my

doings. I'm a blackguard fast enough; but there's no good talking about it. If you'd cared enough about me to keep me straight, you could have done it; but now I'm on my way to the Devil, and no great way to travel before I get there either."

We had come to the turn of the Rim Road where the trees shut off the view of the houses of the village. I stopped and put my hand on his arm.

"Tom," I begged him, "don't talk like that. You don't know how it hurts. You don't mean it; you can't mean it. Nobody but yourself can send you on the wrong road; and I know you're too plucky to hide behind any such excuse. For the sake of your father, Tom, do stop and think what you are doing."

"Oh, father'll console himself very well with prayers; and anyway he'll thank God for sending me to perdition, because if God does it, it must be all right."

"Don't, Tom! You know how he suffers at the way you go on. It must be terrible to have an only son, and to see him flinging his life away."

"It isn't my fault that I'm his son, is it?" he demanded. "I've been dragged into this infernal life without being asked whether I wanted to come or not; and now I'm here, I can't have what I want, and I'm promised eternal damnation hereafter. Well, then, I'll show God or the Devil, or whoever bosses things, that I can't be bullied into a molly-coddle!"

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The sound of wheels interrupted us, and we instinctively began to walk onward in the most commonplace fashion. A farmer's wagon came along, and by the time it had passed we had come to the head of the Rim Road, in full sight of the houses. Tom waited until I turned to the right, toward home, and then he said,—

"I'm going the other way. It's no use, Ruth, to talk to me; but I'm obliged to you for caring."

I cannot see that I did any good, and very likely I have simply made him more on his guard to avoid giving me a chance; but then, even if I had all the chance in the world, what could I say to him? And yet, Tom is so noble a fellow underneath it all. He is honest and kind, and strong in his way; only between his father's meekness and his mother's sharpness—for she is sharp—he has somehow come to grief. They have tried to make him religious so that he would be good; and he is of the sort that must be good or he will not be religious. He cannot be pressed into a mould of orthodoxy, and so in the end—But it cannot be the end. Tom must somehow come out of it.

January 13. When George came in to-night I was struck at once with the look of pleasant excitement in his face.

"What pleases you?" I asked him.

"Pleases me?" he echoed, evidently surprised. "Isn't it a pleasure to see you?"

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"But that's not the whole of it," I said. "You've something pleasant to tell me. Oh, I can read you like a book, my dear; so it is quite idle trying to keep a secret from me."

He seemed confused, and I was puzzled to know what was the matter.

"You are too wise entirely," was his reply. "I really hadn't anything to tell."

"Then something good has happened," I persisted; "or you have heard good news."

"What a fanciful girl you are, Ruth," George returned. "Nothing has happened."

He walked away from me, and went to the fire. He was strangely embarrassed, and I could only wonder what I had said to confuse him. I reflected that perhaps he was planning some sort of a surprise, and felt I ought not to pry into his thoughts in this fashion whatever the matter was that interested him. I sat down on the other side of the hearth, and took up some sewing.

"George," I asked, entirely at random, "didn't you say that the Miss West you met at Franklin is a cousin of the Watsons?"

I flushed as soon as I had spoken, for I thought how it betrayed me that in my desire to hit on a new subject I had found the thought of her so near the surface of my mind. I had not consciously been thinking of her at all, and certainly I did not connect her with George's strangeness of manner. There was something almost weird, it seems to me now, in my putting such a question just then. Perhaps it was telepathy, for she must have been vividly in his thoughts at that moment. He started, flushed as I have never seen him, and turned quickly toward me.

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"What makes you think that it was Miss West?"

"Think what was Miss West?" I cried.

I was completely astonished; then I saw how it was.

"Never mind, George," I went on, laughing and putting out my hand to him. "I didn't mean to read your thoughts, and I didn't realize that I was doing it."

"But what made you"—

"I'm sure I don't know," I broke in; and I managed to laugh again. "Only I see now that you know something pleasant about Miss West, and you may as well tell it."

He looked doubtful a minute, studying my face. The hesitation he had in speaking hurt me.

"It's only that she's coming to visit the Watsons," he said, rather unwillingly. "Olivia Watson told me just now."

"Why, that will be pleasant," I answered, as brightly as if I were really delighted. "Now I shall see

if she is really as pretty as you say."

I felt so humiliated to be playing a part,—so insincere. Somebody has said the real test of love is to be unwilling to deceive the loved one, even in the smallest thing. That may be the test of a man's love, but a woman will bear the pain of that very deception to save the man she cares for from disquiet. I am sure it has hurt me as much not to be entirely frank with George as it could have hurt a man; but I could not make him uncomfortable by letting him see that I was disturbed. Yet that he should have been afraid or unwilling to tell me did trouble me. He knows that I am not jealous or apt to take offense. He is always saying that I am too cold to be really in love. It made me feel that the coming of this girl must mean much to him when he feared to speak of it. If he had not thought it a matter of consequence, he would have realized that I should take it lightly.

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I am not taking it lightly; but what troubles me is not that she is coming, but that he hesitated to tell me. Something is wrong when George fears to trust me.

January 17. I have seen her. I went to church this morning for that especial reason. Mother was a little astonished at me when I said that I was going.

"Well, Ruth," she said, "you don't have much dissipation, but I didn't suppose that you were so dull you would take to church-going."

"You can never tell," I answered, making a jest of a thing which to me was far from funny. "Mr. Saychase will be sure to conclude I'm under conviction of sin, and come in to finish the conversion."

She looked at me keenly.

"What is the matter, Ruth?" she asked in that soft voice of hers which goes straight to my heart.

"It isn't anything very serious, Mother," I said. "Since you will have the truth, I am going to church to see that Miss West who's visiting the Watsons. George thinks her so pretty that my curiosity is roused to a perfect bonfire."

She did not say more, but I saw the sudden light in her eye. Mother has never felt about George as I have wished. She has never done him justice, and she thinks I idealize him. That is her favorite way of putting it; but this is because she is my mother, and doesn't see how much idealizing there must have been on his side before he could fall in love with me.

Miss West is very pretty. All the time I watched in church I tried to persuade myself that she was not. I meanly and contemptibly sat there finding fault with her face, saying to myself that her nose was too long, her eyes too small, her mouth too big; inventing flaws as if my invention would change the fact. It was humiliating business; and utterly and odiously idiotic. Miss West is pretty; she is more than this, she is wonderfully pretty. There is an appealing, baby look about her big blue eyes which goes straight to one's heart. She looks like a darling child one would want to kiss and shelter from all the hard things of life. I own it all; I realize all that it means; and if in my inmost soul I am afraid, I will not deny what is a fact or try to shut my eyes to the littleness of my feeling about her. Of course George found her adorable. She is. The young men in the congregation all watched her, and even grim Deacon Richards could not keep his eyes off of her.

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She does not have the look of a girl of any especial mind. Her prettiness is after all that of a doll. Her large eyes are of the sort to please a man because of their appealing helplessness; not because they inspire him with new meanings. Her little rosebud lips will never speak wisdom, I am afraid; but in my jealousy I wonder whether most men do not care more for lips which invite kisses than for lips which speak wisdom. I am frankly and weakly miserable. George walked home with me, but he had not two words to say.

I must try to meet this. If George should come to care for her more than for me! If he should,—if by a pretty face he forgets all the years that we have belonged to each other, what is there to do? I cannot yet believe that it is best for him; but if it will make him happy, even if he thinks that it will, what is there for me but to make it as easy for him as I may? He certainly would not be happy to marry me and love somebody else. He cannot leave me without pain; that I am sure. I shall show my love for him more truly if I spare him the knowledge of what it must cost me.

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But what mawkish nonsense all this is! A man may admire a pretty face, and yet not be ready for it to leave behind all that has been dear to him. Oh, if he had not asked me that question when he came back from Franklin! I cannot get it out of my mind that even if he was not conscious of it, it meant he still was secretly tired of his long engagement; that he was at least dreaming of what he would do if he were free. He shall not be bound by any will of mine; and if his heart has gone out to this beautiful creature, I must bear it as nobly as I can. Father used to say,—and every day I go back more and more to what he said to me,—"What you cannot at need sacrifice nobly you are not worthy to possess."

January 18. I have had a note which puzzles me completely. Tom Webbe writes to say that he is going away; that I am to forgive him for the shame of having known him, and that his address is inclosed in a sealed envelope. I am not to open it unless there is real need. Why should he give his address to me?

January 19. The disconcerting way Aunt Naomi has of coming in without knocking, stealing in on feet made noiseless by rubbers, brought her into the sitting-room last night while I was mooning in the twilight, and meditating on nothing in particular. I knew her slow fashion of opening the door, "like a burglar at a cupboard," as Hannah says,—so that I was able to compose my face into an appropriate smile of welcome before she was fairly in.

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"Sitting here alone?" was her greeting.

"Mother is asleep," I answered, "and I was waiting for her to wake."

Aunt Naomi seated herself in the stiffest chair in the room, and began to swing her foot as usual.

"Deacon Daniel's at it again," she observed dispassionately.

I smiled a little. It always amuses me that the troubles of the church should be so often brought to me who am an outsider. Aunt Naomi arrives about once a month on the average, with complaints about something. They are seldom of any especial weight, but it seems to relieve her to tell her grievances.

"Which Deacon Daniel?" I asked, to tease her a little.

"Deacon Richards, of course. You know that well enough."

"What is it now?"

"He won't have any fire in the vestry," she answered.

"Why not let somebody else take care of the vestry then, if you want a fire?"

"You don't suppose," was her response, with a chuckle, "that he'd give up the key to anybody else, do you?"

"I should think he'd be glad to."

"He'll hold on to that key till he dies," retorted Aunt Naomi with a sniff; "and I shouldn't be surprised if he had it buried with him. He wouldn't lose the chance of making folks uncomfortable."

"Oh, come, Aunt Naomi, you are always so hard on Deacon Richards," I protested. "He is always good-natured with me." [Pg 26]

"I wish you'd join the church, then, and see if you can't keep him in order. Last night it was so cold at prayer-meeting that we were all half frozen, and Mr. Saychase had to dismiss the meeting. Old lady Andrews spoke up in the coldest part of it, when we were all so chilled that we couldn't speak, and she said in that little, high voice of hers: 'The vestry is very cold to-night, but I trust that our hearts are warm with the love of Christ.'"

I laughed at the picture of the half-frozen prayer-meeting, and dear old lady Andrews coming to the rescue with a pious jest; it was so characteristic.

"But has anybody spoken to Deacon Richards?" I asked.

"You can't speak to him," she responded, wagging her foot with a violence that seemed to speak celestial anger within. "I try to after every prayer-meeting; but he has the lights out before I can say two words. I can't stay there in the dark with him; and the minute he gets me outside he locks the door, and posts off like a streak."

"Why not go down to his mill in broad daylight?" I suggested.

"Oh, he'd stick close to the grinding-thing just so he couldn't hear, and I'm afraid of being pitched into the hopper," she said, laughing. "You must speak to him. He pays some attention to what you say."

"But it's none of my business. I don't go to prayer-meeting."

"But it's your duty to go," she answered, with a shrewd smile that showed that she appreciated her response; "and if you neglect one duty it's no excuse for neglecting another. Besides, you can't be willing to have the whole congregation die of cold." [Pg 27]

So in the end it was somehow fixed that I am to remonstrate with Deacon Daniel because the faithful are cold at their devotions. It would seem much simpler for them to stay at home and be warm. They do not, as far as I can see, enjoy going; but they are miserable if they do not go. Their consciences trouble them worse than the cold, poor things. I suppose that I can never be half thankful enough to Father for bringing me up without a theological conscience. Prayer-meetings seem to be a good deal like salt in the boy's definition of something that makes food taste bad if you don't put it on; prayer-meetings make church-goers uneasy if they do not go. If they will go, however, and if they are better for going, or believe they are better, or if they are only worse for staying away, or suppose they are worse, they should not be expected to sit in a cold vestry in January. Why Deacon Daniel will not have a fire is not at all clear. It may be economy, or it may be a lack of sensitiveness; it may be for some recondite reason too deep to be discovered. I refuse to accept Aunt Naomi's theory that it is sheer obstinacy; and I will beard the deacon in his mill, regardless of the danger of the hopper. At least he generally listens to me.

January 20. Hannah came up for me this evening while I was reading to Mother.

"Deacon Webbe's down in the parlor," she announced. "Says he wants to see you if you're not busy. 'Ll come again if you ain't able to see him."

"Go down, Ruth dear," Mother said at once. "It may be another church quarrel, and I wouldn't hinder you from settling it for worlds." [Pg 28]

"But don't you want me to finish the chapter?" I asked. "Church quarrels will generally keep."

"No, dear. I'm tired, and we'll stop where we are. I'll try to go to sleep, if you'll turn the light down."

As I bent over to kiss her, she put up her feeble thin fingers, and touched my cheek lovingly.

"You're a dear girl," she said. "Be gentle with the deacon."

There was a twinkle in her eye, for the idea of anybody's being anything but gentle with Deacon Daniel Webbe is certainly droll enough. Miss Charlotte said the other night that a baby could twist him round its finger and never even know there was anything there; and certainly he must call out the gentle feelings of anybody. Only Tom seemed always somehow to get exasperated with his father's meekness. Poor Tom, I do wonder why he went away!

The deacon dries up by way of growing old. I have not seen him this winter except the other day at church, and then I did not look at him. To-night he seemed worn and sad, and somehow his face was like ashes, it was so lifeless. The flesh has dried to the bones of his face till he looks like a pathetic skull. His voice is not changed, though. It has the same strange note in it that used to affect me as a child; a weird, reedy quality which suggests some vague melancholy flavor not in the least fretful or whining,—a quality that I have never been able to define. I never hear him speak without a sense of mysterious suggestiveness; and I remember confiding to Father once, when I was about a dozen years old, that Deacon Webbe had the right voice to read fairy stories with. Father, I remember, laughed, and said he doubted much if Deacon Daniel knew what a fairy story was, unless he thought it was something wickedly false. Tom's voice has something of the same quality, but only enough to give a little thrill to his tone when he is really in earnest. There is an amusing incongruity between that odd wind-harp strain in Deacon Webbe's voice and his gaunt New England figure.

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"Ruth," the deacon asked, almost before we had shaken hands, "did you know Tom had gone away?"

I was impressed and rather startled by the intensity of his manner, and surprised by the question.

"Yes," I said. "He sent me word he was going."

"Do you know where he has gone?"

"No."

I wondered whether I ought to tell him about the sealed address, but it seemed like a breach of confidence to say anything yet.

"Did he say why he was going?" the deacon asked.

"No," I said again.

The deacon turned his hat over and over helplessly in his knotted hands in silence for a moment. He was so pathetic that I wanted to cry.

"Then you don't know," he said after a moment.

"I only know he has gone."

There was another silence, as if the deacon were pondering on what he could possibly do or say next. Peter, who was pleased for the moment to be condescendingly kind to the visitor, came and rubbed persuasively against his legs, waving a great white plume of tail. Deacon Daniel bent down absently and stroked the cat, but the troubled look in his face showed how completely his mind was occupied.

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"I'm afraid there's something wrong," he broke out at length, with an energy unusual with him; an energy which was suffering rather than power. "I don't know what it is, but I'm afraid it's worse than ever. Oh, Miss Ruth, if you could only have cared for Tom, you'd have kept him straight."

I could only murmur that I had always liked Tom, and that we had been friends all our lives; but the deacon was too much moved to pay attention.

"Of course," he went on, "I hadn't any right to suppose Judge Privet's daughter would marry into our family; but if you had cared for him, Miss Ruth"—

"Deacon Webbe," I broke in, for I could not hear any more, "please don't say such things! You know you mustn't say such things!"

As I think of it, I am afraid I was a little more hysterical than would have been allowed by Cousin Mehitable, but I could not help it. At least I stopped him from going on. He apologized so much that I set to work to convince him I was not offended, which I found was not very easy. Poor Deacon Daniel, he is really heart-broken about Tom, but he has never known how to manage him, or even to make the boy understand how much he loves him. Meekness may be a Christian virtue; but over-meekness is a poor quality for one who has the bringing up of a real, wide-awake, head-strong boy. A little less virtue and a little more common sense would have made Deacon Webbe a good deal more useful in this world if it did lessen his value to heaven. He is the very salt of the earth, yet he has so let himself be trampled upon that to Tom his humility has seemed weakness. I know, too, Tom has never appreciated his father, and has failed to understand that goodness need not always be in arms to be manly. And so here in a couple of sentences I have come round to the side of the deacon after all. Perhaps in the long run the effect of his goodness, with all its seeming lack of strength, may effect more than sterner qualities.

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January 21. I was interrupted last night in my writing to go to Mother; but I have had Deacon Webbe and Tom in my mind ever since. I could not help remembering the gossip about Tom, and the fact that I saw him coming from the red house. I wonder if he has not gone to break away from temptation. In new surroundings he may turn over a new leaf. Oh, I would so like to write to him, and to tell him how much I hope for this fresh start, but I hardly like to open the envelope.

I have been this afternoon to call on Miss West. The Watsons are not exactly of my world, but it seemed kind to go. If you were really honest, Ruth Privet, you would add that you wanted to see what Miss West is like. It is all very well to put on airs of disinterested virtue; but if George had not spoken of this girl it is rather doubtful whether you would have taken the trouble to go to her in your very best bib and tucker,—and you did put on your very best, and wondered while you were doing it whether she would appreciate the lace scarf you bought at Malta. I understand you wanted to impress her a little, though you did try to make yourself believe that you were only wearing your finest clothes to do honor to her. What a humbug you are!

Olivia Watson came to the door, and asked me into the parlor, where I was left to wait some time before Miss West appeared. I confessed then to myself how I had really half hoped that she would not be in; but now the call is over I am glad to have seen her. I am a little confused, but I know what she is.

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She is the most beautiful creature I ever saw. She has a clear color, when she flushes, like a red clover in September, the last and the richest of all the clovers of the year. Then her hair curls about her forehead in such dear little ringlets that it is enough to make one want to kiss her. She speaks with a funny little Western burr to her r's which might not please me in another, but is charming from her lips, the mouth that speaks is so pretty. Yes, George was right.

Of her mind one cannot say quite as much. She is not entirely well bred, it seemed to me; but then we are a little old-fashioned in Tuskamuck. She did notice the scarf, and asked me where I got it.

"Oh," she said, when I had told her, "then you have been abroad."

"Yes," I said, "I went with my father."

"Judge Privet took you abroad several times, didn't he?" Olivia put in.

"Yes; I went with him three times."

"Oh, my!" commented Miss West. "How set up you must feel!"

"I don't think I do," I answered, laughing. "Do you feel set up because you have seen the West that so few of us have visited?"

"Why, I never thought of that," she responded. "You haven't any of you traveled in the West, have you?"

"I haven't, at least."

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"But that ain't anything to compare with going abroad," she continued, her face falling; "and going abroad three times, too. I should put on airs all the rest of my life if I'd done that."

It is not fair to go on putting down in black and white things that she said without thinking. I am ashamed of the satisfaction I found myself taking in her commonness. I was even so unfair to her that I could not help thinking that she somehow did not ring true. I wonder if a woman can ever be entirely just to another woman who has been praised by the man she cares for? If not I will be an exception to my sex! I will not be small and mean, just because Miss West is so lovely that no man could see her without—well, without admiring her greatly.

January 22. I went down to the grist-mill this afternoon to see Deacon Daniel, and to represent to him the sufferings of the faithful at frozen prayer-meetings. He was standing in the door of the mill, which was open to the brisk air, and his mealy frock gave a picturesque air to his great figure. He greeted me pleasantly, as he always does.

"I've come on business," I said.

"Your own or somebody's else?" he asked, with a grin.

"Not exactly mine," I admitted.

"What has Aunt Naomi sent you for now?" he demanded.

I laughed at his penetration.

"You are too sharp to be deceived," I said. "Aunt Naomi did send me. They tell me you are trying to destroy the church by freezing them all to death at the prayer-meetings."

"Aunt Naomi can't be frozen. She's too dry."

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"That isn't at all a nice thing to say, Deacon Richards," I said, smiling. "You can't cover your iniquities by abusing her."

He showed his teeth, and settled himself against the door-post more comfortably.

"Why didn't she come herself?" he inquired.

"She said that she was afraid you'd pop her into the hopper. You see what a monster you are considered."

"I wouldn't be willing to spoil my meal."

Deacon Daniel likes to play at badinage, and if he had ever had a chance, might have some skill at it. As it is, I like to see how he enjoys it, if I am not always impressed by the wit of what he says.

"Deacon Richards," I said, "why do you freeze the people so in the vestry?"

"I haven't known of anybody's being frozen."

"But why don't you have a fire?" I persisted. "If you don't want to build it, there are boys enough that can be hired."

"How is your mother to-day?" was the only answer the deacon vouchsafed.

"She's very comfortable, thank you. Why don't you have a fire?"

"Makes folks sleepy," he declared; and once more switched off abruptly to another subject. "Did you know Tom Webbe's gone off?"

"Yes."

"Where's he gone?"

"I don't know. Why should I?"

"If you don't know," Deacon Daniel commented, "I suppose nobody does."

"Why don't you have a fire in the vestry?" I demanded, determined to tire him out.

"You asked me that before," he responded, with a grin of delight.

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I gave it up then, for I saw that there was nothing to be got out of him in that mood. I looked up at the sky, and saw how the afternoon was waning.

"I must go home," I said. "Mother may want me; but I do wish you would be reasonable about the vestry. I'll give you a load of wood if you'll use it."

"Send the wood, and we'll see," was all the promise I could extract from the dear old tease.

Deacon Daniel was evidently not to be cornered, and I came away without any assurance of amendment on his part. The faithful will have still to endure the cold, I suppose; but I have made an effort.

What I said to Deacon Richards and what Deacon Richards said to me is not what I sat down to write. I have been lingering over it because I hated to put down what happened to me after I left the mill. Why should I write it? This diary is not a confessional, and nothing forces me to set these things down. I really write it as a penance for the uncharitable mood I have been in ever since. I may as well have my thoughts on paper as to keep turning them over and over in my mind.

I crossed the foot-bridge and turned up Water Street. I went on, pleased by the brown water showing through the broken ice in the mill-flume, and the fantastic bunches of snow in the willows beyond, like queer, white birds. I smiled to myself at the remembrance of Deacon Daniel, and somehow felt warmed toward him, as I always do, despite all his crotchety ways. He radiates kindness of heart through all his gruffness.

Suddenly I saw George coming toward me with Miss West. They did not notice me at first, they were so engaged in talking and laughing together. My mood sobered instantly, but I said to myself that I certainly ought to be glad to see George enjoying himself; and, in any case, a lady does not show her foolish feelings. So I went toward them, trying to look as I had before I caught sight of them. They saw me in a moment, and instantly their laughter stopped. If they had come forward simply and at ease, I should have thought no more about it, I think; but no one could see their confusion without feeling that they expected me to disapprove. And if they expected me to disapprove, it seems to me they must have been saying things—But probably this is all my imagination and mean jealousy.

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"You see I've captured him," Miss West called out in rather a high voice, as we came near each other.

"I have no doubt he was a very willing captive," I answered, smiling, and holding out my hand.

I realize now how I hated to give her my hand, and most certainly her manner was not entirely that of a lady.

"We've been for a long walk," she went on, "and now I suppose I ought to let you have him."

"I couldn't think of taking him. I am only going home."

"But it seems real mean to keep him, after I've had him all the afternoon. I must give him to you."

"I hope he wouldn't be so ungallant as to be given, and leave you to go home alone," I said. "That is not the way we treat strangers in Tuskamuck."

"Oh, you mustn't call me a stranger," Miss West responded, twisting her head to look up into George's face. "I'm really in love with the place, and I should admire to live here all the rest of my life."

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To this I had nothing to say. George had not spoken a word. I could not look at him, but I moved on now. I felt that I must get away from this girl, with her strange Western speech, and her familiar manner.

"Good-by," I said. "Mother will want me, and I mustn't linger any longer."

I managed to smile until I had left them, but the tears would come as I hurried up the hill toward home. Oh, how can I bear it!

January 23. The happiness of George is the thing which should be considered. In any case I am helpless. I can only wait, in woman's fashion. Even if I were convinced he would be happier and better with me,—and how can I tell that?—what is there I could do? My duty is by mother's sick-bed, and even if my pride would let me struggle for the possession of any man, I am not free to

try even that degrading conflict. I should know, moreover, that any man saved in spite of himself would be apt to look back with regret to the woman he was saved from. Jean Ingelow's "Letter L" is not often repeated in life, I am afraid. Still, if one could be sure that it is a danger and he were saved, this might be borne. If it were surely for his good to think less of me, I might bear it somehow, hard as it would be. But my hands are tied. There is nothing for me but waiting.

January 24. George met Kathie last night as she was coming here, and sent word that he had to drive over to Canton. I thought it odd for him to send me such a message instead of coming himself, for he had not seen me since I met him in the street with Miss West. To-day Aunt Naomi came in, and the moment I saw her I knew that she had something to say that it would not be pleasant to hear.

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"What's George Weston taking that West girl over to Canton for?" she asked.

It was like a stab in the back, but I tried not to flinch.

"Why shouldn't he take her?" I responded.

Aunt Naomi gave a characteristic sniff, and wagged her foot violently.

"If he wants to, perhaps he should," she answered enigmatically.

The subject dropped there, but I wonder a little why she put it that way.

January 26. Our engagement is broken. George is gone, and the memory of six years, he says, had better be wiped out.

January 27. I could not tell Mother to-day. By the time I got my courage up it was afternoon, and I feared lest she should be too excited to sleep to-night. To-morrow morning she must know.

II

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FEBRUARY

February 1. I wonder sometimes if human pride is not stronger than human affection. Certainly it seems sometimes that we feel the wound to vanity more than the blow to love. I suppose that the truth is that the little prick stings where the blow numbs. For the moment it seemed to me to-night as if I felt more the sudden knowledge that the village knows of my broken engagement than I did the suffering of the fact; but I shall have forgotten this to-morrow, and the real grief will be left.

Miss Charlotte, tall and gaunt, came in just at twilight. She brought a lovely moss-rose bud.

"Why, Miss Charlotte," I said, "you have never cut the one bud off your moss-rose! I thought that was as dear to you as the apple of your eye."

"It was," she answered with her gayest air. "That's why I brought it."

"Mother will be delighted," I said; "that is, if she can forgive you for picking it."

"It isn't for your mother," Miss Charlotte said, with a sudden softening of her voice; "it is for you. I'm an old woman, you know, and I've whims. It's my whim for you to have the bud because I've watched it growing, and loved it almost as if it were my own baby."

Then I knew that she had heard of the broken engagement. The sense of the village gossip, the idea of being talked over at the sewing-circle, came to me so vividly and so dreadfully that for a moment I could hardly get my breath. Then I remembered the sweetness of Miss Charlotte's act, and I went to her and kissed her. The poor old dear had tears in her eyes, but she said nothing. She understood, I am sure, that I could not talk, but that I had seen what she meant me to see, her sympathy and her love. We sat down before the fire in the gathering dusk, and talked of indifferent things. She praised Peter's beauty, although the ungrateful Peter refused to stay in her lap, and would not be gracious under her caresses. She did not remain long, and she was gay after her fashion. Miss Charlotte is apt to cover real feeling with a decent veil of facetiousness.

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"Now I must go home and get my party ready," she said, rising with characteristic suddenness.

"Are you going to have a party?" I asked in some surprise.

"I have one every night, my dear," she returned, with her explosive laugh. "All the Kendall ghosts come. It isn't very gay, but it's very select."

She hurried away, and left me more touched than I should have wished her to see.

February 2. It was well for me that Miss Charlotte's visit prepared me last night, for to-day Kathie broke in upon me with the most childish frankness.

"Miss Ruth," she burst out, "ain't you going to marry George Weston?"

"No, my dear," I answered; "but you mustn't say 'ain't.'"

"'Aren't,' then. But I thought you promised years and years ago."

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"Kathie, dear," said I, "this isn't a thing that you may talk about. You are too young to understand, and it is vulgar to talk to people about their private affairs unless they begin."

"But it's no wronger than"—

"There's no such word as 'wronger,' Kathie."

"No worse than to break one's word, is it?"

"When two persons make an agreement they have a right to unmake it if they change their minds; and that is not breaking their word. How do the skates work?"

"All right," Kathie answered; "but father said that you and George Weston"—

"Kathie," I said as firmly as I could, "I have told you before that you must not repeat what your father says."

"It isn't wrong," she returned rather defiantly.

I was surprised at her manner, but I suppose that she is always fighting with her conscience about right and wrong, so the mere idea makes her aggressive.

"I am not so sure," I told her, trying to turn the whole matter off with a laugh. "I don't think it's very moral to be ill bred. Do you?"

"Why, Father says manners don't matter if the heart is right."

"This is only another way of saying that if the heart is right the manners will be right. If you in your heart consider whether your father would wish you to tell me what he did not say for my ears, you will not be likely to say it."

That sounds rather priggish now it is written down, but I had to stop the child, and I could not be harsh with her. She evidently wanted much to go on with the subject, but I would not hear another word. How the town must be discussing my affairs!

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February 5. Mother is certainly growing weaker, and although Dr. Wentworth will not admit to me that she is failing, I am convinced that he thinks so. She has been telling me this afternoon of things which she wishes given to this and that relative or friend.

"It will not make me any more likely to die, Ruth," she said, "and I shall feel more comfortable if I have these things off my mind. I've thought them out, and if you'll put them on paper, then I shall feel perfectly at liberty to forget them if I find it too much trouble to remember."

I put down the things which she told me, trying hard not to let her see how the tears hindered my writing. When I had finished she lay quiet for some time, and then she said,—

"May I say one thing, Ruth, about George?"

She has said nothing to me before except comforting words to show me that she felt for me, and that she knew I could not bear to talk about it.

"You know you may," I told her, though I confess I shrank at the thought.

"I know how it hurts you now," she said, "and for that I am grieved to the heart; but Ruth, dear, I can't help feeling that it is best after all. You are too much his superior to be happy with him. You would try to make him what you think he ought to be, and you couldn't do it. The stuff isn't in him. He'd get tired of trying, and you would be so humiliated for him that in the end I'm afraid neither of you would be happy."

She stopped, and rested a little, and then went on.

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"I am afraid I don't comfort you much," she said, with a sigh. "I suppose that that must be left to time. But I want you to remember it is much less hard for me to leave you alone than it would have been to go with the feeling that you were to make a mistake that would hamper and sadden your whole life."

The tears came into her eyes, and she put out her dear, shadowy hand so feebly that I could not bear it. I dropped on my knees by the bed, and fell to sobbing in the most childish way. Mother patted my head as if I were the baby I was acting.

"There, there, Ruth," she said; "the Privets, as your father would have said, do not cry over misfortunes; they live them down."

She is right; and I must not break down again.

February 7. There are times when I seem like a stranger visiting myself, and I most inhospitably wish that this guest would go. I must determine not to think about my feelings; or, rather, without bothering to make resolutions, I must stop thinking about myself. The way to do it, I suppose, is to think about others; and that would be all very well if it were not that the others I inevitably think about are George and Miss West. I cannot help knowing that he is with her a great deal. Somehow it is in the air, and comes to me against my will. If I go out, I cannot avoid seeing them walking or driving together. I am afraid that George's law business must suffer. I should never have let him neglect it so for me. Perhaps I am cold-blooded.

What Mother said to me the other day has been much in my thoughts. I wonder how it was ever possible for me to be engaged to a man of whom neither Father nor Mother entirely approved. To care for him was something I could not help; I am sure of that. But the engagement is another matter. It came about very naturally after his being here so much in Father's last illness. George was so kind and helpful about the business that we were all full of gratitude, and in my blindness I did not perceive how Mother really felt. I realize now it was his kindness to Father, and the relief his help brought to Mother, which made it hard for her to say then that she did not approve of the engagement; and so soon after she became a helpless invalid that things went on naturally

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in their own course.

I am sure that if Mother could have known George as I have known him, she would have cared for him. She has hardly seen him in all these years. She hopes that I will forget, but I should be poorer if I could. One does not leave off loving just because circumstances alter. He is free to go his way, but that does not make me any the less his if there is any virtue in my being so.

February 8. I met Mrs. Webbe in the street to-day, her black eyes brighter, more piercing, more snapping than ever. She came up to me in her quick, jerky way, stopped suddenly, tall and strong, and looked at me as if she were trying to read some profound secret, hid in the very bottom of my soul. I could never by any possibility be half so mysterious as Mrs. Webbe's looks seemed to make me.

"Do you write to Tom?" she demanded.

"I don't even know where he is," I answered.

"Then you don't write to him?"

"No."

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"That's a pity," Mrs. Webbe went on, her eyes piercing me so that they almost gave me a sensation of physical discomfort. "He ought to know."

I looked at her a moment in silence, thinking she might explain her enigmatic words.

"To know what?" I asked at length.

"About you and George Weston," she responded, nodding her head emphatically; "but if you don't know where he is, that's the whole of it. Good-day."

She was gone before I could gather my wits to tell her that the news could make no difference to Tom. In discussing my separation from George I suppose the village gossips—But I will not be unkind because I am unhappy. I know, and know with sincere pain, that Deacon and Mrs. Webbe believe that I could have saved Tom if I had been willing to marry him. I have cared for Tom from girlhood, and I am fond of him now, in spite of all that has happened to show how weak he is; but it would be wicked for him to be allowed to suppose the breaking of my engagement makes any difference in our relations. He cannot be written to, however, so I need not trouble.

February 10. Miss West has gone back to Franklin, but I do not see that this makes any especial difference to me. Aunt Naomi told me this afternoon, evidently thinking that I should wish to hear it, and evidently, too, trying not to let me see that she regarded it as more than an ordinary bit of news. I only wonder how long it will be before George will follow her. Oh, I do hope she will make him happy!

February 12. The consequence of my being of no religion seems to be that I am regarded as a sort of neutral ground by persons of all religions, where they may air their theological troubles. Now it is a Catholic who asks advice. Perhaps I had better set up as a consulting something or other. Mediums are the only sort of female consulting things that I think of, and they are so far from respectable that I could not be a medium; but I shall have to invent a name to call myself by, if this goes much further.

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This time it is Rosa. Rosa is as devout a little superstitious body as I ever saw. She firmly believes all that her church teaches her, and she believes all sorts of queer things besides. I wonder sometimes that her small mind, which never can remember to lay the table properly, can hold in remembrance all the droll superstitions she shiveringly accepts. Perhaps the reason why she is so inefficient a servant, and is so constantly under the severe blight of Hannah's awful disapproval, is that her mental faculties are exhausted in remembering signs and omens. I've no right to make fun of her, however, for I don't like to spill salt myself!

The conundrum which Rosa brings to me is not one which it is easy to handle. She believes that her church has the power of eternal life and death over her, and she wishes, in defiance of her church's prohibition, to marry a divorced man. She declares that unless she can marry Ran Gargan her heart will be broken into the most numerous fragments, and she implores me to devise a method by which she can accomplish the difficult feat of getting the better of the church.

"Sure, Miss Privet," she said in the most naïve way in the world, "you're that clever that ye could invent a way what would get round Father O'Rafferty; he's no that quick at seein' things."

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I suspect, from something the child let fall, that Hannah, with genuine righteous hatred of the Scarlet Woman, had urged Rosa to fly in the face of her church, and marry Ran. Hannah would regard it as a signal triumph of grace if Rosa could be so far persuaded to disobey the tenets of Catholicism. I can understand perfectly Hannah's way of looking at the matter; but I have no more against Rosa's church than I have against Hannah's, so this view does not appeal to me.

"Rosa," I said, "don't you believe in your church?"

She broke into voluble protestations of her entire faithfulness, and seemed inclined to feel that harm might come to her from some unseen malevolence if such charges were made so as to be heard by spying spirits.

"Then I don't see why you come to me," I said. "If you are a good Catholic, I should think that that settled the matter."

"But I thought you'd think of some way of gettin' round it," she responded, beginning to cry. "Me heart is broke for Ran, an' it is himsilf that'll go to the bad if I don't have him."

Poor little ignorant soul! How could one reason with her, or what was there to say? I could only try to show her that she could not be happy if she did the thing that she knew to be wrong.

"But what for is ye tellin' me that, when ye don't belave it's wrong?" she demanded, evidently aggrieved.

"I do think it is wrong to act against a church in which you believe," I said.

I am afraid I did not in the least comfort her, for she went away with an air in which indignation was mingled with disappointment. [Pg 48]

February 15. Rosa is all right. She told me to-day, fingering her apron and blushing very prettily, that she saw Dennis Maloney last night, and was engaged to him already. He has, it seems, personal attractions superior to those of Ran, and Rosa added that on the whole she prefers a first-hand husband.

"So I'm obliged to ye for yer advisin' me to give Ran the go-by," she concluded. "I thought yer would."

I do not know whether the swiftness of the change of sweethearts or the amazing conclusion of her remarks moved me more.

February 16. Father used to say that Peggy Cole was the proudest thing on the face of the earth, and he would certainly be amused if he could know how her pride has increased. I could not leave Mother this afternoon, and so I sent Rosa down with a pail of soup to the poor old goody. Peggy refused to have it because I did not bring it myself. She wasn't a pauper to have me send her soup, she informed Rosa. I am afraid that Rosa was indiscreet enough to make some remark upon the fact that I carry her food pretty often, for old Peggy said,—I can see her wrinkled old nose turned up in supreme scorn as she brought it out,—"That's different. When Miss Ruth brings me a little thing now and then,—and it ain't often she'll take that trouble, either!—that's just a friend dropping in with something to make her sure of her welcome!" I shall have to leave everything to-morrow to go and make my peace with Peggy, for the old goose would starve to death before she would take anything from the Overseers of the Poor, and I do not see how she keeps alive, anyway. [Pg 49]

February 17. I had a note from George this morning about the Burgess mortgage, and in it he said that he is to be away for a week or two. That means—

But I have no longer any right to speculate about him. It is not my business what it means. Henceforth he must come and go, and I must not even wonder about it.

February 19. I must face the fact that Mother will not be with me much longer. I can see how she grows weaker, and I can only be thankful that she does not suffer. She speaks of death now and then as calmly as if it were a matter of every-day routine.

"Mrs. Privet," Dr. Wentworth said this morning, "you seem to be no more afraid of death than you are of a sunrise."

"I'm not orthodox enough to be afraid," she answered, with her little quizzical smile.

Dear little Mother, she is so serene, so sweet, so quiet; nothing could be more dignified, and yet nothing more entirely simple. She is dying like a gentlewoman. She lies there as gracious as if she had invited death as a dear friend, and awaited him with the kindest welcome. The naturalness of it all is what impresses me most. When I am with her it is impossible for me to feel that anything terrible is at hand. She might be going away to pass a pleasant summer visit somewhere; but there is no suspicion of anything dreadful or painful.

It is not that she is indifferent, either,—she has always found life a thing to be glad of. [Pg 50]

"I should have liked well enough to stay a while longer to bother you, Ruth," she said, after Dr. Wentworth had gone, "but we must take things as they come. It's better, perhaps; you need a rest."

Dear Mother! She is always so lovely and so wonderful!

February 21. Mother has been brighter to-day, and really seems better. If it will only last! I asked her last night if she expected to see Father. She lay quiet a moment, and then she turned her face to smile on me before she answered.

"I don't know, Ruth," she said. "I have wondered about that a good deal, and I cannot be sure. If he is alive and knows, then I shall see him. I am sure of that. It is only life that has been keeping us apart. If he is not any more, why, then I shall not be either, and so of course I can't be unhappy. I feel just as he used to when he had you read that translation from something to him the week before he died; the thing that said death could not be an evil, for if we kept on existing we would be no longer bothered by the body, and that if we didn't, it was no matter, for we shouldn't know."

She was still a moment, looking into some great distance with her patient, sunken eyes. Then she smiled again, and said as if to herself, "But I think I shall see him."

February 25. George is married. Aunt Naomi has been in to tell me. She mentioned it as if it were a thing in which I should have no more interest than in any bit of village news. She did not watch me, I remember now, or ask my opinion as she generally does. She was wonderfully tactful and kind; only I can see she thought I ought to know about it, and that the best way was to put the matter bluntly and simply, as if it had no possible sentiment connected with it. When she had done her errand, she went on to make remarks about Deacon Richards and the vestry fires; just [Pg 51]

what, I do not know, for I could not listen. Then she mercifully went away.

I did not expect it so soon! I knew that it must come, but I was not prepared for this suddenness. I supposed that I should hear of the engagement, and get used to it; and then come to know the wedding was to be, and so come gradually to the thing itself that shuts George forever out of my life. It is better, it is a thousand times better to have it all over at once. I might have brooded morbidly through the days as they brought nearer and nearer the time when George was to be her husband instead of mine. Now it is done without my knowing. For three days he has been married; and I have only to think of him as the husband of another woman, and try to take it as a matter of course. Whether George has done this because he cares so much for her or not, he has done what is kindest for me. It is like waking from the ether to find that the tooth is out. We may be sick and sore, but the worst is past, and we may begin, slowly perhaps, but really, to recover.

Yet it is so soon! How completely he must be carried away to be so forgetful of all that is past! We were engaged six years; and he marries Miss West after an acquaintance of hardly as many weeks. I wonder if all men are like this. It seems sometimes as if they were not capable of the long, brooding devotion of women. But it is better so, and I would not have him thinking about me. He must be wrapped up in her. I do care most for his happiness, and his happiness now lies in his thinking of her and forgetting all the six years when he was—when I thought he was mine.

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I will not moon, and I will not fret. That George has changed does not, of course, alter my feeling. I am sore and hurt; I see life now restricted in its uses. He has cut me off from the happiness of serving him and helping him as a wife; but as a friend there is still much that I may do. Very likely I can help his wife,—she seems so far short of what his wife should be. For service in all loyalty I belong to him still; and that is the thought which must help me.

February 28. I have already had a chance to do something for George. I hope that I have not been unfair to my friends; but I do not see how I could decide any other way.

Old lady Andrews came in this afternoon, with her snowy curls and cheeks pink from the wind. Almost as soon as she was seated she began with characteristic directness.

"I know you won't mind my coming straight to the point, my dear," she said. "I came to ask you about George Weston's new wife. Do you think we had better call on her?"

The question had come to me before, but I confess I had selfishly thought of it only as a personal matter.

"Mr. Weston's people were hardly of our sort, you know," she continued in her gentle voice, "though of course after your father took him into his office as a student we all felt like receiving him. I never knew him until after that."

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"I have seen a good deal of him," I said, wondering if my voice sounded queer; "you know he helped settle the estate."

"It did seem providential," Mrs. Andrews went on, "that his mother did not live, for of course we could hardly have known her. She was a Hardy, you know, from Canton. But I have always found Mr. Weston a very presentable young man, especially for one of his class. He is really very intelligent."

"As we have received him," I said, "I don't see how we can refuse to receive his wife."

"That's the way I thought you would feel about it," old lady Andrews answered; "but I wished to be sure. As he has been received entirely on account of his connection with your family, I told Aunt Naomi that it ought to be for you to say whether the favor should be extended to his wife. I am informed that she is very pretty, but she is not, I believe, exactly one of our sort."

"She is exceedingly pretty," I assured her. "I have seen her. She is not—Well, I am afraid that she is rather Western, but I shall call."

"Then that settles it. Of course we shall do whatever you decide. I suppose he will bring her to our church. I say 'our,' Ruth, because you really belong to it. You are just a lamb that has found a place with a picket off, and got outside the fold. We shall have you back some time."

"I am afraid," I said laughing, "that I should only disgrace you and injure the fold by pulling a fresh picket off somewhere to get out again."

She laughed in turn, and fluttered her small hands in her delightful, birdlike way.

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"I am not afraid of that," she responded. "When the Lord leads you in, He is able to make you want to stay. I hope your mother is comfortable."

So that is settled, and Miss West—Why am I such a coward about writing it?—Mrs. Weston is to be one of us. George will be glad that she is not left out of society.

III

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MARCH

March 2. Mother's calmness keeps me ashamed of the hot ache in my heart and the restlessness which makes it so hard for me to keep an outward composure. Hannah is rather shocked that she

should be so entirely unmoved in the face of death, and the dear, foolish old soul, steeped in theological asperities from her cradle, must needs believe that Mother is somehow endangering her future welfare by this very serenity.

"Don't you think, Miss Ruth," she said to me yesterday, "that you could persuade your mother to see Mr. Saychase? She'd do it to oblige you."

"But it wouldn't oblige me, Hannah."

"Oh, Miss Ruth, think of her immortal soul!"

"Hannah," I said as gently as I could, she was so distressed, "you know how Mother always felt about those things. It certainly couldn't do any good now to try to alter her opinions, and it would only tire her."

I left Hannah as quickly as I could without hurting her feelings, but I might have known that her conscience would force her to speak to Mother.

"Bless me, Hannah," Mother said to her, "I'm no more wicked because I'm going to die than if I were going to live. I can't help dying, you know, so I don't feel responsible."

When Hannah tried to go on, and broke down with tears, Mother put out her thin hand, like a sweet shadow. [Pg 56]

"Hannah," she said, "I know how you feel, and I thank you for speaking; but don't be troubled. Where there are 'many mansions,' don't you think there may be one even for those who did not see the truth, if they were honest in their blindness?"

March 4. How far away everything else seems when the foot of death is almost at the door! As I sit by the bedside in the long nights, wondering whether he will come before morning, I think of the nights in which I may sometime be waiting for death myself. I wonder whether I shall be as serene and absolutely unterrified as Mother is. It is after all only the terror of the unknown. Why should we be more ready to think of the unknown as dreadful than as delightful? We certainly hail the thought of new experiences in the body; why not out of it? Novelty in itself must give a wonderful charm to that new life, at least for a long time. Think of the pleasure of having youth all over again, for we shall at least be young to any new existence into which we go, just as babies are young to this.

Death is terrible, it seems to me, only when we think of ourselves who are left behind, not when we think of those who go. Life is a thing so beautiful that it may be sad to think of them as deprived of it; but the more beautiful it is, the more I am assured that whatever power made the earth must be able to make something better. If life is good, a higher step in evolution must be nobler; and however we mourn, none of us would dare to say that our grief is caused by the belief that our friends have through death gone on to sorrow. [Pg 57]

March 8. This morning—

March 11. Mother was buried to-day. I have taken out this book to try to set down—to set down what? Not what I have felt since the end came. That is not possible, and if it were, I have not the courage. I suppose the mournful truth is that in the dreadful loneliness which death has left in the house, I got out my diary as a companion. One's own thoughts are forlorn company when they are so sad, but if they are written out they may come to have more reality, and the journal to seem more like another personality. How strange and shameful the weakness is which makes it hard for us to be alone; the feeling that we cannot endure the brooding universe about us unless we have hold of some human hand! Yet we are so small,—the poor, naked, timorous soul, a single fleck of thistle-down tossed about by all the winds which fill the immensities of an infinite universe. Why should we not be afraid? Father would say, "Why should we?" He believed that the universe took care of everything in it, because everything is part of itself. "You've only to think of our own human instinct of self-preservation on a scale as great as you can conceive," he told me the day before he died, "and you get some idea of the way in which the universal must protect the particular." I am afraid that I am not able to grasp the idea as he did. I have thought of it many times, and of how calm and dignified he was in those last days. I am a woman, and the universe is so great that it turns me cold to think of it. I am able to get comfort out of Father's idea only by remembering how sure he was of it, and how completely real it was to him. Yet Mother was as sure as he. She told me once that not to be entirely at ease would be to dishonor Father's belief, and she was no less serene in the face of death than he was. Yes; it would be to dishonor them both to doubt, and I do not in my heart of hearts; but it is lonely, lonely. [Pg 58]

March 12. It is touching to see how human kindness, the great sympathy with what is real and lasting in the human heart, overcomes the narrowness of creeds in the face of the great tragedy of death. Hannah would be horrified at any hint that she wavered in her belief, yet she said to me to-day:—

"Don't you worry about your mother, Miss Ruth. She was a good woman, if her eyes were not opened to the truth as it is in Jesus. Her Heavenly Father'll look after her. I guess she sees things some different now she's face to face with Him; and I believe she had the root of the matter in her somehow, though she hadn't grace given her to let her light shine among men."

Dear old Hannah! She is too loving in her heart not to be obliged to widen her theology when she is brought to the actual application of the awful belief she professes, and she is too human not to feel that a life so patient and so upright as Mother's must lead to eternal peace, no matter what the creed teaches.

March 13. The gray kitten is chasing its tail before the fire, and I have been looking at it and the

blazing wood through my tears until I could bear it no longer. The moonlight is on the snow in the graveyard, and must show that great black patch where the grave is. She cannot be there; she cannot be conscious of the bleak chill of the earth; and the question whether she is anywhere and is conscious at all is in my mind constantly. She must be; she cannot have gone out like a candle-flame. She said to Mr. Saychase, that day Hannah brought him and Mother was too gentle to refuse to see him, that she had always believed God must have far too much self-respect not to take care of creatures He had made, and that she was not in the least troubled, because she did not feel any responsibility about what was to happen after death. She was right, of course; but he was horrified. He began to stammer out something, but Mother stopped him.

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"I didn't mean to shock you," she said gently; "but don't you think, Mr. Saychase, I am near enough to the end to have the privilege of saying what I really believe?"

He wouldn't have been human if he could have resisted the voice that said it or the smile that enforced the words. Now she knows. She has found the heart of truth somewhere out there in the sky, which to us looks so wide, so thick with stars which might be abiding-places. She may have met Father. How much he, at least, must have to tell her! Whether he would know about us or not, I cannot decide. In any case I think he would like her to tell him. She is learning wonderful things. Yes; she knows, and I am sure she is glad.

March 14. George has been to see me. In the absorption and grief of the last fortnight I have hardly remembered him, and he has brought his wife home without my giving the matter a thought. It is wonderful that anything could so hold me that I have not been moved, but they came back the day after the funeral, and I did not hear of it until a couple of days later. It gave me a great shock when I saw him coming up the walk, but by the time he was in the house, I had collected myself, and I had, I think, my usual manner.

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He was most kind and sympathetic, and yet he could not help showing how ill at ease he was. Perhaps he could not help reflecting that my duty to Mother had been the thing which kept us apart, and that it was strange for this to end just as there was no longer the possibility of our coming together.

I do not remember what George and I said to each other to-night, any more than I can recall what we said on that last time when he was here. I might bring back that other talk out of the dull blur of pain, but where would be the good? Nothing could come of it but new suffering. We were both outwardly calm and self-possessed, I know, and talked less like lovers than like men of business. So a merchant might sell the remnants of a bankrupt fortune, I fancy; and when he was gone I went to prepare Mother's night drink as calmly as if nothing had happened. I did not dare not to be calm.

To-night we met like the friends we promised to be. He was uncomfortable at first, but I managed to make him seem at ease, or at least not show that he felt strange. He looked at me rather curiously now and then. I think he was astonished that I showed no more feeling about our past. I cannot have him unhappy through me, and he must feel that at least I accept my fate serenely, or he will be troubled. I must not give myself the gratification of proving that I am constant. He may believe I am cold and perhaps heartless, but that is better than for him to feel responsible for my being miserable.

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What did he tell me that night? It was in effect—though I think he hardly realized what he said or implied—how our long engagement had worn out the passion of a lover, and he felt only the friendship of a brother; the coming of a new, real love had shown him the difference. Does this mean that married love goes through such a change? Will he by and by have lived through his first love for his wife, and if so what will be left? That is not my concern; but would this same thing have come if I had been his wife, and should I now find myself, if we had been married when we hoped to be, only a friend who could not so fill his heart as to shut out a new love? Better a hundredfold that it should be as it is. At least he was not tied to me when the discovery came. But it is not always so. Certainly Father and Mother loved each other more after long years of living together.—But this is not a train of thought which it is well to follow. What is must be met and lived with; but I will not weaken my heart by dwelling on what might have been.

George was most kind to come, and it must have been hard for him; but I am afraid it was not a happy half-hour for either of us. I suppose that any woman brought face to face with a man she still loves when he has done with loving her must feel as if she were shamed. That is nonsense, however, and I fought against the feeling. Now I am happy in the thought that at least I have done one thing. I have made it possible for George to come to me if hereafter he need me. If he were in trouble and I could help, I know he would appeal to me as simply as ever. If I can help him, I am yet free to do it. I thank God for this!

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March 16. I have asked Charlotte Kendall to stay with me for a while. Dear old Miss Charlotte, she is so poor and so proud and so plucky! I know that she is half starving in that great, gaunt Kendall house, that looms up so among its Balm of Gilead trees, as if it were an asylum for the ghosts of all the bygone generations of the family. Somehow it seems to me that in America the "decayed gentlewomen," as they are unpleasantly called in England, have a harder time than anywhere else in the world. Miss Charlotte has to live up to her instincts and her traditions or be bitterly humiliated and miserable. People generally assume that the family pride behind this is weak if it is not wicked; but surely the ideal of an honorable race, cultivated and right-minded for generations, is a thing to be cherished. The growth of civilization must depend a good deal upon having these ideas of family preserved somehow. Father used to say the great weakness of modern times is that nowadays the best of the race, instead of saying to those below, "Climb up to us," say, "We will come down to you." I suppose this is hardly a fair summing up of modern

views of social conditions, though of course I know very little about them; but I am sure that the way in which class distinctions are laughed at is a mistake. I hope I hate false pride as much as anybody could; yet dear Miss Charlotte, trying hard not to disgrace her ancestors, and being true to her idea of what a gentlewoman should do, is to me pathetic and fine. She cares more for the traditions of her race than she does for her own situation; and anybody who did not admire this strong and unselfish spirit must look at life from a point of view that I cannot understand. I can have her here now on an excuse that she will not suspect, and she shall be fed and rested as she has not been for years.

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March 17. I forgot Miss Charlotte's plants when I asked her to come here. I went over this morning to invite her, and I found her trimming her great oleander tree with tender little snips and with loving glances which were like those a mother gives her pet child in dressing it for a party. The sun came in at the bay window, and the geraniums which are the pride of Miss Charlotte's heart were coming finely into blossom. If the poor old soul is ever really happy it is in the midst of her plants, and things grow for her as for nobody else.

"Do look, Ruth," she said with the greatest eagerness; "that slip of heather that came from the wreath is really sprouting. I do think it will live."

She brought me a vial full of greenish water into which was stuck a bit of heather from the wreath that Cousin Mehitable sent for Mother. Miss Charlotte had asked me if she might go to the graveyard for the slip. She was so pathetic when she spoke of it!

"It isn't just to have a new plant," she said. "It is partly that it would always remind me of your mother, and I should love it for that."

To-day she was wonderful. Her eyes shone as she looked at the twig, and showed me the tiny white point, like a little mouse's tooth, that had begun to come through the bark under the green water. It was as if she had herself somehow accomplished the miracle of creation. I could have taken her into my arms and cried over her as she stood there so happy with just this slip and her plants for family and riches.

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I told her my errand, and she began to look troubled. Unconsciously, I am sure, she glanced around at the flowers, and in an instant I understood.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I said before she had time to speak, "I forgot that you cannot leave the plants."

"I was thinking how I could manage," she answered, evidently troubled between the wish to oblige me and the thought that her precious plants could not be left.

"You need not manage," I said. "I was foolish enough not to think of them. Of course you can't leave them."

"I might come over in the daytime," she proposed hesitatingly. "I could make up the fire in the morning, and at this time of the year the room would be warm enough for them till I came back at night. I know you must be most lonely at night, and I would stay as late as I could."

"You are a dear thing," I said, and her tone brought tears to my eyes. "If you will come over after breakfast and stay until after supper that will do nicely,—if you think you can spare the time."

"There's nothing I can spare better," she said, laughing. "I'm like the man that was on his way to jail and was met by a beggar. 'I've nothing to give you but time,' he said, 'and that his Honor just gave me, so I don't like to give it away.' That's one of your father's stories, Ruth."

I stayed talking with her for an hour, and it was touching to see how she was trying to be entertaining and to make me cheerful. I did come away with my thoughts entirely taken off of myself and my affairs, and that is something.

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March 20. It has done me good to have Miss Charlotte here. She makes her forlorn little jests and tells her stories in her big voice, and somehow all the time is thinking, I can see, of brightening the days for me. Peter was completely scornful for two days, but now he passes most of his time in her lap, condescending, of course, but gracious.

Miss Charlotte has been as dear and kindly as possible, and to-night in the twilight she told me the romance of her life. I do not know how it came about. I suppose that she was thinking of Mother and wanted me to know what Mother had been to her. Perhaps, too, she may have had a feeling that it would comfort me to know that she understood out of her own suffering the pain that had come to me through George's marriage.

I do not remember her father and mother. They both died when I was very young. I have heard that Mr. Kendall was a very handsome man, who scandalized the village greatly by his love of horses and wine, but Father used to tell me he was a scholar and a cultivated man. I am afraid he did not care very much for the comfort of others; and Aunt Naomi always speaks of him as a rake who broke his wife's heart. Charlotte took care of him after Mrs. Kendall died, and was devoted to him, they say. She was a middle-aged woman before she was left alone with that big house, and she sold the Kendall silver to pay his debts. To-night she spoke of him with a sort of pitiful pride, yet with an air as if she had to defend him, perhaps even to herself.

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"I'm an old woman, Ruth," she said, "and my own life seems to me like an old book that I read so long ago that I only half remember it. It is forty years since I was engaged."

It is strange I had never known of this before; but I suppose it passed out of people's minds before I was old enough to notice.

"I never knew you had been engaged, Miss Charlotte," I said.

"Then your mother never told you what she did for me," she answered, looking into the fire. "That was like her. She was more than a mother to me at the time"—She broke off, and then repeated, "It was like her not to speak of it. There are few women like your mother, Ruth."

We were both silent for a time, and I had to struggle not to break down. Miss Charlotte sat looking into the fire with the tears running unchecked down her wrinkled cheeks. She did not seem conscious of them, and the thought came to me that there had been so much sadness in her life that she was too accustomed to tears to notice them.

"It is forty years," she said again. "I was called a beauty then, though you'd find that hard to believe now, Ruth, when I'm like an old scarecrow in a cornfield. I suppose no young person ever really believes that an old woman can have been beautiful unless there's a picture to prove it. I'll show you a daguerreotype some time; though, after all, what difference does it make? At least he thought"—

Another silence came here. The embers in the fire dropped softly, and the dull March twilight gathered more and more thickly. I felt as if I were being led into some sacred room, closed many years, but where the dead had once lain. Perhaps it was fanciful, but it seemed almost as if I were seeing the place where poor Miss Charlotte's youth had died.

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"It wasn't proper that I should marry him, Ruth. I know now father was right, only sometimes—For myself I suppose I hadn't proper pride, and I shouldn't have minded; but father was right. A Kendall couldn't marry a Sprague, of course. I knew it all along; and I vowed to myself over and over that I wouldn't care for him. When a girl tells herself that she won't love a man, Ruth," she broke in with a bitter laugh, "the thing's done already. It was so with me. I needn't have promised not to love him if I hadn't given him my whole heart already,—what a girl calls her heart. I wouldn't own it; and over and over I told him that I didn't care for him; and then at last"—

It was terrible to hear the voice in which she spoke. She seemed to be choking, and it was all that I could do to keep control of myself. I could not have spoken, even if there had been anything to say. I wanted to take her in my arms and get her pitiful, tear-stained face hidden; but I only sat quiet.

"Well, we were engaged at last, and I knew father would never consent; but I hoped something would happen. When we are young enough we all hope the wildest things will happen and we shall get what we want. Then father found out; and then—and then—I don't blame father, Ruth. He was right. I see now that he was right. Of course it wouldn't have done; but then it almost killed me. If it hadn't been for your mother, dear, I think I should have died. I wanted to die; but I had to take care of father."

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I put out my hand and got hold of hers, but I could not speak. The tears dropped down so that they sparkled in the firelight, but she did not wipe them away. I was crying myself, for her old sorrow and mine seemed all part of the one great pain of the race, somehow. I felt as if to be a woman meant something so sad that I dared not think of it.

"And the hardest was that he thought I was wrong to give him up. He could not see it as I did, Ruth; and of course it was natural that he couldn't understand how father would feel about the family. I could never explain it to him, and I couldn't have borne to hurt his feelings by telling him."

"Is he"—

"He is dead, my dear. He married over at Fremont, and I hope he was happy. I think probably he was. Men are happy sometimes when a woman wouldn't be. I hope he was happy."

That was the whole of it. We sat there silent until Rosa came to call us to supper. When we stood up I put my arms about her, and kissed her. Then she made a joke, and wiped her eyes, and through supper she was so gay that I could hardly keep back the tears. Poor, poor, lonely, brave Miss Charlotte!

March 21. Cousin Mehitable arrived yesterday according to her usual fashion, preceded by a telegram. I tell her that if she followed her real inclinations, she would dispatch her telegram from the station, and then race the messenger; but she is constrained by her breeding to be a little more deliberate, so I have the few hours of her journey in which to expect her. It is all part of her brisk way. She can never move fast enough, talk quickly enough, get through whatever she is doing with rapidity enough. I remember Father's telling her once that she would never have patience to lie and wait for the Day of Judgment, but would get up every century or two to hurry things along. It always seems as if she would wear herself to shreds in a week; yet here she is, more lively at sixty than I am at less than half that age.

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She was very kind, and softened wonderfully when she spoke of Mother. I think that she loved her more than she does any creature now alive.

"Aunt Martha," she said last night, "wasn't human. She was far too angelic for that. But she was too sweet and human for an angel. For my part I think she was something far better than either, and far more sensible."

This was a speech so characteristic that it brought me to tears and smiles together.

To-night Cousin Mehitable came to the point of her errand with customary directness.

"I came down," she said, "to see how soon you expect to arrange to live with me."

"I hadn't expected anything about it," I returned.

"Of course you would keep the house," she went on, entirely disregarding my feeble protest. "You might want to come back summers sometimes. This summer I'm going to take you to Europe."

I am too much accustomed to her habit of planning things to be taken entirely by surprise; but it did rather take my breath away to find my future so completely disposed of. I felt almost as if I were not even to have a chance to protest.

"But I never thought of giving up the house," I managed to say.

"Of course not; why should you?" she returned briskly. "You have money enough to keep up the place and live where you please. Don't I know that for this ten years you and Aunt Martha haven't spent half your income? Keep it, of course; for, as I say, sometimes you may like to come back for old times' sake."

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I could only stare at her, and laugh.

"Oh, you laugh, Ruth," Cousin Mehitable remarked, more forcibly than ever, "but you ought to understand that I've taken charge of you. We are all that are left of the family now, and I'm the head of it. You are a foolish thing anyway, and let everybody impose on your good-nature. You need somebody to look after you. If I'd had you in charge, you'd never have got tangled up in that foolish engagement. I'm glad you had the sense to break it."

I felt as if she had given me a blow in the face, but I could not answer.

"Don't blush like that," Cousin Mehitable commanded. "It's all over, and you know I always said you were a fool to marry a country lawyer."

"Father was a country lawyer," I retorted.

"Fudge! Cousin Horace was a judge and a man whose writings had given him a wide reputation. Don't outrage his memory by calling him a rustic. For my part I never had any patience with him for burying himself in the country like a clodhopper."

"You forget that Mother's health"—I began; but with Cousin Mehitable one is never sure of being allowed to complete a sentence.

"Oh, yes," she interrupted, "of course I forgot. Well, if there could be an excuse, Aunt Martha would serve for excusing anything. I beg your pardon, Ruth. But now all that is past and gone, and fortunately the family is still well enough remembered in Boston for you to take up life there with very little trouble. That's what I had in mind ten years ago, when I insisted on your coming out."

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"People who saw me then will hardly remember me."

"The folks that knew your father and mother," she went on serenely, "are of course old people like me; but they will help you to know the younger generation. Besides, those you know will not have forgotten you. A Privet is not so easily forgotten, and you were an uncommonly pretty bud, Ruth. What a fool you were not to marry Hugh Colet! You always were a fool."

Cousin Mehitable generally tempers a compliment in this manner, and it prevents me from being too much elated by her praise.

She was interrupted here by the necessity of going to prepare for supper. Miss Charlotte did not come over to-day, so we were alone together. No sooner were we seated at the supper-table than she returned to the attack.

"When you live in Boston," she said, "I shall"—

"Suppose I should not live in Boston?" I interrupted.

"But you will. What else should you do?"

"I might go on living here."

"Living here!" she cried out explosively. "You don't call this living, do you? How long is it since you heard any music, or saw a picture, or went to the theatre, or had any society?"

I was forced to confess that music and painting and acting were all entirely lacking in Tuskamuck; but I remarked that I had all the books that attracted me, and I protested against her saying I hadn't any society.

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"Oh, you see human beings now and then," Cousin Mehitable observed coolly; "and I dare say they are very worthy creatures. But you know yourself they are not society. You haven't forgotten the year I brought you out."

I have not forgotten it, of course; and I cannot deny that when I think of that winter in Boston, the year I was nineteen, I do feel a little mournful sometimes. It was all so delightful, and it is all so far away now. I hardly heard what Cousin Mehitable said next. I was thinking how enchanting a home in Boston would be, and how completely alone as for family I am. Cousin Mehitable is the only near relative I have in the world, and why should I not be with her? It would be delightful. Perhaps I may manage to get in a week or two in town now and then; but I cannot go away for long. There would be nobody to start the reading-room, or keep up the Shakespeare Club; and what would become of Kathie and Peggy Cole, or of all that dreadful Spearin tribe? I dare say I am too proud of my consequence, and that if I went away somebody would be found to look after things. Still I know I am useful here; and it seems to me I am really needed. Besides, I love the place and the people, and I think my friends love me.

March 23. Cousin Mehitable went home to-day. Easter is at hand, and she has a bonnet from Paris,—“a perfect dream of a bonnet,” she said with the enthusiasm of a girl, “dove-colored velvet, and violets, and steel beads, and two or three white ostrich tips; a bonnet an angel couldn't resist, Ruth!”—and this bonnet must form part of the church service on Easter. The connection between Paris bonnets and the proper observance of the day is not clear in my mind; but when I said something of this sort to Cousin Mehitable she rebuked me with great gravity.

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“Ruth, there is nothing in worse form than making jokes about sacred subjects.”

“Your bonnet isn't sacred,” I retorted, for I cannot resist sometimes the temptation to tease her; “or at least it can't be till it's been to church on Easter.”

“You know what I mean,” was her answer. “When you live with me I shall insist upon your speaking respectfully of the church.”

“I wasn't speaking of the church,” I persisted, laughing at the gravity with which she always takes up its defense; “I was speaking of your bonnet, your Paris bonnet, your Easter bonnet, your ecclesiastical, frivolous, giddy, girlish bonnet.”

“Oh, you may think it too young for me,” she said eagerly, forgetting the church in her excitement, “but it isn't really. It's as modest and appropriate as anything you ever saw; and so becoming and *chic*!”

“Oh, I can always trust your taste, Cousin Mehitable,” I told her, “but you know you're a worldly old thing. You'd insist upon having your angelic robes fitted by a fashionable tailor.”

Again she looked grave and shocked in a flash.

“How can you, Ruth! You are a worse heathen than ever. But then there is no church in Tuskamuck, so I suppose it is not to be wondered at. That's another reason for taking you away from this wilderness.”

“There are two churches, as you know very well,” I said.

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“Nonsense! They're only meeting-houses,—conventicles. However, when you come to Boston to live, we will see.”

“I told you last night that I shouldn't give up Tuskamuck.”

“I know you did, but I didn't mind that. You must give it up.”

She went away insisting upon this, and refusing to accept any other decision. I did so far yield as to promise provisionally that I would go abroad with her this summer. I need to see the world with a broader view again, and I shall enjoy it. To think of the picture galleries fills me with joy already. I should be willing to cross the Atlantic just to see once more the enchanting tailor of Moroni's in the National Gallery. It is odd, it comes into my mind at this moment that he looks something like Tom Webbe, or Tom looks something like him. Very likely it is all nonsense. Yes; I will go for the summer—to leave here altogether—no, that is not to be thought of.

March 24. The whole town is excited over an accident up at the lake this morning. A man and his son were drowned by breaking through the ice. They had been up to some of the logging camps, and it is said they were not sober. They were Brownrigs, and part of the family in the little red house. The mother and the daughter are left. I hope it is not heartless to hate to think of them. I have no doubt that they suffer like others; only it is not likely folk of this sort are as sensitive as we are. It is a mercy that they are not.

March 25. The Brownrig family seems just now to be forced upon my attention, and that in no pleasant way.

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Aunt Naomi came in this forenoon, and seated herself with an air of mysterious importance. She looked at me with her keen eyes, penetrating and humorous even when she is most serious, and seemed to be examining me to discover what I was thinking. It was evident at once that she had news. This is generally true, for she seems always to have something to tell. Her mind gathers news as salt gathers moisture, and her greatest pleasure is to impart what she has heard. She has generally with me the air of being a little uncertain how I may receive her tidings. Like all persons of strong mind and a sense of humor, she is by nature in sympathy with the habit of looking at life frankly and dispassionately, and I believe that secretly and only half consciously she envies me my mental freedom. Sometimes I have suspected her of leading me on to say things which she would have felt it wrong to say herself because they are unorthodox, but which she has too much common sense not to sympathize with. She is convinced, though, that such freedom of thought as mine is wrong, and she nobly deprives herself of the pleasure of being frank in her thoughts when this would involve any reflection upon the theological conventions which are her rule of life. She gratifies a lively mind by feeding it on scraps of gossip and commenting on them in her pungent way; she is never unkind in her thought, I am sure, but she does sometimes say sharp things. Like Lady Teazle, however, she abuses people out of pure good nature. I looked at her this morning as she sat swinging her foot and munching—there is no other word for it!—her green barège veil, and I wondered, as I have often wondered before, how a woman really so clever could be content to pass so much of her time in the gathering and circulating of mere trivialities. I suppose that it is because there is so little in the village to appeal to the intellectual side of her, and her mind must be occupied. She might be a brilliant woman in a wider sphere. Now she seems something like a beaver in captivity, building dams of hairbrushes and boots on a carpeted floor.

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I confess, too, that I wondered, as I looked at her, if she represented my future. I thought of

Cousin Mehitable's doleful predictions of what I should come to if I stay in Tuskamuck, and I tried to decide whether I should come in time to be like Aunt Naomi, a general carrier of news from house to house, an old maid aunt to the whole village, with no real kindred, and with no interests wider than those of village gossip. I cannot believe it, but I suppose at my age she would not have believed it of herself.

"We're really getting to be quite like a city," Aunt Naomi said, with a grimness which showed me there was something important behind this enigmatic remark.

"Are we?" I responded. "I confess I don't see how."

"Humph!" she sniffed. "There's wickedness here that isn't generally looked for outside of the city."

"Oh, wickedness!" I said. "There is plenty of that everywhere, I suppose; but I never have thought we have more than our share of it."

She wagged her foot more violently, and had what might have seemed a considerable lunch on her green veil before she spoke again—though it is wicked for me to make fun of her. Then she took a fresh start.

"What are you knitting?" she asked.

"What started in January to be some mittens for the Turner boy. He brings our milk, and he never seems to have mittens enough."

"I don't wonder much," was her comment. "His mother has so many babies that she can't be expected to take care of them."

"Poor Mrs. Turner," I said. "I should think the poor thing would be discouraged. I am ashamed that I don't do more for her."

"I don't see that you are called upon to take care of all the poor in the town; but if you could stop her increasing her family it'd be the best thing you could do."

When Aunt Naomi makes a remark like this, I feel it is discreet to change the subject.

"I hope that now the weather is getting milder," I observed, "you are not so cold in prayer-meetings."

She was not diverted, even by this chance to dwell on her pet grievance, but went her own way.

"I suppose you'll feel now you've got to look out for that Brownrig girl, too," she said.

"That Brownrig girl?" I repeated.

I tried not to show it, but the blood rushed to my heart and made me faint. I realized something terrible was coming, though I had nothing to go upon but the old gossip about Tom and the fact that I had seen him come from the red house.

"Her sin has found her out," returned Aunt Naomi with indignant emphasis. "For my part, I don't see what such creatures are allowed to live for. Think what kind of a mother she will make. They'd better take her and her baby and drown 'em along with her father and brother."

"Aunt Naomi!" was all I could say.

"Well, I suppose you think I'm not very charitable, but it does make me mad to see that sort of trash"—

"I don't know what you are talking about," I interrupted. "Has the Brownrig girl a child?"

"No; but she's going to have. Her mother's gone off and left her, and she's down sick with pneumonia besides."

"Her mother has gone off?"

"Yes; and it'd be good riddance, if there was anybody to take care of the girl."

It is useless to ask Aunt Naomi how she knows all that goes on in the town. She collects news from the air, I believe. I reflected that she is not always right, and I hoped now she might be mistaken.

"But somebody must be with her if she's down with pneumonia," I said.

"Yes; that old Bagley woman's there. The Overseers of the Poor sent her, but she's about twice as bad as nobody, I should think. If I was sick, and she came round, I know I'd ask her to go away, and let me die in peace."

It was evident enough that Aunt Naomi was a good deal stirred up, but I did not dare to ask her why. If there is anything worse behind this scandal, I had rather not know it. We were fortunately interrupted, and Aunt Naomi went soon, so I heard no more. I was sick with the loathsomeness of having Tom Webbe connected in my thought with that wretched girl, and I do hope that it is only my foolishness. He cannot have fallen to such depths.

March 27. I have heard no more from the Brownrigs, and I must hope things were somehow not as Aunt Naomi thought. To-day I learned that she is shut up with a cold. I must go in to-morrow and see her. Miss Charlotte is a great comfort. The dear old soul begins really to look better, and the thinness about her lips is yielding to good feeding. She tells me stories of the old people of the town whom I can just remember, and she is full of reverence for both Father and Mother. Of course I never talk theology with her, but I am surprised sometimes to find that under the shell of her orthodoxy is a good deal of liberalism. I suppose any kindly mortal who accepted the old

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creeds made allowances for those nearest and dearest, and human nature will always make allowances for itself. I should think that an imaginative belief in a creed, a belief that realized the cruelty of theology, must either drive one mad or make one disbelieve from simple horror. Nobody but a savage could worship a relentless god and not become insane from the horror of being in the clutch of an implacable power.

March 28. I have had a most painful visit from Deacon Webbe. He came in looking so gray and old that it shocked me to see him. He shook hands as if he did not know what he was doing, and then sat down in a dazed way, slowly twirling his hat and fixing his eyes on it as if he were blind. I tried to say something, but only stumbled on in little commonplaces about the weather, to which he paid so little attention that it was evident he had no idea what I was saying. In a minute or two I was reduced to silence. One cannot go on saying mechanical nothings in the face of suffering, and it was impossible not to see that Deacon Webbe was in grievous pain.

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"Deacon Webbe," I said at last, when I could not bear the silence any longer, "what is the matter?"

He raised his eyes to mine with a look of pitiful helplessness.

"I've no right to come to you, Miss Ruth," he said in his slow way, "but there's nobody else, and you always were Tom's friend."

"Tom?" I repeated. "What has happened?"

"It isn't a thing to talk to a woman about," he went on, "and you'll have to excuse me, Miss Ruth. I'm sure you will. It's that Brownrig girl."

I sat silent, and I felt my hands growing cold.

"She's had a baby," he said after a moment.

The simple bald fact was horrible as he said it. I could not speak, and after a little hesitation he continued in a tone so low I could scarcely hear him.

"It's his. Think of the shame of it and the sin of it. It seems to me, if it could only have been the Lord's will, I would have been glad to die rather than to have this happen. My son!"

The wail of his voice went to my heart and made me shiver. I would have given anything I possessed to comfort him, but what could I say? Shame is worse than death. When one dies you can at least speak of the happiness that has been and the consolation of the memory of this. In disgrace whatever has been good before makes the shame only the harder to bear. What could I say to a father mourning the sin and the disgrace of his only son?

It seemed to me a long time that we sat there silent. At last he said:—

"I didn't come just to make you feel bad, Miss Ruth. I want you to tell me what I ought to do, what I can do. I ought to do something to help the girl. Bad as she is, she's sick, and she's a woman. I don't know where Tom is, and I'm that baby's grandfather." His voice choked, but he went on. "Of course I ought not to trouble you, but I don't know what to do, I don't know what to do. My wife"—

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The poor old man stopped. He is not polished, but he has the instinct of a good man to screen his wife, and plainly was afraid he might say something which would seem to reflect on her.

"My wife," he said, evidently changing the form of his words, "is dreadfully put out, as she naturally would be, and of course I don't like to talk much with her about it. I thought you might help me, Miss Ruth."

Never in my life have I felt more helpless. I tried to think clearly, but the only thing I could do was to try to comfort him. I have no remembrance of what I said, and I believe it made very little difference. What he wanted was sympathy. I had no counsel to give, but I think I sent Deacon Daniel away somewhat comforted. I could only advise him to wait and see what was needed. He of course must have thought of this himself, but he liked to have me agree with him and be good to him. He will do his duty, and what is more he will do his best, but he will do it with very little help from Mrs. Webbe, I am afraid. Poor Deacon Daniel! I could have put my arms round his neck and kissed his weather-beaten cheek, but he would not have understood. I suppose he would have been frightened half out of his wits, and very likely would have thought that I had suddenly gone mad. It is so hard to comfort a slow-minded person; he cannot see what you mean by a caress. Yet I hope that Deacon Daniel went away somewhat heartened. Oh, if Tom could only realize the sorrow I saw in his father's eyes, I think he would have his punishment.

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March 29. When Deacon Webbe said last night that he did not know where Tom was, I thought for just a moment of the sealed address Tom left me. I was so taken up with pity, however, that the thought passed from my mind. After the Deacon was gone I wondered whether I should have spoken of the letter; but it seemed to me that it was better to have said nothing. I thought I should open it before saying anything; and I needed to consider whether the time had come when I was justified in reading it. Tom trusted me, and I was bound by that; yet surely he ought to be told the state of things. It was imperative that he should know about the poor girl. I have never been able to be sure why he did not let his family know where he was, but I fear he may have quarreled with them. Now he must be told. Oh, it is such wretched business, so sad and dreadful!

I went upstairs after thinking by the fire until it had burned to embers, and indeed until the very ashes were cold. I took out Tom's letter, and for a moment I was half sick at the thought that he had degraded himself so. It seemed almost as if in holding his letter I was touching her, and I would gladly have thrown it in the fire unopened. Then I was ashamed to be so squeamish and so

uncharitable, and realized how foolish I was. The sealed envelope had in it a card with Tom's address in New York, and this note:—

"If you open this it must mean that you know. I have nothing to say in my own defense that you could understand; only this is true, Ruth: I have never really cared for any woman in the world but you. You will not believe it, and you will not be likely to find it very easy to forgive me for saying it now, but it is true. I never knew better how completely you have possession of me than I do just at this moment, when I know I am writing what you will read hating me. No, I suppose you can't really hate anybody; but you must despise me, and it is an insult for me to say I love you. But I have loved you all my life, and I cannot help it. I shall go on till I die, even if you do not speak to me again in my whole life. Do not make me come home unless I must. Forgive me, if you can."

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The note had neither end nor beginning. I was so overcome by it all, by the pity of it, that I could not trust myself to think. I sat down and wrote to Tom just this message, without salutation or signature:—

"Your father has been here to see me. The Brownrig girl is ill of pneumonia. Her baby was born night before last, and is alive."

I sent this off to-day. What he will do I cannot tell. I cannot even be sure what he ought to do, and I had no right to urge him to come or to stay away. Certainly for him to marry that outcast creature seems impossible; but if he does not the baby must go through life with a brand of shame on her. The world is so cruel to illegitimate children! Perhaps it has to be; at least Father believed that the only preservation of society lay in this severity; but I am a woman, and I think of the children, who are not to blame. Things are so tangled up in human relations that one thread cannot be drawn taut without bringing about tragedies on other lines.

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Yet to marry this girl—Oh, it is not possible! To think of Tom Webbe's living in the same house with that dreadful creature, of his having it known that he had married such a woman—

It is horrible, whichever way I look at it. I cannot be kind in my thoughts to one of them without being cruel to the other. I am so thankful that I have not to decide. I know I should be too weak to be just, and then I should be always unhappy at the wrong I had done. Now, whatever I was called upon to take the responsibility of was done when I had written to Tom.

IV

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APRIL

April 1. When a new month comes in it always seems as if something should happen. The divisions of time do not appeal to the feelings as simple arbitrary conveniences, but as real endings and beginnings; so the fancy demands that the old order shall end and some better, new fashion begin. I suppose everybody has had the vague sense of disappointment that the new month or the new year is so like the one before. I used to feel this very strongly as a child, though never unhappily. It was a disappointment, but as all times were happy times, the disappointment was not bitter. The thought is in my mind to-night because I am troubled, and because I would so gladly leave the fret and worry behind, to begin afresh with the new month.

The thought of Tom and his trouble weighs on me so that I have been miserable all day. Miss Charlotte has not been here this week. Her beloved plants need attention, and she is doing mysterious things with clippers and trowels, selecting bulbs, sorting out seeds, making plans for her garden beds, and working herself into a delightful fever of excitement over the coming glories of her garden. It is really rather early, I think, but in her impatience she cannot wait. Her flowers are her children, and all her affection for family and kin, having nothing nearer to cling to, is lavished on them. It is so fortunate that she has this taste. I cannot help to-day feeling so old and lonely that I could almost envy her her fondness for gardening. I must cultivate a taste for something, if it is only for cats. I wonder how Peter would like to have me set up an asylum for crippled and impoverished tabbies!

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Over and over again I have asked myself what I can do to help Deacon Webbe, but I have found no answer. One of the hardest things in life is to see our friends bear the consequences of their mistakes. Deacon Daniel is suffering for the way he brought Tom up, and yet he has done as well as he was able. Father used to say what I declared was a hard saying, and which was the harder because in my heart of hearts I could never with any success dispute it. "You cannot wisely help anybody until you are willing not to interfere with the discipline that life and nature give," he said. "You would not offer to take a child's medicine for it; why should you try to bear the brunt of a friend's suffering when it comes from his own fault? That is nature's medicine." I remember that once I answered I would very gladly take a child's medicine for it if I could, and Father laughed and pinched my ear. "Don't try to be Providence," he said. I would like to be Providence for Deacon Webbe and Tom now,—and for the girl, too. It makes me shiver to think of her, and if I had to see or to touch her, it would be more than I could endure.

This moralizing shows that I am low in my mind. I have been so out of sorts that I was completely out of key to-day with George. I have had to see him often about the estate, but he has seemed always anxious to get away as quickly as possible. To-day he lingered almost in the old fashion;

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and I somehow found him altered. He is—I cannot tell how he is changed, but he is. He has a manner less—

It is time to stop writing when I own the trouble to be my own wrong-headedness and then go on to set down imaginary faults in my neighbors.

April 3. I am beset with deacons lately. Deacon Richards has been here for an hour, and he has left me so restless that I may as well try to write myself into calmness.

Deacon Richards never seems so big as when he stands talking with me, looking down on the top of my head, with his great bald forehead looming above his keen eyes like a mountain-top. I always get him seated as soon as I can, and he likes to sit in Father's wide arm-chair. One of the things that I like best about him is that, brusque and queer as he is, he never takes that seat until he has been especially asked. Then as he sits down he says always, with a little softening of his great voice,—

"This was your father's chair."

He has never been out of Tuskamuck a fortnight, I dare say; but there is something about this simple speech, ready for it as I of course always am, that almost brings the tears to my eyes. He is country born and country bred, but the delicacy of the courtesy underlying his brusqueness is pure gold. What nonsense it is for Cousin Mehitable to insist that we are too countrified to have any gentlemen! She does not appreciate the old New England stock.

What Deacon Daniel wanted I could not imagine, but while we were talking of the weather and the common things of the day I could see that he was preparing to say something. He has a wonderful smile when he chooses to show it. It always reminds me of the picture one sees sometimes of a genial face peering from behind a glum mask. When I teased him about the vestry fires, he only grinned; but his grin is to his smile as the smell of peppermint to that of a rose. He amused me by his comments of Aunt Naomi.

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"She runs after gossip," he said, "just as a kitten runs after its tail. It doesn't mean anything, but it must do something."

"She is a shrewd creature," I answered. "It is absurd enough to compare anybody so decorous to a kitten."

"Aunt Naomi's nobody's fool," was his response. "She sent me here to-night."

"Sent you here?" I echoed.

His face grew suddenly grave.

"I don't know how this thing will strike you, Miss Ruth," he said explosively. "It seems to me all wrong. The fact is," he added more calmly, but with the air of meaning to have a disagreeable thing over, "it's about the Brownrig girl. You know about her, and that she is very sick."

"Yes," I said.

He stretched out his large hand toward the fire in a way that showed he was not at ease. I could not help noticing the difference between the hand of this Deacon Daniel and that of the other. Deacon Webbe is a farmer, and has a farmer's hand. Deacon Richards has the white hand of a miller.

"I don't see myself," he said grimly, looking into the coals, "that there is likely to be anything contagious in her wickedness, but none of the women are willing to go near her. I should think she'd serve pretty well as a warning. The Overseers of the Poor 've sent old Marm Bagley to nurse her, and that seems to be their part; but who's to look out that Marm Bagley doesn't keep drunk all the time's more than I can see."

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He sniffed scornfully, as if his opinion of women was far from flattering.

"How did you know about it?" I asked.

"Job Pearson—he's one of the Overseers—came to see if there wasn't somebody the church could send down. I went to Aunt Naomi, but she couldn't think of anybody. She's housed with a cold, and she wouldn't be the one to go into a sick-room anyway."

"And she sent you here?"

He turned to me with the smile which I can never resist.

"The truth is," he answered, "that when there's nothing else to do we all come to you, Miss Ruth."

"But what can I do?"

"That is what I came to see."

"Did you expect me to go down and nurse the girl?"

He looked at me with a shrewd twinkle in his eye, and for a moment said nothing.

"I just expected if there was anything possible to be done you'd think of it," he replied.

I thought for a moment, and then I told him I would write to Cousin Mehitable to send down a trained nurse from Boston.

"The Overseers won't pay her," he commented with a grin.

"Perhaps you will," I returned, knowing perfectly that he was trying to tease.

"It will take several days at least to get her here."

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We considered for a little in silence. I do not know what passed through his mind, but I thought with a positive sickening of soul of being under the same roof with that girl. I knew that it must be done, though; and, simply to be rid of the dread of it, I said as steadily as I could,—

"I will go down in the morning."

And so it has come about that I am to be nurse to the Brownrig girl and to Tom Webbe's baby.

April 6. The last four days have been so full and so exhausting that there has been no time for scribbling in diaries. Like Pepys I have now to write up the interval, although I cannot bring myself to his way of dating things as if he always wrote on the very day on which they happened. Father used to laugh at me because I always insisted that it was not honest of Pepys to put down one date when he really wrote on another.

Tuesday forenoon I went down to the Brownrig house. I had promised myself not to let the sick girl see how I shrank from her, but I had a sensation of sickening repugnance almost physical. When I got to the red house I was so ashamed of myself that I forgot everything else. The girl was so sick, the place so cheerless, so dirty, so poverty-stricken; she was so dreadful to look at, with her tangled black hair, her hot cheeks, her fierce eyes; everything was so miserable and dreadful, that I could have cried with pity. Julia was in a bed so dirty that it would have driven me to distraction; the pillow-slip was ragged, and the comforter torn in great places, as if a wild cat had clawed it. Marm Bagley was swaying back and forth in an old broken rocking-chair, smoking a black pipe, which perhaps she thought fumigated the foul air of the sick-room. She had the appearance of paying very little attention to the patient and none at all to the baby, which wailed incessantly from a shabby clothes-basket in a corner. The whole scene was so sordid, so pitiful, so hopeless, that I could think only of the misery, and so forget my shrinking and dread.

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A Munson boy, that the Overseers of the Poor had sent down, was chopping wood in the yard, and I dispatched him to the house for Hannah and clean linen, while I tried to get Marm Bagley to attend to the baby and to help me to put things to rights a little. She smelled of spirits like another Sairey Gamp, and her wits did not appear to be entirely steady. After I found her holding the baby under her arm literally upside down, while she prepared its food, I decided that unless I wished to run the risk of being held as accessory to the murder of the infant, I had better look after it myself.

"Can't you pick up the room a little while I feed the baby?" I asked.

"Don't see no use of clearing up none," she said. "'Tain't time for the funeral yet."

This, I suppose, was some sort of an attempt at a rudimentary joke, but it was a most ghastly one. I looked at the sick girl to see if she heard and understood. It was evident that she had, but it seemed to me that she did not care. I went to the bedside.

"I ought to have spoken to you when I came in," I said, "but your eyes were shut, and I thought you might be asleep. I am Miss Privet, and I have come to help Mrs. Bagley take care of you till a regular nurse can get here from Boston."

She looked at me with a strange sparkle in her eyes.

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"From Boston?" she repeated.

"Yes," I said. "I have sent to my cousin to get a regular trained nurse."

She stared at me with her piercing eyes opened to their fullest extent.

"Do they train 'em?" she asked.

"Yes," I told her. "A trained nurse is almost as good as a doctor."

"Then I shall get well?" she demanded eagerly. "She'll get me well?"

"I hope so," I said, with as much of a smile as I could muster when I wanted to cry. "And before she comes we must clear up a little."

I began to do what I could about the room without making too much bustle. The girl watched me with eager eyes, and at last, as I came near the bed, she asked suddenly,—

"Did he send you?"

I felt myself growing flushed, though there was no reason for it.

"Deacon Richards asked me to come," I answered.

"I don't know him," she commented, evidently confused. "Is he Overseer?"

I hushed her, and went on with my work, for I wanted to think what I had better tell her. Of course Marm Bagley was of no use, but when Hannah came things went better. Hannah was scandalized at my being there at all, and of course would not hear of my doing the rough work. She took possession of Mrs. Bagley, and ordered her about with a vigor which completely dazed that unsatisfactory person, and amused me so much that my disturbed spirits rose once more. This was all very well as long as it lasted, but Hannah had to go home for dinner, and when the restraint of her presence was removed Marm Bagley reasserted herself. She tied a frowzy bonnet over a still more frowzy head, lighted her pipe, and departed for the woods behind the house.

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"When that impudent old hired girl o' yours's got all through and got out," she remarked, "you can hang a towel out the shed winder, and I'll come back. I ain't got no occasion to stay here and git ordered round by no hired girl of anybody's."

My remonstrances were of no avail, since I would not promise not to let Hannah come into the

house, and the fat old woman waddled away into the seclusion of the woods. I suppose she slept somewhere, though the woods must be so damp that the indulgence seems rather a dangerous one; but at nightfall she returned more odorous, and more like Sairey Gamp than ever.

Hannah came back, and we did what we could. When Dr. Wentworth came in the afternoon he allowed us to get Julia into clean linen, and she did seem grateful for the comfort of fresh sheets and pillow-slips. It amused me that Hannah had not only taken the servants' bedding, but had picked out the oldest.

"I took the wornest ones," she explained. "Of course we wouldn't any of us ever want to sleep in them again."

She was really shocked at my proposing to remain for the night.

"It ain't for you, Miss Ruth, to be taking care of such folks," she declared; "and as for that Bagley woman, I'd as soon have a bushel basket of cockroaches in the house as her, any time."

Even this lively image did not do away with the necessity of my remaining. I could not propose to Hannah to take my place. The mere fact of being mistress often forces one to do things which servants would feel insulted if asked to undertake. Father used to say, "Remember that *noblesse oblige* does not exist in the kitchen;" though of course this is true only in a sense. Servants have their own ideas of what is due to position, I am sure; only that their ideas are so different, and often so funnily different, from ours. I could not leave the sick girl to the mercies of Mrs. Bagley, and so I had no choice but to stay.

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All day long Julia watched me with a closeness most strangely disconcerting. She evidently could not make out why I was there. In the evening, as I sat by her, she said suddenly,—

"I dunno what you think yer'll get by it."

"Get by what?"

"Bein' here."

I smiled at her manner, and told her that at least I had already got the satisfaction of seeing her more comfortable. She made no reply for a time, but evidently was considering the matter. I did not think it well for her to talk, so I sat knitting quietly, while Mrs. Bagley loomed in the background, rocking creakingly.

"'Twon't please him none," she said at last. "He don't care a damn for me."

I tried to take this without showing that I understood it.

"I'm not trying to please anybody," I responded. "When a neighbor is sick and needs help, of course anybody would come."

"Humph! Folks hain't been so awful anxious to help me."

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"There is a good deal of sickness in town," I explained.

"'Tain't nobody's business to come, anyhow," commented Mrs. Bagley dispassionately.

"There's precious few'd come if 'twas," the girl muttered.

"Has anybody been to see you?" I asked.

The Brownrig girl turned her fierce eyes up to me with a look which made me think of some wild bird hurt and caged.

"One old woman that sat and chewed her veil and swung her foot at me. She never come but once."

I had no difficulty in recognizing this portrait, even without Mrs. Bagley's explanatory comment.

"That was Aunt Naomi Dexter," she remarked. "She's always poking round."

"Miss Dexter is one of the kindest women alive," I said, "though she is a little odd in her manner sometimes."

"She said she hoped I'd found things bad enough to give me a hankerin' for something better," went on Julia with increasing bitterness. "God! How does she think I'd get anything better? What does she know about it, anyway?"

"There, there, Jule," interposed Mrs. Bagley in a sort of professional tone, "now don't go to gettin' excited and rampageous. You know she brought you some rippin' flannel for the baby. Them pious folks has to talk, but, Lord, nobody minds it, and you hadn't ought ter. They don't really mean nothing much."

It seemed to be time to interpose, and I forbade Julia to talk, sent Mrs. Bagley off to sleep in the one other bedroom, and settled down for the night's watching. The patient fell asleep at last, and I was left to care for the fire and the poor little pathetic, forlorn, dreadful baby. The child was swathed in Aunt Naomi's "rippin' flannel," and I fell into baffling reflections in regard to human life. After all, I had no right to judge this poor broken girl lying there much more in danger than she could dream. What do I know of the intolerable life that has not self-respect, not even cleanliness of mind or body? Society and morality have so fenced us about and so guarded us that we have rather to try to get outside than to struggle to keep in; and what do we know of the poor wretches fighting for life with wild beasts in the open? I am so glad I do not believe that sin is what one actually does, but is the proportion between deeds and opportunity. How carefully Father explained this to me when I was not much more than a child, and how strange it is that so

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many people cannot seem to understand it! If I thought the moral law an inflexible thing like a human statute, for which one was held responsible arbitrarily and whether he knows the law or not, I should never be able to endure the sense of injustice. Of course men have to be arbitrary, because they can see only tangible things and must judge by outward acts; but if this were true of a deity he would cease to be a deity at all, and be simply a man with unlimited power to do harm.

April 7. I found myself so running aground last night in metaphysics that it seemed just as well to go to bed, diary or no diary. I was besides too tired to write down my interview with Mrs. Webbe.

I was just about to go home for a bath and a nap after watching that first night, when, without even knocking, Mrs. Deacon Webbe opened the outside door. I was in the kitchen, and so met her before she got further. Naturally I was surprised to see her at six o'clock in the day.

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"Good-morning," I said.

"I knew you were here yesterday," she said by way of return for my greeting, "but I thought I'd get here before you came back this morning."

"I have been here all night," I answered.

She looked at me with her piercing black eyes, which always seem to go into the very recesses of one's thoughts, and then, in a manner rather less aggressive, remarked,—

"I've come to speak to this Brownrig girl. You know well enough why."

"I'm afraid you can't see her," I answered, ignoring the latter part of her words. "She is not so well this morning, and Dr. Wentworth told us to keep her as quiet as possible."

Mrs. Webbe leaned forward with an expression on her face which made me look away.

"Is she going to die?" she demanded.

I turned away, and began to close the door. I could not bear her manner. She has too much cause to hate the girl, but just then, with the poor thing sick to the very point of death, I could never have felt as she looked.

"I'm sure I hope not," I returned. "We expect to have a professional nurse to-morrow, and then things will go better."

"A professional nurse?"

"Yes; we have sent to Boston for one."

"Sent to Boston for a nurse for that creature? She's a great deal better dead! She only leads men"—

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"If you will excuse me, Mrs. Webbe," interrupted I, pushing the door still nearer to closing, "I ought to go back to my patient. It isn't my business to decide who had better be dead."

She started forward suddenly, taking me unawares, and before I understood what she intended, she had thrust herself through the door into the house.

"If it isn't your business," she demanded sharply, "what are you here for? What right have you to interfere? If Providence is willing to take the creature out of the way, what are you trying to keep her alive for?"

I put up my hand and stopped her.

"Will you be quiet?" I said. "I cannot have her disturbed."

"You cannot!" she repeated, raising her voice. "Who gave you a right to order me round, Ruth Privet? Is this your house?"

I knew that her shrill voice would easily penetrate to Julia's bedroom, and indeed there was only a thin door between the sick girl and the kitchen where we were. I took Mrs. Webbe by the wrist as strongly as I could, and before she could collect her wits, I led her out of the house, and down to the gate.

"What are you doing?" she demanded. "How dare you drag me about?"

"I beg your pardon," I said, dropping my hold. "I think you did not understand, Mrs. Webbe, that as nurse I cannot have my patient excited."

She looked at me in a blaze of anger. I have never seen a woman so carried away by rage, and it is frightful. Yet she seemed to be making an effort to control herself. I was anxious to help her if I could, so I forced a smile, although I am afraid it was not a very warm one, and I assumed as conciliatory a manner as I could muster.

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"You must think I was rather abrupt," I said, "but I did not mean to be. I couldn't explain to you in the kitchen, the partition is so thin. You see she's in the room that opens out of it."

Mrs. Webbe softened somewhat.

"It is very noble of you to be here," she said in a new tone, and one which I must confess did not to me have a genuine ring; "it's splendid of you, but what's the use of it? What affair of yours is it, anyway?"

I was tempted to serve her up a quotation about a certain man who went down to Jericho and fell among thieves, but I resisted.

"I could come, Mrs. Webbe, and apparently nobody else could."

"They wouldn't," she rejoined frankly. "Don't you see everybody else knew it was a case to be let alone?"

I asked her why.

"Everybody felt as if it was," responded she quickly. "I hope you don't set up to be wiser than everybody else put together."

"I don't set up for anything," I declared, "but I may as well confess that I see no sense in what you say. Here's a human creature that needs help, and it seems to be my place to help her."

"It's a nice occupation for the daughter of Judge Privet to be nursing a disreputable thing like a Brownrig."

"A Privet," I answered, "is likely to be able to stand it. You wouldn't let the girl die alone, would you?" [Pg 100]

"She wasn't alone. Mrs. Bagley was here."

"You wouldn't let her die with Mrs. Bagley, then?"

Mrs. Webbe looked me straight in the eye for a moment, with a look as hard as polished steel.

"Yes," she said, "I would."

I could only stare at her in silence.

"There," she went on, "make the best of that. I'm not going to be mealy-mouthed. I would let her die, and be glad of it. Why should I want her alive? Do you think I've no human feelings? Do you think I'd ever forgive her for dragging Tom into the mud? I've been on my knees half the night praying she and her brat might both die and leave us in peace! If there's any justice in heaven, a man like Deacon Webbe won't be loaded down with the disgrace of a grandchild like that."

There was a sort of fascination in her growing wildness. Everybody knows how she sneers at the meekness of her husband, and that she is continually saying he hasn't any force, but here she was catching at his goodness as a sort of bribe to Heaven to let her have the life of mother and child. I could not answer her, but could only be thankful no houses were near. Mrs. Bagley would hear, I supposed, but that could not be helped.

"What do you know about how I feel?" she demanded, swooping down upon me so that I involuntarily shrank back against the fence. "It is all very pretty for you to have ideas of charity, and play at taking care of the sick. I dare say you mean well enough, Miss Privet, but this isn't a case for you. Go home, and let Providence take care of that girl. God'll look after her!" [Pg 101]

I stood up straight, and faced her in my turn.

"Stop!" I cried. "I'm not a believer in half the things you are, but I do have some respect for the name of God. If you mean to kill this girl, don't try to lay the blame on Providence!"

She shrank as if I had struck her; then she rallied again with a sneer.

"I think I know better than an atheist what it is right to say about my own religion," was her retort.

Somehow the words appealed to my sense of humor, and unconsciously I smiled.

"Well," I said, "we will not dispute about words. Only I think you had better go now."

Perhaps my slight smile vexed her; perhaps it was only that she saw I was off my guard. She turned quickly, and before I had any notion of what she intended, she had run swiftly up the path to the house. I followed instantly. The idea of having a personal encounter with Mrs. Webbe was shocking, but I could not let her go to trouble Julia without making an effort to stop her. I thought I might reach the door first, but she was too quick for me. Before I could prevent her, she had crossed the kitchen and opened the door of the sick-room. I followed, and we came almost together into the room, although she was a few steps in advance. She went hastily to the bed. Julia had been awakened by the noise, and stared at Mrs. Webbe in a fright.

"Oh, here you are, are you?" Mrs. Webbe began. "How did you dare to say that my son was the father of your brat? I'd like to have you whipped, you nasty slut!"

"Mrs. Webbe," I said resolutely, "if you do not leave the house instantly, I will have you arrested before the sun goes down." [Pg 102]

She was diverted from her attack upon Julia, and wheeled round to me.

"Arrested!" she echoed. "You can't do it."

"I can do it, and you know me well enough to know that if I say it, I mean it. I'm not a lawyer's daughter for nothing. Go out of the house this instant, and leave that sick girl alone. Do you want to kill her?"

She blazed at me with eyes that might have put me to flight if I had had only myself to defend.

"Do you think I want her to live? I told you once she ought to be out of the way. Do you think you are doing a favor to Tom by keeping this disreputable thing alive?"

I took her by the wrist again.

"You had better go," I said. "You heard what I said. I mean it."

I confess that now I consider it all, the threat to have her arrested seems rather silly, and I do not see how I could well have carried it out. At the moment it appeared to me the simplest thing in

the world, and at least it effected my purpose to frighten Mrs. Webbe with the law. She turned slowly toward the door, but as she went she looked over her shoulder at Julia.

"You are a nice thing to try to keep alive," she sneered. "The doctor says you haven't a chance, and you'd better be making your peace with God. I wouldn't have your heap of sins on my head for anything."

I put my hand over her lips.

"Mrs. Bagley," I said, "take her other arm."

Mrs. Bagley, who had apparently been too confused to understand what was going on, and had stood with her mouth wide open in blear-eyed astonishment, did as I commanded, and we led Mrs. Webbe out of the room. I motioned Mrs. Bagley back into the bedroom to look after Julia, and shut the door behind her. Then I took Mrs. Webbe by the shoulders and looked her in the face.

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"I had rather have that girl's sins on my head than yours," I said. "You came here with murder in your heart, and you would be glad to kill her outright, if you dared. If you have not murdered her as it is, you may be thankful."

I felt as if I was as much of a shrew as she, but something had to be done. She looked as if she were as much astonished as impressed, but she went. Only at the door she turned back to say,—

"I'll come again to see my grandchild."

After that I hardly dared to leave the house, but I got Hannah to stand guard while I was at home. She has a deep-seated dislike for Mrs. Webbe, and I fear would greatly have enjoyed an encounter with her; but Mrs. Webbe did not return.

Now that I go over it all, I seem to have been engaged in a disreputable squabble, but I do not see what else there was for me to do. Julia was so terrified and excited that I had to send for Dr. Wentworth as soon as I could find anybody to go. I set Mrs. Bagley to watch for a passer, and she took her pipe and went placidly to sleep before the door. I had to be with Julia, yet keep running out to spy for a messenger, and it was an hour before I caught one. By the time the doctor got to us the girl was in hysterics, declaring she did not want to die, she did not dare to die, could not, would not die. All that day she was constantly starting out of her sleep with a cry; and by the time night had come, I began to feel that Mrs. Webbe would have her wish.

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April 8. That night was a dreadful one to me. The nurse from Boston had not come, and I could not leave the girl alone with Mrs. Bagley. Indeed Marm Bagley seemed more and more inefficient. I think she took advantage of the fact that she no longer felt any responsibility. The smell of spirits and tobacco about her grew continually stronger, and I was kept from sending her away altogether only by the fact that it did not seem right for me to be alone with Julia. No house is near, and if anything happened in the night I should have been without help. Julia was evidently worse. The excitement of Mrs. Webbe's visit had told on her, and whenever she went to sleep she began to cry out in a way that was most painful.

About the middle of the night, that dreadfully forlorn time when the day that is past has utterly died out and nothing shows the hope of another to come, Julia woke moaning and crying. She started up in bed, her eyes really terrible to see, her cheeks crimson with fever, and her black hair tangled all about her face.

"Oh, I am dying!" she shrieked.

For the instant I thought that she was right, and it was dreadful to hear her.

"I shall die and go to hell!" she cried. "Oh, pray! Pray!"

I caught at my scattered wits and tried to soothe her. She clung to me as if she were in the greatest physical terror.

"I am dying!" she kept repeating. "Oh, can't you do something for me? Can't you save me? Oh, I can't die! I can't die!"

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She was so wild that her screams awakened Mrs. Bagley, who came running in half dressed, as she had lain down for the night.

"Lawk-a-marcy, child," she said, coming up to the bed, "if you was dying do you think you'd have strength to holler like that?"

The rough question had more effect than my efforts to calm the girl. She sank back on the pillow, sobbing, and staring at Mrs. Bagley.

"I ain't got no strength," she insisted. "I know I'm goin' to die right away."

"Nonsense, Jule," was Mrs. Bagley's response. "I know when folks is dyin', I guess. I've seen enough of 'um. You're all right if you'll stop actin' like a blame fool."

I see now that this was exactly the way in which the girl needed to be talked to. It was her own language, and she understood it. At the time it seemed to me brutal, and I interposed.

"There, Mrs. Bagley," I said as soothingly as I could, "you are rather hard on Julia. She is too sick to be talked to so."

Marm Bagley sniffed contemptuously, and after looking at us a moment, apparently decided that the emergency was not of enough importance to keep her from her rest, so she returned to her interrupted slumbers. I comforted my patient as well as I could, and fortunately she was not

again violent. Still she moaned and cried, and kept urging me to pray for her.

"Pray for me! Pray for me!" she kept repeating. "Oh, can't you pray and keep me from hell, Miss Ruth?" [Pg 106]

There was but one thing to be done. If prayer was the thing which would comfort her, evidently I ought to pray with her.

"I will pray if you will be quiet," I said. "I cannot if you go on like this."

"I'll be still, I'll be still," she cried eagerly. "Only pray quick!"

I kneeled down by the bed and repeated the Lord's Prayer as slowly and as impressively as I could. The girl, who seemed to regard it as a sort of spell against invisible terrors, clutched my hand with a desperate grasp, but as I went on the pressure of her hot fingers relaxed. Before I had finished she had fallen asleep as abruptly as she had awakened.

I sat watching her, thinking what a strange thing is this belief in prayer. The words I had said are beautiful, but I do not suppose this made an impression on Julia. To her the prayer was a fetich, a spell to ward her soul from the dark terrors of Satan, a charm against the powers of the air. I wondered if I should be happier if I could share this belief in the power of men to move the unseen by supplication, but I reflected that this would imply the continual discomfort of believing in invisible beings who would do me harm unless properly placated, and I was glad to be as I am. The faith of some Christians is so noble, so sweet, so tender, that it is not always easy to realize how narrowing are the conditions of mind which make it possible. When one sees the crude superstition of a creature like Julia, it is not difficult to be glad to be above a feeling so ignorant and degrading; when I see the beautiful tenderness of religion in its best aspect I am glad it can be so fine and so comforting, but I am glad I am not limited in that way. [Pg 107]

My prayer with Julia had one unexpected result. While I was at home in the morning Mr. Thurston came to see her. The visit was most kind, and I think it did her good.

"He did some real praying," Mrs. Bagley explained to me afterward. "Course Jule'd rather have that."

My efforts in the devotional line had more effect, so far as I could judge, upon Mr. Thurston than upon Julia. I met him when I was going back to the house, and he stopped me with an expression of gladness and triumph in his face.

"My dear Miss Privet," he said, "I am so glad that at last you have come to realize the efficacy of prayer."

I was so astonished at the remark that for the moment I did not realize what he meant.

"I don't understand," I said, stupidly enough.

My look perhaps confused him a little, and his face lost something of its brightness.

"That poor girl told me of your praying with her last night, when she thought she was dying."

"Yes," I repeated, before I realized what I was saying, "she thought she was dying."

Then I reflected that it was useless to hurt his feelings, and I did not explain. I could not wound him by saying that if Julia had wanted me to repeat a gypsy charm and I had known one I should have done it in the same spirit. I wanted to make the poor demented thing comfortable, and if a prayer could soothe her there was no reason why I should not say one. People think because I do not believe in it I have a prejudice against prayer; but really I think there is something touching and noble in the attitude of a mind that can in sincerity and in faith give itself up to an ideal, as one must in praying. It seems to me a pathetic mistake, but I can appreciate the good side of it; only to suppose that I believe because I said a prayer to please a frightened sick girl is absurd. [Pg 108]

It is well that we are not read by others, for our thoughts would often be too disconcerting. Poor Mr. Thurston would have been dreadfully horrified if he had realized I was thinking as we stood there how like my saying this prayer for Julia was to my ministering to Rosa's chilblains. She believes that crosses cut out of a leaf of the Bible and stuck on her feet take away the soreness, but she regards it as wicked to cut up a Bible. I have an old one that I keep for the purpose, and she comes to me every winter for a supply. We began at the end, and are going backwards. Revelation is about used up now. She evidently thinks that as I am a heretic anyway, the extra condemnation which must come from my act will make no especial difference, and I am entirely willing to run the risk. Still, it is better Mr. Thurston did not read my thought.

"I wish you might be brought into the fold," the clergyman said after a moment of silence.

I could only thank him, and go on my way.

April 10. Yesterday the new nurse, Miss Dyer, arrived, and great is the comfort of having her here. She is a plain, simple body, in her neat uniform, rather colorless except for her snapping black eyes. Her eyes are interestingly at variance with the calmness of her demeanor, and give one the impression that there is a volcano somewhere within. She interests me much,—largely, I fancy, from the suggestion about her of having had a history. She is swift and yet silent in her motions, and understands what she has to do so well that I felt like an awkward novice beside her. She disposed of Mrs. Bagley with a turn of the hand, as it were, somehow managing that the frowzy old woman was out of the house within an hour, with her belongings, pipe and all, yet without any fuss or any contention. Mrs. Bagley had the appearance of being too dazed to be angry, although I fancy when she has had time to think matters over she will be indignantly wrathful at having been so summarily expelled. [Pg 109]

"I pity you more for having that sort of a woman in the house than for having to take care of the patient, Miss Privet," Miss Dyer said. "I don't see what the Lord permits such folks in the world for, without it is to sharpen up our Christian charity."

"She would sharpen mine into vinegar, I'm afraid," I answered, laughing. "I confess it has been about all I could do to stay in the house with her."

To-night I can sleep peacefully in my own bed, secure that Julia is well taken care of. The girl seems to me to be worse instead of better, and Dr. Wentworth does not give much encouragement. I suppose it is better for her to die, but it is cruel that she wants so to live. She is horribly afraid of death, and she wants so much to live that it is pitiful to reflect it is possible she may not. What is there she can hope for? She does not seem to care for the child. This is because she is so ill, I think, for anybody must be touched by the helplessness of the little blinking, pink thing. It is like a little mouse I saw in my childhood, and which made a great impression on me. That was naked of hair, just so wrinkled, so pink, so blinking. It was not in the least pretty, any more than the baby is; but somehow it touched all the tenderness there was in me, and I cried for days because Hannah gave it to the cat. I feel much in the same way about this baby. I have not the least feeling toward it as a human being, I am afraid. To me it is just embodied babyhood, just a little pink, helpless, palpitating bunch of pitifulness.

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April 11. Miss Dyer came just in time. I could not have gone through to-night without her, I think. I could not have stayed quiet by Julia's beside, although I am as far as possible from being able to sleep.

To-night, just as the evening was falling, and I was almost ready to come home, I heard a knock at the door. Miss Dyer was in the room with Julia, so I answered the knock myself. I opened the door to find myself face to face with Tom Webbe.

The shock of seeing his white face staring at me out of the dusk was so great that I had to steady myself against the door-post. He did not put out his hand, but greeted me only by taking off his hat.

"Father said you were here," he began, in a strained voice.

"Yes," I answered, feeling my throat contract; "I am here now, but I am going home soon."

I was so moved and so confused that I could not think. I had longed for him to come; I could not have borne that he should have been so base as not to come; and yet now that he was here I would have given anything to have him away. He had to come; he had to bear his part of the consequences of wrong, but it was horrible to me for him to be so near that dreadful girl, and it was worse because I pitied her, because she was so helpless, so pathetic, so near even to death.

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We stood in the dusk for what seemed to me a long time without further speech. Tom must have found it hard to know what to say at such a time. He looked at me with a sort of wild desperation. Then he cleared his throat, and moistened his lips.

"I have come," he said. "What do you want me to do?"

I could not bear to have him seem to put the responsibility on me.

"I did not send for you," I answered quickly.

He gave me the wan ghost of a smile.

"Do you suppose that I should have come of myself?" he returned. "What shall I do?"

I would not take the burden. The decision must be his.

"You must do what you think right," I said. Then I added, with a queer feeling as if I were thinking aloud, "What you think right to her and to—to the baby."

His face darkened, and I was glad that I had not said "your baby." I understood it was natural for him to look angry at the thought of the child, the unwelcome and unwitting betrayer of what he would have kept hidden; and yet somehow I resented his look.

"The baby is not to blame, Tom," I said. "It has every right to blame you."

"To blame me?" he repeated.

"If it has to bear a shame all its life, whose fault is it, its own or yours? If it has been born to a life like that of its mother, it certainly has no occasion to thank you."

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He turned his flushed and shamed face away from me, and looked out into the darkening sky. I could see how he was holding himself in check, and that it was hard for him. I hated to be there, to be seeing him, to be talking over a matter that it was intolerable even to think about; but since I was there, I wanted to help him,—only I did not know how. I wanted to give him my hand, but I somehow shrank from touching his. I felt as if it was wicked and cruel to hold back, but between us came continually the consciousness of Julia and that little red baby sleeping in the clothes-basket. I am humiliated now to think of it, but the truth is that I was a brute to Tom.

Suddenly Tom turned for a moment toward the west, so that the little lingering light of the dying day fell on his face, and I saw by his set lips and the look in his eyes that he had come to some determination. Then he faced me slowly.

"Ruth," he said, "I would go down into hell for you, and I'm going to do something that is worse. What's past, it's no use to make excuses for, and you're too good to understand if I told you how I got into this foul mess. Now"—

He stopped, with a catch in his voice, and I wanted more than I can tell to say something to help him, but no words came. I could not think; I wanted to comfort him as I comfort Kathie when she is desperate. The evident difficulty he had in keeping his self-control moved me more than anything he could have said.

"I'll marry the girl," he burst out in a moment. "You are right about the baby. It's no matter about Jule. She isn't of any account anyway, and she never expected me to marry her. I'll never see her after she's—after I've done it. It makes me sick to think of her, but I'll do what I can for the baby." He stopped, and caught his breath. I could feel in the dusk, rather than see, that he looked up, as if he were trying to read my face in the darkness. "I will marry her," he went on, "on one condition."

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"What is that?" I asked, with my throat so dry that it ached.

"That you will take the child."

I think now that we must both have spoken like puppets talking by machinery. I hardly seemed to myself to be alive and real, but this proposition awoke me like a blow. I could at first only gasp, too much overcome to bring out a word.

"But its mother?" I managed to stammer at last.

"If I'm to marry her for the sake of the child," he answered in a voice I hardly recognized, "it would be perfect tomfoolery to leave it to grow up with the Brownrigs. If that's to be the plan, I'll save myself. Jule doesn't mind not being married. You don't know what a tribe the Brownrigs are. It's an insult for me to be talking to you about them, only it can't be helped. Is it a boy or a girl?"

I told him.

"And you think a girl ought to be left to follow the noble example of the mother!"

"Oh no, no!" I cried out. "Anything is better than that."

"That is what must happen unless you take the poor thing," he said in a voice which, though it was hard, seemed somehow to have a quiver in it.

"But would she give the baby up?" I asked. "She's its mother."

"Jule? She'll be only too glad to get rid of it. Anyway she'd do what I told her to."

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I tried to think clearly and quickly. To have the baby left to follow in the steps of its mother was a thing too terrible to be endured, and yet I shrank selfishly from taking upon my shoulders the responsibility of training the child. Whatever Tom decided about the marriage, however, I felt that he should not have to resolve under pressure. If he were doing it for the sake of the baby's future, I could clear his way of that complication. I could not bear the thought of having Tom marry Julia. This would be a bond on his whole life; and yet I could not feel that he had a right to shirk it now. If I agreed to take the child, that would leave him free to decide without being pushed on by fear about the baby. My mind seemed to me wonderfully clear. I see now it was all in a whirl, and that the only thing I was sure of was that if it would help him for me to take the baby there was nothing else for me to do.

"Tom," I said, "I do not, and I will not, decide for you; and I will not have anything to do with conditions. If she will give me the baby, I will take it, and you may decide the rest without any reference to that at all."

He took a step forward so quickly and so fiercely that he startled me, and put out his hand as if he meant to take me by the arm. Then he dropped it.

"Do you think," he said, "that I would have an illegitimate brat near you? It is bad enough as it is, but you shall not have the reproach of that."

My cheeks grew hot, but the whole talk was so strange and so painful that I let this pass with the rest. I cannot tell how I felt, but I know the remembrance of it makes my eyes swim so that I cannot write without stopping continually; and I am writing here half the night because I cannot sleep. I could not answer Tom; I only stood dully silent until he spoke again.

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"I know I can't have you, Ruth," he said, "and I know you were right. I'm not good enough for you."

"I never said that," I interrupted. "I never thought that."

"Never mind. It's true; but I'd have been a man if you'd have given me a chance."

"Oh, Tom," I broke in, "don't! It is not fair to make me responsible!"

"No," he acknowledged, with the shake of his shoulders I have known ever since we were children; "you are not to blame. It's only my infernal, sneaking self!"

I could not bear this, either. Everything that was said hurt me; and it seemed to me that I had borne all that I could endure.

"Will you go away now, Tom," I begged him. "I—I can't talk any more to-night. Shall I tell Julia you have come?"

He gave a start at the name, and swore under his breath.

"It is damnable for you to be here with that girl," he burst out bitterly; "and I brought it on you! It isn't your place, though. Where are all the Christians and church members? I suppose all the pious are too good to come. They might get their righteousness smudged. Oh, how I hate

hypocrisy!"

"Don't, Tom," I interrupted. "Go away, please."

My voice was shaky; and indeed I was fast getting to the place where I should have broken down in hysterical weeping. [Pg 116]

"I'll go," he responded quickly. "I'll come in the morning with a minister. Will eight o'clock do? I'd like to get it over with."

The bitterness of his tone was too much for me. I caught one of his hands in both of mine.

"Oh, Tom," I said, "are you quite sure this is what you ought to do?"

"Do you tell me not to marry her?" he demanded fiercely.

I was completely unnerved; I could only drop his hand and press my own on my bosom, as if this would help me to breathe easier.

"Oh no, no," I cried, half sobbing. "I can't, I can't. I haven't the right to say anything; but I do think it is the thing you ought to do. Only you are so noble to do it!"

He made a sound as if he would answer, and then he turned away suddenly, and dashed off with great strides. I could not go back into the house, but came home without saying good-night, or letting Miss Dyer know. I must be ready to go back as soon as it is light.

April 12. It seems so far back to this morning that I might have had time to change into a different person; and yet most of the day I have simply been longing to get home and think quietly. I wanted to adjust myself to the new condition of things. Last night the idea that Tom should marry the girl was so strange and unreal that it could make very little impression on me. Now it is done it is more appallingly real than anything else in the world.

I went down to the red house almost before light, but even as early as I came I found Tom already there. The nurse had objected to letting him in, and even when I came she was evidently uncertain whether she had done right in admitting him; but Tom has generally a way of getting what he is determined on, and before I reached the house everything had been arranged with Julia. [Pg 117]

"I wanted to come before folks were about to see me," Tom said to me. "There'll be talk enough later, and I'd rather be out of the way. I've arranged it with her."

"Does she understand"—I began; but he interrupted.

"She understands all there is to understand; all that she could understand, anyway. She knows I'm marrying her for the sake of the child, and that you're to have it."

The Munson boy that I have hired to sleep in the house now Mrs. Bagley is gone, in order that Miss Dyer may have somebody within call, appeared at this minute with a pail of water, and we were interrupted. The boy stared with all his eyes, and I was half tempted to ask him not to speak of Tom's being here; but I reflected with a sick feeling that it was of no use to try to hide what was to be done. If Tom's act was to have any significance it must be known. I turned away with tears in my eyes, and went to Julia.

Julia I found with her eyes shining with excitement, and I could see that despite Tom's idea that she did not care about the marriage, she was greatly moved by it.

"Oh, Miss Privet," she cried out at once, "ain't he good! He's truly goin' to marry me after all! I never 'sposed he'd do that." [Pg 118]

"You must have thought"—I began; and then, with a sinking consciousness of the difference between her world and mine, I stopped.

"And he says you want the baby," she went on, not noticing; "though I dunno what you want of it. It'll be a pesky bother for yer."

"Mr. Webbe wanted me to take it and bring it up."

"Well," Julia remarked with feeble dispassionateness, "I wouldn't 'f I was you."

"Are you willing I should have it?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm willing anything he wants," was her answer. "He's awful good to marry me. He never said he would. He's real white, he is."

She was quiet a moment, and then she broke out in a burst of joy.

"I never 'sposed I'd marry a real gentleman!" she cried.

Her shallow delight in marrying above her station was too pathetic to be offensive. I was somehow so moved by it that I turned away to hide my face from her; but she caught my hand and drew me back. Then she peered at me closely.

"You don't like it," she said excitedly. "You won't try to stop him?"

"No," I answered. "I think he ought to do it for the sake of his child."

She dropped her hold, and a curious look came into her face.

"That's what he said. Yer don't either of yer seem to count me for much."

I was silent, convicted to the soul that I had not counted her for much. I had accepted Tom's decision as right, not for the sake of this broken girl-mother, this castaway doomed to shame [Pg 119]

from her cradle, but for the sake purely of the baby that I was to take. It came over me how I might have been influenced too much by the selfish thought that it would be intolerable for me to have the child unless it had been as far as might be legitimized by this marriage. I flushed with shame, and without knowing exactly what I was doing I bent over and kissed her.

"It is you he marries," I said.

Her tears sprang instantly, tears, I believe, of pure happiness.

"You're real good," she murmured, and then closed her eyes, whether from weakness or to conceal her emotion I could not be sure.

It was nearly eight before Mr. Thurston came. Tom has never been on good terms with Mr. Saychase, and it must have been easier for him to have a clergyman with whom he had never, I suppose, exchanged a word, than one who knew him and his people. I took the precaution to say at once to Mr. Thurston that Julia was too ill to bear much, and that he must not say a word more than was necessary.

"I will only offer prayer," he returned.

I know Mr. Thurston's prayers. I have heard them at funerals when I have been wickedly tempted to wonder whether he were not attempting to fill the interval between us and the return of the lost at the Resurrection.

"I am afraid it will not do," I told him. "You do not realize how feeble she is."

"Then I will only give them the blessing. Perhaps I might talk with Mr. Webbe afterward, or pray with him." [Pg 120]

I knew that if this proposition were made to Tom he would say something which would wound the clergyman's feelings.

"Mr. Thurston," I urged, "if you'll pardon me, I wouldn't try to say anything to him just now. He is doing a plucky thing, and a thing that's noble, but it must be terribly hard. I don't think he could endure to have anybody talk to him. He'll have to be left to fight it out for himself."

It was not easy to convince Mr. Thurston, for when once a narrow man gets an idea of duty he can see nothing else; but I managed in the end to save Tom at least the irritation of having to fight off religious appeals. The ceremony was as brief as possible. It was touching to see how humble and yet how proud Julia was. She seemed to feel that Tom was a sort of god in his goodness in marrying her,—and after all perhaps she was partly right. His coldness only made her deprecatory. I wondered how far she was conscious of his evident shrinking from her. He seemed to hate even to touch her fingers. I cannot understand—

April 15. I have had many things to do in the last two days, and I find myself so tired with the stress of it all that I have not felt like writing. It is perhaps as much from a sort of feverish uneasiness as from anything else I have got out my diary to-night. The truth is, that I suffer from the almost intolerable suspense of waiting for Julia to die. Dr. Wentworth and Miss Dyer both are sure there is no chance whatever of her getting well, and I cannot think that it would be better for her, or for Tom, or for her baby—who is to be my baby!—if she should live. We are all a little afraid to say, or even to think, that it is better for a life of this sort to end, and I seem to myself inhuman in putting it down in plain words; but we cannot be rational without knowing that it is better certain persons should be out of the way, for their own sakes as well as for the good of the community, and the more quickly the better. Julia is a weed, poor thing, and the sooner she is pulled up the better for the garden. And yet I pity her so! I can understand religion easily when I think of lives like hers. It is so hard to see the justice of having the weed destroyed for the good of the flowers that men have to invent excuses for the Eternal. Somebody has defined theology as man's justification of a deity found wanting by human standards, and now I realize what this means. Human mercy could not bear to make a Julia, and a power which allows the possibility of such beings has to be excused to human reason. The gods that men invent always turn to Frankensteins on their hands. If there is a conscious power that directs, He must pity the gropings of our race, although I suppose seeing what it is all for and what it all leads to must make it possible to bear the sight of human weakness. [Pg 121]

The baby is growing wonderfully attractive now she is so well fed and attended to. I am ashamed to think how little the poor wee morsel attracted me at first. She was so associated with dreadful thoughts, and with things which I hated to know and did not wish to remember, that I shrank from her. Perhaps now the fact that she is to be mine inclines me to look at her with different eyes, but she is really a dear little thing, pretty and sweet. Oh, I will try hard to make her life lovely! [Pg 122]

April 16. Aunt Naomi came in last night almost as soon as I was at home. She should not have been out in the night air, I think, for her cold is really severe, and has kept her shut up in the house for a fortnight. She was so eager for news, however, that she could not rest until she had seen me, and I am away all day.

"Well," was her greeting, "I am glad to see you at home once more. I've begun to feel as if you lived down in that little red house."

I said I had pretty nearly lived there for the last two weeks, but that since Miss Dyer came I had been able to get home at night most of the time.

"How do you like going out nursing?" she asked, thrusting her tongue into her cheek in that queer way she has.

I told her I certainly shouldn't think of choosing it as a profession, at least unless I could go to cleaner places.

"I hear you had Hannah clean up," she remarked with a chuckle.

"How did you hear that?" I asked her. "I thought you had been housed with a cold."

Aunt Naomi's smile was broad, and she swung her foot joyously.

"I've had all my faculties," she answered.

"So I should think. You must keep a troop of paid spies."

"I don't need spies. I just keep my eyes and ears open."

I wondered in my heart whether she had heard of the marriage, and as if she read the question in my mind, she answered it. [Pg 123]

"I thought I'd like to know one thing, though," she observed with the air of one who candidly concedes that he is not infallible. "I'd like to know how the new Mrs. Webbe takes his marrying her."

"Aunt Naomi," I burst out in astonishment, "you are a witch, and ought to be looked after by the witch-finders."

Aunt Naomi laughed, and her eyes twinkled at the agreeable compliment I paid to her cleverness. Then she suddenly became grave.

"I am not sure, Ruth," she said, "that I should be willing to have your responsibility in making him marry such a girl."

I disclaimed the responsibility entirely, and declared I had not even suggested the marriage. I told her he had done it for the sake of the child, and that the proposition was his, and his only.

She sniffed contemptuously, with an air which seemed to cast doubts on my sanity.

"Very likely he did, and I don't suppose you did suggest it in words; but it's your doing all the same."

"I will not have the responsibility put on me," I protested. "It isn't for me to determine what Tom Webbe shall do."

"You can't help it," was her uncompromising answer. "You can make him do anything you want to."

"Then I wish I were wise enough to know what he ought to do," I could not help crying out. "Oh, Aunt Naomi, I do so want to help him!"

She looked at me with her keen old eyes, to which age has only imparted more sharpness. I should hate to be a criminal brought before her as my judge; her eyes would bring out my guilty secret from the cunningest hiding-place in my soul, and she would sentence me with the utmost rigor of the law. After the sentence had been executed, though, she would come with sharp tongue and gentle hands, and bind up my wounds. Now she did not answer my remark directly, but went on to question me about the Brownrig girl and the details of her illness; only when she went away she stopped to turn at the door and say,— [Pg 124]

"The best thing you can do for Tom Webbe is to believe in him. He isn't worth your pity, but your caring what happens to him will do him more good than anything else."

I have been wondering ever since she went how much truth there is in what she said. Tom cannot care so much for me as that, although placed as he is the faith of any woman ought to help him. I know, of course, he is fond of me, and that he was always desperate over my engagement; but I cannot believe the motive power of his life is so closely connected with my opinions as Aunt Naomi seems to think. If it were he would never have been involved at all in this dreadful business. But I do so pity him, and I so wish I might really help him!

April 18. Julia is very low. I have been sitting alone with her this afternoon, almost seeing life fade away from her. Only once was she at all like her old self. I had given her some wine, and she lay for a moment with her great black eyes gleaming out from the hollows into which they have sunk. She seemed to have something on her mind, and at last she put it feebly into words.

"Don't tell her any bad of me," she said.

For an instant I did not understand, and I suppose that my face showed this. She half turned her heavy head on her pillow, so that her glance might go toward the place where the baby slept in the broken clothes-basket. The sadness of it came over me so suddenly and so strongly that tears blinded me. It was the most womanly touch that I have ever known in Julia; and for the moment I was so moved that I could not speak. I leaned over and kissed her, and promised that from me her child should never know harm of its mother. [Pg 125]

"She'd be more likely to go to the devil if she knew," Julia explained gaspingly. "Now she'll have some sort of a chance."

The words were coarse, but as they were said they were so pathetic that they pierced me. Poor little baby, born to a tainted heritage! I must save her clean little soul somehow. Poor Julia, she certainly never had any sort of a chance.

April 24. She is in her grave at last, poor girl, and it is sad to think that nobody alive regrets her. Tom cannot, and even her dreadful mother showed no sorrow to-day. Somehow the vulgarity of

the mother and her behavior took away half the sadness of the tragedy. When I think about it the very coarseness of it all makes the situation more pathetic, but this is an afterthought that can be felt only when I have beaten down my disgust. When one considers how Julia grew up with this woman, and how she had no way of learning the decencies of life except from a mother who had no conception of them, it makes the heart ache; and yet when Mrs. Brownrig broke in upon us at the graveyard this morning, disgust was the strongest feeling of which I was conscious. The violation of conventionalities always shocks a woman, I suppose, and when it comes to anything so solemn as services over the dead, the lack of decency is shocking and exasperating together, with a little suggestion besides of sacrilege.

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Miss Charlotte surprised me by coming over just after breakfast to go to the funeral with me.

"I don't like to have you go alone," she said, "and I knew you would go."

I asked her in some surprise how in the world she knew when the funeral was to be, for we thought that we had kept it entirely quiet.

"Aunt Naomi told me last night," she answered. "I suppose she heard it from some familiar spirit or other,—a black cat, or a toad, or something of the kind."

I could only say that I was completely puzzled to see how Aunt Naomi had discovered the hour in any other way, and I thanked Miss Charlotte for coming, though I told the dear she should not have taken so much trouble.

"I wanted to do it, my dear," she returned cheerfully. "I am getting to be an old thing, and I find funerals rather lively and amusing. Don't you remember Maria Harmon used to say that to a pious soul a funeral was a heavenly picnic?"

Whatever a "heavenly picnic" may be, the funeral this morning was one of the most ghastly things imaginable. Tom and Mr. Thurston were in one carriage and Miss Charlotte and I in another. We went to the graveyard at the Rim, where Julia's father and brother were buried, a place half overgrown with wild-rose and alder bushes. In summer it must be a picturesque tangle of wild shrubs and blossoms, but now it is only chill, and barren, and neglected. The spring has reddened and yellowed the tips of the twigs, but not enough to make the bushes look really alive yet. The heap of clay by the grave, too, was of a hideous ochre tint, and horribly sodden and oozy.

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Just as the coffin was being lowered a wild figure suddenly appeared from somewhere behind the thickets of alders and low spruces which skirt the fence on one side. It proved to be old Mrs. Brownrig, who with rags and tags, and even her disheveled gray hair fluttering as she moved, half ran down the path toward us. She must have been hiding in the woods waiting, and I found afterward that she had been seen lurking about yesterday, though for some reason she had not been to her house. Now she had evidently been drinking, and she was a dreadful thing to look at.

I wonder why it is that nature, which makes almost any other ruin picturesque, never succeeds in making the wreck of humanity anything but hideous? An old tower, an old tree, even an old house, has somehow a quality that is prepossessing; but an old man is apt to look unattractive, and an old woman who has given up taking care of herself is repulsive. Perhaps we cannot see humanity with the impartial eyes with which we regard nature, but I do not think this is the whole of it. Somehow and for some reason an inanimate ruin is generally attractive, while a human ruin is ugly.

Mrs. Brownrig seemed to me an incarnation of the repulsive. She made me shudder with some sort of a feeling that she was wicked through and through. Even the pity she made me feel could not prevent my sense that she was vicious. I wanted to wash my hands just for having seen her. I was ashamed to be so uncharitable, and of course it was because she was so hideous to look at; but I do not think I could have borne to have her touch me.

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"Stop!" she called out. "I'm the mother of the corpse. Don't you dare to bury her till I get there!"

I glanced at Tom in spite of myself. He had been stern and pale all the morning, not saying a word more than was necessary, but now the color came into his face all at once. I could not bear to see him, and tried to look at the mother, but repulsion and pity made me choke. She was panting with haste and intoxication by the time she reached us, and stumbled over something in the path. She caught at Tom's arm to save herself, and there she hung, leering up into his face.

"You didn't mean for me to come, did you?" she broke out, half whimpering and half chuckling. "She was mine before she was yours. You killed her, too."

Tom kept himself still, though it must have been terribly hard. He must have been in agony, and I could have sobbed to think how he suffered. He grew white as I have never seen him, but he did not look at the old woman. She was perhaps too distracted with drink and I hope with grief to know what she was doing. She turned suddenly, and looked at the coffin, which rested on the edge of the grave.

"My handsome Jule!" she wailed. "Oh, my handsome Jule! They're all dead now! What did you put on her? Did you make a shroud or put on a dress?"

"She has a white shroud," I said quickly. "I saw to everything myself."

She turned to me with a fawning air, and let go her grasp on Tom's arm.

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"I'm grateful, Miss Privet," she said. "We Brownrigs ain't much, but we're grateful. I hope you won't let 'em bury my handsome gel till I've seen her," she went on, with a manner pitifully wheedling. "She was my gel before she was anybody else's, and it ain't goin' to hurt nobody for me to see her. I'd like to see that shroud."

How much natural grief, how much vanity, how much maudlin excitement was in her wish, I cannot tell; but manifestly there was nothing to do but to have the coffin opened. When the face of the dead woman had once more been uncovered to the light, the dreadful mother hung over it raving and chuckling. Now she shrieked for her handsome Jule, and wailed in a way that pierced to the marrow; then she would fall to imbecile laughter over the shroud, "just like a lady's,—but then Jule was a lady after she was married." Miss Charlotte, Tom, and I stood apart, while Mr. Thurston tried to get the excited creature away; and the grave-diggers looked on with open curiosity. I could not help thinking how they would tell the story, and of how Tom's name would be bandied about in connection with it. Sometimes I feel as if it were harder to bear the vulgarities of life than actual sorrows. Father used to say that pain is personal, but vulgarity a violation of general principles. This is one of his sayings which I do not feel that I understand entirely, and yet I have some sense of what he meant. A thing which is vulgar seems to fly in the face of all that should be, and outrages our sense of the fitness of things.

Well, somehow we got through it all. It is over, and Julia is in her grave. I cannot but think that it is better if she does not remember; if she has gone out like an ill-burning candle. Nothing is left now but to consider what can be done for the lives that we can reach. I am afraid that the mother is beyond me, but for Tom I can, perhaps, do something. For baby I should do much.

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April 25. It is so strange to have a child in the house. I feel queer and disconcerted when I think of it, although things seem to go easily enough. The responsibility of taking charge of a helpless life overwhelms me, and I do not dare to let my thoughts go when they begin to picture possibilities in the future. I wonder that I ever dared to undertake to have baby; and yet her surroundings will be so much better here than with the dreadful Brownrig grandmother that she must surely be better for them. In any case I had to help Tom.

I proposed a permanent nurse for baby, but Hannah and Rosa took up arms at once, and all but upbraided me with having cast doubts on their ability and faithfulness. Surely we three women among us should be able to take care of one morsel, although none of us ever had babies of our own.

April 29. Nothing could be more absurd than the way in which the entire household now revolves about baby. All of us are completely slaves already, although the way in which we show it is naturally different. Rosa has surrendered frankly and without reservations. She sniffed and pouted at the idea of having the child "of that Brownrig creature" in the house. She did not venture to say this to me directly, of course; but she relieved her mind by making remarks to Hannah when I could not help hearing. From the moment baby came, however, Rosa succumbed without a struggle. It is evident she is born with the full maternal instinct, and I see if she does not marry her Dennis, or some more eligible lover, and take herself away before baby is old enough to be much affected, the child will be spoiled to an unlimited extent. As for Hannah, her method of showing her affection is to exhibit the greatest solicitude for baby's spiritual welfare, mingled with the keenest jealousy of Rosa's claims on baby's love. I foresee that I shall have pretty hard work to protect my little daughter from Hannah's well-meant but not very wise theology; and how to do this without hurting the good old soul's feelings may prove no easy problem.

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As for myself—of course I love the little, helpless, pink thing; the waif from some outside unknown brought here into a world where everything is made so hard to her from the start. She woke this afternoon, and looked up at me with Tom Webbe's eyes, lying there as sweet and happy as possible, so that I had to kiss and cuddle her, and love her all at once. It is wonderful how a baby comes out of the most dreadful surroundings as a seedling comes out of the mud, so clean and fresh. I said this to Aunt Naomi yesterday, and she sniffed cynically.

"Yes," she answered, "but a weed grows into a weed, no matter how it looks when it is little."

The thought is dreadful to me. I will not believe that because a human being is born out of weakness and wickedness there is no chance for it. The difference, it seems to me, is that every human being has at least the germs of good as well as of bad, and one may be developed as well as the other. Baby must have much that is good and fine from her father, and the thing I have to do is to see to it that the best of her grows, and the worse part dies for want of nourishment. Surely we can do a great deal to aid nature. Perhaps my baby cannot help herself much, at least not for years and years; but if she is kept in an atmosphere which is completely wholesome, whatever is best in her nature must grow strong and crowd down everything less noble.

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MAY

May 1. Baby is more bewitching every day. She is so wonderful and so lovely that I am never tired of watching her. The miracle of a baby's growth makes one stand speechless in delight and awe. When this little morsel of life, hardly as many days in the world as I have been years, coos and smiles, and stretches out those tiny rosebud fingers only big enough for a fairy, I feel like going down on my knees to the mystery of life. I do not wonder that people pray. I understand entirely the impulse to cry out to something mighty, something higher than our own strength,

some sentient heart of nature somewhere; the desire to find, by leaning on the invisible, a relief from the oppressiveness of the emotions we all must feel when a sense of the greatness of life takes hold on us. If it were but possible to believe in any of the many gods that have been offered to us, how glad I should be. Father used to say that every human being really makes a deity for himself, and that the difference between believers and unbelievers is whether they can allow the church to give a name to the god a man has himself created. I cannot accept any name from authority, but the sense of some brooding power is very strong in me when I see this being growing as if out of nothing in my very hands.

When I look at baby I have so great a consciousness of the life outside of us, the life of the universe as a whole, that I am ready to agree with any one who talks of God. The trouble is that one idea of deity seems to me as true and also as inadequate as all the rest; so that in the end I am left with only my overwhelming sense of the mightiness of the mystery of existence and of the unity of all the life in the universe.

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May 2. To-day we named baby. I would not do it without consulting her father, so I sent for Tom, and he came over just after breakfast. The day has been warm, and the windows were open; a soft breath of wind came in with a feeling of spring in it, and a faint hint of a summer coming by and by. I was upstairs in the nursery when Tom came; for we have made a genuine, full-fledged nursery of the south chamber, and installed Rosa and the baby there. When they told me that he was here, I took baby, all pink and sweet from her bath, and went down with her.

Tom stood with his back to the parlor door, looking out of the window. He did not hear me until I spoke, and said good-morning. Then he turned quickly. At sight of baby he changed color, and forgot to answer my greeting. He came across the room toward us, so that we met in the middle of the floor.

"Good God, Ruth!" he said. "To think of seeing you with her baby in your arms!"

The words hurt me for myself and for him.

"Tom," I cried out excitedly, "I will not hear you say anything against baby! It is neither hers nor yours now. It is mine, mine! You shall not speak of her as if she were anything but the sweetest, purest thing in the whole world!"

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He looked at me so intently and so feelingly while I snuggled the pink ball up to me and kissed it, that it was rather disconcerting. To change the subject, I went straight to the point.

"Tom," I said, "I want to ask you about baby's name."

"Oh, call it anything you like," he answered.

"But you ought to name her," I told him.

He was silent a moment; then he turned and walked away to the window again. I thought that he might be considering the name, but when he came back abruptly he said:—

"Ruth, I can't pretend with you. I haven't any love for that child. I wish it weren't here to remind me of what I would give anything to have forgotten. If I have any feeling for it, it is pity that the poor little wretch had to be chucked into the world, and shame that I should have any responsibility about it."

I told him he would come to love her some time; that she was after all his daughter, and so sweet he couldn't help being fond of her.

"If I ever endure her," he said, almost doggedly, "it will be on your account."

"Nonsense, Tom," I retorted, as briskly as I could when I wanted to cry, "you'll be fond of her because you can't help it. See, she has your eyes, and her hair is going to be like yours."

He laughed with a trace of his old buoyant spirit.

"What idiocy!" was his reply. "Her eyes are any color you like, and she has only about six hairs on her head anyway."

I denied this indignantly, partly because it was not true, and partly, I am afraid, with feminine guile, to divert him. We fell for a moment almost into the oldtime boy-and-girl tone of long ago, and only baby in my arms reminded us of what had come between.

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"Well," I said at last, "it is evident that you are not worthy to give this nice little, dear little, superfine little girl a name; so I shall do it myself. I shall call her Thomasine."

"What an outlandish name!"

"It is your own, so you needn't abuse it. Do you agree?"

"I don't see how I can help myself, for you can call her anything you like."

"Of course I shall," I told him; "but I thought you should be consulted."

He shrugged his shoulders with a laugh.

"Having made up your mind," he said, "you ask my advice."

"I shouldn't think of consulting you till I had made up my mind," was my retort. "Now I want you to give her her name."

"Give it to her how?"

"Her name is to be Thomasine," I repeated.

"It is an absurd name," Tom commented.

"That's as it may be," was all I would answer, "but that's what she's to be called. You're to kiss her, and"—

He looked at me with a sudden flush. He had never, I am sure, so much as touched his child with the tip of his finger, much less caressed her. The proposition took him completely by surprise, and evidently disconcerted him. I did not give him time to consider. I made my tone and manner as light as I could, and hurried on.

"You are to kiss her and say, 'I name you Thomasine.' I suppose that really you ought to say 'thee,' but that seems rather theatrical for us plain folk." [Pg 137]

He hesitated a second, and then he bent over baby in my arms.

"I name you Thomasine," he said, and just brushed her forehead with his lips. Then he looked at me solemnly. "You will keep her?" he said.

"Yes," I promised.

So baby is named, and Tom must have felt that she belongs really to him, however he may shrink from her.

May 3. I have had a dreadful call from Mrs. Webbe. She came over in the middle of the forenoon, and the moment I saw her determined expression I felt sure something painful was to happen.

"Good-morning," she said abruptly; "I have come after my son's infant."

"What?" I responded, my wits scattering like chickens before a hawk.

"I have come after my son's infant," she repeated. "We are obliged to you for taking care of it; but I won't trouble you with it any longer."

I told her I was to keep baby always. She looked at me with tightening lips.

"I don't want to have disagreeable words with you, Ruth," she said, "but you must know we could never allow such a thing."

I asked her why.

"You must know," she said, "you are not fit to be trusted with an immortal soul."

I fear that I unmeaningly let the shadow of a smile show as I said,—

"But baby is so young"—

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"This is no laughing matter," she interrupted with asperity, "even if the child is young. I must do my duty to her from the very beginning. Of course it will be a cross for me, but I hope I shall bear it like a Christian."

Something in her voice and manner exasperated me almost beyond endurance. I could not help remembering the day Mrs. Webbe came to the Brownrig house, and I am much afraid I was anything but conciliatory in my tone when I answered.

"Mrs. Webbe," I said to her, "if you cared for baby, and wanted to love her, I might perhaps think of giving her up, though I am very fond of her, dear little thing."

Mrs. Webbe's keen black eyes snapped at me.

"I dare say you look at it in that way," she retorted. "That's just it. It's just the sort of worldliness that would ruin the child. It's come into the world with sin and shame enough to bear, and you'd never help it to grace to bear it."

The words were not entirely clear, yet I had little doubt of their meaning. The baby, however, was after all her own flesh and blood, and I was secretly glad that to strengthen me in my resolve to keep Thomasine I had my promise to the dead mother and to Tom.

"But, Mrs. Webbe," I said as gently as I could, "don't you think the fact that baby has no mother, and must bear that, will make her need love more?"

"She'll need bracing up," was the emphatic rejoinder, "and that's just what she won't get here. I don't want her. It's a cross for me to look at her, and realize we've got to own a brat with Brownrig blood in her. I'm only trying to do my duty. Where's that baby going to get any religious training from you, Ruth Privet?" [Pg 139]

I sat quiet a moment, thinking what I had better say. Mrs. Webbe was entirely conscientious about it all. She did not, I was sure, want baby, and she was sincere in saying that she was only trying to do her duty. When I thought of Thomasine, however, as being made to serve as a living and visible cross for the good of Mrs. Webbe's soul, I could not bear it. Driven by that strong will over the thorny paths of her grandmother's theology, poor baby would be more likely to be brought to despair than to glory. It was of course right for Mrs. Webbe to wish to take baby, but it could not be right for me to permit her to do so. If my duty clashed with hers, I could not change on that account; but I wished to be as conciliatory as possible.

"Don't you think, Mrs. Webbe," I asked, trying to look as sunny as a June day, "that baby is rather young to get harm from me or my heresies? Couldn't the whole matter at least be left till she is old enough to know the meaning of words?"

She looked at me with more determination than ever.

"Well, of course it's handsome of you to be willing to take care of Tom's baby, and of course you

won't mind the expense; but you made him marry that girl, so it's only fair you should expect to take some of the trouble that's come of what you did."

"You don't mean," I burst out before I thought, "that you wouldn't have had Tom marry her?"

"It's no matter now, as long as she didn't live," Mrs. Webbe answered; "though it isn't pleasant knowing that one of that Brownrig tribe married into our family." [Pg 140]

I had nothing to say. It would have hurt my pride, of course, had one of my kin made such a marriage, and I cannot help some secret feeling that Julia had forfeited her right to be treated like an honest girl; but there was baby to be considered. Besides this, the marriage was made, it seems to me, by Tom's taking the girl, not by the service at her deathbed. Mrs. Webbe and I sat for a time without words. I looked at the carpet, and was conscious that Mrs. Webbe looked at me. She is not a pleasant woman, and I have had times of wishing she might be carried off by a whirlwind, so that Deacon Webbe and Tom might have a little peace; but I believe in her way she tries to be a good one. The trouble is that her way of being good seems to me to be a great deal more vicious than most kinds of wickedness. She uses her religion like a tomahawk, and whacks with it right and left.

"Look here," she broke out at last, "I don't want to be unpleasant, but it ain't a pleasant thing for me to come here anyway. I suppose you mean to be kind, but you'd be soft with baby. That's just what she mustn't have. She'd better be made to know from the very start what's before her."

"What is before her?" I asked.

Mrs. Webbe flushed.

"I don't know as there's any use of my telling you if you don't see it yourself. She's got to fight her way through life against her inheritance from that mother of hers, and—and her father."

She choked a little, and I could not help laying my hand on hers, just to show that I understood. She drew herself away, not unkindly, I believe, but because she is too proud to endure pity. [Pg 141]

"She's got to be hardened," she went on, her tone itself hardening as she spoke. "From her cradle she's got to be set to fight the sin that's in her."

I could not argue. I respected the sternness of her resolve to do her duty, and I knew that she was sacrificing much. Every smallest sight of the child would be an hourly, stinging humiliation to her pride, and perhaps, too, to her love. In her fierce way she must love Tom, so that his shame would hurt her terribly. Yet I could not give up my little soft, pink baby to live in an atmosphere of disapproval and to be disciplined in the rigors of a pitiless creed. That, I am sure, would never save her. Tom Webbe is a sufficient answer to his mother's argument, if she could only see it. If anything is to rescue Thomasine from the disastrous consequences of an unhappy heritage, it must be just pure love and friendliness.

"Mrs. Webbe," I said, as firmly as I could, "I think I know how you feel; but in any case I could not give up baby until I had seen Tom."

A deeper flush came over the thin face, and a look which made me turn my eyes away, because I knew she would not wish me to see the pain and humiliation which it meant.

"Tom," she began, "Tom! He"—She broke off abruptly, and, rising, began to gather her shawl about her. "Then you refuse to let me have her?" she ended.

"The baby's father should have something to say in the matter, it seems to me," I told her.

"He has already decided," she replied sternly, "and decided against the child's good. He wants her to stay with you. I suppose," she added, and I must say that her tone took a suggestion of spite, "he thinks you'll get so interested in the baby as sometime"— [Pg 142]

She did not finish, perhaps because I gave her a look, which, if it expressed half I felt, might well silence her. She moved quickly toward the door, and tightened her shawl with an air of virtuous determination.

"Well," she observed, "I have done my duty by the child. What the Lord let it live for is a mystery to me."

She said not another word, not even of leave-taking, but strode away with something of the air of a brisk little prophetess who has pronounced the doom of heaven on the unrighteous. It is a pity such people will make of religion an excuse for taking themselves so seriously. All the teachings of theology Mrs. Webbe turns into justifications of her prejudices and her hardness. The very thought of Thomasine under her rigorous rule makes me shiver. I wonder how her husband has endured it all these years. Saintship used to be won by making life as disagreeable as possible for one's self; but nowadays life is made sufficiently hard by others. If living with his wife peacefully, forbearingly, decorously, does not entitle Deacon Webbe to be considered a saint, it is time that new principles of canonization were adopted.

Heavens! What uncharitableness I am running into myself!

May 4. I told Aunt Naomi of Mrs. Webbe's visit, and her comments were pungent enough. It is wicked, perhaps, to set them down, but I have a vicious joy in doing it. [Pg 143]

"Of course she'd hate to have the baby," Aunt Naomi declared, "but she'd more than get even by the amount of satisfaction she'd get nagging at it. She's worn Deacon Daniel till he's callous, so there can't be much fun rasping him, and Tom won't listen to her. She wants somebody to bully, and that baby'd just suit her. She could make it miserable and get in side digs at its father at the same time."

"You are pretty severe, Aunt Naomi," I said; "but I know you don't mean it. As for troubling Tom, he says he doesn't care for baby."

"Pooh! He's soft-hearted like his father; and even if he didn't care for his own child, which is nonsense anyway, he'd be miserable to see any child go through what he's been through himself with that woman."

It is useless to attempt to stay Aunt Naomi when once she begins to talk about Mrs. Webbe, and she has so much truth in her favor I am never able successfully to urge the other side of the case so as to get for Mrs. Webbe any just measure of fair play. To-night I almost thought that Aunt Naomi would devour her green veil in the energy with which she freed her mind. The thing which she cannot see is that Mrs. Webbe is entirely blind to her own faults. Mrs. Webbe would doubtless be amazed if she could really appreciate that she is unkind to Deacon Daniel and to Tom. She acts her nature, and simply does not think. I dare say most of us might be as bad if we had her disposition.—Which tags on at the end of the nasty things I have been writing like a piece of pure cant!

May 6. It certainly would seem on the face of it that a woman alone in the world as I am, of an age when I ought to have the power of managing my own affairs, and with the means of getting on without asking financial aid, might take into her house a poor, helpless, little baby if she wished. Apparently there is a conspiracy to prevent my doing anything of the sort. Cousin Mehitable has now entered her protest, and declares that if I do not give up what she calls my mad scheme she shall feel it her duty to have me taken in charge as a lunatic. She wants to know whether I have no decency about having a bachelor's baby in the house, although she is perfectly well aware that Tom was married. She reminds me that she expects me to go to Europe with her in about a month, and asks whether I propose to leave Thomasine in a foundling hospital or a day nursery while I am gone. Her letter is one breathless rush of indignation from beginning to end, so funnily like her that with all my indignation I could hardly read it for laughing.

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I confess it is hard to give up the trip abroad. I was only half aware how I have been counting on it until now I am brought face to face with the impossibility of carrying out the plan. I have almost unconsciously been piecing together in my mind memories of the old days in Europe, with delight in thinking of seeing again places which enchanted me. Any one, I suppose, who has been abroad enough to taste the charm of travel, but who has not worn off the pleasure by traveling too much, must have moments of longing to get back. I have had the oddest, sudden pangs of homesickness when I have picked up a photograph or opened a magazine to a picture of some beautiful place across the ocean. The smallest things can bring up the feeling,—the sound of the wind in the trees as I heard it once when driving through the Black Forest, the sun on a stone wall as it lay in Capri, the sky as it looked at one place, or the grass as I saw it at another. I remember how once a white feather lying on the turf of the lawn brought up the courtyard of Warwick Castle as if a curtain had lifted suddenly; and always these flashing reminders of the other side of the world have made me feel as if I must at once hurry across the ocean again. Now I have let myself believe I was really going, and to give it up is very hard.

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It is perhaps making too much of it to be so disappointed. Certainly baby must be taken care of, and I have promised to take care of her. I fear that it will be a good while before I see Europe again. I am sorry for Cousin Mehitable, but she has never any difficulty in finding friends to travel with. It is evident enough that my duty is here.

May 10. Rosa has not yet come to the end of her matrimonial perplexities. The divorced wife of Ran Gargan is now reported as near death, and Rosa is debating whether to give up Dennis Maloney and wait for Ran.

"Of course Dennis is gone on me," she explained last night in the most cold-bloodedly matter-of-fact fashion, "and I'd make him a main good wife. But Ran was always the boy for me, barring Father O'Rafferty wouldn't let me marry him."

"Rosa," I said, with all the severity I could command, "you must not talk like that. It sounds as if you hadn't any feeling at all. You don't mean it."

Rosa tossed her saucy head with emphatic scorn.

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"What for don't I mean it?" she demanded. "Any woman wants to marry the man she likes best, and, barring him, she'd take up with the man who likes her best."

I laughed, and told her she was getting to be a good deal of a philosopher.

"Humph!" was her not very respectful reply; "it's the only choice a woman has, and she don't always have that. She's better off if she'll take the man that's sweet on her; but it's the way we girls are made, to hanker after the one we're sweet on ourselves."

Her earnestness so much interfered with the supper which she was giving to Thomasine that I took baby into my arms, and left Rosa free to speak out her mind without hindrance.

"I'm not going to take either of 'em in a hurry," she went on. "I'd not be leaving you in the lurch with the baby, Miss Ruth. I'd like to have Ran, but I don't know what he's got. He'd make me stand round awful, they say, and Dennis'd be under my thumb like a crumb of butter. I mistrust I'd be more contented with Ranny. It'd be more stirred up like; but I'd have some natural fear of him, and that's pleasant for a woman."

I had never seen Rosa in this astonishing mood before, and so much worldly wisdom was bewildering. Such generalizations on the relation of the sexes took away my breath. I was forced to be silent, for there was evidently no chance of my holding my own in a conversation of this

sort. It is strange how boldly and bluntly this uneducated girl has thought out her relations with her lovers. She recognizes entirely that Dennis, who is her slave, will treat her better than Ran, who will be her master; yet she "mistrusts she will be more contented with Ranny." The moral seems to be that a woman is happier to be abused by the man she loves than to be served by the man who loves her. That can only be crude instinct, the relics of savagery. In civilized woman, I am sure, when respect goes love must go also.

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No; that isn't true! Women keep on loving men when they know them to be unworthy. Perhaps this applies especially to good wives. A good woman is bound to love her husband just as long as she can in any way compass it, and to deceive herself about him to the latest possible instant. I wonder what I should do? I wonder—Well, George has shown that he is not what I thought him, and do I care for him less? He only showed, however, that he did not care for me as much as I thought, and of course that does not necessarily prove him unworthy. And yet—

What is the use of all this? What do I know about it anyway? I will go to bed.

May 12. It is amusing to see how jealous Hannah and Rosa are of baby's attention. Thomasine can as yet hardly be supposed to distinguish one human being from another, and very likely has not drawn very accurate comparisons between any of us and the furniture; but Rosa insists that baby knows her, and is far more fond of her than of Hannah, while of course Hannah indignantly sniffs at an idea so posterous.

"She really laughed at me this morning when I was giving her her bath," Rosa assured me to-day. "She knows me the minute I come into the nursery."

It is beautiful to see how the sweetness and helplessness of the little thing have so appealed to the girls that prejudices are forgotten. When I brought Thomasine home I feared that I might have trouble. They scorned the child of that Brownrig girl, and they both showed the fierce contempt which good girls of their class feel for one who disgraces herself. All this is utterly forgotten. The charm of baby has so enslaved them that if an outsider ventured to show the feelings they themselves had at first, they would be full of wrath and indignation. The maternal instinct is after all the strongest thing in most women. Rosa considers her matrimonial chances in a bargain-and-sale fashion which takes my breath, but she will be perfectly fierce in her fondness for her children. Hannah is a born old maid, but she cannot help mothering every baby who comes within her reach, and for Thomasine she brings out all the sweetness of her nature.

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May 15. I have been through a whirlwind, but now I am calm, and can think of things quietly. It is late, but the fire has not burned down, and I could not sleep, so Peter and I may as well stay where we are a while longer.

I was reading this afternoon, when suddenly Kathie rushed into the room out of breath with running, her face smooched and wet with tears, and her hair in confusion.

"Why, Kathie," I asked, "what is the matter?"

Her answer was to fly across the room, throw herself on her knees beside me, and burst into sobs. The more I tried to soothe her, the more she cried, and it was a long time before she was quiet enough to be at all reasonable.

"My dear," I said, "tell me what has happened. What is the matter?"

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She looked up at me with wild eyes.

"It isn't true!" she broke out fiercely. "I know it isn't true! I didn't say a word to him, because I knew you wouldn't want me to; but it's a lie! It's a lie, if my father did say it."

"Why, Kathie," I said, amazed at her excitement, "what in the world are you saying? Your father wouldn't tell a lie to save his life."

"He believes it," she answered, dropping her voice. A sullen, stubborn look came into her face that it was pitiful to see. "He does believe it, but it's a lie."

I spoke to her as sternly as I could, and told her she had no right to judge of what her father believed, and that I would not have her talk so of him.

"But I asked him about your mother, and he said she would be punished forever and ever for not being a church member!" she exclaimed before I could stop her. "And I know it's a lie."

She burst into another tempest of sobs, and cried until she was exhausted. Her words were so cruel that for a moment I had not even the power to try to comfort her; but she would soon have been in hysterics, and for a time I had to think only of her. Fortunately baby woke. Rosa was not at home, and by the time Hannah and I had fed Thomasine, and once more she was asleep in her cradle, I had my wits about me. Kathie had, with a child's quick change of mood, become almost gay.

"Kathie," I said, "do you mind staying here with baby while I take a little walk? Rosa is out, and I have been in the house all day. I want a breath of fresh air."

"Oh, I should love to," she answered, her face brightening at the thought of being trusted with a responsibility so great.

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I was out of doors, and walking rapidly toward Mr. Thurston's house, before I really came to my senses. I was so wounded by what Kathie had thoughtlessly repeated, so indignant at this outrage to my dead, that I had had strength only to hide my feelings from her. Now I came to a realization of my anger, and asked myself what I meant to do. I had instinctively started out to denounce Mr. Thurston for bigotry and cruelty; to protest against this sacrilege. A little, I feel sure,—at least I

hope I am right,—I felt the harm he was doing Kathie; but most I was outraged and angry that he had dared to speak so of Mother. I was ashamed of my rage when I grew more composed; and I realized all at once how Mother herself would have smiled at me. So clear was my sense of her that it was almost as if she really repeated what she once said to me: "My dear Ruth, do you suppose that what Mr. Thurston thinks alters the way the universe is made? Why should he know more about it than you do? He's not nearly so clever or so well educated." I smiled to recall how she had smiled when she said it; then I was blinded by tears to remember that I should never see her smile again; and so I walked into a tree in the sidewalk, and nearly broke my nose. That was the end of my dashing madly at Mr. Thurston. The wound Kathie's words had made throbbled, but with the memory of Mother in my mind I could not break out into anger.

I turned down the Cove Road to walk off my ill-temper. After all Mr. Thurston was right from his point of view. He could not believe without feeling that he had to warn Kathie against the awful risk of running into eternal damnation. It must hurt him to think or to say such a thing; but he believes in the cruelty of the deity, and he has beaten his natural tenderness into subjection to his idea of a Moloch. It is so strange that the ghastly absurdity of connecting God's anger with a sweet and blameless life like Mother's does not strike him. Indeed, I suppose down here in the country we are half a century or so behind the thought of the real world, and that Mr. Thurston's creed would be impossible in the city, or among thinkers even of his own denomination. At least I hope so, though I do not see what they have left in the orthodox creed if they take eternal punishment out of it.

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The fresh air and the memory of Mother, with a little common sense, brought me right again. I walked until I had myself properly in hand, and till I hoped that the trace of tears on my face might pass for the effect of the wind. It was growing dusk by this time, and the lamps began to appear in the houses as I came to Mr. Thurston's at last. I slipped in at the front door as quietly as I could, and knocked at the study.

Mr. Thurston himself opened the door. He looked surprised, but asked me in, and offered me a chair. He had been writing, and still held his pen in his hand; the study smelled of kerosene lamp and air-tight stove. Poor man! Theology which has to live by an air-tight stove must be dreary. If he had an open fire on his hearth, he might have less in his religion.

"I have come to confess a fault, Mr. Thurston," I said, "and to ask a favor."

He smiled a little watery smile, and put down his pen.

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"Is the favor to be a reward for the fault or for confessing it?" he asked.

I was so much surprised by this mild jest, coming from him, that I almost forgot my errand. I smiled back at him, and forgot the bitterness that had been in my heart. He looked so thin, so bloodless, that it was impossible to have rancor.

"I left Kathie with baby while I went for a walk," I said, "and I have stayed away longer than I intended. I forgot to tell her she could call Hannah if she wanted to come home, and she is too conscientious to leave, so I am afraid that she has stayed all this time. I wanted you to know it is my fault."

"I am glad for her to be useful," her father said, "especially as you have been so kind to her."

"Then you will perhaps let her stay all night," I went on. "I can take over her night-things. I promised to show her about making a new kind of pincushion for the church fair; and I could do it this evening. Besides, it is lonely for me in that great house."

I felt like a hypocrite when I said this, though it is true enough. He looked at me kindly, and even pityingly.

"Yes," he returned, "I can understand that. If you think she won't trouble you, and"—

I did not give him opportunity for a word more. I rose at once and held out my hand.

"Thank you so much," I said. "I'll find Mrs. Thurston, and get Kathie's things. I beg your pardon for troubling you."

I was out of the study before he could reconsider. Across the hall I found his wife in the sitting-room with another air-tight stove, and looking thinner and paler than he. She had a great pile of sewing beside her, and her eyes looked as if months of tears were behind them, aching to be shed.

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I told her Mr. Thurston had given leave for Kathie to pass the night with me, and I had come for her night-things. She looked surprised, but none the less pleased. While she was out of the room I looked cautiously at the mending to see if the clothing was too worn for her to be willing that I should see it. When she came in with her little bundle, I said, as indifferently as I could, "I suppose if Kathie were at home she would help you with the mending, so I'll take her share with me, and we'll do it together." Of course she remonstrated, but I managed to bring away a good part of the big pile, and now it is all done. Poor Mrs. Thurston, she looked so tired, so beaten down by life, the veins were so blue on her thin temples! If I dared, I'd go every week and do that awful mending for her. I must get Kathie to smuggle some of it over now and then. When we blame these people for the narrowness of their theology, we forget their lives are so constrained and straitened that they cannot take broad views of anything. The man or woman who could take a wide outlook upon life from behind an air-tight stove in a half-starved home would have to be almost a miracle. It is wonderful that so much sweetness and humanity keep alive where circumstances are so discouraging. When I think of patient, faithful, hard-working women like Mrs. Thurston, uncomplaining and devoted, I am filled with admiration and humility. If their

theology is narrow, they endure it; and, after all, men have made it for them. Father said once women had always been the occasion of theology, but had never produced any. I asked him, I remember, whether he said this to their praise or discredit, and he answered that what was entirely the result of nature was neither to be praised nor to be blamed; women were so made that they must have a religion, and men so constituted as to take the greatest possible satisfaction in inventing one. "It is simply a beautiful example," he added, with his wonderful smile which just curled the corners of his mouth, "of the law of supply and demand."

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I am running on and on, although it is so late at night. Aunt Naomi, I presume, will in some occult way know about it, and ask me why I sat up so long. I am tired, but the excitement of the afternoon is not all gone. That any one in the world should believe it possible for Mother to be unhappy in another life, to be punished, is amazing! Surely a man whose theology makes such an idea conceivable is profoundly to be pitied.

May 19. Hannah is perfectly delightful about Tomine. She hardly lets a day go by without admonishing me not to spoil baby, and yet she is herself an abject slave to the slightest caprice of the tyrannous small person. We have to-night been having a sort of battle royal over baby's going to sleep by herself in the dark. I made up my mind the time had come when some semblance of discipline must be begun, and I supposed, of course, that Hannah would approve and assist. To my surprise she failed me at the very first ditch.

"I am going to put Tomine into the crib," I announced, "and take away the light. She must learn to go to sleep in the dark."

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"She'll be frightened," Rosa objected.

"She's too little to know anything about being afraid," I retorted loftily, although I had secretly a good deal of misgiving.

"Too little!" sniffed Hannah. "She's too little not to be afraid."

I saw at a glance that I had before me a struggle with them as well as with baby.

"Children are not afraid of the dark until they are told to be," I declared as dogmatically as possible.

"They are told not to be," objected Rosa.

"But that puts the idea into their heads," was my answer.

Hannah regarded me with evident disapprobation.

"But supposing the baby cries?" she demanded.

"Then she must be left to stop," I answered, with outward firmness and inward quakings.

"But suppose she cries herself sick?" insisted Rosa.

"She won't. She'll just cry a little till she finds nobody comes, and then she'll go to sleep."

The two girls regarded me with looks that spoke disapproval in the largest of capitals. It is so seldom they are entirely united that it was disconcerting to have them thus make common cause against me, but I had to keep up for the sake of dignity if for nothing else. Thomasine was fed and arranged for the night; she was kissed and cuddled, and tucked into her crib. Then I got Hannah and Rosa, both protesting they didn't mind sitting up with the darling all night, out of the room, darkened the windows, and shut baby in alone for the first time in her whole life, a life still so pathetically little.

I closed the nursery door with an air of great calmness and determination, but outside I lingered like a complete coward. The girls were glowering darkly from the end of the hall, and we needed only candlelight to look like three bloodthirsty conspirators. For two or three minutes there was a soothing and deceptive silence, so that I turned to smile with an air of superior wisdom on the maids. Then without warning baby uplifted her voice and wailed.

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There was something most disconcertingly explosive about the cry, as if Thomasine had been holding her breath until she were black in the face, and only let it escape one second short of actual suffocation. I jumped as if a mouse had sprung into my face, and the two girls swooped down upon me in a whirl of triumphant indignation.

"There, Miss Ruth!" cried Hannah.

"There, Miss Privet!" cried Rosa.

"Well," I said defensively; "I expected her to cry some."

"She wants to be walked with, poor little thing," Rosa said incautiously.

I was rejoiced to have a chance to turn the tables, and I sprang upon her tacit admission at once.

"Rosa," I said severely, "have you been walking Thomasine to sleep? I told you never to do it."

Rosa, self-convicted, could only murmur that she had just taken her up and down two or three times to make her sleepy; she hadn't really walked her to sleep.

"What if she had?" Hannah demanded boldly, her place entirely forgotten in the excitement of the moment. "If babies like to be walked to sleep, it stands to reason that's nature."

I began to feel as if all authority were fast slipping away from me, and that I should at this rate soon become a very secondary person in my own house. I tried to recover myself by assuming the most severe air of which I was capable.

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"You must not talk outside the nursery door," I told them. "If Thomasine hears voices, of course she'll keep on crying. Go downstairs, both of you. I'll see to baby."

They had not yet arrived at open mutiny, and so with manifest unwillingness they departed, grumbling to each other as they went. Baby seemed to have some superhuman intelligence that her firmest allies were being routed, for she set up a series of nerve-splitting shrieks which made every fibre of my body quiver. As soon as the girls were out of sight I flopped down on my knees outside of the door, and put my hands over my ears. I was afraid of myself, and only the need I felt of holding out for Tomine's own sake gave me strength to keep from rushing into the nursery in abject surrender.

The absurdity of it makes me laugh now, but with the shrieks of baby piercing me, I felt as if I were involved in a tragedy of the deepest dye. I think I was never so near hysterics in my life; but I had even then some faint and far-away sense of how ridiculous I was, and that saved me. Thomasine yelled like a young tornado, and every cry went through me like a knife. I was on my knees on the floor, pouring out tears like a watering-pot, trying to shut out the sound. There is something in a baby's cry that is too much even for a sense of humor; and no woman could have heard it without being overcome.

I had so stopped my ears that although I could not shut out baby's cries entirely I did not hear Hannah and Rosa when they came skulking back. The first I knew of their being behind me was when Hannah, in a whispered bellow, shouted into my ear that baby would cry herself into convulsions. Demoralized as I was already, I almost yielded; I started to my feet, and faced them in a tragic manner, ready to give up everything. I was ready to say that Rosa might walk up and down with Tomine every night for the rest of her life. Fortunately some few gleams of common sense asserted themselves in my half-addled pate, and instead of opening the door, I spread out my arms, and without a word shooed the girls out of the corridor as if they were hens. Then the ludicrousness of it came over me, and although I still tingled with baby's wailing, I could appreciate that the cries were more angry than pathetic, and that we must fight the battle through now it had been begun. The drollest thing about it all was that it seemed almost as if the willful little lady inside there had some uncanny perception of my thought. I had no sooner got the girls downstairs again, and made up my mind to hold out than she stopped crying; and when we crept cautiously in ten minutes after, she was asleep as soundly and as sweetly as ever.

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But I feel as if I had been through battles, murders, and sudden deaths.

May 20. Baby to-night cried two or three minutes, but her ladyship evidently had the sense to see that crying is a painful and useless exercise when she has to deal with such a hard-hearted tyrant as I am, and she quickly gave it up. Rosa hoped pointedly that the poor little thing's will isn't broken, and Hannah observed piously that she trusted I realized we all of us had to be treated like babies by our Heavenly Father. I was tempted to ask her if our Heavenly Father never left us to cry in the dark. If we could be as firm with ourselves as we can be with other people, what an improvement it would be. I wonder what Tom would think of my first conflict with his baby.

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May 25. I went to-day to call on Mrs. Weston. Although I am in mourning, I thought it better to go. I feared lest she should think my old relations to George might have something to do with my staying away.

It was far less difficult than I thought it would be. I may be frank in my diary, I suppose, and say I found her silly and rather vulgar, and I wonder how George can help seeing it. She was inclined to boast a little that all the best people in town had called.

"Olivia Watson acted real queer about my wedding-calls," she said. "She doesn't seem to know the rich folks very well."

"Oh, we never make distinctions in Tuskamuck by money," I put in; but she went on without heeding.

"Olivia said Mrs. Andrews—she called her Lady Andrews, just as if she was English."

"It is a way we have," I returned. "I'm sure I don't know how it began. Very likely it is only because it fits her so well."

"Well, anyway, she called; and Olivia owned she'd never been to see them. I could see she was real jealous, though she wouldn't own it."

"Old lady Andrews is a delightful person," I remarked awkwardly, feeling that I must say something.

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"I didn't think she was much till Olivia told me," returned Mrs. Weston, with amazing frankness. "I thought she was a funny old thing."

It is not kind to put this down, I know; but I really would like to see if it sounds so unreal when it is written as it did when it was said. It was so unlike anything I ever heard that it seemed almost as if Mrs. Weston were playing a part, and trying to cheat me into thinking her more vulgar and more simple than she is. I am afraid I shall not lessen my unpleasant impression, however, by keeping her words.

Mrs. Weston talked, too, about George and his devotion as if she expected me to be hurt. Possibly I was a little; although if I were, it was chiefly because my vanity suffered that he should find me inferior in attraction to a woman like this. I believe I am sincerely glad that he should prove his fondness for his wife. Indeed fondness could be the only excuse for his leaving me, and I do wish happiness to them both.

I fear what I have written gives the worst of Mrs. Weston. She perhaps was a little embarrassed, but she showed me nothing better. She is not a lady, and I see perfectly that she will drop out of our circle. We are a little Cranfordish here, I suppose, but anywhere in the world people come in the long run to associate with their own kind. Mrs. Weston is not our kind; and even if this did not affect our attitude, she would herself tire of us after the first novelty is worn off.

May 26. George came in this morning on business, and before he went he thanked me for calling on his wife. [Pg 161]

"I shouldn't have made a wedding-call just now on anybody else," I told him; "but your association with Father and the way in which we have known you of course make a difference."

He showed some embarrassment, but apparently—at least so I thought—he was so anxious to know what I thought of Mrs. Weston that he could not drop the subject.

"Gertrude isn't bookish," he remarked rather confusedly. "I hope you found things to talk about."

"Meaning that I can talk of nothing but books?" I returned. "Poor George, how I must have bored you in times past."

He flushed and grew more confused still.

"Of course you know I didn't mean anything like that," he protested.

I laughed at his grave face, and then I was so glad to find I could talk to him about his wife without feeling awkward that I laughed again. He looked so puzzled I was ready to laugh in turn at him, but I restrained myself. I could not understand my good spirits, and for that matter I do not now. Somehow my call of yesterday seems to have made a difference in my feeling toward George. Just how or just what I cannot fully make out. I certainly have not ceased to care about him. I am still fond of the George I have known for so many years; but somehow the husband of Mrs. Weston does not seem to be the same man. The George Weston who can love this woman and be in sympathy with her is so different from anything I have known or imagined the old George to be that he affects me as a stranger.

The truth is I have for the past month been in the midst of things so serious that my own affairs and feelings have ceased to appear of so much importance. When death comes near enough for us to see it face to face, we have a better appreciation of values, and find things strangely altered. I have had, moreover, little time to think about myself, which is always a good thing; and to my surprise I find now that I am not able to pity myself nearly as much as I did. [Pg 162]

This seems perhaps a little disloyal to George. My feeling for him cannot have evaporated like dew drying from the grass. At least I am sure that I am still ready to serve him to the very best of my ability.

VI

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JUNE

June 1. Cousin Mehitable is capable of surprises. She has written to Deacon Richards to have my baby taken away from me.

The Deacon came in to-night, so amused that he was on the broad grin when he presented himself, and chuckling even when he said good-evening.

"What pleases you?" I asked. "You seem much amused about something."

"I am," he answered. "I've been appointed your guardian."

"By the town authorities?" I demanded. "I should have thought I was old enough to look after myself."

"It's your family," he chuckled. "Miss Privet has written to me from Boston."

"Cousin Mehitable?" I exclaimed.

"Miss Mehitable Privet," he returned.

"She has written to you about me?" asked I.

He nodded, in evident delight over the situation.

My astonishment got the better of my manners so that I forgot to ask him to sit down, but stood staring at him like a booby. I remembered Cousin Mehitable had met him once or twice on her infrequent visits to Tuskamuck, and had been graciously pleased to approve of him,—largely, I believe, on account of some accidental discovery of his very satisfactory pedigree. That she should write to him, however, was most surprising, and argued an amount of feeling on her part much greater than I had appreciated. I knew she would be shocked and perhaps scandalized by my having baby, and she had written to me with sufficient emphasis, but I did not suppose she would invoke outside aid in her attempts to dispossess me of Thomasine. [Pg 164]

"But why should she write to you?" I asked Deacon Daniel.

"She said," was his answer, "she didn't know who else to write to."

"But what did she expect you to do?"

The Deacon chuckled and caressed his beardless chin with a characteristic gesture. When he is greatly amused he seizes himself by the chin as if he must keep his jaw stiff or an undeaconical laugh would come out in spite of him.

"I don't think she cared much what I did if I relieved you of that baby," was his reply. "She said if I was any sort of a guardian of the poor perhaps I could put it in a home."

"But you are not," I said.

"No," he assented.

"And you shouldn't have her if you were," I added.

"I don't want the child," Deacon Daniel returned. "I shouldn't know what to do with it."

Then we both laughed, and I got him seated in Father's chair, and we had a long chat over the whole situation. I had not realized how much I wanted to talk matters over with somebody. Aunt Naomi is out of the question, because she is so fond of telling things; Miss Charlotte would be better, but she is not very worldly wise; and if I may tell the truth, I wanted to talk with a man. The advice of women is wise often, and yet more often it is comforting; but it has somehow not the conclusiveness of the decision of a sensible man. At least that is the way I felt to-night, though in many matters I should never think of trusting to a man's judgment.

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"I think I shall adopt baby legally," I said. "Then nobody could take her away or bother me about her."

He asked me if her father would agree, and I said that I was sure he would.

"It would make her your heir if you died without a will," he commented.

I said that nothing was more easy than to make a will, and of course I should mean to provide for her.

"You are not afraid of wills, then?" Deacon Daniel observed, looking at me curiously. "So many folks can't bear the idea of making one."

"Very likely it's partly because I am a lawyer's daughter," I said; "but in any case making a will wouldn't have any more terrors for me than writing a check. But then I never had any fear of death anyway."

Deacon Daniel regarded me yet more intently, clasping his great white hands over his knee.

"I never can quite make you out, Miss Ruth," he said after a little. "You haven't any belief in a hereafter that I know of, but you seem to have no trouble about it."

I asked him why I should have, and he answered that most people do.

"Perhaps that is because they feel a responsibility about the future that I don't," I returned. "I don't think I can alter what is to come after death, and I don't see what possible good I can do by fretting about it. Father brought me up, you know, to feel that I had all I could attend to in making the best I can of this life, without wasting my strength in speculating about another. In any case I can't see why I should be any more afraid of death than I am of sleep. I understand one as well as I do the other."

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He looked at the rug thoughtfully a moment, and then, as if he declined to be drawn into an argument, he came back to the original subject of our talk.

"Would Tom Webbe want to have anything to do with the child?" he asked.

"I think he would rather forget she is in the world," I told him. "By and by he may be fond of her, but now he tries not to think of her at all. I want to make her so attractive and lovely he can't help caring for her."

"But then she will care for him," the Deacon commented.

"Why, of course she will. That is what I hope. Then she might influence him, and help him."

"You are willing to share her with her father even if you do adopt her?" he asked.

I did not understand his manner, but I told him I did not think I had any right to deprive her of her father's affection or him of hers if I adopted her a dozen times over.

The Deacon made no answer. His face was graver, and for some time we sat without further word.

"Tom Webbe isn't as bad as he seems, Miss Ruth," Deacon Daniel said at length. "If you had to live with his mother, I guess you'd be ready to excuse him for 'most anything. His father never had the spunk to say boo to a goose, and Mrs. Webbe has bullied him from the time we were boys. He's as good as a man can be, but it's a pity he don't carry out Paul's idea of being ruler in his own house."

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"Paul was a bachelor like you, Deacon Daniel," I answered, rather saucily; "and neither of you knows anything about it."

He grinned, but only added that Tom had been nagged into most of his wildness.

"I'm not excusing him," he went on, apparently afraid that he should seem to be condoning iniquity; "but there's a good deal to be said for him. Aunt Naomi says he ought to be driven out of decent society, but Tom Webbe never did a mean thing in his life."

I was rather surprised to hear this defense from Deacon Richards, but I certainly agreed with him. Tom's sin makes me cringe; but I realize that I'm not capable of judging him, and he certainly has a good deal of excuse for whatever evil he has fallen into.

June 2. One thing more which Deacon Richards said has made me think a good deal. He asked me what Tom had meant to do about the child if its mother lived. I told him Julia had been willing for me to have baby in any case. He thought in silence a moment.

"I don't believe," he said, "Tom ever meant to live with that woman. He must have married her to clear his conscience."

"He married her so the child should not be disgraced," I answered.

Deacon Daniel looked at me with those great keen eyes glowing beneath his shaggy white brows.

"Then he went pretty far toward clearing his record," was his comment. "There are not many men would have tied themselves to such a wife for the sake of a child." [Pg 168]

This was not very orthodox, perhaps, but a good heart will get the better of orthodoxy now and then. It has set me to thinking about Tom and his wife in a way which had not occurred to me. I wonder if it is true that he did not mean to live with her. I remember now that he said he would never see Julia again, but at the time this meant nothing to me. If he had thought of making a home, he would naturally expect to have his child, but after all I doubt if at that time he considered anything except the good of baby. He did not love her; he had not even looked at her; but he tried to do her right as far as he could. He could give her an honest name in the eyes of the world, but he must have known that he could not make a home with Julia where the surroundings would be good for a child. This must have been what he considered for the moment. Yet Tom is one who thinks out things, and he may have thought out the future of the mother too.

When I look back I wonder how it was I consented so quickly to take Tomine. I wanted to help Tom, and I wanted him to be able to decide without being forced by any consideration of baby. I do not know whether he ought to have married Julia for her own sake. If she had lived, I am afraid I should have been tempted to think he had better not have bound himself to her; and yet I realize that I should have been disappointed in him if he had decided not to do it. I doubt if I could have got rid entirely of the feeling that somehow he would have been cowardly. I wonder if he had any notion of my feeling? He came out of the trial nobly, at least, and I honor him with all my heart for that. [Pg 169]

June 5. Aunt Naomi has now a theme exactly to her taste in the growing extravagance of George's wife. Mrs. Weston has certainly elaborated her style of dress a good deal, a thing which is the more noticeable from the fact that in Tuskamuck we are on the whole so little given to gorgeous raiment. I remember that when I called I thought her rather overdressed. To-day Aunt Naomi talked for half an hour with the greatest apparent enjoyment about the fine gowns and expensive jewelry with which the bride is astonishing the town. I am afraid it does not take much to set us talking. I tried half a dozen times to-day to change the subject, but my efforts were wasted. Aunt Naomi was not to be diverted from a theme so congenial. I reminded her that any bride was expected to display her finery—this is part of the established formality with which marriage is attended.

"That's all very well," she retorted with a sniff; "folks want to see the wedding outfit. This is finery George Weston has had to pay for himself."

"I don't see how anybody can know that," I told her; and I added that it did not seem to me to be the town's business if it were true.

"She tells everybody he gave her the jewelry," Aunt Naomi responded; "and the dresses she's had made since she was married. She hadn't anything herself. The Watsons say she was real poor."

"The marriage was so sudden," I said, "that very likely she hadn't time to get her wedding outfit. At any rate, Aunt Naomi, I don't see what you and I have to do with her clothes." [Pg 170]

The dear old gossip went on wagging her foot and smiling with evident delight.

"It's the business of the neighbors that she's sure to ruin her husband if she keeps on with her extravagance, isn't it? Besides, she wears her clothes to have them talked about. She talks about them herself."

"A few dresses won't ruin her husband," I protested.

"She has one hired girl now, and she's talking of a second," Aunt Naomi went on, unshaken. "Did you ever hear of such foolishness?"

I reminded her that I had two maids myself.

"Oh, you," she returned; "that's different. I hope you don't put her on a level with real folks, do you?"

I tried to treat the whole matter as if it were of no consequence, and I did stop the talk here; but secretly I am troubled. George has very little aside from what he earns in his profession, and he might easily run behind if his wife is really extravagant. He needs a woman to help him save.

June 6. Tomine delighted the family to-day by her wonderful precocity in following with her eyes the flight of a blue-bottle fly that buzzed about the nursery. Such intelligence in one so young is held by us women to betoken the most extraordinary promise. I communicated the important event to Mr. Saychase, who came to call, and he could neither take it gravely nor laugh at the absurdity of our noticing so slight a thing. He seemed to be trying to find out how I wished him to [Pg 171]

look at it; and as I was divided between laughter and secret pride in baby he could not get a sure clue. How dull the man is; but no doubt he is good. When piety and stupidity are united, it is unfortunate that they should be made prominent by being set high in spiritual places.

June 9. I have a good deal of sympathy with Cain's question when he asked the Lord if he were his brother's keeper. Of course his crime turned the question in his case into a mere pitiful excuse, but Cain was at least clever enough to take advantage of a principle which must appeal to everybody. We cannot be responsible for others when we have neither authority nor control over them. It is one of the hardest forms of duty, it seems to me, when we feel that we ought to do our best, yet are practically sure that in the end we can effect little or nothing. What can I do to influence George's wife? Somehow we seem to have no common ground to meet on. Father used to say that people who do not speak the same ethical language cannot communicate moral ideas to each other. This is rather a high-sounding way of saying that Mrs. Weston and I cannot understand each other when anything of real importance comes up. It is of course as much my fault as hers, but I really do not know how to help or change it. I suppose there is a certain arrogance and self-righteousness in my feeling that I could direct her, but I am certainly older and I believe I am wiser. Yet I am not her keeper, and if to feel that I am not involves me in the cowardice of Cain, I cannot help it. I am ready to do anything I can do, but what is there?

June 11. Still it is George's wife. I dare say a good deal of talk has been circulating, and I have not heard it. I have been so occupied with graver matters ever since George was married that I have seen few people, and have paid little heed to the village talk. To-day old lady Andrews said her say. She began by reminding me of the conversation we had had in regard to calling on the bride.

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"I am glad we did it, Ruth," she went on. "It puts us in the right whatever happens; but she will not do. I shall never ask her to my house."

I could say nothing. I knew she was right, but I was so sorry for George.

"She is vulgar, Ruth," the sweet old voice went on. "She called a second time on me yesterday, and I've been only once to see her. She said a good deal about it's being the duty of us—she said 'us,' my dear,—to wake up this sleepy old place. I told her that, personally, since she was good enough to include me with herself, I preferred the town as it had been."

I fairly laughed out at the idea of old lady Andrews' delivering this with well-bred sweetness, and I wondered how far Mrs. Weston perceived the sarcasm.

"Did she understand?" I asked.

"About half, I think, my dear. She saw she had made a mistake, but I doubt if she quite knew what it was. She was uneasy, and said she thought those who had a chance ought to make things more lively."

I asked if Mrs. Weston gave any definite idea how this liveliness was to be secured.

"Not very clearly," was the answer. "She said something about hoping soon to have a larger house so she could entertain properly. Her dress was dreadfully showy, according to my old-fashioned notions. I am afraid we are too slow for her, my dear. She will have to make a more modern society for herself."

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And so the social doom of George's wife is written, as far as I can see. I can if I choose ask people to meet her, but that will do her little good when they have looked her over and given her up. They will come to my house to meet anybody I select, but they will not invite her in their turn. It is a pity social distinctions should count for so much; but in Tuskamuck they certainly do.

June 12. Mr. Saychase called again this afternoon. He is so thin and so pale that it is always my inclination to have Hannah bring him something to eat at once. To-day he had an especially nervous air, and I tried in vain to set him at his ease. I fear he may have taken it into his head to try to bring me into the church. He did not, it is true, say anything directly about religion, but he had an air of having something very important in reserve which he was not yet ready to speak of. He talked about the church work as if he expected me to be interested. He would not have come so soon again if he did not have some particular object.

It is a pity anything so noble as religion should so often have weak men to represent it. What is good in religion they do not fairly stand for, and what is undesirable they somehow make more evident. If superstition is to be a help, it must appeal to the best feelings, and a weak priest touches only the weaker side of character. One is not able to receive him on his merits as a man, but has to excuse him in the name of his devotion to religion.

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Still, Mr. Saychase is a good man, and he means well with whatever strength of mind nature endowed him.

June 13. Tom came to-day to see baby,—not that he paid much attention to her when he saw her. It amuses me to find how jealous I am getting for Tomine, and anxious she shall be treated with deference. I see myself rapidly growing into a hen-with-one-chicken attitude of mind, but I do not know how it is to be helped. I exhibited baby this afternoon with as much pride and as much desire that she should be admired as if she had been my veriest own, so it was no wonder that Tom laughed at me.

He was very grave when he came, but little by little the fun-loving sparkle came into his eyes and a smile grew on his face.

"You'd make a first rate saleswoman, Ruth," he said, "if you could show off goods as well as you

do babies."

I suppose I can never meet Tom again with the easy freedom we used to feel, especially with baby to remind us; but we have been good friends so long that it is a great comfort to feel something of the old comradeship to be still possible.

Tom was so awkward about baby, so unwilling to touch her, that I offered to put her into his arms. Then he suddenly grew brave.

"Don't, Ruth," he said. "It hurts you that I can't care for the baby, but I can't. Perhaps I shall sometime."

I took Thomasine away without a word, and gave her to Rosa in the nursery. When I came back to the parlor Tom was in his favorite position before the window. He wheeled round suddenly when he heard me.

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"You are not angry, Ruth?" he asked.

"No, Tom," I answered; "only sorry."

I sat down and took up my sewing, while he walked about the room. He stopped in front of me after a moment.

"I wanted to tell you, Ruth," he said, "that I am not going back to New York."

I looked at him questioningly, and waited.

"I had really a good opening there," he went on; "but I thought I ought not to take it."

I asked him why.

"I'll be hanged if I quite know," he responded explosively. "I suppose it's part obstinacy that makes me too stubborn to run away from disgrace, and partly it's father. This thing has broken him terribly. I'm going to stay and help him out."

I know how Tom hates farming, and I held out my hand to him and said so.

"I hate everything," he returned desperately; "but it wouldn't be square to leave him now when he's so cut up on my account."

We were both of us, I am sure, too moved to have much talk, and Tom did not stay long. He went off rather abruptly, with hardly a good-by; but I think I understood. I am glad he has the pluck to stand by poor old Deacon Daniel; but he must learn to be fond of baby. That will be a comfort to him.

June 15. George seems to me to be almost beside himself. I cannot comprehend what his wife is doing to him. She has apparently already come to realize that she is not succeeding in Tuskamuck, and is determined to conquer by display and showy ways of living. She cannot know us very well if she supposes that such means will do here.

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Her latest move I find it hard to forgive her. I do not understand how George can have done it, no matter how much she urged him; but I am of course profoundly ignorant how such a woman controls a man. I am afraid one thing which made him attractive to me was that he was so willing to be influenced, but we see a man in a light entirely different when it is another woman who shapes his life. What once seemed a fine compliance takes on a strange appearance of weakness when we are no longer the moving force; but I think I do myself no more than justice when I feel that at least I tried always to influence George for his own good.

Poor Miss Charlotte came over directly after breakfast this morning to tell me. She had been brooding over it half the night, poor soul, and her eyes looked actually withered with crying and lack of sleep.

"I know I exaggerate it," she kept saying, "and of course he didn't mean to insult me; but to think anybody dared to ask me to sell the house, the Kendall house that our family has lived in for four generations! It would have killed my father if he had known I should live to come to this!"

I tried to soothe her, and to make her believe that in offering to buy her house George had thought only of how much he admired it, and not at all of her feelings, which he could not understand.

"Of course he could not understand my feelings," Miss Charlotte said, with a bitterness which I am sure was unconscious. "He never had a family, and I ought to remember that."

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She grew somewhat more calm as she unburdened her heart. She told me George had praised the place, and said how much he had always liked it. He confessed that it was his wife who first suggested the purchase: she wanted a house where she could entertain and which would be of more importance than the one in which she lived.

"He said," Miss Charlotte went on with a strange mingling of pride and sorrow, "his wife felt that the house in itself would give any family social standing. I don't know how pleased his wife would be if she knew he told me, but he said it. He told me she meant to have repairs and improvements. She must feel as if she owned it already. He said she had an iron dog stored somewhere that she meant to put on the lawn. Think of it, Ruth, an iron dog on our old lawn!"

Then suddenly all the sorrow of her lot seemed to overwhelm her at once, and she broke down completely. She sobbed so unrestrainedly and with so complete an abandonment of herself to her grief that I cried with her, even while I was trying to stop her tears.

"It isn't just George Weston's coming to ask me to sell the place," she said; "it is all of it: it's my

being so poor I can't keep up the name, and the family's ending with me, and none of my kin even to bury me. It's all of the hurts I've got from life, Ruth; and it's growing so old I've no strength any longer to bear them. Oh, it's having to keep on living when I want to be dead!"

I threw my arms about her, and kissed the tears from her wrinkled cheeks, though there were about as many on my own. [Pg 178]

"Don't," I begged her, "don't, dear Miss Charlotte. You break my heart! We are all of us your kin, and you know we love you dearly."

She returned my embrace convulsively, and tried to check her sobbing.

"I know it's cowardly," she got out brokenly. "It's cowardly and wicked. I never broke down so before. I won't, Ruth dear. Just give me a little time."

Dear Miss Charlotte! I made her stay with me all day; and indeed she was in no condition to do anything else. I got her to take a nap in the afternoon, and when she went home she was once more her own brave self. She said good-night with one of her clumsy joking speeches.

"Good-by, my dear," she said; "the next time I come I'll try not to be so much like the waterworks girl that had a creek in her back and a cataract in each eye."

She is always facetious when she does not quite trust herself to be serious. And I, who do not dare to trust myself to think about George and his wife, had better stop writing.

June 17. Deacon Richards presented himself at twilight, and found me sitting alone out on the doorsteps. I watched his tall figure coming up the driveway, bent with age a little, but still massive and vigorous; and somehow by the time he was near enough to speak, I felt that I had caught his mood. He smiled broadly as he greeted me.

"Where's the baby?" he demanded. "I supposed I should find you giving it its supper."

"There isn't any 'it' in this house," was my retort; "and as for baby's supper, you are just as ignorant as a man always is. Any woman would know that babies are put to bed long before this." [Pg 179]

He grinned down upon me from his height.

"How should I know what time it went to bed?" he asked, with a laugh in his voice. "I never raised a baby. I've come to talk about it, though."

"Look here, Deacon Daniel," I cried out, with affected indignation, "I will not have my baby called 'it,' as if she were a stick or a stock!"

He laughed outright at this; then at my invitation sat down beside me. We were silent for a time, looking at the color fading in the west, and the single star swimming out of the purple as the sky changed into gray. The frogs were working at their music with all the persistence of a child strumming five-finger exercises, but their noise only made the evening more peaceful.

"How restful it is," I said to him at last; "it almost makes one feel there can never be any fretting again about anything."

Deacon Daniel did not answer for a moment, then he said with the solemnity of one who seldom puts sentiment into words,—

"It is like the Twenty-third Psalm."

I simply assented, and then we were silent again, until at last he moved as if he were waking himself, and sighed. I always wonder whether somewhere in the past Deacon Richards has had his romance, and if so what it may have been. If he has, a night like this might well bring it up to his memory. I am glad if it comes to him with the peace of a psalm.

"Have you thought, Miss Ruth," the Deacon asked at length in the growing dark, "what a responsibility you are taking upon yourself in having that baby?" [Pg 180]

It was like the dear old man to have considered me and to look at the moral side of the question. He wanted to help me, I could see; and of course he cannot understand how entirely religious one may be without theology. I told him I had thought of it very seriously; and it seemed to me sometimes that it was more than I was equal to. But I added that I could not help thinking I could do better by baby than Mrs. Webbe.

"Mrs. Webbe is no sort of a woman to bring up a child," he agreed. Then he added, with a shrewdness that surprised me a little: "Babies have got to be given baby-treatment as well as baby-food."

"Of course they have," was my reply. "Babies have a right to love as well as to milk, and poor little Thomasine would get very little from her grandmother."

Deacon Daniel gave a contemptuous snort.

"That woman couldn't really love anything," he declared; "or if she did she'd show it by being hateful."

I said she certainly loved Tom.

"Yes," he retorted; "and she's nagged him to death. For my part I can't more than half blame Tom Webbe as I ought to, when I think of his having had his mother to thorn him everlastingly."

"Then you do think it's better for baby to be with me than with her grandmother?" I asked him.

"It's a hundred times better, of course; but I wondered if you'd thought of the responsibility of its—of her religious instruction."

We had come to the true kernel of the Deacon's errand. I really believe that in his mind was more concern for me than for baby. He is always unhappy that I am not in the fold of the church; and I fancy that more or less consciously he was making of Thomasine an excuse for an attempt to reach me. It is not difficult to understand his feeling. Mother used to affirm that believers are anxious to proselyte because they cannot bear to have anybody refuse to acknowledge that they are right. This is not, I am sure, the whole of it. Of course no human being likes to be thought wrong, especially on a thing which, like religion, cannot be proved; but there is a good deal of genuine love in the attempt of a man like Deacon Daniel to convert an unbeliever. He is really grieved for me, and I would do anything short of actual dishonesty to make him suppose that I believed as he would have me. I should so like him to be happy about my eternal welfare. When the future does not in the least trouble me, it seems such a pity that he should be disturbed.

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I told him to-night I should not give baby what he would call religious instruction, but I should never interfere if others should teach her, if they made what is good attractive.

"But you would tell her that religion isn't true," he objected.

"Oh, no;" I answered. "I should have to be honest, and tell her if she asked that I don't believe we know anything about another life; but of course as far as living in this one goes I shouldn't disagree with religion."

He tried to argue with me, but I entirely refused to be led on.

"Deacon Daniel," I told him, "I know it is all in your kindness for me that you would talk, but I refuse to have this beautiful summer evening wasted on theology. You couldn't convince me, and I don't in the least care about convincing you. I am entirely content that you should believe your way, and I am entirely satisfied with mine. Now I want to talk with you about our having a reading-room next winter."

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So I got him to another subject, and what is better I think I really interested him in my scheme of opening a free library. If we can once get that to working it will be a great help to the young men and boys. "The time seems to have come in human development," I remember Father's saying not long before he died, "when men must be controlled by the broadening instead of by the narrowing of their minds."

June 18. I have been considering why it is that I have had so much said to me this spring about religion. People have not been in the habit of talking to me about it much. They have come to let me go my own way. I suppose the fact of Mother's death has brought home to them that I do not think in their way. How a consistent and narrow man can look at the situation I have had a painful illustration in Mr. Thurston. If Kathie had not pushed him into a corner by asking him about Mother, I doubt if he could have gone to the length he did; but after all any really consistent believer must take the view that I am doomed to eternal perdition. I am convinced that few really do believe anything of the sort, but they think that they do, and so baby and I have been a centre of religious interest.

Another phase of this interest has shown itself in Mr. Saychase's desire to baptize Thomasine. I wonder if I had better put my preferences in my pocket, and let the thing be done. It offends my sense of right that a human being should have solemn vows made for her before she can have any notions of what all this means; but if one looks at the whole as simply promises on the part of adults that they will try to have the child believe certain things and follow certain good ways of living, there is no great harm in it. I suppose Deacon Webbe and his wife would be pleased. I will let Tom decide the matter.

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June 21. I met Tom in the street to-day, and he absolutely refuses to have baby christened.

"I'll have no mummeries over any child of mine," he declared. "I've had enough of that humbug to last me a lifetime."

I could not help saying I wished he were not so bitter.

"I can't help it, Ruth," was his retort. "I am bitter. I've been banged over the head with religion ever since I was born, and told that I was 'a child of the covenant' till I hate the very thought of the whole business. Whatever you do, don't give anybody the right to twit Thomasine with being 'a child of the covenant.' She has enough to bear in being the child of her parents."

"Don't, Tom," I begged him. "You hurt me."

Without thinking what I did I put my hand on his arm. He brushed it lightly with his fingers, looking at it in a way that almost brought tears to my eyes. I took it off quickly, but I could not face him, and I got away at once. Poor Tom! He is so lonely and so faithful. I am so sorry that he will keep on caring for me like that. No woman is really good enough not to tremble at the thought of absorbing the devotion of a strong man; and it seems wicked that I should not love Tom.

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June 25. The rose I transplanted to Mother's grave is really, I believe, going to bloom this very summer. I am glad the blossoms on Father's should have an echo on hers.

June 29. Babies and diaries do not seem to go very well together. There is no tangible reason why I should not write after the small person is asleep, for that is the time I have generally taken; but the fact is I sit working upon some of Tomine's tiny belongings, or now and then sit in the dark and think about her. My journal has been a good friend, but I am afraid its nose is out of joint. Baby has taken its place. I begin to see I made this book a sort of safety-valve for poor spirits and general restlessness. Now I have this sweet human interest in my life I do not need to resort to pen and ink for companionship. The dear little rosy image of Thomasine is with me all the time I

seem to be sitting alone.

June 30. Last night I felt as if I was done with relieving my mind by writing in an unresponsive journal; to-night I feel as if I must have just this outlet to my feelings. Last night I thought of baby; to-night I am troubled about her father.

I saw Tom this afternoon at work in the hayfield, looking so brown and so handsome that it was a pleasure to see him. He had the look of a man who finds work just the remedy for heart-soreness, and I was happy in thinking he was getting into tune with wholesome life. I was so pleased that I took the footpath across the field as a mere excuse to speak to him, and I thought he would have been glad to see me. I came almost up to him before he would notice me, although I think he must have seen me long before. He took off his hat as I came close to him, and wiped his forehead.

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"Tom," I said at once, "I came this way just to say how glad I am to see you look as if you were getting contented with your work. You were working with such a will."

I do not know that it was a tactful speech, but I was entirely unprepared for the shadow which came over his face.

"I was trying to get so completely tired out that I should sleep like a log to-night," he answered.

Before anything else could be said Deacon Daniel came up, and the talk for the rest was of the weather, and the hay, and nothings. I came away as sad as I had before been pleased. I can understand that Tom is sore in his heart. He is dominant, and his life is made up of things which he hates; he is ambitious, and he is fond of pleasure. He has no pleasure, and he can see nothing before him but staying on with his father. It is true enough that it is his own fault. He has never been willing to stick to work, and the keenest of his regrets must be about his own ill-doing. He is so generous, however, and so manly and kind that I cannot bear to see him grow hard and sad and bitter. Yet what can I do to help it? Certainly this is another case for asking if I am my brother's keeper. I am afraid that I was resigned not to be the keeper of Mrs. Weston, but with Tom it is different. Poor Tom!

VII

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JULY

July 2. Thomasine is legally my daughter. It gives me an odd feeling to find myself really a parent. George and Tom met here this forenoon with the papers, and all necessary formalities were gone through with. It was not a comfortable time for any of us, I fancy; and I must own that George acted strangely. He was out of spirits, and was but barely civil to Tom. He has never liked the idea of my having Thomasine, and has tried two or three times to persuade me to give her up. I have refused to discuss the question with him, because it was really settled already. To-day he came before Tom, and made one more protest.

"You can keep the child if you are so determined," he said, "though why you should want to I can't conceive; but why need you adopt it? It hasn't any claim on you."

I told him that she had the claim that I loved her dearly. He looked at me with an expression more unkind than I had ever seen in his face.

"How much is it for her father's sake?" he burst out.

The words, offensive as they were, were less so than the manner.

"A good deal," I answered him soberly. "I have been his friend from the time we were both children."

He moved in his chair uneasily.

"Look here, Ruth," he said; "you've no occasion to be offended because I hint at what everybody else will say."

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I asked what that was.

"You are angry," was his response. "When you put on your grand air it is no use to argue with you; but I've made up my mind to be plain. Everybody says you took the baby because you are fond of him."

I could feel myself stiffening in manner with every word, but I could not help it. I had certainly a right to be offended; but I tried to speak as naturally as I could.

"I don't know, George," was my reply, "what business it is of everybody's; and if it were, why should I not be fond of Tom?"

He flushed and scowled, and got up from his seat.

"Oh, if you take it that way," he answered, "of course there's nothing more for me to say."

I was hurt and angry, but before anything more could be said Rosa showed Tom in. He said good-morning to George stiffly, but Tom is always instinctively polite, I think. George had toward him an air plainly unfriendly. I do not understand why George should feel as he does about my

adopting Thomasine, but in any case he has no right to behave as he did. I felt between the two men as if I were hardly able to keep the peace, and as if on the slightest provocation, George would fly out. It was absurd, of course, but the air seemed to be full of unfriendliness.

"I suppose we need not be very long over business," I said, trying with desperation to speak brightly. "I've been over the papers, Tom, and I can assure you they are all right. I'm something of a lawyer, you know."

George interposed, as stiffly as possible, that he must urge me to have the instrument read aloud, in order that I might realize what I was doing. I assured him I knew perfectly what the paper was, even if it were called an instrument.

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"Ruth is entirely right," Tom put in emphatically. "There is not the slightest need of dragging things out."

"I can understand that you naturally would not want any delay," George retorted sharply.

Tom turned and looked at him with an expression which made George change color, but before anything worse could be said, I hurried to ask Tom to ring for Rosa to act as a witness. I looked in my turn at George, and I think he understood how indignant I was.

"It's outrageous for you to burden yourself with his brat," George muttered under his breath as Tom went across the room to the bell-rope.

"You forget that you are speaking of my daughter," I answered him, with the most lofty air I could manage to assume.

He turned on his heel with an angry exclamation, and no more objections were made. George never showed me this unpleasant side of his character before in all the years I have known him. For the moment he behaved like a cad, like nothing else than a cad. Something very serious must have been troubling him. He must have been completely unstrung before he could be so disagreeable.

Rosa came in, and the signing was done. After the business was finished George lingered as if he wished to speak with me. Very likely he wished to apologize, but my nerves were not in tune for more talk with him, and in any case it was better to ignore all that had been unpleasant.

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"You have no more business, have you, George?" I asked him directly. "Tom of course will want to see the daughter he has given away. I didn't let him see her first for fear he'd refuse to part with her."

George had no excuse for staying after that, and he was just leaving the room when Rosa reappeared with Tomine. The darling looked like a cherub, and was in a mood truly angelic. George scowled at her as if the dear little thing had done him some wrong, and hurried away. I do not understand how he could resist my darling, or why he should feel so about her. It is, I suppose, friendship for me; but he should realize a little what a blessing baby is to my lonely life.

Tom stood silent when Rosa took Thomasine up to him. He did not offer to touch the tiny pink face, and I could fancy how many thoughts must go through his mind as he looked. While he might not regret the dead woman, indeed, while he could hardly be other than glad that Julia was not alive, he must have some feeling about her which goes very deep. I should think any man who was not wholly hard must have some tenderness toward the mother of his child, no matter who or what she was. It moves even me, to think of such a feeling; and I could not look at Tom as he stood there with the living child to remind him of the dead mother.

It seemed a long time that he looked at baby, and we were all as quiet as if we had been at prayer. Then Tom of his own accord kissed Tomine. He has never done it before except as I have asked him. He came over to me and held out his hand.

"I must go back to haying," he said. Then he held my hand a minute, and looked into my eyes. "Make her as much like yourself as you can, Ruth," he added; "and God bless you."

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The tears came into my eyes at his tone, and blinded me. Before I could see clearly, he was gone. I hope he understood that I appreciated the generosity of his words.

July 3. I am troubled by the thought of yesterday. George went away so evidently out of sympathy with what I had done, and very likely thinking I was unfriendly, that it seems almost as if I had really been unkind. I must do something to show him that I am the same as ever. Perhaps the best thing will be to have his wife to tea. My mourning has prevented my doing anything for them, and secretly, I am ashamed to say, this has been a relief. I can ask them quietly, however, without other guests.

July 8. I feel a little as if I had been shaken up by an earthquake, but I am apparently all here and unhurt. Day before yesterday Cousin Mehitable descended upon me in the wake of her usual telegram, determined to bear me away to Europe, despite, as she said, all the babies that ever were born. She had arranged my passage, fixed the date, engaged state-rooms, and cabled for a courier-maid to meet us at Southampton; and now I had, she insisted, broken up all her arrangements.

"It's completely ungrateful, Ruth," she declared. "Here I have been slaving to have everything ready so the trip would go smoothly for you. I've done absolutely every earthly thing that I could think of, and now you won't go. You've no right to back out. It's treating me in a way I never was treated in my whole life. It's simply outrageous."

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I attempted to remind her that she had been told of my decision to stay at home long before she

had made any of her arrangements; but she refused to listen.

"I could bear it better," she went on, "if you had any decent excuse; but it's nothing but that baby. I must say I think it's a pretty severe reflection on me when you throw me over for any stray baby that happens to turn up."

I tried again to put in a protest, but the tide of Cousin Mehitable's indignation is not easily stemmed.

"To think of your turning Cousin Horace's house into a foundling hospital!" she exclaimed. "Why don't you put up a sign? Twenty babies wouldn't be any worse than one, and you'd be able to make a martyr of yourself to some purpose. Oh, I've no patience with you!"

I laughed, and assured her that there was no sort of doubt of the truth of her last statement; so then she changed her tone and begged me not to be so obstinate.

Of course I could not yield, for I cannot desert baby; and in the end Cousin Mehitable was forced to give me up as incorrigible. Then she declared I should not triumph over her, and she would have me know that there were two people ready and just dying to take my place. I knew she could easily find somebody.

The awkward thing about this visit was that Cousin Mehitable should be here just when I had asked the Westons to tea. I always have a late dinner for Cousin Mehitable, although Hannah regards such a perversion of the usual order of meals as little less than immoral; and so George and his wife found a more ceremonious repast than I had intended. I should have liked better to have things in their usual order, for I feared lest Mrs. Weston might not be entirely at her ease. I confess I had not supposed she might think I was endeavoring to impress her with my style of living until she let it out so plainly that I could not by any possibility mistake her meaning. She evidently wished me to know that she saw through my device; and of course I made no explanations.

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It was an uncomfortable meal. Cousin Mehitable refused to be conciliating. She examined the bride through her lorgnette, and I could see that Mrs. Weston was angered while she was apparently fascinated. George was taciturn, and I could not make things go smoothly, though I tried with all my might. By the time the guests went, I felt that my nerves were fiddlestrings.

"Well," Cousin Mehitable pronounced, as soon as the door had closed behind them, "of all the dowdy frumps I ever saw, she is the worst. I never saw anybody so overdressed."

"She was overdressed," I assented; "but you behaved horribly. You frightened her into complete shyness."

"Shyness! Humph!" was her response. "She has no more shyness than a brass monkey. That's vulgar, of course, Ruth. I meant it to be to match the subject."

I put in a weak defense of Mrs. Weston, although I honestly do find her a most unsatisfactory person. She is self-conscious, and somehow she does not seem to me to be very frank. Very likely, moreover, she had been disconcerted by the too evident snubs of my unmanageable cousin.

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"If I snubbed her," was the uncompromising rejoinder with which a suggestion of this sort was met, "I'm sure I am not ashamed of it. To think of her saying that you evidently wanted to show Tuskamuck how to do things in style! Does she think any person with style would let her into the house?"

I thanked her for the compliment to me.

"Oh, bother!" she retorted. "You are only a goose, with no sense at all. To think you once thought of marrying that country booby yourself!"

I was too much hurt to reply, and probably my face showed my feeling, for Cousin Mehitable burst into a laugh.

"You needn't look so grumpy about it," she cried. "All's well that ends well. You're safely out of that, thank heaven!"

I felt that loyalty to George required that I should protest, but she interrupted me.

"Don't be a humbug, Ruth," she said; "and for pity's sake don't be such a fool as to try to humbug yourself. You're not a sentimental schoolgirl to moon after a man, especially when he's shown what his taste is by taking up with such a horror as Mrs. Weston."

"I am fond of him," I asserted, stubbornly enough.

She seized me by the shoulders, and looked with her quick black eyes into mine so that I felt as if she could see down to my very toes.

"Can you look me in the face, Ruth Privet, and tell me you really care for a man who could marry that ignorant, vulgar, dowdy woman just for her pretty face? Can you fool yourself into thinking that you haven't had a lucky escape from a man that's in every way your inferior? You know you have! Why, can you honestly think now for a moment of marrying him without feeling your backbone all gooseflesh?"

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Fortunately she did not insist upon my answering her, but shook me and let me go. I doubt if I could have borne to have her press her questions. I was suddenly conscious that George has changed or that my idea of him has altered; and that if he were still single, I could not marry him under any circumstances.

Cousin Mehitable went home this morning, but her talk has been in my mind all day.

It comes over me that I have lost more than George. His loving another did not deprive me of the power or the right to love him, and his marriage simply set him away from my life. In some other life, if there be one, I might have always been sure he would come back to me. I cannot help knowing I fed his higher nature, and I helped him to grow, while his wife appeals to something lower, even if it is more natural and human. I felt that in some other possible existence he would see more clearly, and she would no longer satisfy him. Now I begin to feel that I have lost more than I knew. I have lost not only him, but I have lost—no, I cannot have lost my love for him. It is only that to-night I am foolish. It is rainy, dreary, hopeless; and seeing Mrs. Weston through Cousin Mehitable's eyes has put things all askew.

Yet why not put it down fearlessly, since I have begun? If I am to write at all it should be the truth. I am beginning to see that the man I loved was not George Weston so much as a creature I conjured up in his image. I see him now in a colder, a more sane light, and I find that I am not looking at the man who filled my heart and thought. He has somehow changed. This would be a comfort to some, I suppose. I see now how Mother felt about him. She never thought him what he seemed to me, and she always believed that sooner or later I should be disappointed in him. I should not have been disappointed if I had married him—I think! Yet now I see how he is under the influence of his wife—But no, it is not her influence only; I see him now, I fear, as he is when he is free to act his true self, unmoved by the desire to be what I would have had him. He was influenced by me. I knew it from the very first, and I see with shame how proud of it I was. Yet it gave me a chance to help him, to grow with him, to feel that we were together developing and advancing. Oh, dear, how cold and superior, and conceited it sounds now it is on paper! It truly was not that I thought I was above him; but it is surely the part of a woman to inspire her lover and to grow into something better with him. Now it seems as if whatever George did he did for me, and not because of any inner love for growth. He appears now less worthy by just so much as what he was seems to me higher than what he is. I have lost what he was. It is cruel that I cannot find the George I cared for. It is hard to believe he existed only in my mind.

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July 9. I have been reading over what I wrote last night. It troubles me, and it has a most self-righteous flavor; but I cannot see that it is not true. It troubles me because it is true. I remember that I wondered when George tired of me if the same would have come about if we had married. Am I so changeable that if I had been his wife I should have tried him by my severe standards, and then judged him unworthy? I begin to think the Pharisees were modest and self-distrustful as compared to self-righteous me. It is terribly puzzling. If I were his wife I should surely feel that my highest duty was to help him, to bring out whatever is best in him. I think I should have been too absorbed in this ever to have discovered that I was idealizing him. Now I am far enough away from him to see him clearly. The worse part of him has come out; and very likely I am not above a weak feminine jealousy which makes me incapable of doing him justice. I believe if I had been his wife I might have kept him—Yet he was already tired of my influence!

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Such speculations are pretty unprofitable work. The only thing to keep in mind now is that he is my friend, and that it is for me to do still whatever I can for him. I confess that Cousin Mehitable is right. I am no longer sorry I did not marry George, but I still care for him sincerely, and mean to serve him in every way possible.

July 12. Miss Charlotte came in this morning while I was playing with Tomine, and hailed me as a mother in Israel. She is a great admirer of baby, but she declines to touch her.

"I'm too big and too rough," she says. "I know I should drop her or break her, or forget she isn't a plant, and go to snipping her with my pruning-shears. You'd better keep her. You've the motherly way with you."

It must please any woman to be told that she has the motherly way, and just now I certainly need it. Miss Charlotte came to talk with me about Kathie. The poor child has been growing more and more morbid all summer, and I do not see what is to be done for her. I have tried to comfort and help her, but as her troubles are religious I am all but helpless.

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Miss Charlotte went over the Cove yesterday on one of her roving tramps in the woods,—"bushwhacking," as she calls it,—and found Kathie roaming about in Elder's Cut-down, wringing her hands and crying aloud like a mad thing.

"You can't tell what a start it gave me, Ruth," she said. "I heard her, and I thought of wild beasts and wild Indians, and all sorts of horrors. Then when I saw her, I didn't know her at first. Her hair was all tousled up, and she wrung her hands in the craziest way."

"Did you speak to her?" I asked.

"I couldn't. She ran away as soon as I called to her. She'll end in a lunatic asylum if you don't get hold of her."

I could only shake my head.

"What can I do, Miss Charlotte?" I asked her. "The trouble is she is half crazy about sin and judgment, and things of that sort that I don't even believe in at all. What can I say? You don't want me to tell her her father's religion is a mistake, I suppose."

Miss Charlotte smiled serenely, and regarded me with a look of much sweet kindness.

"You're a fearful heathen, Ruth," was her response, "but you have a fine wheedling way with you. Couldn't you persuade her she's too young to think about such things?"

"I've tried something of the kind, but she says she is not too young to die. She is like a child out of an old memoir. She isn't of our time at all. We read of that sort of a girl, but I supposed they all

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died a hundred years ago."

"I doubt if there ever were such girls," Miss Charlotte returned with candor; "except once in a very great while. I think the girls of the memoirs were very much like the rest of us most of the time. They probably had spells of being like Kathie. The difference is that she is at boiling point all the time."

"Of course it's her father," I said thoughtfully.

"Yes," she assented. "He's such a rampant Methodist."

I could not help the shadow of a smile, and when she saw it Miss Charlotte could no more help smiling in her turn.

"Of course you think it's a case of the pot's calling the kettle black," she said, "but the Methodists do make such a business of frightening folks out of their wits. We don't do that."

I let this pass, and asked if she couldn't make some practical suggestion for the treatment of Kathie.

"I can't tell you how to dilute her Methodism," she returned with a shrewd twinkle in her eye. "You must know the way better than I do."

I am troubled and perplexed. I have so many times wondered what I ought to do about talking to Kathie. I have always felt that the fact her father trusted her with me put me on my honor not to say things to her of which he would not approve. It seemed unwise, too, for the child to have any more turmoil in her brain than is there already; and I know that to make her doubt would be to drive her half distracted. The question is whether she has not really begun to doubt already, and needs to be helped to think fearlessly. She is a strange survival from another century. Our grandmothers used to agonize over sin, it is claimed, although I think Miss Charlotte is probably right when she says they were after all a good deal like us. At any rate they were brought up to dread eternal punishment, but it is astonishing to find anybody now who receives this as anything but a theory. Belief in the old creeds would seem impossible in these days except in a conventional and remote fashion; and yet Kathie takes it all with the desperation of two hundred years ago. If she were to listen to a suggestion of using her creed less like a hair-shirt, she would feel she had committed an appalling transgression. She is only a baby after all, and heaven knows what business she has with creeds anyway. I would as soon think of giving Tomine dynamite bombs to play with.

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I said something of this sort to Miss Charlotte, and she agreed with me that Kathie ought not to brood over theologic questions, but she thought even a child ought, as she put it, instinctively falling into the conventional phraseology of the church, to make her peace with God. I am so glad that nobody ever put it into my childish head that I could ever be at war with God.

Peter has made a leap to the table, and set his foot on my wet writing. Evidently he thinks it foolish to waste time in this sort of scribbling; but I do wish I knew what I can do and what I ought to do.

July 15. Deacon Daniel Webbe came this afternoon to see his granddaughter. Mrs. Webbe—had forbidden him, I was about to write, but perhaps that is not fair. He only said she thought he had better not come, and he tried clumsily to hint that he hoped I would not betray him. It was touching to see him, he was so much moved by the beauty and the daintiness of baby, and by all the thoughts he must have had about Tom. He said little, only that he spoke with a good deal of feeling of how good it is in Tom to stay at home and take charge of the farm; but tears were in his patient eyes, and he looked at Tomine with a glance so pathetic that I had to go away to wipe my own.

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I find that having baby here naturally keeps my thoughts a good deal on Tom and his possible future. I can't help the feeling that I owe him some sort of reparation for the devotion he has given me all these years. Surely a woman owes a man something for his caring for her so, even if she cannot feel in the same way toward him. Tom has always been a part of my life. We were boy and girl together long before I knew George. When the Westons moved here, I must have been ten or twelve years old; and I never knew George until Father took him into the office. It was the winter Father had first been ill, and he had to have an assistant at once. I remember perfectly the excellent reports Father got from some office in Boston where George had been, and these decided him. He had been inclined not to like George at the beginning. I think I first became interested in George through defending him.

George always seemed rather to prefer that I should not know his people, and this struck me as strange. The less admirable they were the more Tom would have insisted upon my knowing them. Dear old Tom! How many times he has told me of his own faults, and never of his good deeds. He is certainly one of the most stubbornly honest creatures alive.

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Tom and George are about as different as two mortals could be. George has very little of Tom's frankness, and he has not much of Tom's independence. Father used to declare that George would always be led by a woman, but would never own it to himself. I wonder if this is true. He is being led now by his wife. I fancy, though, he has no idea of such a thing. Tom would lead wherever he was.

I have rambled far enough away from Deacon Daniel and the baby. I do hope Tomine will have her father's honesty. If she have that, other things may be got over. Deacon Daniel spoke of her having her father's eyes, and she could hardly have Tom's eyes and not be straightforward.

July 20. Mr. Saychase has taken to frequent pastoral visitations of late. He probably feels now

that the moral welfare of baby is involved he must be especially active. I wish he did not bore me so, for he comes often, and I do wish to be friendly.

To-night he seemed rather oddly interested in my plans for the future.

"I hope that you mean to remain in Tuskamuck," he said. "Some folks think you are likely to move to Boston."

I told him that I had no such intention, and reminded him that baby made a new bond between me and the place.

"Oh, the baby," he responded, it seemed to me rather blankly. "You mean, I presume, that you contemplate keeping the infant."

"Keeping her?" I responded. "Why, I have adopted her."

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"I heard so," Mr. Saychase admitted; "but I did not credit the report. I suppose you will place her in some sort of a home."

"Yes," I answered; "in my home."

He flushed a little, and as he was my guest I set myself to put him at his ease. But I should like to understand why everybody is so determined that Tomine shall be sent to a "Home."

July 21. I went to see old lady Andrews to-day. She was as sweet and dear as ever, and as immaculate as if she had just been taken out of rose-leaves and lavender. She never has a hair of her white curls out of place, and her cheeks are at seventy-five pinker than mine. I like to see her in her own house, for she seems to belong to the time of the antique furniture, so entirely is she in harmony with it. I get a fresh sense of virtue every time I look at her beautiful old laces. I wonder if the old masters ever painted angels in thread laces; if not it was a great oversight. Dear old lady Andrews, she has had enough sorrow in her life to embitter any common mortal; her husband, her two sons, and her near kin are all dead before her; but she is too sweet and fine to degenerate. When sorrow does not sour, how it softens and ennobles.

Old lady Andrews was greatly interested about baby, and we gossiped of her in a delightful way for half an hour.

"It pleases me very much, Ruth," she said at last, "to see how motherly you are. I never had any doubt about you at all except that I wondered whether you could really mother a baby. I knew you would love it, and be kind, of course; but babies ought to have motherliness if they are really to thrive."

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I flushed with pleasure, and asked if she meant that she had thought me cut out for an old maid.

"If I did," she answered, with that smile of hers which always makes me want to kiss her on the spot, "I shall never think so again. You've the genuine mother-instinct."

She looked at me a moment as if questioning with herself.

"The truth is," she went on, as if she had made up her mind to say the whole, "you have been for years making an intellectual interest do instead of real love, and of course your manner showed it."

I could not ask her what she meant, though I only half understood, and I wished to hear more. She grew suddenly more serious, and spoke in a lower tone.

"Ruth," she asked, "I am an old woman, and I am fond of you. May I say something that may sound impertinent?"

Of course I told her she might say anything, and that I knew she could not be impertinent. I could not think what was coming. She leaned forward, and put her thin hand on mine, the little Tennant hand with its old-fashioned rings.

"It is just this, Ruth. Be careful whom you marry. I'm so afraid you'll marry somebody out of charity. At least don't think of being a parson's wife."

"A parson's wife?" I echoed stupidly, not in the least seeing what she meant.

"That would be worse than to take up with the prodigal son," she added, not heeding my interrogation; "though it does seem to me, my dear, that you are too good to be just served up like a fatted calf in honor of his return."

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I stared at her with bewilderment so complete that she burst into a soft laugh, as mellow as her old laces.

"I am speaking parables, of course, and it's no matter now about the prodigal. I only wanted to suggest that you are not just the wife for Mr. Saychase, and"—

"Mr. Saychase!" I burst out, interrupting her, I think, for the first time in my life. "Why, who ever thought of anything so preposterous?"

"Oh, you innocent!" she laughed. "I knew you'd be the last one to see it, and I wanted to warn you so that he need not take you entirely by surprise. He is my pastor, and a very good man in his way; but he isn't our kind, my dear."

I sat staring at her in a sort of daze, while I suddenly remembered how much Mr. Saychase has been to see me lately, and how self-conscious he has seemed sometimes. I had not a word to say, even in protest, and old lady Andrews having, I suppose, accomplished all she wished in warning me, dropped the subject entirely, and turned back to Thomasine's doings and welfare.

The idea that Mr. Saychase has been thinking of me as a possible helpmate is certainly ludicrous. I believe thoroughly any girl should "thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love," but in this case I do not see how love comes into the question at all. I cannot help feeling that he would intellectually be the sort of a husband to put into a quart-pot, there to bid him drum, and at least he will lose no sleep from a blighted passion for me. Certainly I should be intellectually starved if I had to live with him. He is not naturally a man of much power of thinking, I suppose, and he has never cultivated the habit. One cannot help seeing that whatever his original capabilities they have been spoiled by his profession. A minister, Father said to me once, must either be so spiritual that his creed has no power to restrain him, or a poor crippled thing, pathetic because the desire of rising has made him hamper himself with vows. I think I understand what he meant, and I am afraid Mr. Saychase is of the latter sort: a man who meant well, and so pledged himself always to cling to the belief the church had made for him, no matter what higher light might come into his life. He is to be pitied,—though he would not understand why. He could hardly care for anybody so far from his way of thinking as I am, so old lady Andrews cannot be right there.

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July 25. George is having his house enlarged. Mrs. Weston is certainly energetic, with what is perhaps a Western energy. She has been married only about four months. George told me the other day that he meant to make the house larger.

"Gertrude wants a bigger parlor," he explained, rather ill at ease, I thought. "The house is big enough for me, but when a man has a wife things are different."

There was a labored playfulness in his manner which troubled me. He has bought a phaeton and pony for her. I hope that he is not going beyond his means. As for a larger parlor, I am afraid that Mrs. Weston will have to fill it with rather odd people.

July 27. Kathie has shown a new side to her character which troubles me. It is all, I suppose, part of her morbid, unhinged condition, but it is unpleasant. She has conceived a violent jealousy of baby. She refuses to stay in the house if I have Thomasine with me. This afternoon I had sent for her to come over and stay to tea. She came in about five, with a wild look in her eyes which she has almost all the time now. She sat down without saying anything, and began to pull the roses in a bowl on the table to pieces, scattering the petals on the floor.

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I laughingly told her that she evidently thought she was in the woods where roses grew wild and there were no rugs. Instead of answering me, or apologizing, she looked at me strangely, and for a moment said nothing.

"Are you going to have baby brought down here this afternoon?" she demanded at last.

I said Tomine was out with Rosa, but that I expected them in soon, as it was almost time for baby's supper.

"Will she come in here?" Kathie asked.

"Oh, yes," was my reply. "You will see her. Never fear."

"Then I may as well go home now," observed this astounding child, rising, and going deliberately toward the door.

"What in the world do you mean?" I cried out, completely taken by astonishment.

"I never will stay in the room with her again," Kathie responded emphatically. "I just hate her!"

I could only stare at her.

"You're all taken up with her now," Kathie continued. "You used to like me, but now it's all that baby. I'm much obliged to you for inviting me to supper, but I can't stay any longer if she's coming."

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If anybody could make me understand whether Kathie is sane or not I should have more confidence in attempting to deal with her. To-day I felt as if I were dealing with a mad creature, and that it was idle to try to do anything. It seemed to me it would be a pity to treat the matter too seriously, and I tried to act as if I thought she was merely joking. I laughingly told her that the idea was one of the funniest I ever heard, and that we must tell baby when she came in, to see if we could make the small person laugh. Kathie received my remarks with unmoved seriousness.

"It isn't a joke at all, Miss Ruth," she said, with an uncanny air which was most uncomfortable, but which in some indefinable way gave me for the first time in all my dealings with the girl a sort of hint that she was partly acting. "It is just my wicked heart. I hate"—

I interrupted her briskly.

"Your wicked fiddlesticks, Kathie!" I said. "Don't talk nonsense. What time has been settled on for the church fair?"

She was so taken aback that she had no defense ready, and after a sort of gasp of amazement she answered my question, and said no more about her wickedness. Baby came in with Rosa, and Kathie behaved as usual, only I remember now that she did not offer to touch Tomine. I went upstairs for a moment with Rosa and baby to see if everything was right, and when I went back to the parlor my guest had taken herself off. She had gone without her supper as she had said she should. I confess my first feeling was that she needed to be soundly shaken; but after all when a child is morbidly wrong in her feelings the particular way in which she shows it is not of much consequence. Perhaps she had better be expending her distempered mood on jealousy of baby than on religion. The question is what I had better do; and I confess I do not know how to answer

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it.

July 28. Mr. Saychase has made his purpose and his ideas entirely clear, and I wish I could think of them with less inclination to laugh. If he could for a single minute know how funny he was, it would do him more good than anything I can think of as likely to happen to him.

He came to call to-night, and so evident was his air of excitement that even Rosa must have noticed it; she was all significant smiles when she ushered him in. I tried to talk about commonplace things, but could get practically no response. For half an hour by the clock we went stumbling on with intervals of silence when I could think of nothing except that I must say something. At last he cleared his throat with a manner so desperate and determined that I knew something dreadful was coming.

"Miss Privet," he said, "I thought I would mention to you that I came to-night for a particular purpose."

It came over me with a sickening sense that old lady Andrews was right, and that it was too late to stop him. I did make a desperate effort to interpose, but he had at last got started, and would not be stayed.

"You must have noticed," he went on, as if he were repeating a lesson, "that I entertain a great respect for your character." [Pg 209]

"Indeed, Mr. Saychase," I responded, with a laugh which was principally nerves, "you evidently mean to make me unbearably vain."

"That you could never be," he returned with an air of gallantry I should not have thought him capable of. "Your modesty is one of your greatest charms."

The girl who can hear her modesty praised and not be amused must be lacking in a sense of humor. I laughed aloud before I realized what I was doing. Then, as he looked hurt, I apologized humbly.

"It's no matter," he said graciously; "of course you wouldn't be modest if you knew how modest you are."

This sounded so ambiguous and so like comic opera that in spite of myself I laughed again.

"Come, Mr. Saychase," I begged him, "don't say any more about my modesty, please. We'll take it for granted. Have you seen Aunt Naomi this week? She has had a little return of her bad cold."

"I came over to-night," he broke out explosively, not in the least diverted by my question, "to ask you to marry me."

All I could do was to blurt out his name like an awkward schoolgirl.

"I dare say you are surprised, Miss Ruth," he went on, evidently relieved to have got the first plunge over with, "but that, as we were saying, may be laid to modesty."

I respect Mr. Saychase,—at least I think he means well, and I hated to be the means of making him uncomfortable; but this return to my modesty was too funny, and nearly sent me off into laughter again. My sense of the fun of the situation brought back, however, my self-control. [Pg 210]

"Mr. Saychase," I said, as gravely as I could, "I am not so dull as not to feel the honor you have done me, but such a thing is entirely impossible. We had better talk of something else."

"But I am in earnest, Miss Privet," he urged.

I assured him that I was not less so.

"I hope you will not decide hastily," was his response. "I have long recognized your excellent qualities; our ages are suitable; and I think I am right in saying that we both find our highest satisfaction in doing good. Be sure my esteem for you is too great for me to easily take a refusal."

"But, Mr. Saychase," I argued, catching at any excuse to end his importunity, "you forget that I am not a sharer in your beliefs. A clergyman ought not to marry a woman that half his parish would think an atheist."

"I have thought of that," he responded readily, "and knew you must recognize that a clergyman's wife should be a helpmeet in his religious work; but I hoped that for the sake of the work, if not for mine, you might be willing to give up your unhappy views."

There was a sort of simplicity about this which was so complete as to be almost noble. It might be considered an amazing egotism, and it might be objected that Mr. Saychase had a singular idea of the sincerity of my "unhappy views;" but the entire conviction with which he spoke almost made me for the moment doubt myself. Unfortunately for him, a most wickedly absurd remembrance came into my mind of a sentimental story in an old red and gold annual that was grandmother's. A noble Christian chieftain has fallen in love with a Moorish damsel, and says to her: "Beautiful Zorahida, only become a Christian, and thou shalt be my bride." Beautiful Zorahida took at once to the proposition, but I am made of more obstinate stuff. I hid the smile the story brought up, but I determined to end this talk at once. [Pg 211]

"Mr. Saychase," I said as firmly as I could, "you are kind, but it is utterly impossible that I should change my views or that I should marry you. We will, if you please, consider the subject closed entirely. How soon do you go to Franklin to the annual conference?"

He evidently saw I was in earnest, and to my great relief said no more in this line. He could not help showing that he was uncomfortable, although I was more gracious to him than I had ever

been in my life. He did not stay long. As he was going I said I was sure he would not let anything I had said wound him, for I had not meant to hurt him. He said "Oh, no," rather vaguely, and left me. I wonder how many girls ever get an offer of marriage without a hint of love from beginning to end!

July 30. Tomine is more adorable every day. I wish Tom could see her oftener. It would soften him, and take out of his face the hard look which is getting fixed there. He surely could not resist her when she wakes up from her nap, all rosy and fresh, and with a wonder-look in her eyes as if she had been off in dreamland so really that she could not understand how she happens not to be there still. I think the clasp of her soft little fingers on his would somehow take the ache out of his heart. Poor Tom! I wonder how far being sorry for a thing makes one better. Repentance is more than half discomfort, Mother used to say. I always told her that to me it seemed like a sort of moral indigestion which warned us not to eat any more of the forbidden fruit that caused it. Tom is unhappy. He is proud, and he feels the disgrace more than he would own. Any country town is so extremely pronounced in its disapproval of sins of a certain kind that a man would have to be covered with a rhinoceros hide not to feel it; and to stand up against it means to a man of Tom's disposition a constant attitude of defiance.

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Sometimes I find myself feeling so strongly on Tom's side that I seem to have lost all moral sense. It is my instinct, the cruelly illogical injustice of my sex perhaps, to lay the blame on poor dead Julia. Only—but I cannot think of it, and how I come to be writing about it is more than I can tell. I do think a good deal about Tom, however, and wonder what the effect on his character will be. He is of a pretty stubborn fibre when once he has taken a determination; and now that he has made up his mind to fight down public opinion here he will do it. The question is what it will cost him. Sometimes it seems a pity that he could not have gone away from home, into a broader atmosphere, and one where he could have expended his strength in developing instead of resisting. Here he will be like a tree growing on a windy sea-cliff; he will be toughened, but I am afraid he will be twisted and gnarled.

I wonder if little Tomine will ever ask me, when she is grown, about her mother. If she does I can only say that I never saw Julia until she was on her deathbed; and that will have to do. Dear little soft baby! The idea of her being grown up is too preposterous. She is always to be my baby Thomasine, and then I can love her without the penalty of having to answer troublesome questions.

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VIII

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AUGUST

August 1. I said a thing to Tom to-day which was the most natural thing in the world, yet which teases me. He came to pay one of his rare visits to baby, and we were bending over her so that our heads were almost together. I was not thinking of him, but just of Tomine, and without considering how he might take it I declared that I felt exactly as if she were my very own.

"What do you mean?" Tom asked. "She is yours."

"Oh, but I mean as if I were really her mother," I explained, stupidly making my mistake worse.

"Would to God you were!" he burst out. "Would to God you cared enough for me to be now!"

I was of course startled, though I had brought it on myself. I got out of it by jumping up and calling to Rosa to take Tomine and give her her supper. Now recalling it, and remembering how Tom looked, his eyes and his voice, I wonder what I ought to do. I do not know how to make him understand that because George has left me I am no more likely to marry somebody else. I may not feel the same toward George, but nothing follows from that. I own to myself frankly that I respect Tom more than I do George; I can even say that I find more and more as time goes on that I had rather see Tom coming up the walk. The old boy and girl friendship has largely come back between Tom and me; and I am a little, just a little on the defensive on his account against the talk of the village. I think now all is over, and Julia in her grave, that might be allowed to rest. Only one thing I do not understand. I am no more moved by the touch of George's hand now than by that of any acquaintance; I cannot touch Tom's fingers without remembering Julia.

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August 2. It is curious to see how Rosa's heart and her religion keep up the struggle. Ran's wife has obstinately refused to die, but has instead got well enough to send Rosa an insulting message; so the hope of finding a solution of all difficulties in Ran's becoming a widower is for the present at least abandoned. Rosa is evidently fond of Ran, and while the priest and her conscience—or rather her religious fear of consequences—keep her from marrying him, they cannot make her give him up entirely. She still clings to some sort of an engagement with Dennis; and she still talks in her amazingly cold-blooded way about her lovers, speculating on the practical side of the question in a fashion so dispassionate that Ran's chance would seem to be gone forever; but in the end she comes back to him. What the result will be I cannot even guess, but I feel it my duty not to encourage Rosa to incline toward Ran, who is really drunken and disreputable. I remind her how he beat his wife; but then she either says any man with spunk must beat his wife now and then when he isn't sober, or she declares that anybody might and indeed should beat that sort of a woman. I can only fall back upon the fact that she cannot marry

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him without incurring the displeasure of her church, and although she never fails to retort that I do not believe in her religion, I can see that the argument moves her. In dealing with Rosa it is very easy to see how necessary a religion is for the management of the ignorant and unreasonable. In this case the obstinacy of Rosa's attachment may prove too strong for the church, but the church is the only thing which in her undisciplined mind could combat her inclination for a moment.

Sometimes when Rosa appeals to me for sympathy I wonder whether genuine love is not entirely independent of reason; and I wonder, too, whether it is or is not a feeling which must last a whole life long. I seem to myself to be sure that if I had married George I should always have loved him, —or I should have loved the image of him I kept in my mind. I would have defied proof and reason, and whatever he did I should have persuaded myself that no matter what circumstances led him to do he was really noble in his nature. I know I should have stultified myself to the very end, rather than to give up caring for him; and it seems to me that I should have done it with my mental eyes shut. I should have been hardly less illogical about it than Rosa is. What puzzles me most is that while I can analyze myself in this lofty way, I believe I have in me possibilities of self-deception so complete. Whether it is a virtue in women to be able to cheat themselves into constancy I can't tell, and indeed I think all these speculations decidedly sentimental and unprofitable.

August 5. Aunt Naomi came to-day, like an east wind bearing depression. She has somehow got hold of a rumor that George is speculating. Where she obtained her information I could not discover. She likes to be a little mysterious, and she pieces together so many small bits of information that I dare say it would often be hard for her to say exactly what the source of her information really was. She is sometimes mistaken, but for anybody who tells so many things she is surprisingly seldom entirely wrong. Besides I half think that in a village like ours thoughts escape and disseminate themselves. I am sometimes almost afraid as I write things down in this indiscreet diary of mine, lest they shall somehow get from the page into the air, and Aunt Naomi will know them the next time she appears. This is to me the worst thing about living in a small place. It is impossible not to have the feeling of being under a sort of foolish slavery to public opinion, a slavish regard to feelings we neither share nor respect; and greater still is the danger of coming to be interested in trifles, of growing to be gossips just as we are rustics, simply from living where it is so difficult not to know all about our neighbors. [Pg 217]

Speculation was the word which to-day Aunt Naomi rolled as a sweet morsel under her tongue. Any sort of financial dealing is so strangely far away from our ordinary village ways that any sort of dealing in stocks would, I suppose, be regarded as dangerously rash, if not altogether unlawful; but I do hope that there is nothing in George's business which will lead him into trouble. I know that I am bothering about something which is none of my affair, and which is probably all right, if it has any existence.

"I don't know much about speculation myself," Aunt Naomi observed; "and I doubt if George Weston does. He's got a wife who seems bound to spend every cent she can get hold of, and it looks as if he found he'd got to take extra pains to get it." [Pg 218]

"But how should anybody know anything about his affairs?" I asked in perplexed vexation.

She regarded me shrewdly.

"Everybody knows everything in a place like this," she responded waggishly. "I'm sure I don't see how everything gets to be known, but it does. You can't deny that."

I told her that I was afraid we were dreadfully given to gossiping about our neighbors, and to talking about things which really didn't concern us.

"Some do, I suppose," she answered coolly, but with a twinkle from behind the green veil which is always aslant across her face. "It's a pity, of course; but you wouldn't have us so little interested in each other as not to notice the things we hear, would you?"

I laughed, of course, but did not give up my point entirely.

"But so much that is said is nonsense," I persisted. "Here Mrs. Weston has been in Tuskamuck for four or five months, and she is already credited with running into extravagance, and bringing her husband into all sorts of things. We might at least give her time to get settled before we talk about her so much."

"She hadn't been here four or five weeks before she made it plain enough what she is," was the uncompromising retort. "She set out to astonish us as soon as she came. That's her Western spirit, I suppose."

I did not go on with the talk, but secretly the thing troubles me. Speculation is a large word, and it is nonsense to suppose George to be speculating in any way which could come to much, or that Aunt Naomi would know it if he were. I do wish people would either stop talking about George, or talk to somebody besides me. [Pg 219]

August 6. Mrs. Tracy came in to call to-day. She makes a round of calls about once in two years, and I have not seen her for a long time. She had her usual string of questions, and asked about me and baby and Tom and the girls and the summer preserving until I felt as if I had been through the longest kind of a cross-examination. Just before she left she inquired if Mrs. Weston had told me that her husband was going to make a lot of money in stocks. I said at once that I seldom saw Mrs. Weston, and that I knew nothing about her husband's business affairs; but this shows where Aunt Naomi got her information. Mrs. Weston must have been talking indiscreetly. I wonder—But it seems to me I am always wondering!

August 7. Kathie has not been near me since she left the house the other evening. It seemed better to let her work out things in her own way than to go after her. I hoped that if I took no notice she might forget her foolishness, and behave in a more natural way. I met her in the street this afternoon, and stopped to speak with her. I said nothing of her having run away, but talked as usual. At last I asked her if she would not come home with me, and she turned and came to the gate. Then I asked her to come in, but she stopped short.

"Is the baby gone?" she demanded.

"No," I answered.

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"You know I shall never come into your house again while that baby is there," she declared in an odd, quiet sort of way. "I hate that baby, and he that hates is just like a murderer."

She said it with a certain relish, as if she were proud of it. I begin to suspect that there may be a good deal of the theatrical mixed with her abnormal feeling.

"Kathie," I said, "you may be as silly as you like, but you can't make me believe anything so absurd as that you hate Thomasine. As for being a murderer in your heart, you wouldn't hurt a fly."

She looked at me queerly. I half thought there was a little disappointment in her first glance; then a strange expression as if she unconsciously took herself for audience, since I would not serve, and went on with her play of abnormal wickedness.

"You don't know how wicked I am," she responded. "I am a murderer in my heart."

A strangely intense look came into her eyes, as if a realization of what she was saying took hold of her, and as if she became really frightened by her own assumption. She clutched my arm with a grasp which must have been at least half genuine.

"Oh, Miss Ruth," she said. "I don't know what I shall do. I know I am lost!"

I wanted to shake the child, so completely for the moment did I feel that a lot of her emotion was make-believe, even if unconscious; but on the other hand she was actually beginning to turn pale and tremble with the nervous excitement she had raised by her fear or her theatricals.

"Kathie," I said, almost severely, "you know you are talking nonsense. Come into the house, and have a glass of milk and a slice of cake. You'll feel better after you've had something to eat."

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She looked at me with eyes really wild, and without a word turned quickly and ran down the street at full speed, leaving me utterly confounded. I am sure she acts to herself, and that her religious mania is partly theatrical; but then I suppose religious mania always is. Yet it has a basis in what she believes, and with her imaginative, hysterical temperament she has the power of taking up her ideas so completely that she gets to be almost beside herself. When she is so much in earnest she must be treated, I suppose, as if all her self-accusations and agony of mind were entirely real.

August 8. I have been to lay a bunch of sweet-peas on Mother's grave. I wonder and wonder again if she knows when I am so near the place where we left her, the place where it always seems to me some life must yet linger. I have all my life been familiar with the doubt whether any consciousness, any personality survives death; and yet it is as natural to assume that life goes on as it is to suppose the sun will rise to-morrow. I know that my feeling proves nothing; but still instinctively I cling to it.

In any case there is the chance the dead are alive and alert somewhere in the shadows, and if they are they must be glad not to be forgotten. I should not be willing to take the chance, and neglect the grave of one who had been fond of me. Mother loved me as I loved her; and this decides I shall run no risk of her being unhappy after death in the thought that I have forgotten.

I suppose I cling to a feeling that there must be some sort of immortality largely from the loneliness I feel. The idea of never seeing Father or Mother again is more than I could endure. Father used to say that after all each of us is always really alone in this world, and even our best friends can no more come close to us than if they did not exist; but this always seemed to me a sort of cold, forlorn theory. The warmth of human companionship somehow makes it impossible for me to feel anything like this. When I said so to Father, I remember he smiled, and said he was glad I did find it impossible.

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One thing I am sure of to the very bottom of my heart: that things are somehow completely right, so that whatever death means it must be part of a whole which is as it should be.

August 10. To-day Tom brought me a bunch of cardinal-flowers. He had been up to the Lake Meadows, he said, and thought I might like them. The whole parlor is alive with the wonderful crimson—no, scarlet, of the great flaming armful of blossoms. Tom used to get them for me when I was a girl, but since those days I have had only a stray spike now and then. They bring back the past, and the life-long friendship I have had with Tom. I wonder sometimes why I have never been in love with Tom. Life never seemed complete without him. In the years he kept away on account of George I missed him sorely, and more than once I have thought of all sorts of ways to bring things back to the former footing; only I knew all the time it was of no use. It is the greatest comfort to have the old friendship back, and now Tom must understand that I have no more than friendship to give him. It would be vexing if he should misunderstand, but I must take care he does not.

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August 11. I have been at the Town Hall helping to make ready for a raspberry festival, to raise money for the church. Miss Charlotte came after me, and of course I had to go. She said all that

was wanted was my taste to direct about decorating the hall, but I have been told so before, and I knew from experience that taste is expected to work out its own salvation. To be really fair I suppose I should say I cannot stand by and give directions, but have to take hold with my own hands, so it is nobody's fault but my own if I do things. Besides, it is really good fun among the neighbors, with the air full of the smell of cedar, with all the pretty young girls making wreaths and laughing while they work, and with your feet tangled in evergreens and laurel whenever you cross the floor. Miss Charlotte is in her element at such a time. Her great-throated laugh, as strong as a man's, rings out, and she seems for the time quite happy and jolly with excitement.

It came over me to-day almost with a sense of dismay how old I seem to the young girls. They treated me with a sort of respect which couldn't be put into words exactly, I suppose, but which I felt. Somehow I believe the breaking of my engagement has made me seem older to them. Perhaps it is my foolish fancy, but I seem to see that while I was engaged I had still for them a hold on youth which I have now lost. I suppose they never thought it out, but I know they feel now that I am very much their senior.

At a time like this, too, I realize how true it is that I am somehow a little outside of the life of the village. I have lived here almost all my life. Except for the years I was at school, and a winter or two in Boston or abroad I have been generally at home. I know almost everybody in town, by sight at least. Yet I always find when I am among Tuskamuck people in this way that I am looking at them as if I were a spectator. I wonder if this means that I am egotistical or queer, or only that my life has been so much more among books and intellectual things than the life of most of them. I am sure I love the town and my neighbors.

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The thing I wish to put down, however, has nothing to do with my feelings toward the town. It is that I am ashamed of the way I wrote the other day about Mr. Saychase. He entered the hall this afternoon just as old Mrs. Oliver came limping in to see the decorations; and the lovely way in which he helped the poor old lame creature made me blush for myself. I almost wanted to go to him and apologize then and there. It would have been awkward, however, first to explain that I had made fun of him in my diary, and then apologize! But he is a good soul, even if he did think I was a sort of nineteenth century Zorahida, to give up Mohammedanism for the sake of wedding a Christian chief.—And here I go again!

August 15. I have been reading to-night a book about the East, and it has stirred me a good deal. The speculations of strange peoples on the great mystery of life and death bring them so close to us. They show how alike all mankind is, and how we all grope about after some clue to existence. On the whole it is better, I think, not to give much thought to what may come after death,—no more thought, that is, than we cannot help. We can never know, and we must either raise vague hopes to make us less alive to the importance of life, the reality of life—I do not know how to say it. Of course all religion insists on the importance of life, but rather as a preparation for another existence. I think we need to have it always before us that what is important is not what will happen after we are dead and gone, but what is happening now because we are alive and have a hand in things. I see this is not very clear, but I am sure the great thing is to live as if life were of value in itself. To live rightly, to make the most out of the life we can see and feel, is all that humanity is equal to, and it is certainly worth doing for its own sake.

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The idea which has struck me most in what I have been reading to-night is the theory that each individual is made up of the fragments of other lives; that just as the body is composed of material once part of other bodies, so is the spirit built up of feelings, and passions, and tendencies, and traits of temperament formerly in other individuals dead and gone. At first thought it does not seem to me a comfortable theory. I should not seem to belong to myself any more, if I believed it. To have the temper of some bygone woman, and the affections of another, and the tastes of a third,—it is too much like wearing false hair! It does not seem to me possible, but it may be true. At least it is a theory which may easily be made to seem plausible by the use of facts we all know. If it is the true solution of our characters here, it is pleasant to think that perhaps we may modify what for the present is our very own self so it shall be better stuff for the fashioning of another generation. I should like to feel that when this bunch of ideas and emotions goes to pieces, the bits would make sweet spots in the individuals they go to make part of. I suppose this is what George Eliot meant in the "Choir Invisible," or something like this. As one thinks of the doctrine it is not so cold and unattractive as it struck me in the reading. One could bear to lose a conscious future if the alternative was happiness to lives not yet in being. I should like, though, to know it. But if there weren't any me to know, I should not be troubled, as the old philosophers were fond of saying, and the important thing would be not for me to know but for the world to be better. I begin to see how the doctrine might be a fine incentive to do the best with life that is in any way possible; and what more could be asked of any doctrine?

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August 17. Baby was ill night before last, and we three women were smitten to the heart. Hannah went for Dr. Wentworth, and when he came he laughed at our panic, and assured me nothing serious was the matter. It was only a little indigestion caused by the excessive heat. I do not know how I should have behaved if it had not been that Rosa was in such a panic I had to give all my spare attention to keeping her in order. It came to me then what an advantage an officer must have in a battle; he cannot break down because he has to look to his men. Last night I wished greatly Tom were in reach; it would have been dreadful if anything really serious had happened to baby, and he not to know it until it was too late. Yet he could have done nothing if the worst had been true and he had been here. It would have been no comfort to poor little sick Tomine to have one person by her more than another, so long as her nurses were not strangers. A father is nothing to her yet. I wonder when he will be.

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Yesterday Tomine was better, and to-night she seems as well as ever; but it will take time for me

to be rid entirely of fear. I wonder if she had gone whether her little bunch of vitality would have been scattered through new lives. She can hardly have much personality or individuality yet. Sometimes the universe, the power that keeps going on and on, and which is so unmoved by human pain, strikes me as too terrible for thought; but I cling desperately to Father's idea that nature is too great to be unkind, and that what looks to us like cruelty is only the size of things too big for us to grasp. It is a riddle, and the way I put it is neither so clear nor wise, I suppose, as the theories of countless religious teachers, they and I alike guessing at things human insight is not equal to. I doubt much if it is profitable to speculate in this vein. "Think all you can about life as a good and glorious thing," Father wrote to me once when I had expressed in a school-letter some trouble or other about what comes after death, "but keep in mind that of what came before we were born or will happen after we are dead we shall never in this life know anything, no matter how much we speculate, so dreaming about it or fretting about it is simply building air-castles." I have said over to myself ever since I began to be perplexed that to speculate about another life is to build air-castles.

Baby is well again and I will not fret or dream of what it would mean if she had slipped away from us.

August 20. I must settle myself a little by writing, or I shall be like old Mrs. Tuell, who said that for years she never slept a wink because her nerves wiggled like angleworms all over her inside. I have certainly been through an experience which might make anybody's nerves wiggle. [Pg 228]

About half past two o'clock Rosa brought me a note, and said:—

"That Thurston girl left it, and told me not to give it to you till three o'clock; but if I don't give it to you now, I know I'd forget it."

I opened the note without thinking anything about the time. It was written in Kathie's uneven hand, and blotched as if it had been cried over. This is what it said:—

DEAR MISS RUTH,—This letter is to bid you good-by. You are the only one in the world I love, and nobody loves me. I cant stand you to love that baby better than me, and God is so angry it dont make any difference what I do now. When you read this I shall be in torment forever, because I am going down to Davis Cove to drownd myself because I am so wicked and nobody loves me. Dont tell on me, because it would make you feel bad and father wouldnt like it to get round a child of his had drownd herself and mother would cry. Yours truly and with a sad and loving good-by forever,

KATHIE THURSTON.

P. S. If they get me to bury will you please put some flowers on my coffin. No more from yours truly

K. T.

My first impulse was to laugh at this absurd note, but it came over me suddenly that there was no knowing what that child will do. Even now I am bewildered. I cannot get it out of my mind that there is a good deal of the theatrical in Kathie, but I may be all wrong. At any rate I reflected how she has a way of acting so that apparently she can herself take it for real. [Pg 229]

I thought it over a while; then I got my hat and started down the street, with the notion that at least it would do no harm to go down to Davis Cove, and see if Kathie were there. As I walked on, recalling her incomprehensible actions, a dreadful feeling grew in my mind that she might have meant what she said, and she would be more likely to try to drown herself because she had told me. A sort of panic seized me; and just then the town clock struck three.

I had got down just opposite the Foot-bridge, and when I remembered that three was the time when I was to have the note, I feared I should be too late, and I began to run. Fortunately, there was nobody in sight, and as I came to the bend in the street I saw George coming, leading Kathie by the arm. She was dripping wet, and half staggering, although she kept her feet. I hurried up to them, too much out of breath with haste and excitement to be able to speak.

"Hullo!" George called out, as I came up to them, "see what a fish I've caught."

"Why, Kathie," gasped I, with a stupidity that was lucky, for it kept George from suspecting, "you've been in the water."

She gave me a queer look, but she said nothing.

"A little more and she'd have stayed there," George put in.

"You are wet too," I said, looking at him for the first time.

"Yes," he returned; "luckily I got off my coat and vest as I ran, so I saved my watch, but everything else is wet fast enough." [Pg 230]

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"She was trying to get sugar-pears from those trees by the water," George answered; "and I suppose she lost her balance. I was going along the road and heard her scream."

"Along the road?" I echoed; for I knew Davis Cove is too far from the road for him to have heard a cry.

"She fell in just by the old shipyard on the point," he said.

"The boys were in swimming in the cove," Kathie explained, in a way which was of course

unintelligible to George.

"Well," George commented, after a moment in which he seemed to clear up her meaning, "the next time you want sugar-pears you'd better get them when the boys are out of the way, so you needn't go in swimming yourself."

We had been walking along the road as we talked, and by this time had reached the Foot-bridge. I told George he must go home and get on dry clothing, and I would see to Kathie. He demurred at first, but I insisted, so he left us to cross the bridge alone. We walked in silence almost across the bridge, and then I asked her what kept bumping against me as I held her up.

"It's rocks in my pocket," she answered, quite in a matter-of-fact way. "I put 'em there to sink me."

I could have shaken her on the spot, so uncharitable was my mood, but I managed to answer her in a perfectly cool tone.

"Then you had better take them out," I said.

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She got her hand into her pocket and fished out three or four pebbles, which all together wouldn't have sunk a three-days-old-kitten; and when these had been thrown over the bridge we proceeded on our drabbled way. My doubts of the genuineness of the whole performance grew in spite of me. I do not know exactly why I am coming so strongly to feel that Kathie is not wholly ingenuous, but I cannot get rid of the idea.

"Kathie," I asked, "did you see Mr. Weston coming when you jumped in?"

She looked up at me with eyes so honest I was ashamed of myself, but when she answered unhesitatingly that she had seen him, I went on ruthlessly to ask if she did not know he would save her.

"I thought if he was coming I'd got to hurry," she returned, as simply as possible.

I was more puzzled than ever, and I am puzzled still. Whether she really meant to take her life, or whether she only thought she meant it, does not, I suppose, make any great difference; but I confess I have been trying to make out ever since I left her. I would like to discover whether she is consciously trying to fool me or endeavoring as much to cheat herself, or is honest in it all; but I see no way in which I am ever likely to be satisfied.

I asked her to say nothing at home about how her ducking happened, and I satisfied her mother by repeating what George had said. To-morrow I must have it out with Mr. Thurston somehow or other; although I am still completely in the dark what I shall say to him. I hope the old fairy-tales are right when they say "the morning is wiser than the evening."

August 21. The morning is wiser than the evening, for I got up to-day with a clear idea in my mind what I had better do about Kathie. It is always a great comfort to have a definite plan of action mapped out, and I ate my breakfast in a cheerful frame of mind, intending to go directly to see Mr. Thurston while I should be fairly sure of finding him. I reckoned without Kathie, however, who presented herself at the dining-room window before I had finished my coffee, and begged me to come out.

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"I can't come in without breaking my word," she said.

I could not argue with the absurd chit in that situation, so I went out into the garden with her and sat down on the bench by the sun-dial. The big red roses Father was so fond of are all in blossom, and in the morning air were wonderfully sweet. It was an enchanting day, and the dew was not entirely dried, so the garden had not lost the freshness it has when it first wakes up. I was exhilarated by the smell of the roses and the beauty of everything, and the clearness of the air. Rosa held baby up to us at the nursery window above, and I waved my hand to her, smiling from pure delight in everything. Kathie watched me with her great eyes, and when I sat down on the bench she threw herself at full length on the grass, and burst out sobbing.

"You do love her better than me!" she wailed. "I came to say how sorry I was, but I'm sorry now that I didn't stay in the water."

I took her by the shoulder, and spoke to her so sternly that I startled her.

"You are not to talk in that way anymore, Kathie," I said. "I am fond of you and I am fond of baby; but if baby were big enough and talked this silly way about you, do you suppose I would allow it? Sit up and stop crying."

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I have always been careful not to hurt her feelings; perhaps I have been too careful. She sat up now, and then rose to her feet in a dazed sort of way. I determined to see if anything was to be made out of her mood.

"Kathie," said I, "how much of that performance yesterday was real, and how much was humbug? Tell me the truth."

She grew a little paler and her eyes dilated. I looked her straight in the face, half minded to force her if need be to give me some guidance in what I should do.

"I really meant to drown myself," she answered solemnly, "only when I saw the water and thought of hell I was afraid."

She stopped, and I encouraged her to go on.

"I saw Mr. Weston, and I was scared of him and—and everything, and so I jumped in."

I reflected that very likely the child was more of a puzzle to herself than she was to me, and in any case I had more important ends to gain than the satisfying of my curiosity, so I asked her as gently as I could if she really believed she would be eternally lost if she killed herself.

"Oh, yes, Miss Ruth!" she cried with feverish eagerness.

"Then why do you do it?" I went on. "How do you dare to do it?"

She looked at me with a growing wildness in her face that was certainly genuine.

"I'm lost, anyway," she burst out. "I know I have been too wicked for God to forgive me. I have committed murder in my heart, and I know I was never meant to be saved." [Pg 234]

"Stop!" I commanded her. "You are a little, foolish girl, too young even to know what you are talking about. How dare you decide what God will do?"

She regarded me with a look of stupefaction as if I were a stranger whom she had never seen; and indeed I can well believe I seemed one. Then the perversity of her mind came back to the constant idea.

"That's just it," she declared. "That's just my wickedness."

After this I refused to go into the subject any further. I got up and asked her if I should find her father at home. She begged me not to go to see him, and then said with an air of relief that he had gone out to Connecticut Mills to visit a sick woman. I did not stay with her longer. I said I must go into the house, and as she refused to come, I left her, a forlorn little figure, there among the roses, and went in. It seemed hard to do it, but I had made up my mind she had better not indulge in any more talk this morning.

August 22. Cousin Mehitable, in a letter which came this morning, pities me because of my colorless existence; but I begin to feel that life is becoming too lurid. I have to-day bearded—no, Mr. Thurston hasn't any beard; but I have had my interview with him, and I feel as if I had been leading a cavalry charge up a hill in the face of a battery of whatever kind of guns are most disconcertingly destructive.

I am somewhat confused about the beginning of our talk. I got so excited later that the tame beginnings have slipped away; but I know I said I had come to make a proposition about Kathie, and somehow I led up to the child's mad performance the other day. I showed him the note and told him the story, but not until I had made him promise not to mention the matter to the child. When he had finished he was as pale as my handkerchief, his thin, bloodless face positively withered with pain. [Pg 235]

"I cannot keep silence about this," he said when I had finished. "I must withdraw my promise, Miss Privet. My Kathie's soul is in danger."

I am sure that I am not ill-tempered, but over Kathie and her father I find myself in a state of exasperation which threatens to destroy all my claims to be considered a sane and temperate body. I had to struggle mightily to keep myself in hand this morning, but at first, at least, I succeeded.

"Mr. Thurston," I said, "I cannot release you. I should never have told you except on your promise, and you cannot honestly break it. Now listen to me. I have no right to dictate, but I cannot stand by and see dear little Kathie going to ruin. I am sure I know what is good for her just now better than you do. She is a good child, only she has gone nearly wild brooding over theologic questions she should never have heard of until she was old enough to judge them more reasonably."

He tried to interrupt me, but I put up my hand to stop him, and went on.

"You know how nervous and high-strung she is, and you cannot think her capable of looking fairly at the awful mysteries with which a creed deals."

"But I have only instructed her in those things on which her eternal salvation depends," he broke in.

"Her eternal salvation does not depend on her being driven into a madhouse or made to drown herself," I retorted, feeling as if I were brutal, but that it couldn't be helped. "The truth is, Mr. Thurston, you have been offering up Kathie as a sacrifice to your creed just as the fathers and mothers of old made their children pass through the fires to Moloch." He gasped, and some thin blood rushed to his face, but I did not stop. "I have no doubt they were conscientious, just as you are; but that didn't make it any better for the children. You have been entirely conscientious in torturing Kathie, but you have been torturing her." [Pg 236]

His face was positively gray, and there was a look of anguish in his eyes which made me weak. It would have been so much easier to go on if he had been angry.

"You don't understand," he said brokenly. "You think all religion is a delusion, so of course you can't see. You think I don't love my child, and that I am so wrapped up in my creed I can't see she suffers. You won't believe it hurts me more than it does her."

"Do you think then," I asked him, doing my best to keep back the tears, "that it can give any pleasure to a kind Heavenly Father? I do understand. You have been so afraid of not doing your duty to Kathie you have brought her almost to madness, almost"—

"Don't! Don't!" he interrupted, putting out his hand as if I had struck him. "Oh, Miss Privet, if she had"—

I saw the real affection and feeling of the man as I have never realized them. I had been hard, and perhaps cruel, but it was necessary to save Kathie. I spoke now as gently as I could.

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"No matter for the things that didn't happen, Mr. Thurston. She is safe and sound."

"But she meant to do it," he returned in a tone so low I could hardly catch the words.

"Meant?" I repeated. "She isn't in a condition to mean anything. She was distraught by brooding over things that at her age she should never even have heard of. I beg your pardon, Mr. Thurston, but doesn't what has happened prove she is too high-strung to be troubled with theology yet? I am not of your creed, but I respect your feeling about it. Only you must see that to thrust these things on Kathie means madness and despair"—

"But she might die," he broke in. "She might die without having made her peace with her Maker, and be lost forever."

There was anguish in his face, and I know he meant it from the bottom of his heart; but in his voice was the trace of conventional repetition of phrases which made it possible for me to be overcome by exasperation. I looked at him in that mingled fury of impatience and passionate conviction of my ground which must have been the state of the prophets of old when the spirit of prophecy descended upon them. I realize now that to have the spirit of prophecy it is necessary to lose the temper to a degree not altogether commendable in ordinary circumstances. I blazed out on that poor, thin-blooded, dejected, weak-minded, loving Methodist minister, and told him he insulted the God he worshiped; I said he had better consider the text "I will have mercy and not sacrifice;" I flung two or three other texts at him while he stood dazed with astonishment; I flamed at him like a burning-bush become feminine flesh; and fortunately he did not remember that even the Old Nick is credited with being able to cite Scripture for his purposes. I think the texts subdued him, so that it is well Father brought me up to know the Bible. At least I reduced Mr. Thurston to a state where he was as clay in the hands of the potter.

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Then I presented to his consideration my scheme to send Kathie away to boarding-school for a year. I told him he was at liberty to select the school, if only it was one where she would not be too much troubled about theology. Of course I knew it would be hopeless to think of her going to a school entirely unsectarian, but I have already begun to make inquiries about the relative reasonableness of Methodist schools, and I think we may find something that will do. To put the child into surroundings entirely new, where her mind will be taken away from herself, and where a consciousness of the keenly discerning eyes of girls of her own age will keep her theatrical tendencies in check, should work wonders. I made Mr. Thurston give his consent, and before I left the house I saw Mrs. Thurston. I told her not to trouble about Kathie's outfit, and so I hope that bother is pretty well straightened out for the present.

August 24. George has taken a violent cold from his ducking, and is confined to the house. I hope that it is nothing serious. It is especially awkward now, for Mr. Longworthy is coming over from Franklin in a day or two to go over his accounts as trustee.

Kathie came over this morning while I was at breakfast, and tapped on the dining-room window. She was positively shining with happiness. I never saw a child so transformed.

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"Oh, Miss Ruth," she cried out, as soon as I turned, "oh, won't you come out here? I do so want to kiss you!"

I asked her to come inside, but she said she had promised not to, and rather than to get into a discussion I went out to her. She ran dancing up to me, fairly quivering with excitement.

"Oh, Miss Ruth," she said, "it is too good to be true! You are the most loveliest lady that ever lived! Oh, I am so happy!"

I had to laugh at her demonstrativeness, but it was touching to see her. She was no more like the morbid, hollow-eyed girl she had been than if she had never had a trouble. It is wonderful that out of the family of a Methodist parson should come a nature so exotic, but after all, the spiritual raptures and excesses which have worn Mr. Thurston as thin as a leaf in December must have their root in a temperament of keenly emotional extremes.

"I always wanted to go to boarding-school," Kathie went on, possessing herself of my hand, and covering it with kisses; "but Mother always said we couldn't afford it. Now I am going. Oh, I shall have such a beautiful time!"

I laughed at her enthusiasm, but I tried to moderate her extravagance a little by telling her that at boarding-school she would have to work, and to live by rule, so that she must give up her wild ways.

"Oh, I'll work," she responded, her ardor undampened. "I'll be the best girl you ever heard of. I beg your pardon for everything I've done, and I'll never do anything bad again."

This penitence seemed to me rather too general to amount to much, but that she was so much pleased was after all the chief thing, so I made no allusion to particular shortcomings, I did not even urge her to come into the house, for I felt this was a point for her to work out in her own mind. We walked in the dewy garden, discussing the preparations for her leaving home, and it was droll and pathetic to find how poverty had bred in her fantastic little pate a certain sort of shrewdness. She said in the most matter-of-fact way that it would be nice for her father to have one less mouth to fill, and that she supposed her smaller sisters could have her old clothes. I confess she did not in talking exhibit any great generosity of mind, but perhaps it was not to be expected of a child dazzled by the prospect of having a dream come true, and of actually being blessed with more than one new frock at a time. I am not clear what the result of sending her

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among strangers will be, and I see that a good deal of care will be necessary in choosing the school. I do believe good must come of it, however; and at least we are doing the best we can.

August 25. I went over to George's this morning to find out whether he is able to see Mr. Longworthy. He was in bed, but insisted upon seeing me. I have had a terrible day. I left him completely broken down with his confession. O Mother! Mother!

August 26. Childishly I cried myself to sleep last night. It is so terrible to feel that a friend has done wrong and proved himself unworthy. I could not help shivering to think of George, and of how he has had night after night to go to sleep with the knowledge of his dishonesty. I settled in my own mind what I could do to cover his defalcation, which fortunately is small enough for me to provide for by going to Boston and selling some of the bonds Aunt Leah left me, and which Mr. Longworthy has nothing to do with. Then I lay there in the dark and sopped my pillow, until somehow, I found myself in the middle of a comforting dream.

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I dreamed that I was a little girl, and that I was broken-hearted about some indefinite thing that had happened. I had in my dream, so far as I can recall, no idea what the trouble was, but the grief was keen, and my tears most copious. I was in the very thickest of my childish woe when Father came behind me, picked me up like a feather, and set me down in his lap. I had that ineffable sense of companionship which can be named but never described, and I clung to him with a frantic clasp. He kissed me, and wiped away my tears with soothing words, and then at last he whispered in my ear as a precious secret something so infinitely comforting that my sorrow vanished utterly. I broke into smiles, and kissed him again and again, crying out that it was too good to be true, and he had made me happy for my whole life. So keen was my joy that I awoke, and lay in bed half dreaming still, saying over and over to myself his enchanting words as if they would forever be a safeguard against any pain which life might bring. Gradually I became sufficiently wide awake to realize what this wonderful message of joy was, and found myself ecstatically repeating: "Pigs have four feet and one tail!" Of course I laughed at the absurdity, but the comfort stayed with me all the same, and all day I have gone about with a peaceful mind, cheered by the effect of this supernaturally precious fact of natural history.

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I went to Boston and came back without seeing anybody but business men. I saw George a moment on my way from the station, and now everything is ready for Mr. Longworthy to-morrow. Both George and I may sleep to-night in peace.

All the way to and from Boston I found myself going over my whole acquaintance with George, questioning myself about what he has been and what he is. To-night I have been reading over what I have written of him in my diary, and the picture I find of him this year has gone to my heart. I am afraid I have not been kind, perhaps have not been just; for if what I have been writing is true George is—he is not a gentleman. It does not startle me now to write this as it would have done two days ago. I am afraid it will be years before I am able to get out of my remembrance how he looked when he confessed. It seems almost as if I should never be able to think of him again except as I saw him then, his face almost as colorless as his pillow, and then red with shame. He looked shrunken, morally as well as physically. I do not know whether I blamed him more or less because he was so eager to throw the whole blame on his wife's extravagance; I only know that it can hardly have been more cruel for him to tell me of his dishonor than it was for me to hear.

If he had asked me I would have lent him money, or given it to him, for that matter, and done it gladly rather than to have him troubled. To think how he must have been teased and bothered for this pitiful sum, just two or three hundred dollars, before he could have made up his mind to borrow it on my securities! He might have got it honestly, it was so little; but he did not wish anybody to know he needed it. Pride, and folly, and vanity,—I am so hurt that I begin to rail. I will put the whole thing out of my mind, and never think of it again if I can help it.

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SEPTEMBER

September 15. At last Kathie is gone. What with having dressmakers and seeing to her, and doing the shopping, and corresponding with the principal of the school, and all the rest of it, I have had my hands full for the last three weeks. I have enjoyed it, though; I suppose it is always a pleasure partaking of the moral for a woman when she can conscientiously give her whole mind up to the making of clothes. I do not doubt the delight of sewing fig-leaves together went for the moment far toward comforting Eve for leaving Paradise. I cannot now help smiling to see how entirely Kathie's fine scruples about breaking her vow not to come into the house were forgotten when I had a dressmaker here waiting to fit her frocks.

I feel a little as if I were trying to be Providence and to interfere in her life unwarrantably now she is gone and there is nothing more to do about it but to await the result. I have done what I thought best, though, and that is the whole of it. As Father used to say, it is not our duty to do the wisest thing, for we cannot always tell what it is, but only to be honest in doing what seems to us wisest. I hope she will do well, and I believe she will.

September 17. Cousin Mehitable writes me from Rome that she is sure I am tired of baby, and

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had better come over for a couple of months. I cannot tell whether she means what she says, or is only trying to carry her point. She has never had a child near her, and can hardly know how completely a baby takes possession of one. There are many things in the world that I should enjoy, and I should certainly delight in going abroad again, but baby has so taken the first place in my heart and life that everything else is secondary. I wonder sometimes whether after a woman has a child of her own she can any longer give her husband her very warmest love. Perhaps the law of compensation comes in, and if men grow less absorbed in their wives the wives have an equal likelihood of coming to feel that the husband is less a part of their lives than the child. Only if a woman really loved a man—

September 18. It is a childish habit to break off in the middle of a sentence because one does not know how to finish it. I have been turning over the leaves of this book to see if I had done it often, and I have been amused and humiliated to find so many places where I have ended with a dash, like an hysterical schoolgirl. Yet I do not see just what one is to do when suddenly one finds a subject hopelessly too deep. Last night when I got to a place where I was balancing the love of a mother for her husband and for her child, I naturally realized suddenly that I had never had a child, and very likely never really loved a man. The love I had for George seems now so unreal that I feel completely fickle; although I believe I am generally pretty constant. I could not bear to think I am not loyal in my feelings. I have come to be so sure the George I was fond of never existed, though, that I can hardly have the same feelings I had before.

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This is the sort of subject, however, which is sure to end in a dash if I go on with it, so it seems wiser to stop before such a catastrophe is reached.

September 19. To-day is Father's birthday. It is always a day which moves me a good deal. I can never be reminded of an anniversary like this without finding my head full of a swarm of thoughts. I cannot think of the beginning or the ending of Father's life without looking at it as a whole, and reckoning up somehow the effect of his having lived. This is the real question, I suppose, in regard to any life. He was to me so wonderful, he was so great a man, that I have almost to reason with myself to appreciate why the world in general does not better remember him. His life was and is so much to me that I find it hard to realize how narrow is the circle which ever even knew of him at all. His books and his decisions keep his name still in the memory of lawyers somewhat, and those who knew him will not easily forget; but after all this is so little in comparison to the fame he might have had.

How persistent is an old thought! I should have supposed this idea might have died long ago. Father himself answered it when he told Cousin Mehitable he was entirely satisfied if his part in the progress of humanity was conducted decently and in order; he was not concerned whether anybody knew he lived or did not know. "The thing is that I live as well as I can," he said, "and not that it should be known about. I shan't mind, Cousin Mehitable, whether anybody takes the trouble to praise me after I am dead, but I do think it may make some tiny difference to the race that I did my level best while I was alive."

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I can see him now as he stood by the library fire saying this, with his little half whimsical smile, and I remember thinking as he spoke how perfectly he lived up to his theories. Certainly the best thing a man can leave to his children is a memory like that which I have of Father: a memory half love and half respect.

Father's feeling about the part of the individual in the general scheme of things was like certain oriental doctrines I have read since his death; and I suppose he may have been influenced by the writings of the East. He seemed to feel that he was part of a process, and that the lives of those who sometime would come after him might be made easier and happier if he lived well and wisely. I am sure he was right. I do not know how or where or when the accounts of life are settled, or whether it makes any difference to the individual as an individual or not; but I am sure what we do is of consequence, and I wish my life might be as fine, as strong, as noble as was Father's.

September 20. Aunt Naomi came in this forenoon with her catlike step, and seated herself by the south window in the sunshine. The only eye which could be seen clearly was bright with intention, and it was evident at a glance that she had things to say. She was rather deliberate in coming at it. Aunt Naomi is an artist in gossip, and never spoils the effect of what she has to tell by failing to arouse expectation and interest. She leads one on and stirs up curiosity before she tells her news, and with so much cleverness does she manage, that a very tiny bit of gossip will seem a good deal when she has set it forth. It is a pleasure to see anything well done, even gossip; so Aunt Naomi is an unflinching source of amusement to me,—which is perhaps not to my credit.

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She made the usual remarks about the weather and asked after baby; she observed that from the way Miss Charlotte breathed when she was asleep in prayer-meeting last night she was afraid she had taken cold; she told me Ranny Gargan's divorced wife was at death's door again, and tried to get from me some sort of information of Rosa's feelings toward the possible widower; then she gradually and skillfully approached her real subject.

"It's strange how folks get over being in love when once they are married," she said, hitching her chair into the sunlight, which had moved a little from her while she talked.

I knew by her careless tone, too careless not to be intentional, that something was coming, but I would not help her. I simply smiled vaguely, and asked where the sewing-circle was to be next week. She was not disconcerted by the question, but neatly turned it to her uses.

"At Mrs. Tobey's," she answered. "I hope we shan't see anything unpleasant across the road."

"What do you mean?" I asked, rather startled at this plain allusion to George's house.

"They say George Weston and his wife do rather queer things sometimes."

I asked her at once to say exactly what she meant, and not to play with it. I added that I did not see why George and his wife should be so much discussed.

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"They are talked about because they deserve it," Aunt Naomi returned, evidently delighted by the effect she had produced. "If they will quarrel so all the neighborhood can hear and see, of course people will talk about it. Why shouldn't they? We ought to take some interest in folks, I should think."

I was silent a minute. I wanted to know why she said this, and what George and his wife had been doing to make the village comment, but I would not go on gossiping about them, and I dropped the subject altogether. I made a remark about the Willeyville Fair. Aunt Naomi chuckled audibly, but she did not persist in talking about the Westons.

September 22. Rosa is once more in a state of excitement, and the household is correspondingly stirred. Hannah goes about with her head in the air and an expression of the most lofty scorn on her face; Rosa naturally resents this attitude, both of mind and of body; so I have to act as a sort of buffer between the two.

The fuss is about Ranny again. I begin to feel that I should be justified in having him kidnapped and carried off to some far country, but I hardly see my way clear to measures so extreme. I am astonished to find that Aunt Naomi did not know all the facts about the illness of Ranny's wife; or perhaps she was too much occupied with the affairs of the Westons to tell the whole. Ranny seems this time to have got into real difficulty, and apparently as the result of his latest escapade is likely to pay a visit to the county jail. It seems that while he was pretty far gone in liquor ex-

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Mrs. Ranny came to plead with him to take her back and marry her over again. She having had the greatest difficulty in getting divorced from him in the first place, one would think she might be content to let well enough alone; but she is evidently madly fond of Gargan, who must be a good deal of an Adonis in his own world, so completely does he sway the hearts of the women, even though they know him to be brutal, drunken, disreputable, and generally worthless. On this occasion Ranny behaved worse than usual, and met his former wife's petition by giving her a severe beating with the first thing which came to hand, the thing unluckily being an axe-handle. The poor woman is helpless in her bed, and Ranny has been taken possession of by the constable.

Rosa refuses to see anything in the incident which is in the least to the discredit of Ranny. I was in the garden this morning, and overheard her defending her lover against Hannah's severe censures upon him and upon Rosa for siding with him.

"Why shouldn't he beat his own wife when she deserved it," Rosa demanded, "and she nothing but a hateful, sharp-nosed pig?"

"She isn't his wife," Hannah retorted, apparently not prepared to protest against a doctrine so well established as that a man might beat his spouse.

"Well, she was, anyhow," persisted Rosa; "and that's the same thing. You can't put a man and his wife apart just by going to law. Father O'Rafferty said so."

"Oh, you can't, can't you?" Hannah said with scornful deliberation. "Then you're a nice girl to be talking about marrying Ranny Gargan, if he's got one wife alive already."

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This blow struck too near home, I fear, for Rosa's voice was pretty shrill when she retorted.

"What do you know about marrying anyhow, Hannah Elsmore? Nobody wants to marry you, I'll be bound."

It seemed to be time to interfere, so I went nearer to the window and called to Rosa to come out to baby and me.

"Rosa," I said, when she appeared, flushed and angry, "I wish you wouldn't quarrel with Hannah."

"Then what for's she all the time twitting me about Ranny Gargan?" demanded the girl with angry tears in her eyes. "She don't know what it is to care for a man anyhow, and what for does she be taking me up short when I'm that bad in my mind a'ready I can't stand it? Ranny Gargan's old beast of a wife's got him into a scrape, but that don't make any difference to me. I ain't going back on him."

I established myself on the grass beside the sun-dial, and took baby, sweet and lovely, into my arms.

"I am sorry, Rosa," I said when we were settled comfortably. "I hoped you'd got over thinking about Ranny Gargan. He is certainly not the sort of man to make you happy, even if he were free. He'd never think of sparing you or letting you have your own way."

"Who's wanting to have their own way, Miss Privet?" demanded my astonishing handmaid; and then went on in her usual fashion of striking me breathless when she comes to discourse of love and marriage. "That ain't what women marry for, Miss Privet. They're just made so they marry to be beat and broke and abused if that's what pleases the men; and that's the way they're best off."

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"But, Rosa," I put in, "you always talk as if you'd be meekness itself if a husband wanted to abuse you, but I confess I never thought you would be at all backward about defending yourself."

A droll look came into her rosy Irish face, and a funny little touch of brogue into her voice.

"I'd think if he loved me the way he ought to, Miss Privet, he'd be willing to take a whack himself

now and then, just in the way of love. Besides," she added, "I'd come it round Ranny when it was anything I really wanted. Any man's soft enough if a woman knows how to treat him right."

I abandoned the discussion, as I am always forced to abandon a talk of this sort with Rosa. I suppose in her class the crude doctrine that it is the right of the man to take and the duty of the woman to give still exists with a good deal of simplicity and force, but it almost stops my breath to hear Rosa state it. It is like a bit of primeval savagery suddenly thrust into my face in the midst of nineteenth-century civilization. The worst of it all is, moreover, to feel the habits of old generations buzzing dizzily in my ears until I have a confused sensation as if in principle the absurd vagaries of Rosa might be right. I am tinglingly aware that fibres which belonged to some remote progenitress, some barbaric woman captured by force, perhaps, after the marriage customs of primitive peoples, retain the instinct of submission to man and respond to Rosa's uncivilized theories. I have a sort of second sense that if a man I loved came and asserted a brutal sovereignty over me, it would appeal to these inherited instincts as right and proper, according to the order appointed by nature. I know what nonsense this is. The sense of justice has in the modern woman displaced the old humiliating subjection,—although if one loved a man the subjection would not be humiliating, but just the highest pleasure. I can conceive of a woman's being so fond of a man that to be his abject slave would be so much the happiest thing in the world that to serve him to her very utmost would be so great a delight as almost to be selfishness.

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How Father would have shouted over a page like this! I would not have supposed even Rosa could have spurred me into such an attempt at philosophy, and I hardly believed I knew so many long words. After all I doubt if Rosa and I are so far apart in our instincts; only she has the coolness to put them into words I only imitate, and cannot pretend to rival.

September 24. It is delightful to see how really fond Tom is becoming of baby. I came home from a walk this afternoon, and there in the parlor was Tom down on the floor with Tomine, shaking his head at her like a bear, and making her laugh. Rosa beamed from the background with the most complete approval. He sprang up when I appeared, but I ignored all the strangeness, and only said how glad I was to see him. I think he liked my taking as a matter of course his being there, and very likely this was what made him confess he had been in two or three times to play with baby when he knew that I was not at home.

"I saw you going down the other side of the river," he said, "so I came to keep Thomasine from being lonesome."

I returned that it was not very complimentary to tell me he had tried to avoid me, but that I appreciated how much more fascinating baby was than I, so he need not apologize; and the end of it was that after this nonsense had broken the ice we sat on the floor together to entertain her ladyship. She was pleased to be in the most sunny mood imaginable, and responded to our fooling most graciously. With truly feminine preference, however, she bestowed most of her attention upon the man. She is a more entrancing creature every day; and she certainly has her father's eyes. I compared them this afternoon.

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September 26. The reading-room seems really at last to be coming into being. I have found a place for it. It is a kind of square box over the post-office, but with furniture and pictures it can be made rather attractive. I have made out a list of periodicals, and sent to Boston for framed photographs for the walls. To-day I went to talk over the plan with Deacon Richards.

The mill was fragrant with its sweet mealy smell, and Deacon Daniel was as dusty as a moth-miller. As I stood in the doorway waiting for him to come down from the wheel, where he was doing something or other about the hopper, I fell to humming the old rhyme we sang as children when we went by the mill:—

"Miller, miller, musty-poll,
How many bags of wheat you stole?'
'One of wheat and one of rye.'
'You naughty miller, you must die!'"

"That isn't very polite," Deacon Daniel said, coming up behind me before I knew he had left his perch.

I turned and greeted him smilingly, repeating the last line:—

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"You naughty miller, you must die!"

"I suppose I must," he assented; "but it won't be for stealing, Miss Ruth."

I love the old mill, with its great beams and its continual sound of dashing water and the chirruping of the millstones grinding away at the corn like an insatiate monster that can never have enough. The smell of the meal, too, is so pleasant, and even the abundant dust is so clean and fresh it seems to belong there. The mellow light through the dim windows and the shadows hiding in every corner have always from childhood appealed to my imagination. I find there always a soothing and serene mood.

"I want your advice, Deacon Richards," I said.

"So as not to follow it?" he demanded. "That's what women generally want of advice."

I assured him I was ready to follow his advice if it were good, and so we talked about the reading-room. I told him it seemed to me that if it was to go on properly it should have a head; somebody

to manage it and be responsible for the way in which it was carried on.

"But you will do that yourself," he said.

I answered that it must be a man, for it was nonsense to think of a woman's running a reading-room for men. He looked at me for a moment with his droll grin, and then he was pleased to say that for a woman I had a remarkable amount of common sense. I thanked him for the compliment to my sex, and then asked if he would undertake the business, and promise not to freeze the readers out the way he did the prayer-meetings.

"I'm not the sort of person you want," he answered, chuckling at my allusion to the fire question. [Pg 256]
"I've sense enough to know that without being a woman. Why don't you ask Tom Webbe?"

I confessed that I had thought of Tom, but—And there I stuck, for I could hardly tell the deacon how I thought gossip had already said enough about Tom and myself without my giving folk any more to talk about.

"I don't know what that 'but' means," he remarked, grinning more than ever, as if he did know perfectly. "Anyway, there's nobody in town who could do it so well. All the men and boys like him, and he has a level head. He's the only one of the young fellows that's been to college, and he ought to know more about books than any of the rest of them. Besides, he needs something to take up his mind."

I felt the deacon was right, and I began to ask myself whether my personal feelings should be allowed to count in such a matter. Still I could hardly make up my mind to take the responsibility of putting Tom at the head of a reading-room I had started. If nothing else were to be considered I did not want my connection with the plan to be too prominent, and gossip about Tom would be just the thing to keep my name always to the front.

"I hope you are sensible enough to do one thing," Deacon Daniel went on, "and that is to have everybody who uses the room pay for it. It needn't be much, but they'll respect it and themselves more if they pay something, and it'll give them the right to grumble."

"I don't want them to grumble," I returned.

"Oh, nobody cares much for anything he can't grumble about," was his reply, with a laugh; "but [Pg 257]
really they are twice as likely to grumble if you pay for everything than if they help. That's the way we are made."

I told him that he was an old cynic, but I saw in a moment he was right about the value that would be put on a thing which was paid for. If the men feel they are helping to support the reading-room they will take a good deal more interest in it.

"Tom Webbe will manage them all right," the deacon declared. "He'll let them grumble just enough, and make them so contented they'll think they're having their own way while he's going ahead just the way he thinks best. He's the only man for the place."

Perhaps he is; and indeed the more I think about it, the more I see the deacon is right. It would certainly be good for Tom, and that is a good deal. I wonder what I ought to do?

What Deacon Daniel said about the way in which Tom would manage the men has been running through my mind. I wonder that I, who have known Tom so well, never thought before of how great his power is to control people. It showed itself when he was a boy; and if he had carried out his plan to study law it would have been—I do wonder if Tom is working by himself, and if that is the reason he borrowed those law-books?

September 27. Old lady Andrews has solved the question for me. I am so glad I thought to go to her for advice. She suggests that we have a committee, and make Deacon Richards chairman. Then Tom can be put on, and really do the work.

"It wouldn't do at all for you to put Tom Webbe at the head alone, my dear," she said. "It would [Pg 258]
make talk, and Aunt Naomi would have you married to him a dozen times before the week was over; but this way it will be all right."

I asked her if committees did not usually have three on them, and she answered that Deacon Richards would know.

"I belong to an old-fashioned generation, my dear, and I never can feel that it's quite respectable for a woman to know about committees and that sort of thing. I'm sure in my day it wouldn't have been thought well-bred. But Deacon Daniel will know. He's always on committees at church conferences and councils."

Once more I visited the mill, and told Deacon Daniel of old lady Andrews' suggestion. He agreed at once, and declared the plan was better than that of having one man at the head.

"It'll be much the same thing as far as managing the reading-room goes," he observed, stroking his chin thoughtfully, "but somehow folks like committees, and they generally think they have a better show if three or four men are running things than if there's only one. Of course one man always does manage, but a committee's more popular."

Deacon Daniel was very sure that the committee should have three on it, and when I asked who should be the other man he said:—

"If it were anybody else but you, Miss Ruth, I shouldn't think it was any use to say it, but you'll see what I mean. I think Cy Turner is the man for the third place."

"The blacksmith?" I asked, a good deal surprised. "I'm afraid I don't see what you mean. I don't [Pg 259]

even know him."

The deacon grinned down on me from his height, and made me a characteristic retort.

"He doesn't look as if he'd kept awake nights on that account."

The blacksmith's jolly round face and twinkling eyes as I had seen him on the street now and then came up before my mind, and I felt the full force of the deacon's irony. I told him that he was impertinent, and asked why he named Mr. Turner.

"Because," he answered, seriously, "what you want is for the folks that haven't any books at home and don't have a chance to read to get interested in the reading-room. If Cy Turner takes hold of it, he'll do more than anybody else in town could do to make it go among just those folks. He's shrewd and good-natured, and everybody that knows him likes him. He'll have all the boys in the reading-room if he has to take them there by the collar, and if he does they'll think it's fine."

I could see at once the wisdom of the deacon's idea. I asked how Tom and the blacksmith would work together, and was assured that Mr. Turner has a most unlimited admiration for Tom, so that the two would agree perfectly. I made up my mind on the spot, and decided to go at once to interview the blacksmith, from whose shop I could hear above the whirring of the mill the blows on the anvil. I had no time on the little way from the mill to the blacksmith shop to consider what I should say to Mr. Turner, and I passed the time in hoping there would be no men about. It made no difference; he was so straightforward and simple, so kindly and human, that I felt at ease with him from the first. He was luckily alone, so I walked in boldly as if I were in the habit of visiting the forge every day of my life. He looked surprised to see me, but not in the least disconcerted. The self-respecting coolness of a New England workingman is something most admirable. Mr. Turner was smutty and dressed in dirty clothes, leather apron and all, but his manners were as good as those of the best gentleman in the land. There is something noble in a country where a common workingman will meet you with no servility and without any self-consciousness. I liked Mr. Turner from the moment I saw his face and heard his voice, rich and cheery, and I was won by his merry eyes, which had all the time a twinkling suggestion of a smile ready to break out on the slightest occasion. I went straight to my errand, and nothing could have been better than the way in which he received my proposition. He had no false modesty, and no over-assurance. He evidently knew that he could do what was required, he was undisguisedly pleased to be asked, and he was troubled by no doubts about social proprieties or improprieties.

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"I suppose Mr. Webbe will do most of what work there is to do," I said, "but he will be an easy person to work with on a committee, I should think."

"Yes, marm, he will," the blacksmith responded heartily. "There ain't a squarer fellow alive than Tom Webbe. Tom's been a bit wild, perhaps; but he's an awful good fellow just the same, if you know him. I'm pleased to be on the committee with him, Miss Privet; and I'll do my best. I think the boys'll do about as I want 'em to."

I had only to see Mr. Turner to understand why Deacon Daniel had chosen him. I think the committee—but "oh, good gracious mercy me," as the old woman in the story says, it just occurs to me that I have not said a word to Tom about the whole business!

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September 28. It is strange that my only difficulty in arranging about the reading-room should come from Tom, on whom I had counted as a matter of course; but it is fortunate that I had assumed he would serve, for this is what made him consent. When I saw him to-day, and told him what I had done, he at first said he could not possibly have anything to do with the whole matter.

"I thank you, Ruth," he said, "but don't you see I had better not give folks any occasion to think of me at all just now? The gossips need only to be reminded of my being alive, and they will begin all over again."

"Tom," I asked him desperately, "are you never going to get over this bitter feeling? I can't bear to have you go on thinking that everybody is talking about you."

"I don't blame them for talking," was his answer.

I assured him he would have been pleased if he could have heard the way in which Mr. Turner spoke of him yesterday.

"Oh, Cy! he is too good-hearted to fling at anybody."

"But Deacon Richards was just as friendly," I insisted.

"Yes, he would be. It isn't the men, Ruth; they are ready to give a fellow a chance; but the women"—

He did not seem to know how to finish his sentence, and I reminded him that I too was a woman.

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"Oh, you," responded Tom, "you're an angel. You might almost be a man."

I laughed at him for putting men above angels, and so by making him smile, by coaxing him, and appealing to his friendliness to back me up now I had committed myself, I prevailed upon him to serve. I am sure it will be good for the reading-room, and I am equally sure it will be good for Tom. Why in the world this victory should have left me a little inclined to be blue, I do not understand.

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OCTOBER

October 5. I went this afternoon to walk on the Rim road. The day was beyond words in its beauty,—crisp, and clear, and rich with all that vitality which nature seems so full of in autumn, as if it were filling itself with life to withstand the long strain of the winter. The leaves were splendid in their color, and shone against the sky as if they were full of happiness. Perhaps it was the day that made it possible for me to see the red house without a pang, but I think it was the sense of baby at home, well and happy, and learning, unconsciously of course, to love me with every day that goes over her small head. A thin thread of smoke trickled up from the chimney, and I thought I ought to go in to see if the old grandmother was there. I wonder if it is right not to try if the blessed granddaughter might not soften her old heart, battered and begrimed if it be. Nobody answered my knock, however, and so I did not see Mrs. Brownrig, for which I was selfishly glad. She has not been very gracious when I have sent her things, so I was not, I confess, especially anxious for an interview. I went away smiling to myself over a saying of Father's: "There is nothing so pleasant as a disagreeable duty conscientiously escaped."

October 6. I really know something which has escaped the acuteness of Aunt Naomi, and I feel greatly puffed up in consequence. Deacon Richards has been here this evening, and as it was rather cool I had a brisk, cheery fire.

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"I do like to be warm," he said, stretching out his hand luxuriously to the blaze. "I never could understand why I feel the cold so. I should think it was age, if it hadn't always been so from the time I was a boy."

I thought of the cold vestry, and smiled to myself as I wondered if Deacon Daniel had ascetic ideas of self-torture.

"Then I should think you would be fond of big fires," I observed.

"I am," he responded, "only they make me sleepy. I'm like a kitten; I go to sleep when I get warmed through."

I laughed outright, and when he asked me what I was laughing at I told him it was partly at the idea of his being like a kitten, and partly because I had found him out.

"It is all very well for you to keep the vestry as cold as a barn so that you can keep awake," I added; "but don't you think it is unfair to the rest of the congregation to freeze them too?"

He looked rather disconcerted a moment, and then grinned, though sheepishly.

"Heat makes other people sleepy too," he said defensively.

I chaffed him a little, and told him I should send a couple of loads of wood to the vestry, and that if it were necessary I would give him a bottle of smelling-salts to keep him awake, but certainly the room must be warmer. I declared I would not have dear old lady Andrews exposed to the danger of pneumonia, even if he was like a kitten. It is really quite as touching as it is absurd to think of his sitting in prayer-meeting shivering and uncomfortable because he feels it his duty to keep awake. In biblical times dancing before the Lord was a legitimate form of worship; it is almost a pity that sleeping before the Lord cannot be put among proper religious observances. Dear Miss Charlotte always sleeps—devoutly, I am sure—at every prayer-meeting, and then comes out declaring it has been a beautiful meeting. I have no doubt she has been spiritually refreshed, even if she has nodded. Father used to say that no religion could be permanent until men were able to give their deity a sense of humor; and I do think a supreme being which could not see the humorous side of Deacon Richards' pathetic mortification of the flesh in his frosty vestry could hardly have the qualifications necessary to manage the universe properly.

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October 12. Ranny Gargan has settled the question of marriage for the present at least. He has remarried his first wife to prevent her from bringing suit against him. As Miss Charlotte rather boldly said, he has legitimized the beating by marrying the woman.

Rosa takes the matter coolly. She says she is glad to have things so she can't think of Ranny, for now she can take Dennis, and not bother any more about it.

"It's a comfort to any woman not to have to decide what man she'll marry," she remarked with her amazing philosophy.

"Then you'd like to have somebody arrange a marriage for you, Rosa," I said, rather for the sake of saying something.

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"Arrange, is it?" she cried, bristling up suddenly. "What for would I have somebody making my marriage? I'd like to see anybody that would dare!"

The moral of which seems to be that if Rosa is so much of a philosopher that she sometimes seems to me to be talking scraps out of old heathen sages, she is yet only a woman.

October 20. Aunt Naomi had about her when she came stealthily in this afternoon an air of excitement so evident as almost to be contagious. I could see by the very hurry of her sliding step and the extra tightness of her veil that something had stirred her greatly.

"What is it, Aunt Naomi?" I asked at once. "You fairly bristle with news. What's happened?"

She smiled and gave a little cluck, but my salutation made her instantly moderate her

movements. She sat down with a composed and self-contained air, and only by the unusually vigorous swinging of her foot showed that she was not as serene as on ordinary occasions.

"Who said anything had happened?" she demanded.

I returned that she showed it by her looks.

"Something is always happening, I suppose."

I know Aunt Naomi well enough to understand that the quickest way of coming at her tidings was to pretend indifference, so I asked no more questions, but made a careless remark about the weather.

"What made you think anything had happened?" persisted she.

"It was simply an idea that came into my head," was my reply. "I hope Deacon Daniel keeps the vestry warm in these days." [Pg 267]

Aunt Naomi was not proof against this parade of indifference, and in a moment she broke out with her story.

"Well," she declared, "Tom Webbe seems bound to be talked about."

"Tom Webbe!" I echoed. "What is it now?"

I confess my heart sank with the fear that he had become desperate with the pressure of weary days, and had somehow defied all the narrow conventionalities which hem him in here in this little town.

"It's the Brownrig woman," Aunt Naomi announced. "If you get mixed up with that sort of creatures there's no knowing what you'll come to."

"But what about her?" I demanded so eagerly that I became suddenly conscious of the keen curiosity which my manner brought into her glance. "What has she been doing?" I went on, trying to be cool.

It was only by much questioning that I got the story. Had it not been for my real interest in Tom I would not have bothered so much, but as it was she had me at her mercy, and knew it. What happened, so far as I can make out, is this: The Brownrig woman has been worse than ever since Julia's death. She has been drunk in the streets more than once, and I am afraid the help she has had from Tom and others has only led her to greater excesses. Once Deacon Richards came upon her lying in the ditch beside the road, and she has made trouble more than once, besides disturbing the prayer-meeting.

Last evening Tom came upon a mob of men and boys down by the Flatiron Wharf, and in the midst of them was Mrs. Brownrig, singing and howling. They were baiting her, and saying things to provoke her to more outrageous profanity. [Pg 268]

"They do say," observed Aunt Naomi with what seemed to me, I am ashamed to say, an unholy relish, "her swearing was something awful. John Deland told me he never heard anything like it. He said no man could begin to come up to it."

"John Deland, that owns the smoke-houses?" I put in. "What was he doing there? I always thought he was a decent man."

"So he is. He says," she returned with her drollest smile, "he was just passing by and couldn't help hearing. I dare say you couldn't have helped hearing if you'd been passing by."

"I should have passed pretty quickly then; but what did Tom Webbe do?"

She went on to say that Tom had come upon this disgraceful scene, and found the crowd made up of all the lowest fellows in town. The men were shouting with laughter, and the old woman was shrieking with rage and intoxication.

"John Deland says as soon as Tom saw what was going on and who the woman was, he broke through the crowd, and took her by the arm, and told her to come home. She cursed him, and said she wouldn't go; and then she cried, and they had a dreadful time. Then somebody in the crowd—John says he thinks it was one of the Bagley boys that burnt Micah Sprague's barn. You remember about that, don't you? They live somewhere down beyond the old shipyard"—

"I remember that the Spragues' barn was burned," answered I; "but what did the Bagley boy do last night?"

"He called out to Tom Webbe to get out of the way, and not spoil the fun. Then Tom turned on the crowd, and I guess he gave it to them hot and heavy." [Pg 269]

"I'm sure I hope he did!" I said fervently.

"He said he thought they might be in better business than tormenting an old drunken woman like that, and called them cowards to their faces. They got mad, and wanted to know what business it was of his, anyway. Then he blazed out again, and said"—

I do not know whether the pause Aunt Naomi made was intentionally designed to rouse me still further, or whether she hesitated unconsciously; but I was too excited to care.

"What did he say?" I asked breathlessly.

"He told them she was his mother-in-law."

"Tom Webbe said that? To that crowd?" cried I, and I felt the tears spring into my eyes. It was chiefly excitement, of course, but the pluck of it and the hurt to Tom came over me in a flash.

"What did they do?"

"They just muttered, and got out of the way. John Deland said it wasn't two minutes before Tom was left alone with the old woman, and then he took her home. It's a pity she wouldn't drink herself to death."

"I think it is, Aunt Naomi," was my answer; though I wished to add that the sentiment was rather a queer one to come from anybody who believes as she does.

I do not know what else Aunt Naomi said. Indeed when she had told her tale she seemed in something of a hurry to leave, and I suspect her of going on to repeat it somewhere else. Tom's sin has left a trail of consequences behind it which he could never have dreamed of. I cannot tell whether I pity him more for this or honor him for the courage with which he stood up. Poor Tom!

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October 24. An odd thing has happened to the Westons. A man came in the storm last night and dropped insensible on the doorstep. He might have lain there all night, and very likely would have died before morning, but George, when he started for bed, chanced to open the door to look at the weather. He found the tramp wet and covered with sleet, and at first thought that he was either dead or drunk. When he had got him in and thawed out by the kitchen fire, the man proved to be ill. George sent for Dr. Wentworth, and had a bed made up in the shed-chamber, but when he told me this morning he said it seemed rather doubtful if the tramp could live.

"What did Mrs. Weston say?" I asked.

I do not know how I came to ask such a question, and I meant nothing by it. George, however, stiffened in a moment as if he suspected me of something unkind.

"Mrs. Weston didn't like my taking him into the house," he said. "She thought I ought to have sent him off to the poor-farm."

"You could hardly do that last night," I returned, wondering how I could have offended him. "I am afraid the tramp's looks set her against him."

"She hasn't seen him. She'd gone to bed before I found him last night, and this morning he is pretty sick. Dr. Wentworth says he can't be moved now. He's in a high fever, and keeps talking all the time."

It is so very seldom we hear of tramps in Tuskamuck that it is strange to have one appear like this, and it is odd he chose George's house to tumble down at, as it is a little out of the road. Tramps have a law of their own, however, and never do what one would expect of them. I hope his illness will not be serious. I offered to do what I could, but George said they could take care of the man for the present. Then he hesitated, and flushed a little as if confused.

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"I am sorry," he said, "it should happen just now, for Gertrude ought not to be troubled when—when she isn't well."

It is a pity, and I hope no harm will come of it, but if Mrs. Weston has not seen the tramp and has not been startled, I do not see why any should.

October 26. If I could be superstitious, I think I should be now; but of course the whole thing is nonsense. People are talking—in forty-eight hours! How gossip does spring and spread!—as if there were something peculiar about that tramp. There is nothing definite to say except that he came to George's house, which is a little off from the main street, and that in his delirium he keeps calling for some person he says he knows is there, and he will surely find, no matter how she hides. The idea of the sick in a delirium is always painful, and the talk about this man makes it doubly so. I am afraid the fact that Mrs. Weston's servants do not like her has something to do with the whispers in the air. Dislike will create suspicion on the slightest excuse, and there can be nothing to connect her with this dying tramp. What could there be? I wish Aunt Naomi would not repeat such unpleasant things.

October 27. I have been with Tom hanging the pictures in the new reading-room, and everything is ready for the opening when the magazines and the books come. Next Wednesday is the first of the month, and then we will have it opened. Tom has already a list of over twenty men and boys who have joined, and lame Peter Tobey is to be janitor. It is delightful to see how proud and pleased he is. He can help his mother now, and the poor boy was pathetic in the way he spoke of that. He only mentioned it, but his tone touched me to the quick.

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Tom and I had a delightful afternoon, hanging pictures, arranging the furniture, and seeing that everything was right. Mr. Turner and Deacon Richards came in just as we finished, and the three men were so simple in their interest, and so hearty about it, that I feel as if everything was going forward in just the right spirit. Mr. Turner saw where a bracket was needed for one of the lamps, and said at once he would make one to-morrow. It was charming to see how pleased he was to find there was something he could furnish, and which nobody else at hand could have supplied. We are always pleased to find we are not only needed, but we are needed in some particular way which marks our personal fitness for the thing to be done. Deacon Daniel brought a big braided rug that an old woman at the Rim had made by his orders. He was in good spirits because he had helped the old woman and the reading-room at the same time. Tom was happy because he was at work, and in an atmosphere that was friendly; and I was happy because I could not help it. And so when we locked the room, and came home in the early twilight, I felt at peace with all the world.

Tom came in and had a frolic with Tomine, and when he went he held my hand a moment, looking into my face as if to impress me with what he said.

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"Thank you, Ruth," were the words; "I think you'll succeed in making me human again. Good-night."

If I am helping him to be reconciled with the world and himself I am more glad than I can tell.

October 28. The earthquake always finds us unprepared, and to-night it has come. I feel dazed and queer, as if life had been shaken to its foundations, and as if it were trembling about me.

George came in suddenly—My hand trembles so that I am writing like an old woman. If the chief object of keeping a journal is to help myself to be sane and rational, I must have better control over my nerves.

About seven o'clock, as I sat sewing, I heard Hannah open the front door to somebody. I half expected a deacon, as it generally is a deacon in the evening, but the door opened, and George came rushing in. His hurry and his excited manner made me see at once that something unusual had happened. His face was pale, his eyes wild, and somehow his whole air was terrifying.

"What is the matter?" I cried, jumping up to meet him.

He tried to speak, but only gave a sort of choking gasp.

"Has anything happened?" I asked him. "Your wife"—

"I haven't any wife," he interrupted.

The shock was terrible, for I thought at once she must be dead, and I made some sort of a horrified exclamation. Then we stared at each other a minute. I supposed something had happened to her, and that he had from the force of old habit come to me in hope of comfort.

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"I never had a wife," he went on, almost angrily, and as if I had disputed him.

I do not know what we said then or how we said it. It was a long time before I could understand, and even now it seems like a bad dream. Somehow he made me understand that the tramp who was sick at their house had kept calling out in his delirium for Gertrude and declaring he had found her, that she need not hide, for he would surely find her wherever she hid. The servants talked of it, and George knew it a day or two ago. I do not know whether he suspected anything or not. Very likely he could hardly tell himself. Finally one of the girls told Mrs. Weston, and she acted very strangely. She wanted to have a description of the man, and at last she insisted on going herself to peep at him, to see what he was like. George happened to come home just at the time Mrs. Weston had crept up to the door of the shed-chamber. Some exclamation of hers when she saw her husband roused the sick man, who sat up in bed and screamed that he knew his wife's voice, and he would see her. George caught her by the arm, pushed the door wide open with his foot, and led her into the chamber. She held back, and cried out, and the tramp, half wild with delirium, sprang out of bed, shouting to George: "Take your hands off of my wife!"

George declares that even then he should not have believed the tramp was really speaking the truth if Gertrude hadn't confirmed it. He thought the man was out of his head, and the worst of his suspicion was that the stranger had known Mrs. Weston somewhere. As soon as the tramp spoke, however, she fell down on her knees and caught George's hand, crying over and over: "I thought he was dead! I thought he was dead!" It must have been a fearful thing for both of them; and then Gertrude fainted dead away at George's feet. The girl who had been taking care of the tramp was out of the room at the moment, but she heard George calling, and came in time to take her mistress away; while George got the tramp back to bed, and soothed him into some sort of quiet. Then he rushed over here. I urged him to go back at once, telling him his wife would want him, and that it might after all be a mistake.

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"I don't want ever to set eyes on her again," he declared doggedly. "She's cheated me. She told me I was the first man she ever cared for, and I never had a hint she'd been married. She made a fool of me, but thank God I'm out of that mess."

"What do you mean?" I asked him. "You are talking about your wife."

"She isn't my wife, I tell you," persisted he. "I'll never live with her again."

He must have seen how he shocked me, and at last he was persuaded to go home. I know I must see him to-morrow, and I have a cowardly desire to run away. I have a hateful feeling of repulsion against him, but that is something to be overcome. At any rate both he and his poor wife need a friend if they ever did, and I must do the best I can.

I cannot wonder George should be deeply hurt by finding that Mrs. Weston had a husband before and did not tell him. She can hardly have loved him or she must have been honest with him. It may have been through her love and fear of losing him that she did not dare to tell; though from what I have seen of her I haven't thought her much given to sentiment. How dreadful it must be to live a life resting on concealment. I have very likely been uncharitable in judging her, for she must always have been uneasy and of course could not be her true self.

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October 29. Some rumor of the truth has flown about the town, as I was sure when I saw Aunt Naomi coming up the walk this forenoon. Sometimes I think she sees written on walls and fences the things which have happened or been said in the houses which they surround. She has almost a second sight; and if I wished to do anything secret I would not venture to be in the same county with her.

She seated herself comfortably in a patch of sunshine, and looked with the greatest interest at the mahonia in bloom on the flower-stand by the south window. She spoke of the weather and of Peter's silliness, told me where the sewing-circle was to be next week, and approached the real

object of her call with the deliberation of a cat who is creeping up behind a mouse. When she did speak, she startled me.

"I suppose you know that tramp over to the Westons' died this morning," she remarked, so carelessly it might have seemed an accident if her eye had not fairly gleamed with eagerness.

"Died!" I echoed.

"Yes, he's dead," she went on. "He had some sort of excitement yesterday, they say, and it seems to have been the end of him."

She watched me as if to see whether I would give any sign of knowing more of the matter than she did, but for once I hope I baffled her penetration. I made some ordinary comment, which could not have told her much. [Pg 277]

"It's very queer a tramp should go to that particular house to die," observed Aunt Naomi, as if she were stating an abstract truth in which she had no especial interest.

I asked what there was especially odd about it.

"Well, for one thing," she answered, "he asked the way there particularly."

I inquired how she knew.

"Al Demmons met him on the Rim road," she continued, not choosing, apparently, to answer my question directly, "and this man wanted to know where a man named Weston lived who'd married a woman from the West called something Al Demmons couldn't remember. Al Demmons said that George Weston was the only Weston in town, and that he had married a girl named West. Then the man said something about 'that used to be her name.' It's all pretty queer, I think."

To this I did not respond. I would not get into a discussion which would give Aunt Naomi more material for talk. After a moment of silence, she said:—

"Well, the man's dead now, and I suppose that's the end of him. I don't suppose Mrs. Weston's likely to tell much about him."

"Aunt Naomi," I returned, feeling that even if all the traditions of respect for my elders were broken I must speak, "doesn't it seem to you harm might come of talking about this tramp as if he were some mysterious person connected with Mrs. Weston's life before she came to Tuskamuck? It isn't strange that somebody should have known her, and when once a tramp has had help from a person he hangs on." [Pg 278]

She regarded me with a shrewd look.

"You wouldn't take up cudgels for her that way if you didn't know something," she observed.

After that there was nothing for me to say. I simply dropped the subject, and refused to talk about the affairs of the Westons at all. I am so sorry, however, that gossip has got hold of a suspicion. It was to be expected, I suppose, and indeed it has been in the air ever since the man came. I am sorry for the Westons.

October 30. After the earthquake a fire,—I wonder whether after the fire will come the still, small voice! It is curious that out of all this excitement the feeling of which I am most conscious after my dismay and my pity is one of irritation. I am ashamed to find in my thought so much anger against George. He had perhaps a right to think as he did about my affection for him, though it is inconceivable any gentleman should say the things he said to me last night. Even if he were crazy enough to suppose I could still love him, how could he forget his wife; how could he be glad of an excuse to be freed from her; how could he forget the little child that is coming? Oh, I am like Jonah when he was so sure he did well to be angry! I am convinced I can have no just perception of character at all, for this George Weston is showing himself so weak, so ungenerous, so cruel, that he has either been changed vitally or I did not really know him. I was utterly deceived in him. No; I will not believe that. We have all of us possibilities in different directions. I wish I could remember the passage where Browning says a man has two sides, one for the world and one to show a woman when he loves her. Perhaps one side is as true as the other; and what I knew was a possible George, I am sure. [Pg 279]

He came in yesterday afternoon with a look of hard determination. He greeted me almost curtly, and added in the same breath:—

"The man is dead. She's confessed it all. He was her husband, and she was never my wife legally at all. She says she thought he was dead."

"Then there's only one thing to do," I answered. "You can get Mr. Saychase to marry you to-day. Of course it can be arranged if you tell him how the mistake arose, and he won't speak of it."

He laughed sneeringly.

"I haven't any intention of marrying her," he said.

"No intention of marrying her?" I repeated, not understanding him. "If the first ceremony wasn't legal, another is necessary, of course."

"She cheated me," he declared, his manner becoming more excited. "Do you suppose after that I'd have her for my wife? Besides, you don't see. She was another man's wife when she came to live with me, and"—

I stared at him without speaking, and he began to look confused.

"No man wants to marry a woman that's been living with him," he blurted out defiantly. "I

suppose that isn't a nice thing to say to you, but any man would understand."

I was silent at first, in mere amazement and indignation. The thing seemed so monstrous, so indelicate, so cruel to the woman. She had deceived him and hidden the fact that she had been married, but there was no justice in this horrible way of looking at it, as if her ignorance had been a crime. I could hardly believe he realized what he was saying. Before I could think what to say, he went on.

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"Very likely you think I'm hard, Ruth; and perhaps I shouldn't feel so if it hadn't come about through her own fault. If she'd told me the truth"—

"George!" I burst out. "You don't know what you are saying! You didn't take her as your wife for a week or a month, but for all her life."

"She never was my wife," he persisted stubbornly.

I looked at him with a feeling of despair,—not unmixed, I must confess, with anger. Most of all, however, I wanted to reach him; to make him see things as they were; and I wanted to save the poor woman. I leaned forward, and laid my fingers on his arm. My eyes were smarting, but I would not cry.

"But if there were no question of her at all," I pleaded, "you must do what is right for your own sake. You have made her pledges, and you can't in common honesty give them up."

"She set me free from all that when she lied to me. I made pledges to a girl, not to another man's wife."

"But she didn't know. She thought she was free to marry you. She believed she was honestly your wife."

"She never was, she never was."

He repeated it stubbornly as if the fact settled everything.

"She was!" I broke out hotly. "She was your wife; and she is your wife! When a man and a woman honestly love each other and marry without knowing of any reason why they may not, I say they are man and wife, no matter what the law is."

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"Suppose the husband had lived?" he demanded, with a hateful smile. "The law really settles it."

"Do you believe that?" I asked him. "Or do you only wish to believe it?"

He looked at me half angrily, and the blood sprang into his cheeks. Then he took a step forward.

"She came between us!" he said, lowering his voice, but speaking with a new fierceness.

I felt as if he had struck me, and I shrank back. Then I straightened up, and looked him in the eye.

"You don't dare to say that aloud," I retorted. "You left me of your own accord. You insult me to come here and say such a thing, and I will not hear it. If you mean to talk in that strain, you may leave the house."

He was naturally a good deal taken aback by this, and perhaps I should not—Yes, I should; I am glad I did say it. He stammered something about begging my pardon.

"Let that go," interrupted I, feeling as if I had endured about all that I could hear. "The question is whether you are not going to be just to your wife."

"You fight mighty well for her," responded George, "but if you knew how she"—

"Never mind," I broke in. "Can't you see I am fighting for you? I am trying to make you see you owe it to yourself to be right in this; and moreover you owe it to me."

"To you?" he asked, with a touch in his voice which should have warned me, but did not, I was so wrapped up in my own view of the situation.

"Yes, to me. I am your oldest friend, don't you see, and you owe it to me not to fail now."

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He sprang forward impulsively, holding out both his hands.

"Ruth," he cried out, "what's the use of all this talk? You know it's you I love, and you I mean to marry."

I know now how a man feels when he strikes another full in the face for insulting him. I felt myself growing hot and then cold again; and I was literally speechless from indignation.

"I went crazy a while for a fool with a pretty face," he went rushing on; "but all that"—

"She is your wife, George Weston!" I broke in. "How dare you talk so to me!"

He was evidently astonished, but he persisted.

"We ought to be honest with each other now, Ruth," he said. "There's too much at stake for us to beat about the bush. I know I've behaved like a fool and a brute. I've hurt you and—and cheated you, and you've had every reason to throw me over like a sick dog; but when you made up the money I'd lost and didn't let Mr. Longworthy suspect, I knew you cared for me just the same!"

"Cared for you!" I blazed out. "Do you think I could have ruined any man's life for that? I love you no more than I love any other man with a wife of his own!"

"That's just it," he broke in eagerly. "Of course I knew you couldn't own you cared while she"—

The egotism of it, the vulgarity of it made me frantic. I was ashamed of myself, I was ashamed of him, and I felt as if nothing would make him see the truth. Never in my whole life have I spoken to any human being as I did to him. I felt like a raging termagant, but he would not see.

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"Stop!" I cried out. "If you had never had a wife, I couldn't care for you. I thought I loved you, and perhaps I did; but all that is over, and over forever."

"You've said you'd love me always," he retorted.

Some outer layer of courtesy seemed to have cracked and fallen from him, and to have left an ugly and vulgar nature bare. The pathos of it came over me. The pity that a man should be capable of so exposing his baser self struck me in the midst of all my indignation. I could not help a feeling, moreover, that he had somehow a right to reproach me with having changed. Thinking of it now in cooler blood I cannot see that since he has left me to marry another woman he has any ground for reproaching me; but somehow at the moment I felt guilty.

"George," I answered, "I thought I was telling the truth; I didn't understand myself."

The change in his face showed me that this way of putting it had done more to convince him than any direct denial. His whole manner altered.

"You don't mean," he pleaded piteously, "you've stopped caring for me?"

I could only tell him that certainly I had stopped caring for him in the old way, and I begged him to go back to his wife. He said little more, and I was at last released from this horrible scene. All night I thought of it miserably or I dreamed of it more miserably still. That poor woman! What can I do for her? I hope I have not lost the power of influencing George, for I might use it to help her.

XI

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NOVEMBER

November 3. How odd are the turns that fate plays us. Sometimes it seems as if an unseen power were amusing himself tangling the threads of human lives just as Peter has been snarling up my worsted for pure fun. Only a power mighty enough to be able to do this must be too great to be so heartless. I suppose, too, that the pity of things is often more in the way in which we look at them than it is in the turn which fate or fortune has given to affairs. The point of view changes values so.

All this is commonplace, of course; but it is certainly curious that George's wife should be in my house, almost turned out of her husband's. When I found her on the steps the other night, wet with the rain, afraid to ring, afraid of me, and terrified at what had come upon her, I had no time to think of the strange perversity of events which had brought this about. She had left George's house, she said, because she was afraid of him and because he had said she was to go as soon as she was able. He had called her a horrible name, she added, and he had told her he was done with her; that she must in the future take care of herself and not expect to live with him. I know, after seeing the cruel self George showed the other day, that he could be terrible, and he would have less restraint with his wife than with me. In the evening, as soon as it was really dark, in the midst of the storm, she came to me. She said she knew how I must hate her, that she had said horrid things about me, but she had nowhere else to go, and she implored I would take her in. She is asleep now in the south chamber. She is ill, and I cannot tell what the effects of her exposure will be. Dr. Wentworth looks grave, but he does not say what he thinks.

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What I ought to do is the question. She has been here two days, and her husband must have found out by this time what I suppose everybody in town knows,—where she is. I cannot fold my hands and let things go. I must send for George, much as I shrink from seeing him. How can I run the risk of having another scene like the one on Friday? and yet I must do something. She can do nothing for herself. It should be a man to talk with George; but I cannot ask Tom. He and George do not like each other, and he could not persuade George to do right to Gertrude. Perhaps Deacon Richards might effect something.

November 5. After all my difficulty in persuading Deacon Richards to interfere, his efforts have come to nothing. George was rude to him, and told him to mind his own affairs. I suppose dear old Deacon Daniel had not much tact.

"I told him he ought to be ashamed of himself," the Deacon said indignantly, "and that he was a disgrace to the town; but it didn't seem to move him any."

"I hope he treated you well," I answered dolefully. "I am sorry I persuaded you to go."

"He was plain enough," Deacon Daniel responded grimly. "He didn't mince words any to speak of."

I must see him myself. I wish I dared consult Tom, but it could not do any good. I must work it out alone; but what can I say?

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November 6. Fortunately, I did not have to send for George. He appeared this afternoon on a singular errand. He wanted to pay me board for his wife until she was well enough to go away. I

assured him he need not be troubled about board, because I was glad to do what I could for his wife; and I could not help adding that I did not keep a lodging-house.

"I'm willing to be as kind to her while she's here as I can," he assured me awkwardly, "and of course I shall not let her go away empty-handed."

"She is not likely to," I retorted, feeling my cheeks get hot. "Dr. Wentworth says she cannot be moved until after the baby comes."

He flushed in his turn, and looked out of the window.

"I don't think, Ruth," was his reply, "we can discuss that. It isn't a pleasant subject."

There are women, I know, who can meet obstinacy with guile. I begin to understand how it may be a woman will stoop to flatter and seem to yield, simply through despair of carrying her end by any other means. The hardness of this man almost bred in me a purpose to try and soften him, to try to bewitch him, somehow to fool and ensnare him for his own good; to hide how I raged inwardly at his injustice and cruelty, and to pretend to be acquiescent until I had accomplished my end. I cannot lie, however, even in acts, and all that sort of thing is beyond my power as well as my will. I realized how hopeless it was for me to try to do anything with him, and I rose.

"Very likely you are right," I said. "It is evidently useless for us to discuss anything. Now I can only say good-by; but I forbid you to come into my house again until you bring Mr. Saychase with you to remarry you to Gertrude."

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He had risen also, and we stood face to face.

"Do you suppose," he asked doggedly, "now I am free I'd consent to marry any woman but you? I'll make you marry me yet, Ruth Privet, for I know perfectly well you love me. Think how long we were engaged."

I remembered the question he asked me when he came back from Franklin after he had seen her: "How long have we been engaged?"

"I shall keep your wife," was all I said, "until she is well and chooses to go. George, I beg of you not to let her baby be born fatherless."

A hateful look came into his eyes.

"I thought you were fond of fatherless babies," he sneered.

"Go," I said, hardly controlling myself, "and don't come here again without Mr. Saychase."

"If I bring him it will be to marry you, Ruth."

Something in me rose up and spoke without my volition. I did not know what I was saying until the words were half said. I crossed the room and rang the bell for Rosa, and as I did it I said:—

"I see I must have a husband to protect me from your insults, and I will marry Tom Webbe."

Before he could answer, Rosa appeared.

"Rosa," I said, and all my calmness had come back, "will you show Mr. Weston to the door. I am not at home to him again until he comes with Mr. Saychase."

She restrained her surprise and amusement better than I expected, but before she had had time to do more than toss her head George had rushed away without ceremony. By this time, I suppose, every man, woman, and child in town knows that I have turned him out of my house.

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November 7. "And after the fire a still, small voice!" I have been saying this over and over to myself; and remembering, not irreverently, that God was in the voice.

I have had a talk with Tom which has moved me more than all the trouble with George. The very fact that George so outraged all my feelings and made me so angry kept me from being touched as I might have been otherwise; but this explanation with Tom has left me shaken and tired out. It is emotion and not physical work that wears humanity to shreds.

Tom came to discuss the reading-room. He is delighted that it has started so well and is going on so swimmingly; and he is full of plans for increasing the interest. I was, I confess, so preoccupied with what I had made up my mind to say to him I could hardly follow what he was saying. I felt as if something were grasping me by the throat. He looked at me strangely, but he went on talking as if he did not notice my uneasiness.

"Tom," I broke out at last, when I could endure it no longer, "did you know that Mrs. Weston is here, very ill?"

"Yes," was all he answered.

"And, Tom," I hurried on, "George won't remarry her."

"Won't remarry her?" he echoed. "The cur!"

"He was here yesterday," I went on desperately, "and he said he is determined to marry me."

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Tom started forward with hot face and clenched fist.

"The blackguard! I wish I'd been here to kick him out of the house! What did you say to him?"

"I told him he had insulted me, and forbade him to come here again without Mr. Saychase to remarry them," I said. Then before Tom's searching look I became so confused he could not help seeing there was more.

"Well?" he demanded.

He was almost peremptory, although he was courteous. Men have such a way in a crisis of instinctively taking the lead that a woman yields to it almost of necessity.

"Tom," I answered, more and more confused, "I must tell you, but I hope you'll understand. I had a frightful time with him. I was ashamed of him and ashamed of myself, and very angry; and when he said he'd make me marry him sometime, I told him"—

"Well?" demanded Tom, his voice much lower than before, but even more compelling.

"I told him," said I, the blood fairly throbbing in my cheeks, "that I should marry you. You've asked me, you know!"

He grew fairly white, but for a moment he did not move. His eyes had a look in them I had never seen, and which made me tremble. It seemed to me that he was fighting down what he wanted to say, and to get control of himself.

"Ruth," he asked me at last, with an odd hoarseness in his voice, "do you want George Weston to marry that woman?"

"Of course I do," I cried, so surprised and relieved that the question was not more personal the tears started to my eyes. "I want it more than anything else in the world." [Pg 290]

Again he was still for a moment, his eyes looking into mine as if he meant to drag out my most secret thought. These silences were too much for me to bear, and I broke this one. I asked him if he were vexed at what I had said to George, and told him the words had seemed to say themselves without any will of mine.

"I could only be sorry at anything you said, Ruth," he returned, "never vexed. I only think it a pity for you to link your name with mine."

I tried to speak, but he went on.

"I've loved you ever since I was old enough to love anything. I've told you that often enough, and I don't think you doubt it. I had you as my ambition all the time I was growing up. I came home from college, and you were engaged, and all the good was taken out of life for me. I've never cared much since what happened. But if I've asked you to love me, Ruth, I never gave you the right to think I'd be base enough to be willing you should marry me without loving me."

Again I tried to speak, though I cannot tell what I wished to say. I only choked and could not get out a word.

"Don't talk about it. I can't stand it," he broke in, his voice husky. "You needn't marry me to make George Weston come up to the mark. I'll take care of that."

I suppose I looked up with a dread of what might happen if he saw George, and of course Tom could not understand that my concern was for him and not for George. He smiled a bitter sort of smile. [Pg 291]

"You needn't be afraid," he said. "I'll treat him tenderly for your sake."

I was too confused to speak, and I could only sit there dazed and silent while he went away. It was not what he was saying that filled me with a tumult till my thoughts seemed beating in my head like wild birds in a net. Suddenly while he was speaking, while his dear, honest eyes full of pain were looking into mine, the still, small voice had spoken, and I knew that I cared for Tom as he cared for me.

November 8. I realize now that from the morning when Tom and I first stood with baby in my arms between us I have felt differently toward him. It was at the moment almost as if I were his wife, and though I never owned it to myself, even in my most secret thought, I have somehow belonged to him ever since. I see now that something very deep within has known and has from time to time tried to tell me; but I put my hands to the ears of my mind. Miss Fleming used to try to teach us things at school about the difference between the consciousness and the will, and other dark mysteries which to me were, and are, and always will be utterly incomprehensible, and I suppose some kind of a consciousness knew what the will wouldn't recognize. That sounds like nonsense now it is on paper, but it seemed extremely wise when I began to write it. No matter; the facts I know well enough. It is wonderful how a woman will hide a thing from herself, a thing she knows really, but keeps from being conscious she knows by refusing to let her thoughts put it into words.

To myself I seem shamefully fickle,—and yet it seems also as if I had never changed at all, but that it was always Tom I have been fond of, even when I fully believed it was George. Of course this is only a weak excuse; but at least I have been fond of Tom as a friend from my childhood. He has always commanded me, too, in a way. He has done what I wished and what I thought best; but I have always known he could be influenced only so far, and that if I wanted what he did not believe in he could be as stubborn as a rock. The hardness of his mother shows itself in him as the stanch foundation for the gentleness he gets from his father. [Pg 292]

Miss Charlotte came in for a moment to-day, and by instinct she knew that something had made me happy. She was full of sympathy for a moment, and then, I think, some suspicion came into her dear old head which she would not have there.

"Ruth, my dear," she said in her rough way, "you look too cheerful for the head of a foundling asylum and a house of refuge. I hope you've made George Weston promise to marry his own wife, —though if I made the laws it wouldn't be necessary for a man to marry a woman more than

once. I've no idea of weddings that have to come round once in so often like house-cleaning."

She was watching me so keenly as she spoke that I smiled in spite of myself.

"No," I told her, "I haven't been able to make him; but Tom Webbe has undertaken to bring him round, so I believe it will be all right."

Whether she understood or not I cannot tell, but from the loving way in which she leaned over and kissed me I suspect she had some inkling of it.

November 9. They are married. Just after dusk to-night I heard the doorbell, and Rosa came in with a queer look on her face to say that Mr. Saychase and Mr. Weston were in the hall. I went out to them at once, and tried to act as if everything had been arranged between us. George was pale and stern. He would not look at me, and I did not exchange a word directly with him while he was in the house, except to say good-evening and good-by. I kept them waiting just a moment or two while I prepared Gertrude, and then I called them upstairs. She behaved very well, acting as if she were a little frightened, but accepting everything without a word. I suspect she is too ill really to care for anything very much. The ceremony was over quickly, and then George went away without noticing his wife further except to say good-night.

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Tom came in for a moment, later, to see that everything was well, and of course I asked him how he had brought George to consent. He smiled rather grimly.

"I did it simply enough," he said. "I tried easy words first, and appealed to him as a gentleman,—though of course I knew it was no use. If such a plea would have done any good, I shouldn't have been there. Then I said he wouldn't be tolerated in Tuskamuck if he didn't make it right for his wife. He said he guessed he could fix that, and if other people would mind their own business he could attend to his. Then I opened the door and called in Cy Turner. I had him waiting outside because I knew Weston would understand he meant business. I asked him to say what we'd agreed; and he told Weston that if he didn't marry the woman before midnight we'd have him ridden out of town on a rail. He weakened at that. He knew we'd do it."

I could not say anything to this. It was a man's way of treating the situation, and it accomplished its end; but it did affect me a good deal. I shivered at the very idea of a mob, and of what might have happened if George had not yielded. Tom saw how I felt, I suppose.

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"You think I'm a brute, Ruth," he said, "but I knew he'd give in. He isn't very plucky. I always knew that."

He hurried away to go to the reading-room, where he had to see to something or other, and we said nothing about our personal relations. I wonder if I fancied that he watched me very closely to see how I took his account, or if he really thought I might resent his having browbeaten George. He need not have feared. I was troubled by the idea of the mob, but I was proud of Tom, and I could not help contrasting his clear, straightforward look with the way George avoided my eyes.

November 12. Now there are two babies in the house, and Cousin Mehitable might think her prediction that I would set up an orphan asylum was coming true in earnest. In spite of Mrs. Weston's exposure everything is going well, and we hope for the best. I sent George a note last night to tell him, and he came over for a minute. He behaved very well. He had none of the bravado which has made him so different and so dreadful, and he was more like his old self. He was let into his wife's chamber just long enough to kiss her, but that was all. I suppose to be the father of a son must sober any man.

November 20. Tom never comes any more to see me or baby. When I discovered I cared for him I felt that of course everything was at last straightened out; and here is Tom, who only knows that he cares for me, so the case is about as it was before except that now he will never speak. I must do something; but what can I do? When I thought only of getting out of the way of George's marriage it was bad enough to speak to Tom, and now it seems impossible. I can't, I can't, I can't speak to him again!

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November 23. Cousin Mehitable and her telegram arrived this time together, for the boy who drove her from the station brought the message, and gave it to her to bring into the house. She was full of indignation and amazement at what she found, and insisted upon going back to Boston by the afternoon train.

"I never know what you will do, Ruth," she said, "so of course I ought not to be surprised; but of all the wild notions you could take into your head, I must say to have Mrs. Weston come here to have her baby is the most incredible."

"You advised me to have more babies, as long as I had one," I interposed.

"I've a great mind to shake you," was her response. "This is a pretty reception when I haven't seen you since I came home. To think I should be cousin to a foundling hospital, and that all the family I have left!"

I suggested that if I really did set up a foundling hospital, she would soon have as large a family as anybody could want, and she briskly retorted that she had more than she wanted now. She had come down to persuade me to go to Boston for the winter, to make up, she said, for my not going abroad with her, and she brought me a wonderful piece of embroidered crêpe for a party dress. She was as breezy and emphatic as ever, and she denounced me and my doings in good round terms.

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"I suppose if you did come to Boston," she said, "you'd be mixed up in all the dreadful charities

there, and I should never see you."

"But you know, Cousin Mehitable," I protested, "you belong to two or three charitable societies yourself."

"But those are parish societies," was her reply. "That is quite different. Of course I do my part in whatever the church is concerned in; but you just do things on your own hook, and without even believing anything. I think it's wicked myself."

I could only laugh at her, and it was easy to see that her indignation was not with any charitable work I did, but only with the fact I would not promise to leave everything and go home with her.

Before she went home I told her I had a confession to make. She commented, not very encouragingly, that she supposed it was something worse than anything had come yet, but that as she was prepared for anything I might as well get it out.

"If you've decided to be some sort of a Mormon wife to that horrid Mr. Weston," she added, "I shouldn't be in the least surprised. Perhaps you'll take him in with the rest of his family."

I said I did indeed think of being married, but not to him.

"Let me know the worst at once, Ruth," she broke out, rather fiercely. "At my age I can't stand suspense as I could once. What tramp or beggar or clodhopper have you picked out? I know you too well to suppose it's anybody respectable." [Pg 297]

When I named Tom, she at first pretended not to know him, although she has seen him a dozen times in her visits here, and once condescended to say that for a countryman he was really almost handsome.

"I know it's the same name as that baby's father's," she ended, her voice getting icier and icier, "but of course no respectable woman would think of marrying him."

"Then I'm not a respectable woman," I retorted, feeling the blood rise into my face, "for I'm thinking of it."

We looked for a moment into each other's eyes, and I felt, however I appeared, as if I were defying anything she could say.

"So he has taken advantage of your mothering his baby, has he?" she brought out at last.

I responded that he did not even suspect I meant to marry him. She stared, and demanded how he was to find out. I answered that I could think of no way except for me to tell him. She threw up her hands in pretended horror.

"I dare say," she burst out, "he only got you to take the baby so that you'd feel bound to him. I should think when he'd disgraced himself you might have self-respect enough to let him alone. Oh, what would Cousin Horace say!"

Then she saw she was really hurting me, and her eyes softened somewhat.

"I shan't congratulate you, Ruth, if that's what you expect; but since you will be a fool in your own obstinate way, I hope it'll make you happy."

I took both her hands in mine.

"Cousin Mehitable," I pleaded, "don't be hard on me. I know he's done wrong, and it hurts me more than I can tell you. I am so sorry for him and I really, really love him. I'm all alone now except for baby, and I am sure if Father were alive he would see how I feel, and approve of what I mean to do." [Pg 298]

The tears came into her eyes as I had never seen them. She drew her hands away, but first she pressed mine.

"Ruth," she said, "never mind my tongue. If you've only baby, I've nobody but you, and you won't come near me. Besides, you are going to have him. I can't pretend I like it, Ruth; but I do like you, and I do dearly hope you'll be happy. You deserve to be, my dear; and I'm a selfish, worldly old woman, with a train to catch. Now don't say another word about it, or I'll disinherit you in my will."

So we kissed each other, and she went away with my secret.

November 25. Kathie has come home for her Thanksgiving vacation, and I never saw a creature so transformed. She is so interested in her school, her studies, her companions, that she seems to have forgotten that anybody ever frightened her about her soul; and she is just a merry, happy girl, bright-eyed and rather high-strung, but not in the least morbid. She hugged me, and kissed Tomine, and the nonsense of her jealousy, as of her having committed the unpardonable sin, was forgotten entirely. It is an unspeakable comfort to me that the experiment of sending her away has turned out so well.

Miss Charlotte came in while Kathie was here, and watched her with shrewd, keen eyes as she rattled on about the things she is studying, the games she plays, and the friends she has made. When she had gone, Miss Charlotte looked at me with one of her friendly regards. [Pg 299]

"She's made over, like the boy's jackknife that had a new blade and a new handle," was her comment. "I think, my dear, you've saved her soul alive."

I was delighted that she thought Kathie so much improved, though of course I realized I had not done it.

November 26. I have invited George to Thanksgiving dinner. I do hope Gertrude will be able to come downstairs; if she is not I shall have to get through as best I can without her. Miss Charlotte will come, and that will prevent the awkwardness of our being by ourselves.

George comes every day to see his wife, and I think his real feelings, his better side, have been called out by her illness. She is the mother of his son, and she is so extremely pretty and pathetic as she lies there, that I should not think any man could resist her. She is so softened by what she has gone through, and so grateful for kindness, she seems a different person from the overdressed woman we have known without liking very much.

She told me yesterday a good deal about her former life. She has been an orphan from her early girlhood, largely dependent upon an aunt who wanted to be rid of her. It was partly by the contrivance of her aunt, and partly because she longed to escape from a position of dependence, that she married her first husband. She did not stop, I think, to consider what she was doing, and she found her case a pretty hard one. Her husband abused her, and before they had been married a year he ran away to escape a charge of embezzlement. Word was sent to her soon after that he was drowned. She took again her maiden name, and came East to escape all shadow of the disgrace of her married life. She earned her living as a typewriter, until she saw George at Franklin, where she was employed in the bank. She confessed that she came here to secure him, and she wept in begging my pardon for taking him away from me.

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If she can keep to her resolutions and if George will only be still fond of her, things may yet go well with them. Aunt Naomi dryly observed yesterday that what has happened will be likely to prevent Mrs. Weston for a long time to come from trying to make a display, and so it may be the best thing that could have befallen her. So much depends upon George, though!

November 30. The dinner went off much better than I could have hoped. Dr. Wentworth allowed Gertrude to leave her room for the first time, and George brought her down to dinner in his arms. She was given only a quarter of an hour, but this served for the topic of talk, and George was so tender with his wife that Miss Charlotte was quite warmed to him.

The two babies of course had to be produced, but it was rather painful to see how thin and spindling the little Weston baby looked beside my bonny Thomasine. Tomine has grown really to know me. She will come scrambling like a little crab across the floor toward me if I appear in the nursery. Hannah and Rosa are both jealous of me, and I triumph over them in a fashion little less than inhuman.

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I am glad Thanksgiving is over, for in spite of all any of us might do to seem perfectly at ease, some sense of constraint and uncomfortableness was always in the background. On the whole, however, we did very well; and Miss Charlotte sat with me far into the twilight, talking of Mother.

XII

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DECEMBER

December 1. I dreamed last night a dream which affected me so strongly that I can hardly write of it without shivering. I dreamed that George came with Mr. Saychase to remarry, as I thought, Gertrude. When we all stood by the side of her bed, however, George seized my hand, and announced that he had come to marry me, and was resolved to have no other wife. Gertrude fell back on her pillow in a faint. I struggled to pull away the hand George had taken, but I was powerless. I tried to scream, but that horrible paralysis which sometimes affects us in dreams left me speechless. I felt myself helpless while Mr. Saychase went on marrying me to George before the eyes of his own wife, in spite of anything I could do to prevent it. The determination to be free of this bond struggled in me so strongly against the helplessness which held me that I sprang up in bed at last, awake and bursting into hysterical crying.

The strange thing about it all is that I seem to have broken more than the sleep of the body. It is as if all these years I had been in a drowse in my mind, and had suddenly sprung up throbbingly awake. I am as aghast at myself as if I should discover I had unconsciously been walking in the dark on the edge of a ghastly precipice,—yes, a precipice on the edge of a valley full of writhing snakes! My very flesh creeps at the thought that I could by any possibility be made the wife of any man but Tom. I look back to-day over the long years I was engaged, and understand all in a flash how completely George spoke the truth when he used to complain I was an iceberg and did not know what it was to be in love. He was absolutely right; and he was right to leave me. I can only wonder that through those years when I endured his bodily presence because I thought I loved his mental being, he could endure me at all. He could not have borne it, I see now, if he had been really in love with me himself. I am wise with a strange new wisdom; but whence it comes, or why it has opened to me in a single night, from a painful dream, is more than I can say. I understand that George never loved me any more than I did him. He will go back to Gertrude,—indeed I do not believe he has ever ceased to be fond of her, even when he declared he was tired of her and wanted me to take him back. He was angry with her, and no human being understands himself when he is angry.

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Last night after I waked I could not reason about things much. I was too panic-stricken. I lay there in the dark actually trembling from the horror of my dream, and realized that from my very

childhood Tom has stood between me and every other man. Now at last I, who have been all these years in a dull doze, am awake. I might almost say, without being in the least extravagant, that I am alive who was dead; I, who have thought of love and marriage as I might have thought about a trip abroad, know what love means. My foolish dream has changed me like a vision which changes a mere man into a prophet or a seer.

I cannot bear that Tom should go on suffering. I must somehow let him know. December 2. Fortune was kind to me this morning, and Tom knows. I had to go to take some flannel to old Peggy Cole, and as I crossed the Foot-bridge Tom came out of Deacon Daniel's mill. He flushed a little when he saw me, and half hesitated, as if he were almost inclined to turn back. I did not mean to let him escape, however, and stood still, waiting for him. We shook hands, and I at once told him I had wanted to see him, so that if he were not in a hurry I should be glad if he would walk on with me.

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He assented, not very willingly I thought, and we went on over the bridge together. The sun was shining until the snow-edges glistened like live coals, and everywhere one looked the air fairly shimmered with light. The tide was coming up in the river, and the cakes of ice, yellowed in patches by the salt water until they were like unshorn fleeces, were driven against the long sluice-piers, jostling and pushing like sheep frightened into a corner. The piers themselves, and every spar or rock that showed above the water, were as white as snow could make them. It was one of those days when the air is a tonic, so that every breath is a joy; and as Tom and I walked on together I could have laughed aloud just for joy of the beautiful winter day.

"How cold the water looks," Tom said, turning his face away from me and toward the Rim. "It is fairly black with cold."

"Even the ice-cakes seem to be trying to climb out of it," I returned, laughing from nothing but pure delight. "I suppose that is the way you feel about me, Tom. You haven't been near Tomine or me for ten days, and you know you wanted to get away from me this morning."

He did not answer for a minute. Then he said in a strained voice:—

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"It's no use, Ruth; I shall have to go away. I can't stand it here. It was bad enough before, but now I simply cannot bear it."

"You mean," I returned, full of fun and mischief, "that the idea of my offering myself to you was too horrible? You had a chance to refuse, Tom; and you took it. I should think I was the one to feel as if it wasn't to be borne."

He stopped in the street and turned to face me.

"Don't, Ruth," he protested in a voice which went straight to my heart. "If you knew how it hurts me you wouldn't joke about it."

I wanted to put my arms about his neck and kiss him as I used to do when we were babies; but that was manifestly not to be thought of, at least not in the street in plain sight of the blacksmith shop.

"It isn't any joke," said I. "Just walk along so the whole town need not talk about us, please."

He walked on, and I tried to think of a sentence which would tell him that I really cared for him, yet which I could say to him there in the open day, with the sun making a peeping eye of every icy crystal on fence or tree-twig.

"Well?" he cried after a moment.

"O Tom," I asked in despair, "why don't you help me? I can't say it. I can't tell you I"—

I did not dare to look at him, and I came to a stop in my speech because I could feel that he was pressing eagerly to my side.

"You what, Ruth?" he demanded, his voice quivering. "Be careful!"

Perhaps his agitation helped me to master mine. Certain it is for the moment I thought only that he must not be kept in suspense, and so I burst out abruptly:—

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"Tom, you are horrid! I've offered myself to you once, and now you want me to protest in the open street that I can't live without you! Well, then; I can't!"

"Ruth!"

It was all he said; just my name, which he has said hundreds and hundreds of times ever since he could say anything; but I think I can never hear my name again without remembering the love he put into it. I trembled with happiness, but I would not look at him. I walked on with my eyes fixed on the snowy hills beyond the town, and tried to believe I was acting as if I had said nothing and felt nothing unusual. I remember our words up to this time, but after that it is all a joyful blur. I know Tom walked about and waited for me while I did my errand with Peggy Cole; the droll old creature scolded me because the flannel was not thicker, and I beamed on her as if she were expressing gratitude; then he walked home with me, and couldn't come in because as we turned the corner we saw Aunt Naomi walk into the house.

One thing I do remember of our talk on the way home. Tom said suddenly, and with a solemnity of manner that made me grave at once:—

"There is one thing more, Ruth, we must be frank about now or we shall always have it between us. Can you forgive me for being baby's father?"

He had found just the phrase for that dreadful thing which made it most easy for me to answer.

"Tom, dear," I answered, "it isn't for me to forgive or not to forgive. It is in the past, and I want to help you to forget utterly what cannot now be helped." [Pg 307]

"But baby," he began, "she"—

"Baby is ours," I interrupted. "All the rest may go."

He promised to come in to-night, and then I had to face Aunt Naomi. She looked me through and through with eyes that seemed determined to have the very deepest secrets of my soul. Whether I concealed anything from her or not I cannot tell; but after all why should I care? The day has been lived through, and it is time for Tom to come.

December 3. If I could write—But I cannot, I cannot! Ever since Rosa rushed in last night, crying out that Tom was drowned, I have seen nothing but the water black with cold, and the flocks of ice cakes grinding—Oh, why should I torment myself with putting it down?

December 5. We buried him to-day. Cousin Mehitable sent a wreath of ivy. Nobody else knows our secret. If he remembers, it is sweet for him to know.

December 13. The stars are so beautiful to-night they make me remember how Tom and I in our childhood used to play at choosing stars we would visit when we could fly. To-night he may be exploring them, but for me they shine and shine, and my tears blur them, and make them dance and double.

December 19. I have been talking with Deacon Richards and Mr. Turner. They both think I can take Tom's place on the reading-room committee without coming forward too much. Nothing need be said about it, only so I can do most of Tom's work. Of course I cannot go to the room evenings as he did; but Mr. Turner will do that. Tom was so interested in this that I feel as if I were continuing his work and carrying out his plans. I remember all he had told me, and it almost seems like doing it with him. Almost! [Pg 308]

December 20. Now I know all about Tom's death that anybody knows. I could not talk about it before. Aunt Naomi and dear Miss Charlotte both tried to tell me, but I would not let them. To-night Mr. Turner came to talk about the library, and before he went away we spoke about Tom. He was so homely in his speech, so honest, so kindly, that I kept on, and could listen to him even when he told how Tom died.

That night Tom had been down on the other side of the river, and was coming up—coming to me—past the Flatiron wharf. Mrs. Brownrig was on the wharf, crazy with drink, and threatening to throw herself overboard. Two or three of the people who live near there, men and women, were trying to get her away, and when Tom appeared they asked him to see what he could do. As he came near her the old woman shrieked out that he had killed her daughter and would murder her; and before they realized what she was doing she had jumped into the water. Tom ran to the edge, unfastening his overcoat as he went, and just paused to tear it off before he leaped in after her. The tide was running out, and the water was full of ice. He had a great bruise on his forehead where he had evidently been struck by a block. Mrs. Brownrig pinioned his arms too, so he had no chance anyway. It was a mercy that the bodies were recovered before the tide drifted them out. [Pg 309]

"Tom was an awful good fellow," the blacksmith concluded, "an awful good fellow."

I could not answer him.

December 23. Deacon Webbe has been here to-day. He was so bowed and bent and broken I could hardly talk to him without sobbing; and I had to tell him I was to have been his daughter, and that if he would let me, I would be so still. He was greatly touched, and he will keep our secret.

December 24. More than the death of Father, more, even, than that of Mother who had been my care and comfort so long, the death of Tom seems to leave me alone in a wide, empty universe. I cannot conceive of a future without him; I cannot believe the bonds which bound us are broken. I have his child, and I cannot take baby in my arms without feeling I am coming closer to Tom. All my friends have been very dear. I do not think any one of them, except perhaps Miss Charlotte, suspects how much the loss of Tom means to me, but they at least realize that we were life-long comrades, and that I must feel the death of the father of baby very keenly. However much or little they suspect, no one has betrayed any intimation that Tom and I were more than close friends. Even Aunt Naomi has said nothing to make me shrink. People are so kind in this world, no matter what pessimists may say.

December 31. I have been very busy with all the Christmas work for my poor people, the things Tom wanted done for the reading-room, and the numberless trifles which need to be attended to. To-night I think I am writing in my diary for the last time. The year has been full of wonderful things, some of them terrible to bear, and yet, now I look back, I see it has brought me more than it has taken away. Tom is mine always, everywhere, as long as we two have any existence in all the wide spaces between the stars we used to choose to fly to; and his baby is left to comfort me and to hearten me for the work I have all around me to do. I cannot keep the tears back always, and heartache is not to be cured by any sort of reasoning that I know; yet as long as I have his love, the memory of Father and Mother, and dear baby, I have no right to complain. Just to be in one's place and working, to go on growing,—dying when the time comes,—what a priceless, blessed thing life is! [Pg 310]

Repeated word "a" removed from page 228:
(Yours truly and with a a sad and loving)

Typos corrected:

page 35:
"fastastic" changed to "fantastic"
(fantastic bunches of snow in the willows)

page 119:
"be" changed to "he"
(clergyman with whom he)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DIARY OF A SAINT ***

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