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, by Elsie Singmaster**

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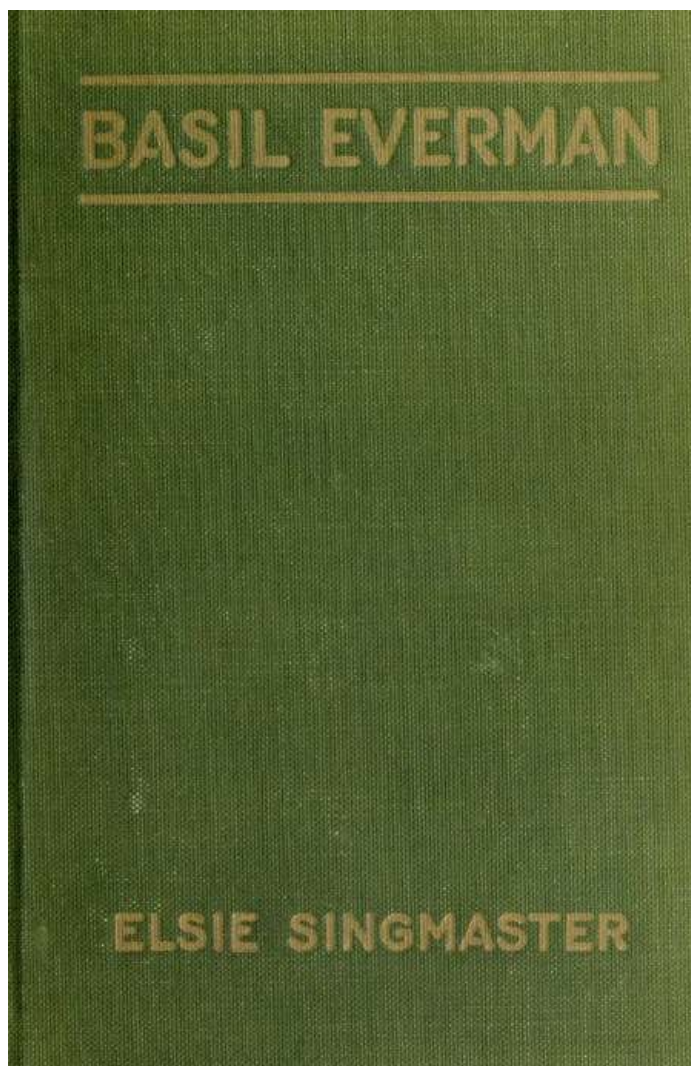
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By Elsie Singmaster

BASIL EVERMAN.

MARTIN LUTHER. THE STORY OF HIS LIFE. With frontispiece.

THE LONG JOURNEY. Frontispiece in color.

EMMELINE. Illustrated.

KATY GAUMER. Illustrated.

GETTYSBURG. Illustrated.

WHEN SARAH WENT TO SCHOOL. Illustrated.

WHEN SARAH SAVED THE DAY. Illustrated.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

BASIL EVERMAN

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BASIL EVERMAN

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BY

ELSIE SINGMASTER



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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BASIL EVERMAN

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CHAPTER I

THE SHADOW ON A BRIGHT DAY

Richard Lister's mother stood at the head of the stairs and called a little impatiently. She was a large, middle-aged woman who looked older than she was in the black silk dress and bonnet with strings which was the church- and party-going costume of women of her years and time. Middle age had not yet begun to dress in light colors and flowery hats like youth.

When, above the sound of a tinkling piano, a young voice answered, "I'm coming!" she returned to her room, without expecting, however, that Richard would keep his promise at once.

Walton College, on whose campus Mrs. Lister lived, of which her husband was president, and from which her only son was being graduated to-day, had not yet dreamed of being a "greater Walton." Satisfied with its own modest aims, it had not opened its eyes to that "wider vision" of religion and education and "service" which was to be loudly proclaimed by the next generation. Even games with other colleges were as yet unheard of; the students were still kept at their books and it was expected of them that they learn their lessons. Each was required to deliver an oration on Commencement Day, the first speaker saluting in old-fashioned English pronunciation *Auditores, Curatores, Professores, and Comites*, and making humorous allusions to *puellæ*. Only in admitting the daughters of the professors, and once an ambitious girl from the village, was the college a little ahead of its own times.

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Waltonville, like its college, belonged to an order which was elsewhere passing. Lying a little north of Mason and Dixon's line, it resembled in many pleasant ways a Southern town. The broad streets were quiet and thickly shaded and the houses were plainly built of red brick with noble white pillars. The young people gathered in the twilight and talked and sang; occasionally a group of students lifted their voices in *Integer Vitæ* or "There's Music in the Air"; and those citizens who lived near the campus could hear a chanted "bonus-a-um" or "amo-amas-amat" from the room of the Latin professor, who was a stern drillmaster. Otherwise the village was as quiet as the country.

The Civil War was still the chief topic of discussion among the older men. Dr. Lister, Dr. Scott, who was the teacher of English—Waltonville was careful about titles—and Dr. Green, the village physician, met many times in the long vacation and talked about Grant and Sherman and Lee. Dr. Lister had served a brief term at the end of the war; Dr. Scott had been too young to enlist, but had lost father and brothers; Dr. Green, who was still younger, had had no personal experience of war, nor, so far as any one knew, of its losses.

Of Dr. Green, Waltonville knew comparatively little. Mrs. Lister remembered his single year at the college, whither he had come, self-prepared, to enter the senior class. An unexpected legacy had given him the opportunity, passionately desired and as passionately despaired of, of studying medicine. He was older than the other students, a tall, dark, quiet man who allowed himself no diversions, who belonged to no fraternities, and who cared nothing apparently for girls. His companions knew, however, that he was not always silent. He burst occasionally into fierce and eloquent harangues, condemning and scorning those who wasted their time in idleness or love-making. His successful efforts to educate himself gave him an air of authority. The students knew

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also that he went now and then, as many of them did, to see Margie Ginter, the daughter of the hotel-keeper, but they believed that he went merely to be amused by her bad grammar, and that for him her round figure, her childish mouth, and the touches of her pretty hand on arm or knee had no temptation. When the Ginters left, Margie sent back to him letters with misspelled addresses which the students did not believe he answered.

After being entirely lost to the view of Waltonville, Green returned. He had become a physician, but the four years of preparation had lengthened to six, during which he had changed into a weary and disappointed man. He had come, he explained, to see old Dr. Percy, now retiring from his practice, and offering the good-will of his business for sale. He had hoped that Dr. Everman would recommend him and that others would remember him. When he heard that Dr. Everman had died, he expressed to Mrs. Lister so hearty an admiration for her imposing and learned father and so unfeigned a regret that he was gone, that he won at once her valuable support. It was not long before he ceased to look like a beaten man, his thin frame filled out, he walked briskly, and began to exhibit some of the scolding eloquence of his college days.

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In Waltonville class distinctions continued. The college people, the clergymen, Dr. Green, and the lawyers who attended a sleepy court in April and August, made up one class; all other white persons another. The servants were negroes who lived in low, neat cabins along a grassy lane which bounded the town on its eastern side. Waltonville had never been a slave-holding community, but some of the older negroes had been attached to the same family for several generations. 'Manda Gates, Mrs. Lister's cook, had served her mother, and Miss Thomasina Davis's 'Melia had held her in her arms the day she was born.

There was neither strife nor envy between Waltonville's classes. Mrs. Lister respected Mr. Underwood, the storekeeper, but did not invite him to dinner, and Mrs. Underwood would have been greatly disturbed at the prospect of entertaining Mrs. Lister.

The old house, in whose exact center Mrs. Lister stood when she called Richard, had been built sixty years earlier for her father, President Richard Everman, and had descended to his son-in-law and successor. It was a broad, pleasant house with high ceilings and with woodwork of solid oak. One side of the first floor was divided into library and sitting-room and the other into dim, long double parlors. Dining-room and kitchen were in a wing at the back.

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On a level with Mrs. Lister the bedrooms opened each with an elaborately dressed and inviting bed, dim in the pleasant light which filtered in through bowed shutters. Above in the third story were other bedrooms and a large, otherwise empty attic in which stood the reservoir which held the supply of water for the house. As a little girl, she had come with her two companions, her brother Basil and Thomasina Davis, to steal short peeps at the tank in which they could easily have been drowned. She was the only one of the three who was really afraid. Thomasina insisted upon running boldly into the room and little Basil was found afterwards there alone. Basil's desire to investigate was always keener than his fear of danger.

Having waited for ten minutes, Mrs. Lister now returned to her post in the hall, and raised her voice in three successive calls. At the last impatient summons, the piano in the parlor ceased its clangor with a series of great chords, rolling under a fine, clear touch from the lowest of the yellowed keys to the uppermost treble. In the bass the tones were indescribably mournful, as though the aged instrument cried out in pain under the strong fingers of youth; in the treble they sounded a light cackle, half childish, half senile, like the laughter of an old man. The piano, bought years ago for Basil, resembled an old man in many ways; its teeth were yellow, it creaked as though rheumatism had taken a permanent abode in its joints, and it was swathed in a covering of warm red felt. Though it was the only object in Mrs. Lister's house which was not exactly adapted to the use to which it was put, and though it reminded her of misery, she would not have dreamed of selling it or of giving it away or of exchanging it for another instrument, any more than she would have sold or given away or exchanged an aged relative. A piano once was a piano forever, and no dismal sound from its depths, no fierce sarcasm from Richard could depreciate it in her eyes.

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"Richard!" Before the player had righted the piano stool or had closed the square lid over the yellowed keys, Mrs. Lister called again.

"Yes, mother!"

He took the stairway in four great leaps, the last of which his mother stepped aside to avoid. But she did not escape the bear's hug with which he grasped her. He was a tall, spare young fellow, scarcely more than a lad, with crisp, light hair and dark eyes.

"Yes, mother! Yes, mother! Yes, mother!"

"Your cap and gown are there on my bed, and you must change your tie and do it quickly."

"The procession will form in one half-hour, mother, and they can't possibly begin till I tune up. I have half a mind to be late so I can see 'em squirm." Richard took the tie from his mother's hand and stationed himself before the glass in her bedroom, where the walnut furniture was heaviest and most elaborately carved. "Think of it, my last morning in chapel! No more eight o'clocks! No more Pol Econ, no more Chemistry, no more worthless stuff of any sort!"

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"I hope you know your speech *thoroughly*, Richard."

"I do, oh, I do!"

"I could never memorize well, and I was always frightened when I had to say a piece in school. Aren't you at *all* nervous?"

"Not at all. I'm cool-headed and cold-hearted. *Morituri te salutamus*, that is, 'We, about to die, salute you!'"

"You are not going to say that, Richard!"

"No, mother, darling!" Richard folded his black gown about him. "I bow like this, till my long wings touch the ground, and I say, '*Alius annus cum perpetua sua agitatione abiit, et alia classis in vitæ limine est,*' etc. Wouldn't old Jehu skin me alive if I failed? It is bad enough that Eleanor Bent is ahead of me, of *me*, if you please—faculty family and all that. Now, good-bye, mother. Have a little more faith in me than you look, or I may rush to your shoulder weeping." With a "Farewell, great Queen, live forever," and a light touch of lips on his mother's broad, smooth cheek, he was gone, down the polished banister.

When the screen door had slammed, Mrs. Lister sat for a while quietly by her bed. There was, now that Richard was started, plenty of time. She had been up since six o'clock, but she was not tired, being a person of almost inexhaustible vigor. The house was in perfect order, 'Manda was singing in the kitchen, and she had a short breathing space. She loved those moments in which, her tasks finished, she could sit perfectly still, almost without thinking, yet vividly conscious of her blessings, of her good husband, of her fine son, and of her pleasant home.

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Above all, she was thankful that she was content, that she was driven by no wild impulses as was Thomasina Davis, who often sat with her in the morning and in the evening heard a concert in Baltimore. She visited Baltimore—which she called "Baltimer"—in the fall and again in the spring, after having made detailed, dignified, and long-announced plans, and there, with the aid of a commissionaire, made her purchases for six months. She enjoyed these journeys, but she was always glad to get home with her silks and linens, her little stories of the courteous attentions of the Baltimoreans, of the baked blue-fish, and of the stately house of her old cousin on Fayette Street.

But now, even with all her morning's work done and Richard started on his way, she was not at peace. His playing disturbed her, not because the piano was old and gave forth so many painful sounds, but because music had sad associations. She believed that it roused strange passions in the human heart, that it made men and women queer, abnormal, sometimes even wicked. It was connected in her mind with a quality called "genius" which animated the minds of poets and musicians and artists and made them a little more than human and at the same time a good deal less. It was a general conviction among quiet people of the time that those who could write or paint or sing beyond a mere amateur excellence were "wild," like poor Mr. Poe, about whom a tradition lingered among her Baltimore cousins. Genius was not a necessary part of greatness; her father and her husband were great men, but they were also sober, dignified, comprehensible, reasonable, which geniuses were not.

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Thomasina Davis had wrong ideas and she put them into Richard's head. She had spent all but three years of her life in Waltonville, but those three in New York, under the instruction of a famous pianist, had made her wish to be a concert player. Fortunately family duties had called her home, and now, those duties long since done, she lived alone in the homestead set back in the garden on the street which led to the college. While she condemned Thomasina, Mrs. Lister remembered with a stirring of the heart all the hundreds of times she had pressed her latch. Thomasina had three pupils; Cora Scott, who attained technical correctness; Eleanor Bent, who played with all the imperfect brilliancy of one who learns easily; and Richard, who attained both correctness and brilliancy. Mrs. Lister explained to strangers that Thomasina did not need to give lessons; she blushed when her quarterly bill arrived, and shivered when she heard her talk to Richard about playing.

"You must read poetry, Richard, and *feel* it; that is the way and the only way for youth to gain emotional experience.

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'Magic mirror thou hast none
Except thy manifest heart; and save thine own
Anguish or ardor, else no amulet.'

When you have learned to feel, then you can play."

Richard was not a genius—thank God! It seemed impossible that he should be graduating; that he should be no longer her lovely, placid baby, who had done so much to heal an old hurt. Though he would have to go away for a few years for further study, he would come back to teach in the college and would perhaps some day be its president, like his father and grandfather. Then she could stay on in the house which was like the outer shell of her soul, not to leave it until she left this life. Richard might marry—ought to marry—a pretty, biddable girl like Cora Scott. Cora would do her duty by her mother-in-law.

Mrs. Lister's life, now so uneventful, had had its great sorrow, its unsatisfied passion. There was another love, stronger almost than that for husband and son, because its object needed no longer the loving affection which sought to serve him, had never, indeed, needed it while he lived.

It was at such times as this, upon holidays, anniversaries, and other great days, that she thought

most of the past, most of her father in his white stock and his bands, he having been a clergyman as well as a scholar; of her mother who seemed to her dim recollection very different from, but who was, nevertheless, very much like herself; and most of all of her brother Basil, for whom she had the rare and passionate affection of sister for brother of a Dorothy Wordsworth or a Eugénie de Guerin; that affection which equals in intensity a lover's, which brooks no rival, and which is almost certain to result in misery.

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She thought of them all now, sitting in her room. She could hear the laughter of the faculty and the boys and girls gathering for the procession; she knew that it was time for her to go, but she could not move. How long, long ago it all was! Yet how close they were, especially Basil, who had been of all most vivid, most bright.

Presently, moved by an irresistible impulse, she left her chair by the window and climbed the stairs into the low-pitched third story. There she laid her hand upon a door. She desired intensely to go in; the touch of the knob restored to her an old mood of grief, the phase in which one feels that seeking, importuning, one must find. Basil was here; his wide, bright gaze sought her eyes, as she often fancied, with reproach. All dead persons seemed to Mrs. Lister to look like that; her father did, as she remembered some little service unrendered, some command forgotten. Basil's gaze was like his father's, yet different. He seemed to reproach, not his sister, but his Creator for having laid him low, banishing him from the sunshine when his contemporaries still had years of life before them.

This was his room; here he had slept and idled and whistled and sung; here had been unpacked and put away his belongings sent home after he was dead; here lingered still an odor of disinfectants and still more subtly an odor of tobacco, not approved of in the Lister house; here were his pens and pencils and his books, shabby little editions of Greek plays, lined and annotated, which he carried about with him. Here he had sat by the window, indifferent to heat and cold, alone, doing, alas! nothing. Surely if she entered she would find him, would hear him speak, would see him smile! Surely—

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Mrs. Lister took her hand from the knob and went down the steps. This was Richard's Commencement Day; it was wrong to give her mind free course in the region which invited. Basil was at peace; must be at peace, nothing could disturb him. He was gone almost entirely from human recollection. The old fear that the world might come to know about him, that things might be "found out," was laid. She, too, must forget him; that was the only way to live. Dr. Lister had said, many years ago, that Basil's belongings should be destroyed; that this was the first step toward her recovery. But Dr. Lister spoke of him no more and to Richard he was a vague ghost. Changes in the faculty of the college, the death of old friends in the town had contributed to forgetfulness. Most of all, Mrs. Lister's own grief was of the variety which endures no mention of the dead and which creates the oblivion which it is likely most bitterly to resent. Basil was dead and forgotten.

CHAPTER II

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER

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In a little house overlooking the fields on the far side of Waltonville, where Mrs. Margie Bent, of Waltonville's middle class, lived with her daughter Eleanor, preparations for Commencement were in progress. The house was pale gray in color, and had about its little porch a mass of pink climbing roses with dark foliage and thick clusters of bloom. Before it lay a smooth lawn, and back of it a tiny garden, symmetrically divided by grass paths. There were no outbuildings, there was no stick or weed; the little establishment looked like a playhouse or the model for an architect's picture. One did not ascribe to its inhabitants any academic aspirations.

Waltonville was accustomed to think of the little house as "back of" the town. Yet the town was in a truer sense back of the little gray house, which looked out upon a wide sweep of open country. Before it the fields dipped in a long and beautiful slope, then rose a few miles away to a low range of blue hills. A part of the land was cultivated, but there remained many stretches of woodland, especially along a wandering stream whose silver course could be followed for a long distance, and from which rose mist, now in thick, obscuring masses, now in transparent vapor. Beyond the low hills was another higher range. Here and there in the pleasant valley were farmhouses and large barns whose dimensions and design were copied from the barns of Lancaster County not many miles away.

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Within the little house was the same clean prettiness. The furniture was simple and plain and there was a great deal of exquisite hand-sewing; hem-stitching on the white curtains, heavy initials on the linen, and beautiful embroidery on Eleanor's clothes in the closets. In the little parlor stood a bookcase filled with handsome and well-chosen books, and in the dining-room there were both bookcase and desk, the latter now neatly closed.

Little Mrs. Bent was helping her tall daughter into the Commencement dress which she had made with her own unresting hands. Her fair hair curled about her forehead, her short upper lip made her look like a little girl, and her whole appearance was at once attractive and pathetic. Mrs. Scott, whose inquisitive spirit made her wish to know every one in Waltonville by sight and as much about each person as she could discover, said of Mrs. Bent that she looked and acted

like a lady, though she was none. Thomasina Davis, whose kindly spirit made her judge her acquaintances with sympathy, said that she believed that Mrs. Bent was a good woman who had suffered cruelly. Thomasina remembered her perfectly as Margie Ginter, the daughter of the most unpleasant, sodden, law-breaking tavern-keeper Waltonville had ever had, but did not think evil of her on that account. She knew that Margie had been light as thistledown, too easily pleased, too careless of the company she kept, entirely too free with her smiles, and a source of anxiety to the mothers of the young men of the town and to those who had the well-being of the college boys at heart; but she did not believe any of the serious accusations made against her by the older women; had not believed them when they were made and did not believe them now that they were occasionally recalled.

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Margie had left Waltonville long ago with her father for another tavern in another State, and after a few years had returned with a married name and with a little girl whom she called "Nellie," and with means for very simple living. Whether her income had its source in the ill-gotten gains of her father or in the property of a deceased husband, or in some other less creditable source, Waltonville did not know. A few persons speculated about her when she returned, but she and her little daughter were soon accepted and ignored.

If there had been any one to compare Margie Ginter with Mrs. Bent, he would scarcely have believed her to be the same person. Margie Ginter had lived indifferently in a miserable tavern; Mrs. Bent conducted her little house with the most exquisite tidiness, and maintained therein the most perfect order. Her linens were less elegant than Mrs. Lister's, but they were no less beautifully laundered, no less elaborately marked. Margie had longed for constant company, and a succession of the most idle of pleasures; Mrs. Bent shrank even from the back-door calls of her neighbors. Margie had been confident, assured in all her motions, and almost impertinent in her glances at those whose disapproval she surmised; Mrs. Bent was humble, even frightened. Margie had never gone to church, but Mrs. Bent took a little side pew in the college church and sat there at each service. To Margie had come some mighty metamorphosis, changing her instincts, changing her very soul, as completely as a human body could have changed its position at a "Right-about face." The process had not been easy; it had written pathetic lines in the countenance which had once expressed only light-heartedness.

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The tall daughter whom she was helping into her embroidered Commencement dress was as dark as her mother was fair and as direct of gaze as her mother was timid. Her gray eyes were singularly clear and bright; they held the glance so that her other features, beautiful as they were, became unimportant. Her other features, except her nose and her upper lip, were like her mother's; she had evidently a maternal inheritance, permeated and strengthened by a different strain.

She had not inherited, it was clear, from little Mrs. Bent the good mind which put her at the head of her class in college. Mrs. Bent was not a dull person, and she had certainly strength of will, but she had no aptitude for books even though she sat from time to time with one of Eleanor's volumes in her hand and listened for hours together while Eleanor read to her. Sometimes when her daughter was not about she looked in a puzzled, frightened way over what Eleanor had been reading, and she kept an old grammar hidden under a pile of neatly folded clothes in her bureau drawer.

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Poor little Mrs. Bent made a brave effort to follow her swan in her flight. She had not, however, risen far, even in her effort to speak as others spoke. Her mistakes were those of a low stratum. Falling from her pretty lips in her youth and heard by uncritical ears, they had not seemed so dreadful. Now they were shocking. In her anxiety to do well, she sometimes formed new words upon the analogy of those which she knew.

"I thicken it with cream and I thinnen it with vinegar," she would say sweetly.

Sometimes a sudden "them there," long pruned from Eleanor's speech, slipped from her mother's tongue. "Them there" Mrs. Bent knew was execrable and was tortured by that knowledge.

Eleanor was now almost twenty years old, and seldom do twenty years flow with such smooth current. She could not remember when she had come to Waltonville to live, and she could recall distinctly only one incident in her life before she started to the village school. Children, in families where the past is frequently referred to, recall, or imagine that they recall, many incidents, but to Eleanor nothing was recalled.

The single incident which she remembered was impressed upon her by terror. Her mother and she were walking together upon a shady street when a man stopped them and spoke to them. "So you've come back, Margie!" was all that Eleanor could remember but the words remained in her mind. The man had laid his hand on her mother's arm, and Mrs. Bent had jerked away and had hurried down the street. Eleanor had seen the man a hundred times since, a heavy, dissipated creature named Bates who sat all day on the porch of the hotel.

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When she went to school the teacher, a newcomer in Waltonville, asked her her father's name and she had stood bewildered.

"Her father is dead, I guess," said the little girl next to her.

Eleanor nodded solemnly. A day or two later, when the teacher's question came to her mind again, she repeated it to her mother. Mrs. Bent, whose experience had not prepared her for the questions of a first day in school, stared at her daughter.

"The teacher asked me, and a little girl said she guessed he was dead, and so I said he was dead. Was that right, mother?"

Mrs. Bent's face grew deathly pale, so that long afterwards the incident came back to Eleanor.

"Yes, that was right," said she.

Another problem suggested itself.

"Were we ever away from here?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because that man said, 'So you've come back.'"

Mrs. Bent shivered. "Yes, we were away from here once. Don't think of that man, and don't ever speak to him. If he comes toward you, you run, Nellie." Then Mrs. Bent took the little girl roughly by the arm. "Children should be seen and not heard—remember that!"

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From Eleanor's first year in school a few vivid experiences remained. Racing home, she had fallen and had cut her head and several stitches had to be put in under her thick hair. A neighbor, running for the old doctor, had returned with the newcomer, Dr. Green, who had dismissed the spectators and had hurt her terribly. Then he had carried her to bed, where she slept for a long time and waked with a burning pain in her head, the first pain she had ever had.

When he came the next day, she was better and he had sat by her bed for a long time, asking her question after question about her lessons. He spoke in a stern, fierce tone, as though nothing about her education or about the world pleased him. He corrected savagely her inherited errors in speech as though he could re-make her language in a morning. Her eyes closed in the middle of a sentence, and when she woke he was no longer in the room. But it seemed to her that a voice was still about, going on and on and on. Another excited voice made answer after a long time, "I ain't a-goin' to do it!" If it was Dr. Green's voice and if it was to Mrs. Bent that he was speaking, their knowledge of one another had advanced far beyond the stage of casual acquaintance. Their dialogue was not a conversation, but a quarrel.

The next day, when Eleanor sat up against the pillows, Dr. Green brought her a book. He had written "Eleanor" on the fly-leaf.

"Nellie is a nonsensical name," he declared. "It must be changed."

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Eleanor looked at her mother.

"I don't care," said Mrs. Bent. If Eleanor had been dragged from the grave instead of suffering a small scalp wound, she could have been no more terrified. Her face was tear-stained, her color was gone, and one hand closed and opened constantly upon the other. In her eyes shone not only anguish, but a fierce anger. She seemed to take little pleasure in this friend of her youth.

The picture book was the first of a long series of books which appeared in the little house. First came story-books, wonder-tales, fairy-tales, "Robinson Crusoe," "Swiss Family Robinson," then a set of Scott, then poetry. Presently a bookcase had to be bought, then another.

She was allowed to go henceforth to Dr. Green's untidy office, or, at least, her mother did not reprove her when she came late from school because Dr. Green had called to her to stop, or to climb into his buggy and go with him into the country. She had ceased to be afraid of him; once or twice she ventured a shy touch of hand. There was a need in little Eleanor's soul which he supplied, a precocious intellectual curiosity which was now wakening. Presently she began to ask questions and Dr. Green answered them. Curt and positive as he was with others, he never was curt with her. He sometimes examined her to see what she had retained, and smiled to himself over the success of his teachings. Eleanor had gained all unconsciously a knowledge far superior to that of Cora Scott or even to that of Richard Lister. Neither Dr. Scott nor Dr. Lister talked to their offspring about world politics, about the literature of their own country and all others, about the trees by the wayside and the stars in the heavens as Dr. Green talked to little Eleanor Bent. It was when she repeated at home, as nearly as she could in his language, all his wisdom, that Mrs. Bent took to studying her grammar in the evenings, after Eleanor had gone to bed, and hiding it under her pillow.

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Eleanor was deeply impressed by what she read and was also acutely conscious of the world about her. She had vivid impressions of each detail of the landscape before the door; of the smooth, concave fields rising to the blue hills, which rose in turn to mountains of paler blue; of the winding stream with its accompanying mists; of the journeying sun with its single moment of rest through all the year in a deep cradle in the southwestern ridge; of the distant, dim sound of the train which made its way along the next valley with rhythmic thunder; of the peace of quiet afternoons and evenings; of the changing light.

She had not yet, though she was graduating from college, begun to observe or to understand the sorrows or sufferings of human beings or the strange complexities and thwartings of human life. She lived within herself without speculating about other people, even about the life so close to her, to which she was so thoroughly accustomed that its shrinking, its various and inconsistent characteristics, did not seem strange to her. In her eighth year she followed to the cemetery the funeral of the father of one of her schoolmates, and saw from a distance his widow throw herself upon his coffin. She pictured thenceforth her mother in the same situation and regarded her with

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tender awe.

In only one respect did she fear her mother. The dreadful "them there" was pruned out of her own speech by Dr. Green's continued admonitions and, having learned her lesson, she proceeded to pass it on.

"Mother, you must not say 'them there.' Dr. Green says that it is outlandish talk."

Mrs. Bent rose from her place at one side of the little table. Her eyes looked no more wild when Eleanor was brought home to her bleeding.

"Don't you dare to tell your mother how to talk! That is a dreadful sin, a dreadful, dreadful sin!"

Eleanor burst into tears; her mother did not stay to comfort her, but went upstairs to her room and there remained until Eleanor started to school. Eleanor heard her talking to herself, heard her pacing back and forth, and did not dare to go to her. It was only after many days that their old pleasant relations were restored.

Eleanor and her mother went nowhere to pay social visits and few persons came into their little house. They were so situated with reference to their nearest neighbors that either the making of a long journey or the scaling of a sharp picket fence was a necessary preliminary to the borrowing of a lemon or a recipe. The nearest neighbor, who often needed lemons, had suggested a gate through the common fence, but it had never been cut. [Pg 23]

The successive pastors of the college church came at proper intervals to call. There were no aid societies or "Busy Bees" in the church government, and the young people were not drawn into association by oyster suppers or similar entertainments. Nor was Mrs. Bent drawn into the company of the older women. Mrs. Scott, whose pew was near by, walked with her once or twice a year to the corner and had always some impertinent inquiry to make. Only a week ago she had asked about Eleanor's future.

"Nursing, perhaps, Mrs. Bent? Young women are taking up nursing."

A person with a sharper tongue than Mrs. Bent's might have asked whether Cora meant to take up nursing. But Mrs. Bent said, with her gentle, frightened air, "Oh, I think not!"

"Then, teaching, perhaps?"

"She hasn't said anything yet about teaching."

"Fit her for something, Mrs. Bent. I suppose she will have to earn her living?"

Mrs. Bent smiled and passed on, not seeming to realize that Mrs. Scott's last sentence was a question. Mrs. Scott was still talking. She said, in conclusion, that she had great difficulty in finding maids; that colored girls were almost worse than nobody and that white girls had wrong and proud notions. If she meant to imply that Eleanor had wrong or proud notions, Mrs. Bent did not understand. If she had a "place" in Waltonville society, she knew, alas! where that place was. [Pg 24]

If Mrs. Scott had suspected the ambitions which filled the mind of pretty Eleanor, she would have run after Mrs. Bent. Eleanor had become inspired with a desire to write, an ambition put into her head by Dr. Green, and zealously cultivated by him, and she had got into shape, without telling any one but her mother, several stories which were not without merit. One she had ventured to send away and to-day the excitement of graduation was dulled by the approach of a more important event. The editor of "Willard's Magazine" to which she had sent "Professor Ellenborough's Last Class" had written to say that a representative of that magazine would call upon her in the course of the week. It was improbable that they would send a messenger from New York to distant and inaccessible Waltonville unless her story was really to be accepted! Yet acceptance was outside the bounds of possibility.

"I shouldn't eat or sleep for a week," she declared as the embroidered Commencement dress went over her head and her white shoulders.

Mrs. Bent looked up at her with her most frightened expression. Her duckling had proved to be a swan—there was no doubt of that.

"Don't set yourself on it," she said, remembering sundry very different disappointments of her own. "Things often don't turn out like we want they should."

Mrs. Bent's hands trembled; she would have given her life to have things turn out the way Eleanor wanted they should. Even now there was another happiness approaching, of which Eleanor knew nothing. Going one day to Thomasina's house, Mrs. Bent had asked Thomasina to do a service for her and Eleanor. [Pg 25]

"I don't like to put you to trouble," she explained nervously. "I want to sell my piano."

"Yes?" said Thomasina. Was poor little Mrs. Bent in financial difficulties? It would be a great pity if Eleanor had to discontinue her lessons. "That is, not exactly to sell it, but to change it."

"Yes," said Thomasina, who never interrupted or tried to complete the sentences of other persons.

"For a better one."

"Yes." Thomasina saw that her guess was wrong.

"But I don't know much about—about such things." Mrs. Bent had meant to say about pianos, but she suddenly could not remember whether the *i* was long or short. She knew that one or the other was very wrong, but she could not remember which she had used a moment ago.

"I'll be very glad to help you."

Mrs. Bent's relief showed on her face and she breathed a long sigh.

"What kind of piano do you want, Mrs. Bent?"

"A large one," answered Mrs. Bent, knowing now certainly that she had the wrong word.

"A grand piano?"

"That is it, exactly."

Thomasina hazarded the name of the best by way of elimination.

"That is it," said Mrs. Bent. "If you will pick it out when you go to the city, the money part will be fixed. It is a Commencement present to her." [Pg 26]

Mrs. Bent rose to go. She was invited to stay longer, and she would have liked to sit forever in the pleasant room, but she was afraid. When she had gone, Thomasina stood for a moment frowning, then bit her lip. She wondered a good deal about Mrs. Bent, and she was to wonder still more when she saw the large check in the hand of the salesman in Baltimore from whose stock she selected the finest piano. Not only the amount, but the signature of the check astonished her.

The piano, now at the railroad station upon its side, its shining rosewood swathed in many folds of flannel and canvas and rubber, was to be delivered while Eleanor was at Commencement. If she had dreamed of its presence, her cheeks would have been still redder, her shining eyes still happier. She laid her black gown over her arm and took her black cap by its tassel.

"Get your bonnet, mother."

A glance at the clock frightened Mrs. Bent. Eleanor should be off at once or she would meet the men with the piano. Mrs. Bent had given explicit charges as to the time of its delivery. She was to let the carriers, whose chief she knew to be trustworthy, into the house before she started.

"I'm not ready yet. You go quick, and I'll come right away."

"You'll surely wait for me afterwards?"

"Oh, yes."

She followed Eleanor to the door, and watched her pass the corner. The emotion which shone from her eyes was sufficiently intense to explain even a greater metamorphosis than that which had changed Margie Ginter into Mrs. Bent. [Pg 27]

Almost at once the piano, towering high above the horses which drew it, lumbered in from the other direction. All had turned out well.

CHAPTER III

A WALTONVILLE COMMENCEMENT AND AN INQUISITIVE STRANGER

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The railroad, a fifty-mile spur of the Baltimore & Northern, ran to Waltonville, but not beyond it. Miles away across the beautiful valley which lay spread before Mrs. Bent's little house, the main line was dimly discernible by the long trail of white smoke visible now and then against the blue hills, and, when the wind blew from the west, by the faint, distant roar of flying trains. The officials of the B. & N. had originally intended that it should pass through Waltonville, and the reason for their change of mind was an unusual one. The railroad engineer brought his family to Waltonville for the summer, and Waltonville received them as it did all unintroducted strangers. The engineer and his wife and children did not exist for Waltonville. Therefore, the railroad swerved far away to another village which was reported as larger, more important, and approached with less expense, and in the course of a few years Waltonville was made the terminus of a branch road leaving the main line at a junction fifty miles away.

Its loss was, however, not unmixed with gain; it remained as it was, unaspiring, peaceful, still, and beautiful. The students, the Commencement visitors, the agents for commercial firms, the few persons haled to court, traveled from the east and south on the B. & N. Those who came from other directions either made a wide *détour* by rail or approached, as they had approached from time immemorial, by horseback or carriage. [Pg 29]

The last train on the eve of Commencement Day had been late. There was good reason for delay, traffic being heavy. Beside the usual travelers from village to village, there were at least fifty

fathers and mothers and sisters of college boys, and there were four traveling men—in this fashion, at least, the conductor classified his passengers. Starting was long deferred; first the main-line train was behind time; then the engine of the Waltonville train moved slowly, as though it felt in every wheel and valve its heavy burden. The traveling men scolded; the staid fathers and mothers and pretty sisters sat quietly, as though this slow journey were a not unsuitable preparation for the solemnities of the morrow. The lateness of the train would be one more interesting detail of a delightful experience. In a few days the doubtful fame of the "nine o'clock" would have spread far beyond Waltonville.

There was one passenger whom the conductor was not able to classify, a tall man who wore a beard sharply pointed in a new fashion, young, but how young it was hard to say. He was handsomely dressed, and his bags were of a different pattern from the square leather cases of the agents and the unwieldy and bulging satchels carried by other travelers.

He rode in the smoking-car and smoked steadily. Once or twice he rose and walked up and down the aisle, complaining of the roughness of his progress. When a passenger took the seat in front of him, he leaned forward and made comment as though communion with a fellow being were suddenly imperative.

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"This is a beastly road!"

The newcomer turned toward him, blinking, as though his mind had to exert itself to understand. He regarded the pointed beard and the handsome tie near him with some astonishment.

"What did you say?"

"I said this was a beastly road. I can apply still other adjectives."

"I guess it's good enough for those that have to travel on it," answered the mild voice. "I myself don't travel much. The testimony of our church is rather against traveling."

The handsome young man sat back with a muttered "Humph!" He was not in the least interested in churches or testimonies or those who thought of them seriously; his mind was occupied with certain literary problems which he considered important. At present he was engaged in a quest which he expected confidently would make him famous.

For fifteen minutes he stared out the window, until the darkening pane gave back only his own countenance. Then he turned in his seat and spoke to the man behind him. This man was very friendly; he explained at once that he was going to Waltonville to see his only son graduate and that mother and the girls were in the other car. The sending of his son to college had been a heavy expense, but the boy had justified all his hopes and would be able to pay back into the family treasury the amount which he had received.

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"My name is Illington," said he in conclusion.

Instead of giving his name in return, the young man asked a question.

"Are you acquainted in Waltonville?"

"A little." Mr. Illington shifted his position so that he might talk more comfortably. He thought of offering to sit with the young man.

"Did you ever hear of any one named Basil Everman?"

The answer came with a kindly, frowning effort to remember.

"No and yes. The name sounds familiar."

"Do you know whether such a person lives in Waltonville now?"

"No, sir, I don't."

"Did you *really* ever know of such a person?"

The kindly man shook his head. "I can't say that I *really* did. But the name sounds—"

The young man turned away as if to say, "That will do." He lifted to the seat beside him the smaller of his bags and opened it. Upon the top of a pile of fine, smoothly folded clothes lay three old magazines, bound in pale covers which were now dull with age. In each one he opened to an anonymous article. "The Roses of Pæstum," an essay, was one; "Bitter Bread," a story, was another. The third was a long poem, "Storm." He opened them, evidently without any intention of exhibiting them to his neighbor, but with the purpose of furnishing some reassurance to himself. Having looked at them earnestly one after the other, he returned them to the bag, closed it, and set it on the floor. Once more he appealed to the man behind him.

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"You're sure you don't know anything about any Evermans?"

"I'm afraid I don't, sir. But—"

The young man took a little notebook from his pocket and wrote in it a few words which his neighbor, curiously peering over his shoulder, could see plainly. "Approach to shrine. A prophet in his own country." The inscription made the observer feel a vague mortification.

"You might ask the conductor," he suggested.

"Thank you," was the solemn answer. Then, in slightly uneven script, the stranger added to his notes, "Ask the conductor," and placed an exclamation point after the words.

The conductor, approaching from the rear, was halted and the question put.

"Did you ever hear the name Basil Everman?"

"Never." The conductor also felt a kindly unwillingness to give a negative answer. "But I've only been on this run fifteen years, and my home's at the other end. But you can ask the brakeman; he lives in Waltonville."

The young man's notebook was still in his hand. He wrote in it, "Ask the brakeman about B. E., the incomparable," and followed it with three exclamation points.

The brakeman answered that he, too, was ignorant of Basil Everman. He perched on the arm of the inquirer's seat. He said that he lived in Waltonville because it was cheaper and his wife liked to keep chickens. He gave various other reasons why his wife liked the country. He preferred the city. [Pg 33]

When the brakeman had gone, Mr. Illington began to prophesy the probable outcome of the next presidential election, and the young man, making some incoherent excuse, rose to go into the other car. But the other car was crowded, and he had to come back, heavy bags in hand. When Mr. Illington, not in the least offended, asked him whether he was a traveling man, he answered so gruffly that he was left in peace.

In spite of the fact that this was the eve of Commencement and that numerous fathers and mothers were to be its guests, the Waltonville Hotel sent no porters to the station to meet the train. It was taken for granted that those persons who were able to travel were able also to carry their hand luggage. Those who had trunks or sample cases sent Black Jerry down from the hotel after they had registered.

The young man knew nothing of old Jerry, so he carried his many changes of clothing, his silver-mounted toilet articles, and his books in his own hand. He stepped from the train almost before it stopped, anxious to secure for himself as good accommodations as were to be had, and asked of the amused station agent the location of the best hotel. The agent looked after his rapidly disappearing figure and winked at the baggage-man as if to say, "I wonder what he will think of it when he sees it!" [Pg 34]

When the young man reached the hotel, having stumbled and almost fallen on protruding bricks in the uneven pavement, the expression of weariness on his face changed to one of disgust. The hotel was small; its furnishings were poor and rickety; it was not clean; and it was saturated throughout with the odors of stale beer and stale cooking. To engage a room one must enter the bar-room and endure the scrutiny of half a dozen pairs of curious eyes peering out of dull, bloated faces. The young man set his bags down heavily and asked for the best room in the house.

The landlord looked at him with a sour smile.

"They're all pretty much alike."

"Any with baths?"

"No, sir."

"Isn't this a college town?"

"I believe they call it that."

"Humph!" said the stranger. Then he wrote his name, "Evan Utterly, New York," in a square hand in the untidy, blotted register and the landlord gave him a key to Number Five.

"First room at the head of the stairs. You can find it. Name's on the door."

"Thank you," said Mr. Utterly. He intended to convey stern reproof by his tone so that the landlord should burn with mortification. But his tone was not reproving, it was exclamatory. His eyes had lifted to a picture hung above the dingy mirror behind the bar. It was a poor old English print, representing the arrival of the stage at an inn door. From the stage window leaned the head of a young girl, who looked with a frightened expression at the coarse face of the landlord, while a little dog barked furiously at the horses. The poor picture seemed to have some powerful fascination for the stranger. His tone became eager. [Pg 35]

"Did you ever hear of any one named Basil Everman?" he asked.

"Never."

"How long have you been here?"

"Ten years."

"Did you ever hear of any one by the name of Everman?"

The landlord turned to wait upon the first of the advancing fathers.

"Never," said he.

Into the face of one of the loafers came a startled look. This was the lawyer, Bates, who had dulled a fine mind by dissipation and of whom little Eleanor Bent lived in terror. The mention of Basil Everman seemed to amaze him. His brow was for an instant furrowed as though he tried to concentrate all his powers of mind upon some long-past circumstance, but he was not able, at this hour of the day, to concentrate upon anything, and presently the fumes of liquor and tobacco and the warm summer air sent him back into the state of somnolence from which he had been roused.

Utterly found a hard, uneven bed in an unaired room and spent a wretchedly uncomfortable night filled with foolish dreams of impossible quests. So depressed was he with the last search, which seemed to extend over years and years and lead nowhere, that his first act upon waking was to reach out and take in his hand the thin old magazines which lay in his bag on a chair near by and open to "Bitter Bread."

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"It was late afternoon when she reached her destination," he read. "There, instead of the eager face of Arnold, she saw looking from the inn door the cruel face of Corbin; there, instead of Arnold's welcoming voice, she heard the sharp bark of Corbin's unfriendly dog."

Having read the two sentences, which seemed to restore his confidence, Utterly rose, dressed himself in white flannel, and went down to the dining-room.

Breakfast was, as was to be expected, poor. But among the mildly excited persons with whom the room was filled, Utterly was at first the only one who complained. Mothers and fathers were nervous with fear that John and Harry might not do well; sisters watched, bright-eyed, for brothers and the friends of brothers. Mr. Illington stopped at Utterly's end of one of the long, untidy tables to bid him good-morning. He called him now by his name, having consulted the hotel register, and offered in friendly fashion to introduce him to "the girls."

There was, Utterly said to himself, but one person with a mind in the room. The person whom he thus distinguished was Dr. Green, who came late and brought with him the strong odor of drugs which betrayed his profession. He moved his chair as though he would have liked to relieve a black mood by tossing it above his head, and perhaps by slamming it down upon the floor. His quick motions and his bright eyes indicated an abundance of physical and mental energy, neither of which had, perhaps, full exercise. Having waited long for a late-appearing housekeeper, he had at last sped down the street to the hotel. Now he ordered breakfast sharply and impatiently.

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Old Jerry, waiter as well as man-of-all-work, obeyed him spryly with many a chuckle "Yes, doctor; yes, mars'r," which indicated that the doctor was a less formidable person than he seemed.

"That good-for-nothin' Jinnie ought to go to Geo'gia trade, mars'r, that's where she ought to be sent a-flyin'. Didn't get you no breakfus! Yes, mars'r, these is meant for cakes." Old Jerry looked toward the kitchen. "That one out there's like Jinnie, mars'r. The wimmen, they is all alike, seems to me."

The doctor looked as though he agreed with Jerry's humorous disgust with the sex. Utterly, watching him, grew more certain that here at last was promise of intelligence. He might have been less sure of the doctor's intelligence could he have seen the complete turn of head and body which followed his own exit.

"These," said Dr. Green, "go clad as the angels."

Jerry bent to pick up the doctor's napkin, and once bent to the floor, found it difficult to rise, so convulsed was he.

"Yes, mars'r, that am so."

Stopping at the bar on his way from the dining-room, Utterly asked the hotel-keeper the name of the teacher of English at the college. The hotel-keeper regarded his white apparel with unconcealed astonishment, and shook his head.

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"Can't tell you. Don't believe you can do any business out there this morning. They're having their graduating exercises. Is your line books?"

"Yes," answered Utterly. "That's my line."

His disgust with the ignorance of those whom he had encountered and his recollection of his uncomfortable night faded as he walked, an hour later, out toward the campus. Here was Waltonville, after all, as he imagined it, and in order that such a Waltonville might be preserved, it was endurable that some discomforts should be preserved also.

Here was a broad street, sloping up to the college gates; here were tall trees and broad lawns, and everywhere masses of roses and honeysuckle which one had a right to expect in this latitude and longitude in June. He looked with admiration at the graceful curve of the black railing which protected those who went up the steps to Dr. Green's office, and stopped stock-still when he came to Thomasina's gateway and saw her straight flagged walk and her flowers, and said, "By Jove!" when he heard the music of the bees in the blossoming honey locust. The campus was surrounded by a brick wall with high, thick, brick posts, all covered with ivy which was now sending out clean, bright little shoots. The old buildings were covered so that they seemed to be constructed of green vines.

In the distance the academic procession was approaching, the gowned and hooded shepherds of the flock leading, the boys and girls, similarly gowned, following sedately after. From the chapel toward which they advanced came the sound of music, a festival march well played on a sweet-toned old organ. A bit of poetry came to Utterly's mind:

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"Who are these coming to the sacrifice?...
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its folk this pious morn?"

"How delightfully Attic!" he said to himself, not without satisfaction in the knowledge which made this comment possible.

The various members of the procession were not so set upon the significance of their orderly march that they did not notice the stranger as he stood watching them. All the professors saw him and envied him a little his youth and his elegance, and were at the same time a little amused. Eleanor Bent saw him and flushed, then grew very white. Here, perhaps, was the stranger who was to call upon her! Her heart was wax, as yet unwritten upon, but this day plastic and ready for a lover's signature. She was, at the thought that Utterly might be the coming messenger of "Willard's Magazine," at once excited and alarmed. She was so ignorant—what should she say to so imposing and elegant a person?

Seeing that the body of the chapel was filled, Utterly climbed one of the two broad staircases which led to the rear gallery, and from there looked down upon the bonnets of the ladies and upon the flower-decked platform on which faculty and graduates were now taking their places. There were two other occupants of the gallery—at the organ a handsome boy, who was evidently a senior, since his black gown lay on the bench beside him, and the same tall gentleman redolent of drugs who had breakfasted at the hotel.

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The boy was playing vigorously. His touch was clear and true, and Utterly, who possessed, along with many other serviceable and unserviceable bits of knowledge, an acquaintance with organ music, listened with surprise to his spirited and accurate work. His eyes then passed from one member of the faculty to another, resting longest upon President Lister, short, dark-skinned, and Jewish in appearance, and upon a tall, slender, smooth-shaven man whom he guessed to be the Professor of English. In these two, he decided, after contemplating them and their colleagues, was concentrated the intellectual strength of Walton College.

When the processional was finished, the player slid off the organ bench, slipped into his gown, straightened his shoulders, whispered a "Hello!" at the doctor, and left the gallery. A much smaller boy emerged, red-faced, from the interior of the organ, and to him Utterly signaled a demand for a programme.

During the long prayer, he read the list of graduates. The first name upon which his eye fell, that of Eleanor Bent, startled him so that he almost exclaimed aloud, and for a few moments he continued to stare at it as though he were not quite certain that he read aright. But the name was unmistakable, as well as the young woman's part on the programme—"Eleanor Bent, Valedictory." Utterly slid along the bench toward the doctor, who was much surprised to find him close by when he lifted his head after the prayer. There was a strange, excited look in the doctor's eyes. At the programme which Utterly held out to him he glared almost savagely. He did not like Utterly's looks; he was an effeminate dandy.

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Utterly had drawn a heavy line under Eleanor Bent's name, and he pointed to it now with his pencil.

"Is that a *young* lady?" he whispered rather stupidly.

The doctor looked at him with unfriendly astonishment.

"Naturally!"

"I mean—is there another person of that name in the town?—an aunt, perhaps, or—"

"No," said Dr. Green, "there isn't."

"And here!" Mr. Utterly's pencil moved to another point. "'Richard Everman Lister.' Do you know anything of him?"

The doctor jerked his head toward the organ. "That was he."

"Did you ever hear of a Basil Everman?"

It was impossible to tell whether this jerk of head signified impatience or negation. Utterly pointed again to Richard's name. He did not observe or choose to observe that the doctor objected to this whispered questioning.

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"Do you know anything about his relatives?"

"I know them all."

"And there is no Basil Everman?"

The doctor turned his shoulder now with an unmistakable intention to say no more. As Utterly slid back to his place, he saw an old catalogue in another pew and leaned forward to secure it. Among the former presidents of the college was Richard Everman, who was also Professor of Greek. Basil—who but a Professor of Greek would give his son such a name? Mr. Utterly glared at Dr. Green. Was this foolish doctor trying to conceal something from him, something which he had every right to know? He had a moment's silly suspicion that the conductor and the hotel-keeper and the brakeman and the doctor might have conspired against him.

Putting the old catalogue into his pocket, he gave his attention to the speaker, that same bright-eyed, blond Richard who was beginning his "*Auditores, Comites, Professores*," in a clear voice and with a smiling face. Utterly smiled back, partly in response and partly at the old-fashioned English pronunciation, antiquated even to him, though he was years older than these children.

Between Richard Lister and Eleanor Bent came ten speakers, each addressing a tense and motionless audience, sympathetic with aspiring youth, sympathetic in turn with each attentive parent and sister, and breathing audible sighs with each concluding bow. Of all the boys only Richard was composed. The only girl in the class beside Eleanor, Cora Scott, made no impression upon Utterly except that she was a frail little thing, what color and prettiness she might have overshadowed, blotted out by the black gown in which she was swathed. Of them all, no one failed, but there were slight hesitations and cheeks red with embarrassment. The topics which they discussed might well have excited older heads than theirs. Especially were the theories of Mr. Darwin, penetrating after many years to Walton College, now torn, shredded, cast to the winds.

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But Eleanor Bent—here was no blotting-out, but rather a heightening of vivid beauty. Utterly, who did not have an enthusiastic temperament, said to himself that he had never seen a more charming girl. She walked well in her approach to the center of the platform, she bowed gracefully, she had, he decided, the most wonderful gray eyes he had ever seen, and the most musical, low voice. She was in a sense his discovery also, and this evening he would talk to her and learn just how remarkable she was.

Her address was merely an elaborate farewell, flowery, perhaps, but appropriately and becomingly flowery, matching well the roses and the honeysuckle and the Southern inflections of her sweet young voice.

While the degrees were being conferred, Utterly consulted again the catalogue in his pocket. The name of the teacher of English was Scott, Henry Harrington Scott; was certainly the smooth-faced gentleman. He lived probably in one of the pleasant houses on the campus with their domestic resemblance to the classic architecture of the large buildings.

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He looked with interest at Richard Everman Lister when he returned to his place on the organ bench for the recessional. Richard's countenance was frank and open; there had descended to him, if he were at all related to this mysterious Basil, no outward trace, at least, of the interesting qualities of mind and soul which distinguished the author of "Bitter Bread" and "Roses of Pæstum."

CHAPTER IV

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MR. UTTERLY MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MRS. SCOTT

When Utterly started from the hotel to call upon the Professor of English, the three members of the Scott family were still at the dinner table. Mrs. Scott occupied the chief seat, a small, birdlike creature with quick motions and a sharp tongue which helped to shape staccato notes as varied as those of a catbird. She condemned now in rapid succession the decorations of the chapel, President Lister's address, and Eleanor Bent's color, which she believed was not altogether natural.

Little Cora, who sat to her mother's left, was, to most persons acquainted with the family, a negligible quantity. She had gone through college because college was at hand, and she would now assume, it was to be expected, like the other girls in Waltonville, an attitude of waiting, which was to her mother not without its precise object.

"Richard Lister never looked at any one else," she often insisted to her husband.

"Richard is very young," Dr. Scott would remind her in his nervous way. He stammered when he addressed his wife, who seldom allowed him to finish his long, beautiful sentences. Sometimes she helped him with a word, sometimes she finished the sentence herself, radically altering his meaning, and proceeding precipitately to some lighter theme.

He sat opposite his wife and awaited impatiently the moment of release. About twenty-five years after he was married, he had made for himself a refuge in a room adjoining his classroom. Here a single wide window opened upon a part of the prospect which Mrs. Bent and her daughter enjoyed daily; here was a fireplace and here ample space for shelves. He transported himself thither with desk, pamphlets, old books, and all other movable possessions except his clothes, to spend that part of his time which was not devoted to eating or sleeping or teaching. There Mrs. Scott did not seek him out, having everything in her own hands, and needing no advice upon any

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subject domestic or foreign.

He had an intense desire for a little fame, both because he did not wish to be wholly forgotten, and because he longed for association with those who were working in the same field. He wrote short articles for the "Era" and longer articles for the "Continent," and occasionally he received letters in comment from scholars. He read widely, and his mind, quickened by some modern instance, offered at once a parallel from literature or history. An eruption of Ætna reminded him of magnificent and almost forgotten lines of Cowper; a summer evening recalled stanza upon stanza; in spring he thought in verse.

Occasionally he received for his compositions a small honorarium. The first he had passed with fatal gallantry to Mrs. Scott. When she spent it for an atrocious "Head of an Arab" in Arabian colors, he determined to use the next for books. But she expected a continuation of these perquisites and was quick to suspect their arrival. Instead of adding new volumes of Pater or old editions of the poetry of Robert Herrick to his library, he added new pieces of statuary and other objects of doubtful value to his wife's collection. When the precious slips of paper passed from his hand, he was tempted to wonder why he had married. But loyalty was a religion with him and he would be loyal even in thought.

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The vacant place opposite Cora belonged to her brother Walter, or, as he preferred to sign himself, W. Simpson Scott, a product peculiarly his mother's, moulded by her hand, holding her convictions. Earnestly advised in his boyhood that without a large income one could do and be nothing in the world, he had accepted a position with an uncle, a manufacturer in New York, and had risen until he was now his uncle's chief assistant at a salary well known in Waltonville. He proved himself to be equal to all those commercial emergencies in which a little sharp dealing goes farther than a good deal of hard work. He came home about twice a year, bringing with him the most recent of slang, the most fashionable of wardrobes, the latest musical-comedy songs, and the most contemptuous opinion of Waltonville.

To the Scott household the closing of the college for the summer brought little change. The time that Dr. Scott had spent in the classroom he would spend now in his study; the time that Cora had spent with her books she would spend embroidering. Mrs. Scott's life would know at first no change, but in August she would take Cora to Atlantic City to meet Walter, and Dr. Scott would spend a month in heavenly quiet and with an entirely negligible indigestion.

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When Evan Utterly reached the porch steps, Mrs. Scott stood still at the foot of the stairway which she was about to ascend and looked and listened, regretting the chance which had taken her husband to the porch before her. Somehow Utterly in his beautiful white clothes had escaped her attention at the morning exercises, or she would have had up to this time an uncomfortable period of speculation.

Vaguely provoked because she was not summoned at once, she stood still, her eyes roving from the parlor, with its gilt chairs and its pale upholstery, to the sitting-room, with its table spread with Cora's presents. There could be no better time to entertain a stranger!

She heard Utterly comment upon the Attic beauty of the campus; then his voice sank. He was still talking about Waltonville's charm, but she suspected a confidential communication. She determined to wait until she heard more. There was only one situation in life in which she was truly patient and in such a situation she now waited and listened. When a single clear statement reached her alert ears, she moved nearer to the door. The stranger had said that he was a member of the staff of "Willard's Magazine"! She had a passion for literature, she believed, and here was doubtless a very celebrated literary man at her door! She laid her hand lightly upon the latch, thereby producing a little sound which the stranger could not hear, but which Dr. Scott could not mistake. Surely he would rise at once and invite her to join them!

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But her husband gave no sign of summoning her. Patience became impatience. She could hear in his voice the tone which he assumed when he was bored or when he was talking with persons whom he did not like. She could still hear only unintelligible fragments of the conversation. She clicked the latch again.

Dr. Scott did not like the stranger, either for himself or his clothes or his speech. It was a period when Anglomania affected the rising generation and this youth used English pronunciations as he might have used a monocle, with evident and painful effort. In what he had to say Dr. Scott was not the least interested. He had begun to open the mail which lay on the chair beside him and he wished desperately that the young man would state his errand and go.

When Utterly asked finally for Basil Everman, Dr. Scott was not able to help him in his search. He said that he had lived in Waltonville for only about fifteen years and that he did not remember that he had ever heard of Basil. Richard Everman had been president of the college and he had had one child, a daughter who was now Mrs. Lister. From her the family history could doubtless be learned. It might be that Basil was her uncle. Dr. Scott stirred uneasily, as he was wont to do when he was anxious to be left in peace.

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Mrs. Scott had moved to the side of the doorway from which she could see the stranger. He seemed to her each moment more distinguished in appearance. She was certain that he hailed from that distant Boston which she adored without having seen. When she saw him reach for his hat and stick, which he had laid on the porch floor beside him, she lifted the latch and walked out. She was just in the nick of time. Neither the conductor nor the brakeman nor even the hotel-keeper was as offensive to Utterly as this man who professed to teach English literature. He did

not exhibit his magazines or explain why he sought Basil Everman.

For once, Dr. Scott did as he was expected and desired to do. Rising, he presented the stranger to Mrs. Scott with a cordiality which only hope of his own escape could have inspired. Now, at least, he need not talk. Perhaps he could even leave the stranger entirely in her hands. This was, he explained with a Chesterfieldian bow, Mr. Utterly, who was making inquiry about some one named Basil Everman.

Mrs. Scott seated herself with a finality of manner which made it necessary for Utterly to be seated also.

"Oh, yes?" said she eagerly and inquiringly.

"Do you know anything of him?" asked Utterly.

"Why, yes. He was a brother of Mrs. Lister. He died—"

"Died!" repeated Utterly.

"Oh, yes, before we came to Waltonville. I believe he lived away from home. He died of some contagious disease and he wasn't buried here, I know that. I think he was a bit *wild*." Mrs. Scott looked at the stranger with some deep meaning.

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Dr. Scott flushed during this rush of words. It was strange that she should know so much about Basil Everman and he so little, but whether he had never heard his name, or whether he had known and had forgotten were questions of too little importance to solve or to explain.

"What do you mean by 'wild'?" asked Utterly with blunt curiosity.

"Oh, he—he didn't do things as other people did them," answered Mrs. Scott vaguely.

"You never saw him?"

"No."

"Nor heard anything of him but that?"

"No." Mrs. Scott made the acknowledgment with reluctance.

When Utterly said that her not knowing more was very singular, her curiosity became almost a physical distress.

"Was there anything remarkable about him?" she asked.

"Rather!" Utterly now took hat and stick firmly in his hand. "Where do the Listers live?"

Mrs. Scott ignored the question. It annoyed her to think of this brilliant stranger in the hands of Mrs. Lister even though his business was with her.

"If you are interested in hearing about Basil Everman"—the name slipped from her lips as though it had long waited just behind them—"you might like to meet some Waltonville people here to-morrow evening. They could tell you a great deal."

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Utterly accepted the invitation with alacrity. If he were still in Waltonville, he should like nothing better.

"There is another citizen of Waltonville whom I should like to meet," said he.

Mrs. Scott's mind traveled rapidly down the list of professors. She almost purred in her satisfaction.

"I shall be glad to ask any one. That person is—"

When Utterly answered "Miss Eleanor Bent," Mrs. Scott looked astonished and disapproving. Utterly read her countenance with amusement. It was evident that Miss Bent did not move in Mrs. Scott's circle. The worse for Mrs. Scott! He explained that he was to call on Miss Bent that evening by appointment. She was, thank fortune! here and alive and easy to find. Then, with a polite good-afternoon, he descended the steps and started toward the Listers' white house.

Dr. Scott and his wife spoke simultaneously.

"What on earth does he want?" demanded Mrs. Scott of Dr. Scott and of the universe.

"The man is a stranger! Why did you invite him here like that?"

"We are told to entertain strangers," replied Mrs. Scott flippantly. "What *does* he want here? What does he want with Eleanor Bent? What is this about Mrs. Lister's brother?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask. It's none of my affair."

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"Perhaps she has applied somewhere for a position. What—"

Dr. Scott gathered up his papers and books. He dropped the "Fortnightly Review" and almost groaned to see that magazine and cover had parted company. Then he bestowed upon his wife one of the glances of incredulous astonishment which he had cast upon her during all but a very brief period of their married life, and fled. That a party involved the making of ice-cream and that

he would be required to furnish the motive power for its manufacture in the middle of tomorrow's hot afternoon was not the least disturbing of the reflections which this unfortunate incident introduced into his mind.

CHAPTER V

MR. UTTERLY CONTINUES HIS SEARCH

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Hat and cane in hand and carrying under his arm the three old magazines which he contemplated from time to time so earnestly, Utterly ascended the steps of the Lister porch. There, in mid-afternoon, Dr. Lister sat alone, the dinner guests having departed to join the general exodus on the five-o'clock train. Mrs. Lister had gone upstairs to change her black dress for one of lighter weight, and now sat quietly and happily beside her window. Such periods of unhappiness as she had lived through that morning were followed by spaces of calm when a crust seemed to form over the grief which could still burn so fiercely. The house was very still; the only movement indoors was that of the thin curtains swaying gently in the summer air.

Hearing a strange voice on the porch, she made haste to complete her change of apparel. She was as punctilious in the small relations of life as she was in its more important principles. Perhaps the visitor did not wish to see her; if he lingered she would go quietly down into the hall and find out.

Dr. Lister had seen Utterly and had wondered who he was. Now, saying to himself that Waltonville was seldom glorified by so well-clad a figure, he rose to meet his guest. Dr. Lister loved Greek and taught his boys and girls faithfully, but without much enthusiasm for their capabilities or possibilities. His mind was more intently occupied with the affairs of the great world which seemed to lie so far away, with prospective changes in the English cabinet, with ominous stirrings in the East. It seemed to him at the first glance that his guest belonged to that interesting outer world.

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"This is Dr. Lister?" Utterly saw the eager eyes. Here was a man! "I am Mr. Utterly of 'Willard's Magazine.' Can you spare me a few moments of your time?"

Dr. Lister motioned the stranger to one of the comfortable chairs. He had been thinking of a few minutes' sleep before supper, but he gave it up willingly and even eagerly in the prospect of a talk with this keen stranger.

"My vacation began at noon, sir. I shall be glad to give you all the time you wish."

Utterly sat with the magazines in his hand. This Waltonville, he said, was charming.

"A New Yorker would find it rather dull," answered Dr. Lister.

"There would be compensation here for anything New York could offer," said Utterly, without meaning it in the least. "This peaceful Attic flavor"—with a gesture toward the green trees and the smooth lawn and Dr. Lister's canna beds—"makes one feel that after all some persons and some places do arrive at serenity. We never do in New York. We don't know what serenity is." Then Utterly descended from the pedestal upon which Dr. Lister had for the moment established him. He added a "don't you know" to his sentence. "We don't know what serenity is, don't you know." The phrase was still not common property in America, but it offended Dr. Lister's ear.

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"I listened with great pleasure to your boys and girls, especially to the playing of your own boy—I believe it was your son who played the organ?"

"Yes," said Dr. Lister.

"I stood at the campus gate and watched your peaceful procession with envy and I might say with awe. I felt that it wasn't real. I seemed to have stepped back just about two thousand years. You ought to keep it forever as a spectacle. Pilgrimages ought to be made here, not by train, but on foot. Everything in the world is changing—you have something that is old. I couldn't help thinking of 'Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,' and so forth, don't you know?"

Dr. Lister shifted his knees so that the one which had been uppermost was now beneath the other. Who was this strange, bearded, sentimental youth, robed like the lilies, who quoted poetry at first acquaintance? Dr. Lister read poetry, but he did not quote it to men whom he did not know. He wished that the young man, still running eloquently on about the Attic scene, would state his errand and go. He thought longingly of his couch in the cool study.

Then, in the still afternoon, thus far so like any other Commencement afternoon, he was startled out of all sleepiness.

"It is difficult to understand how Basil Everman with such an environment could have looked so keenly and seeingly at the grimmer side of life."

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Dr. Lister turned his head.

"I didn't understand you."

"I said that it is difficult to understand how Basil Everman, with such an environment as this in

his youth, could have presented so completely a side of life so grim and terrible."

"*Basil Everman!*" repeated Dr. Lister. Still he could not believe that he had heard aright. He had been sleepy and he had misunderstood.

"Why, yes! It surely is not possible that Dr. Lister does not know Basil Everman!"

"Basil Everman was my wife's brother. He has been dead for twenty years!"

"You did not know him as a writer?" Utterly's eyes arraigned Dr. Lister for stupidity or some worse fault.

"No. What do you mean?" Dr. Lister lowered his voice. His impressions of Basil Everman, whom he had not known, were not extensive, but they were very positive. He had been a strange youth who had brought sorrow, and sorrow only, to those who loved him, talented without question, but lacking in balance of mind. He had often felt for him a stern disapproval, coupled with a half-defined jealousy because of the devotion of his sister to a memory which was best put away.

"I am a member of the staff of 'Willard's Magazine,'" explained Utterly. "Some weeks ago I looked carefully over the old files with a view to making a comparison of the shorter fiction of to-day with that which was being written twenty-five years or more ago. Ours to-day is vastly superior." Suddenly Utterly's words came in a flood. He grew ardent and excited. "We are beginning to learn from the French and Russians. We are learning the beauty of the lowly, even of the degraded. We are learning to look at life with our eyes and not with our puritanic moral sense. I have no words with which to express my contempt for that dull, blind, wickedly perverted thing called Puritanism."

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Dr. Lister now sat motionless, his knees a limp parallel. His perfect quiet, the intentness of his gaze, the complete stillness of all about them, suggested to Utterly a breathless moment in a play. He felt that he was talking well, that he had never talked better in his life.

"But here, twenty years ago, was an exception, a glorious, shining exception. I found a story called 'Bitter Bread,' an essay called 'Roses of Pæstum,' and a poem called 'Storm.' Every one who has read them considers them extraordinary. They exhibit not only marvelous imaginative power, but an extensive experience of life, the experience of a man who has seen many things and felt all things. I am not one of those who hold that genius finds both its source and its material in itself, furnishing at once its own fuel and its own fire."

Utterly paused for breath. Here was a well-expressed sentiment of which he must make mental and afterwards written note.

"But—" began Dr. Lister.

Utterly lifted his hand.

"We found after a good deal of searching that one of the original manuscripts had been preserved. It was mailed from Waltonville, Pennsylvania, though the answer was to be sent to Baltimore. I had another errand here, and I was anxious to discover what I could about this contributor of twenty-five years ago, who promised such extraordinary things and who then, as far as we know, ceased to write. I belong to that class of biographers who believe that all is sacred and valuable in the development of genius. The facts of a writer's life are of transcendent importance. The power of imagination fails after a certain point, rather it does not begin until a certain degree of experience has been reached. A writer must have *lived*. I am hungry to know all you can tell me of Basil Everman. I mean to write about him at length." Utterly settled himself a little more comfortably in his chair. "You say that he is dead? How unfortunate!"

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"Yes," said Dr. Lister slowly. "He has been dead for twenty years."

"Did he die here?"

"No. He died away from home in an epidemic. It was not possible to bring his body home. His death seriously affected my wife, who is his sister, and who lost her father about the same time. I never saw Basil Everman either in life or death."

"And you never knew or suspected that he wrote?"

"I never heard that he was supposed to have talent of any sort. He was very young."

"So was Keats when he wrote 'St. Agnes Eve.' Surely Basil Everman's sister knew about his talent!"

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"I do not believe she ever knew that he had published any writings."

"May I see her?"

"I—I will see."

Dr. Lister rose, bewildered, and went slowly toward the door. Surely Mary Alcestis could have known nothing of this! The idea that she might have mental reservations was new. He was certain that she would be shocked by this inquiry and he wished that there were time to prepare her for it. He could, if she wished, ask the stranger to come at another time, or he could excuse her entirely.

He found her in the hall. He had a fleeting impression that she had been for some time where she stood now, by the stairway with her hand on the newel post. But she came forward at once, her smooth and slightly pale face showing only its usual expression of placid content.

"Did you have a rest, mother?" asked Dr. Lister.

"Yes," she answered in her steady voice. "All that I needed."

"There is a literary man here who comes from a New York magazine who wishes to speak to you."

"To me?" repeated Mrs. Lister. It was not a question, real or rhetorical, it was simply a mechanical repetition of her husband's words.

"Yes. He wishes, strangely enough, mother, to ask you about some literary work of your brother Basil's."

"Of Basil's." Mrs. Lister did not seem so much surprised as benumbed. Dr. Lister was now certain that she had heard the stranger, and had tried, and was still trying, to gather herself together. [Pg 61]

"He says that your brother sent to his magazine many years ago some remarkable compositions which they published anonymously. Did you know of them?"

"He used to write some," said Mrs. Lister in a childish way. "He played some, too, on the piano. No, I didn't know that anything was published."

"Will you come out and speak to this gentleman? Do you feel able to speak to him?"

Mrs. Lister walked toward the door without answering. She rested her hand for an instant on the door frame and felt for the step with perceptible confusion. If the sunshine looked suddenly dark, and the honeysuckle seemed to exhale a sickly odor, it was not the first time in her life that under like circumstances she had held her head bravely. She had heard every word the stranger had said. If she had put on spectacles of some strange, distorting medium, he could not have looked more monstrous, more frightful to her. She gave him a cold hand because his own hand reached for it, and then sat down.

Utterly repeated his account of the finding of Basil Everman's stories and his estimate of his genius. He expressed in even more realistic phrase his admiration for the insight of the younger generation of writers. He said that modern literature was finding material in thieves, drunkards, in what had hitherto been considered bottomless pits. Even Keats had said that truth was beauty. [Pg 62]

He recounted with witty embroidery how he had asked the brakeman and the conductor and the person whom he called "mine host" about Basil Everman and how none of them could tell him anything.

"But the little tavern gave the whole thing away. The heroine of 'Bitter Bread' takes refuge in just such a place; there is the identical worn doorstep and the fly-blown bottles and the print over the bar which pictures exactly her own arrival. There, at least, Basil Everman must have been long enough to have a photographic impression printed on his sensitive brain."

Dr. Lister's hands, lying upon the arms of his chair, straightened themselves as though, using them as a fulcrum, he meant to rise with a mighty spring. The tavern was not a place for Mary Alcestis's brother to be connected with! But he looked at Mrs. Lister and sat still. Her face was a little whiter, but it was unruffled. Now that he had been so unwise as to let her see this creature, the interview had better be conducted as she chose.

"Then I went to the house of the Professor of English and he knew nothing. If it hadn't been for the tavern, I should have despaired entirely. Will you"—Utterly, looking at Mrs. Lister decided that so Victorian a person could not possibly understand or appreciate her brother. "Will you tell me about Basil Everman? Will you not tell me everything?"

Mrs. Lister began in a smooth voice as though she were reciting a well-conned lesson. Not a quiver betrayed her spinning world. [Pg 63]

"Basil was born here in this house. My father was president of the college before Dr. Lister. Basil was his only son and I his only daughter. He had no other children. Basil was only twenty-five years old when he died. He died of diphtheria." Mrs. Lister had evidently concluded. "In Baltimore," she added as though that put a period to her sentence.

"Yes?" said Utterly.

Mary Alcestis smiled a meaningless little smile and said nothing.

"That isn't all, Mrs. Lister!" cried Utterly.

"Yes."

"Oh, but Mrs. Lister!" Utterly was delighted to see that suddenly her eyes burned and her hands twitched. "What was he like? Do you remember him distinctly? What did he look like?"

"Remember him!" said Mrs. Lister's heart. "Remember Basil!" Aloud she said steadily and clearly, "He was quite tall and slender. He had black hair, curly hair. His eyes were large and bright."

"You have photographs of him, of course?"

Dr. Lister rose at Mrs. Lister's command to fetch the album from the parlor table. He recalled more and more distinctly those long hours when she had lain sleepless at his side suffering her abnormal and unwholesome grief for her brother. He moved his chair closer to hers as he handed the stranger Basil's picture.

"What extraordinary eyes!" said Utterly. "They look like another pair of eyes I've seen recently." He frowned, but could not remember what eyes. "That is, their shape is the same. What color were they?"

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"Basil had gray eyes."

"You surely must have known that he was wonderful!"

"He was bright," conceded Mrs. Lister.

"Was he a graduate of this college?"

"No."

"He must have traveled a great deal. He could not have written 'Roses of Pæstum' without having been at Pæstum, and one does not get to Pæstum without going through some other places. I think your father was extraordinarily wise to let him get his education in that way. Did he live abroad?"

"He was never abroad."

"He never saw Pæstum!"

"No."

Utterly looked at Mrs. Lister as though he did not believe her. Again Dr. Lister's hands flattened on the arms of his chair.

"Extraordinary! And he lived here in this house!" Utterly looked up at the walls as though he expected them to bear a memorial plate or some other record. "Was he"—He turned impatiently to Dr. Lister—"Are there no interesting facts about him, no *memorabilia*, no traditions of any kind? If he has been dead only twenty years, he should still be alive in the minds of men and women, especially of women. A man like that couldn't simply grow up and die, like a vegetable! We used to think the Brontës had only lived and grown up and died, but we are learning differently. It was silly ever to have thought otherwise. Moreover, the reading public is determined to have the facts about those whom it admires. You cannot keep people from knowing," concluded Utterly in a harsh tone, some basic rudeness in his nature showing suddenly through the outer veneer. He was certain that they were withholding something from him, certain that Mrs. Lister knew a great deal more than she would tell. To him Basil Everman grew each moment more unusual, more mysterious, the position of the scholar who should discover him more to be desired. If he could see Dr. Lister alone, he might be able to learn more. He rose and asked whether he might leave the magazines until the next day.

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"I suppose you will wish to read them?"

"Certainly," answered Dr. Lister, rising also.

"Basil Everman stands only second to Edgar Allan Poe among the *littérateurs* of the United States; of that even this small amount of work gives ample proof. It is the most deplorable tragedy in the history of American literature that the amount should be so small. Are you *sure* there is nothing else?"

"Other magazines of the period might have something, might they not?" suggested Dr. Lister. "Have you thought of looking there? If the style is so individual, you should be able to recognize the work of the author elsewhere."

"Even if I did, I couldn't ask questions. Don't you see that I don't want any one else to find out now? Any calling of the attention of another magazine to Basil Everman would bring a representative here at once. There is no reason why I shouldn't have the facts as well as any one else."

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Mrs. Lister rose heavily. The interview had been prolonged a moment too long and her composure was gone. What she said startled her husband more than anything that had preceded.

"Do you know all the facts about Homer, or about Shakespeare, or other writers? I know that you don't know anything about Shakespeare because there are some people who think that Bacon wrote his works. Why *should* you know?"

"We should never cease to give thanks if we could find out, dear lady," answered Utterly. "I'll give you a hundred dollars a word for any authentic information about Shakespeare, and a thousand for any about Homer. Homer and Shakespeare have been dead for centuries and men are still trying to find out about them. *And will keep on trying*," he added.

When Utterly was well out of sight, Dr. Lister took his wife's hand.

"Why, my dear! What is it?"

Mrs. Lister turned upon him a gray face. She looked old, terrified, distraught.

"That is a wolfish man," said she. "Make them leave poor Basil in his grave! I will tell nothing about Basil. I have nothing to tell about him."

CHAPTER VI A NEW PIANO

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Richard Lister had been a placid, comfortable baby, though his birth had followed a period of deep anguish in his mother's life. To her he was a miracle, an incredible phenomenon, his dependence upon her for every need of his little being the most heavenly experience she had ever had. He slept a proper and wholesome number of hours and remained awake long enough for ample petting, and for the first twelve years of his life he was scarcely out of her sight. She tended him awake and watched him while he slept, enduring with considerable pain the sight of him in the arms of any one except his father or Thomasina Davis or 'Manda.

When he was five years old, she entered upon a period of anxiety whose beginning she had set for this time. She compelled herself to realize that she could not have him always; that the small imitations of mannish clothes which he wore would be presently exchanged for full-grown originals which he would put on and off without her aid. He would have, moreover, some day a wife who would supersede his mother in the delectable kingdom of his heart.

She began also to anticipate the moment when she must begin to discipline him, and to dread the various forms of infant crime for which she searched her mind. Presently he would cease to obey promptly; he would refuse to put his toys away neatly on the low shelf of the cupboard assigned to him; he would stamp and scream like other naughty little boys. He might, alas, take pennies from her pocketbook. Then there would be the fondness for tobacco and playing-cards on whose account he would have to be struggled with and possibly whipped. She had never been whipped, and she had good reason to doubt the efficacy of whipping, but she would not allow her own observation to contradict Biblical injunction. No one but herself, however, should lay hand or switch upon Richard, hideous as such necessity would be to her.

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But Richard needed no whipping and his mother could decide upon no moment when the discipline, to which she had given so many hours of anxious thought, should begin. He continued, up to and long past the age of five, to be the most biddable little child that ever lived, satisfied with what he had, requiring no other companionship than that of his father and mother and 'Manda, playing a great deal by himself, and never screaming or stamping or taking pennies from pocketbooks. He liked, as he grew older, to have little Cora Scott come to play with him, but to the Scotts he would not go without his mother, having a wholly justifiable fear of Walter.

He was allowed each pleasant morning in summer to cross the broad, grassy field back of the campus to a little stream, tin bait-can, fishing-rod, and package of lunch in hand, and a great old straw hat of his father's on his head. As he sat and fished, 'Manda could watch him from the kitchen window and his mother could gloat over him from a window above. Even Dr. Lister left his work once an hour to see how he fared. If it were a baking morning 'Manda would go down with a fresh patty-cake or a handful of cookies.

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Luck was always poor with Richard, probably because he sang constantly while he fished. His repertoire was composed of hymns and songs of a rather solemn cast. He was particularly fond of the lengthy liturgical service of the church, and prayed the Lord a hundred times in a morning to have mercy upon him. The fervor with which he expressed this plea frightened his mother, who feared that such intense emotion indicated a spirit not long for this world.

Sometimes in the evenings he and 'Manda held a concert at the kitchen door, 'Manda in her rocking-chair on the porch, Richard on the lowest step, hands on knees, eyes gazing upon the meadow with its shadowy trees and its myriad fireflies or looking up at the stars. 'Manda was loath to leave upon such occasions and sat long after the hour when she was usually in the colored settlement.

Richard was the soloist and always selected and began the hymns. Frequently the two took liberties with the original form. Richard made a long pause after each line of "I was a wandering sheep," and 'Manda's rich contralto inserted an eerie, tender, indescribably deep and rich "po' lamb!" The refrain varied constantly and the variety indicated a keen instinct for harmony.

When he changed to "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," or "Hallelu," or "These Bones Shall Rise Again," 'Manda ceased to rock, and bending forward, hands on knees, joined in at the beginning, her rich voice furnishing a background for the child's soprano with its piercing sweetness. In her performance was all the savagery of deepest Africa and besides all spiritual meanings and desires. Thomasina Davis, sitting often with Dr. and Mrs. Lister on the porch on the other side of the house, commanded every one to stop and listen.

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"It makes clear the universal kinship of believers," said she with shining eyes. "There are a hundred thrilling suggestions in that duet of blue-eyed Anglo-Saxon and black-haired African."

Dr. Lister smiled back at Thomasina. Mrs. Lister did not understand exactly what she meant, but she smiled also and obeyed willingly the command for silence. No sound in the world was so sweet to her as Richard's voice.

Little Richard liked also to preach. The audience which he usually selected was, like that of St. Anthony, one of fishes. In imagination he saw before him, from his pulpit on the bank, a decorous congregation and a tuneful choir. His performance, while it shocked his mother, yet gave her hope that he might incline toward the ministry. Her father, for whom he was named, had had theological training and used to preach in the college church. It seemed to her often that she could see in Richard's solemn gestures a resemblance to those of the grave old man.

Richard's discourses suggested no such probability to his father, eavesdropping from behind a convenient tree. They were pleasant to Dr. Lister, who sometimes feared that a boy who was never uproarious, who always remembered to wipe his shoes on the mat, and who never carried toads or mice in his pockets, might be too amiable and good. He wished for a little temper, a little disobedience, a little steel under the satin. When Richard cried out, "Oh, you darned fishes!" in imitation of the ice man whom Mrs. Lister could neither silence nor reform, his father was convulsed.

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When Richard grew older and ceased to sing, his mother, while she missed his hymns, was content. Thus had Basil sung when he was a little boy. At Thomasina's suggestion, Richard had begun early to take music lessons from her. Except that he had often to be summoned from the old piano to other duties, and that he often called to his mother to listen to little melodies which he invented or to certain resolutions of chords which pleased him, and which were to her ear like any other musical sounds, he gave no disturbing sign of special interest in music. Sometimes he repeated stories of musicians which Thomasina told him, about Beethoven who was an accomplished player at the age of nine, and who had become deaf when he had scarcely left his youth, and about Handel who had become blind. Richard's face would glow and his eyes shine with tears.

"Could you imagine, mother, how he felt when he knew that he could never hear again? He never heard his greatest works. Think of it, mother, what a fearful thing that would be!"

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Mrs. Lister could not imagine it and would not think of it, having but slight conception of the pleasures which harmonious sound can give to the ear of the musician. Thus had Basil called upon her for sympathy in his strange, incomprehensible satisfactions. She wished that Thomasina would not tell Richard such stories.

Richard was always busy. He kept a series of little notebooks, neatly indexed; he cut clippings from newspapers and filed them away; he divided his day into periods for each sort of study, for exercise, and for play.

Soon after he entered college, his voice returned, a clear, serviceable tenor. He led the Glee Club which then took no long journeys round the country, but sang for its own amusement and that of the college, and he played the chapel organ and the assembly room piano. He continued to practice at home, but his practice was chiefly that of dull exercises and unending scales which roused no alarm in his mother's breast, and which his father regarded fearfully as the indication of a rather feeble intellect seeking exercise which involved no mental or physical effort. Richard called out no more with tears, "Oh, mother, did you know that Handel was blind?" cried out no more, "Oh, mother, listen!" in ecstasy over some sound which he had produced, no more, "That is to be played *delicatessimente*, mother. Isn't that a beautiful word?" Richard's musical passion, at least so it seemed to his mother, had died a natural death. She could not quite understand why he sought the society of Cora Scott so seldom and that of Thomasina for several hours daily—but that was a choice to be thankful for at his age.

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In the fall he would have to begin in earnest to prepare for whatever profession he was to follow. So far there had been no family discussion of this matter. Mrs. Lister had not quite given up her hopes that he might become a preacher. Of the other professions open to him, medicine, law, and teaching, she hoped that he would choose teaching. Then they could all stay here, forever.

As a matter of fact—alas, for poor Mrs. Lister!—Richard's plans were made, and of them in their entirety one person knew beside himself. Under Richard's satin there was steel. His life-work had been selected and he meant to begin to-morrow. His Commencement money would buy him a clavier and to it he intended to devote the summer. He could have it in his own room where it would disturb no one and where he could look upon it when he woke and practice upon it when he was supposed to be in bed. He knew that his mother was not fond of music, but his mother would let him have his way, had always let him have his way. He did not realize that thus far his way had been hers. In the fall he would go to study with Faversham in New York, and therefore it was probable that he would be at home no more. Thus lightly does youth arrange for itself. If poor Mary Alcestis could have looked into Richard's mind as he sat beside her at the dinner table when Commencement was over, and could there have read its hopes and plans so alien to her own, her heart would have been nearly broken.

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Thomasina Davis was not sanguine about Mrs. Lister's easy yielding to Richard's wishes. She was prepared to talk to his parents by the hour if need be; she would have been willing to live on bread and water and go without shoes so that he should be able to study. She was determined to behold in him the fruit of her labors. Faversham had been a fellow pupil in the three happy years away from Waltonville; to send Richard Lister to him with supple, well-trained fingers and with fine taste, to have Richard say to him that he was a pupil of Thomasina Davis, was a reward she had promised herself since Richard had sat beside her piano on a high chair, enchanted by her music. Thomasina, unlike Mrs. Lister, had a profound respect, an adoration, indeed, for genius. This adoration was innate, but it owed its strength to certain events in her past, a past which

seemed to Mrs. Lister to have been pathetically empty of most of women's joys.

When Commencement and the Commencement dinner were over, Richard felt suddenly restless. He realized that there was nothing that he must do, that no lessons waited. He sat for a while talking with his mother's guests, then he went out to the kitchen, meaning to escape across the campus to the chapel and play. That was what he wanted and needed, the touch of the smooth keys under his fingers, the sound of the full, rich organ tones, to give him, instead of this sense of idleness and emptiness, a consciousness of all the work that was beginning.

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But there were obstacles in the way of his playing. The chapel organ and the assembly room piano were public; he would have an audience in a few minutes, and he did not wish an audience. If he could find some one to play duets with him, he would have the volume of sound for which his ear longed. Thomasina was away; only Cora Scott remained. Cora did not read well, but they could play compositions which she knew.

'Manda paused in her dishwashing to regard him with a warm and beaming glance which expressed entire sympathy with him in his flight.

"Goin' to git out, honey?"

"Yes, 'Mandy, I'se goin' to git out."

Making a wide détour in the shrubbery and round the back of the chapel, he approached the Scotts' porch. Then he stopped short. There in white splendor sat the stranger whom he had seen that morning in the chapel gallery. He turned promptly away.

"No sitting for an hour listening to that!" said he.

Then it was, swayed by the slight incident of Evan Utterly's presence, that Richard, who had hitherto sailed in such a calm domestic stream, turned his boat into another and an alien channel. He said to himself that he would play, that he would perish if he did not play. He considered going to Thomasina's, even though she was not at home and rousing 'Melia from her afternoon nap to let him in. But when he had reached Thomasina's gate, he thought of Eleanor Bent.

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Eleanor played well; he had heard her at Thomasina's. She was pretty and bright, but not very friendly. There was, he believed, something queer about her and her mouselike little mother. He had a vague feeling that his own mother would not quite approve of his going to their house.

But he had set his mind upon playing the Eighth Symphony, and, if possible, several other symphonies. He had, he remembered suddenly and happily, a volume of music belonging to Eleanor Bent, which he had carried away by accident from Thomasina's. He would take this round to Eleanor, and if she were not cordial or the piano not tolerable, he would come away.

With the same care he stole back through the shrubbery to the kitchen door and succeeded, after ludicrous blunders, in getting through 'Manda the volume which he sought. As he crossed the campus again, he saw Utterly rising from his chair. But the die was cast; it was with Eleanor Bent that he wished to play and not with Cora Scott. He kept on his way through the college gate and down the broad street which led to the other side of the town, whistling softly as he went, and feeling a sense of freedom and adventure.

Mrs. Bent let him in from the little front porch to the neat little hall. He explained that he was Richard Lister and that he had come to return a book of Eleanor's, and she invited him into the parlor, saying that Eleanor would appear in a few minutes. Eleanor had had a surprise, she explained, which had delayed their dinner. Her cheeks were flushed; she seemed to be excited.

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There was nothing queer to Richard's eye, either in Mrs. Bent, or, at his first glance, in the interior of her little house. All was fresh and neat and simple and in good taste. There was a picture opposite the door, a view of the Castel Angelo, exactly like one which hung in his father's study; there were pretty curtains, there was—Richard stopped short in the doorway, the bright color in his fair cheeks fading rapidly away and then as suddenly returning. Here before him in the parlor of this little gray house, unknown of him, was a new piano! Moreover, it was a magnificent grand piano, finer than Thomasina's, finer, indeed, than any piano he had ever seen. He did not need to read the name on the front; its very shape was familiar to him from catalogues at which he had gazed in inexpressible longing.

"Why, Mrs. Bent!" cried Richard.

Mrs. Bent smiled in her frightened way at his confusion and delight.

"That is the surprise," said she. "It is hers. It came while she was at the exercises."

"It looks as though it hadn't been touched!"

"It hasn't. She had sort of a queer spell when she saw it"—was that right, or was it "seen"?—"I said she would better eat something."

"It was a surprise to her?"

"Yes."

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"How glorious! I wish some one would surprise me that way!"

Left alone, Richard walked round and round staring at the shining rosewood and the gleaming

keys. He had expected—he almost laughed aloud as he remembered—an upright piano of a poor make, covered with a velvet cover laden with vases and photographs. Thus was the Scott piano decorated. And here was really a grand piano, and the best grand piano that could be bought! If he might only play it!

Eleanor found him walking about. She held out her hand, like her mother all excitement and friendliness. She still wore her beautiful embroidered dress, full in the skirt and low in the neck. Her hair was ruffled and her eyes more than ever brilliant.

There were no introductory explanations. Richard forgot to say why he had come, never explained, indeed, until long afterward when together, as is the custom of those in like case, they made each impulse, each trivial incident of their association the subject of conversation.

"It hasn't been touched," said Eleanor. "When I saw it I forgot how to play!"

"Does Miss Thomasina know about it?"

"She selected it in Baltimore. She had known about it for weeks and I knew nothing. It doesn't seem as though it could be real. Will you, oh, will you play it first?"

Richard turned pale once more.

"I'm not sure that I can play either. I'm not sure that I ever touched a piano!"

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"Oh, you can! Something with great, heavy, rolling, smashing chords. I know that if I touch it it will disappear, and I can't possibly wait till Miss Thomasina comes home. I never could have got through Commencement if I had known it was here."

"Nor I. If I had met it, I would have followed it like the children follow the elephant, and some one else might have saluted the audience. It makes Commencement seem like three cents."

"Now, play!" commanded Eleanor. "Mother!"

Mrs. Bent came to the door. Richard saw her look at her daughter, and the glance was worth coming farther than this to see. It adored her, swept over her from head to foot, devoured her. Something of its intensity entered into Richard. Eleanor was older than he; she had stood ahead of him in school; she had scarcely spoken to him a dozen times; but she became in that moment a creature to be admired, to be cherished. Life changed for him, boyhood was left behind. He met Eleanor's eyes and saw in them youth, curiosity about himself, restlessness, a reflection, it seemed to him, of the confused emotions of his own heart. It was Eleanor's gaze which first turned away.

"The concert is going to begin, mother."

Mrs. Bent sat down in the bay window and Eleanor took a chair from which she could watch Richard's beautiful hands. Once after he had taken his place on the stool, he looked into her eager face, then he let his hands fall upon the keys. He shut his eyes to keep back starting tears. He remembered that some one had said that life held few moments to which a man would say, "Stay, thou art so fair!" The saying was not true. Here was such a moment; there would be for him, he knew, a thousand more.

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A Schumann Nachtstück, a Bach Prelude, a Mozart Sonata rolled from under his fingers, which then danced into a jig, performances allowed by Thomasina. There were others, forbidden except under her own direction and in careful, studious sections. These Richard now hazarded boldly and played them not ill. A dozen compositions finished, he whirled round upon the piano stool.

"Won't you play, now?"

"I can't."

"Will you play with me?"

"There is nothing here."

"I brought the second volume of Beethoven with me."

"I will try," promised Eleanor.

Richard spread the music open on the rack. Both had been trained by Thomasina, both played easily and well, both knew their parts. Shoulders and hands touched; sometimes Richard laughed aloud from sheer pleasure, sometimes he sang an air, sometimes he stopped to give directions. At that Eleanor laughed a little nervously. Richard seemed to all his mates to hold himself above them, to be dictatorial. He had seemed all of this to Eleanor, but now she obeyed instantly.

In the bay window Mrs. Bent sat and watched. She could not have looked at them with anything but pleasure. Eleanor was so young, so pretty. There was no mother in Waltonville who would not have been pleased to see her daughter playing duets with Richard Lister.

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But a shadow had settled on Mrs. Bent's face. The look which had transfigured her changed to a look of anxiety and trouble. She had years ago made wise plans for her life and Eleanor's—they had begun to seem now not wise, but insane. They were wicked, because they were made in one of the rages into which she had fallen, like her father, in her youth; they were stupid, because they had taken no account of the future; and they were selfish, because they had taken no

account of anything but her own fury.

When Dr. Green drove by in his buggy, Mrs. Bent laid her hand with a gesture which was almost melodramatic across her heart, and stared after him, as though the sight of him had for an instant illuminated her despair. In another instant, however, the shadow returned to her face and she bent over her sewing.

Dr. Green drove by, returned and passed again, drove a mile or two into the country and passed the fourth time. He thought that Eleanor was playing, and he said, "Good for her!" He took a great deal of credit to himself for Eleanor.

The afternoon light softened, shadows began to spread over the little garden. When Richard rose to go, Mrs. Bent had vanished, and the two young people looked at each other, startled and a little bewildered, trying to hide their confusion. Eleanor did not say "Come back," nor did Richard ask whether he might come again, but the volume was left open on the piano.

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CHAPTER VII UTTERLY SPENDS A PLEASANT EVENING

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Utterly sat for three hours with Eleanor Bent on her mother's porch, talking. He did not arrive until eight o'clock, which was late in Waltonville, and she had been nervously watching for him for an hour. She was consumed with impatience to hear what he had to say. If her story had not been accepted, she wished to know it at once; if, perchance, he had come to advise her to write no more—that also she wished to know at once. She did not wish the young man—if that gorgeously clad young man were really the messenger of the gods—to stay long; she needed, after the excitement of the day, to be alone, to be quiet, to touch her piano in the darkness, the piano dedicated in such a surprising and poetic way.

She was too restless to play it now. She sat for a while beside her mother, who was sewing beneath the pleasant lamp; then she struck a few chords; then she went out to the porch, calling to her mother not to expect anything.

"They might merely be sending an agent to town to ask people to subscribe to their old magazine, or even to ask me to be agent. John Simms has been and he is going away. That is it, I am sure, mother."

When she saw approaching through the twilight the tall figure of the stranger, she summoned Mrs. Bent and let that frightened little woman greet him.

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Utterly anticipated in the evening's call a pleasant experience. The wide landscape lay soft and beautiful in the moonlight, a panorama spread for his delectation. He called it, in the city-dweller's metaphor, a beautiful stage-set. After she had greeted him, Mrs. Bent went back to her work. Except for a few moments an hour later when she came out to put on the porch table a tray with a plate of cake and tinkling glasses, Utterly saw her no more.

He regarded the young woman before him with a critical eye. She was beautiful, of that there was no question. She was talented also, and though she was still immature and provincial, she was not awkward or self-conscious. She accepted the announcement which he had come to make as quietly as any of the older, more sophisticated women with whom he associated would have accepted it.

"I hope you are pleased."

"Very much," answered Eleanor in a quiet voice which belied the tumult within. It seemed to her that she could hardly breathe.

"And you will keep on writing?"

"Oh, *yes!*" said Eleanor.

"You keep notebooks, I suppose, and record all your impressions?"

"Yes."

"And you read a great deal?"

"Yes."

"How do you mean to get new impressions? Are you going to stay here?" Utterly's voice now disparaged Waltonville.

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"I had not thought of going away," said Eleanor. "I have just graduated to-day and I haven't any particular plans."

"You and your mother are alone?"

"Yes."

"Couldn't you have a winter in New York?"

"I had thought that sometime I might go to Boston," said Eleanor.

Utterly sniffed the air. He had, he said, little opinion of Boston as an experience. Boston was of the past. No one got experience of anything but the past there, and the past one ought to try to get away from.

"A writer must have stimulation," he went on. "A woman's talent is, in far greater degree than a man's, dependent upon outside influences; it is far less self-nourished and self-originated; she must have life, though not too much life, and she must hold herself in a measure separate from it."

Utterly added to this sage prescription a "don't you know," and Eleanor answered with a hesitating "yes." She was, in spite of her confusion, a little amused. Utterly had come half a day too late; had he presented himself last evening instead of this, he might have made a deeper impression.

Presently he ceased to ask questions and began to orate. In this audience he found none of the stupid dullness which he had observed in Dr. Scott, none of the silent unresponsiveness of Dr. Lister. All that he would have said yesterday to his fellow travelers if they had had minds to understand, all that he would have said to-day to Dr. Lister and Dr. Scott, if they had had ears to hear, all that he would have said at any time to any one who would listen, he said now. He discussed schools of writing, ancient and modern; he discussed the influence of Shelley upon the young Browning, the place of Edgar Allan Poe in American literature and in English literature as a whole, and finally, the ethics of biographical writing. The heat with which he spoke upon the last topic was the sudden bursting into flame of the embers which had smoldered since the afternoon. Had the world a right to all it could learn of the lives of geniuses, or had it not? It most assuredly had, declared Utterly. An author's acts in the world, an artist's, a musician's, were as much the property of the world as they were the property of the recording angel—if modern theology had not banished that person from modern life. He spoke of the invaluable revelations of old letters, which proved so clearly that no matter how long the world believed that writers evolved from their inner consciousness the material of their work, in the end it was proved to have a foundation in actual experience. Time and scholarly investigation were showing what was long suspected and long denied, that Charlotte Brontë's own life had furnished her with her "stuff."

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Experience in life, however, must, so said Utterly, go only so far, must stop short before a man or woman was bound to obligations which would rob him of his freedom. Only a few great men had been men of family, or, being men of family, had got on with their families. There was Byron, for instance, and there was Shelley, and there were dozens of others on the tip of his tongue.

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To the most of this fluent outpouring his dazzled audience made only polite general responses. She knew, thank fortune! a good deal about each of the authors whom he mentioned. Shelley she had read from cover to cover and Byron also, and Charlotte Brontë, of course. But she did not know much about them as human beings, Dr. Scott having an old-fashioned way of requiring a reading of the works of great authors, rather than a knowledge of their lives.

Finally Utterly spoke of the works of Basil Everman. One could almost make up Basil Everman's life from his works, so clearly did they indicate the storm and stress of spirit in which he must constantly have lived.

"I believe I don't know who Basil Everman was," confessed Eleanor, mortified by her own ignorance. "Was he related to Dr. Lister?"

"Of course you don't know!" Utterly leaned back in his chair, his voice sharp with sarcasm. "It is apparently the deliberate intention of this community not only to quench all sparks of divine fire, but to hide their ashes. Basil Everman was the brother of the wife of your college president; he grew up in this town, a person of extraordinary mind; he died. But nobody remembers him or seems to want to remember him. It is an attitude not peculiar to Waltonville; it is characteristic of Keokuk, Ishpeming, and many other communities, bourgeois, intolerable, insane."

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When Utterly went at eleven o'clock, Eleanor flew to her mother. She was excited and elated, her wonderful day had sloped to no anticlimax.

"They have taken my story, mother, and I am to have seventy-five dollars!"

"Seventy-five dollars! Land of love!" repeated Mrs. Bent. "Why, Eleanor!" Mrs. Bent's cheeks grew red, then pale.

"Mr. Utterly thinks that I really can amount to something. He thinks we should go to New York, mother, and sometime to Europe. He says one must have many different things to write about, and of course that is true. Are you pleased, mother?"

"Oh, yes!" Mrs. Bent gasped, as though events were happening too fast for her to follow.

"And, mother, did you ever know any one by the name of Basil Everman when you lived here long ago?"

Mrs. Bent rose and gathered her work together. Her face reddened again with the flush which came and went so easily. She looked not only startled, but frightened. For some reason Eleanor remembered the long-past encounter with drunken Bates on the shady street. As Mrs. Bent

answered, she walked out into the darkened kitchen, her voice coming back with a muffled sound.

"He didn't talk about Basil Everman!"

"Yes, he did. He said that Basil Everman wrote wonderfully, and that nobody in Waltonville appreciated him or was willing to tell anything about him. Did you know him, mother?" [Pg 89]

"Yes," answered Mrs. Bent. "I knew him." She came back into the lamplight. "Ain't you sleepy, Eleanor?" But Eleanor was not to be thus easily turned away. Basil Everman was Richard Lister's uncle and that was enough to make him interesting.

"Did you know him well, mother?"

Mrs. Bent put out her hand toward the lamp.

"Start upstairs, then I'll outen the light."

"Did you say you knew him well, mother?"

"Not so very well."

"Did you know about his writing?"

"No."

"Is Richard anything like him?"

"No."

"Was he anything like Mrs. Lister?"

"No." Mrs. Bent turned out the lamp and followed Eleanor up the stairs. At the head she bade her good-night. At the window of her room, which looked toward the garden and the houses of the town, she sat a long time. There was on her face the same expression of alarm that had rested there when she sat in the parlor listening to Richard and Eleanor play. It was the expression of one who felt herself to be entangled in a net from which there was no escape.

Eleanor was certain that she should not close her eyes. She had been waiting hours for this moment, when she might sit down by her window and think of Richard Lister, of the crisp waves of his hair, of his strong young hands which moved so swiftly. It seemed to her that he had played not only upon the piano, but upon her, making her fingers fly faster and more lightly than they had ever moved. Her heart expanded, her soul seemed to burgeon and to bloom. [Pg 90]

She wanted to think not only of this day's experience, but of the past. She had seen Richard daily at college for four years, she had sat with him in the same classes, but she had never known that he was like this! She had met him, also, coming and going from Thomasina's. He must have made, though she was unconscious of it at the time, a deep impression upon her, because she could recall every motion of his light-stepping figure as he moved from the flag walk to let her pass. She remembered the straight line in which his coat fell from his shoulders as he sat at Thomasina's piano, she could see his flashing smile. She tried to remember the details of the appearance of others, and decided with satisfaction that she had forgotten them. She heard the clock strike twelve, then one, and still she sat by the window, every faculty alert, the heavenly consciousness of expansion and growth growing keener. She remembered hours of discouragement when time moved so slowly and nothing seemed to get done. Now everything moved toward a happy conclusion. The moonlight had never shone so soft, the night air had never been so sweet.

After she had gone to bed, a tiny misgiving crept into her pleasant meditations, the forerunner of a score of anxious questions which had long been shaping themselves without her knowledge. For a moment she could not quite grasp the cause, and lay still, her heart beating faster and faster. She had done—she realized it now in a flash—a dreadful thing. In "Professor Ellenborough's Last Class" she had made humorous use of some of the small mannerisms of the college professors. Little habits of Dr. Lister's were described; his constant swinging of his foot, the tendency of his shoelaces to dangle, and his drawing-in of his breath with a click against his cheek. Dr. Scott's den was there, though in reality Eleanor's material was drawn from Dr. Green's office. But she had come since morning to look at Dr. Lister and Dr. Scott from a different angle, and it seemed to her that in using them even to so small an extent she had done a monstrous thing. [Pg 91]

The isolation of her mother and herself, their complete separation from Waltonville and its citizens, became for the first time a source of anxiety. Hitherto she had been indifferent to the fact that she was almost unacquainted with Mrs. Lister. Now it became a serious matter.

She remembered that her volume of Mozart Sonatas had appeared mysteriously—that was why Richard had come to the house and not to see her! The duets had been an afterthought, suggested by the new piano. He had merely happened to have the book with him, being on his way doubtless to Thomasina's. He would come to-morrow to fetch it—it was evidently his dear, careless way to leave things about—and then he would come no more.

If he did not come again—Eleanor looked out over the moonlit fields and faced another problem, more serious than the recollection of Dr. Lister's dangling shoelaces—or if he came to-morrow [Pg 92]

and took his book away and made her feel that they were strangers, then she would suspect that for Richard and the Listers, and therefore for Waltonville, she and her mother were unknown because they were unknowable. If Waltonville were merely careless or thoughtless or indifferent—that was nothing. But if Waltonville were deliberate, that was another matter.

She could not sleep, though she longed now intensely to sleep. Another disturbing thought roused her to greater wakefulness. Her mother seemed always to have ample supplies of money for their needs. But the price of the beautiful piano must have been enormous—had her mother been unwisely extravagant? She should be told about their affairs.

When, at last, she fell asleep, it was to disturbing dreams. Bates appeared to threaten her and she fled from him. She called upon Richard Lister to rescue her, and Richard proved to be not himself, but Dr. Green, who would have none of her. This imaginary behavior of Dr. Green was not unjust, since all day Eleanor had not thought of him who was next to her mother her best friend.

CHAPTER VIII UTTERLY IS PUT UPON HIS METTLE

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In the morning Utterly continued the search which was the chief object of his visit to Waltonville. Passing the house of Dr. Green soon after breakfast, he beheld that gentleman sitting inside his window. Dr. Green looked up absent-mindedly and bowed. Utterly stopped short.

"I have had an amusing time hunting for my Basil Everman," said he in his high, clear voice.

Dr. Green laid his paper on his knee and looked over his spectacles.

"Did you find him?"

"I found he was Mrs. Lister's brother, but not much more. They seem singularly averse to answering questions about him, to say nothing of offering any information."

"Possibly there isn't anything to offer," said Dr. Green, returning to his paper.

Thus dismissed, Utterly departed, having taken a long and astonished stare into Dr. Green's chaotic office, and having decided that he never saw a spot better suited to the harboring of germs.

Now he sought the cemetery beside the college church, and there gave expression to a "By Jove!" The building copied exactly the old Colonial church first built on that spot, and was as beautiful in proportions and design as any Colonial building he had ever seen. Still looking up, he walked round it, gazing at the tall steeple with its fine lantern and at the high, narrow windows with their delicate, diamond-patterned old glass. Then with another "By Jove!" he began to search for the family plot of the Evermans.

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Without difficulty he found the place where Richard Everman and his wife lay side by side under heavy slabs of marble. Of their son Basil there was no memorial. For a while he wandered about reading names and inscriptions, then, shaking his head in strong disapproval of death and all its emblems, he passed through the gate once more and out to the street. He decided that he would wander about and steep himself in Waltonville's primitive atmosphere. He grew more and more baffled and angry, and more certain that information was being kept from him. Descriptive sentences formed themselves tantalizingly in his mind. "Here in this quiet spot, surrounded by quiet influences, belonging to the family of a clergyman, growing up under the shadow of the old church, was developing one of the most somber geniuses to which our nation has given birth." Until noon, still constructing sentences, he wandered unhappily.

In the afternoon he returned to the Listers' for his magazines. Again Dr. Lister sat on the porch; Utterly said to himself angrily that his manner was as stolid as his mind was stupid.

Dr. Lister agreed with him that Basil Everman's contributions to "Willard's Magazine" were remarkable, that they gave extraordinary promise.

"Then it is certain that Basil Everman had extraordinary experience of life, and that that experience is the property of those interested in him."

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"Not necessarily." Dr. Lister reversed the position of his knees as was his habit. He now made what was for him a long speech. "I have talked at length with Mrs. Lister about him. Even after these many years it is difficult for her to speak of him. There is apparently no foundation whatsoever for your supposition that he led a life in any way different from the ordinary life of a young man in this community. He was an omnivorous reader, and, I gather, a reader of most careful taste. It is my judgment that any one who carried about with him volumes of Euripides and Æschylus did not—"

"Did he do that?" Utterly took out his notebook.

"—Did not need any personal experience with the strange contrarities of the human mind or the strange twists of fate in order to write either 'Roses of Pæstum' or 'Bitter Bread.' I am sorry for

your disappointment, Mr. Utterly, but there really is nothing beside the simple facts which we have told you. If there were any possibility of establishing a posthumous fame for Basil, surely an affectionate sister would be the last to withhold information leading to such a result! I think—if you will allow a much older man to express an opinion—I think you are building upon entirely false premises. The constructive power of the human imagination is greater than you are willing to believe. What deep or wide experience could this young man have had? He could not have been much over twenty when he wrote these articles. They were published—at least two were published—before he died, and then he was less than twenty-five. He must have been living here at home when they were written. He had never been away from home except for occasional visits to Baltimore. His ability to imagine the heat, the blue sky, the loneliness of Pæstum without ever having been to Italy is proved beyond a doubt; why could he not picture the heat and the passion of the human heart of which each one of us has such conclusive proof within him?"

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Utterly did not care for general speculations.

"How did he happen to die in Baltimore?" he asked.

"He happened to be there on business when he was smitten with malignant diphtheria," explained Dr. Lister again patiently. "His death occurred about the same time as that of his father. Mrs. Lister lost in a short period her father and her brother. She lost also in a sense her home, since her father's death made it necessary to call a new president to the college. She returned to this house upon her marriage. You will understand, I am sure, how gladly she would furnish you with information if it would in the slightest degree give her brother that fame for which he probably longed. You will understand also, I am sure, that your inquiry, since it is so unlikely to bear any profitable fruit, is trying to her."

"But it will be profitable."

"My dear sir, the world has moved too far and too fast for this small contribution, excellent as it is, to be of great account!" Dr. Lister spoke with politeness, but there had crept into his voice at last a note of impatience. He thought again of a nap. Mrs. Lister had accepted an invitation to Mrs. Scott's for the evening, and an evening at Mrs. Scott's was not to be endured without all possible physical and mental fortifying of one's self. He wished most earnestly that the young man would go.

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"And he left nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"No notes?"

"Nothing."

Utterly bade his host farewell and went across the campus and out the gate. For a second he was convinced that his errand was a fool's errand. But "Bitter Bread" and "Roses of Pæstum" did exist—an account of their author was valuable, even if he had never written another line. Debating with himself whether he should now shake the dust of Waltonville from his feet or whether he should make another effort to shake from its stupid mind some of the recollections which in spite of all testimony to the contrary must exist, he walked back to the hotel. There, he discovered, the question had been decided for him. The four-o'clock train, which had gone, was the last train that day. He was almost as angry as he would have been if the B. & N. had arranged its schedule to try his patience and if Basil Everman had lived his brief life, had written his great works, and had died to spite him.

Then, as he turned away from questioning the landlord, he took heart once more. Above the damp, unpleasant bar with its dripping glasses, its show of tawdry bottles, hung, faded and fly-blown, the picture described in "Bitter Bread." Utterly set his lips and swung out his hands with a crack of the joints.

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The Listers notwithstanding, the stolid landlord behind the bar notwithstanding, he would learn what was to be learned about Basil Everman. Even if Basil Everman had never written anything, he would still pursue his search.

At that moment he found before him and close to him a vessel of testimony more important than the old picture. This was one of the miserable sodden creatures whom he had seen in the bar-room and on the hotel porch, perhaps the most forlorn and disreputable of them all. It was afternoon; he had recovered from the morning's stupor and evening drowsiness was not yet upon him.

"You were asking yesterday about young Basil Everman," said he with a thick tongue. "I knew young Basil Everman."

Utterly's loathing of the bloated face, the soiled clutching hand, was not as keen as his pleasure.

"I was a good friend to him," said the drunkard.

Utterly drew the miserable creature across the hall to a dark little parlor where dampness and the odor of beer were only a shade less unpleasant, that same parlor where Margie Ginter had entertained her admiring friends. There he sat him down in the most comfortable chair.

"What is your name?"

"My name is Bates."

"What do you do for a living?"

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Bates explained that he was a lawyer, but that business was poor and he could not really earn a living. It had not always been this way; when Basil Everman was young, things had been different, very different. He had associated with the best people then, he had had plenty of money. Now he had nothing. Contemplating his misery, Bates wept.

With leaping heart Utterly took his measure.

"I will give you five dollars if you will tell me everything you know about Basil Everman."

At this munificent offer Bates wept again and made an unsuccessful effort to stroke the hand of his benefactor, who realized that he might have purchased the commodity he was bargaining for with a quarter of a dollar.

Bates began making apologies for himself, to which Utterly listened impatiently and which he presently cut short.

"About Basil Everman," said he. "Did you know him when he was a boy?"

Bates said that he had known Basil always. Weeping he described Basil in his childhood.

"He would hold my hand, this one." He put out his hand palsied by dissipation. "I would tell him stories and stories."

"And then you knew him when he was a young man?" said Utterly briskly.

Bates blinked at him uncomprehendingly. The brief period of sobriety was passing. He was already, in anticipation, drunk upon Utterly's bounty. Then he mumbled something about a pretty girl. Utterly leaned forward, his soul crying Eureka! But the well was almost dry. Bates could only complain that Basil had got a girl away from him, that Mary Alcestis would never speak to him nowadays, and that he had had bad luck for thirty years. Utterly closed the door; he coaxed, he cajoled, he suggested. But Bates only wept or smiled in a maudlin way. Presently he began to whine for his five dollars in a loud tone, and angry, yet encouraged, Utterly gave him his easily earned fee and let him go.

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Now, Utterly determined, he would shake Waltonville. He would go to Mrs. Scott's party and sit by the gilt table which he had seen through the window, and shake Waltonville well.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. SCOTT'S PARTY

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Mrs. Scott did not announce, when she sent Cora round the campus with her invitations, that Mr. Utterly was to be her guest. She was not certain, in the first place, that he would remain in Waltonville—what kept him here she could not imagine. In the second place, she preferred to behave as though distinguished persons were her daily visitors. She invited, besides the three Listers, and Thomasina Davis, who had that afternoon returned from Philadelphia, Dr. Green and Professor and Mrs. Myers of the German Department. The college society was limited in summer when all but a few of the faculty sought a cooler spot.

She liked to give parties, having an unalterable conviction that upon her depended the literary and social life of the feminine portion of Waltonville. Her parties were not like Mrs. Lister's, to which the ladies took their sewing and where there were many good things to eat. She set her astonished and frightened guests down to little tables, furnished them with paper and pencil and required them to write, beside the words "Popular Bishop" or "Little Misses' Adoration" or "Curiosity Depicter," the names of the famous individuals whose initials were thus indicated and whose qualities or achievements were thus described. In planning her entertainments she always had consideration for the slight attainments of her guests and never included from her long list of eminent persons "Eulogizes Antipodes" or "Eminently Zealous" or "Won England's Greatness."

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For this party she provided no entertainment. Mr. Utterly would be there, and during her impatient waiting inside her screen door she had heard that he did not lack words or a will to use them. Thomasina Davis could talk well when she wished, and there were Richard and Cora to sing and play. Moreover, there was herself!

Cora put on one of her prettiest dresses, and, parasol and little bag in hand, devoted a large part of the morning to her errand. At the Myerses she did not linger; at the Listers she sat long enough to be certain that Richard was nowhere about; at Thomasina's she stayed for an hour, enjoying the cool, pleasant parlor and the quiet, and wishing that Richard would come. She admired the chintz curtains which Thomasina substituted for her winter hangings, she liked the bare floors and the cool gray walls which her mother thought were so very homely and she loved to listen to Thomasina's voice. Thomasina seemed to be so complete, and though she gave so much to other people, she seemed to be so wholly sufficient for herself. It must be dreadful, Cora thought, to grow old and not to have been married, even though one had everything else, good looks and a lovely house and beautiful clothes and perfect independence. Even those could not

compensate for being an old maid. But Thomasina really seemed not to mind. She could, Cora believed, always be happy with her books and her music and her flowers. One always felt, when one was leaving her on a rainy morning after one's lesson, when the day looked interminable, that it did not look interminable to her, and that even if she were alone she would still be content. Cora wished that she herself did not care so desperately for other people, especially for Richard Lister. She had hoped in vain to see him this morning either at his mother's or here. But his mother said that he would come to the party—there was that to look forward to.

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Having dispatched her messenger and having set herself and her maid to the baking of cake and her husband to the turning of the ice-cream freezer, Mrs. Scott was relieved to see that the stranger was still in Waltonville after the four-o'clock train had gone. She grew more and more elated as the hours passed. She had read of the curious and interesting behavior of celebrated persons at parties—perhaps she would henceforth have her own anecdotes to relate. She had asked a number of persons about Basil Everman, including her black 'Celie, who rolled her eyes and promised to inquire of the older members of the settlement. She reported that 'Manda had said there was no harm in Marse Basil and that Virginia's mother had said there was no good in him. He didn't do much of anything and he was "pow'ful good-lookin'."

When she thought of Eleanor Bent, Mrs. Scott's curiosity grew torturing in its keenness. Was Eleanor trying to get some sort of literary position? Dr. Scott, when questioned, said that she was the best pupil he had, the best he had ever had, he believed, but that she was hardly prepared for any literary position.

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"Besides, the Bents wouldn't know of any," said Mrs. Scott.

Dr. Scott was on the last lap of his task. Back and arms ached and perspiration streamed from his body. When Mrs. Scott asked in sudden uneasiness whether she had better provide a game of authors or some similar entertainment, he looked up at her with the expression of a kindly, inoffensive animal prepared for sacrifice and entirely aware of the intentions of his master. He longed for his quiet study, longed for his comfortable chair, longed for his English magazine with a new article by Pater. The prospect of an evening spent in company with the stranger and with the Myerses was almost intolerable. Even the Listers and Dr. Green and Thomasina Davis, for whom he had usually the friendliest regard, seemed to acquire unpleasant qualities. When Mrs. Scott suggested his hanging Chinese lanterns from the roof of the porch, he rebelled and fled.

Utterly arrived early, and Mrs. Scott, to her intense annoyance, was not quite ready to receive him, nor was Dr. Scott. While she struggled with the most elaborate of her dresses and her husband labored with his necktie, Utterly sat on the front porch with Cora, who answered him in monosyllables. Cora was always ready for everything, and in her quiet way was equal to any task which might fall to her lot. She did not like the stranger, and when he began to sing the praises of Eleanor Bent's appearance and pretty manners and bright mind, she felt a sharp antagonism. She was thankful when her mother billowed noisily down the stairway, her silk skirts rustling, for then she could sit chin on hand on the step and look off toward the dim bulk of the Lister house.

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As Mrs. Scott reached the porch, Professor and Mrs. Myers came into sight. Except with a view to providing a sufficient number for her party, Mrs. Scott had no special reason for inviting them. Professor Myers spoke English with difficulty, and his wife scarcely spoke at all in any language, and never upon subjects which did not have to do with the nursery or the kitchen. Mrs. Scott felt that neither was worthy for an instant of the brilliant give-and-take of her own conversation.

Beside the tall stranger Professor Myers looked like a fat and very dull cherub. When Utterly addressed Mrs. Myers, with what was to Mrs. Scott delightful courtesy, she looked upon his overtures with an emotion which was plainly alarm. She answered him only with a shake of the head and a faint smile which to Mrs. Scott savored of imbecility.

Before Mrs. Scott could "save him," as she phrased it, from the Myerses, the Listers had come. At sight of Utterly in the midst of her friends, Mrs. Lister gave a little gasp and tightened her grasp on her husband's arm.

"Would you like to go home, mother?" asked Dr. Lister, himself annoyed. "I'll make excuses for you, and Richard and I will go on."

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"What's the matter?" asked Richard, from the other side of his mother. Thus Mrs. Lister liked to walk and sit and live, beside and close to the two whom she loved.

"Nothing is the matter," said she in an even tone, and, more erect than ever, she mounted the steps and replied to Mrs. Scott's greetings. She selected a chair as far from Mr. Utterly as possible. He, she was sure, looked sorry to see her. Had he meant to conduct a sort of symposium about Basil? But she had come in the nick of time and she would stay and if necessary outstay him.

When Thomasina Davis arrived in her soft, flowing gray dress with her great red fan in her hand, Utterly almost gave audible expression to his favorite "By Jove!" Here was, at last, he said to himself, a real person, here was some one with spirit and sense, and, unless he read all signs wrongly, with a mind. There was a little stir among Mrs. Scott's guests. Mrs. Lister's face lost its stiff look as she cried, "Why, Thomasina, when did you come back?" Dr. Scott's face glowed, and Richard and Cora sprang up from the step and escorted her in, one on each side.

Thomasina had a singularly bright glance and a singularly winning smile. She bestowed them

both upon the tall stranger who greeted her with the lowest of bows. She wondered where Mrs. Scott had found this citizen of the world. She did not accept the offer of his chair, but swept back to sit by Mrs. Lister and to bestow upon Mrs. Myers just as beaming a smile. Once established she talked to Mrs. Myers about her babies. She spoke English and Mrs. Myers German, but there was perfect understanding between them.

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Dr. Green was the only guest who had not arrived. He had no patients at this hour; indeed, he sat deliberately waiting until it drew near the time when Waltonville customarily served its ice-cream. Upon arriving he would take a sardonic delight in complimenting Dr. Scott upon the excellence of his product. He believed that every married man had his symbol of subjection, every Hercules his distaff. Dr. Scott's was an ice-cream freezer. His failure to arrive on time did not disturb any one, least of all his hostess. She established herself beside Utterly and looked up at him with an expression which had been used long ago with telling effect upon Dr. Scott, but which was now reserved for persons of greater brilliancy and promise.

She asked leading questions, putting into practice for once the precept that it is more polite to let others talk than to talk one's self. What was being done in Boston in a literary way? She looked amazed, yet became immediately sympathetic when Utterly laughed at Boston. Such iconoclasm was daring and delightful. What, then, was doing in New York? Utterly answered at length. As he had discoursed to Eleanor Bent, so he now discoursed to Mrs. Scott and her guests, especially to Thomasina Davis. American literature, if such a thing as American literature could be said to exist, was in a parlous state. America had never done much of importance. There were, of course, Poe and Whitman, but—

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"But Longfellow!" cried Mrs. Scott.

Utterly laughed.

"A few sonnets! You don't take Longfellow seriously, my dear Mrs. Scott."

Up to this moment Mrs. Scott had taken Longfellow very seriously indeed.

"And Bryant! And Whittier!" she cried in more explosive tones. "'Thanatopsis,' Mr. Utterly! And 'Snow-Bound'!"

"The feeble expression of a little talent at peace with itself and the world."

"Oh, naughty, naughty!" cried Mrs. Scott, playfully. "You astonish me!" She looked about at her neighbors as if to say, "Oh, see what I've got!"

No one else made any response. If silence is a tribute to eloquence and a plea for further utterance, Utterly was thoroughly justified in going on. He could see the shimmer of Thomasina's beautiful dress, the slow waving to and fro of her great fan, and once or twice the gleam of her bright eyes. He fancied that Thomasina hung upon his words. He sought to surpass himself, and little by little he shed his veneer of fine manners. To the mouth agape beside him he brought large mouthfuls. There were anecdotes of celebrated writers, true and untrue, pleasant and unpleasant, new and ancient, widely circulated or unknown, published and sometimes not fit for publication. This man, the author of peculiarly spiritual essays and exhortations, was in private life peculiarly unspiritual and evil. For a day each week his long-suffering wife imprisoned him in a room and the next day herself carried the products of his sober meditation to the publishers so that she and her children might live. The last chapters of Lawrence Miller's brilliant novel had been written in prison. Edward Dillingham did not dare to leave a little Western town where, unknown, he had found for many years a haven.

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But the moral state of American writers was, as Utterly pictured it, nothing to compare with that of literary men abroad. He wandered now into the past and demolished famous reputations, as sacred in Waltonville as those of Biblical heroes and heroines.

Mrs. Scott was enchanted. Trying with all her might to impress upon her tenacious memory each incident, each smart expression, she paid small heed to her other guests, and did not observe that upon Dr. Lister's countenance astonishment struggled with weariness, that Professor Myers was half and Mrs. Myers wholly asleep, and that Thomasina was perfectly silent and that therefore she neither admired nor agreed.

On the step Cora and Richard exchanged an occasional whisper, and once or twice Richard turned an impertinently inquiring face toward the speaker. Cora was amused and made no effort to restrain him.

It became at last evident to Mrs. Scott that her guest was not receiving that attention which his parts deserved. Professor Myers, awaking as if from a dream, sat up in his chair with a loud exclamation.

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"It is true, there is nothing worth in American literature, nothing!"

Utterly had left that subject so far behind that Professor Myers's inattention was clear even to Mrs. Scott. Thus recalled to the fact that all were not able to enjoy the mental food which she found palatable, she summoned Cora and Richard to the piano, and they obeyed promptly, Miss Thomasina following after. Utterly at once left his place on the porch and went in to sit beside Thomasina on the parlor sofa.

Cora sang in a pretty voice to Richard's accompaniment. Once or twice he corrected her in his

commanding young way and she obeyed smilingly and gratefully. To Thomasina the state of Cora's mind was as plain as the blush on her cheek.

Then the two played furiously together. The piano was a generation younger than the Lister piano, but it had long since passed its first youth. As a demonstration of digital agility and of power to make a loud noise, the performance was a success; otherwise it was worse than a failure. Cora glanced out of the corner of her eye at Richard. Upon his face was an expression of excitement. It frightened her in a vague way, and she was thankful when Thomasina called a gentle "Quietly, children!"

Utterly bent toward Thomasina.

"Have you lived long in Waltonville, Miss Davis?"

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"All my life." Thomasina answered without that pleasant enthusiasm inciting to further talk which was one of her chief charms. She liked this stranger less and less. "That is about forty-five years."

Utterly was about to express a polite doubt of Thomasina's having lived anywhere that long, but thought better of it.

"It is a very interesting town, isn't it?"

"Very," answered Thomasina shortly.

"One feels that the lives spent here must be happy."

"Not necessarily. The average of happiness is probably no higher here than elsewhere. People carry the material of happiness in their hearts."

Utterly listened a little impatiently. It was a period when abstract opinions fell oftener from the lips of men than of women.

"Did you ever know Basil Everman?" he asked.

Thomasina laid her crimson fan across her knees. The children came suddenly to a climax and somewhat boisterously, went to bring in the refreshments provided by Mrs. Scott, the sound of voices from the porch had sunk to a gentle murmur. Into Thomasina's face came a bewildered expression; she looked at the same time incredulous, and intensely desirous of hearing more.

"Did I know Basil Everman?" She repeated the question as though she were trying to make herself believe that it had really been uttered.

"Yes," said Utterly, "Basil Everman."

"I knew him all his life."

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"Will you tell me about him?"

"Tell you what about him?"

"Tell me what he looked like, how he spoke and walked—all your impressions of him."

Thomasina lifted her fan and held it spread out against her breast as though it were a shield. She could not quite trust the stranger, though he had uttered a magic name.

"What do *you* know about him?"

"He published some anonymous work in 'Willard's Magazine' and we are anxious to learn everything we can about his history."

"Basil Everman!" said Thomasina again, slowly. Then the words came rapidly, as rapidly as she could speak. "How he looked? He was tall and very slender. I should say his most remarkable feature was his eyes. They were gray with flecks of black in them. They seemed almost to give out light. Webster's eyes are said to have had that effect. If you had ever seen Basil, you would know what that meant. He was extraordinarily quick of mind and speech and motion. Sometimes, as a boy, he seemed to give an impression of actual flight. He had mentally also the gift of wings. He seemed to live in a different world, to have deeper emotions and more vivid mental experiences than the rest of mankind. He was the most radiant person I ever knew—I think that is the best word for him. He was a creature of great promise. He—"

Utterly turned his head to follow the direction of Thomasina's gaze, which seemed to expand as her speech ceased. He could not see the white, startled face of Mrs. Lister, cameo-like, against the black foliage of the honeysuckle vines. It was plain to Thomasina that what she was saying gave Mrs. Lister distress. Moreover, she remembered, now that her first bewilderment had passed, the stranger's astonishing and ill-natured gossip.

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"And then?" Utterly was sure of his quarry at last.

"There isn't much more." From Thomasina's voice the life had gone. "He died when he was a very young man."

Utterly looked about him furiously. He did not know what had stopped Thomasina, but, moved either from within or without, she had paused. He raised his voice so that Dr. Green, approaching, heard him many yards away.

"Basil Everman was a great writer," he declared for Mrs. Lister's benefit. "Worth a dozen Longfellows and Bryants and Whittiers. The world has a right to know all about him, and those who keep back the facts of his life are cheating him of the fame which he deserves, they are willfully and intentionally doing him an injury. It is a strange thing that here in this college community, where one would expect an interest in literature, nobody is interested or can tell anything or will tell anything about this man. I would give," cried Utterly in conclusion, "a thousand dollars for one of his stories!"

Mrs. Scott said "Gracious alive!" Then Dr. Green began to talk in a loud voice about nothing. He saw Mrs. Lister's white, shocked face and watched a little uneasily the rapid pulse in her neck. He continued to talk until Richard and Cora had finished passing the ice-cream and cake. The stranger seemed to be drowned by his words. [Pg 114]

Then every one sat dully. Utterly said no more. Mrs. Lister waited for him to go. He waited for Thomasina and she waited for Mrs. Lister. Finally Mrs. Myers rose, still half asleep. Thomasina found Utterly at her side.

"May I come to see you to-morrow morning?"

"Yes."

"Would you like to see Basil Everman's stories?"

"Yes."

"I'd quite forgotten about Basil Everman," said Dr. Green as he and Thomasina passed through the campus gate. "He was Mrs. Lister's brother and he has been dead for many years, hasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that he was a writer?"

"Yes."

"And that he published what he wrote?"

"No."

"I think he had just gone away when I entered college. This man Utterly was at Commencement. I never saw a man I liked less. What did you do while you were away?"

"I bought some clothes and visited an old friend and selected a piano, a very fine piano for Eleanor Bent."

"She plays well, doesn't she?"

"Yes, but not as well as Richard Lister." In the darkness Thomasina turned upon Dr. Green an inquiring glance. "It is the finest piano in the county." [Pg 115]

Dr. Green did not seem interested in Eleanor Bent's piano. "This man said he found some stories of Basil Everman's; wasn't that it?"

"Yes."

"Was Basil Everman an extraordinary person?"

Thomasina stumbled a little on the brick pavement whose roughnesses she should have known thoroughly.

"There have been two persons in Waltonville in fifty years who have been ambitious," said she grimly. "I was one, and Basil Everman was the other. In addition to his ambition, Basil had genius. He could have done anything. He is dead, he died before he had really lived. And here am I, burning to the socket!"

Dr. Green looked at Thomasina in amazement. They had traversed the flag walk and had come to her broad doorstep upon which a light from within shone dimly. It was evident that she was deeply stirred. Dr. Green was not in the habit of giving much thought to the problems of other people, and now it came upon him with a shock that she could hardly have arrived at the peaceful haven in which she seemed to spend her days without some sort of voyage to reach it. Disappointed ambition was enough to chasten any one, thought Dr. Green, and Dr. Green knew.

"You mean you would like to have been a musician?"

Thomasina answered cheerfully, already ashamed of herself.

"Yes," she said; "that is what I mean. Thank you for seeing me safely home."

Dr. Green bade her good-night, and went swiftly out the flag walk. Basil Everman's step could have been no more rapid or more light.

Inside her door Thomasina stripped from head and shoulders the filmy lace with which she had covered them. Then she went into her parlor and turned out the light and opened a long French door at the back of the room and sat down in a deep chair just inside it and looked out upon her garden. The garden was shut in by a high wall; in the center stood a pair of old, low-spreading apple trees; round its edge ran a flag walk, and between the wall and the walk were beds in

which grew all manner of sweet flowers. Dr. Scott, when he first saw it, had said "San Marco!" and Thomasina's eyes had glowed.

"It has required the most Herculean of labors to establish it and the greatest Niagaras of water. You are the first human being who has known what I have tried to do. You have been there, of course?"

"No," answered Dr. Scott, sadly, "I have never been there."

Now the moon floated over its scented loveliness. There was neither sound nor motion except that of a moth, huge and heavy-winged. Thomasina herself sat perfectly still, her hands folded in her lap. Presently she raised them, one to each burning cheek.

"What is to come of this?" said she aloud.

After a while she rose and stepped out into the garden and began to pace up and down. An hour later, when even Mrs. Scott was asleep, Thomasina was still pacing up and down. [Pg 117]

Dr. and Mrs. Lister did not cross the campus directly, but went round by one of the paths, since a direct course would have brought upon them the company of the Myerses. Mrs. Lister was trembling; her husband felt her lean more and more heavily upon him.

"Mother," said he impatiently, "what is the matter? What is it that troubles you?"

Mrs. Lister did not answer until they had reached the porch.

"They dare not drag poor Basil from his grave! I can't have it! It can't be!"

"But is there anything against Basil? Did he commit any crime? Did he wrong any one? This young man is ill-bred, but he is evidently sincere in his admiration. What is there to fear? What can be found out?"

Mrs. Lister answered hesitatingly, choosing her words.

"He did not get on with my father. He—he went away. He was always strange—we loved him dearly. I—oh, Thomas, he went away in anger and we couldn't find him; we never saw him or heard of him till he was dead. No one knew that he was alienated from us. I cannot endure it that any one should know!"

Then Richard came up on the porch.

"Little Cora might have amounted to something with another mother," said he. "Who is this man Utterly? He sat there beside Miss Thomasina and rattled like a dry gourd full of seeds. What is his business here?" [Pg 118]

Dr. Lister remembered that Richard had been out of the room when Utterly had said his say about Basil Everman. Mrs. Lister found in his absence one cause for thankfulness. She answered with an evasion and the three went into the house.

CHAPTER X

"MY BROTHER BASIL WAS DIFFERENT!"

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In the morning Utterly sought Thomasina early. He looked about her beautiful room and out into the quiet garden and his hopes rose. Here was atmosphere! If he had only seen Miss Davis first, he might have saved a great deal of time. He had accounted to himself for her sudden silence the evening before. Mrs. Lister was within hearing and her morbid attitude toward the memory of her brother was doubtless known to her friends. He had brought with him the copies of "Willard's Magazine" and had laid them on the table beside him.

Thomasina, cool and pretty in a white dress, sat in a winged chair inside her garden door and rested her slippered feet on a footstool. The excitement had disappeared from her brown eyes, and she had evidently slept in the few hours which she had allowed herself.

Utterly, who arrived with such high hopes, went away in anger. Thomasina either would or could tell him nothing; insisted, indeed, that there was nothing to tell.

"He was brighter than other people and he did things in a different way—if Mrs. Scott really thinks he was 'wild' as you say, that is the source of her impression. But she is a newcomer, and —" Thomasina hesitated, flushed, and then said exactly what she had determined not to say—"if it were not for her husband's position she would be entirely outside the circle in which Basil Everman moved." [Pg 120]

"But Mrs. Lister does not speak of him frankly; there's no gainsaying that!"

"I dare say she didn't approve of everything he said or did. Few sisters do wholly approve of their brothers. The style of Basil's writing would probably not have been appreciated by one brought up on Maria Edgeworth. But she loved him with her whole soul. Did you ever read Maria Edgeworth, Mr. Utterly? Do you know about 'Rosamund and the Purple Jar'?"

Utterly brushed Maria Edgeworth aside. He was certain that while Mrs. Lister had risen up like a stone wall against him, this person was laughing at him.

"Did Basil Everman come here?"

"A thousand times. I chased him under the piano usually. He was a very dignified, polite little boy, and I was a very undignified and impolite little girl."

"Miss Davis—" Utterly moved impatiently in his chair—"I have journeyed all the way from New York to be told that this really extraordinary young man, of whom this whole community ought to be proud, was chased round the leg of the piano and that he had gray eyes. What do you suppose would become of literary biography or of any sort of biography if all the relatives and friends of talented men acted as you do?"

"I dare say it would be greatly improved," said Thomasina, smiling. "I dare say many of the facts which make biographies interesting are inventions." [Pg 121]

The nearer Utterly approached the railroad station and the farther the B. & N. train drew him from Waltonville, the more certain did he become that he had been cheated.

During the days following his visit, Mrs. Lister told her husband more about Basil. The facts came out gradually. To Dr. Lister the revelation was almost incredible. It was not that the facts were so startling, but that Mary Alcestis could have remained silent all these years of their married life: she who was so open, so confiding, so dependent upon him for advice and sympathy in everything.

As she proceeded with her story, he was still more astonished at her amazing conclusions.

"Basil was different from other children even when he was a little boy. I remember that my mother said that he used to require less sleep than other children, and that when she would go to his crib, she would find him lying awake and staring in the strangest way at nothing. She used to be afraid when he was a little boy that he might go blind, he looked at her so steadily. He never cried loudly like other children when he was tired or hungry, but sat with great tears rolling down his cheeks. Even as a little boy he liked to be alone. He was forever disappearing and being found in queer places, such as a pew in the college church in the dark. Sometimes he would sit alone in the dark tank room in the third story. He said he had 'strange thoughts' there.

"As he grew older, he would not accommodate himself to the ways of the household, would not come to meals regularly. He didn't seem to care whether he ate or not. He didn't come to breakfast on time, and he would not go to bed at the proper hour. Then my father said he could not have any breakfast, and my father took his lamp away at nine o'clock." [Pg 122]

"He would not study the subjects which were assigned to him. It was almost intolerable to my father as president of the college. He would not even open his mathematics. He said life was too short. I believe that was the only time he ever said anything in answer to my father. He took punishment without even crying out."

"Punishment!" repeated Dr. Lister.

Mrs. Lister gasped. "Once or twice my father punished him—corporally.

"Once he went away on a walking trip to the Ragged Mountains alone. We didn't know where he had gone, and when people asked where he was, we had to—to invent. My father used to try to pretend that it made no difference, that he had done his best and that God would not hold him responsible. But I used to hear him at his window at night. He used to pray there.

"Basil used to go down and sit at the edge of the colored settlement and hear them sing. It was as though he let himself dwell on all evil things."

"Oh, mother, not evil things!" protested Dr. Lister.

"Some of the songs were evil. You could hear him singing them afterwards in his room. They were songs that made you shiver." [Pg 123]

"Did he ever drink or gamble, or do anything of that kind?"

"I don't know certainly. My father kept some things from me. I know, though, that my father fetched him from the tavern once. He used to sing sometimes as he came home. You could hear him coming from far away."

"But, mother, surely you can see in 'Bitter Bread' why he went walking to the Ragged Mountains! He wanted new impressions, different impressions from those of humdrum people. Did you never suspect that he was trying to write? Did you never see anything he wrote? Didn't your father realize that here was no ordinary boy, here no ordinary talent?"

"My father found one of his stories and read it. It was then that he told Basil that he could not stay if he continued in his course. My father really didn't mean that he was to go away, but he took him at his word. Then we tried to find him again and again. His going away killed my father. All the clues led nowhere. We didn't hear anything about him till he was dead and buried. Then my father died." Mrs. Lister became excited. "I feel as though it would kill me. I thought at the time I couldn't live. Everything came at once."

"But, mother, it is all so long ago!"

"It is all as plain and dreadful as though it were yesterday. I have been afraid for twenty years that people would find out about Basil, that they would put this and that together. I have thought of Mrs. Scott finding it out and of how she would talk and talk and of all the tradespeople knowing, and—"

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"But, my darling, what could they know?"

Mrs. Lister seemed suddenly to repent her vehemence.

"That he was alienated from us," said she. "Isn't that enough? And I shall never get over grieving for him. If he had done as my father wished he might have been here with us yet, and not be lying in his grave!"

"But he did live intensely. He probably got more happiness out of a day than ordinary mortals get out of a month. And you must learn not to grieve. It's unnatural. You have Richard and all your friends—and me!"

Mrs. Lister was slow to take comfort. For several days she did little but wander round the quiet house. It dawned upon her presently that the house was unusually quiet and that she had seen little of Richard since Commencement. In the thought of him she found at last her accustomed consolation. He was normal; he would give her no hours of misery as Basil had. He would do just what she wanted him to do—he was *darling*—even to think of him healed.

But where was Richard? Probably at Thomasina's. Mrs. Lister put on her bonnet and walked thither.

Richard was not there, and Thomasina in her trying way would talk of nothing but his musical talent. She had an annoying fashion of assuming that people agreed with her. When Mrs. Lister reached home, Richard had not come.

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During the absence of his wife, Dr. Lister had visited the third story and looked through some of Basil's belongings. In the bottom of his little trunk lay his books, his tiny Euripides and his Æschylus with their poor print and their many notes. How strange it was to think of these books as the pocket companions of a young man! How mad to pick quarrels with any young man who went thus companioned!

The old bureau in which Mrs. Lister kept Basil's clothing was locked. From it came still a faint, indeterminate, sickening odor of disinfectants, and more faintly still that of tobacco. In the corner stood his stick, that stick which he had doubtless carried with him into the Ragged Mountains. Dr. Lister saw him suddenly, his cane held aloft like a banner, his eyes shining. He felt a chilling sensation along his spine. Then he smiled. Thus traditions of haunted rooms were established. The boy was dead, *dead*. Dr. Lister said the word aloud. The shrine was empty, deserted, forlorn.

For a long time he sat by the window in the dim, hot room. He meant to shake off the vague, uncanny sensations which he felt; he said to himself that he was too sober and too old for any such nonsense as this.

But while he sat still, his eyes now on the smooth white bed, now on a faded picture of Basil's mother above the bed, now on the bureau with its linen cover and its beadwork pincushion, his heart began to throb. He remembered a picture of Basil somewhere in the house, a picture brighter, younger, less severe than the one in the family album; he must ask Mary Alcestis to find it for him. He saw the boy, eager, alert, with a sort of strangeness about him as his sister had said, the unnatural product of this puritanic household in which he was set to grow. He did not like regular meals—even Dr. Lister had hated them in his youth. He had not liked to go to bed when other people went or to get up when they got up. Did any boy ever like it in the history of the world? His father had once or twice punished him—"corporally." A portrait of Dr. Everman hung in the library—it was difficult to fancy that delicate hand clutching a weapon, especially a weapon brandished over his own flesh and blood!

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Dr. Lister was a placid person to whom the consciousness of immortality was not ever present. He had had few personal griefs; he had had little Christian experience; he was not quite certain, indeed, that immortality was desirable. But now there swept into his heart, along with a passionate grief for this forgotten lad, a passionate demand that he should not be dead, but that he should have made up to him somewhere, somehow, his loss of the sunshine and the pleasant breeze and the chance to go on with what was unquestionably remarkable work.

He wished, though from quite another reason than Mrs. Lister's, that the stranger had not come. The search could lead nowhere; the boy was dead and all his unborn works had perished with him. The thought of him hurt, and in spite of his admonitions to his wife, Dr. Lister mourned him.

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CHAPTER XI

A DUET AND WHAT CAME OF IT

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Richard Lister played with Eleanor Bent for the first time on the afternoon of Commencement

Day, which was Thursday. He played with her also on Friday and Saturday and again on Monday and Tuesday. In the mornings he played with Thomasina, who was certain that she had never seen her beloved pupil so anxious for perfection. Never was there such gilding of the lily, such painstaking practice of trill and mordent. She would have opened her brown eyes to their greatest possible diameter could she have known that what he practiced with her in the mornings he played with Eleanor Bent in the afternoons, when he displayed all the fine shadings of expression, all the tricks of fingering which he had learned from her. With Eleanor's mistakes he was patient, to himself he allowed no mistakes.

As little as Thomasina suspected that his playing with her was for the time mere practicing for a more important audience, so little did Richard suspect that the young lady beside him neglected all other tasks in order to prepare as well as she could to support his treble.

On two evenings of the week, they read poetry together, sitting on the little porch facing the wide valley and each taking a turn. They looked at the beautiful prospect, then they read again. Each watched the other. When Eleanor's eyes were turned definitely toward the western mountains and her head away from him, Richard's eyes took their fill of her. When his eyes were upon his book, she learned by heart each line of his countenance. She had quite forgotten by now her uncertainties and fears. Within doors Mrs. Bent sat under her lamp, forever embroidering beautiful things.

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Together the two read "Abt Vogler," together "A Toccata of Galuppi's." Thomasina, appealed to by Richard, produced "A Toccata of Galuppi's" and played it smilingly.

"Curious, isn't it? You've been reading Browning. Yes, take it with you."

To Richard Eleanor carried from her neat bookcases, volume after volume.

"How many books you have!"

"My mother gives them to me, and Dr. Green has given me a great many."

"Your mother and Dr. Green have good taste," said Richard.

Together they read the "Blessed Damozel," together "Love among the Ruins," together "Staff and Scrip." Then in an instant the old, common miracle was wrought. Life was short and troubled and often tragic—one must have companionship to make it endurable. Looking up they met each other's eyes.

Richard's hands trembled, a solemn thrill was succeeded by a warm wave of emotion, all emotions which seemed to gather themselves into one. He could not look long into the bright eyes so near him, he could say nothing, he must rise and go away, even though Eleanor begged, trembling, "Oh, do not go!" He had not reckoned upon anything like this, was not prepared for it.

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"I have forgotten something. I will come to-morrow."

Richard went home and sat by his window and looked out over the campus with its deep shadows, a broad shadow here by the chapel, a lesser shadow by the Scott house. He heard in a daze his mother's voice and his father's footstep, and when all was quiet once more he gave to his youthful fancy, still clean and fresh, free rein. He leaned his head against the window frame, then, hiding his eyes, he laid his cheek on his folded arms. The night seemed to excite while it blessed him.

He began to be sorry that he had left her. What was she doing now? Had she thought him rude? Did she think of him at all when he was not with her? She seemed far above him, she had been more conscientious about college work, she knew more than he did. But he would work, there should be no limit to his working. If only he had his clavier now! He would have at least the noblest profession in the world. He began to count the years before he could amount to anything. And she was already complete, already perfect!

When he thought of Thomasina, it was to bless her for setting his feet in the right way and for guarding him and guiding him. He thought of his mother with a slight feeling of uneasiness about her opinion of Eleanor. She had never even invited Eleanor to the house. But that should not worry him. His mother loved him, wished him to be happy; she would not deny him that which would be the most blessed source of happiness. He would tell her about Eleanor to-morrow. It should be a casual sentence at first, a word or two about the pretty house or the magnificent piano or the many books.

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It was long past midnight when he went to bed and almost morning when he fell asleep. He was certain that he was the only person awake in Waltonville and he felt as though he were guarding his beloved.

Mrs. Bent said nothing to her daughter about the sudden and frequent visits of this young man. Certainly no two persons could be more safely or profitably employed than in playing or reading together! She did not listen to what they read, but sat wrapped in her own thoughts, or in that blankness of mind which serves even the most mentally active for thought at times. There were now many moments when she looked worried and harassed. A course which had once seemed reasonable was beginning to seem more and more mad.

On Wednesday evening Richard returned, having kept himself away since Tuesday afternoon. He had said nothing to his mother about Eleanor or her books or her piano. He had been making

vague plans. Certain expressions of his mother's came back to him; a sigh when he sat down at the piano, and an unflattering opinion of Thomasina's finger exercises, heard by Mrs. Lister as she passed the house. Thomasina, she had said, had been "tinkling and banging," two favorite words from her small musical vocabulary. Richard felt that the time was not propitious. He would wait a day or two until the confusion in his mind had given place to those even and regular processes which had always been his.

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He found Eleanor seated on the upper step of the porch, trying to read by the failing light, and he sat down and leaned against the other pillar from where he could watch her. She told him what she had been doing, how she had practiced—this a little wistfully—all the morning, and how she had found that Dr. Green had sat in his carriage listening to her for dear knows how long.

"He's a funny soul," said Eleanor. "He's always bossing me and correcting me, but I love him. Aren't you very fond of him?"

"I don't know that I am," said Richard, conscious of a sudden cooling of whatever emotion he had felt toward Dr. Green.

"Well, I am," said Eleanor. "Did you ever hear how he disposes of his books?"

"No."

"If he begins a book and doesn't like its theories, he drops it into his waste-basket. Then his Virginia carefully fishes it out and carries it down to the cabins. She has a lot of shelves made of soap-boxes, and there stand Billings on the Eye and Jackson on Bones and Piatt on dear knows what."

Eleanor talked easily and well. Her teachers and her friend Miss Thomasina and her acquaintance Mr. Utterly would have been astonished to hear her. It seemed to her that some confining band within her had parted and that she was expanding out of the former compass of her body and her mind. She talked about the moonlight, about the lovely valley, about the poetry she had been reading. Suddenly she turned to Richard.

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"What are you going to do this fall?"

"I'm going to study music." Richard woke from a trance to his uneasy thoughts.

"How lovely!" Eleanor sighed. She was beginning to know him and now he would go away; he would become famous, he would forget her entirely. To her came also a determination to be more devoted to her work, to grow as he grew. "When are you going away?"

"In the fall."

"And where will you study?"

"In New York, with Faversham."

"Miss Thomasina's friend?"

"Yes."

"How fortunate you are!" Eleanor meant not only that he was fortunate to be able to do as he pleased, but that he was fortunate to be Richard. "Then you'll forget all about Waltonville."

"It's not likely." Richard remembered miserably that after all nothing was settled. An exceeding high mountain blocked his path and it was growing higher and higher. He looked out over the valley, chin on hand. It seemed to Eleanor that he shut her out of his thoughts, that he had already forgotten her.

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"I have written a story that has been accepted," she said timidly, forgetting all her fears and punctions about what she had written. "It has been accepted by 'Willard's Magazine' and it is to be published very soon. A Mr. Utterly came here to tell me."

Richard's comment came after a long pause.

"I think that is splendid!"

"I haven't told any one but my mother," faltered Eleanor, certain that he must think her boastful and conceited. It seemed to her that again he left in a sudden, unceremonious way.

Again Richard sat by his window. He would have liked to walk the floor, but he was afraid that his mother would hear and that she would come to his room and talk to him. He must have this time alone. He had accomplished nothing, was accomplishing nothing. Only a little while ago he had been so happy and so certain of himself and of all that he was going to do. But Eleanor Bent had had a story accepted for publication! He did not believe that Dr. Scott, whom he called "Old Scotty," had ever dreamed of such an honor. That man Utterly had come to tell her! Utterly had seemed a counterfeit, but he must be a man of some parts or he would not hold a responsible position. She was now even farther above him than before. To-morrow his own future must be definitely settled.

The next afternoon he went to see Thomasina. She would help him as she had always helped him. She sat upon her throne by the garden door with a new life of Beethoven open on the table by her side; she had put it down as he came in to take up a piece of sewing.

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"It is amazing and incredible and inspiring to contemplate the obstacles which great spirits have overcome," said Thomasina with shining eyes. "Physical defects, mental defects, opposition of relatives, of all mankind, of fate itself—none of them ever daunted an earnest man set upon achieving a great thing. All great achievement seems to have had the history of Paul's! 'In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.' Richard—" Her bright eyes searched his troubled face—"What is the matter, my dear?"

"Everything," said Richard.

"Suppose we begin with one thing."

Richard slapped his cap up and down on his knee. "I want to get to work."

"Why don't you?"

"What do you suppose my father and mother will say to my studying music?"

"The sooner you hear what they have to say the better for all of you. Your parents are persons of excellent common sense. And I have some news for you. Henry Favershaw is to be in Baltimore for a few days before long."

Richard's head whirled.

"Do you suppose I could play for him there? Do you suppose he will ever take me as a pupil?"

"Certainly he will! I haven't spent all these years teaching you to have you refused by anybody." [Pg 136]

"Suppose I did go, what should I prepare to play?" The unhappy look was gone from Richard's face. Thomasina had the gift of wings, no less than Basil Everman. Moreover, she lifted others out of fog-dimmed valleys up to mountain peaks. Richard's eyes shone, his cheeks glowed, ambition and aspiration now quickened by a new motive, took up their abode once more in his breast.

On his way home Mrs. Scott called to him from her porch. Impatiently he obeyed the summons. He did not like her, and had never disliked her so much as he did at this moment. She had many foolish questions to ask. What did he think of her friend Mr. Utterly? What did he suppose was Mr. Utterly's business with Eleanor Bent? She understood that he had spent an evening with her. The Bents were strange people, they behaved well, yet everything that one knew definitely about Mrs. Bent was that she was a hotel-keeper's daughter.

Richard said shortly in reply that he had had no conversation with Mr. Utterly and that he knew none of his business.

"And I do think it is the most pathetic thing about your Uncle Basil," said Mrs. Scott.

"My Uncle Basil," repeated Richard. "What of him?"

Mrs. Scott's hands clasped one another in a gesture of amazement.

"Why Mr. Utterly said—why where were you?—oh, yes, you were in the kitchen so kindly helping Cora!—he said your uncle wrote wonderfully. I think it's very strange—" [Pg 137]

Richard was suddenly certain that his neighbor wished to "get something out of him."

"Oh, that!" said he, without having any idea what she meant.

Mrs. Scott made him promise to come the next afternoon to play with Cora. He could not escape. He almost added poor, inoffensive Cora to her mother and the metallic piano in the limbo to which he consigned them. Now his wings drooped. He decided that after supper he would lie down for a few minutes to get rid of the sharp pain which too much practicing had put into the back of his neck. Then he would join his father and mother on the porch and settle the important business of his future.

At the supper table he asked about his Uncle Basil and his mother answered placidly, prepared for the question.

"He had published anonymously some stories and this Mr. Utterly came to ask questions about his life."

"Why wasn't I told?"

"You haven't been here very much of late, my dear."

"Where are the stories?"

"Mr. Utterly has them."

"Couldn't we get them?"

"Perhaps we could."

"How did Mrs. Scott know about him?"

"Mr. Utterly went there to inquire."

"No. You had better stay with us this evening. We scarcely know our boy."

There was to be no escaping to his room. Mrs. Lister laid her arm across his shoulders and together they went out to the porch. The air was cool and sweet; near by a woodpecker tapped slowly, wrens chattered, anxious about their late nestlings, song sparrows trilled, and flickers and robins hopped under the spray which Dr. Lister was sending over his cannas and elephant ears.

Mrs. Lister, with Richard at her side, felt her heart at rest. Utterly had vanished definitely, leaving no trail behind him. She could now think of Richard's future, both immediate and far removed. She asked him whether he would like to pay a visit to Dr. Lister's kin in St. Louis.

"No, indeed," said Richard.

"But you used to want to go out there!"

"But I don't now, mother—unless you want me to take you," he added with sudden compunction.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Lister.

Further conversation was postponed by the arrival of the Myerses to call. When all possible themes of common interest had been discussed and they had moved on to talk of the same subjects at the Scotts', darkness had come. Mrs. Lister did not wish to give up the idea of a visit.

"You have had a busy winter and this fall you will go to the university, and you may wish to do something else in vacations."

Richard cleared his throat. He sat about a dozen feet away from his father and mother and facing them as a culprit might have sat.

"But I don't wish to go to the university, mother."

"What do you wish to do?"

Richard almost said passionately, "You know what I wish to do!" But he would have been wrong. Mrs. Lister was certain that Richard had put away all childish things.

"I wish to study music."

Mrs. Lister dropped her hands, palm upward, into her lap.

"I thought you were over *that!*" said she, much more sharply than Richard had ever heard her speak. "I thought you had given it up."

"I have never given it up for a minute. I never shall give it up."

Mrs. Lister gasped. Richard might almost as well have announced that he had ceased to think of her or love her. She could not brook difference of opinion in her son.

"It cannot be. I cannot hear of it. You are a man and you must do a man's work."

"It is a man's work!" cried Richard. The pain in the back of his neck was growing more acute. "Father, don't you consider it a man's work?"

Dr. Lister moved uneasily.

"We haven't had musicians in the family thus far. Suppose you tell us about it."

Richard drew a long breath.

"It's what I have wanted to do ever since I have wanted to do anything! I have planned for it all my life. I have practiced for professional, not for amateur playing. The two are very different. Miss Thomasina has drilled me with the greatest care. I have taken pains with my German and French and Italian. I have talent, Miss Thomasina says so, and I know that I have no other talent, at least. I—"

"Thomasina has been encouraging you, I suppose?" said Mrs. Lister.

"She was my teacher, of course she encouraged me. I am prepared for Faversham. I—"

"Faversham?" Mrs. Lister's tone was as nearly scornful as she could make it. It was as though she alluded to a mountebank.

"I have often told you about him, mother. He is the greatest teacher in New York and he is Miss Thomasina's old friend. She has prepared me for him as though she were a pupil teacher."

"What is a pupil teacher?" asked Mrs. Lister in the same tone.

"He is the pupil of a great master who prepares younger pupils according to the master's methods. Miss Thomasina is the most wonderful person I know."

After that sentence there was a pause, which grew longer and longer.

"Your mother would like you to be a preacher or a teacher like your father and grandfather," said

Dr. Lister at last. "Or, perhaps a lawyer or doctor."

"I could not be a doctor. I hate the sight of Dr. Green's office with all the bottles and knives. And a lawyer—I think a lawyer's business is hideous. They make people pay to get what is theirs by right, and they help to cheat the poor. They defend murderers when they know they are murderers and try to hang innocent men. I'm not interested in sick bodies or in crimes. I'm willing to be a teacher, but it must be a teacher of music."

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"To take children to teach, like Thomasina, for pay?"

"Why, certainly, for pay! A musician must live like any one else. I wouldn't want to take absolute babies or too many stupid children, but I'd be perfectly willing to begin that way."

"You would cover me with shame!"

"Mother!"

Dr. Lister tapped the arms of his chair nervously. Above all things in the world he disliked acrimonious discussion between members of the same family. Mrs. Lister was hard on the boy. Besides, she was becoming a little ridiculous. He was apt to put off disagreeable duties in the hope that they would not have to be performed or that they might cease to be disagreeable.

"We needn't decide it all at this moment."

"It is decided," said Mrs. Lister.

"Mr. Utterly thought he played very well. I suppose he has had opportunity to judge."

"I consider Mr. Utterly a poor judge of anything," Mrs. Lister went on vehemently. It seemed to her agonized eyes that Richard looked like Basil. Basil never argued, but he took his own way. "I cannot have it," said she. "I will not have it. You are my child. I brought you into the world. I have some rights in you. If you persist—" Mrs. Lister stopped, terrified, at a bitter reminiscence suggested by her tone and her words. She put up her hand to hide her eyes.

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Richard was frightened. It could not be that they would seriously oppose him, that he could not persuade them! It could not be that he would have to work his own way. It could not be that he must hurt and defy his mother! He thought of Eleanor Bent, successful, honored, sought out, lost to him.

"It will not be necessary for you even to get a new piano, mother. I can use Miss Thomasina's and the assembly room piano. I am going to spend my Commencement money for a clavier. It will not make any noise that can be heard when the door of my room is shut. I need not practice at home at all. I will not be a nuisance in the least."

Mrs. Lister looked at him as though he had struck her.

"It is not money," she said slowly. "And it is not noise. But what you wish to do is impossible."

She rose and went into the house.

Richard turned to his father.

"I am sorry for mother," said he. "But I am going to study music."

Here at last was steel under the satin.

CHAPTER XII GROWING PAINS

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Eleanor did not yield without a struggle to the tyranny of this new affection. The seclusion in which she and her mother lived, a natural shyness as deep, though not as manifest, as that which her mother had so strangely developed, and the keen ambition implanted and nourished by Dr. Green had prevented thus far the characteristic seeking of youth for emotion to match its own.

Nor had she been humiliated by the failure of a lover to seek her. Waltonville had seemed to offer no one who was not too old or too young or too dull or already married. She admired her teachers, Dr. Lister and Dr. Scott, and would have selected Dr. Scott as a specimen of her favorite masculine type.

Now she found herself changed. She could not rise in the morning and fill her leisurely summer day as she had planned. The long mornings and longer afternoons and quiet evenings were not hers to divide and use. Instead of steady practicing at exercises and scales, she practiced the bass or treble of duets; instead of sitting at her desk for many quiet productive hours, she sat on the porch or in the little parlor. Plots which she had expected to crystallize promptly now that school was over, refused to progress beyond the point where she had left them in her notebooks; images grew dim, words refused to fit themselves to thought, thought itself was dull and valueless. She could put her mind upon one object, Richard Lister; could wish for but one thing, his company.

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In the mornings she was least possessed. Then she had still the hope of his coming; the childish belief that if she practiced a certain number of hours or wrote a certain number of pages, the fates would reward her. If afternoon did not bring him, she tried vainly to work, as though she would by her very striving win a blessing. The evenings, if he did not appear, were intolerable. At bedtime she made up her mind definitely to think of him no more, to make to-morrow a day of accomplishment. She saw herself in a dim future greeting him placidly from some tall peak of literary achievement, but she knew while she planned that literary achievement, hitherto so intensely desired, allured no more. In anger at herself she wept.

"I am a fool! I will do differently! I will not think of him!"

The excuses which she invented for him only made a bad matter worse. He was under no obligation to come to see her. Then he did not need her as she needed him! He was surely under no obligation to come to see her every day since he was preparing for the splendid career which was to be his. But she would never shut him out from any career of hers! He was spending his days in the society of his father and mother or of Thomasina or—with Cora Scott. The first possibility she could endure, the second was tolerable, though it brought a pang. But that he could be seeking out Cora Scott, little, quiet, dull Cora Scott! That could not be believed.

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A score of pin-pricking anxieties, which she would have laughed at at another time, rose now to vex her. There was a new gown which did not fit; there was an entirely imaginary coolness in Thomasina's greeting; there was, especially, the outrageous use she had made of Dr. Lister's shoelaces and Dr. Scott's den. Her unconsciousness of the offense made it all the more terrible since it seemed to indicate a lack of fine feeling. It was now impossible for her to understand how she could have ever committed so grave a fault.

When Richard had not presented himself for three days, she deliberately collected the meager facts which she knew about her mother and herself. Her mother had been the daughter of the tavern-keeper—Eleanor saw the present tavern-keeper. She had gone away from Waltonville and had married and had afterwards returned. Her father was dead long since; that she had told Eleanor definitely; and her husband was dead also, and she could not bear to speak of either of them or be spoken to about them. She had ample means for their simple living—enough, indeed, for such a luxury as the finest piano in Waltonville, enough so that she and Eleanor could go to New York or Boston for the next winter if they wished. Her money came to her each month from a lawyer in Baltimore who attended to her affairs. There was the total which Eleanor possessed.

It was a total with which she might have been still longer satisfied if it had not been for Richard and the contrast between his situation and her own. He knew all the details of his family history. One grandfather had perished in the Civil War, another had been the honored president of the college. One ancestor, indeed, had signed the Declaration of Independence. If only there were a single Bent or Ginter to place beside him, only a single Bent or Ginter about whom one could even speak!

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Steadily bits of the past came into her quickened mind. There was the insulting familiarity of Bates, the sodden drunkard. But he would have known her mother when she lived at the tavern and he might not always have been as he was now.

"Am I growing mad?" said Eleanor in horror of herself.

She remembered also the scolding voice which had gone on and on, which connected itself with her cut head, and which had on another occasion wakened her at night. She heard her mother's voice, weeping, angry, and a single ungrammatical protest, "I ain't going to do it!"

"That I have imagined," said Eleanor.

The simple expedient of asking her mother occurred to her and was rejected. Old habit persisted; she had never forgotten her first rebuff. She still stood, in spite of her superior knowledge, her superior height, and various other superiorities, in awe of little Margie.

When the need of a confidant for some of her trouble became too pressing to be resisted, she went to Dr. Green, to whom she had gone in all childish complaints. His independent custom of following his own will with complete indifference to all else appeared suddenly a most desirable quality. She would tell him about Dr. Lister's shoelaces.

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Dr. Green hailed her loudly and directed her to his inner office while he saw a patient in the outer room. The night was warm and the odor of chemicals more oppressive than usual. Eleanor looked about with the amused astonishment with which the chaos always filled her. How could a human being live in such a state when all might be put to rights in a day? In the corners on the floor was piled an accumulation of medical journals covering five years. Dr. Green's method of filing consisted apparently of a left-handed fling for the "Journal," a right-handed fling for the "Lancet," and a toss over the head for the "Medical Courier." In the fourth corner a spigot dripped water steadily into a rusty sink. In the upper corners were dusty spider webs, and over all the light of an unshaded lamp glared. Sitting in the midst in her beautiful clothes, Eleanor looked like a visiting princess.

When Dr. Green came back, he sat down in the swivel chair before his desk and looked at her carefully, as though seeking some sign of illness. There was for an instant a hungry look in his eyes; he regarded her a little as her mother regarded her, or as Mrs. Lister regarded Richard. It was a look which only Thomasina had ever detected; it had made her laugh when he talked about

young men encumbering themselves with families.

"Why don't you have a wife?" asked Eleanor.

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Dr. Green stared.

"What!"

"Why don't you have a wife?" Eleanor waved her hand toward the pile of "Lancets." "She'd fix you up."

Dr. Green continued to stare. He flushed and blinked. Eleanor had changed somehow, had gathered from some source a new self-assurance. She had gathered also a new beauty.

"I don't see anything the matter with you." He laid his finger tips on her wrist. "What did you come for? To see me or to borrow a book?"

"I came to see you."

"You don't look exactly happy about it."

"I'm not happy."

"What's the matter with you?"

"I've gotten dreadfully worried about something."

"'Gotten' is obsolete, my dear, and an ugly word at best. What's worrying you?"

Eleanor suddenly blushed scarlet. She had known for three weeks that "Willard's Magazine" would publish "Professor Ellenborough's Last Class."

"I've written a story."

"You have!" Dr. Green brought the seat of his swivel chair down upon the base with a slam. "What sort of story? Where is it?"

"I sent it away." She could not help enjoying the telling. She felt her throat swell and her fingers tingle. She forgot even Richard and realized only that her hopes had been realized. She saw herself a little girl in Dr. Green's buggy, traveling along a country road. Her clasped hands lay in her lap and were covered by his strong grasp. "You must amount to something, Eleanor," he had said. It had seemed to her that he was almost crying.

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"Your story didn't come back, did it?" said Dr. Green now.

"Three times. But at last it has been accepted by 'Willard's Magazine.'"

Dr. Green gave a little start. Though he was a purist, he allowed himself certain vivid expressions.

"The dickens you say!"

Again the hungry look came back into his eyes and was gone. He looked Eleanor over from top to toe, as though expecting her triumph to have left some visible mark upon her.

"Aren't you surprised?"

"I am overwhelmed. Did you bring the story to read to me?"

"Oh, no!"

"When did you hear from them?"

"A Mr. Utterly came to tell me."

"That lily of the field! On Commencement Day? And you are telling me *now*! Why, Eleanor!"

"I had to get used to it. Then I got worried."

"Worried? What about?"

"It is a college story, and I wrote it without ever dreaming that Waltonville might read it or that any one would take it. I have represented people here in it."

"Not by name!"

"No; but I said one professor in the story had dangling shoelaces."

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"Whose?"

"Dr. Lister's."

"Do his shoelaces dangle? What else?"

"I described a den like Dr. Scott's."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Well, as far as the shoelaces are concerned, perhaps it'll teach Lister to keep his tied. And Scott doesn't have a den; he has a neat, dustless resting-place from terror by day and tempest by night. Tell them it's my den. Does your mother know?"

"Of course."

After this there was a little silence. Dr. Green looked at the floor.

"No one else, I suppose?"

"Richard Lister knows." Eleanor believed that she had succeeded in saying the name naturally and easily.

"Richard Lister! How does he come to know?"

"He has been playing duets with me. I—I just happened to tell him."

"Richard is such a nice, sleek, silky mother's boy! I expect he'll be a preacher. Did you read him the story?"

"No. Of course not. I wouldn't read it to any one. I only told him it had been accepted."

"What are you going to do next?" Dr. Green rose and began to walk up and down. He seemed possessed by a sort of rage. "Are you going to sit here and wait for some one to say, 'Eleanor, be mine!' meanwhile making tating or lambrequins with String, or are you going to improve your mind and amount to something? You haven't done anything yet, you know! You do know that, don't you?"

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"Oh, perfectly," answered Eleanor. "I don't know what I'm going to do. It depends on mother. I—"

Dr. Green swept "mother" aside and Eleanor's further explanations with her. "You ought to have experiences; you ought to see pictures and hear fine music and see the world. You—why, Eleanor, you're young, you have talent, you have the finest of prospects! I wouldn't think of anything else. I'd make all my plans for every minute of the day to accomplish one end. You haven't any encumbrances, you haven't any duties! But you must realize that you can't serve two masters. If you have talent, it's a trust, and you've got to improve it. If you don't, if you betray the trust, you'll suffer all your life." He came back and bent over her. "My dear Eleanor, promise to listen to what I say!"

Eleanor's voice refused to obey her bidding. She felt an excitement almost as intense as Dr. Green's and confidence in herself returned.

"Promise me!"

"I promise."

Then she rose unsteadily. Dr. Green's eyes disturbed her. "I must go home. Mother will want me."

Dr. Green did not go with her to the door; instead he tramped up and down his untidy room. "'Mother will want me!'" said he when she had gone.

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Eleanor's mood lasted until morning. But when Richard did not come, morning, afternoon, or evening, either that day or the next, ambition became once more ashes in her mouth. It was all very well for Dr. Green to command her to write. Writing could be accomplished only with a mind at peace; talent was not a friend, but a fickle mistress, the companion of happy hours and not a panacea for heartache. She could not understand how her mother, completing her little round of daily duties, could be so quiet, so content. Presently the sight bred resentment. No sympathetic heart could be at rest when one's own was so ill at ease. When another day passed and still Richard did not come, she grew, for the first time in her life, irritable. Presently she put a question without preface as she and her mother sat together in the little dining-room on a rainy evening. The house had seemed all day like a prison.

"Mother, I wish you would tell me something about my father."

Mrs. Bent's head bowed itself lower over her work. The question had all the suddenness of an unexpected thunderbolt.

"What do you want to know about him?"

"Who he was, where he came from, who his people were."

"He was tall," answered Mrs. Bent. "He hadn't many relatives. He lived in Baltimore."

Eleanor saw her mother's hand shake. She had the uncomfortable sensation of one who is pursuing a perfectly correct course, but who is at the same time made to feel that he is entirely wrong.

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"Could he write?"

"Could he write?" repeated Mrs. Bent.

"Stories, I mean. I thought that perhaps I had inherited my talent—if I have any talent—from him. I thought perhaps he had written."

"I never heard anything of his writing stories." Mrs. Bent was folding up her work as though she

planned for flight, but Eleanor was determined that the conversation should not end.

"Mother—"

Mrs. Bent stood upright.

"I've worked for you and slaved for you," said she thickly. With her flushed face and her eagerness she looked as she had looked twenty years before. With her prettiness something else returned, a certain vulgarity, long shed away. "You have everything you need, don't you?"

"Why, mother!"

"I've given up enough so that you could have things, I guess, and sewed for you and washed and ironed for you, and—"

"Oh, mother, don't!" cried Eleanor. "I didn't mean to worry you, I only thought I would like to know. It's a sort of a mystery."

"It ain't no mystery to me," said Mrs. Bent. Then she began to cry. "I hear somebody coming. Go in and entertain your fine beau that makes you ashamed of your mother!"

Eleanor stood appalled. This must be finished, talked out.

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"Why, mother, I—"

"There is some one on the porch, I tell you!"

Eleanor listened. Her breath came in a sob. Then she went to answer the door. Richard was there with a book. He stood for a few minutes and talked, then he sat down at the piano and opened the volume upon the rack.

"I have exactly thirty minutes to stay," said he. "Shall we play?"

Eleanor sat down beside him, her hands like ice. As well play as sit, dumbly.

When he had gone, she went to her mother's closed door. She did not mean to persist in her inquiries, her soft "Mother!" asked only for pardon. But Mrs. Bent made no answer. She was, however, not asleep; she believed, lying exhausted in her little iron bed, that at last, after years of fierce guarding of her tongue, she had done for herself.

CHAPTER XIII

RICHARD WRITES A NOTE

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Mrs. Lister was relieved in mind when, from day to day, Richard said no more about the choice of a profession. What he was to be was not as important as what he was not to be. Having given up so easily his own plans, he would, she was certain, agree with whatever plans might be made for him. He had never disobeyed in his life and he would not disobey now. She thought with comfort of his acquiescent years.

It was true that he seemed to be taking a little time to recover from the defeat of his plans, but that was only natural. He went quietly about the house, spending most of the day in his own room. When he was away for a whole afternoon, he was of course with Thomasina. His mother determined not even to ask where he had been. She smoothed his bed with the tenderest of touches, she fetched and carried, she consulted with 'Manda about the viands which he liked best.

The summer took on once more its normal character. The Waltonville ladies gave their little parties and Mrs. Scott discovered or invented new devices for the showing-up of their ignorance. She had always been tiresome to Mrs. Lister and this summer she became intolerable. She patterned her conversation after that of Utterly, happy to give rein to an inborn tendency to gossip and to make the most of the small foibles of her acquaintances, a tendency which association with Thomasina and Mrs. Lister had somewhat curbed.

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Never had Mrs. Lister had to endure so much of her society. She "ran in" in the mornings; she called with a quiet Cora in the afternoons, and with a still more silent Dr. Scott in the evenings. Always she inquired for Richard. Sometimes she asked outright; again she pretended to see him just vanishing round the corner of the hall. She thought he was not well; she was afraid that he practiced too much and took too little physical exercise; she wondered what he meant to do with himself in the fall. Walter, she was thankful to say, had had no difficulty in deciding upon a life-work.

Presently Mrs. Lister invited Cora to supper and Cora came gladly, prettily dressed and ready with her little fund of small talk. It seemed as though all the pleasant characteristics which had been left out of Mrs. Scott's nature had been given her daughter. Mrs. Lister thought that she had never seen her so sweet.

That Richard was quite unlike himself was clear to every one. He answered in monosyllables; he did not address Cora except in general conversation; he teased no one, not even 'Manda who

waited for some comment upon her biscuit; and after supper, rising suddenly, he pleaded an engagement and went away. His mother was stricken numb and dumb, his father looked astonished, and Cora's eyes expressed not so much amazement as cruel pain.

"Why, Richard!" cried Mrs. Lister.

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But Richard was gone.

It was Cora who recovered most quickly. Dr. Lister blinked for a second before answering the question which she promptly put to him, first with amazement at Richard, then in sympathy with her evident astonishment and pain, then at her question. She inquired about the politics of modern Italy, and in a second, he answered her as carefully as he would have answered her father. Was she interested in modern Italy? Cora even managed a little laugh as she answered that it was the interesting look of Italy on the map which had always attracted her. She paid Dr. Lister a pretty compliment about his teaching at which he flushed with pleasure and carried her off to the library. If poor Cora wilted a little after her first instinctive flash in her own defense, he did not observe, so absorbed was he in showing her his books.

Both Dr. and Mrs. Lister walked across the campus with her when it was time to go home, her little figure proceeding straight and slender between them. She now talked about nothing, though she spoke steadily in a high, clear voice. When they reached the porch, she did not invite them to come in.

From her sitting-room Mrs. Scott asked where Richard was.

"He's—"for an instant little Cora meant to say, "Richard didn't come in"; then she proceeded composedly into the bright light.

"Dr. and Mrs. Lister brought me home."

"Where was Richard?"

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"He had an engagement."

"An engagement! Do you mean to say that he wasn't at supper?"

"Yes, he was at supper."

"An engagement with whom?"

"I didn't ask. Perhaps—" Cora's voice failed her for a second. With whom in Waltonville could Richard have an engagement when he might have been with her?—"perhaps with Miss Thomasina."

"An engagement with Thomasina! When you were there to supper!" Mrs. Scott's ferret eyes seemed to pierce to Cora's soul. "When did this engagement begin?"

"About an hour ago."

"Thomasina is a fool," declared Mrs. Scott. Then she repeated, "a fool."

"Oh, no, mother!" said Cora lightly. "Good-night."

She went up the stairs with an even, steady step. At the top, where all sound was lost in the thick carpet, she stood still, her hand on the banister.

"Nothing dreadful has happened," said she to herself. "He might easily have gone to Miss Thomasina's, he's so crazy about music." After a while she said again, "Nothing dreadful"; then she went into her room and closed the door, and all dressed in her best as she was, lay down and hid her face in her pillow.

When Richard came home at eleven o'clock, his father and mother had gone to bed. He heard them talking, and they heard him come in. He saw his mother standing in her white gown at her door as he came up the stairs. She had determined to be patient even with this vagary.

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"Good-night, Richard," said she. "Good-night, darling."

"Good-night," said Richard.

He went into his room, and for the first time in his life turned the key in the lock, stealthily, slowly, and noiselessly. When, with a shaking hand, he had lit his lamp, he sat down at his desk and wrote a note and pinned it to a newspaper clipping and fastened them both to his pincushion. Then, his hands still shaking, he undressed and blew out his light and lay down upon his bed. His cheeks were scarlet, his hands cold; he lay motionless. At this moment the world revolved that Richard might be happy, stars shone to light his way, flowers bloomed to make his path sweet, streams ran to make music for him. Last night he had been unhappy, worried, uncertain of everything. Now everything was different, everything was glorified. No one had ever been so happy, it was doubtful whether any one could ever have known what happiness was before this transfigured moment.

He had not meant to be rude to Cora; he had scarcely realized even yet that he had been rude, and still less had he meant to give his mother pain. He had read in the morning paper, his eye falling accidentally upon it as it lay on the arm of his father's chair, that Henry Faversham was to

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be in Baltimore the next day, and he had to tell Thomasina—that was all, at first. His mother would not have accepted this excuse for leaving and the only course was to leave without excuse. He had so little to say to Cora and she had so little to say to any one, that time spent with her was wasted unless they could play, and playing was impossible upon the aged Lister piano. If he waited until she was ready to go home, Thomasina might have gone to bed, or if she went home early, Mrs. Scott would entrap him in her spidery way. He *had* to see Thomasina, so he rose and went.

When, excited and elated, he left Thomasina, he did not go home. He had a letter to Henry Faversham; he had certain compositions of his own which she had selected; he had the recollection of a smooth hand on either cheek and a light kiss on his forehead.

"Why, Miss Thomasina is *young*!" said Richard.

He did not go home, because he was afraid that he might find Cora still there, or his mother might be waiting to reprove him. He was determined to endure no more reproof, to take part in no more argument. Argument was undignified and worse than useless. It left opponents with opinions unchanged, but deeply offended with one another; it prevented one from working for a whole day; it numbed one's mind and paralyzed one's hand and blinded one's eyes.

So, to avoid an encounter that night, Richard went to see Eleanor Bent. He *had* to see Eleanor as he had had to see Thomasina. It was after nine o'clock and he was suddenly frightened lest she might have gone to bed, and he took a short cut down a lane and ran.

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Eleanor came promptly to the door and then out to the porch in the soft dark night, and sat down on the upper step. All day she and her mother had avoided each other's eyes. She was forlorn and deeply troubled.

"No, I wasn't thinking of bed. I have always hated to go to bed."

She bent forward and the light from the doorway shone on her dark hair and made her bright eyes gleam, and the little breeze which blew across her to Richard brought the faint scent of perfume. Her voice seemed to have deepened overnight and she spoke with a little tremolo as though she were not quite in command of it.

Richard told his story, at once calmed and further excited. When one has found in one human being both stimulation and peace, a die is cast. He was going to-morrow to Baltimore to see Faversham and arrange for his winter's work. He was going to play for him, to show him his compositions. It was already late and he could not stay. He merely wanted her to know, to think of him.

Eleanor leaned a little toward him.

"Oh, don't go yet," said she, her voice trembling. This, it seemed to her, was the beginning of the end.

"I must," said Richard.

"When will you come again?" Would he ever come, or would he leave her to watch for him, day after day, to do nothing but watch for him? He had already risen; it was possible that he might never come back. She was filled with nameless terror. Her mother—

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"You look sorry," said Richard. His voice was not like hers, but high and clear. Thomasina did not guess what her kiss had done for Richard. He held out his hand and Eleanor took it and rose.

"I am sorry because you are going away. I haven't any plans except to stay here. I am not sure that I can write any more and the winter looks very long. I ought to go away, but I don't know just how. I—I wish you were going to be here to play with me and read with me sometimes. I—"

"Miss Thomasina is here," said Richard lightly. "She will play with you."

Eleanor smiled, but she seemed to shrink within herself.

Then Richard laughed and crossed the lane of light which separated them and put his arm round her shoulders and drew her back into the deep shadows. He laid his hand beneath her chin and tipped her head back against his breast.

"Do you love me?" asked Richard.

Eleanor yielded slowly to his arm. She felt his lips on her cheek, her hair, her eyes, at first lightly. Then he laughed and kissed her on the mouth.

"Well?" said he. "Have you nothing to say?"

Eleanor lifted her hand to his cheek.

"Nothing," said she.

In a second a sound from within doors drove them apart. Eleanor knew that her mother would not appear, but already Richard stood on the steps. He would bring her music, he said, when he could come at a less unearthly hour. This evening he had come out for a walk after they had had company. He hoped that Mrs. Bent was well. It was strange that all of yesterday's rain had not cleared the air. His mother prophesied a day of storms to-morrow and his mother always knew.

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Now Richard lay wide-eyed upon his bed. The soft breeze fanned his cheek and wafted the curtains like waving arms into the room. Toward morning the breeze quickened to a gale. It lifted his note and newspaper clipping from the pincushion and carried them across to the farthest corner under the bookcase. By this time he was asleep.

CHAPTER XIV AN ANXIOUS NIGHT

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In the morning Richard breakfasted with his father and mother. The breeze had died down and the day was already intensely warm. Mrs. Lister had given a large part of the night to thoughts of him and her pale face showed the effect of her vigil. She had determined upon second thought that his offense could not be overlooked, and for the first time in his life she was thoroughly angry with him. He had not only offended, but he had caused her to offend also. She could not forget Cora's brown, astonished eyes. If it had been Mrs. Scott to whom he had been rude, she might have found an excuse for him. But only the most wanton cruelty could hurt Cora.

Her indignation deepened, when, after her household labors were finished, she could not find the object of her just wrath. He was not in his room, nor in his father's study, nor on the porch, and there was no sound from the chapel organ or the assembly room piano. She had prepared her reproach and she wished to deliver it at once.

But she was to be denied still longer the relief of expression. Richard did not come to his dinner. Occasionally he had lunch with Thomasina, to which objection was made only when dinner had been prepared with a special view to his taste. Mrs. Lister always missed him and never really enjoyed a meal without him, but she felt that such absences were good for her, since they helped

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to prepare for the day, now so rapidly approaching, when he would go away altogether. This was not a propitious time for him to absent himself, not only because his mother wished to see him, but because 'Manda had baked waffles. Mrs. Lister could eat nothing and 'Manda scolded about the pains she had taken to prepare food which her "fambly" would not touch.

When he had not appeared at three o'clock, Mrs. Lister passed from a state of anger into one of acute anxiety. She could not rest, could not lie down, could not sew. The heat was intolerable. She sought her husband in his study.

"Where is Richard?" she demanded. "What has got into the boy? Last evening he insulted Cora Scott by walking out as soon as he had had his supper, and now he has gone away, apparently to stay all day, without saying a word to his mother."

Dr. Lister looked up, startled.

"Hasn't he come?"

"He hasn't been here since eight o'clock this morning!"

"He can't be very far away."

"But *where* is he?"

"Perhaps with Thomasina?"

"Thomasina lies down every afternoon. She'd send him home if he hadn't sense enough to come. Besides, I think she's gone away."

"Perhaps he's in the chapel or the assembly room, practicing."

"There isn't a sound from that direction, not a sound. I've sat at my window and listened and listened." Mrs. Lister began to cry.

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"But, mother! This is a grown man, this is not a child!"

"He is a child in his father's house. He owes us respect if he's fifty years old." Mrs. Lister crossed the room and looked out between the slats of the bowed shutter across the shimmering campus. "There are thunderheads above the trees and"—her voice took on a tragic tone—"Mrs. Scott is coming!"

Dr. Lister rose from the couch where he had been napping.

"Shan't I excuse you? It's too hot to see any one, least of all, Mrs. Scott."

"No. Richard might be there. Something might have happened to him and she is coming to tell us!"

"Nothing has happened to him, my dear."

Mrs. Lister met Mrs. Scott at the door. The heat which smote her face as she opened it was so great that she urged her guest to come quickly into the cool parlor. Surely Mrs. Scott would not have ventured out unless she had some special purpose! Perhaps she had come to speak about Richard's behavior to Cora! The idea was fantastic, but it seemed to Mrs. Lister in her alarm

perfectly reasonable. Or she might pretend to know nothing about it, yet make Mrs. Lister the most miserable of human beings.

Mrs. Scott agreed that it was hot, but she did not continue to dwell upon the weather or allow Mrs. Lister to dwell upon it. Even to Dr. Lister, sitting across in his study in a position from which he could see neither of the two ladies or be seen by them, it was plain that she had come upon business of importance. He pictured them both, Mary Alcestis, large, benign, gentle, and slow of speech, Mrs. Scott, small, eager, ferret-like. [Pg 167]

He heard the two opening sentences, Mrs. Lister's pleasant compliment to Mrs. Scott's energy, Mrs. Scott's answering boast that the heat could not "throw her out of her stride." Her voice then went on and on. It was confidential and pleasant enough in tone and Dr. Lister could not understand a word, but he was certain that she was worrying Mrs. Lister. It was undoubtedly wrong and un-Christian, but he hated her. He rose, intending to cross the hall and relieve Mary Alcestis of some of the burden of conversation.

Then he stood still by his desk. The softly murmuring voice rose to a tone approximating that in which Mrs. Scott addressed her family.

"I thought you would want to know it, Mrs. Lister. I thought you ought to know it."

"I didn't understand exactly what you said."

"I said that your Richard had been visiting morning, noon, and night, since Commencement, Eleanor Bent," repeated Mrs. Scott. "I said that people thought it very strange that Dr. Lister's son should devote his time to her. He plays duets with her on a beautiful new piano that dear knows where she got, and her mother sits by watching them. I guess she has her own intentions. The piano must have cost a thousand dollars." [Pg 168]

Promptly and smoothly came Mrs. Lister's answer.

"I have heard Thomasina say often that Miss Bent plays very well. And he is not there morning, noon, and night, as you say, Mrs. Scott. He is here almost all the time. And after all"—the pause between Mrs. Lister's words suggested to her husband a straight gaze and a head somewhat lifted—"after all, it is Richard's affair, isn't it, and not any one else's?"

Mrs. Scott was too astonished to answer. She was furious at Richard and almost as angry at Cora, who, when informed, would say nothing about his visits to Eleanor except that he was his own master. She had expected that Mrs. Lister would grow deathly white and perhaps faint.

"I should dislike to have my Walter show any attention to a person in such an anomalous position," said she, rising. "I came out of the kindness of my heart."

"I don't know what you mean by an 'anomalous position,'" said Mrs. Lister, rising also. "I am sure Mrs. Bent and her daughter are very quiet, retiring people."

She went with Mrs. Scott to the door and let her out into the burning sunshine. She did not return to the study, but went directly to her room. Dr. Lister sat for a few minutes with his pen poised over his paper, then, when she did not return, he began a letter. He was amused at Mrs. Scott's feline retaliation and was grateful to the gods for having given him a Mary Alcestis. There was nothing to be distressed about in the fact that Richard played duets with Eleanor Bent, who was a bright, pretty girl. He said to himself vaguely that if the young rascal didn't come home soon, he would go and fetch him. Hearing a low rumble of thunder, he rejoiced that a change of temperature was at hand. [Pg 169]

Richard did not come home to supper. Mrs. Lister ate nothing and made no pretense of eating. The rumbling of thunder continued, growing loud very gradually, as though the storm were only slowly gathering force. She rose from the table and went from window to window, not so much to see whether they were securely fastened as to look out in every direction. There was still the vividly blue sky in all quarters but the northwest, where there was a low, but slowly rising, bank of dark cloud with white-tipped thunderheads above it.

She grew more and more pale, more and more wretched. Her anxiety seemed to weigh down her cheeks and add ten years to her age. Richard must have been hurt; he might have gone for a walk and have fallen and be lying somewhere helpless.

"But there isn't any place to fall from, mother!" said Dr. Lister, now as anxious as she.

Presently, as the sky grew darker and the thunder louder, she wept.

"I will go to Thomasina's," said Dr. Lister, "and I'll stop at Dr. Green's and—"

"Do not ask them any questions!" cried Mrs. Lister. "Do not let them know! People will get to talking!" [Pg 170]

"But, mother, we must find him!"

"I cannot have any one know that Richard does not obey us," insisted Mary Alcestis. "You can look in at the window. Thomasina's curtains are always up to the sky and Dr. Green hasn't any in his front office."

Dr. Lister put on a raincoat and took an umbrella and started out against the high wind. The

search seemed unreal, weird, impossible. Richard was not at Thomasina's, for the house was dark, and Dr. Green was alone. Dr. Lister went to the assembly room and to the chapel and to all the rooms of the recitation building. He stood in the doorway of each one until a bright flash of lightning or several flashes had illuminated each corner. At the door of Dr. Scott's study he knocked. Within, Dr. Scott sat at the window watching the wide valley magically illuminated by the flashing light, which was now rosy, now bright blue. He had seen nothing of Richard. Dr. Lister said that he had brought Richard an umbrella thinking that he was here. He supposed that by now he was at home. Under the first heavy drops of rain, he hurried back to his house.

As he neared the porch, the sight of a figure approaching from the opposite direction, or, rather, being blown from the opposite direction, startled and relieved him.

"Richard!" said he.

He saw to his amazement that the figure was not that of Richard, but the broader form of his mother. [Pg 171]

"I thought I would look for him," she gasped, blown finally to the porch step and there firmly seized by her husband. "I couldn't stay in the house and do nothing."

"Where have you been?"

"I thought he might be about s-s-somewhere. I went to see." She quickened her steps. "Perhaps he is here. Oh, I am sure he has come home!"

But he had not come home. His mother called as she opened the door and was answered only by a faint echo from the upper story. She walked with tottering step into the study and sat down and smoothed her hair back into its proper place. Her face was contorted, her lips trembling. Dr. Lister laid his hand on her shoulder.

"My dear, you are so strange! What is back of this? Had you any words with him about anything?"

Mrs. Lister laid her hands palm upward on her lap. With a start at each new roll of thunder she began to speak. The first words made her husband frown; they had long been the sign and signal of trouble. As he listened, he grew amazed, then sick at heart.

"My brother Basil—" Mrs. Lister paused and looked dumbly at her husband.

"Yes, my dear—"

"My brother Basil left us to—to follow the daughter of the village tavern-keeper. That was the last straw, that was what worked on my father's health and finally killed him. He never saw Basil again. You've said to me so often that Basil was past, that we needn't think of him or trouble about him or break our hearts over him. But he is not past. Nothing ever is. You cannot get away from the things you do and that other people do. They keep on forever, from generation to generation." [Pg 172]

"Mary Alcestis, tell me plainly what you mean!"

"It was this woman who calls herself Mrs. Bent whom he followed away. Her name was Margie Ginter."

Dr. Lister drew up a chair and sat down by Mrs. Lister.

"How much of this is suspicion? How much do you really *know*?"

Mrs. Lister started again. The storm increased in intensity without breaking. The rain fell in slow, heavy drops, audible as they struck the roof of the porch. Her voice, on a high and monotonous key, seemed to fill the house.

"She lived here at the tavern. It was a terrible place. People who keep places of that kind pay some attention to public opinion now, but they didn't then. We found that he went there—my father thought it was to drink. Then one evening I came upon them, him and the girl, on Cherry Street in the dark, walking together under the thick trees. I was not often out alone in the evening, but it seemed that this had to happen. I heard her talking to Basil and I told my father. In a little while they left here, and then he went also."

"Do you mean that your father could compel them to leave?" [Pg 173]

"No, I think they were just going. And Basil went too."

"And then?"

"Then, afterwards, he died. And she came back here, brazenly, with a little child and a married name. Once she spoke to me on the street. She said she would like to talk to me about him, but I told her I couldn't. I had Richard with me in the coach and it was right out in the open street. I was afraid to go out for weeks."

"Did she ever make any other effort to speak to you?"

"No; she seemed afraid."

"But if what you think is true, the girl should be older than she is! It can't be, mother!"

"I believe that she is older than she says. How else should she have got ahead of our Richard in school? That is the only way to account for it."

Dr. Lister remembered the astonishing maturity of Eleanor's mind.

"And I know what my eyes tell me!" cried Mrs. Lister. "Her eyes are Basil's eyes. It was her eyes Mr. Utterly was thinking of when he saw Basil's picture. I knew it. Her walk is his. She is Basil over again. For all these years I have had to look at her in church and on the street. I had begun to feel a little safe because I thought that now she might go away. Then this man came with his hateful inquiries."

"Poor Mary Alcestis!"

"I couldn't forbid her to go to college. I couldn't do anything but"—Mrs. Lister now broke down completely—"but watch and pray." [Pg 174]

"And you never told me!"

"I couldn't tell any one about Basil. If you had known what a sweet little boy he was, perhaps I could have told you. And Richard—oh, Richard, Richard!"

"I heard Mrs. Scott."

"I went there to look for him."

"To the Bents'!"

"Yes, through all the lanes. It was quite dark and no one saw me. But I fell once; I was so excited and the lane was rough. Miss Bent and her mother were sitting together like innocent people, but he was not there. I said to myself that if he was I would go in and bring him home."

"But, mother, this about Richard is imagination run mad!"

"All the dreadful things I ever imagined came true. When he sits at the piano, he looks like Basil. It's something in them, it—Hark!"

Dr. Lister sprang up and went to the door. As he opened it the wind set the flame of the lamps quivering. There was a shrill, wailing sound.

"What is it?" cried Mrs. Lister.

"Nothing but the wind," answered Dr. Lister, his own nerves badly shaken. He came back into the study. "Mrs. Scott exaggerates till she lies. Suppose he has gone there to play for a few hours! They are both pupils of Thomasina's."

"Thomasina's ideas are all wrong—about *everything*," said Mrs. Lister. "She never had a brother or a child, she has had no experience. She puts a higher value on talent than on the Ten Commandments. Where *is* Richard?" She sprang up. Her cry was lost in the breaking of the storm. "This very house is rocking!" [Pg 175]

Dr. Lister drew her down once more beside him.

"At this moment we can do nothing but wait."

"I've gone through this misery before," said she piteously. "It isn't new to me."

Dr. Lister tried to persuade her to lie down, but she would not stir. The storm reached a climax, seemed to recede, and advanced in greater fury. Silently, hand in hand, the two waited.

CHAPTER XV EXPLANATIONS

[Pg 176]

By midnight, when the fury of the storm had abated, there was still no Richard. Mrs. Lister would not hear of going to bed, but sat stiffly upon the sofa in the study or wandered through the house. With a candle she explored the third story, venturing even into the tank room where the dim light cast flickering shadows on the brown unfinished walls and ceiling. She remembered with horror the old story of the bride locked into a chest and found mouldering after many years, and a more recent and sentimental tale of a young woman, who, discovering that she was merely the foster child of her parents, fell fainting to the floor before the old trunk into which she had been prying, and there remained until she was accidentally stumbled upon. Mrs. Lister did not climb the projecting beam and look into the tank—that madness she forbade herself.

She went into Richard's room and opened distractedly the cupboard door, then laid back the covers on the bed as she had always laid back Richard's covers, every night of his life.

As Dr. Lister sat beside her, he heard the whole story of Basil Everman, and his first puritanic disapproval of Basil's course gave place to protesting amazement.

"Something within him seemed to impel him to do wrong things," said Mrs. Lister. "It wasn't that he didn't love us. I am convinced that he loved us dearly. *But he had to have his own way!*" [Pg 177]

"*Had to have his own way!*" Dr. Lister repeated the words to himself. His own way, which led him to "Roses of Pæstum" and "Bitter Bread"! If they had only let him have his own way, unmolested, or had helped him to it, poor Basil might not have turned into this unpleasant by-path.

Certainly the friendship between Richard and Eleanor Bent must end. Could there be any serious feeling between them? With this new light upon the girl's mental inheritance and with quickened recollection of her as she had sat in his classes, came deeper alarm.

There were moments when Mrs. Lister, in her fright and exhaustion, seemed to confuse Basil and Richard. Basil had been out in such storms; she had waited and watched for him all night long. He had been gone not only all night, but days and nights. Sometimes he had been almost within call, but he had insisted upon watching the storms. He was sorry to have troubled them, but he would not change any of his idle, purposeless ways.

She had tried and her father had tried to find a precedent for Basil, but in vain.

"I never heard of any one so strange and willful but Mr. Poe, until Mr. Utterly told those dreadful stories. And now Richard is—is like them!"

"Did Basil never announce his departures?"

"He knew that my father would forbid him wasting his time in idleness and wandering. He knew that my father would prevent him. So he simply went." [Pg 178]

At one o'clock and at two o'clock there was still no Richard. The house assumed a different appearance after the customary hour for retiring. The high ceilings seemed in some strange fashion to rise, the walls to expand, the shadows to darken. Another storm approached, broke over Waltonville, and died away. Mrs. Lister, selecting a darkened window, looked out and saw that the Scotts were stirring. Her anger with Mrs. Scott almost suffocated her. Poor Mary Alcestis was not created to bear heroic passions.

Again and again Dr. Lister begged her to rest.

"You will be utterly worn out. Richard will not come any sooner because you wait for him."

"But where can he be?" wailed Mary Alcestis.

Dr. Lister determined that at dawn he would set forth, make a round of the village and all the neighboring walks, and then go to Thomasina Davis's and take counsel with her. If Richard had not come by eight o'clock, his disappearance must be made public. He could have no reason for going away and search could be no longer postponed. Having acknowledged this to himself, Dr. Lister became as much a victim of terror as his wife. There had never been a more obedient son; to attribute callous indifference to him was wicked. That he could thoughtlessly or intentionally have brought upon them such cruel anxiety was unthinkable. In his distress Dr. Lister began to tramp up and down the long study.

Then, at last, as dawn was breaking, Richard came home. In the study the watchers still sat with the shades drawn, not realizing that outside a gray light was already exhibiting the ruin wrought in the night. The smooth grass was strewn with branches and twigs, the cannas lay flat, gardens were flooded, and at the campus gate a tree lay across the street. [Pg 179]

At the first click of the latch Mrs. Lister screamed, then held her hand across her lips. Nervous strength had forsaken her. But she gathered herself together and Dr. Lister, watching her, failed to see the entrance of the prodigal. Her form stiffened, the distress on her face altered to a stern and savage disapproval. She looked suddenly and uncannily like the portrait of the austere old man above her head. The night's vigil seemed to have removed the plumpness which disguised her physical resemblance to her father and her indignation destroyed the placid good nature which was her usual mood. She felt no weak impulse to throw herself upon her son's shoulder or to reinforce her maternal influence by any appeal to his affection.

When he entered, bedraggled, wet, black with railroad dust, he saw, first of all, his mother, sitting like a judge before him. He saw his father also, but his father seemed as usual a little indifferent to him and his needs, and even to this adventure.

"Mother!" he cried from the doorway.

Mrs. Lister did not answer. That the boy was amazed, that he could not account for their waiting presence was evident, but she did not help him to straighten out the puzzling situation in which he found himself. [Pg 180]

"You have been up all night!"

Mrs. Lister allowed the evident truth of this assertion to serve for an answer. She felt as though she could never speak, as though her throat were paralyzed, her tongue dead in her mouth. A lover, hearing his mistress explain her faithlessness, could have been no more powerless to express the sense of injury within him. There was a great gulf between her and her son, who till this moment had seemed almost as much a part of her as he was in the months preceding his birth.

Richard sat down inside the door.

"You didn't get my message, then?"

Still she did not speak.

"What message, Richard?" asked Dr. Lister. "We have had no message. We only knew that you vanished yesterday after breakfast."

"I found I had to go," explained Richard. Then he paused. His words sounded as strange to him as to his parents. "I wrote a note telling you where I was going and I fastened it to my pincushion where I was certain mother would find it. I missed the train home, and I came on the freight and it was delayed. I tried to telegraph, but the wires were down. Didn't you find my note, mother?"

"There was no note on your pincushion," said Mrs. Lister in a hollow voice.

Richard turned and ran up the steps. The two waiting below could hear him throw up the blinds. He descended in his fashion, three steps at a time, carrying two bits of paper in his hand. [Pg 181]

"There, mother, they were under the edge of the bookcase! They must have blown there. I am so sorry that you have been anxious." His voice trembled, his father saw that he was almost exhausted.

Mrs. Lister did not lift the papers from her lap where he laid them. In the confusion of her mind, one intention was firm. She would not learn his excuse from any paper.

"But, Richard—" Dr. Lister, returning to the comfortable habits of every day, changed his right knee for his left. "Why did you go away and where did you go?"

Richard straightened his shoulders.

"I heard that Henry Faversham was to be in Baltimore for a few days and yesterday I saw in the paper that he had come. I knew that he accepted no pupils without having first heard them play, and I thought it would be better to see him in Baltimore than to make the long trip to New York. Miss Thomasina had written him about me and had given me a letter to him, and I expected certainly to go down and back in a day. Mother, of course she didn't know that I had gone without telling you! You know she would have told you herself rather than have that happen."

Dr. Lister cleared his throat.

"But, Richard, has it been our custom to communicate with one another by newspaper slips or written notes?"

"No," said Richard. He drew a deeper breath and looked his father in the eyes. "I couldn't have any argument about it, father. I *had* to go. There was no time for argument. I thought it would be easier for everybody if I just went. I am deeply sorry that you had this anxiety. I didn't mean you should." [Pg 182]

Mrs. Lister saw the pleading eyes, heard the pleading voice, saw the even more eloquent grime and the white, streaked cheeks, but she made no affectionate sign of yielding, no tender motion to her son to come to that bosom which had thus far been a pillow for all his troubles. Hereditary motives were no less strong in her than in her son.

"Please, mother!"

"You'd better get a bath and go to bed."

For the sake of saving his life, Richard could not have kept his lips from quivering.

"When did you have anything to eat, my boy?" asked Dr. Lister.

"I'm not hungry," answered Richard steadily.

"But how lately have you eaten?"

"Not very lately," confessed Richard. "I didn't think much about eating yesterday." For an instant his face was lightened by pleasant recollection. "I'm really not hungry. Please, mother, don't bother! You ought to go to bed; you're more tired than I."

Mrs. Lister paid no heed to Richard's protests. She went to the kitchen and filled a tray and carried it upstairs. When he came from his bath, he found it there and ate, like a criminal in his cell. Then with a long sigh, he lay down. He threw his arm round the unused pillow beside his own on his broad bed and smiled. He heard for an instant heavenly harmonies, then he was asleep. [Pg 183]

Even now that Richard had come home, Mrs. Lister would not lie down. She changed her dress for her usual morning apparel and put away the remains of his breakfast which he had placed on a chair outside his door, so that 'Manda might not suspect the strange doings of the night, then she went into the study. Dr. Lister lay on the couch. When she entered, he opened his eyes for a second, then closed them again, and she sat down and waited. In a little while, as though the tremendous disturbance of her mind was transferred through the still air to his sleepy brain, he opened his eyes wide and sat bolt upright.

"Yes, yes, my dear! What is it?"

Mrs. Lister made no apology for any telepathic means by which she might have awakened him. It

was his business to be awake.

"This thing must be settled, Thomas."

From the vague borderland of sleep, Dr. Lister tried honestly and vainly to understand just what must be settled.

"What thing, mother?"

Mrs. Lister gave him a look in which astonishment and impatience were mingled.

"Richard can't have anything to do with this girl; he can't play with her, or see her, or talk to her; it isn't decent or right."

"You mean he must be told about Basil?" Dr. Lister remembered now the events and revelations of the night. [Pg 184]

"It must be stopped. Everything must be stopped. Our child must do what is right."

The revelations of the night seemed to Dr. Lister like illusions.

"You are sure of all you told me, mother?"

"I am sure."

"Do you know where they went after they left here—the girl and her father, I mean?"

"We heard it was a little town in Ohio called Marysville."

"You never caused any inquiry to be made there?"

"Oh, no!"

"Basil wasn't with them when he died, was he?"

"No."

"We can't do anything at this minute. We'll have to learn whether Richard has gone any farther than to play the piano a few times with this young lady and I'll find out about these plans and intentions of his."

"His plans and intentions!" repeated Mrs. Lister.

"He's old enough to have them, my dear. I think we'd better let him have his music, don't you?"

Mrs. Lister gave her husband another long, level, and astonished glance. Then she sought her own room.

Richard came downstairs for lunch, white and with dark-rimmed eyes. But he was clean and his eyes shone. Faversham had accepted him, had said he would be glad to have him. He had sent messages to Miss Thomasina; he had said a hundred things which she must hear at once. [Pg 185]

"He talked about her as though he were in love with her," thought Richard whose thoughts ran in one channel.

Faversham had played for him, had talked about Beethoven and John Sebastian Bach. Faversham had heard and had torn up his small compositions and had put them into the wastebasket, smiling.

"You don't want those to appear in collections of your works, my boy!" he had said.

Richard would not have exchanged places with the Queen of England, or the Czar of all the Russias, who still held enviable positions in those days, or with any great character of history past or present. As for the future, he intended to be one of the great characters.

And there was sweet Eleanor, waiting, perhaps even at this instant, for him to come up the little walk.

If he could only tell his father and mother now about Henry Faversham and all the things that he had said! He must make them see that music was the breath of life to him; that he must be a musician, could be nothing else.

But he would not make them try to see now. His mother's features were too tense, her disapproval too evident, his own voice too tremulous. He would stay at home in the early part of the evening and explain to them, persuade them. Now he must find hungrier ears than theirs.

As Richard pushed back his chair, Mrs. Lister's eyes sought her husband's, and thus prompted, he asked his son, a little unwillingly, where he was going. [Pg 186]

"I am going to Miss Thomasina's."

"And after that?" Mrs. Lister was not quite sure whether she had asked the question, or whether he had announced his plans in defiance.

"Afterwards I am going to play duets with Eleanor Bent." He did not mean to say exactly that. In both him and his mother forces were operating which carried them farther along the path

appointed than either had any intention of proceeding. Here, to Richard, was another subject upon which there could be no arguing.

"Eleanor Bent plays very well, and she has the finest piano in Waltonville, the only piano really, except Miss Thomasina's. It is a young and strong piano"—Richard smiled pleasantly—"without a tin mandolin inside it like the Scotts'. I wish you could hear it, mother."

He waited for a second for an answer, but no answer came. Into his face rushed a flood of brilliant color. Cora Scott had never made her case plainer, never betrayed herself more helplessly. He turned and went out of the room and upstairs quickly.

When he came down, Dr. Lister called him into the study.

"Richard, you have caused your mother and me very grave anxiety."

"I know. I'm very sorry and I told mother so. I didn't mean to, and nobody can regret it more than I do." He could hardly wait to be gone.

"I'm going away for a few days, and I should like you to stay with your mother."

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"Why, of course!"

"I mean that I should like you to stay here at the house."

"All the time!" gasped Richard.

"Yes."

"What for?"

"Suppose we say that it is to show your mother that you are really sorry."

"But I can show her that without staying in the house! When are you going?"

"At four o'clock."

"Then I can see Miss Thomasina before you go."

"It is after two now."

"But I must, father!"

Dr. Lister had never so loathed managing other people.

"You'll be back before I start?"

"Yes."

Richard flew across the campus and down the street. His father often made trips away in the interest of the college, but he did not often go so suddenly. Richard remembered that his mother had planned to accompany him to Pittsburgh. Was he going to Pittsburgh now? Why didn't she go too? Was she staying at home to watch him?

Miss Thomasina, he heard from Amelia, had gone away. Now he could see Eleanor. Then he groaned. He could not rush in upon her and off! Turning homeward he found his father completing his preparations for departure.

"Where are you going?"

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"To Baltimore, then to Pittsburgh."

"I thought you were going to Pittsburgh, mother!"

His mother looked at him reproachfully. Did he not know that she never left him?

"No, darling," said Mary Alcestis. "My place is here."

CHAPTER XVI

FURTHER EXPLANATIONS

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For three days Richard roamed like a caged creature from room to room. An impulse to immediate rebellion soon spent itself. His intentions had not changed, his position was not to be receded from, but the necessity for a new step was not yet pressing. He would wait, he could afford to wait for three days, reckless and unconsidered and foolish as his promise had been. He did not remember that Eleanor might be unhappy.

In the meanwhile he would make his plans. He walked up and down or sat at his window chin on hand. When Mrs. Scott came within his line of vision he made a childish grimace in her direction. She came no nearer than the common walk which led from both houses to the college gate, being entirely satisfied with her recent visit to Mrs. Lister.

Richard thought of writing to Eleanor, but promptly abandoned the idea of substituting a cool

and unresponsive sheet of paper for a glowing cheek. He had inherited none of his Uncle Basil's facility with a pen. He must tell her everything, except that he had had to steal away and that he was received like a returning prodigal, and he must watch her as he talked.

It occurred to him after the first day that his father might have a really good reason for requiring him to stay with his mother. Could she be suffering from some dangerous and treacherous disease and for that reason need constant company? The possibility frightened him and he went at once to find her.

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Mary Alcestis sat at the window of her bedroom, her little sewing-table beside her and a sock of Richard's stretched over her hand. Thus placed and thus occupied, she forgot for short periods her misery and with it his. It was difficult at best for her to put herself in the place of one who had experiences alien to her nature. Her large, sweet face now beamed upon her son. Richard, she was sure, would soon see, if he had not seen already, the blessedness of doing that which was exactly right.

"No, darling, I am not sick," said she. "There is nothing whatever the matter with me."

Richard read his mother's mind. She need not think that he was yielding, that he would ever yield—there should be demonstration of that immediately upon his father's return.

He took from his desk-drawer those neat notebooks which his mother admired without knowing their contents and turned from page to page. Here were his first transpositions and here his first exercises. How often he had worked at music when Greek and mathematics were supposed to be his occupation, until transposing had become much easier than reading Greek and until musical phrases stood for distinct ideas. Here were simple compositions, hymns, little tunes, and more elaborate exercises in counterpoint, worked out and agonized over by him and Thomasina, whose knowledge of harmony had been acquired because of his necessities. Here were sketches for greater works—his eyes glowed. Concerto, symphony, opera—his ambition was boundless. Weeks had passed since he had looked into his notebooks and in the meantime he had changed. His long conversation with Faversham, his new emotional experience, made all that he had done thus far seem puerile, undeveloped. He had now so much better plans! He studied his notes, covered sheets of music-paper with sketches, hummed a hundred airs, rewrote, and longed for Eleanor's piano. Faversham had opened undreamed-of vistas, and here he was doing nothing for three precious days which could never be his again!

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Once he sat down at the piano. He lifted his long fingers over a great chord and let his hands fall—the result was a combination of tinkling and slightly discordant sounds, dying away with metallic echoes and even with a sharp wooden crack of the old frame. At the very end, he heard a gentle sigh and knew that his mother sat in the study across the hall. He longed at that to bring both hands and arms thumping down upon the yellow keys. It was a Richard far removed from the one who had once preached to the fishes.

Thomasina, to his keen disappointment, did not appear. The necessity for some one to talk to, the discomfort of repression, grew less tolerable. He went for the mail, his mother waiting for him on the porch, not with outspoken intention of staying there until he should return, but with every appearance to his mind of a jailer watching the short exercise of a prisoner. He stopped at Thomasina's door, but found that she was still absent. He met Cora Scott and answered her shortly, saying yes, it was a pleasant day. What he meant was that it was a long and hateful and intolerable day. Here was a heart aching for a word, here a mind which would have welcomed, cherished, and kept inviolate all confidences! Richard knew it and hated the heart upon Cora's sleeve.

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That evening, the second of Dr. Lister's absence, black 'Manda sat herself down on the kitchen porch to rest before she went on her way to the cabins, and there she lifted up her voice in "I was a wandering sheep." Richard heard her from the front porch and sprang up from the hammock and went round the house. His clear and steady tenor took the melody from her, lifted it and went on with it, the deep tones of 'Manda proceeding undisturbed.

They sang one stanza, then another and another, 'Manda's "po' lamb" booming out. When they had finished, Mrs. Lister looked for Richard to return. She was almost smiling, the duet recalled so many blessed hours. But Richard did not return. He led off in "Hallelu," then "Swing low, sweet chariot." He sat down with 'Manda and an old-time concert began.

Suddenly the singers forsook religious themes. 'Manda's repertoire was not altogether that of the church; it included a variety of songs which Richard had up to this time never heard, mournful, uncanny, without intelligible words to express their burden of savagery, songs learned she knew not how long ago, unsung she knew not for how long. Mrs. Lister stopped her ears.

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But that did not stop the sound. She went through the house into the kitchen and looked out. Richard sat on the upper step, a writing-pad on his knee, the light from the door falling on his bent head.

"Now, 'Manda, that last line once more. How perfectly extraordinary!" Mrs. Lister went back to her chair.

Cora Scott heard the singing clearly as she sat at her window and cried, and told her mother, when she came to her door, having heard also and being curious to know whether Cora heard, that she was very sleepy and had gone to bed. Her voice sounded sleepy.

Eleanor Bent, walking restlessly on a pretended errand to Thomasina's, heard and stood still in the thick shadow of the maple trees and listened. Richard was away, surely he was away! But here he was at home, singing! And his last word had been a promise to come again. He had taken her in his arms, had kissed her, and had not come back. Was he angry or offended? Had she said anything to hurt him?

At that instant all her frightened questions returned. It was in just such a black shadow that hideous, sodden Bates from the hotel had taken her mother by the arm. She ceased to hear Richard's singing, ceased to feel the soft breeze of the summer night, ceased to hear the sound of voices on the other side of the street which a moment before had warned her to go on her way. She heard that scolding, masculine voice out of the past, she saw again her mother's strange outbreak of anger. Was it what she *was* that had offended Richard? And what *was* she?

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Mrs. Lister went a second time through the house to the kitchen door.

"Richard, you mustn't keep 'Manda any longer. She'll be all tired out to-morrow."

'Manda rose heavily and tremulously. She had seemed to herself for the last half-hour to be a very different person in a very different place. Now she was once again only an old, homely, and fat darkey.

"Yes'sum, Miss Mary Als'tis," said she.

Richard followed his mother into the house.

"The old girl's got a lot of queer tunes in her head. I've written some of them down. Something could be made of them."

Mrs. Lister's heart sank.

In the morning Richard went again for the mail. This afternoon his father would come home, and then there would be an end to this nonsense. His evening's course was planned. He would go straight to Eleanor and would tell her everything. His fancy, restrained for the last few days so that he might not make himself too miserable, now leaped all restraint. He recalled Eleanor in her seat in the classroom, sought her out in her pew in church, dwelt upon her at her piano, adored her on the little porch in the evening light. He basked in each remembered smile, he counted each clustering curl. It was only four days since he had seen her, but he paled with fear lest some ill might have befallen her, or that some change might have lessened her regard. He must have her promise to marry him before he could go on with his work. He felt sharply impatient with this interruption to his steady course. Shut into the house a year ago with a cold, he had read the accumulated chapters of a serial story at whose hero's failure he had laughed to Thomasina.

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"No Christina Light could drive any steady man off his track like that!"

Thomasina had smiled and had said nothing. He remembered the story now with irritation. But it had no meaning for him; he was going to have his Eleanor, he had her already.

Coming back through the hot sunshine from the post-office, he handed his mother his father's letters and sat down in the hammock with the papers and magazines. He glanced at the headlines of the paper and threw it aside; it was not a period when the news was exciting. Then he stripped off the covers of the August magazines. As he opened the first, he started visibly. He glanced at his mother and saw that she was occupied and his eyes dropped once more to the "Table of Contents" and rested there, his cheeks reddening. Here was Eleanor's story "Professor Ellenborough's Last Class," and here was another story, "Bitter Bread," by Basil Everman!

Mrs. Lister, looking up, met his astonished eyes and took instant alarm.

"What is the matter, Richard?"

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"Why, mother, here is a story written by my Uncle Basil and reprinted! It is called 'Bitter Bread.' It is very long." Richard turned page after page.

She neither moved nor spoke.

"And at the beginning there is a note, telling about it. Listen! 'In his small output, Basil Everman may be said to have equaled Edgar Allan Poe in originality and power. An essay "Roses of Pæstum," a vivid descriptive poem "Storm," and a single story "Bitter Bread," which we republish, were originally printed in this magazine. They prove the extraordinary genius of this young man, long since dead. Basil Everman was born in Waltonville, Pennsylvania, and died in Baltimore at the age of twenty-five. His productions surpass in quality, we believe, all other productions of their time.'

"Mother, how perfectly splendid! Aren't you pleased?" Richard waited for no answer. "He wasn't so very much older than I. Mother—" He meant to ask questions, but respect for his mother's silence was bred into him. His head bent lower. "There is another story here and another note. 'We print in this issue another story from Waltonville, a contribution very different in character, but also exhibiting the promise of talent of a high order, "Professor Ellenborough's Last Class, by Eleanor Bent.'"

"Won't Scotty champ his bit?" demanded Richard as he looked up boldly. "I wonder what kind of a story Eleanor would write. I—" Richard meant to say that this was not the first knowledge he had

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had of her success, but he saw that his mother looked at him with fright and anger. "Mother, in the name of common sense, what is the matter with the people in this house?"

Mrs. Lister rose unsteadily.

"You have never before spoken to your mother in such a way, Richard!"

Mrs. Lister entered the door, ascended the steps, and lay down upon her couch. Richard, frightened and repentant, followed at once, and hung over her, begging to be allowed to wait upon her.

"Shall I darken the room, mother?"

"Yes, Richard, please."

"Shall I bring you a drink?"

"No, Richard, thank you."

"Shall I take myself downstairs?"

"Yes, Richard, please."

Richard ran down the steps.

"In six hours father will be here, then let us hope that sanity will return to this demented household."

Richard read "Professor Ellenborough's Last Class" and smiled; then he read "Bitter Bread" and was filled with awe. It was English and it was prose, but it was like the old Greek stuff that he had pegged away over for so many years. It made him see for the first time sense and beauty in the old Greek stuff. Perhaps he had been up to this time very stupid. He felt, with all his good opinion of himself, that even after a second reading of "Bitter Bread" he could not understand it wholly. Humbled, he took from the long line of texts on his father's shelf a familiar and hated volume and looked into it. He had never expected to look into it again, but now as he read ideas for music came into his mind.

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While he read, he held "Willard's Magazine" on his knee. It was overwhelming, ennobling, to be connected with so great a man. He longed to read the story to his mother, to make her see in it what he saw, to ask a hundred questions about Basil. He reviewed all the facts that he knew; the locked room which had been Basil's; the conviction, early impressed upon him, that it was not to be entered, was not, indeed, a place where one would wish to be.

"I hope, when I am dead, no one will treat my room that way," said Richard. To die with work undone, with life waiting! How cruel! He wondered whether Basil had known that he must die. Shivering, he went out of the cool study into the sunshine.

Dr. Lister returned, as was expected, at four o'clock. He looked white and tired. When Richard met him with the word that Mrs. Lister was not well, he went at once to her room. There, weeping, she told him about "Professor Ellenborough's Last Class." What he had to tell made her feel no better. She said that she did not wish any supper; she would stay where she was, and when he had told Richard he should come back.

"Tell him at once," said Mary Alcestis as she hid her face in the pillow.

Together Richard and his father had a quiet supper. The table shone with its array of old silver, and upon the meal Manda had done her best. Both men ate heartily. Richard gave his father an account of the few unimportant incidents of his absence, but Dr. Lister gave in return no account of his journey.

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"Mother was sitting on the porch when suddenly she said she didn't feel well and went upstairs. She wouldn't let me do anything for her. I think it was Uncle Basil's story which made her feel badly. I hope nobody will ever bury me like that! I don't even know what he looked like!"

When supper was over the two went into the study and there Dr. Lister closed the door. He took the chair behind his desk, and then, as though dissatisfied with that magisterial position, crossed the room and sat down by one of the low windows. Richard waited, standing by the desk, impatient to be gone, and prepared for some unwelcome command. Had his father visited his acquaintances in Baltimore and was he to be ordered to Johns Hopkins? He rejected this as untenable. His father would not treat him like a baby. Was it an ultimatum, favorable or unfavorable, about music? He trembled.

Several seconds passed before Dr. Lister began to speak, and he had in that time exchanged twice the position of his knees. So long was the silence that Richard gave expression to his impatience.

"Father, the queerest air of mystery pervades this house. Mother is not ill; she is offended with me. She will scarcely speak to me. I made an entirely innocent remark, and off she went. If I have done anything to bring this about, I am sorry and I'll try to correct it. If my speaking about Uncle Basil hurt her feelings, I'll never do that again. But I can't be treated like a baby."

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Dr. Lister blinked.

"Sit down, Richard. It is nothing that you have done that troubles your mother. It is a condition which has risen without your will entirely."

"I have an engagement this evening, father!"

"I'll not keep you long." Dr. Lister paused again, this time to steady his voice. He had had no knowledge of disappointed love from his own experience, Mary Alcestis having fallen like a ripe peach into his hand, but he could imagine the discomforts of the situation.

Richard found a seat in a corner of the sofa. His heart beat a little more rapidly and he was puzzled by his father's gravity. He seemed to see the edge of a cloud, as yet no larger than a man's hand, but none the less ominous.

"I must tell you about your Uncle Basil, Richard."

"Well," said Richard, "go ahead. He's a very mysterious person to me so far."

"Your grandfather had two children, your mother and Basil. Upon Basil he founded many hopes and began early in his youth a most careful system of training so that he should waste no time, but should become what Dr. Everman himself was, a careful and thorough student of Greek.

"A certain amount of instruction Basil listened to willingly, but his nature was not one which submitted itself to regular, long-continued training of any sort. He was a very handsome, talented lad, but a cruel disappointment to his father. He would not graduate from the college, refusing peremptorily to spend his time upon subjects in which he had no interest. He learned to read Greek fluently; indeed, he had a passionate admiration for the literary beauties of the language, but to his father's great chagrin he would go no deeper." [Pg 201]

"Then he was not like Browning's grammarian who never got anything out of life but a funeral on a high mountain," said Richard gayly. Uncle Basil had nothing to do with him, the little cloud had disappeared.

"Finally, after some difficulty with his father, he left home."

"He was grown up, I suppose," said Richard. "There isn't much to do in Waltonville."

"He left home, as I have said, and after a year he died of malignant diphtheria in a lodging-house in Baltimore. His father's death followed close upon his. Thus your mother was in a short time bereft of father, only brother, and also of her home, since this house is the property of the college. I was elected to your grandfather's place, as it happened, and I brought her back."

Richard looked up at the picture of his grandfather. He was tempted to say, "Handsome old boy."

"Slowly your mother returned to a normal condition of mind, but she has never recovered from the death of your uncle. Her father and mother were old, she and Basil were born late in their lives, and to him she looked for companionship. His death away from home, waited upon by strangers, almost unhinged her mind." [Pg 202]

"After you were born she sat less in Basil's room in the third story; she began to take an interest in life; she became wrapped up in you, in caring for you, in making plans for your future. You were to do what Basil was to have done, to—"

"But it's not safe to plan what children are to do!" cried Richard. "You don't know what their plans may be. I'm sorry for mother, but I should think she would have known that!"

"That is true to a certain point. Your mother has feared that you would show some of those traits which distressed her in Basil, that intense absorption in matters which are to her the least important in life, to the utter exclusion of those which seem to her to be more practical and valuable. She does not understand persons of a different temperament, especially the temperament to which regular meals"—here Dr. Lister smiled a little at Richard—"and neat clothes and the good opinion of the public are adaphora."

"I have always done what she wanted me to do like a lamb," declared Richard in a hard tone. He moved now toward the edge of his chair.

"You have always been an obedient son."

"What does mother consider matters of no importance?"

"In Basil's case it was art, literature, and music which she thought he set above everything else." [Pg 203]

"Was my Uncle Basil musical?"

"To a certain extent." Dr. Lister wondered uneasily how he would ever approach the point of his discourse. "To go on, Richard—"

"Why did mother ever let me take lessons?"

"She thought you would in that way exhaust in your childhood any enthusiasm you might have and you would then give your mind to other things."

"Glory!" said Richard. Then, "I am very sorry for my Uncle Basil."

"He deserved some sympathy. We all do in this contrary world. I—"

"I cannot see why Greek should seem any more practical than music to my mother."

"Greek is the language of the New Testament."

"I cannot see what this has to do with me, anyhow, father. I have been in this house or on the porch for three days."

Dr. Lister began to speak with nervous haste.

"The history of your Uncle Basil has recently been opened by this man Utterly, who came here to find out what he could about him. Your mother was willing to give him only the most meager information. In this she was justified, for the young man seemed bound to prove that no one could have written as Basil wrote without having had the terrible experiences about which he wrote.

"When I urged her to tell him what she knew, she told me that for a year before his death Basil had been estranged; that his father had died from the shock of his death; that Waltonville had never suspected the alienation; and that she had always had an intense dread of its being suspected.

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"After that I could only send Mr. Utterly on his way with the surface facts of Basil's life, hoping that the matter would end there.

"But now a new element has entered into the situation. Your mother had not even then confided in me the whole of your uncle's story. Her affection for him and her pride in the good name of the family had kept her lips closed. A day or two ago she told me more. This has a relation to you, but not, I trust, Richard, a very vital relation. I wish she had told me long ago. I have hoped it would not be necessary to tell you—perhaps it isn't really necessary now."

Richard's face expressed a mild curiosity. His father seemed to be making a great deal of nothing.

"When you were in Baltimore, Mrs. Scott came to see your mother and told her, with all her impertinence, that you had been spending a good deal of time with Eleanor Bent. Your mother said in response that Eleanor was a bright, pretty girl and that it was your affair."

Richard felt that now his father was a very direct and satisfactory *raconteur*.

"That night, while we waited for you to come home, your mother told me the whole story of your uncle. He was attached, it seems, to Margie Ginter, the daughter of the tavern-keeper, and it was she whom he followed away. Your mother had come upon them in the twilight, and had overheard a conversation between them."

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"Mother is suspicious," said Richard.

"From their conversation she had every reason to suspect a close intimacy. At any rate, they went away and Basil went away. Sometime after his death, this Margie returned with a little girl."

Richard's eyes darkened. The cloud had increased in size. His father regretted the orderly way in which he had presented the facts, one after the other. He wished that he had said abruptly, "Eleanor Bent is your first cousin, and if there is anything between you it must end."

"Here she stayed, Richard."

Richard seemed still more puzzled than alarmed.

"You mean Mrs. Bent? But she is a widow, her name is Bent. What an atrocious suspicion!"

Dr. Lister raised his hand.

"Quietly, Richard! Your mother will hear!"

Richard's blazing eyes said that that made little difference.

"I know that she calls herself Mrs. Bent and her name may be Mrs. Bent. The point is that her daughter is like Basil." He quoted unconsciously from Mrs. Lister's sentences. "She walks like him, her coloring is like his, her eyes are his, and she has begun to show talent like his."

"I should need better proof than that!" declared Richard.

"I needed more proof also, and so I went to the little town in Ohio where the Ginters were said to have gone. That is where I have been. The father and daughter and a tall young man who was superior to them are dimly remembered. They didn't stay long. Marysville, it seemed, could not endure Ginter. I talked to the Squire."

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"My Uncle Basil may have married her and afterwards she may have married a second time!"

"It is possible," agreed Dr. Lister. "I hope that is the way of it."

"Well, then, what is all this fuss about?" demanded Richard rudely. "Nothing is Eleanor's fault! Nothing can make any difference in my feeling for her! When I am able I mean to marry her."

"Richard!"

"Well?"

Dr. Lister described briefly the consequences of such an alliance. His remarks were made to fill time, to give Richard an opportunity to get hold of himself.

Richard clasped and unclasped his hands, fitting his fingers neatly together. He did not lift his eyes, he wished only to get away, but he did not feel certain of his power of locomotion.

"Mother had no right to let this go on!"

"She didn't dream of such a thing. Be fair!"

"Not dream of it! Did she suppose I could associate day after day with a girl like Eleanor and not love her?"

"She didn't know you associated with her. I hope you have come to no sort of understanding."

Richard answered only with a setting of his jaw. What he had done was his business. They should pry no farther; his heart was bleeding, but they should not count the drops. As soon as he felt certain of his knees he would fly.

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Dr. Lister gave his body a little comfort against the back of his chair.

"I have no objection to your following music as a career, Richard, and I am sure we can win your mother over also. We want to do what is best for you—that is our chief desire in life. We will give you every possible opportunity here and abroad. What did Mr. Faversham say about your playing?"

Richard had now got to his feet. It seemed to him that he kept on and on rising. Insult had been added to injury.

"I have nothing to tell," said he with dignity, and so got himself away.

CHAPTER XVII

MRS. LISTER TAKES TO HER BED

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Surely there could have been no more remarkable coincidence than this proximity in "Willard's Magazine" of the work of Basil Everman and of Eleanor Bent. It seemed to Mrs. Lister that their connection must be blazoned thereby to the world, that the two compositions must bear on their faces evidence which the least discerning could interpret. Things done in secret could not be hidden; all her efforts of years to save the name of Basil from disgrace were of no avail before the power of God's law. She had given one painful, fascinated reading to the "Scarlet Letter"; to her, now, Basil and his companion were approaching the scaffold in the market-place for their final acknowledgment of common guilt.

After a few days she rose, white and trembling, from her bed and went once more into a suspicious world. She had faced it for twenty years, she would face it again.

But in spite of her terror, the coincidence apparently suggested nothing to Waltonville, brought back no damning recollection to any human being. The memory of mankind is short; that which she had desired was accomplished; Basil's swinging step, his bright eyes, his dark, beautiful hair were long ago forgotten; the step so like his, the eyes lit by the same fire, the mass of dark curls recalled his image as little as did this youthful writing connect itself with his work. As a matter of fact, Eleanor's account of a semi-pathetic, semi-humorous college incident was not in the least like Basil's work, but to Mary Alcestis writing was writing.

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Waltonville's response to Basil's story was varied. Mrs. Scott did not think it in any way remarkable; it reminded her, she said, of the productions of Edgar Allan Poe, and was therefore a little old-fashioned.

"He gave us long ago our fill of horrors," said she lightly. "And I don't think this is even as horrible as 'The Black Cat' and it certainly doesn't compare with 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue.'"

With Utterly's opinions as a stepping-stone she had leaped far above him, as one might leap from a supporting hand into a high saddle. She talked until her husband blushed, until his soul writhed. As for Basil Everman's story, she thought Utterly had been absurd to talk about a thousand dollars.

"I warrant that Mrs. Lister has searched through every old trunk in the attic," said she.

Dr. Scott stirred with one of his uneasy little motions, but made no other answer. He was having a restless, unhappy summer, the worst he had passed since his marriage. There was literally nothing in life which was worth while. He longed to go away, he longed for the companionship of those with kindred tastes and gentle ways, he longed for a sight of the foreign lands of which he dreamed. He stood sometimes and looked about his house with its frivolous and worthless gauds; he thought of the bill for Mrs. Scott's outing, postponed a little this year beyond its usual date, and then of how simply one could live in Italy for a springtime.

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Italy!—He took a book from his shelf and opened it.

"A city of marble, did I say? nay, rather a golden city, paved with emerald. For truly, every pinnacle and turret glanced or glowed, overlaid with gold or bossed with jasper. Beneath the unsullied sea drew in, deep breathing, to and fro, its eddies of green wave.... It lay along the face of the waters, no larger, as its captains saw it from their masts at evening, than a bar of the sunset that could not pass away; but for its power, it must have seemed to them that they were sailing in the expanse of heaven, and this a great planet whose orient edge widened through the ether. A world from which all ignoble care and petty thoughts were banished, with all the common and poor elements of life. No foulness nor tumult in those tremulous streets, that filled, or fell, beneath the moon; but rippled music of majestic change, or thrilling silence. No weak walls could rise above them; no low-roofed cottage, or straw-built shed. Only the strength as of rock, and the finished setting of stones most precious. And round them, far as the eye could reach, still the soft moving of stainless waters, proudly pure; as not the flower, so neither the thorn nor the thistle, could grow in the glancing field. Ethereal strength of Alps, dreamlike, vanishing in high procession beyond the Torcellan shore; blue islands of Paduan hills, poised in the golden west. Above free winds and fiery clouds ranging at their will;—brightness out of the north, and balm from the south, and the stars of evening and morning clear in the limitless light of arched heaven and circling sea."

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Dr. Scott sighed and took down another book, then for hours he was dull to the passing of time. Sometimes he was able to lose himself in dreams. But when he woke his house was all the more intolerable and even his study offered no balm. Late July brought Walter for a visit and Walter seemed more than ever worldly, smart, progressive, and intolerable. Cora sat in her room silent and white-faced. Sometimes she read for a long time from one of her padded poets. Mrs. Scott longed for Atlantic City and complained about the Listers.

To Dr. Scott the story of Basil Everman exhibited all the cruel sadness of human fate. His imagination was fertile and he reconstructed Basil, an alien spirit in the Everman house. His speech was not the speech of Puritanic theology, his ways could not have been the ways of Mary Alcestis. He was so soon a ghost, wandering forlorn, his work only begun when life was ended! Dr. Scott meant to talk to Thomasina Davis about him—she surely would remember him.

He saw no reason why "Bitter Bread" should not make a little book. Would the Listers think of him as the editor for such a volume? So happy an event was hardly, in this disappointing world, probable; nevertheless, though he knew himself to be reckoning without any host whatever, he began to put together editorial words and phrases. Then, remembering Utterly, who had a certain right as a discoverer, he ceased dreaming.

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Mrs. Scott thought Eleanor's story poor and called attention to the fact that she had taken Dr. Green's office as a model for untidiness, at which he laughed immoderately. He said that Eleanor might use himself or his office as a model at any time or to any extent she wished.

"Undoubtedly she has some kind of a pull," was Mrs. Scott's next comment.

"Pull?" repeated Dr. Scott nervously.

"Yes, influence over the editor," explained Mrs. Scott, "pull" in this sense being a new usage adopted from Walter. "Perhaps a financial influence. They seem to have money."

Thomasina Davis, when she opened her copy of "Willard's Magazine," grew pale; then she put it aside and went to walk up and down her garden. It was a long time before serenity returned to her countenance.

Later in the day she went to the Bents' to congratulate Eleanor. It was probable, she thought, that no one else in Waltonville but Dr. Scott would say anything to her. Eleanor looked ill and troubled, not as one would expect a rising author to look, and her mother looked even more distressed. They sat on the porch with Mrs. Bent watching her daughter anxiously, from the background, the dark circles under her eyes telling of sleepless nights.

"You ought to take Eleanor away for a vacation," advised Thomasina. "There is no place superior to Waltonville, but you have to go away sometimes to realize it. Perhaps she would like to go somewhere with me."

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To Thomasina's astonishment Eleanor burst into tears, and rising, overwhelmed with mortification, went indoors.

"She ain't very well," explained Mrs. Bent, who was overwhelmed also. "Please do excuse her, Miss Davis. She has studied hard and she has practiced too much since she got her piano. That is, she did, but she don't now."

"Perhaps she ought to see Dr. Green."

"Perhaps." But Mrs. Bent's forehead did not smooth itself out at the suggestion. Her anxieties tightened about her daily like a coil of wire long ago flung out and now being wound closer and closer.

Thomasina said nothing to Mrs. Lister about Basil's story. They had never talked about him, for though they had been intimate companions, Mary Alcestis had shut her out with every one else from her grief. She believed that Thomasina had thought even when they were children that she did not love him enough, was not always amiable with him. Not love Basil! It was because she had loved him so dearly, so desperately, that she had tried to watch over him, to lead him, to

admonish him. A woman who had never been really in love, who had never married, who had never had children, who had always maintained even toward Dr. Lister an air of mental equality, could not be expected to know the height and depth of love which Mary Alcestis knew. Thomasina, for all her bright mind and all her knowledge of many things, had had little experience of life's realities.

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From others the Listers had comments in plenty. "To the relatives of Basil Everman, Waltonville, Pennsylvania," had come to be a familiar address to the postmaster. Editors wrote asking whether there had not been preserved other compositions of Basil Everman. They would welcome even fragmentary notes. Could not anything be found by searching? Dr. Lister went to the attic and opened the little trunk and took the Euripides and the Æschylus down to his study. He laid his hand for an instant on the upper drawer of the old bureau where Basil's clothes were packed, but did not open it. These clothes should long, long ago have been given away or burned.

A few old friends wrote to Dr. Scott for information about his distinguished fellow citizen. The story was to be followed in "Willard's" by "Roses of Pæstum" and "Storm." It promised to be fashionable to reprint old material. Dr. Lister heard nothing from Mr. Utterly, but imagined him swelling with pride and heard his sharp, high voice going on interminably about the rights of the public in all the details of an author's life.

Richard sat about quietly, holding a book in his hand, but not reading. His first experience with pain appalled him. So this was the world, was it? this was life? Was this dull shade the real color of the sky, this heavy vapor the atmosphere? He could not reconcile so malevolent a trick of fate with any conception of benevolence. Presently he began to resent his misery. He had done nothing to deserve this pain.

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To his side, as he sat in Dr. Lister's study or on the porch, his mother made frequent journeys.

"Dinner-time, Richard," said Mary Alcestis gently. "Fried chicken, Richard," she would add hopefully. Or, "'Manda has just finished baking, Richard. Would you like a little cake? It would please 'Manda, Richard." Or—now Mrs. Lister's heart throbbed with hope—"Would you like to have the piano tuned, Richard?"

To all these suggestions he returned a polite, "No, I thank you, mother." No tuning or feeding could help either the piano or Richard now.

Once he turned upon his mother with a question.

"Mother, do you mean to say that during all these years, you and Mrs. Bent have never exchanged a word about—this matter?"

"She came up to me once on the street with her little girl," confessed Mrs. Lister tremulously. "But of course I couldn't talk to her there—or anywhere!"

"What did she say?"

"She said she wanted to talk to me about Basil."

Finally Mrs. Lister yielded her citadel.

"Richard, your father and I have been talking about music. We think that when you get your clavier with your Commencement money, we had better get a piano also. Father thinks I should go with you to Baltimore and that it would be well to ask Thomasina to go too. You could have it to practice on now, and then it would be here when you came from—from New York, Richard."

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Richard made no answer.

"Would you like that, dear?"

Richard laid his book on the table before him. He remembered the things which had been said about music, about art, about him! He laid his head down on his arms.

"A grand piano, Richard!" said Mrs. Lister, appealingly. "Papa thinks—"

"I would like to be let alone!" said Richard. "That is all I ask."

But Mrs. Lister had not yet made the hardest of her sacrificial suggestions. She was grieved by Richard's response, but she had determined to bear anything.

"I am thinking of that young girl," said she timidly.

"What young girl?" asked Richard with a warning savageness.

"Of Miss Bent. I don't like you to seem rude to her. I don't suppose she knows anything about her history. I can't believe she does. Perhaps you might make another call on her—with Thomasina. I am sure she would go with you if you would ask her. There would not be anything strange in it. Then you would go away and it would be—over. You will have new scenes."

In answer Richard simply looked at his mother. He believed that her mind was affected by long brooding over his Uncle Basil; thus only could her behavior and her conversation be explained. To embrace Eleanor Bent, to stay away from her for days, and then to call upon her with Thomasina Davis! It was, indeed, a fantastic scheme.

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Presently he went away. His father's sisters sent once more from St. Louis an urgent invitation and to their quiet household he was persuaded to go. Mary Alcestis composed a letter saying that he had not been well and that he did not care at the present time for gayety. Before mailing the letter she wrote another saying that he had lived so entirely with older folk that it was good for him to have gayety and go about with young people. When she had finished this letter the possibility of a western daughter-in-law disturbed her. In the end she destroyed both letters and he set out unencumbered by directions.

Casually in Dr. Green's office Dr. Lister asked about the marriage of first cousins and Dr. Green reached into the irregular pile of "Lancets" behind him and dragged out a copy, sending thereby the superincumbent stack to the floor. Upon it he did not bestow a glance.

"There, read the pleasant catalogue! Deaf children, dumb children, children malformed, children susceptible to disease, children with rickets, no children at all. I can give you a dozen articles if this doesn't suffice."

Early in August the Listers went to call upon Thomasina. In her living-room there was a single dim light, only a little brighter than the moonlight outside. The rest of Waltonville whose rooms blazed, wondered often how she made her parlor so restful, so comfortable to talk in. From the garden through the long doors came the odor of jasmine and sweet clematis and the heavier scent of August lilies.

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She had been walking in her garden and when she came in to meet her guests there appeared with her a slender young figure in a white dress. Eleanor had come to show that she was not a fool, that she could talk sensibly and not burst out crying. Her heart had changed from a delicate throbbing organ into a hard lump, but her eyes were dry.

At sight of Eleanor, Mrs. Lister drew closer to Dr. Lister, who looked at her in return as sternly as he ever looked at any one. Thomasina asked at once about Richard, where he was and how soon he would be at home. Mrs. Scott had come to her with her story, and Thomasina, concealing her surprise, had said that she saw nothing unsuitable in such a friendship. In a few hours she ceased even to be surprised, she felt only an aching envy for youth and happiness. She did not share Dr. Green's opinion that youthful marriages were suicidal. But something evidently had gone wrong between Richard and Eleanor. Could Mrs. Scott have made trouble between them!

Mrs. Lister told where Richard had gone and said they did not know when he would return.

"He is going to New York late in the fall," she explained. "He is going to be a musician."

Thomasina's arm felt the throb of Eleanor's heart.

Before the Listers had found seats, the knocker sounded again. Now the Scotts arrived. This was the evening that Dr. Scott had set as the limit of his boredom. Things had grown no better; they had, on the contrary, grown worse. But when he had set out, Mrs. Scott announced her intention of accompanying him, and she was now at his side, effervescent, sharp-voiced, and more than usually trying to her husband.

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Eleanor lingered, feeling awkward and unhappy. She wished to be alone with her own thoughts of Richard, alone with her never-ending effort to account for his silence, his departure without a good-bye. Perhaps he would write to her! The possibility made her happy for a second. She waited a pause in the conversation so that she might go home, but none came. When Dr. Green arrived, the talk grew more rapid and the opportunity seemed farther away.

Of the hard feeling which she had exhibited against Eleanor, Mrs. Scott gave now no sign. She spoke of "Our budding authoress" with whom she said she had had little opportunity thus far to become acquainted. How, she asked, with her sweetest expression, did one write? She drew a picture of Eleanor sitting before a ream of paper, laying aside finished sheets with machine-like regularity.

Eleanor made no answer; she did not wish to be rude, but she had no words. It was before the days when the reporter penetrated through the boudoir of the writer or artist into the more secret regions of his work-room to watch hands flitting above a typewriter, or to photograph preoccupation at a flower-laden mahogany desk. Eleanor blushed as though she had been asked to describe the process of putting on her clothes.

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Her silence did not suggest to Mrs. Scott the propriety of stopping.

"What are you going to do, Miss Bent?"

"What do you mean, Mrs. Scott?"

"I mean are you going to bury your talent in Waltonville or are you going into the great world? I hear that women are going into all the fields of men. Perhaps you will be a reporter and write us all up!"

"I have no plans for anything of that kind."

"You speak as though Waltonville were a cemetery, Mrs. Scott," said Thomasina.

"Where did you get the idea for your little story?" persisted Mrs. Scott.

It was clear now that Eleanor was being baited. Even Mrs. Lister felt sympathy. Eleanor's cheeks

flamed; their color could be seen even in the dim light. Thomasina was about to answer, when Dr. Green interposed.

"Out of her head, Mrs. Scott, where all authors that are worth while get theirs. That's where Shakespeare got his and where Basil Everman got his. Their heads are differently stocked from ours. You don't suppose they have to see everything they write about, do you? Mrs. Lister, I have been deeply interested in Basil Everman. I suppose it is too much to hope for—but is it possible that anything else will turn up?"

"I'm afraid not," answered Dr. Lister. "There is a chance of something in other magazines of the time, but I fancy they have been pretty carefully gone over in that hope." [Pg 221]

Mrs. Scott, never long quiet, turned to Mrs. Lister.

"Cora had a letter from Richard."

"Did she?" said Mrs. Lister. "That was nice."

She spoke smoothly, but a sudden pang of sympathy for Eleanor shot through her heart. Eleanor must love Richard, could not do otherwise. His caring for Cora became suddenly undesirable; his tragedy had lifted him above her. Mrs. Lister was glad now that he was going away, to win fame, to separate himself from Waltonville. He could never emancipate himself from Mrs. Scott if he were her son-in-law. That fate she could not wish any one, least of all her dear child. The occasion of his letter to Cora was the return of a book long since lent him and forgotten.

"I told him he must write at once and explain why he had kept it so long," explained Mary Alcestis simply.

Eleanor moved suddenly closer to Mrs. Lister.

"I read about Basil Everman," said she hurriedly. "I was mortified to see my poor story published in the same magazine with his. I think he was wonderful. It makes Waltonville seem like a different place when one realizes that he lived here. It must have been wonderful to be with him, to help him. There is a poem about 'a brother, a sister, anything to thee!' My mother says she remembers him well. I think she knew him *quite* well and admired him very much. I told her she ought to come to you and talk to you about him." [Pg 222]

"Yes," said Mrs. Lister faintly.

It seemed to her that she went on saying "yes" interminably. She saw tearful Mrs. Bent, laying her hand on Richard's coach, her little gray-eyed daughter clinging to her and staring round-eyed at the other baby. She had not described this incident in full either to Dr. Lister or to Richard. She could not confess how sharply she had refused to talk to Mrs. Bent; how she had backed away, literally pulling the coach from under her hand; how eyes and voice had expressed horror and anger. It was not likely, whatever her daughter might think, that Mrs. Bent would approach her again! But equally dreadful things had happened. She looked at poor Eleanor now as she had looked at her mother; then she rose to go. The next morning she stayed in bed, waiting for the blow to fall.

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. LISTER HAS TWO CALLERS

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Mrs. Lister would not at first see Dr. Green. She insisted that she was only tired and that she would be out of bed and downstairs by to-morrow. She had been like this after her father and Basil had died, and she had recovered then without the help of a doctor. It was her mind and not her body which was ailing and there was no medicine for her mind.

Nor should Richard be sent for. She answered the suggestion impatiently.

"I am only too thankful that he is away. I want him to be away. I used to want him to be here always and to have this house when we are gone and marry Cora Scott and have little children, but now I believe the best thing for him is to stay away. I think I did wrong to dissuade you when you had the call from the New York College, papa. We would have plenty for him, wouldn't we, even if he doesn't succeed with his music?"

Dr. Lister laughed.

"Don't add that to your other worries, Mary Alcestis! Richard is not the kind to fail."

"I could easily economize in the house. There are many things one can do without if one only thinks so."

Most of the time she lay still thinking. She turned over and over in her mind the old days, their routine, their precepts. She tried to excuse Basil, to find some flaw in his bringing-up. But she had had exactly the same bringing-up and she had always been obedient to her parents and to the laws of society and of God. The flaw must have been in him. [Pg 224]

She thought of Mrs. Bent as a young girl with her pretty face. She had seemed, at least, superior

to her father and her station. It was not perhaps her fault that she had gone astray, and helped others to go astray. She had not had any bringing-up, poor soul, except what she had given herself. But one could not excuse her, could not look lightly upon dreadful sin! Again Mary Alcestis heard that frantic pleading in the dark on Cherry Street, saw again Basil's bending face in the light of the dim street lamp.

"It would be best to go away," said Basil distinctly.

When, at last, she tried to go downstairs, she found herself unequal to the exertion. She rose, walked about the room, and returned as quickly as possible to bed, her knees trembling, darkness before her eyes. Then, at last, she consented to have Dr. Green prescribe for her. She could lie here no longer; she must be up and about her business, which was the defending of her house and her name from disgrace.

Dr. Green came, whistling softly, up the stairs and into her room. There he let his tall figure down into an armchair. His eyes were unusually bright, his hair had just been trimmed, his clothes were, comparatively speaking, smooth. He was really, thought Mrs. Lister, rather a handsome man.

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He said that her illness was merely exhaustion due to the heat. He would send her some medicine and she must stay in bed for another week. He expected to go to Baltimore for a few days and she was upon no account to stir until he got back.

"You take life far too strenuously. I dare say you are saving 'Manda all the time."

When his taking of her pulse and his somewhat perfunctory inquiry about her symptoms were over, he did not go. The room was deliciously cool after the blazing heat through which he had walked and there was even a slight breeze, blowing in between the slats of the bowed shutters and swaying the curtains gently. 'Manda came presently with a tray and a glass of lemonade and he called down the blessings of Heaven upon her in his extravagant way.

When she had gone he asked Mrs. Lister, by way of opening a pleasant and soothing conversation, whether she had read Eleanor Bent's story.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Lister.

"Did you think it was a good story?"

Mrs. Lister answered with a fainter "yes." She was determined to give poor Eleanor her due; indeed, "Professor Ellenborough's Last Class" was not nearly so "wild" as she expected. Then she ventured a question.

"Dr. Green, if a person has talent, is it likely to be inherited, or does it spring up of itself?"

Dr. Green, strange to say, flushed scarlet. Mrs. Lister grew panic-stricken. What had she said? What did he know? What might she not have put into his head? She wished that he would go, she became suddenly afraid of her own tongue. He began a lengthy dissertation upon the laws of heredity as laid down by scientists. Some one among Eleanor's ancestors had certainly had brains and had used them. She had a very good mind; she might go far if she could be brought to value her talent as it should be valued; if she could be persuaded to hold it higher than any marital experience, for instance.

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"I do not think marriage is for every one," agreed Mary Alcestis. "There are some people who do not seem equal to its demands."

Dr. Green sniffed the pleasant air.

"I think Eleanor would be equal to it. I meant it would probably ruin her career. I think the majority of young people have been tricked, trapped, by the instinct to mate."

"Oh!" said Mary Alcestis. "I don't agree with you."

"She ought to have new experiences of life," went on Dr. Green. "She should get out of this back water into the fuller current." He was rather pleased with his metaphor.

A gleam of hope illuminated Mrs. Lister's despair.

"Perhaps we could help," she said eagerly. "Her mother must have found her education and her clothing rather expensive. She always wears such very pretty clothes. And she takes lessons from Thomasina, and I hear—I hear she has a very fine piano. If we could do anything in a quiet way for her, I am sure Dr. Lister would be willing. I—we should be very, very glad."

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"I think there is no lack of money," said Dr. Green.

Then with a promptness which indicated to Mrs. Lister a connection in his mind between the two subjects, he began to speak of Basil Everman.

"Your brother must have been a very brilliant person."

Mary Alcestis's body moved with a slight convulsive motion under the bed-covers.

"He was a dear little boy," said she. "He and Thomasina Davis and I used to play together."

"His death was a calamity," said Dr. Green. "But I needn't tell you that, for no one could value

him as highly as you do, naturally. But it was a pity, a very great pity. I suppose we will have a book about him some day. Eleanor Bent might do such a piece of work when she's older. Biography is far more interesting and far harder to do well than fiction. Eleanor—"

"Did you say you were going to Baltimore?" asked Mrs. Lister faintly.

Dr. Green pulled out his watch.

"I am going to Baltimore in exactly one half-hour and I have a satchel to pack. Good-bye and do as I tell you."

Mrs. Lister lay in a cold perspiration. Eleanor writing a book about Basil! She tried to grip the smooth sheet drawn tightly over the smooth mattress; finally she put both hands over her face. She forgot Basil, she forgot Richard, she forgot everything except a prayer that she might not scream.

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Thomasina came in the front door as Dr. Green went out. She was told by him that Mrs. Lister was only exhausted by the heat, that company would do her good, and that she, Thomasina, should go upstairs and stay as long as she could. She glanced about as she went through the hall, her mind filled with pleasant recollections of the former dwellers in the high-ceilinged rooms. A friendship handed down from generation to generation as was hers with the Everman family was rare and precious.

She laid her rose-colored parasol on the hall table and went slowly up the stairs. When she had almost reached the top, she heard the sound of a smothered sob, and remembered with a pang the days when she had sat with Mary Alcestis beside her father's coffin. Poor Mary Alcestis had had a good deal to bear. What could be the matter now? Surely, surely nothing could have happened to Richard! Thomasina hastened her steps.

Mrs. Lister lay face downward, her cheek pressed deep into the pillow. Her hands were clenched above her head and the bed shook with the violence of her weeping. She had now passed the limit of endurance.

Thomasina went close to the ample bed with its quivering figure.

"Mary Alcestis, I am here and I will stay with you. If it does you good to cry, I'll stand guard, so cry away."

Thomasina bowed one shutter a little more closely and closed the door and then sat down in the chair which Dr. Green had left. There could be nothing the matter with Richard, or Dr. Green would have told her.

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Mrs. Lister did not, as Thomasina suggested, have her cry out. She tried at once to control herself, and succeeded bravely with her tears. But the hysterical impulse was not spent. It would have been better if she had continued to weep, but instead she began to talk, and having begun, could not stop.

She told Thomasina the whole story of Basil from the day of his birth as though Thomasina had never seen or heard of him.

"We did everything we could for him, father and I—everything. I felt I must make up mother's loss to him. We—"

"*Everything except understand him,*" said Thomasina to herself.

"We prayed—that is father did—with him, and talked with him, and labored with him, and watched for him."

"*But did not sympathize with him,*" said Thomasina, again to herself.

"But when it came to Margie Ginter, oh, Thomasina! it was too hard with father the president of the college and so admir—"

"To Margie Ginter!" repeated Thomasina.

"Oh, hush, Thomasina! Do not speak so loud! I have never talked about it with you, because it was my own brother, and I wanted you to think as well as you could of him, and because we have never talked about such things. But you must know, Thomasina!"

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"I know nothing!"

"I mean you will have to know, because it is creeping out."

"Creeping out!" Thomasina's voice was horror-struck. "What is creeping out?"

"He began to go with Margie Ginter here. He walked with her in the evenings and he used to go often to the tavern. You know how we used to run past the tavern, Thomasina!"

"This is madness, Mary Alcestis!"

"It is not. I saw them and heard them. I was coming home from your house and I heard them. She was pleading with Basil to help her and he said it would be best to go away. She was crying, and I followed them down Cherry Street. I felt I must know so as to tell my father. It was very dark and a storm was coming, but I followed them nevertheless."

"Followed them?"

"It was my duty. Don't look at me like that, Thomasina! Do you suppose I would believe anything against Basil I didn't have to believe? I never loved any one more than him—not even Richard, you know that. I have had this hanging over me for years. You haven't had much experience with trouble or sorrow or you would understand better than you do. And then this dreadful Mr. Utterly from New York determined to pry into our affairs. It is a wonder that I am living to-day, indeed it is!"

"Basil did nothing that could not be published to the world!" said Thomasina sharply. "What is the matter with you? What are you afraid of? Have you repeated this to any one else?" [Pg 231]

"You know me better than that," said Mrs. Lister with dignity. "You have been my companion since we were children. How can you ask such a question?"

"But what do you mean? What is there to suspect about Basil? What is creeping out?"

"You are so sharp-witted about many things, Thomasina. You know so much more than I do in so many ways. You know what I mean and yet you pretend that you do not!"

"I do not know what you mean!"

"Even Mr. Utterly saw that Eleanor Bent has eyes like Basil and he never saw her but once or twice. You can't fail to see it! And there is this writing!"

Thomasina always sat quietly, but now she seemed to have turned to stone. After a long time Mary Alcestis took her hands from her eyes and looked up.

"You look at me as though I were a fool and wicked, too, Thomasina."

Thomasina made no answer, but continued to stare with a face as white as Mrs. Lister's sheets. Mrs. Lister sat up suddenly in bed.

"I hear some one downstairs, I believe it is Dr. Lister. Will you tell him, Thomasina, that I am trying to sleep?"

Thomasina rose quickly.

"You are a fool, Mary Alcestis," said she slowly. [Pg 232]

"Oh, Thomasina!" Mary Alcestis laid herself down.

"This is an invention of your own brain. Shame upon you, Mary Alcestis!"

Mrs. Lister now covered her face with the sheet.

Thomasina went out and closed the door. The astonishment in her eyes had changed to a sick horror. She held feebly to the hand rail as she descended the steps. For the first moment in her life she looked old. She heard Dr. Lister moving about in his study, but she did not deliver Mary Alcestis's message. It made no difference to her whether or not Mary Alcestis was disturbed in her sleep.

Forgetting to raise her sunshade, she crossed the sunniest spaces of the campus without feeling the heat, and went down the street past her own gateway to Dr. Green's office. There she waited, sitting straight in a small stiff chair until black Virginia, in answer to her ring, entered from a distant quarter of the house. Virginia blinked away the last drowsiness of her mid-morning nap as she looked admiringly at Thomasina.

"Doctor's gone away, Miss Thomas'."

"Where to?"

"Baltimore."

"I saw him less than an hour ago."

"Yessum, but he went to the train like a cyclone."

"When will he be back?"

"Couple o' days, I guess. Was yo' sick, Miss Thomas'?"

Thomasina rose unsteadily. [Pg 233]

"No."

"Shall I write anything on the slate?"

"No, thank you, Virginia."

"Can I get you a glass o' water, Miss Thomas'?"

"No, thank you."

With a dragging step, Thomasina proceeded on her way. She opened her door and entered the hall and looked up the broad stairway toward the second floor. The stairway seemed very steep,

and she stepped quickly into her parlor and shut the door and sat down in the nearest chair. By this time she looked like death.

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. LISTER OPENS AN OLD BUREAU

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Mrs. Lister lay motionless for many moments after Thomasina had left. Exhausted both mentally and physically she was for a little while dull to her own woes. She should not have talked to Thomasina, but neither should Thomasina have responded as she did. Thomasina had put her in the wrong, she had not acted like a friend.

"As though I made it up!" sobbed Mary Alcestis. "What does she think I am?"

Once more she dropped into a doze which was not so much physical as mental. She dreamed that a dreadful danger threatened them all, like the collapse of the solid Lister house, and under the impression of the dream she stepped from bed without being fully awake. Once on her feet, she understood its significance and determined to carry out that which she had long intended. She felt under the edge of the bed for her slippers and put them on and wrapped round her a capacious dressing-gown. Locomotion, tried at first warily, proved easier than she expected. Opening the door, she stood still and listened. Dr. Lister was doubtless comfortable in the conviction that she was asleep and would consequently be lost in his book until dinner-time.

Opening the door more widely, she stepped out into the hall. She was not accustomed to stealing about her own house and her weakness and the throbbing of her heart terrified her. But with the foresight of one accustomed to sly deeds, she closed the door softly. If her husband came upstairs he would think that she was asleep and he would not disturb her. She went stealthily along the hall to the stairway and stopped once more. There were certain steps that creaked so that they could be heard all over the house, but she knew which steps they were and with painful care stepped over them. Her dressing-gown got in her way and almost tripped her, and she steadied herself by the aid of the banister and stood for a long time trembling.

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"I shall say I am going to find something I need," she planned. "I have a perfect right to go into my own attic."

But mercifully she heard no sound nearly as loud as the throbbing of her own heart. Each step made her feel weaker and more miserable as it lifted her into the hot darkness of the third-story hall with its smell of dry wood and camphor and other faintly odorous objects. The shutters were closed tight and the blinds were drawn, but through them and through the roof the sun penetrated until the air was furnace-heated. She gasped, feeling a sharp pain in her head, but she moved on, her hand against the wall, to the door of Basil's room.

There she turned the key and entered. The temperature was higher than that of the hall and the odors stronger and more significant. Each simple article of furniture, the narrow bed, the high, old-fashioned bureau, the little washstand with its Spartan fittings, a single chair, a little table, the old trunk, all was as it had been for twenty years. In it was no life or reminder of life; it was empty, terrible as an old burial vault.

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She did not open a window and thereby admit a breath of saving though heated air; her purpose must be quickly accomplished and admitted of no discovery and no interruption. She believed that if any one should come upon her suddenly at this moment she would die of shock. She went directly to the old bureau and opened the upper drawer. There, each garment wrapped in paper with a little piece of camphor in its folds, lay specimens of Basil's clothes going as far back as a little winter coat discarded when he was five. How often had she wept over them! How speedily her husband or Thomasina would have consigned them to the flames, refusing to connect a human life with the garments of the past, now so grotesque!

Thrusting her hand beneath the lower layer, she brought out a key and with it opened the second drawer. Then she stood very still. The drawer was not filled to the top, but held only a few large, thick old tablets in a pile, a few books, a small handful of letters, a half-dozen pens and pencils, a little penwiper and a half-dozen packages of paper thickly covered with writing in a small, delicate hand.

She lifted the tablets and, trembling, turned the yellowed pages, also covered with close writing. She lifted the packages of paper and laid them softly back. When she took the letters in her hand, tears ran down her cheeks. Here was her father's handwriting, here her own, here even her mother's. Only once had Mrs. Everman left her home, and it was then, upon the occasion of a funeral in her family, that she had written to her children. That he had kept this letter, which, when it came, he had been too young to read, or even to understand, was a redeeming, a consoling incident in Basil's life. The little penwiper moved her most strongly. She remembered when it was made, what scraps of her own dresses composed it; she laid it carefully away.

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But she treated the relics of Basil's mind with no such tenderness. She lifted one of the packages of manuscript in her hands. She was not mad or wicked, poor Mary Alcestis, she was only devoted to what was seemly and right. This was a duty which she owed Basil, a duty which she should have performed long ago. Persons changed their opinions as they grew older and he,

could he have survived, would have come to regret those stories of love and crime and hate which he had written, which would now so cruelly reveal his soul. Had not Mr. Utterly confirmed all her own convictions on this point? Loving Basil, she would do exactly as she knew he would wish her to do! She would do it quickly. Certain remarks of Dr. Lister's in other connections made her fear that he would be not upon her side and that of Basil's good, but upon the side of Basil's youth. Standing tall, loosely wrapped in her long robe, she looked for once in her life heroic, like a sybil or prophetess. Her hands grasped the paper and she tried to tear the whole across.

But the paper was still tough in spite of its age and she had to lay the package down and take a few sheets at a time. The slow process made her nervous; it seemed hours since she had come into the room. She tore the half-dozen sheets across, then dropped them into the pitcher on the little washstand. When she had finished she would carry them downstairs. 'Manda had a good fire at this time of day.

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She lifted six other sheets and tore them across. She remembered dimly the story of the manuscript of some famous and important book accidentally fed day after day to the fire. But that was a great work of philosophy or history or theology, it was not anything like poor Basil's stories! She saw as she proceeded a few clear words, "Hunger knows no niceties and passion no laws," and she shuddered. They could not too soon perish, these utterances of Basil's sad, uncontrolled youth!

Suddenly she began to feel faint. She remembered again the story of the bride locked into the great chest. But that was nonsense! Dr. Lister would soon find her. Was he not coming, did she not hear steps, a voice, did she not feel—not a hand touching her—but a breath upon her cheek? Thomasina had said—what was it Thomasina had said?

She pushed the drawer shut, all but a crack, then she moved slowly and with dignity toward Basil's bed. She would lie down and after a little rest strength would return. Then she would go on, tearing the papers into finer and ever finer bits.

CHAPTER XX

BASIL'S ROOM HAS A NEW VISITOR

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Dr. Lister read the "Times" and "Public Opinion" until he heard 'Manda setting the dinner-table. Then he folded his papers, glanced out through the pleasant medium of dim green light under his awning, raised his arms above his head in a motion which relieved cramped muscles, yawned, and wondered about Mary Alcestis. Reproaching himself because he had not gone directly to her side when he came in, he went upstairs.

He found her door closed and upon listening with his ear against the frame, felt confident that he heard a gentle breathing. He opened the door, holding the knob so that it should make no noise, and looked into the darkened room. When his vision reached the bedspread, turned down over the bed's foot, he withdrew. What Mary Alcestis needed was sleep. She needed also absence from these familiar scenes. He determined that he would propose a journey, much as he disliked leaving his pleasant home in summer. They might go and bring Richard home, all returning by way of Niagara Falls; they might even take him directly to New York and see him settled there. By next summer he would look back on his miseries with astonishment at himself. Youth was so resilient; it changed and forgot, thank God! Tiptoeing downstairs Dr. Lister ate his dinner, still more reassured by 'Manda's statement that her mistress had given orders early in the morning that she was not to be disturbed.

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As he sat alone at his meal, he thought of Basil who had so often sat here looking over the broad meadow toward the creek where he, like Richard, had fished when he was a little boy. How pleasant it was to be safe and alive, with friends, bodily comforts, good books; how dreadful to be struck down, cut off from life and sunshine and work. How sad to be forgotten, to have no place in the memory of man, even in the minds of one's contemporaries. His thoughts turned from Basil's life to his own. What had he done to be remembered except by a few persons connected with him by ties of blood? A few short texts edited, a few boys and girls taught a little Greek! Alas, during the most of his adult years he had been satisfied to get merely his academic work done and to make no further effort. This house, he believed, with all its soft comforts had been bad for him; he had had so many more plans, so many high ambitions when he was a struggling young man, before Mary Alcestis had begun to pillow his existence. He saw once more Basil in this quiet house. How he must have filled it with unrest and discontent!

When he had finished his dinner, he went to his wife's door. Again he was certain of the breathing which was restoring her to herself.

As he descended the stairs he heard a strange and startling sound, a loud, thin twang metallic and musical. He had forgotten that the old piano gave occasional expression to a complaint over the misery and dreariness of age and felt for an instant his flesh creep. Then, smiling at himself, he went on to his study.

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But he could not read. The musical vibration lingered in the air, disturbing him. He even walked into the parlor and laid his hand on the red cover of Basil's old piano. He hoped that it would

make no such sound again, he felt that it would disturb him greatly. He walked about uneasily and then returned to his study and got out of the lower drawer of his desk some old notes. He had once made plans for a translation of the "Medea," he had even begun it—was it now too late to snatch a little fame from the passing years? He turned over his old notes eagerly, then more slowly. But his taste had changed as had his handwriting and the lines seemed stiff, the whole stilted and poor. Young faces seemed to smile at him. Poetry, even in translation, was for the Basils and not for him. Medea did not companion with Mary Alcestis! He lay down to his afternoon nap.

At four o'clock he woke with a start. He had been wandering in a deep cave and great waters fell and rushed about him. Sometimes delicious peace and coolness encircled him; again he struggled in a steaming bath. Rousing, he remembered suddenly that he was a man of family with a sick wife whom he had not seen for a good many hours. He went rapidly toward the stairway and for the third time approached the closed door. This time he did not stop to listen, but rapped and turned the knob. To his astonishment, Mary Alcestis was not there. Moreover, the covers lay over the foot of the bed just as they had lain in the morning, and he saw now that the drapery was not merely the spread, but sheet and blanket as well. Was it possible that the bed could have been empty when he looked before?

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At once he went from room to room. She had doubtless sought greater coolness in another spot. Richard's room—she was not there, one guestroom, another—she was nowhere. He remembered the attic and went toward the steps.

"Mary Alcestis!" he called.

The echoes of his own voice answered him. She could not be so mad as to sit in Basil's room on a day like this! He took the steps in bounds.

He found her on Basil's bed. Her eyes were open and she greeted him with a feeble smile.

"I called you, Thomas, but I guess you didn't hear."

"Why, Mary Alcestis! What are you doing here? How long have you been here?"

"Not so very long." The statement was true so far as Mary Alcestis knew. She thought that she had slept a little while. "I came up to get something I wanted and I found I hadn't strength to get back. You will help me, won't you?"

Dr. Lister lifted the window and thrust open the shutter, pushing hard to free it from the vines. It was like an oven out of doors, but the air there was at least better than this!

"I am afraid the flies will come in, Thomas," protested Mary Alcestis in a stronger voice.

"Let them!" said Dr. Lister. "Of course I didn't hear you! I have been again and again to your door and I thought you were asleep and that sleep was the best medicine for you. Come, my dear, you must try to get downstairs at once. This atmosphere is enough to sicken a well person."

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"I—I came up on an errand. I didn't mean to stay long." Mary Alcestis's eyes sought the bureau. Had she closed the drawer? "Then I grew faint, I guess, from the heat. If I had a little food I would feel stronger, then I could walk downstairs. Does 'Manda have lunch ready?"

Dr. Lister's eyes had followed her glance, had seen the slightly open drawer, the key in the lock. It was easy to guess the nature of her employment, the old mournful, brooding inspection of Basil's property! He saw also a scrap of paper on the floor. Had Basil left papers?

"Lunch is over," said he. "Mary Alcestis—" but this was not the time for questioning. He went down to the kitchen and brought back a cup of broth, which she drank slowly. She looked no more with anxiety at the bureau and he saw that the drawer was closed and the key gone from the lock. In a few minutes she made her way downstairs with the aid of his arm and sank upon her bed. Her eyes were heavy.

"How lovely it is here! If I can get a good nap, I'll feel much better. Then," said Mary Alcestis to her soul, "I shall finish what I began."

Before Dr. Lister had covered her she was asleep. He went out and closed the door and straightway climbed the third story steps. He had never wondered what was in the old bureau, he naturally avoided thinking of it at all. Now a suspicion had entered his mind, rousing his curiosity. There was, he was convinced, some object here which his wife did not wish him to see, something which helped to keep grief alive, some mystery which had better be at once probed. He did not believe that even yet she had told him everything about her brother.

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In the upper drawer lay the neat packages of Basil's clothing, he felt of each one—here was no mystery. The second drawer was locked, but access to it was easy since he had only to lift out the upper drawer. But there was a wooden partition between them. Had Mary Alcestis carried the key away with her? He explored among the paper bundles. Slipped into one, he found the key.

When he had opened the locked drawer, he stood for a long time motionless before it. He saw the tablets, the sheaves of paper, the small parcel of old letters, the little penwiper, the pens and pencils. First he took up one of the pens, holding it in his hand and staring at it. After a while he took up a tablet and turned back the cover. He read the first page, bringing it close to his somewhat nearsighted eyes. At the bottom, he whispered what he read aloud as he turned the

"Now doth he forget
Medea and his sons that he may make
His bed with Creon's daughter."

He read on. The moments passed. The dreaded enemies anticipated by Mary Alcestis drifted in at the window and out again, and at last the campus clock struck five. Supper in the Lister house was early. He began to turn the pages rapidly and five or six at a time. They were covered with close writing; here and there were bars of music with Greek words between them. [Pg 245]

He took up another of the thick books. Here, closely copied, was "Bitter Bread"; here were other titles—"The Dust of Battle" with an explanatory sentence beneath it: "The fire of hell shall not touch the legs of him who is covered with the dust of battle in the road of God." Here was "Obsession," here "Victory," here "Shame." He opened the third book, saw poetry and blinked eyes which had begun to ache. He saw loose sheets of paper, and the string which had held them. When he put the string round them, he saw that some had been taken out of the package. He opened the other drawers—they contained only more camphor-scented, carefully wrapped packages of clothing. He went prowling about, he lifted the pillows from the bed, he looked into the pitcher on the little washstand. From it he dipped the fragments of paper and laid them on the bureau. "Passion makes its own laws"—he read, seeing exactly what Mary Alcestis had thought and what she had begun to do. Oh, miserable Mary Alcestis!

His coat had capacious pockets. These he filled and went to his study. He emptied the contents into the drawer which contained his own meager original work. Then he went back to the third story, fastened the window and the drawer, and, locking the door, carried the key and the remaining manuscripts away with him. [Pg 246]

At nine o'clock that evening he stepped quietly from the side door of his study across to Dr. Scott's room in Recitation Hall where he saw a light. Mrs. Lister had wakened, had taken more broth, and again slept peacefully. Her intention to destroy Basil's manuscript brought peace to her mind. She would have lost that peace suddenly and completely could she have seen her husband as he appeared before Dr. Scott, his spectacles awry, his face flushed, his eyes burning.

Dr. Lister had complete confidence in Dr. Scott's judgment and in his sense of honor. It was necessary to lay a certain matter before one whose judgment was sound and who could be entirely trusted, and he was grateful because he had such a friend.

"Will you come to my study for a few minutes?" he asked.

Dr. Scott rose at once. There was a stealthy appearance in their advance. Dr. Scott looked back over his shoulder toward his house. If his wife saw him from the porch she would be just as likely as not to call to him; not because she wanted him or needed him, but because she was curious. When they reached the Lister house safely, Dr. Lister explained in a low tone that Mrs. Lister was not well and was asleep. He opened the door quietly and tiptoed into his study and then closed the door into the hall.

"Scott—" he began and paused. Now that he was about to impart his discovery, it seemed melodramatic, impossible. [Pg 247]

"Yes?" said Dr. Scott. He had sat down on the side of the desk opposite Dr. Lister's chair. His eye fell upon the old books with their close writing and he wondered whether Lister had called him to consult him about compositions of his own. He had hoped for something more interesting, but after all, what could excite a man more than conviction of his own powers? Dr. Scott wondered how he would get out of an uncomfortable situation. Then, at Dr. Lister's words, he felt the blood beating through his wrists and in the vein in his neck.

"I have found a quantity of manuscript belonging to Basil Everman. I did not know until this afternoon that it existed. It has been stored away for many years as having no value beyond that of a souvenir of Basil for whom Mrs. Lister—" his voice changed a little. He had not quite forgiven Mary Alcestis—"for whom Mrs. Lister had a very deep affection. I wish to have your opinion of them before I speak to her about their value, of which she has, I am sure, no conception."

Dr. Scott reached across the table. His motion was swift, eager, unlike him. He might have been said to pounce, hawk-like, upon the old books and papers and his hand shook as he touched first of all one of the unbound sheaves. He shielded his eyes from the glare of the lamp, his figure relaxed, became motionless, except for the turning of pages.

Dr. Lister sat at first quietly, one knee thrown over the other, his foot swinging. After a while his guest looked up at him, in his face intense annoyance amounting almost to disgust. He tried to cover this revelation of his inner feeling, but was too late. [Pg 248]

"Don't mind saying just what you think," said Dr. Lister. "Nothing in the world would be so unfortunate as for us to set too high a value upon Basil's writings."

But it was not Basil's writings which annoyed.

"I wish you would stop swinging your foot!"

Dr. Lister looked astonished, then he laughed. He went upstairs to glance in upon a sleeping Mary Alcestis. All compunctions had now departed from his breast. When he came back to the study, Dr. Scott asked a question.

"How old was he?"

"About twenty-five."

"Incredible!"

He bent again over Basil Everman's writing. Dr. Lister opened a notebook and read for a few minutes and laid it down, surfeited with Basil Everman. He crossed the hall and walked up and down the long parlor. When he went back within reach of Dr. Scott's whisper, he heard, "It seems to me you've come perilously near committing a sort of murder. What was his family about?"

"They thought him a little wild. That is between you and me, Scott."

"Wild!" repeated Dr. Scott, and still again, "Wild!"

Again Dr. Lister started upon a promenade through the parlor where Basil had walked, past the old piano, under the old portraits. [Pg 249]

When he came back to the study, Dr. Scott had ceased reading.

"I forgot my glasses," said he. "I've read myself almost blind. And anyway, I can't read any more. Two hours of this is like two hours of Euripides; it takes life out of you. Was he really here, in this house, in Waltonville?" Dr. Scott drew the word out to a dreary length.

"Do you think anything can be made of them?"

"My dear Lister! You know and I know that they can be published as they stand. There are lines which might be annotated, but that is all. They are unique, priceless. They help to redeem the nation from charges such as Utterly's. He was right about them in the wildest of his extravagance."

Dr. Lister thrust his hands into his pockets.

"It would help Mrs. Lister to see that they should be published if—"

"She will surely publish them with pride and joy!"

"I didn't mean that exactly as it sounded. I mean, she would, I am sure, be glad if you would arrange to select, to edit—that is if—when they are published."

Dr. Scott put his hand again between his eyes and the light. If he could have chosen a task from all the tasks in the world, barring the greater work of the creative writer, it would have been such a task as this. He rose and slipped his hand into the front of his coat. In this position he had received Mrs. Scott's "Yes." This moment was to be classed with that; it was later to be placed above it in quality and in importance. [Pg 250]

"I should count myself the most fortunate of men," said he. "I envy Mrs. Lister her relationship to Basil Everman. I wish—" The hall clock had begun to strike and he paused to count the strokes. "It is time for me to go. When can this work begin? There are only six more weeks of vacation."

His eagerness made Dr. Lister uneasy.

"When I have talked it over with Mrs. Lister I will let you know at once," said he.

Then, having closed the door behind his friend, he stood thinking deeply.

CHAPTER XXI

A QUESTION PUT TO RICHARD

[Pg 251]

Mary Alcestis did not dream, as she lay comfortably in her bed the next morning breathing the cooler air and watching the shadows on the wall, that there moved about her house a plotter against her peace far more dangerous than an enemy from without. She thought that her husband looked at her with unusual gravity and she was touched by his solicitude, not suspecting that he searched her face for signs of recovery in order that he might deal her a cruel blow.

At the end of the second day she rose and sat by her window looking out over the pleasant greensward and recalling the hours when she had sat there with tiny Richard beside her. She felt happier; it did not seem rational that Mrs. Bent would speak now after having been silent for so many years, especially if poor Basil were allowed to sink once more into oblivion. When his manuscripts were really destroyed, she believed that the course of life would be again smooth.

Dr. Lister, coming in, took her hand and found it cool; he looked into her eyes and saw that they were bright and clear, and thereupon began what he had to say.

"My dear, there is a matter which we shall have to discuss." He spoke cheerfully, having decided that a cheerful air would help Mary Alcestis.

"Yes," said she, thinking of Richard's music. She was prepared to grant Richard anything.

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"It concerns Basil."

She gave a little cry.

"Oh, papa, can you not let Basil rest! If any one should pursue and hound me after I was dead as people pursue and hound Basil, I should not rest in my grave! Let us not talk about him! I was just thinking how Richard used to lie there in his crib and how sweet he was. He was always a lovely boy. I am sorry that I opposed him and I am willing to give up entirely. I told you that!"

"We cannot put Basil aside," said Dr. Lister.

"I suppose that something dreadful happened while I was sick. I ought not to have gone to bed. Perhaps she has been here or that young girl. Perhaps that young girl has known all along. Oh, I hope Richard has made her no promises. I hope—"

"You are working yourself into a dangerous condition of excitement. Will you hear what I have to say quietly, or shall I go away and finish another time?"

"You had better say it now."

"This has to do with Basil alone. When you lay on the bed in his room, I saw your eyes turn toward the bureau. I connected your uneasiness with something in the open drawer. When I came back from the kitchen with your broth, the drawer was closed, the key gone; then I was sure. I do not like mysteries, so I went upstairs and looked again."

"The drawer was locked!"

"Yes, my dear, but I found the key."

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Mrs. Lister's cheeks paled, then crimsoned. She looked now at her husband, now out the window, saying nothing. She expected to feel a terrible indignation, but she waited in vain. Instead she felt a deep relief. If she had only obeyed her husband long ago and had destroyed all Basil's possessions, she would have been far happier. Now Dr. Lister might destroy them, all his clothes, his childish toys, his youthful writings, and she need think of them no more. At last her grief was stale, she wished to think no more of Basil.

"I found in the bureau a great many manuscripts of Basil's."

"Tear them up," said Mary Alcestis. "You know you advised me long ago to destroy everything. I had just begun when I fainted."

"I never advised you to tear up any writings."

"You said Basil's 'things.'"

"I meant Basil's clothing, you know that. Did you not suspect, after Mr. Utterly was here, that these papers might be valuable?"

Mary Alcestis made no answer.

"These writings of Basil's can never be destroyed. It would be like murder."

"But who will ever read them?" she wailed. "I cannot bear to. Basil had such strange ideas. And Richard will not care for them, poor Richard. He thinks Basil ruined his life. It is dreadful how things can go on and on!"

"Other persons will care for them."

"Other persons! What other persons?"

"All persons who care for good literature," answered Dr. Lister steadily.

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Mrs. Lister turned head and shoulder so that she could look into his eyes.

"You would not think of having them *published!*"

"Without any question I should have them published!"

"He was only a boy." She began in a trembling voice her first skirmish. "They are surely not worth publication. We might prize them, but others wouldn't. Do you not see that, papa?"

"He was more than a boy and he was an extraordinarily fine writer of English. Why, mother, his very ghost would cry out upon us! Do you suppose he spent his days and nights, writing and polishing in order that his compositions might lie in an old bureau in an attic? We should be traitors to him!"

"I would rather be a traitor to him in that way than be responsible for publishing his—his sins!" cried Mrs. Lister wildly. "If his writings are really good, people would come flocking about us like wolves. That Mr. Utterly reminded me of a wolf. They would ferret things out, they would—"

"From whom would they ferret anything out?"

"They might make her believe it was her duty to tell. If Mr. Utterly talked to her he might persuade her. He would tell her it was an honor. Oh, I could not endure it!"

"Mother, that is sheer nonsense!"

Mrs. Lister turned a still more direct gaze into her husband's eyes.

"It is not your affair. You have nothing to do with it. You had no right to unlock Basil's bureau. You—" she bowed her head on the arm of her chair. "Oh, Thomas, forgive me! I don't know what I'm saying. I think of Richard. I don't care about Basil. I have cherished his memory and I have had only misery and shame. I think about Richard and his children and the good name of my dear father. Don't let us bring this matter to light! I beseech of you, dear Thomas!" [Pg 255]

Dr. Lister took the hand which sought his. He almost yielded to this desperate pleading. Did anything in the world really matter as much as this? Would Basil's fame survive more than a few generations? Would a publisher even consider the bringing out of the work of a man so long gone? Was it not better that he should remain dead than that his sister's heart should ache?

Then Dr. Lister saw in Basil's handwriting certain clear sentences, certain lines of verse. His face crimsoned.

"I have shown Basil's compositions in confidence to Scott," said he, firmly.

Mary Alcestis began to cry.

"He thinks they are admirable, mother." Dr. Lister drew an unwilling head to his shoulder. "My dear, let me take this burden from you. I have taken other burdens, and I should have borne this long ago."

"He could see nothing derogatory to Basil in them?" sobbed Mary Alcestis.

"Nothing. He would be outraged by such a suggestion. He would arrange them, edit them, and write a life of Basil from the information you gave him and in a certain sense under your direction." [Pg 256]

"In a certain sense?" repeated Mary Alcestis, warily.

"He would do no prying. He would use the material you gave him and ask no questions. He would consult no one but you and perhaps Thomasina whose recollection of Basil should have value."

"I told her," sobbed Mrs. Lister. "I think I had a sort of hysteria. I didn't know what I was saying."

"What did she say?"

"She said I was a fool."

Dr. Lister could not restrain a smile.

"That was a hard word from Thomasina. I should think it would have done you good."

"It didn't," said Mrs. Lister.

"If Scott could do this work, he would do it admirably and I believe it would be the greatest satisfaction of his life. I think he might even forget Mrs. Scott for a while."

"It has come upon me too suddenly. Richard should be consulted. It is Richard whom it most concerns."

"I shall write to Richard."

"I must see what you write!"

"Surely."

Dr. Lister helped Mary Alcestis to bed, then he stated his views to Richard and also her views and Dr. Scott's views. In the morning he read her the letter.

"I think you are a little hard on Basil," said she and wept.

In four days Dr. Lister had an answer. The envelope contained two sheets. [Pg 257]

"Dear Mother," read one, "I am willing for you and father to do as you think best about Basil Everman's writings." On the other sheet Richard had written, "Dear Father, I do not give a hang for Basil Everman. Do as you please."

Dr. Lister jumped. Richard! Smiling broadly, he started upstairs to show both letters; then he returned from the hall and dropped Richard's note to him in fine pieces into the waste-paper basket.

"I must be losing my mind!" said he.

CHAPTER XXII

A CONFIDENCE BETRAYED

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When she returned from Mrs. Lister's bedside, Thomasina sat for a long time looking into her

garden. The light shimmered above the flower-beds, the plants were drooping. The air even in her cool room was heavy and hard to breathe.

Summoned to lunch, she ate only enough to prevent alarmed inquiries from 'Melia, then she went upstairs. She took off her dress and put on a cool and flowing gown and lay down upon her couch and closed her eyes. After a while she rose and opened a drawer in her bureau and took out a little inlaid box, and from it lifted a package of letters. She did not read them or even open the package, but looked at them and laid them back. Once more she lay down upon her couch and hot tears rolled from under her eyelids and out upon her cheeks. After a long time she fell asleep.

In the morning she went again to Dr. Green's office. She rang the bell and entered and sat down to wait Virginia's pleasure, almost certain that Dr. Green had not come back. When Virginia appeared, lithe and shapely and deliberate of motion, Thomasina had reached a point which she seldom allowed herself even to approach. Virginia looked in consternation at her flushed face.

"You sure you not sick, Miss Thomas'?"

"No, Virginia. Has the doctor come?"

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"No, Miss Thomas'."

"Virginia"—Thomasina could be no longer restrained—"why don't you keep the doctor's office in better order? Look at that corner. And at that!"

Virginia leaned against the door.

"Don't believe doctor he could find things if it was too clean, Miss Thomas'. Could I get you something—glass of water or something? You look all wore out."

Thomasina smiled faintly. The race disarmed anger.

"No, I thank you."

She started to Dr. Green's office on a third morning. As she was about to leave her door she saw the doctor entering the gate.

"I got back on the nine o'clock train," he explained. "This morning Virginia came early—early, if you please—to tell me that you have been twice to my office. She suspects all sorts of afflictions. Surely you are not ill!"

Thomasina led the way into her parlor and sat down upon her throne-like chair. Her pale face wore both a judicial and an embarrassed air.

"You should have a wife, Dr. Green. Virginia should be taken in hand, dealt with, commanded, bullied."

"I agree with you. You are thinking of my office. I suppose when I'm away, Virginia's 'on the town' as she says."

"But a wife could make a fine girl of Virginia."

Dr. Green looked at Thomasina with faint astonishment. It was not like her to assume so intimate and bantering an air.

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"I hope there is nothing serious the matter. What are your symptoms? Do you not think it is the intense heat that has affected you?"

"The heat never troubles me. It is a patient of yours who worries me. I mean Mrs. Lister."

"Mrs. Lister! there's no reason to worry about her. There was nothing seriously wrong with her when I went away and I found no message when I got back."

"They wouldn't send a message about this. Her trouble is not to be cured by medicine, it is of the mind."

Dr. Green pursed his lips and frowned. He was surprised at Thomasina and was prepared to give her his most earnest attention. She would not speak to him in this fashion without good reason. He rested his arms on the arms of his chair and leaned forward, his hands clasped lightly. Whatever his origin, he was a person of distinguished presence, and, except in the matter of order in his office, of fastidious taste.

"Well, Miss Thomasina," said he in his clear, deliberate, well-modulated voice.

When Thomasina began to speak in a high tone, as though she were forcing herself a little, he frowned again; as she went on a dull color stole into his cheek and his motionless figure seemed to stiffen. He might well blush to hear so extraordinary a betrayal of confidence.

"Dr. Green, Basil Everman, Mrs. Lister's brother, about whom we have recently heard so much and of whom you and I spoke upon one occasion, was a good man, but he was a genius, and it is the common fate of geniuses to be misunderstood. They are often denied by their friends the possession of common and sometimes of moral sense. Basil wore flowing neckties at a period when neckties were small; he used well-selected words when the rest of mankind were indifferent to their speech; he drew sometimes a parallel from the classics—consequently Waltonville thought him queer. You know Waltonville's attitude of mind?"

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"Perfectly."

"But he did worse, he did not always come to meals on time, or go, candle in hand, in solemn procession to bed when the rest of the family went, old Dr. Everman in his white stock, Mary Alcestis looking tearfully back over her shoulder, hoping in terror that Basil might at that moment be heard on the porch. They attributed to him strange motives and stranger acts. They watched him, were embarrassed for him, apologized for him. They thought of him, in moments of unusual charity, as not quite sound. They thought in other moments a good deal worse of him. Basing their opinion on stupid coincidences, they blamed upon him actual crimes. They did not wish to believe these things of Basil. Over what she really believes is true, Mrs. Lister has been for many years breaking her heart. It is that which ails her, and not the heat."

"How foolish!" said Dr. Green, leaning back in his chair. "Let the past bury its dead. Middle life, you see, with no mental exercise. How very foolish!" [Pg 262]

"But the dead aren't buried, they are in our midst, and as long as Eleanor Bent is in sight, Mrs. Lister must worry her heart out."

"Eleanor Bent!" repeated Dr. Green, bending forward once more. "What has she to do with it?"

Thomasina looked down at the floor. She hesitated; perhaps remembering at this moment that she had never before betrayed the confidence of a friend. Perhaps it was because she had a sickening conviction that her whole course in this matter was that of a fool.

"The Listers have imagined—at least Mrs. Lister has from these stupid coincidences—has imagined it for years, weeping over it in secret—that Eleanor Bent is her brother Basil's daughter."

"Extraordinary!" said Dr. Green slowly. "Does any one else have this notion?"

"I think not. Basil was as much forgotten as though he had never been born."

"What are these coincidences?"

"Mrs. Lister saw the two together, followed them, indeed, and says that Margie Ginter was clinging to Basil's arm and pleading with him and crying. In the second place, he went away from Waltonville about the time that the Ginters went. In the third, Eleanor has in Mrs. Lister's eyes a strong resemblance to him. Then there is this writing."

"Writing?" queried Dr. Green.

"Yes, Eleanor's writing. What is more likely than that she should have inherited talent from Basil Everman?" [Pg 263]

"The fact that her work bears not the remotest resemblance to his has nothing to do with the question, I presume?"

"Writing is writing," answered Thomasina in her lightest tone. She waited for a word from Dr. Green, but none came. "Margie Ginter was a good girl, I have always believed," she went on. "She was in a dreadful position here. If Basil had anything to do with her, it was to help her in some fashion. He was—" Thomasina did not go on with her sentence; it seemed difficult for her to say what he was. "As for the resemblance, Eleanor has gray eyes and so had he, and a light step and so had he, but others have bright eyes and a light step."

Dr. Green still said nothing. He seemed to give each sentence of Thomasina's careful consideration.

"It is a pity for Mary Alcestis to have worried for so many years." Her voice seemed to lose its strength.

"One can't do much for a woman as foolish as that," said Dr. Green. "I should say she deserves to have the punishment exactly suited to her case."

"It is a pity, too, for little Mrs. Bent," went on Thomasina.

"What no one knows will not hurt Mrs. Bent."

"No one knows now," answered Thomasina. "But Mary Alcestis told me. She is in a hysterical condition and there is no telling to whom she may break out. It would be most unfortunate to have this pried out of her by—well, say by Mrs. Scott."

Again Dr. Green was silent.

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"It's a pity, too, for Eleanor," said Thomasina.

"I think it very unlikely that Mrs. Lister will let such a mad tale become public—you say it is a mad tale."

"It is a pity for Richard, too."

"Richard least of all," answered Dr. Green. "I can't see how he would be affected."

"Then you have not been watching the young people."

"I don't understand you."

"I mean that Richard is evidently in love with Eleanor and that his mother has found it out—therefore his absence and her tears."

"Is Eleanor in tears?" Dr. Green's tone sharpened.

"Yes, a part of the time Eleanor is in tears."

"She had better cry than think of marrying," declared Dr. Green. "Such a match would be the end of her work. It would be the greatest mistake, it would be a calamity. She has every prospect of success. I do not believe that she can be seriously impressed with that silky mother's boy. If she is, let her get over it!"

"You have always taken a great interest in her."

"Yes," answered Dr. Green. "I have. She has possibilities."

"I saw by accident your check for her piano," said Thomasina. "It lay on the desk in the company's office."

"Did you?" asked Dr. Green coolly. His tone could have been no more severe if Thomasina had opened and read one of his letters. "What did you conclude from that?" [Pg 265]

Thomasina did not answer his question.

"It is worst of all for Basil Everman," said she. "When one thinks of him, it becomes monstrous. Doesn't it seem so to you, Dr. Green?"

Green rose to his feet. He met Thomasina's eyes coolly.

"Miss Thomasina—"

Thomasina lifted her hand.

"What I concluded was simply that you knew more about Mrs. Bent and her daughter than the rest of us," said she. "I am sure that Eleanor has an honorable paternity and Mrs. Bent a history that could be safely revealed. But one could not go to her and ask her!"

"From your own account the danger of this myth becoming public is so small as to be almost negligible. Since Mrs. Bent and her daughter are not likely to stay in Waltonville, it is wholly negligible. As for my connection with the Bents—it is this—I believe that Eleanor has a mind of great promise. I have tried to influence her and I shall continue to try."

"I am sorry that I told you," said Thomasina faintly.

"There is no reason that you should be," said Dr. Green. "If Mrs. Lister needs any further attention I shall have her case already diagnosed."

When he had gone, Thomasina sat down in her high-backed chair. Her face was deathly pale, her hands lay limply in her lap, her eyes were closed. Suddenly she sat upright.

"I believe he has lied to me," said she. Her hands gripped the arms of her chair, her eyes seemed to be fixed intently upon objects outside her parlor. She saw Dr. Green and heard him speak; she saw also another figure and heard also another voice. [Pg 266]

"I would like for you to choose a pie-anna"—why was it that the one suggested the other? Thomasina remembered Dr. Green distinctly in his queer, opinionated, misogynistic youth. Had he ever even spoken to Margie Ginter before she had returned to Waltonville? She thought of Eleanor, followed the lines of her body, the contour of her face. There was a line from brow to chin, there was a shapely nose, there was—but she could think no more.

She rose and walked up and down the room, her brain weary with speculation. After a long time she said aloud, "Oh, *Basil!*"

CHAPTER XXIII

A WALTONVILLE DELILAH

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Pacing his quiet study, sitting before his desk, eating his absent-minded meals, lying sleepless in his bed, Dr. Scott waited impatiently. In another month school would begin, but school work had become routine which would take only his time and would not interrupt his mental processes. He had read the last of Basil Everman's compositions and had made complete and elaborate plans for their presentation to the world, even though Dr. Lister had warned him that Mrs. Lister's consent must first be gained. Dr. Scott did not believe for an instant that she would refuse. She would rejoice as any sensible person would in this late fame for her brother.

Already he saw before him "Miscellaneous Studies, Basil Everman," "The Poems of Basil Everman," "Bitter Bread and other Stories, Basil Everman," "Translations from the Greek, Basil Everman." The books would need no wide advertising to float them; they would come gradually and certainly into favor. They should be smoothly bound in dark blue, excellently printed on

thick, light, creamy paper in large type, and on the title-page of each should stand "The Works of Basil Everman, vol.—, Henry Harrington Scott, Editor." He gave a half-day to deciding whether "Professor of English Literature in Walton College" should be added.

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He saw before him his own sentences, few in number, rich in meaning. He wrote them down, some on slips of paper which he carried with him on long walks into the country or held in his hand in the twilight as he sat in his study. "Everman's style," he wrote, "combines the freshness and lightness of youth with the more solid qualities which belong to maturity. He ornamented dexterously the subjects whose impressiveness was enhanced by an embroidery of words and with equal taste pruned rigorously those passages whose truth was best set forth undecked." Here and there he underlined a word as an indication that it was to be further considered and its suitability scrutinized.

He placed Basil in the Everman house, saw him walking the streets and wrote a sentence which pleased him mightily. The sentence was to please poor Mary Alcestis: "The history of Basil Everman offers a positive answer to that problem about which there is and will always be frequent contention—whether the human soul finds within itself the material for such presentations." Basil Everman had found tragedy, gloom, passion in his own heart and in the literature which he read and not in his own experience.

He determined to quote passages which he had loved and cherished—cherished, it might well seem for this end: Basil Everman "sensed that old Greek question, yet unanswered. The unconquerable specter still flitting among the forest trees at twilight; rising ribbed out of the sea sand; white, a strange Aphrodite—out of the sea foam; stretching its gray, cloven wings among the clouds; turning the light of their sunsets into blood."

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Another sentence he meant to use which was still new and whose applicability he saw as yet vaguely:

"She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants; and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands."

He considered the sources for the brief biography. There was Mary Alcestis, first and most important. There were, he hoped, letters. And there was Thomasina.

His delight in his work set the machinery of his mind into swift revolution. He recalled with satisfaction his short contributions to contemporary literature and got down the scrapbooks in which he had preserved them. Here was an admirable paragraph—there was one which should be recast. He read again the carefully preserved letters which he had received in agreement and commendation. When the works of Basil Everman appeared, Vreeland and Lewis and Wilson would in all probability write to him again. He was still not middle-aged; there might be before him deeper literary satisfactions than the editing of another man's work, extraordinary as that work was. He might see some happy day his own productions beautifully printed, beautifully bound, his own name in gold on dark-blue cloth—Henry Harrington Scott.

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In the glow which pervaded his spirit, old feelings revived, feelings which had no connection with literary matters. He began to remember once more not only why he had married, but why he had married Mrs. Scott. He saw her blue eyes, unsharpened and unfaded; he saw her eager face; he heard—alas for him!—her siren tones of appreciation and admiration. He had not, he knew, justified himself in her eyes, but that should all be changed; he promised himself that she should think well of him, that he would still achieve that success which every woman has a right to expect in the man whom she marries. Even Walter—supercilious, prosperous Walter, jingling coin in his pocket—should think well of him. To Cora's opinion he attributed no value. But he anticipated more and more pleasantly the moment when he should tell Mrs. Scott his happy secret.

That his condition might become apparent to the sharp eyes which daily reviewed him, that it might require some cunning to conceal from his wife the aura of renewed hopes in which he walked, did not occur to him. If the evidences of excitement had been hers, if she had shown signs of interest in affairs unknown to him, he would have let her proceed, unquestioned and unmolested, glad in his secret soul that he did not have to know. But Mrs. Scott's position was different. She planned a gayer August than ever before, and such an expression of countenance as that brought by Dr. Scott to breakfast could have been inspired only by some small literary success.

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Had the work which he had done been paid for? Mrs. Scott had long since lost interest in successes which were not accompanied by money, and since she had heard from Mr. Utterly of the prices paid for promising stories, she had despised in secret her husband's receipts. It seemed to her that now he must have achieved something worth while.

In his absence on one of his long walks, she visited his study and turned over his papers. But he had left accessible no written word of his own, and Basil Everman's manuscript lay safely in Dr. Lister's desk drawer, awaiting Mrs. Lister's decision. She slipped out of their envelopes several letters, but found only a few small bills for books. Neither an invitation to write an article in exchange for a hundred dollars nor an actual check for ten dollars appeared. She frowned and for

several days said less than usual. Then, Dr. Scott's preoccupation increasing, she pleaded general weariness and a severe headache and stayed in bed.

In the evening Dr. Scott went to sit for an hour in her room. She lay high on her pillows with a flutter of lace and ribbons about her, and he sat by the window, a pleasant breeze fanning him, a young moon smiling at him over the shoulder of the Lister house. The Lister house was dark and somber in the deep shadow and its almost sinister appearance might have warned him to keep its secrets. But he was not warned.

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Mrs. Scott talked about his work, about the drudgery of the classroom, about the dull boys and girls upon whom he wasted so many weary hours, about the pittance he received. She wished for him leisure, larger pay, opportunities such as he deserved.

"It is all you need to bring you out. I get angry at the conditions under which you slave in this dull town when you might take a high place elsewhere and become famous."

"You rate me highly, my dear," said Dr. Scott. Nevertheless he smiled.

"No, I don't," contradicted Mrs. Scott. "Here is Mrs. Lister's brother writing a few things and dull things at that, and having his name heralded through the whole world; and here is Eleanor Bent, a nobody, with her name in every one's mouth."

Dr. Scott looked out of the window. He had suffered—and blushed with shame for it—acute envy of Eleanor and her youth.

"You could do so much better! You are older and more learned and you have had more experience and more outlook on the world."

Dr. Scott glanced back into the room. His eyes settled themselves on the figure on the bed. If he could have seen Mrs. Scott clearly, he would have recalled the disillusioning years between his wedding day and this moment. But he saw in the dusk only the motion of a hand which seemed to brush away a tear. This was the wife of his bosom, a part of himself!

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"I am to have an enviable opportunity," said he slowly. "The Listers have asked me—that is, Dr. Lister has asked me—to edit and prepare for publication the works of Mrs. Lister's brother, Basil Everman."

"You mean that story and those other things!" Mrs. Scott's voice was flat, disappointed, angry.

"Those and many equally valuable compositions which have accidentally come to light after many years."

"'Accidentally come to light!'" repeated Mrs. Scott, with fine scorn. "Didn't I tell you they would ransack every chest in the attic after what Utterly said? Are they really worth anything?"

"They are magnificent," said Dr. Scott, trying to keep his voice steady. "They will form a notable addition to the literature of America, to the literature indeed of the world."

"Of all things!" With a vigor which escaped the notice of her husband Mrs. Scott sat suddenly upright. "Won't this town be surprised!"

"Oh, my dear!" protested Dr. Scott. "Nothing is to be said, nothing! It is all in the air as yet. Nothing is decided definitely. Oh, my dear, not a word to any one!"

"I am glad to hear that nothing has been decided definitely," said Mrs. Scott. "Glad, indeed! What have they offered you to do this work, Henry?"

Dr. Scott's whole body quivered.

"Offered me?"

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"Yes; what have they offered to pay you?"

"We haven't said anything about pay."

"Were you going to do it for nothing?" Mrs. Scott's tone implied that exactly this particular lunacy was to have been expected.

"It is a very great honor to be asked," answered Dr. Scott nervously. "It will, I am convinced, be an opportunity, leading probably to other things."

"To other things!" repeated Mrs. Scott. "I want something more substantial than opportunities leading to other things. I am sick of honors without pay. Why, Utterly said he would give a thousand dollars for another story! A thousand dollars is almost as much as you earn in an entire year. They'll make a fortune, and they are well off already! I shouldn't be surprised if they could live without Dr. Lister's salary. And he gets five hundred dollars more a year than you do. If you charge them well, they'll think better of you. I'll warrant they're trying to get it done here because they think you'll do it for nothing and for no other reason whatever. I am pretty sick of the Listers anyhow. Here is poor Cora in love with Richard and encouraged by all of them since she was a baby and he running round now with that miserable Bent girl. I would make them pay well for every hour I spent on their work! They will make enough out of it, I'll warrant! Why, it is like finding money for them! I—"

Dr. Scott lifted his hand with an uncertain motion to his head. Thus might Samson have felt of his shorn pate when he lifted it from the lap of Delilah. [Pg 275]

"Oh, my dear!" said he. "Oh, my dear!"

"I mean it all," insisted Mrs. Scott. "Every last word."

Then, to his unspeakable discomfort, she stepped from bed and came across the room and kissed him.

"I'd charge either by the hour for my work, or else I'd ask a high percentage on the sale of the books and have an iron-bound agreement to see the publisher's accounts. You cannot be too careful. This is the time for you to take council with Walter, papa. You have no idea how keen he is; you have never had patience with him or done him justice. I think you should send word to him to come here. He would be glad to make the trip for such a reason. You could go to see him, but if he came here he could talk to the Listers himself. He is certainly the one to make the contract. I do not see why you should trouble yourself with the matter at all."

Mrs. Scott took silence for consent, or at least for respectful consideration of her suggestions.

"You think it over," said she, as she returned to bed. "You will see that I am right."

Dr. Scott slept uneasily. He dreamed of impending avalanches and of being compelled to enter, not entirely clothed, into the presence of some august tribunal.

When he woke early on a cloudy morning, he lay for a while very still with his eyes turned away from the sleeping figure at his side. After a long time he rose quickly and, taking his clothing, stole into the spare room to dress. Something had happened to him overnight. A situation long suspended had crystallized, long dully seen, had become plain. Betrayed and cajoled, he had revealed a secret entrusted to him. He laid no blame upon his wife. He said, without bitterness, that he should have known, did know Mrs. Scott. It seemed to him—and herein lay the source of his misery—that his own moral fiber must have been gradually weakening or he could not have so failed himself. [Pg 276]

When he heard Mrs. Scott stirring, he came into the room.

"I hope you feel quite well."

"Oh, yes!" She did not regret yesterday's strategy, but she was thinking that now yesterday's tasks were still to be done. "I think you ought to write to Walter right after breakfast, Henry."

Dr. Scott straightened his tall figure. His declaration of independence had been formulated.

"It is none of Walter's business. He is perfectly incapable of managing this affair. His instincts are those of the counting-house. He is to know nothing about it. If you speak of it to any one, I shall give the whole thing up, both the work and the money—if there is any money involved. My sense of honor will not allow me to proceed with it for a day."

Brush in hand, Mrs. Scott looked at him with amazement. Unfortunately she had never been spoken to in this fashion in all her married life.

"Do you think you've succeeded so well, Henry, that you can't take any advice?" [Pg 277]

"I know better than you do whether I've succeeded or failed. I'm speaking of this particular instance, and what I say is this, if you breathe a word of what I have told you to Walter, or to any one, I give the whole thing up! Work like this is generally paid for, but I do not care whether it is paid or not. I should be glad to do it for nothing. Since you do care for money, you had better see that you don't lose whatever there is in it by talking about it."

He went downstairs, his knees shaking under him, but a heavenly sense of freedom in his heart. In the dining-room he found Cora standing by the window waiting for the advent of her elders. He had meant to talk to her, but this was not the time. He felt a sudden, keen pity for her white face and her drooping shoulders. She was so steady, so occupied with her own small concerns, so—if the truth must be told—dull; he did not think her capable of any grand passion or deep sorrow. It was not easy, he was certain, for her to bear her trouble under her mother's eye. But she would get over it, she was young. It might make it harder for her if he talked to her about it.

All day he hung about the house. Mrs. Scott was packing her trunks, but he was afraid that some one might come in. He was not yet quite as free as he thought. To-morrow she would be gone and he could breathe for a little while in peace. Then his sensitive soul reproached him. When at dark, Dr. Lister came to tell him that Mrs. Lister had consented to the publication of Basil's work, and he went to tell Mrs. Scott, she smiled from one corner of her mouth. [Pg 278]

"Did you suppose she wouldn't consent?" said she.

CHAPTER XXIV A DEEPENING SHADOW

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As the days passed the friendly relations between Mrs. Bent and her daughter were not restored. Mrs. Bent looked at Eleanor furtively, cried when she was away from her, and redoubled all her self-sacrificing toil. The sound of a step on the porch made her shiver. She spoke to Eleanor and Eleanor spoke to her as though there were an ever-present danger of another breaking-through of the thin crust which masked a crater of seething emotion.

Mrs. Bent need not have feared that her daughter would open the subject which had led to so unpleasant a scene. No one who had the run of Dr. Green's library could fail to know that there were other forms of existence beside the conventional unions of Waltonville's married folk and Eleanor had, with youth's eagerness to learn the ways of a wider world, followed the lives of a few historical examples of other sorts of union. She had believed herself to be in this matter, as in others, broad-minded. But now her opinions had changed; a fearful possibility threatened her. She came to believe that her mother waited an opportunity to confide in her a secret no longer to be hidden and grown too heavy to bear alone. In her fright she avoided her mother, and when they were together interrupted with some foolishness each sentence which promised to be serious.

"I am sorry for her," cried Eleanor to herself. "I am sorry, but I cannot listen to her."

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In the middle of a hot August afternoon she determined to go for a walk. If she went a long distance and came home tired and drank no coffee for her supper, it might be that she could sleep through the night. She had no goal in view; she would simply go on until she was tired and then turn for the long walk home. As she dressed she reproached herself for her weakness. She would persuade her mother to go away from Waltonville; it was said that time and new scenes cured troubles of the mind. They would go to a larger place where no one would inquire into their business or even know them.

"But I don't want to know anything about it!" said Eleanor to herself. "I don't want her to tell me! If she tells me I shall die!"

Standing before her mirror she brushed her dark hair with long, sweeping motions of her arm. Her eyes met their reflection.

"I am beautiful," said Eleanor. "There is some satisfaction in that."

Then her cheeks crimsoned. Neither her eyes nor her dark hair nor her height had come from her mother—from whom had they come? She gave up her intention to walk and threw herself face downward upon her bed.

"I will not hear anything about it," said she. "I will think only of going away."

But her fears were stronger than her will. Her mind traveled again its old round. There was sodden, debauched Bates, with his rude and intimate salutation; there was the impertinent freedom of Mrs. Scott; there was the appraising stare of Walter Simpson Scott; there was her mother's embarrassed unwillingness to talk about Basil Everman; there was also that strange voice which she had heard long ago, that voice which seemed to reprove and to beseech her mother.

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"She is good!" cried Eleanor. "And I am wicked and hateful!"

Presently she was wakened by the opening of the door in the hall below, and she sprang up, deceived for an instant into thinking that Richard Lister had returned and was asking for her. Then she lay down, dizzily. The voice was not Richard's, but Dr. Green's older, deeper tones which asked, "Is Eleanor at home?"

When her mother answered that she had gone out, Eleanor closed her eyes. He had probably come to invite her to ride into the country with him. But she could not go; she could not bear the heat or the light or his bright eyes. Their expression disturbed her, had disturbed her subconsciously for weeks, the look of hunger which had brightened them when she had told him of her success with "Professor Ellenborough's Last Class" reminding her of the eyes of a caged animal, of strong feeling kept under, but there, waiting to blaze out. She had been repelled by it.

Dr. Green, told that she was out, did not go away. He said, instead, "It is you I wish to see, Margie."

Eleanor heard a step, the opening of a door into the dining-room, then its sharp closing.

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She sat up on the edge of her bed. Had her mother sent for Dr. Green? That was not possible, both from the nature of his greeting and because her mother had only her to send on errands. Could it be that she was ill, and that he had observed it and had come to remonstrate with her for not having medical advice? If there was anything the matter with her mother, she must know. She rose quickly and went on with her dressing.

Then her face grew white. Dr. Green had called her mother "Margie!" Moreover, he was now loudly and rudely remonstrating with her. He was, one might say, storming at Mrs. Bent. It was as though the caged animal in his breast had escaped.

Eleanor stood still, her figure straight, one hand pressing the thick coil of her dark hair close to her head, the other holding a long pin. Her hair was drawn back closely; the unsoftened line of her forehead and cheek changed her expression, gave her a different and austere cast of countenance. She stood motionless, regarding herself absently until her arms dropped. It was Dr.

Green, of course, who had long ago scolded her mother!

Downstairs Green's voice rose and fell, rose and fell. There was the heat of anger in it, there was a tone of command, there was no softer tone.

But Eleanor no longer heard. Again she gathered her hair back from her face and stood looking at herself. She saw the single line of austerity; she turned her head now this way, now that. Then she sat down once more on the edge of her bed. [Pg 283]

For more than an hour she watched the ticking clock. It was half-past two when Dr. Green's first angry sentence fell upon the quiet air; it was four when he closed the door behind him.

When at last she went downstairs, her mother had gone into the garden. Mrs. Bent came in and put the supper on the table slowly, and called Eleanor. When supper was eaten and the dishes put away, she joined her daughter on the porch.

"I have something I must tell you," said she. "I—"

Eleanor sprang up in panic.

"I can't stop now, mother. I must go for the mail. I have important mail coming. I must go."

Mrs. Bent looked at her, then down at the floor. She twisted her hands together.

"All right."

Eleanor walked swiftly through the dusk.

"I don't want to hear anything," said she. "I will not hear anything."

As she approached the college gate she halted for an instant, out of breath and panting. Two men were coming slowly toward her from the other side. She heard Dr. Lister's clear, high voice and Dr. Scott's answering laugh. Not only had Mrs. Lister given her consent to the publication of Basil's manuscript, but the publisher of "Willard's," who was also a publisher of books, had said in answer to Dr. Scott's inquiry that he would be deeply interested in any work of Basil Everman's. Last, but not least, Mrs. Scott had gone to Atlantic City. Her husband had many reasons for cheerfulness. [Pg 284]

"I wish that each day had forty-eight hours and that every one was a working hour," Eleanor heard him say gayly. Then, as Dr. Lister turned to go back to his own door, Dr. Scott called after him, "So Richard is back!"

"Yes," answered Dr. Lister. "He came the day before yesterday by way of Niagara. Mrs. Lister is getting him ready to go to New York."

"When does he go?"

"To-morrow. I'm going with him. His teacher doesn't usually begin so early, but he is making a special case of Richard."

"He's a lucky boy."

A meeting with Dr. Scott at the gate could not be avoided. He lifted his hat and came to Eleanor's side with courtly alacrity. He had no longer envy for any living soul. He told her as they walked along about Basil Everman, about his youth, about the extraordinary achievement which was to startle the reading world.

"We lack information about the two years of his absence from Waltonville. They were his richest years. But we must be grateful for what we have." He looked down kindly. The summer, he thought, had been hard on Eleanor as it had been hard on every one. "It makes one wish to be very diligent, doesn't it—such a record as this lad's?"

Tears came into Eleanor's eyes. She longed to say, "Yes, but what if no diligence avails?" But she could not trust herself to say anything.

At the door of the post-office Dr. Scott bowed himself away. So Richard was here, had been here since the day before yesterday and had not been to see her! [Pg 285]

Then Eleanor put a period upon the episode of Richard. As she stepped out the door, she encountered him coming in. Their eyes met and clung to one another, their cheeks crimsoned.

"Eleanor!" cried Richard.

"Well?" said Eleanor.

Richard seemed to be struggling to find words in which to answer. When he sought in vain, she looked at him, unsmilingly, from under level brows.

"I wish you would let me pass," said she.

She did not go in the direction of the little gray house, but out toward the far end of Waltonville. There was nothing to be afraid of even after dark in the quiet country roads, and at home there was a great deal to be afraid of.

CHAPTER XXV

DR. SCOTT PAYS A CALL

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Dr. Scott manufactured beautiful phrases as he walked to Thomasina's. He thought of his last visit to her house, when he had been accompanied, when his most polished sentences had hung, unfinished, on the air while Mrs. Scott spoke of matters totally unrelated to the subject in hand. This call would be very different. He hoped that Thomasina would let him sit in the semi-darkness of her parlor, and look out into her garden. He was punctilious about appearances; he had not the least instinct of a Don Juan, and he would have been horrified to have any one suppose that his affections wandered for an instant. But to-night he did not care for appearances. If a suspicious spouse had been upon his track, if the whole village had been at gaze, he would still have gone to call upon Thomasina. She was of Basil Everman's generation, she would be able to talk well about him. She was a keen observer who would have remembered and noted incidents and traits that even his sister might have forgotten. He had many questions to ask; he would be scholarly and elaborate and impressive—Dr. Scott at his best. It would disappoint him keenly to find that Thomasina was not at home, or that there were other callers to claim her attention.

But Thomasina was at home and she was alone. She was pale, but paleness was not unbecoming. He looked at her with admiration. She was distinguished, she was a personage, she was the most notable citizen of Waltonville, and he was proud of her friendship. [Pg 287]

She inquired for Mrs. Scott and for Cora. She was not unaware of Cora's trouble. She spoke of Richard and of the opportunities before him.

"He has talent and time and youth and ambition and ample means," said she.

"It sounds too promising."

"Oh, he'll be chastened, poor lad. We all are, sooner or later!"

"Miss Thomasina—" Dr. Scott paused; a sentence hovered upon the edge of recollection; he tried to identify and complete it. Was it something about "a girl to go gypsying with through all the world"? Such a girl he seemed to see before him.

"Yes?" said Thomasina encouragingly.

"I am to have an extraordinary opportunity thanks to Mrs. Lister."

"Yes?" said Thomasina with a little more curiosity. Her heart was still sore at thought of Mary Alcestis.

"I am to edit her brother's works!"

"What works?" asked Thomasina.

"Works which they have found; other stories, poems, translations, an incredibly rich and valuable collection."

Thomasina leaned forward, an intensely eager look in her brown eyes.

"Works they have found! Where?" [Pg 288]

"I think they were put away. I think from what Dr. Lister said her grief for her brother was so great that she could not bear to have them touched."

"And who has touched them now?" asked Thomasina in a hard voice.

"I think—it is my impression—that Dr. Lister found them and persuaded her."

Thomasina sank back in her chair.

"Did you know Basil Everman well?" asked Dr. Scott.

"Yes." Thomasina's voice was now a whisper.

"I wonder whether you would talk to me about him. I must prepare a biographical chapter and the material is so very scant."

Thomasina rose unsteadily, and asked to be excused for a moment. She went out into the hall and climbed the stairs slowly. When she came back she carried her little inlaid box as though it contained precious and fragile jewels. She stood before Dr. Scott and held it out.

"Here are Basil Everman's letters," said she. "They show all his plans and hopes. They were written to *me*." The first utterance of a bride could have been no more filled with sweet triumph. "I did not know that any of his plans had been carried out. I did not know anything survived. You may use the letters if you wish."

Dr. Scott felt like Richard that there were moments in life to which one could say, "Linger, thou art so fair!"

Thomasina still held out the little box.

"Do you wish me to look at them now?" [Pg 289]

"If you will."

He put out a shaking hand. He would have thought long before exchanging this experience for a year of the opportunities of a Boswell.

Thomasina took up a book; then she walked into her garden; then she crossed the hall, closing both doors behind her, and practiced finger exercises in her music room. The light, delicate arpeggios and runs and trills came faintly to Dr. Scott's enchanted ears. Thus had Thomasina quieted her soul a thousand times.

When she returned there remained but one letter in the little box. Dr. Scott was not reading; he sat staring at the floor. It seemed to him that he had helped to open the tomb of a Queen Ta, that he had touched the jewels with which the hands of love had decked her. Then he looked up. Thomasina regarded him; alive, breathing, lovely, she was not in the least like Queen Ta. He felt that he must speak, but his eloquence, slow, but equal to every occasion, failed him now.

"If you will tell me what passages you wish to use, I shall copy them for you."

"May I say that they were written to you?"

An inward light illumined Thomasina's face. It was not pride, it was an emotion more intense, more exalted.

"You have been honored above most women," said Dr. Scott.

Thomasina took one of the letters in her hand.

"Say they were written to a friend. His biography does not need me, and I had rather be invisible beside him." Thus Thomasina, who longed, in Mrs. Lister's opinion, for fame! "Now I must go over to the Listers to say good-bye to Richard." [Pg 290]

Together Dr. Scott and Thomasina crossed the campus and at the Listers' door Dr. Scott said good-night. He could scarcely wait to get back to his study and to his pen. He did not mean to stop at his house; indeed, he thought it unlikely that his house would see him until dawn, but remembering a need for matches, he ran up the steps. There sitting on the doorstep, a valise beside her, was a small figure.

"Cora!" said Dr. Scott. "What in the world are you doing here?"

Cora rose stiffly. It seemed that she had been waiting a long time.

"I came back on the nine o'clock train."

"Where is your mother?"

"She is at Atlantic City. I told her that I wouldn't stay."

The last sentence startled Dr. Scott even more than Cora's unexpected appearance. He unlocked the door and picked up the valise. There was a new tone in her sweet voice, a tone which disturbed him, but when he got the lamp lighted and had a good look at her round little face, it would doubtless seem imaginary. Surely it could not be that she had come home so as to be near Richard Lister!

When the lamp was lit, it seemed to reveal the same Cora, a little white and tired and travel-stained, but surely not wild or violent!

"Sit down, my dear!" [Pg 291]

Cora sat down heavily on a little gilt chair.

"Are you hungry?"

"No, I thank you," she answered, true to her polite type.

Dr. Scott sat himself down on the second step.

"What does this return mean, my dear? You went away to have a change."

Cora looked at him, looked long at him. In that look certain messages passed from her to her father. For a long time she did not answer, then she burst into tears.

"I am not crying because I want to cry," said she angrily. "Or because I feel like crying. I am tired, that is why I cry. I came home because I couldn't stand the dullness."

"The dullness!" Dr. Scott was bewildered. "Of Atlantic City!"

"I want something to do," demanded Cora, "something for my mind. You have always treated me like a baby. You've sent me to school and put me out of your thoughts. You don't even talk to me intelligently; I mean that you don't talk to me as if I were intelligent. You talk to Miss Thomasina and Dr. Lister in an entirely different way. I can study as well as Richard and—and as—" but the name of her rival Cora could not pronounce. "I have a better mind than Walter. Walter can't do anything but make money. You should hear him with his friends at Atlantic City, you should hear him only ten minutes! And he wants me to like those people!"

"My dear—"

But Cora had not said all she had to say.

"Mother thinks I have failed because I am not engaged to Richard. He never thought of me. I am convinced that he never thought of me. It has made me appear like a crazy person. I don't know what the Listers think of me."

Then Cora gave her father a shock of many volts. She had not read her padded poets or her Bible in vain. Nor was her paternity entirely without evidence.

"I don't wish to go in solemn procession all my days because of the bitterness of my soul."

For the first time in his life, Dr. Scott's reaction from a thrilling experience was expressed in terms of money. He determined at that instant that his work on Basil Everman's writings must be paid for; he determined, moreover, that henceforth the whole of his salary should not be handed over as heretofore. He put his arm round his weeping daughter.

"Don't cry, Cora! You will have plenty left in life. Sometime you will smile over this trouble. You and I will work together, and by and by we will go abroad."

CHAPTER XXVI

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"LET US BE ENTIRELY FRANK WITH ONE ANOTHER"

Eleanor walked far out on the country road. She met no one and felt no fear. There was in her heart, on the contrary, a bitter satisfaction in feeling that she was doing what Cora Scott would not dream of doing and what Mrs. Lister would heartily disapprove of. She felt a sullen indifference to Waltonville's rules of conduct.

As she went on she made plans. As soon as arrangements could be completed, they would go away to return no more. She would leave behind her all the gifts which Dr. Green had showered upon her since her childhood. She saw his strong-featured face, animated by intellect and will, and then Margie's frightened eyes and her trembling mouth. For herself she would not have anything to do with love in any of its manifestations.

But when she had turned back, she said under her breath, "Oh, Richard, Richard!"

As she passed Dr. Green's door, walking rapidly because she felt sudden compunction on her mother's account, he appeared on the step and spoke to her with astonishment.

"Where have you been at this hour, Eleanor?"

Eleanor looked up at him, hating his authoritative voice.

"I've been walking in the country."

"Come in. I wish to speak to you."

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"It's late; my mother does not know where I am."

"A few minutes won't make any difference. I'll walk home with you."

Against her will Eleanor went slowly up the steps and into the untidy rooms. She sat down upon the edge of a chair in the office and Dr. Green sat opposite her.

"I have persuaded your mother to go away from Waltonville."

"Have you?" said Eleanor.

"Aren't you interested?"

"Oh, yes." Eleanor's tone belied her words.

"It is time that you were getting away."

"Why?" asked Eleanor perversely.

"So that you may possess the world. You didn't expect to stay here forever, did you?"

Eleanor made no answer. There were certain conditions under which she would have been willing to stay here forever.

Dr. Green looked at her impatiently.

"You had plans for your future. Where is the young woman who was going to be George Eliot and Jane Austen in one, pray? You haven't forgotten her?"

"She has ceased to exist. I'm not interested in writing."

"Not interested in writing! Nonsense!" He began to argue for learning, for travel, for education. He reminded Eleanor of her achievements, of her fine mind; he told her that it was sinful to think of anything but her own mental progress in these formative years. She had no responsibilities, no cares, nothing to look after but herself. She should go to school, continuing her work at a

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university.

"But I am not interested in writing," repeated Eleanor.

"What are you interested in, then?" Dr. Green looked angrily at the pretty creature who listened unmoved to his harangue. "I spoke to you, Eleanor. I asked you what you are interested in?"

Eleanor rose, tall and slim, and looked at him across the untidy office. It seemed to her that he knew about Richard and that he was mocking her.

"That is my own affair."

Dr. Green rose also and for an instant the two faced one another, eye meeting eye.

"Eleanor," he announced distinctly, "if you ever speak to me like that again, I shall punish you."

Eleanor measured the distance to the door, her eye creeping along the floor. Then she looked back at Dr. Green. He had turned pale, the fine, severe line of his forehead and cheek were outlined plainly against the dark woodwork of the door behind him.

"I am going home," said Eleanor.

Dr. Green stepped between her and the door.

"You can't go like this!" said he earnestly.

"I can go any way I choose," said Eleanor. "You have no authority over me. I know perfectly well what is in your mind when you threaten me. It has been coming to me slowly for a long time, but I was too dull to understand until to-day."

Dr. Green still stood before the outer door. A deep red rose from neck to forehead.

"Your mother and I had very little in common," said he at last. Then, after a long pause, "She has had every comfort, she has not suffered, she has lived exactly the quiet, domestic, undisturbed life she wanted to live." [Pg 296]

Still Eleanor said nothing.

"And she has had you."

Eleanor made a tiny motion with her hand.

"All my boyhood I starved for learning. When I finished my college course and was about to enter the medical school, I found myself carried away. I had starved myself in other ways. I had known no women. Your mother was very pretty. I blame myself entirely. But she couldn't see any necessity for my going on. She was satisfied with things as they were. I had ambitions; she—" Dr. Green did not finish his sentence, but it was impossible not to know what was in his mind. "I gave her all I had to leave me free to go on, and that, with what she had from her father, was enough for her to live on. She went away. *But she didn't tell me about you!*" Dr. Green's hands clenched. "We had had hard times, but I didn't deserve that! I found her here by mere chance. She had even taken another name! But I don't wish to cast any blame on her."

"I don't want to hear anything said against her," said Eleanor bluntly.

"I am not going to say anything against her," protested Dr. Green, "except that she has had the easier part."

"I don't see that," said Eleanor. She went rapidly toward the door.

"You will go away from Waltonville?" [Pg 297]

"Yes."

"Where would you like to go?"

"Where I can get work, teaching or something of that kind."

"Eleanor!" cried Dr. Green.

She paused, her hand on the knob.

"If you have any feeling for me at all, you won't even make it necessary for me to tell you what I'm going to do."

Then she went down the office steps. Dr. Green let her go alone.

When she had gone, he sat and looked about. "The little monkey!" said he, aloud. Then suddenly he rose with a mighty spring and opened the door. Though the hour was late he strode up the street toward the college. At Thomasina's he glanced in, but the house was dark. As he went through the campus gate, he saw that there was a light in Dr. Lister's study; it might be that she was there—if so, well and good; it would save him some words.

In Dr. Lister's study Richard and his father and mother and Thomasina sat together. There were traces of tears on Mrs. Lister's face, as was natural to one who was bidding farewell this evening to a happy era. Dr. Lister swung his foot rapidly; he anticipated with delight his journey to New York. Thomasina sat with Richard on the sofa. He was thin; his boyish good looks were gone, but

good looks of a better sort had come to take their place. He discussed impersonal matters with a manly air.

All four were glad to see Dr. Green. The moments had grown a little difficult and Thomasina took advantage of his coming to make her adieux. [Pg 298]

"I'll see you next month, my dear. If I can persuade your mother to come, too, we'll have a fine time."

Green's tall figure barred the way to the hall.

"Please wait a minute, Miss Thomasina," said he. "I have something to say to all of you and it is easier to say it to all of you together. Miss Thomasina told me some days ago that you, Mrs. Lister, have been misled by several coincidences into thinking that Eleanor Bent was the daughter of your brother Basil."

Mrs. Lister looked aghast.

"That is a great mistake," said Dr. Green. "Eleanor Bent is my daughter. I fell in love with her mother when I was here and followed her away. Before Eleanor was born, we separated, and when I came here to practice I found them. Her mother was established and was not willing to readjust her life and I deferred to her. It was an absurd mistake. Eleanor's ideas of a departed parent were already fixed; otherwise it would have been more absurd."

Having finished his speech, Dr. Green was left without a response. One would have thought that he had stricken his audience dumb. After a long time Dr. Lister swung his right knee over his left.

"Mrs. Lister thought she resembled her brother," said he.

"She resembles *me*," said Dr. Green.

"But her talent!" said Mrs. Lister, beginning to cry. [Pg 299]

Green smiled grimly.

"That couldn't have been inherited from me, I suppose?" said he. "I asked Mrs. Bent about Basil Everman. She said that she had been persecuted by John Bates, then sinking into debauchery, and that your brother had protected her. She looked upon him as a sort of Saint George."

"Oh! oh! oh!" wept Mary Alcestis.

Richard rose to his feet.

"Does Eleanor know this?" he demanded.

"She knows now," said Dr. Green sorely.

"By Gad, you've got her into a pretty mess between you!" said Richard.

Thomasina sat with her hand covering her eyes. Suddenly she took it away and looked sharply at Mary Alcestis.

"This isn't the time to cry!"

"You cannot understand," sobbed Mary Alcestis.

"Can I not?" said Thomasina softly.

Mrs. Lister looked at Thomasina; then she crossed the room and sat down beside her.

"You said I was a fool, Thomasina. I was just that." She stared at Thomasina as though she saw her now for the first time. She did not even know the moment when Dr. Green left them to themselves.

The college clock struck eleven as Dr. Green went through the campus gate. But he did not go home, even though that was a late hour for Waltonville. He went across the town to the little gray house where the light still burned in the dining-room. When he walked in, Mrs. Bent looked up at him helplessly. [Pg 300]

"I am trying to talk to her. I tell her that both of us was wrong. I was too much for gayety and going, and I didn't appreciate learning. But I appreciate learning now. I didn't know I should come to be ashamed."

Eleanor's face looked frozen.

"You kill me, mother, when you talk about being ashamed. I'm never ashamed of you. I don't see why we need to talk about it. Let it go."

"He was always kind to you," said Mrs. Bent. "Your books he gave you and your pie-anna and even your name that you like so well and your learning and you get your mind from him, and—"

"They are all hers by right," said Dr. Green.

"And he might go somewheres else and be a great doctor. I heard people say it often. I was hard to get along with," sobbed Mrs. Bent. "And I was afraid you would grow up ashamed of me. Oh, I done wrong!"

Still Eleanor said nothing.

"Do not make it harder for us than you must, my dear," said Dr. Green at last. "There have been some matters I didn't give heed to because I wanted you to come to something. I didn't know you had a question in your mind. I am more ambitious for you than I was for myself. An early and unconsidered marriage like your mother's and mine—"

Now Eleanor lifted her head.

"Oh! oh! oh!" she cried as Mrs. Lister had cried.

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"What is it?" asked Dr. Green. "Let us be entirely frank with one another."

"I did not understand that you had *married* my mother!" cried Eleanor. "Oh, I think you have been wrong and foolish and wicked, not so much to me as to one another!"

At midnight, when Dr. Green went out the little gate, he saw a dark figure in the shadow. It did not frighten or surprise him.

"Well, Richard?"

"I'm not going in. I wanted just a glimpse of her, that was all. I can't stand seeing her and talking to her and then having to come away."

"You have had your glimpse?"

"Yes. I'm fortified till the morning." Without further confidences, Richard took the first short cut that offered.

CHAPTER XXVII

EPILOGUE

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In late August of the next year, Thomasina came slowly across the green from the Lister house toward the campus gate. Mrs. Lister had begged her to stay longer, but she had felt a need for quietness. Mrs. Lister had been talking about Basil; she had not yet exhausted all possibilities for conversation in his strange posthumous fame, or in his attachment to Thomasina, so long unsuspected. She did not ask many questions at one time of Thomasina; they came slowly, a question or two this week, another question next month. Sometimes she wept.

"There are times when I can see just how I thought that dreadful thing about Basil and there are other times when I just cannot understand!"

"I wouldn't think of it," said Thomasina cheerfully. "And, anyway, Mary Alcestis, you didn't hurt any one but yourself."

A flood of tears choked Mrs. Lister's voice.

"I could explain it to Basil. He was always very kind and understanding." She looked at Thomasina with a sort of angry astonishment. "You are always so calm, and I—I am homesick to see Basil. I shall never be altogether at peace until I see him."

"Yes," said Thomasina, "I can understand that."

"You ought to be with Richard as much as you can," said Mrs. Lister. "In another month he will have gone back to New York."

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Thomasina smiled. Across from the chapel drifted the sound of music. Richard had spent a day inside the old organ and had coaxed and wheedled it into a new sound. He was now on the organ bench with Eleanor beside him. For Richard at his happiest moments there was still a favorite form of expression, the chants of his boyhood. With full organ he sang the Ambrosian Hymn. The Gregorian music, the summer evening, Richard's voice—Thomasina was never to forget them.

"We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge:
We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants: whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious
blood.
Make them to be numbered with Thy saints: in glory ever-lasting....
O Lord, have mercy upon us: have mercy upon us.
O Lord, let Thy mercy be upon us: as our trust is in Thee."

Then Richard established a deep and majestic foundation for his clear tenor:

"O Lord, in Thee have I trusted: let me never be confounded!"

"She is a nice girl," said Mrs. Lister, her voice trembling. Music was still terrible to Mary Alcestis. "I am satisfied. I believe she will make a good wife to Richard. He wants her to write, but I don't

believe she thinks much about writing now. And her mother is a nice woman," added Mrs. Lister. "She has excellent ideas and she has trained Eleanor."

Thomasina intended to stop for a moment in the chapel and went so far as the threshold. Then, seeing the two heads close together, she turned away. She did not fear interrupting Richard and Eleanor—there was no one among all her acquaintances, least of all these two, whom she could interrupt. But she turned away. Youth, with its confidence and its ignorance, was alien to her mood; youth which knew nothing of heartache, which had no visions of a loved body, covered—how many years ago!—with earth, of lonely days, of nights filled with rebellion. Even Mary Alcestis, who thought herself so wise in grief, knew nothing.

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The Scott house was closed, the Scott family scattered, in happy separation, Mrs. Scott with her son at Atlantic City and Dr. Scott and little Cora exploring in Italy. Thinking of them, Thomasina smiled. She saw Dr. Scott enchanted, inarticulate. It seemed to her that each of her friends had that which his heart desired—even Mrs. Bent, whom Waltonville still called Mrs. Bent, though it knew better, who stayed in her little gray house adoring her household gods, and even Dr. Green, who seemed to crave management by his daughter. Neither Dr. Green nor Mrs. Bent felt apparently any reviving flame of affection, but jealousy at least was gone. Both now had Eleanor.

Each one, it seemed to Thomasina, entering her gate, had some hearth whereat to warm himself, some eyes wherein to see himself reflected. The latch of her door felt cold, the cool hall vault-like. The house was empty; she shivered as she entered it.

She moved across her parlor. On the shelf nearest her throne-like chair stood four books, which she took one by one into her hand and then put back. All had been completed as Dr. Scott had planned, all had been brought out in perfection to the delight of the discerning. She did not open them, did not need to open them to read.

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"The admirers of Basil Everman are grateful to his friend Thomasina Davis, of Waltonville, to whom he wrote constantly during the last years of his life his aspirations and his plans. Miss Davis has allowed his biographer to make extracts from his correspondence."

Here was fame—the only fame for which Thomasina cared!

When she sat down before the garden door, tears were in her eyes. Her flowers offered their incense to the sky; the sound of Richard's music was carried softly to her by the evening breeze. The hour was enchanted. She was too wise not to know that it was a space set apart, that unhappiness, discontent, a fierce resistance to life as it was, would have their hours also. But this was reality—to that she held with a divine stubbornness—this hour in which Basil, young, radiant, immortal, stood beside her. For such hours as this, infrequent though they were, she had declined other loves, refused to sit at warmer hearths.

"Saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs,
Answer 'yes!'"

remembered Thomasina.

"I, Sergius, live!" said she, aloud.

Then, folding her hands, she sat quietly.

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