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SOUTHERN HEARTS.

From "The Wife of Lothario" —Part II.]

Southern Hearts

By

FLORENCE HULL WINTERBURN

Author of "Nursery Ethics," *and* "From the Child's Standpoint"

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1900

MY VIRGINIA FRIENDS;
ESPECIALLY TO
THAT ONE OF THEM WHO LIVES IN MY MEMORY
AS THE
TYPE OF ALL THAT IS SINCERE,
HOSPITABLE AND KINDLY
IN THE
SOUTHERN CHARACTER,
THIS VOLUME IS CORDIALLY INSCRIBED
BY THE AUTHOR.

Several of the stories in this volume have appeared in the magazines; three are entirely new. For courteous permission to reprint thanks are due the publishers of "Romance," "Godey's Magazine," "The Ladies' World," and "The Independent."

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WHEN LOVE ENSLAVES.

It was a beautiful morning of early October in the mountain region of Virginia. The old Fitzhugh homestead, now the property of an Englishman who had married the only daughter of the impoverished family and bought in the home from creditors with good British gold, reared its dull red sides from amid a mass of sugar maples, larches and sycamore trees, and seemed with its widely opened doors, to proclaim an endless hospitality. The passer-by caught a glimpse of rambling out-houses whose chimneys shed lazy wreaths of smoke from pine wood fires, and if near enough he might have sniffed the pleasant odor of savory cookery from the rear building where Aunt Rose, the old-time cook, exercised her skill to please her epicure master, or tempt the less robust appetite of her young mistress.

Mrs. Meeks stood at this moment in the middle of the sitting-room, her arms clasped over a broom, and her dark eyes gazing upon the floor in front of her. But her meditations had nothing to do with the rug where the broom rested, nor yet with the sun-lit slope of the Blue Ridges that extended in all their wealth of autumn beauty in front of the open windows.

She was thinking of Mr. Meeks. He had just left the house, and as not infrequently happened, had left the sting of sharp words behind him. Yet, not exactly sharp, either. Overbearing, dogmatical words, not intentionally cutting ones, for that was not the nature of the man; but words that, said in his tone of command, bore heavily upon sensitive feelings.

Mrs. Meeks was sensitive. That was evident in every line of her softly rounded face, but the red lips that were curved in Cupid's bow could straighten and stiffen when she was roused into one of her rare moods of determination. Mr. Meeks called these moods "tantrums," although his wife always spoke low and never lost her good manners. She had been reared by a grandmother who was one of the last of the Southern dames of the *ancien régime*, and would have died before she would have condescended to a rough and vulgar quarrel.

It was the opposite trait in Mr. Meeks that hurt her. He was inclined to quarrel on slight occasion. He had not the least idea of his defect of temper; it was always clear to him that he was in the right, and people who differed from him were wrong. They quarreled with him. If people would do what they were told, he would never have cause to get out of humor. This lordliness of tone did not set ill on a man presiding at town meetings, and explaining to badly informed clients the intricacies of law. In these cases, suavity and a fine, melodious voice were the decent coverings of an egotism that wore less disguise when he was laying down the law to the little woman at home.

It had been only an agreeable sort of masterfulness in the courting days. Then it had seemed to the romantic girl that yielding her will to a tender, protecting lover gave to their relation a delightful exclusiveness, as contrasted with other relations. But in three years she had learned that what from one point of view is agreeable authority, becomes from another point of view distasteful restraint. Besides, the fiber of the American woman which yields sweetly to suggestions of warmer wraps and the reserving of dances, is less compliant under complaints of neglected hose or bad management of fuel.

Still, one could conceive of a demeanor that would have deprived even such fault-finding of its sting. But the most tender wifely forbearance will bristle with resentment when such a slight matter as a wrongly folded white tie calls forth allusions to a blissful and ante-marital condition in which hired landladies were attentive to a man's comfort; and above all, when ill-humor allows itself the parting shot from the doorway of a muttered "darned fool."

Mrs. Meeks had watched her stout, well-set-up husband drive away behind his handsome bay horses to his office in town, and then fallen into an unpleasant fit of meditation over her morning task of putting the sitting-room in order.

The suggestion of Cupid's bow had entirely disappeared by the time she had mentally reviewed the whole situation, and her mouth was, as the old black servant secretly observed as she entered, "set for a fight."

"Ef ever Mis' Linda gits her back up onc't, that air Englishman better look out for hisse'f," old Rose had confided to a confidential friend. "I knows the Fitzhugh blood. It won't bear much puttin' upon, now I tells you."

The old family servant was not particularly fond of her Mis' Linda's husband, and she looked forward to that crisis when the Fitzhugh blood would become heated.

"Laws, honey," she made bold to say as she came forward and took the broom into her hard, muscular hands, "you go and set down. You's got no call to worry yo'se'f no-how 'bout housewuk."

"But you have enough to do already, Rose," said Mrs. Meeks kindly, and turning her eyes, in which tears glistened, away from the withered, kindly old face. She dared not meet the look of sympathy, being in that humor when even a dignified woman may be melted into indiscreet confidences under the temptation of a silent, intelligent championship.

Old Rose, however, began to sweep with those deft, smooth strokes that raise no dust, and with her head bent, she talked along in a seemingly purposeless fashion.

"I's an ole coon, Mis' Linda; a little extry wuk ain't goin' to hurt me none. You take keer yo'se'f, honey, an' don' wuk yo' good looks away. An' don' fret 'em away, neither. You mus'n't wu'y yo'se'f, chile. Never was er *man* wuth wu'yin' over. Ain't I had three husbands? De good Laud, He tuk Jim an' Abraham, an' den I, like a fool, tuk up wid Josh. An' he drunk an' drunk, an' den he cusses an' swear at me, an' me wu'kin' myse'f like er ole hoss, and den I jes gets up an' I say, 'Josh, I don' 'low no nigger ter cuss at me!' I says, 'You kin hev de inside of dis house an' I'll tek de outside,' and so I comes back ter de ole place, an' what Josh do? Why, Josh, he sober up, an' he 'gins ter see den w'at comes o' ugliness, an' he follow a'ter me, an' heah he is, gard'nin' fur Mr. Meeks. But when he comes home ter de shanty he don' cuss at me no mo'. Bes' way is jes ter let dese men know dere place, honey, once an' fur all."

After old Rose had gone out with the dust-pan, Mrs. Meeks sat still in the rocking chair by the window, from which she could see quite a distance down the road; but her vision was turned too intensely inward to admit of her taking any interest in the few passers-by.

Strange how a single sentence coming at the right time, will have a force that tons of inopportune advice has not. "Bes' way is jes ter let dese men know dere place, honey, once an' fur all." The sage, worldly-wise policy of this ignorant colored woman, to whom mother-wit had suggested methods culture could scarcely have rendered more effective, struck a chord in the heart of her mistress that would have failed to vibrate at any other moment. When causes of irritation are not present, one is simply amused in listening to recitals that piquantly set forth the temper of the subject, but when the mind is oppressed by a sense of long-smothered injuries, it turns a very different aspect toward experiences that appear similar to its own.

Mrs. Meeks would not have deliberately made herself, or permitted any one else to make comparisons between her husband and Uncle Josh, whose outward uncouthness removed him leagues distant from his master. Yet, with that gentleman's last muttered expression smarting in her ears, she quailed at the suggestion of a spiritual likeness between the two beings in their antipodal tweed and jeans. Floating in upon her disturbed mind came a certain rude epigram which she had heard in the kitchen years ago when, a tiny girl, she was playing about the door, and had remembered because it struck her as being funny: "All men's tar off de same stick."

"True!" said Mrs. Meeks bitterly, the tears falling now without disguise. "Men are all alike. I thought Robert was different. And our life together was to be a heaven upon earth? Well, this is the end of it all. I cannot stand his temper—I will not stand it!"

How far her resentful musings would have extended if she had been left a while longer in that worst of solitudes, the loneliness of affronted dignity, is uncertain, for her tears were suddenly checked by sounds of visitors. A keen-eyed, vivacious, middle-aged woman alighted at the door from an open carriage and made her way in without ceremony. Mrs. Meeks started up with intent to escape, but settled back in her chair again as her visitor entered with the little whirl and rush that characterizes the movements of a lively, excitable woman.

Her sharp black eyes took in the situation at a glance; the half-arranged room, Mrs. Meek's dishabille, her despondent attitude and the traces of tears. She advanced quickly and put out both hands, exclaiming in a voice of mingled affection and curiosity:

"Linda, what is the matter?"

"Oh, Louise, for once I am sorry to see you!"

These two women were lifelong friends; friends in the sense in which Virginians understand the term, their relations being of the sort that involves the frankest self-disclosure, and an immediate discussion of every important circumstance entering into their experience.

"Now, my dear," said Louise Gourlay, in a husky, emphatic voice, which to her torment she could never soften, "Providence sent me here this morning. I think too much of you not to understand at once what ails you. Mr. Meeks has been abusing you!"

Mrs. Meeks blushed and tried to look indignant, but only succeeded in looking unhappy.

"There is no use in talking about it," she said, bracing herself to encounter opposition. "Some things ought not to be talked about. It cannot help any. I can't go back and be a girl again." There was a slight pause and a struggle after control, and then she broke out with a sob: "Oh, Louise, why did I marry?"

"The good Lord only knows why any of us marry," answered the older woman, raising her eyes devoutly. "But I suppose the world has to be carried on some way. It isn't so much the marrying, after all, that's the trouble, as the foolishness afterward. Now, dear, you remember that I prophesied long ago that Mr. Meeks would tyrannize over you hand and foot, if you let him. A man can't help trying to rule the roost—mercy, what's all that row about?"

She broke off suddenly and got up to look out of the window as sounds of a great commotion in

the garden turned the peaceful scene without into one of those miniature pandemoniums not uncommon in the country, where a flock of hens follow a Robin Hood of a spouse in his raids upon forbidden territory.

Robin Hood in this case was a superb black Spanish cock with large powers of leadership, and he had succeeded in marshaling his entire female troop into the geranium patch before Uncle Josh, soberly hoeing corn in the rear, was made aware of the invasion.

He ambled forward, waving his hat and shouting. Aunt Rose ran out, waving her apron, and the daring Robin Hood, making as much noise as both of them, strode back and forth, protecting while at the same time vigorously protesting against the retreat of his flock.

"Mercy on us!" ejaculated Mrs. Gourlay, "the hens are trampling over your yellow chrysanthemums, Linda."

Confidences can wait, but the peril of a cherished flower-bed is not lightly to be set aside. Mrs. Meeks was stung into renewed interest in the life she had been upon the point of denouncing as utterly devoid of satisfaction. It was impossible to sit still and watch those lazy, awkward negroes vainly trying to head off the stout-hearted rooster. She went out, at first with rather a contemptuous, indifferent air, but, as the cause of provocation scuttled toward her she suddenly felt her indefinite sense of wrong against a sex at large become concentrated into fury toward this small masculine specimen, and entered into the chase with an ardor that soon routed him from the field.

She entered the house half laughing, half frowning at the two darkies, who had rather enjoyed the little excitement.

"Aunt Rose, you are as bad as a child, standing giggling there! You had better be making some little cakes for lunch. Miss Louise will stay."

"Laws, Mis' Linda, I couldn't he'p myse'f. Dat rooster, he de wuss sp'iled fowl I ebber see. He oughter be clapped inter de pot. He got a heap o' sense, too, but he done sp'iled tell he jes rotten." Thus Rose, as she sauntered back to her kitchen, to look up eggs and sugar for her cakes. Meanwhile, Mrs. Gourlay was saying:

"No, Linda, I can't stay to-day. You drive back with me and stay all night. It's an age since you spent the night at my house. Come, it will do Mr. Meeks good to show him you feel a proper resentment. It's high time you took a stand."

"Stay all night?" said Linda slowly. She felt that the significance of the act would be greater to her husband than her adviser was aware. It would be dropping the old life, putting a check upon all the sweet, confidential relations that were so dear to both, and starting out in a new, untried path of independence, of separateness that might end in complete alienation. She was a reasoning woman, used to foreseeing consequences. Sometimes she was impatient of the sound logical faculty that held her impulsive disposition in check, and longed to plunge headlong into some kind of folly, as a child bound over by a promise not to meddle with sweets, has spasms of temptation which even the certainty of illness and castor oil are hardly sufficient to restrain.

She got up and walked slowly toward the door that opened into her own and her husband's room. It was a spacious chamber, capable of holding the belongings of two persons, and before its wide-open fireplace filled with small logs ready for lighting, was drawn a great easy-chair, in which he loved to recline in the evenings with her on a cushion at his feet, while they watched the blaze together. A slight, nervous shudder passed over Linda as her dress brushed against the chair on her way to the closet where her numerous hats were arranged in their boxes. Mr. Meeks liked to see his pretty wife well dressed, and no woman in the county had such an abundance of fine clothes. She took down a fawn-colored wool gown and went to the dressing-case to fasten it before the glass. A serious, tremulous face looked back at her, a face made for sweet looks, for happiness, but now shadowed by the most miserable feelings a woman can have, for "to be wroth with one we love doth work like madness in the brain."

There, hanging on its pretty stand, was her jeweled watch, his wedding gift to her. Shining on the pin cushion were brooches and little trinkets, every one of which marked some pleasant episode. A vase of her favorite late white roses gathered by his hands only the evening before, breathed reproachful sweetness as she hastily bent over them.

But Linda was a proud woman as well as a tender one. The Fitzhugh spirit had been chafed beyond endurance; it could bear the hurts of privation, of grief, ruin and all sufferings inflicted by evil circumstances; it could not submit to insult. So she named the roughness of the man whose one great fault had to-day come to outweigh in her mind innumerable virtues. She called old Rose, gave a few orders in a tone that warned the servant to preserve silence in the midst of surprise, and then, beside her friend who kept up a cheerful flow of talk, moved tall and stately toward the carriage, and gazed dry-eyed, but ah, how sadly, at the fine old red brick dwelling half-covered with Virginia creeper and clematis, till a turn of the road swept it out of sight.

The strong black horses pranced merrily along the road, which now on one side lay beneath the mountain, covered with the red, yellow and brown masses of forestry that in the autumn glorify the earth, and in daily bleeding beauty divert a gazer's thoughts from the cruel frosts of night. To the left a deep gorge, rocky and dangerous, swept to the river below. Two vehicles, coming in opposite directions, could barely pass each other, and the driver who had the inside track might well bless his luck. But secure in the skill of their black Jehu, the two women gave no single thought to danger, but kept up their conversation indefatigably. John, keen and alert, pulled up his team carefully as he heard the tramp of a horseman rapidly approaching.

The horseman also slowed up, and when alongside stopped entirely, to exchange greetings. He was elderly and distinguished-looking, despite his shabby, dust-covered clothing and carelessly-cropped hair and beard. His worn, melancholy face brightened as he swept off his hat and made careful inquiries after the ladies' health. Then he cantered on and the inmates of the carriage leaned back again.

"Poor Colonel Thomas!" commented Mrs. Gourlay. "I recollect when he was the first young man in the county. He has gone all to pieces in the last year. He was rather high once, but Amanda was too much for him. Sam calls her 'Petruchio in petticoats.'"

Her tones smote her listener's ear as sounds coming from afar. Poor Colonel Thomas! Had he ever been in love with that sharp-tongued woman? How terrible for a woman to have upon her conscience the wreck of a man's life. If Robert should ever come to wear that bowed look—if instead of the proud confidence that well became his comely Saxon features, he should show in sunken eyes and fitful flush the marks of that ill remedy that promises but never brings "surcease of sorrow...." But he was too strong, too sane; misery could never drive him to dissipation, although it might drive him to desperation of another sort. Her quick fancy began to picture Robert estranged from the woman he loved. Mentally she saw him growing cold, gloomy and reserved—their intimacy gone as if it had never been, and they two, bound by unbreakable ties, aging in sight of each other, their lives dragging on in a way that might come to end in mutual aversion and disgust. She knew that Robert would construe her going away to-day, after their cold parting, into a determination to assert herself against him, and still worse, to seek abroad sympathy for that which she was bound as a loving wife to bear in silence and to forget.

The proud Fitzhugh blood flamed in her cheeks and her head flung up unconsciously. But at the same instant there came into her mind, as a bugle note sounds amid the horrid discord of battle, a sentence Robert had uttered to her once in the early days of their love, when he had inadvertently offended her by a careless remark: "A man is not to be judged by one word, but by all the acts of his life."

And as if in her mental struggle she had been seeking some maxim as a guide, she fastened upon this and repeated it over and over to herself.

All this time she had been mechanically giving outward attention to Mrs. Gourlay, although that shrewd woman, comprehending her absent glance, made small exactions upon her for reply. But seeing a sudden brightness take the place of her friend's dull gaze, she gave her talk more point.

"Sam is home, my dear. He came yesterday, and he says he means to pay us an old-fashioned visit. I hope the weather will keep fine so we can have some dancing picnics. He declares they are better fun than anything in Philadelphia."

"Yes, I always liked them—when I was a girl."

"What are you now, an aged woman? Nonsense, you are even prettier than you used to be when Sam spent his days on the road between our place and your father's. Ah, child, you treated Sam badly. He never got over your marriage, poor fellow. I don't know how he will bear meeting you to-day, without any preparation. But men's hearts bend, they never break; that's one comfort. Still, perhaps you'd best not flirt too hard with him."

Linda started and looked squarely at her friend. She knew that in the code of the Virginia matron, herself holding her girlhood's coquetries in dear remembrance, such meetings between old flames and mild renewals of former admiration were perfectly harmless and natural. But her husband would think differently. He might believe this meeting pre-meditated on her part; believe that she sought diversion of a dangerous and a doubtful nature. For she knew well, and he had guessed, that Sam Hilton's courtship of her had been no idle pastime, and that the young Southerner bore the Englishman a grudge which would make him a swift partisan if there once entered his head the slightest suspicion that she had reason to complain of the treatment she received.

Had she? Her husband was in general goodness itself, all indulgence and kindness except when wrought upon by outer irritating quality, or annoyed at carelessness in herself. For she was forgetful—not wantonly careless, but lacking in that perfect method his good taste demanded. He was arbitrary—yes—still, some of the blame was hers, and if they had differences it was her place to give in. So the wife told herself in the quick interval between Mrs. Gourlay's last remark, and the turning of the carriage into the east fork of the road that marked half the distance between the two residences.

"Louise," she said in an imperative undertone, "tell John to turn back and take me home. I *must* go back this minute. If you think anything of me," she added hastily, interposing against remonstrance, "do as I ask."

"Now, Linda, listen to reason. If you've made up your mind to go back and eat humble-pie—excuse the truth—at least wait till after dinner and Sam shall drive you back. It would be absurd to turn back now."

"Louise—you don't understand my feeling. I was wrong to come. Robert was to come home early this evening and bring an old friend just from England with him to stay a few days. Think how mortifying to find me gone away!"

"It would look badly. Still—serve him right!"

"No, I was cross myself this morning—probably. I didn't mean to tell you of our quarrel—our *half* quarrel. But never mind talking about it, only, please take me back. Or else let me walk? I can

walk; it's not far."

"Linda Fitzhugh! Well, then—John, Mrs. Meeks has forgotten an important engagement and we must take her straight home again. Can you turn the carriage here?"

"Reckon I kin, m'm," said John sulkily, and the horses were turned about.

Mrs. Gourlay glanced at her watch and said resignedly:

"It will be half-past one by the time I am back, and the children will be savage, for I promised them I wouldn't stay long this morning. But you always have your own way with me, Linda. I wish you were half as spunky with somebody else."

"Don't, dearest," Linda entreated, the color rising in her cheeks.

"I will say it. If you keep on giving in this way to a man's temper, you'll end by not daring to say your soul's your own."

"Robert is imperious, perhaps," the young wife answered slowly. "But that is between him and me. If I can stand it, my friends needn't worry."

"My dear child, you know I don't mean to be meddlesome. I might have recollected the old adage about a husband and wife being a pair of scissors, and whatever comes between the blades gets cut. But there is a principle involved here."

"Yes," assented Linda, "there is a principle involved."

"I suppose you mean your principles and mine are not the same," said the elder woman, with a little heat.

"Oh, yours are all right for you. But I must conform myself to a different rule. I can't explain it all, dear, only, right or wrong, I shall continue to give in—as you term it—to Robert. If he is high-tempered, there's all the more reason why I shouldn't be. I know what he expects of me—what he has always expected of me——"

"Expects you to be an angel!" broke in her friend, "while he is—whatever he chooses."

"Well," answered Linda, with a brilliant smile, "I'll be as near an angel as I can. You don't understand. There are compensations. Even if there is a little bitter drop now and then, he makes me very happy. And happiness is worth an effort."

"Well, well," sighed her friend, and they both fell into silence.

At the porch they parted with a warmer kiss than usual. Linda could not help feeling that she had cast herself adrift to swim alone henceforth in waters that might be cold and sullen. She went into the house and took off her hat half reluctantly. The next few hours dragged on in unbroken dulness. About four o'clock the bay horses dashed up and Mr. Meeks alighted from his buggy, followed by a fine-looking, gray-haired man who was in the midst of remarks evidently admiring and complimentary in their nature.

Mrs. Meeks stood upon the veranda, her eyes a trifle brighter than usual, her cheeks a trifle warmer; her head was held unconsciously a little high, but otherwise there was no criticism to be made upon the gracious sweetness with which she greeted her husband and his guest.

"I was in a measure prepared to meet you," said the suave Briton. "Meeks has been treating me to certain rhapsodies of description with which I now perfectly sympathize."

"In Virginia we say that an acquaintance begun with a compliment ends in a duel," said Linda, smiling.

When the guest had been ushered upstairs to wash off the dust of travel, Mr. Meeks put his arm about his wife's waist. His eyes were unshadowed by any disagreeable recollections.

"Sweetheart!" he said.

"He will never make any apologies," thought Linda. "Well, no matter. I am glad I came back."

THE WIFE OF LOTHARIO. [1]

I.

"MANDY'S jest crazy to go to New York," said Mrs. Powell to her friend Mrs. Thomas, who was spending the day with her.

The two elderly women were "kin" in that wide-reaching term that in Virginia stretches out over blood relationship to the remotest degree of fortieth cousinship. Mr. Thomas' mother had been a

Powell, and it was from the Powells, she was accustomed to say with ill-concealed pride, that her son Vivian got his high spirit and his splendid eyes.

Amanda Powell had the identical dark brown eyes and apparently the same high spirit. When she was six and Vivian twelve, the two had been used to retire from family parties

anywhere from one to a dozen times in the course of an afternoon to have it out, in the back hallway, or in the garret, or even, when the excitement was intense, in the "far barn," a dilapidated building a quarter of a mile away from the house.

Vivian, even at the manly age of twelve, and in the face of all the traditions of chivalry, which to a Southern boy of that period exercised a very real influence over his attitude toward the softer sex, despite the vigilance of his mother and aunts, who were perpetually admonishing him to recollect that "Mandy was little and a girl besides," Vivian was tormented by a desire to subdue his spunky, small cousin at any cost of time and ingenuity. He had once made a great flourish with a hazel switch and raised a welt on her slim bare arm, which gave him immense satisfaction at the moment, and haunted him remorsefully for weeks afterwards. Amanda had promptly pulled out a lock of his hair, and then, setting her back against the side of the barn and gritting her tiny white teeth, had bidden him "come on" in a tone ringing with belligerent probabilities.

After that day a new element was added to the attraction the two children had for each other. Their attitude was much like that of two unfledged chickens who have had a fight ending in a drawn battle, and have a thirst for satisfaction. Whoever has watched a pair of very young roosters in the act of combat, knows how each one makes a peck and then draws off and stands upon the defensive, vigilant and defiant; another peck—then another rest, neither one giving in or running away until some intruder parts them.

Vivian and Amanda had continued upon these terms until increasing years rendered actual fighting impossible, and left to their antagonistic spirits only the resource of stinging words, and to hours of repentance the mere interchange of shy glances and softer speech, added to a fierce absorption of one another's society, which left the rest of the world completely outside.

The Powell and Thomas tribe had come in the course of time to accept the alliance between the fighting cousins as one of the mysterious results of the strange similarity of the two children in looks and disposition, and all the other young cousins had learned that these two black-eyed friend-enemies belonged to one another, and tolerated no interference in their relation.

Both were fatherless, and so, in either case, the young spirit that needed wise and loving restraint, had broken through the feeble curb of motherly fondness and gained freedom before achieving the self-control that prevents liberty from degenerating into license.

Amanda was now eighteen, and Vivian—just home from a two-years' term at the College of Virginia—was twenty-four. The two mothers, sitting together that afternoon, a week after Vivian's premature return from college, were anxiously alive to all the possibilities smouldering in such a period and fanned by recent separation and the excitement of inquiry into the changes a couple of years had wrought.

I should like to dwell for a moment upon the scene of this little motherly conference. It was the "settin'-room" of a large, old-fashioned mansion in central Virginia, and was one of two ample square rooms lying on either side of a great hall that ran straight through the middle of the house and lost itself in a broad porch in the rear.

Its newly white-washed walls were half covered with dusky old family portraits interspersed with bits of what Amanda called "bric-a-brac," meaning wood-cuts from the illustrated weeklies, brilliantly colored fans, and bunches of ferns and grasses tied together with ends of sash ribbon. The worn carpet covering the middle of the floor was an ancient and costly Axminster, and the few pieces of furniture were of massive mahogany, the long sofa and two armchairs covered with black haircloth, but overlaid with so many knitted tidies and scarfs that their dreariness was well concealed. In the deep, wide fireplace a big log burned slowly this chilly April day, and on either side of a spider-legged table drawn up before the blaze, sat and rocked the elderly ladies, dividing their attention between a small decanter of Madeira and a plate of Aunt 'Liza's delicious plum cake, and the subject of Amanda's craze to go to New York.

"Mandy's always had her own way about everything up to this," said Mrs. Thomas, her cool, pale blue eyes turning their wavering glance upon the plump, handsome face of her hostess, whose blooming cheeks were framed in snowy curls and set off by a lace fichu that came up high around the neck of her gray merino dress and was fastened in front by a pin made of her husband's hair woven into the form of a bunch of grapes. The term "motherly" described her accurately; her cheery smile, her ponderous but quick motions, her rich-toned voice and large, soft hands, all made up a personnel that drew hearts to her in affectionate confidence. She laughed in responding to her cousin's remark, a mellow, rippling laugh, such as you might have expected from her.

"I dunno what 'u'd happen if anybody wuz to set 'emselves up against Mandy," she said, shaking her beautiful white curls. "And I dunno's her way is sech a bad way. She don't like to have anybody say what she shall do and what she sha'n't, but give her her head and she's generous as the day, and good-hearted. The Powell disposition always wuz to be a leetle wilful, but the Major and I always got along well, and Mandy's like her pa. She was always wild to travel, and she's not had a great opportunity to see the world. If I could leave home—or had anybody to take her! But I reckon it'll have to be managed some way. Mandy's bound to go."

"There's one person 'u'd be glad enough to take her," said Mrs. Thomas. "He'd take her anywhere

she wanted to go, shore."

"You mean Edgar Chamblin?"

"You know I mean Vivian, so what's the use o' talkin' 'bout anybody else? I seen cl'ar 'nuff, Nellie, five year ago, how things wuz goin' to be when them two growed up. It's nater, and I dunno's we kin help it, even supposin' we wuz to desire to."

A troubled look passed over Mrs. Powell's face; passed and left no trace, as a cloud passes over the sun. "Whatever is, is best," she had been saying all her life, when persons about her were complaining of fate and Providence and ill-luck. But beneath her optimism was a basis of sound judgment, and she always quietly made herself sure that nothing better was attainable before acquiescing in such arrangements as Providence allotted.

"Edgar Chamblin is jest sech a young man as I'd like to see Mandy marry," she observed placidly. "I've nothin' ag'in Vivian—you know I've always been as fond of him as if he wuz my own—but put fire and tow together! Now, Edgar's one of the kind that'd let Mandy do jest what she pleased. He's easy-goin'. Not but what he's sensible too, and steady. I'd be proud to hev Mandy so well suited in a husband as Ed'd suit her."

"I should think you'd know better'n to pick out who Mandy's goin' to marry," said Vivian's mother. "And I ain't so shore as it's the best thing fur a woman to have a husband give in to her every whip-stitch. Probably you dunno what it is to have a shiftless, no-account, no-back-bone sort o' creetur 'round under foot—"

"Lord knows, all I want's my child's happiness," sighed good Mrs. Powell. "If she and Vivian air fond o' one another, I'm not the one to oppose 'em. But I can't say now as I want it so. It stands to reason two black-eyed, high-strung people, both proud as Lucifer, must expect to have a stormy life together. Why, it'd make me tremble—the idee of 'em goin' away on a weddin' tour!"

"Vivian's a good boy, Nellie," answered his mother in a tone that trembled a little. "You know, yourself, he's a gentleman. No woman need be afeard of a man if he's a gentleman."

"My dear, the Major wuz a gentleman; no man more so. But I dunno what'd happened if I hadn't known how to manage him. You've either got to manage a man or *be* managed, and though there air women that need managin', and some that like it, I've never seen the man yet that's fit to be the head o' woman. I ain't sayin' they don't exist. I haven't been about much. But my mother had. She'd been everywhere. Her father was Commander in the Navy, as you know, and she said to me once: 'Nellie, I never yet see the man that was good enough for a good woman.' I don't go as fur as that. Ma was ruther high in her notions. But on the other hand it'd go mighty hard with me to have to stand by and see a man that married Mandy with his hand on top."

"Seems to me you needn't be afeard o' that if she has Vivian. It's been all along with them two that if one wuz ahead one day, t'other was shore to git ahead the next. You recollect the old saying: 'Pull Dick, pull deevil,' I reckon, Nellie?"

"That's the worst on it. I'm mortal afeard they'd kill one another. They ain't noways suited, Jane, and I trust to mercy that the thing's not to be."

Mrs. Powell pronounced her ultimatum with unusual energy, and rising, began to stir about the room, setting cushions and folding up pieces of sewing in a manner that evinced a wish to shake off a disagreeable impression. Never before had she felt a wish to fight the inevitable. She was not one of the thin-skinned, superstitious beings who claim to be intuitional, and she was content, ordinarily, to recognize events when they actually took place, and not spy them out beforehand in the clouds of fancy. But mothers seem to have a special sense that warns of coming danger, and this good mother had felt within the last few minutes a strange sinking at the heart in connection with thoughts of Mandy which made her very anxious and, as she put it, "fidgety," so that to sit still longer and discuss the matter of this undesired marriage was an impossibility.

"I sort o' hoped you wouldn't be averse to the children's comin' together, Nellie," were Mrs. Thomas's parting words as she settled herself in the broad carryall while the sun was still high, to drive the two miles to Bloomdale, where, standing back a little way from Main Street, was the modern brick house that her father, the general storekeeper "in town," had left her and to her eldest son George after her, the entail taking no account of Vivian, to whom she promptly gave up his father's farm the day he came of age.

As she took up the reins after this plaintive remark and turned her eyes reproachfully upon Mrs. Powell's countenance, beaming upon the parting guest from the broad doorway, another vehicle whirled around the curve and stopped, and two beautiful pairs of dark eyes smiled upon her, as Vivian himself sprang out and put his arm about Amanda with a zeal that was totally unnecessary to the furthering of that active damsel's descent to the ground.

"Where have you two been all this blessed afternoon, when I needed Mandy to hem them table-cloths?" said Mrs. Powell, her beaming countenance contradicting her complaint, as Amanda put both arms about her neck and kissed her with an affection that was as genuine as it was spontaneous.

"Been to Bear's Den," said Amanda, a rich color mantling her opal-tinted cheeks, and a shy, saucy smile curving a mouth formed for the torment of men, in more senses than one. Her voice was a modified edition of her mother's, lazy, rich and sweet, but with keener timbre. Under provocation it might become scornful, which Mrs. Powell's could not. She was tall and symmetrically built, her figure already showing the luxurious development that to girls of northern race comes only with an uncomfortable embonpoint. But there was not a trace of clumsiness in her make-up,

which united energy and languor in singularly equal proportions.

A fair picture the little group made, when Vivian had placed himself beside his young kinswoman and stood, leaning against the pillar, his soft hat dangling from one hand, while the other surreptitiously held Amanda's under cover of her shawl. He was her match in beauty and very like her, but with lighter coloring, his mother's blonde tints reappearing in his ruddy skin and bronze-brown mustache. With equal fire of glance, there was yet something that was not present in her spirited countenance; a hint of petulance and selfishness. But it was counter-balanced by a wonderful tenderness of expression that now spread over his clear-cut features like a wave of moonlight, bringing out the rare charm that made Vivian at times irresistible.

His mother, watching him with all her heart in her eyes, caught her breath and dropped the reins on her lap as she met the significant look he turned toward her for a second, before bending his gaze, filled with its utmost persuasive power, upon Mrs. Powell.

"I reckon," he said slowly, his tones cutting the air decisively, yet quivering with a certain plaintiveness that recalled "Cousin Jane's" tremulous minor notes, "this is as good a time as any to tell you both that Amanda and I have made up our minds to try housekeeping together at Benvenew."

"After we come back from New York," put in Amanda with a saucy glance of reminder.

"Children," said Mrs. Powell, more solemnly than she had ever spoken in her life. She took a hand of each and looked from one to the other, while Jane Thomas scarcely breathed as she leaned out of the carryall toward them. "Children, if ye've both made up your minds, I've got no call to interfere with young folks' happiness, and I sha'n't. What I say now, I say once and for all, and I sha'n't harp on it. But I know both on ye pretty nigh as well as I know myself. I'm afeard my girl needs somethin' you can't give her, Vivian. You think you don't, honey," she added, squeezing the soft palm laid in her own, and longing for eloquence to express the meaning that was in her heart; "but you ain't a woman yet; you're only a child. And what you're a-goin' to turn out depends more'n you can think now, on the kind of marriage you make. I pity the man that sets his heart on makin' you over to suit himself. And you, my dear boy, air too rash—you ain't settled enough. And it's my duty to say, fur your own sake, that if you two try gettin' along together, you'll be ridin' over to your mother or to me some day with a mouthful of complaints 'gainst Mandy. And some of 'em 'll be just. There's a soft streak in Mandy and there's a hard streak, and I'm afeard you'll find the hard one."

"Why, mother!" said Amanda, astonished and a little alarmed at her jolly mother's grave discourse. The words meant nothing to her then. She turned a laughing glance upon her lover, who had listened with equal lack of comprehension. Now they with one accord drew closer together. Certainly, any advice which does not harmonize with the wishes of those matrimonially inclined is as the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

"We always meant to be married, Aunt Nellie," answered Vivian after a short pause. "No other girl would suit me, and she is satisfied with me. Arnt you, Mandy?"

"Yes," said Amanda without hesitation.

"Nellie," cried Mrs. Thomas, unable to contain herself any longer, "don't you make 'em feel you don't believe they'll be happy together. They ain't children now, and because they've always been sparrin' is all the more reason they'll settle down tame enough."

"I should just hate a man I couldn't have a good quarrel with, once in a while," the girl made a pretense of whispering to her mother, and giving Vivian a look which meant that he was to understand they were to have things as they wanted them.

"I've got no call to say any more," said Mrs. Powell, to whom this slight opposition had been an extraordinary effort. She felt that conscience could demand no more of her. So she kissed Amanda and then kissed Vivian, and Jane Thomas kissed them both and cried over them, as sentimental women cry when they get their heart's desire, and they all stood on the porch together for a few minutes, talking eagerly, perhaps to cover a little feeling that had been stirred up by the discussion; a foreboding that could not quite be laid to rest, whether, after all, this marriage was a wise one, a prudent one, and one from which good was to come.

Did Amanda feel this doubt? Perhaps the odd little shiver that came over her and that she shook off so lightly was a premonition she would have done well to heed, instead of turning, as she did, to lay her beautiful head on her lover's shoulder in a manner that was rather too deliberate to be altogether fond.

Did Vivian experience any fear of the future in this instant of promised fulfilment of his hopes? Not he. The time was as yet far distant when that buoyant glance which seemed to challenge fate was to be turned downward in melancholy resignation, and the impetuous outleaping of suggestion and comment that was natural to his enthusiastic temperament become hesitating appeal to one he feared to displease.

And the two mothers, watching this adored son and daughter and rejoicing in their joy, sympathizing and admiring with that admiration which is most perfectly free from envy, did their knowledge of human nature and their past experience not suggest that which must make them tremble in regarding these two heedless young creatures, both children of one haughty race, bent upon gratifying that impulse of mutual attraction which was more than likely to have its source in animal obstinacy than in reasonable, human affection?

But how limited is the outlook of elderly women in these little southern villages, where the

history of a few lives constitutes their entire equipment in sociology, and to whom the idea of essential differences between sets of conditions superficially alike, can never present itself strongly. Mrs. Powell's motherly instinct had had its spasm of alarm, but had been quieted by the soothing reflection that marriage tames high spirits, and that the Rubicon of matrimony once passed, adjustment to circumstances *must* follow. Nothing else was conceivable. As for Jane Thomas, any picture of a future into which trouble might come to her son even from the "curse of a granted prayer" was beyond her imagination. All she had asked in life since Vivian was born was that he might have whatever was necessary to make him happy, and that spirited youth had succeeded in convincing her that happiness lay in having what he wanted. He wanted Amanda, and now he had got her. Mrs. Thomas rejoiced as far as her melancholy temperament permitted, and trusted the future to Providence. And in a month Amanda Powell had become "young Mrs. Thomas." A month is a short engagement in Virginia, but Vivian was impatient to open up his closed homestead, and start the farm going according to some new theories of farming, which chiefly took shape in patent fertilizer and an improved kind of harrow; also, the introduction of white labor to supersede the "lazy darkies."

And to Amanda marriage meant the pretty pearl ring her lover had placed upon her finger, the rustling white silk gown her mother had made for her in Ryburg, and—the wedding journey. Our wildest dreams are only re-combinations of what we have experienced or read of, and how could this girl of eighteen, for all her rich and varied nature, dream of the coming of responsibilities that would shake her frail fancies of married life like an earthquake, or of mental development that would awaken critical faculties to the extent of making her rebel against what she now accepted as matters of course; nothing better having presented itself to her mind?

She was satisfied that the wedding was conventionally correct, according to Fauquier County standards; that the day was bright; that she looked her best, and that Vivian was devoted without being uncomfortably demonstrative. For without at all understanding why it was so, the young girl, so full of ardor in all her attachments, had a virginal coldness toward her young lover that made her shrink with distaste from caresses and put aside any suggestion of an intimacy other than had always existed between them, and of which she foresaw merely an extension, not a transformation into anything more exacting.

Reared by an old-fashioned southern mother, watched and shielded as maidens once were when maternal ideas of duty included an anxious supervision over a daughter's reading, amusements, and associations, Amanda was in all essentials still a child, with only her natural dignity and womanly instinct to protect her amid the various perplexities and temptations the future might hold for her.

New York burst upon her eager senses as the first deafening crash of a full orchestra might salute the ears of a music-mad boy who had never heard anything more stimulating than the wheezy strains of a second-rate melodeon. Stunned but delighted, she gazed from the carriage windows upon the crowds, the stores, and the elevated railway, and thought that now she was seeing the world.

Vivian went to the Windsor, and as the youthful pair descended to the dining-room about seven o'clock and told a servant at the door that they wanted "supper," the lofty head waiter in condescending admiration, swooped down and led them to the extreme rear of the room, where, ranged in close proximity, were four other bridal couples as newly made as themselves.

But Amanda had come down in a white lawn gown profusely trimmed with pink satin ribbon, and heavy gold bracelets on her arms, bare to the elbow. The other brides wore walking suits and bonnets, with the exception of one, whose gown was of rich brocade, and whose supercilious face was set off by the most unapproachable coiffure Amanda had ever seen.

She had quick perceptions, and was keenly alive to any defect in her own appearance, and in ten minutes she suffered all the agony that would be felt by a finished woman of the world who had inadvertently worn full dress to a reception demanding bonnets. Yet, to the first test her metal rang true. With heightened color she went through the form of dining, and Vivian, whose sensibilities were as keen as hers and whose self-love was greater, took note of certain differences between his young wife and the other women, and felt himself aggrieved by her lack of taste. It was too soon, and he was too tender toward her for him to betray intentionally this slight annoyance. But an admitted cause of irritation is like the first rip in one's apparel; every movement that touches the rent extends it until the garment falls into rags.

Vivian had permitted himself the latitude of secret fault-finding, and from this to the next step it was easy.

Their first quarrel came within a week. The wonder is not that it came so soon, but that it was deferred so long. Yet, the immediate cause was absurdly trivial. They had arranged to drive to Clairmont and lunch in company with some friends of Vivian. But when the morning came he felt averse to carrying out the program. Perhaps his head ached, or he had slept ill, or the discovery that his trunk key was missing annoyed him unduly. But anyway he was out of tone.

One o'clock found him stretched out on the couch in their room yawning discontentedly over the *Herald*. Amanda, flitting about, suddenly became aware when her toilet was half made that he had not begun to get ready.

"If you don't hurry up I'll go off and leave you—lazy fellow!" she cried. "They talk about women being always the ones to keep people waiting. I'm sure it's the other way. I'm always ready for everything before you."

"I'm not going," said Vivian abruptly, directing a scowl toward the wall paper.

They had now been married eight days. A certain French author, renowned for his biting epigrams, remarks: "I do not believe there ever was a marriage in the world, even the union of a tiger and a panther, which would not pretend to perfect happiness for at least fifteen days after the marriage ceremony."

In this case was neither tiger nor panther; only a young man who had always lorded it prettily over the women in his family, and a girl who had been brought up to expect much deference. Perhaps in France it might have taken fifteen days for the glamour to wear off. But in America emotions exhaust themselves rapidly. Amanda, standing with one gloved hand stretched out before her, seemingly intent upon fastening the buttons, had begun to reflect.

"You ain't well," she observed coldly. "Probably you ate too much pie last night."

Now, among the trifles that grate upon the masculine mind, is having an indisposition referred to gastronomic indulgence. At such times a man is apt to consider that a wife but poorly replaces a mother.

"Amanda, I wish you would learn that all varieties of pastry don't come under the head of 'pie.' And I wish you wouldn't say 'ain't.' It's deucedly countrified."

"Oh," said Amanda. She deliberately took off her gloves and hat, and sat down upon an ottoman near the couch. Her color had arisen, and her black eyes had an ominous sparkle. "Is there anything else you wish?" She asked this aggressively. Her tone suggested that she had not forgotten that episode of the fight in the barn that lay a dozen years back. She was quite as ready to stand upon the defensive now as she had been then. But when women stand sentinel their guns go off inadvertently.

"I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself, Vivian Thomas!" then said Amanda. She felt that he ought to be ashamed; that his display of petulance had occurred at least a fortnight too soon; that aside from the general fact that she was in the right, as usual, he had put himself in the exceptional attitude of ill-treating a bride and trying to spoil her pleasure during the tour avowedly taken to give her pleasure.

"What of?" asked Vivian, shutting his eyes.

"Of the way you're acting," promptly answered Amanda. "If you were a little boy you'd deserve a whipping. As you're supposed to be a man——"

"Only supposed to be?" sarcastically put in the depreciated young gentleman.

"Well, *act* like a man, then!" said Amanda in a biting tone.

"You're acting like a shrew," he returned, not entirely without reason, for the girl-wife had worked herself up to quite a pretty rage. Yet, as is plain, the blame was his, and in his heart he knew it. But since he had evoked a display of temper he had a mind to bring her to the stool of repentance. As well now as later.

Amanda, upon her side was reminded that Vivian's mother had spoiled him, and she fancied that the time had come for her to establish the supremacy over him that was essential to the happiness of both. So mixed are the motives that direct any one of our actions that it is possible there lay side by side with this lofty determination of the spirited young woman a wish to prove her husband; to find out if he had strength of character sufficient to hold his own against her and bring her to the point he evidently aimed toward, of coaxing him into good humor. There was no suggestion of any such weakness in her next words.

"It's no use to talk sense to you," she remarked, as if considering ways and means. "Because you haven't got common sense. Ma always said that."

One can pardon reproaches provoked by the occasion, but a deliberate accusation delivered at second hand has the weight of society behind it. And the affront was the greater in this instance, in that Vivian had considered "Aunt Nellie" his firm friend. He turned a trifle pale, and rising to his feet began walking slowly up and down the floor. After a few strides he paused in front of Amanda and said:

"I guess your mother was right—if she meant I hadn't good sense when I wanted to marry you. I don't know as I've ever shown myself much of a fool, otherwise."

And then—it was only eight days since the ceremony, and they were both so young—somehow the quarrel died out, and they patched up a peace, and went to Clairmont after all, in a great hurry, and with spirits considerably ruffled. But neither of them enjoyed the day.

After that a great many things went wrong. There was money enough to pay their expenses for a month or so, but none to waste; and they wasted it. Accustomed to the use of carriages, as a matter of course neither of them thought of economizing in this line, until confronted with an appalling livery-bill. They did not know how to order a dinner *à la carte*, until they learned by costly experience, and the fees they bestowed upon the servants, although seemingly a trifle at the time, were matters of grave moment when the sum total of their expenditures for the month came under discussion.

It had been the plan to remain away six weeks, but upon the thirtieth day Vivian came up to his wife, who was talking with some other ladies upon the porch of the Grand Union Hotel—they were then at Saratoga—and said abruptly:

"Dear, can I speak with you a minute?"

Rather alarmed, Amanda accompanied him to a retired spot, and put herself in a listening attitude. It was an awkward minute for Vivian. He was the soul of generosity, and nothing gratified him more than to give to others pleasure, when it cost him no effort. Yet here he was in a deuce of a hole, and under the necessity of making a humiliating explanation to the person whom of all others he found it hard to confess to.

"Well?" said Amanda, rather impatiently, as he fidgeted about without saying anything.

"Well, my—dearest," said poor Vivian, with pathos, turning out an empty pocket, "we are in a fix. We've spent money a little too fast, and have only this left!" And he held up to view a five-dollar bill, and two silver quarters.

Amanda gave a gasp, and then collected her mental forces. She had a fund of practical common sense in her nature, and now when she summoned it for the first time it responded to call. The first impression her husband's confidence made upon her was to arouse a slight contempt, not attended to at the instant, but unconsciously stored away to be used on other occasions. When our friends gracefully ignore our blunders and follies is it to be supposed that they have really been blind to what they gave no evidence of perceiving? As well hope that the stone we flung into the wayside stream was totally lost when the ripples ceased, and that it found no home in the bed beneath.

"I have some money," said Amanda, hastily. "Do we owe for hotel bills?"

"No, I've just settled up everything. It was that opened my eyes. I had no idea I was so nearly broke."

"Then we can get home—I reckon—if we start right off. I have fifty dollars that mother gave me, the last thing. For 'extras,' she said. Perhaps she meant this."

She could not help the little fling. It was too hard to use this money, which she had reserved for a special purpose.

Vivian bit his lip and turned his back for a moment; but what was the use of making a fuss now? He was thankful upon the whole to get out of a bad scrape. It wouldn't be Amanda if she didn't say something unpleasant.

Ah, Vivian, has it come to this already? It seems the scars of certain little passages at arms have not faded away.

Upon a warm, sunshiny day in June they came home. Benvenew was in order, owing to the efforts of the two mothers, and Mrs. Powell's four-seated wagon was waiting at the little station, and her genial face smiled a welcome from the back seat.

"Darling mother!" murmured Amanda, yielding to the clasp of her mother's arms, and for one instant feeling as if the past month with its bewildering experiences, was all a wild dream, and she a child again, careless, irresponsible, and light hearted. The familiar sights, of which she had been weary not long ago, were charming; the smiles and nods from people they met warmed a heart that had been chilled and affrighted many times since she had left her Virginia home. Here, in her own clime, she was a princess, with friends to love her and listen to her with respect and sympathy.

They forded a stream and came to the old mill, standing half-buried in the marsh. Part of the roof was off and the rank, clambering vine of the wild grape had reached up and hung over the sides in graceful festoons. Their appearance started up a number of yellow butterflies that had been fluttering over the stream, and now rose in the air like a shower of golden sparks.

"How beautiful it all is," said Amanda. "I am glad to be home again. But where is Alex taking us?"

"To Benvenew, of course," Mrs. Powell answered. "Why, Mandy, dear, didn't you want to go right there, or would you ruther go home fur to-night? We thought probably you'd both prefer—but the laws knows I'd be glad to have you both come back with me."

"Why, ma, I forgot!" said Amanda. "And so I'm to begin my housekeeping right off. I don't know enough about it to take care of that big place."

"You'll have Ellen Digby to cook," said Mrs. Powell anxiously, "and little Admonia."

"Admonia!" exclaimed Vivian, looking around in some indignation from the front seat. "I can't have that harum-scarum creature on the place."

"You know Ellen really is a good servant," Mrs. Powell explained, apologetically. "And she won't come without the child. Admonia's twelve now, and she's really not so bad. She can be trained. There wasn't anybody else we could lay hands on."

"Never mind, ma, Admonia 'll do well enough," interposed Amanda. "She's a funny little thing, and I rather like her."

"Ex—actly!" Vivian observed, with an accent lately acquired. "I imagine Amanda training anybody."

We all have our secret pet vanities which undiscriminating persons, seeing only our surface beauties, are perpetually wounding. Amanda's vanity was a wish to be acknowledged sensible and practical. Beautiful, she knew herself to be, and to hear of that was an old story; but her executive ability was not yet proved, and she was very sensitive upon this point. And herein Vivian blundered. It did not occur to him that he hurt her feelings by depreciating her executive powers. He had been used to regarding her as a pretty play-thing, something to be petted and disciplined alternately. That she had an ambition to be something more was what he had not yet

discovered. Perhaps the idea was one that he would have to blindly grope his way toward; for "we can only comprehend that of which we have the beginnings in ourselves," and in the handsome, suave, popular young Virginian the germ of common sense and good judgment was small; so very much smaller than his little world believed it to be.

"Mandy is a leetle apt to spoil the young niggers," said her peace-making mother. "But then she wuz always so powerful fond o' children."

Amanda patted her mother's shoulder, while a far-away look came into her eyes as she fixed them on a distant hill, where the newly plowed earth lay darkly red against the tender sky-tints, and the sun swept down upon one spot, covered with young wheat, and spread over it like the caressing touch of a golden hand.

She was passionately fond of children—this fiery, tender-hearted woman, who showed so many prickles to the grown people who approached her incautiously. And Vivian was not. So much the more diplomatic, so much the more polished, so full of gentleness toward women and forbearance toward their troublesome little ones—was it possible that it was he who failed in patience and kindness, and the forward Amanda who must be credited with the possession of both, when helpless hands were stretched out toward her? Fauquier County would have shaken its head over such a question. Fauquier County said that Vivian Thomas was the mildest and best humored young man in the world except when things happened that he had a right to be angry about; but that Amanda Powell was rather too spunky and high-strung for any man except a saint to get along with peaceably. For her mother's sake—and also, a little in spite of its preternaturally wise judgment—for the sake of certain winning ways of her own, the county people liked her; but Vivian, they adored.

And so, overshadowed by this disadvantage, of which she was not quite unconscious, the young wife descended from the wagon, helped out as gracefully and tenderly as he had helped her out of another vehicle the day we first saw her, by her courteous husband, and entered the door of her new home.

The first person they laid eyes upon was the shock-headed, wild-eyed little creature called Admonia, who dropped a flower-pot she was carrying through the hall, and without stopping to pick up the pieces, raced to the kitchen, shouting:

"Mis' Mandy and Mr. Vivian done come home, fur shore! Whoopy! Ain't I glad! Now, we'uns gwine ter have times!"

Admonia was a prophet.

II.

"Admonia!" called a woman's voice, and in a twinkling the owner followed and stopped in the last one of the long row of outbuildings that spread beyond the dining-room of Benvenew.

It was a mere shed, enclosed on three sides and open at the end, the sky showing through holes in the roof. The rough boarding that answered for a floor was broken in many places, and dirt and confusion reigned everywhere. Upon a stool sat a shock-headed, wild-eyed darkey girl of twenty or so, plucking the feathers from a couple of fowls, and throwing them upon the floor. Her heavy under-lip fell and her eyes rolled as the imperative tones of her mistress smote upon her ear, and she arose quickly, a cloud of feathers falling from her unspeakably dirty dress, and stood dangling a half plucked fowl, her dark brown face so immersed in gloom that all the features seemed to have run together, the whites of her eyes and her broad yellow teeth giving her the appearance of a bank of much soiled and partly melted snow.

"Admonia," said her mistress, pausing in the doorway, "where is Nellie?"

"Laws, Mis' Mandy, I dunno. I hain't saw de chile sence Mr. Thomas tuk her."

"When was that?" Amanda's voice had a peculiar ring which the girl recognized, and knew the cause of. Her dusky face softened into an expression of sympathy, and with the fluency of her race she uttered the first consoling thought that came into her head.

"Now, Mis' Mandy, honey, don' yo' tak' on—li'le Nellie she all safe 'nuff; her pa done tak' her wid him up ter he room on'y lettle bit ago. She was pesterin' him ter show her de stuffed owl what he done brung home frum Ryburg, an' he jes tuk her wid him ter show her. He—he all right, Mis' Mandy."

The last sentence was spoken in a lower tone, and the harum-scarum girl, whom everyone except her mother and her mistress considered irreclaimably rough and wild, averted her eyes from Amanda's pale face, and sitting down again began industriously plucking her fowls.

Without another word, but with one sharply indrawn breath that left her lips white, Amanda entered the house and ascended the stairs. As she drew near a rear room on the second floor sounds reached her ear that brought a flaming color into her cheeks and made her hasten her steps. The frightened, sobbing tones of a little child came from behind the closed door of her husband's room, mingled with a half articulate but apparently angry growl of a deep masculine voice.

Amanda turned the handle of the door with an expression that boded ill for the person who had evoked it. The door resisted her pressure. It was locked. Then, in a second, all the smouldering anxiety of the mother's heart leaped into furious flame.

"Open this door!" she commanded. There was no answer. The sobbing ceased.

"Mother!" called the child.

Amanda shook the door and pushed against it with all her strength. "Open this door, or I'll break it down!" So her grandfather might have thundered out an order to some refractory sailor on board his own good ship. The only reply was an oath. The man in his sober senses addressed by any one, especially a woman, in such a manner, must have been mild indeed, had he refrained from swearing. But a mother, maddened by such fears as lacerated this woman's heart, takes nothing into account but her own feelings. With swift steps she turned into her own room, brought thence a large and heavy hammer and gave the door the strongest blow her arms were capable of throwing against it. Another—and another. The lock yielded, and Amanda, holding the hammer under her left arm, flew into the room.

Could anything excuse or justify such violence in a wife? Would not the man who had met force with force and turning upon her, knocked her down, have been not only cleared but applauded by any court in a Christian country? And in Virginia, of all other places, the laws are made for the protection of men; and public sentiment is in harmony with the State's code.

Vivian Thomas must then either be despised by those of us who see him leaning against the wardrobe in a passive attitude, while the woman who had vowed to love, honor, and obey him, ten years before, effected this headlong entrance into his own sacred stronghold, or he must be considered a saint, enduring with superhuman patience the tantrums of a domineering wife. The critic may take his choice of opinions; only, let us note that the handsome man now averting his eyes from Amanda's scorching glance is not exactly the frank, fresh-looking fellow who brought his young bride to Benvenew. All the graceful bearing, the nobility of outline, and that indescribable beauty Nature confers upon her favorite sons, are still here. The silky brown mustache droops over sensitive red lips with tender, downward curves; the white brow is placid, and the nostrils delicate and fine. But the entire effect is different. A slight alteration of a few details has changed everything. The dark eyes have faded to a dull hazel, and the whites have taken on a yellowish tinge. The cheeks have rather too much color, the flush extending to the nose. In a word, Vivian's countenance, while retaining the refinement that seems a part of the very flesh of some organisms and independent of those shaping forces that ennoble or mar the faces of most people, betrayed some deterioration of the whole man.

He seemed rather embarrassed than enraged as Amanda, panting from her exertions and trembling from the terrible tension of her nerves, swept past him and picked up a little girl cowering in the corner.

Without staying for another look or word she clasped the child in her arms and left the room; the very atmosphere charged with the contempt that emanated from her haughty spirit and which Vivian felt, even in his dulled condition, to the core of his being.

She carried the little girl to her own room, and with hurried motions bathed her face, changed her dress, and put on her hat and cloak, all the while uttering low, endearing words, and pressing tender kisses on the little upturned face which was lovely as an angel's, with great, dark eyes looking out from a thicket of golden-brown curls.

"Are we going to grandma's, mother?" Nellie asked, as Amanda changed her wrapper for a black silk dress and took up her bonnet and gloves. Once before, about a year ago, after a scene between father and mother, which had deeply impressed itself upon the child's memory, she had been taken in the carriage to her grandmother's, and had remained there a week, her mother with her. It had been a week of rare delight, shadowed only by two things: her grandmother's remarkable gravity, and the indisposition of her adored mother.

"Yes, darling," Amanda answered hastily, as she threw some things into a satchel and arising from her kneeling posture before a chest of drawers, left the room with her child, locking the door behind her.

They went straight to the barn, where Amanda hitched up old Queenie, her own horse, to a rickety old phaeton, and drove out into the yard, Admonia holding the gate open and sniffling audibly as she muttered:

"Goo'bye, Mis' Mandy; goo'bye, li'le Nellie. Wish't I wuz gwine wif ye, so I does."

"Be a good girl, Admonia," said her mistress, bending down and giving the black hand a cordial shake. "Look after things as well as you can. You and your mother are all I have to depend on now, you know, since Pete is gone."

"Good-bye, Admonia!" called Nellie's liquid tones. "Please take care of my Bantam hen!"

With the blessed elasticity of childhood she had already partly recovered from the distress of the morning, and was able to entertain charming visions of the pleasure before her. But although there is in a child a superficial light-heartedness, so that we are led to flatter ourselves that its woes are soon over, it is certain that injuries inflicted in the spirit of injustice, sink deeply into the soul, and not through inability to forgive, but through inability to forget, the young heart once wounded in the tender spot of confidence, never again can put forth vigorous shoots of affection toward the person who has affronted it. Strange as it seemed to the world that in after years Vivian Thomas' fondness for his daughter never evoked in her any corresponding demonstration, valid reason might have been found by one acquainted with the experience of this and other mornings, why Nellie always listened to the praises bestowed upon her popular parent with a pensive smile, and why, in her dutiful attention to him, there was a reserve and hesitancy widely different from the cordiality of a relation free from doubt and fear.

Mrs. Powell met them on the front porch. She had on her sun-bonnet and gardening-gloves, and

behind her stalked Alex, armed with her rake and hoe, his features expressing the contempt of his stronger nature for the woman's tools he carried, tempered with a respectful sort of indulgence toward the fancies of the best woman in the world.

Ten years had passed lightly over Mrs. Powell's fair countenance. At sixty she was a handsome and vigorous old lady, the wear and tear of life, felt only through sympathy with the troubles of others, showing mainly in a thinning of the silver curls over her temples, and a few lines about her true, mild, blue eyes.

Her first look told her that something was wrong with Amanda, and without any great strain upon her reasoning powers she understood that the trouble had reference to little Nellie. Nothing else brought that tense expression to the mouth of her beautiful daughter, nor kindled deep in her black eyes the glare that told of unendurable suffering and unquenchable resentment.

"I wuz jes' goin' to pot a few roses afore frost gits 'em," she said, after affectionate greetings had been exchanged. "Will ye set out hyar on the bench awhile, honey, an' we kin talk whilst I wurk?"

She hoped that in the course of a little quiet talk Amanda's fierce mood would give way to soothing influences, and that the injudicious things the impulsive woman was apt to utter when excited might remain upon this occasion unsaid. But now, as always, the conservative policy of the good woman only modified, but could not repress the burning indignation of a spirit that could easier pardon great injuries to itself, than the slightest wrong done to one who was incapable of self-defense.

Leaning her head back against the trunk of the ancient magnolia tree her grandfather had planted here, Amanda watched her mother dig and fuss among the roses and listened with slight response to her cheerful sentences, biding her time.

Nellie flitted about like a humming bird, coming every now and then to lay her little head against her mother's arm with a caressing touch that spoke well for the relation between the two. She stayed to carry water in her own tiny watering pot, when at last her grandmother could no longer make excuse to stop out of doors, and with a secret sigh, led her daughter into the house.

"Well, honey," she said, with an attempt at treating matters lightly. "You're not feeling jes' right to-day. Now, try to forgit all about whatever's been plaguin' you, and res' yo'self on the sofa, whilst I go an' see about somethin' nice fur dinner."

"No, no, mother. You know well enough Aunt Liza don't need any suggestions about her dinner. And I want to talk to you. I *must*. You'll be sorry if you don't listen to me."

"Don't I always listen to you, Mandy?"

"Yes, mother, but you don't always listen willingly. You seem to think that if things are not spoken about that it's the same as if they didn't exist. You think I'll stand things better if I'm quiet about them."

"No, my dear child; dear knows I'm ready an' willin' to hyar all you want to say if it eases yo' mind any. But, honey, I do hate to hyar yo' say sech hard things about yo' husband as you've said to me before when you wuz put out."

"Put out!" repeated Amanda, with scornful emphasis. "Oh, mother, why won't you see the thing as it is? A wife may bear with her husband and not let anybody know what she goes through, but a mother with a helpless little child to defend, will be up in arms against a brute, and if anybody says she is wrong to take her child away from a father that abuses her, why, they can *say* it. I know in my own heart what's right, and I'll not take it out in talk. I'll act."

"Mandy, darlin'," pleaded her mother. "Shorely you're exaggeratin'. Vivian's got his faults, and fur be it frum me to defend 'em. I said to Jane Thomas, only last week, at the Bush Meetin', that if Vivian could only be persuaded to come up to the bench then an' thar an' promise to leave off it'd make me happier'n I've been since you wuz married. And she said—I ain't tellin' you to rile you 'gainst Vivian's ma; yo' know she feels fur him, same's I feel most fur you—says Jane; 'If Mandy'd ashow'd a leetle more fondness Vivian he'd a been different. He always wuz dependent on affection, an' a lovin' woman could hev done anythin' with him. Mandy's been cold as a stun, an' it's no wonder'—I mean t'say she said it wuz a wonder 't he *didn't* go after other women."

A hot color rushed into Amanda's cheeks, and she spread her hands widely, with a gesture of repulsion. "Don't take the trouble to try to hide it," she said in a low tone. "Do you think I don't know what he races down to Richmond for every month or two—and where all the money goes to? Benvenew falling to pieces, Nellie and I with no clothes excepting what you give us, and he—gambler and libertine!"

"Mandy, Mandy, hush!" begged Mrs. Powell, alarmed at a much more forcible expression than Amanda had ever yet permitted herself.

"You know it's true, mother," Amanda answered in a softer manner. "You and I and his mother know all about it. Of course Mrs. Thomas blames me, and upholds him. If it hadn't been for her interference and continually taking his part, I might have made him behave himself better. I know all Fauquier County believes he's the injured innocent. I'm outspoken and he's deceitful. With his soft, smooth manner outside it's not surprising people think as they do; that my temper drove him to drink. And then he never gets so far gone in public as he does at home."

"Honey, that's somethin' to be thankful fur, shorely?"

"Oh, yes," said Amanda with a strange look. "Appearances are so much. Why, even our own minister took it upon himself, not long ago, to read me a sort of veiled lecture about the beauty of

meekness in a woman. I'm tired—tired, tired of being eternally misunderstood, and of this sort of 'devil and angel' game—such as the children play—where he's the angel and I'm the devil."

Mrs. Powell rocked back and forth softly, her placid face expressing more concern than had ever appeared there before. There was a sustained earnestness about Amanda's bitter outpouring different from the hysterical anger she was used to show upon the occasions when she and her child appeared with their traveling bag at the Powell homestead.

"Dearie," she said hesitatingly, "do you pray about it?"

"We had better let that subject alone," Amanda answered quietly. "I might hurt your feelings, and I don't want to do that, mother dear. Poor ma! It isn't your fault. You didn't want me to have him."

"No, honey, but now you're married thar ain't nothin' else to do but to b'ar it. Fur the child's sake, Mandy, live as peaceable as you kin. Think how dretful it is fur her to see you two on bad terms with one another."

"The child! Yes, I should think—for her sake," cried Amanda, her wrath flashing forth again. "It is of *her* I'm thinking more than anything. Vivian Thomas hasn't any more love for his child than he has for anything outside of his own pleasure. He even abuses her!" And then she told of the scene of the morning.

"Poor little thing—poor little darling," said the grandmother indignantly; but adding in a soothing tone: "After all, Mandy, you know he is the child's father, and he maybe didn't hurt her much."

"What right had he to even go near her when he was in that condition? But, mother, I tell you, it's not only when he's the worse for liquor. I've known him strike her at other times. He's cruel. There was always a streak of cruelty in his nature. You won't believe it—nobody'd think it to see him, but I tell you he is born to impose on weaker people. Nellie is afraid of him, and he makes her little life miserable. I can't stand it. People have no right to bring a child into this world and make it miserable. It's my duty to take her away from such a father."

"Yo' can't do that," said Mrs. Powell.

"I can. I can go away and take her with me."

"Dearie, now yo're talkin' wild. Leave yo' husband?"

"Yes," said Amanda, vehemently. She got up and began to pace the floor. It was almost impossible for her to sit still, when excited, and her mother had long since accustomed herself to seeing her daughter moving back and forth with hurried yet measured steps, her hands clasped tightly in front of her, while she talked in tones always growing lower and clearer as her mind became more energetic.

"I've been thinking of this for a long time. I took a resolution last time it—it happened, that the next time he did anything to Nellie, I'd shake the dust of his place from my feet. It's not so much his drinking, mother—though I believe any woman has a right to leave a man that drinks, and that if there's danger of having children by him, it's her *duty* to leave him—but it's what he is altogether. I despise Vivian Thomas."

"I wish I knowed what to say to you. I know you ain't right, Mandy. It's a woman's place to stay by the man she marries, through thick and thin. 'Fur better or worse,' reck'lect."

"That was the old idea—the idea of people who made up the form for the marriage ceremony. It's a dead letter in our law to-day, and it's a dead letter in society, too. Does anybody expect men and women to stay tied all their lives to what's horrible? These are modern times, mother."

"I'm afeared this comes o' that visit o' yo'n to Chicago, to Cousin Lois' folks," lamented her good mother. "I dunno nothin' 'bout sech notions. But I do know somethin' 'bout what people think in Fauquier County. A woman that leaves her husband puts herself in the wrong, and no matter if she's innocent as the driven snow there's always a shadow hangin' to her. Jes' stop and think what folks'd say, my dear!"

"Aye," assented Amanda, bitterly. "I know what they'd say well enough. But Fauquier County isn't the world. Why, mother, out beyond these narrow boundaries of Virginia there's free territory where women own their own souls, and can think for themselves. They can even obey their own conscience if it leads them to go against the minister and the church."

Mrs. Powell raised a hand that trembled and put it up to her temple with a despairing gesture. Tears, almost strangers to her gentle, serene eyes, gathered and rolled down her cheeks.

"Pore Mandy," she said in a choking voice. "You's fur and away from any ground whar I kin meet up with you. I've knowed fur a spell back you ain't took no interest in the church, and I'm gre'tly afeared that's at the bottom o' your troubles. If you desert the Lord He'll desert you, honey. It's shore as I'm settin' hyar."

Amanda had kneeled down and pressed her mother's head against her shoulder; but as the good woman regarded her sadly, somewhat as she might have regarded a sinner about to be prayed for in her congregation, a melancholy, half-mocking smile succeeded to the concern on the worn, handsome face upon a level with her own.

"Do you think if I had worked for the fair last month, and had gone regularly to the sewing society all this while that it might have helped to make a different man of Vivian?"

"Maybe not, dearie; though the Lord wurks by means, an' we can't tell," answered her mother, naïvely.

"Well, mother," Amanda said, "we can't think just alike about some things. You're good. You'd be good whether you were in the Second Baptist Church or in Egypt squatting before a hideous image. And I must be myself. I must do what I think right, no matter what other people think or say. And I think it right to take my child away from a father that ill-treats her, and who sets her a frightful example in every way."

"Why, you wouldn't want to cast such a slur as that on yo' daughter. People'd throw it up to her always—that her father an' mother didn't live together!"

"But if she was so much happier in other ways that she could afford to stand the talk, mother?"

"No, Mandy, no. Thar ain't no woman that's come uv a good family and been raised proper, an' to feel like a nice woman nat'rally does feel, but what'd ruther suffer anything else'n creation than to hev the finger o' scorn pointed at her an' know she or any o' her family'd done anything to desarve it."

Mrs. Powell had been wrought up to a point where her feelings demanded expression, and she continued with an earnestness and sincerity that had the effect of the finest eloquence.

"Even if thar air what yo' call 'extenuatin' circumstances,' you couldn't do this thing without bringin' 'pon yo'self the very hardest trial you could be set to endure. You couldn't be in any company without thinkin' uneasily, 'Would these people be willin' I sh'd be amongst 'em if they knowed how 'twas with me?' In church you'd fancy every wurd the preacher utters p'inted straight at you. And let alone yo'self, what wouldn't you go through thinkin' people wuz slightin' Nellie because o' you?"

"Mother, mother!" Amanda cried, "you mistake me. You're exaggerating the thing. I—I didn't mean *divorce*!"

"No, you don't mean it now, but it'd come to that. I feel it in my bones," said Mrs. Powell, solemnly.

"Well, now, dear, dear mother, listen to me," her daughter pleaded. "Suppose that—finally, that was the only way to save myself—to—to protect myself from—suppose we were in another place, in a northern city, where nobody knows me?"

"Thar ain't no place on the face of the 'arth so remote but what talk'd find you out."

"Shall we be martyrs, then, to a few old women's tongues? Am I to take the risk of"—Amanda bent and finished her sentence in her mother's ear.

"Honey, shorely ye kin leave *that* in the good Lord's hands!"

"I'd have been in a nice fix if I'd have left it in his hands all these years," said Amanda Thomas, with a look so skeptical and full of accusation against something seen only in her mind's eye, that her mother's pink color faded and left her pretty cheeks white. "That's where our creeds differ, mother. I believe in not leaving things to chance."

"I said leavin' 'em to the Lord," the old lady amended.

"It's the same thing," said Amanda, recklessly.

"Oh, Mandy, Mandy, it gives me a cold chill fur to hear you talk so."

"I won't talk so, then. Heaven knows I don't want to worry you any more than can be helped. But let's look at this thing reasonably. First, about Nellie. The child must and shall have a chance for a happy, peaceful life. She mustn't be tyrannized over, and hampered, and kept down; she ought to be well educated and have a fair chance in the world. And for that she must be away from here—and away from her father."

"Why, I sh'd think her pa wuz the ve'y one to help her to an eddication. Vivian's smart enough, an' ain't he been to college?"

"Yes, he's been to college, and he can sing sweetly, the girls say, and play the flute, and read Horace's odes in the original, and dance better than any other man in the county," said Amanda, despairingly. "But does all that make him a good father, or fit him to supervise Nellie's education?"

"I dunno what more you kin want, dear," answered her perplexed parent.

"Well! There are certain moral qualities. We needn't go into it. To come to myself. I'm a young woman yet, mother, only twenty-eight. Is my whole life to be ruined for this one mistake, made when I was a mere child, and ignorant of the world as a baby?"

"You forgit. A woman's life's sp'iled if she leaves her husband. Thar ain't no sech thing as takin' a fresh start with a livin' husband in the background o' your life. He'd be croppin' up yar an' thar an' ev'ywhar, wors'n a field o' nettles. Do you reckon Vivian's goin' to lose sight o' you? And, moreover, Mandy, if you sh'd go to the dretful pass o' seekin' a divorce, wouldn't the law give him the child?"

Amanda started, and bent her black brows fiercely. This was the first argument her mother had used that she was unable to answer.

"Of course the laws are all in favor of the men. Yes, they would give my innocent darling—my baby that is part of my own flesh and blood, that I've nourished at my breast, that I've suffered for and lived for these nine years—to a besotted, selfish, immoral man who would never fulfill one duty toward her, and who doesn't care for her the worth of his little finger. The only thing is that I don't believe he'd want her."

Mrs. Powell shook her head. "You can't depend on that. Men always want the last thing you might s'pose'd be any use to 'em. They want their own way, you see."

"Then the only thing I can do is to keep it a secret where I go. There are places enough."

"An' how'd ye git along, poor child? How'd ye do cooped up'n some mean leetle place without no run fur Nellie, an' without horses, nor anybody to do a han's turn fur ye? And, dearie, you know, even though I'd ruther you'd stay hyar by yo' duty, wharever you go my lov'd foller you, an' I'd always do all in my power. But money's the one thing we don't hev. If you're somewhar 't you hev to put yo' han' in yo' pocket fur ev'y livin' thing, even to an egg, or a slip o' parsley, how 'pon 'arth'll you do?"

"I mean to work, dear mother. I can sew, and embroider, and do lots of things," said Amanda, spreading her white hands and looking at them meditatively; not dreaming, poor, thing, of the thousands and thousands of other defter and more experienced hands stretched forth in the localities she thought abounding in lucrative work, for the merest shadow of employment, and the paltriest sort of recompense.

In Mrs. Powell's imagination Amanda was a rarely talented and capable woman, able to perform wonders, yet her shrewd common sense suggested difficulties that Amanda could not but recognize when they were pointed out, averse as she was to consider any details made against her plan.

They talked over the matter from every point of view, the elder woman reiterating the same arguments she had used already, and the younger one meeting them continually with that free, liberal interpretation of the gospel of individuality which youth has always flourished in the face of age and conservatism.

Mrs. Powell held out as stanchly as only a good, bigoted Christian woman, devoutly living up to the public opinion of an insular, mountain village, can hold out against modern heresies striking at the very foundation of her social system, and her religious beliefs. But Amanda had been for a very long time working herself up to her present resolution, and she stuck to her purpose with unflinching steadfastness, and had by supper-time succeeded in convincing her mother that she was in deadly earnest and not to be dissuaded. And after she had put Nellie into the great old-fashioned bed and tucked the coverlet about her soft, warm little throat, she only stayed by her long enough to be sure that the child was sound asleep, then kissing the curls floating out over the pillow, with a fervent affection such as no man had ever known from this woman with a genius for motherhood, she stole away softly, leaving the door ajar, and went back to the sitting-room to talk to her mother more definitely about the plans she had formed for the future.

But hardly had the two settled down before the fire when, with a rattle and a bang, very unlike her old-time timidity, Jane Thomas flung herself into the room.

"Sh—h!" said Amanda, as the heavy door slammed shut. "You'll wake Nellie!" She got up and set the door partly open again, then resumed her seat, pushing the chair away from the hearth to make room for her mother-in-law, but saying no word of welcome, for she felt that this visit was made with some special disciplinary intention toward herself.

If ever a woman's face and mien conveyed indignation and resentment of the splenetic sort, Mrs. Thomas' meager visage and thin figure manifested these sentiments as she fell into the chair drawn forward for her, and turned her watery-blue eyes upon her son's wife.

"Nellie!—to be shore!" she uttered in a spiteful whimper. "Pity but what yo'd hev a leetle consideration for other folks 'sides that child. Hyar yo've done pitched onter Vivian and attackted him with hammers an' druv him out'n his own house, an' made a scandal that'll ring through Fauquier County, and the saints above knows what it's all about. I thank the Lord I ain't got yo' disposition!"

"You've a great deal to be thankful for in the way of disposition," observed Amanda. She had closed her lips tightly, resolving to maintain absolute silence; but what woman can suppress the witty retort when her antagonist exposes a vulnerable point?

"Seems ter me I'd be a leetle mo' humble, consider'n' what yo've done. It'd become you ter be thankful 't yo' awful temper didn't do no mo' harm 'n it done. Not but what it done 'nuff an' mo'n I shu'd like ter hev 'pon my conscience."

"If you'd take a few of your son's sins upon your conscience it might give you something to do."

"Oh, I don't look fur nothin' but sass from you, 'Mandy Powell. Yo've a tongue the devil hisself 'd fly frum."

"If Vivian Thomas has run from it you must be right," answered Amanda.

Mrs. Thomas rocked back and forth till her chair creaked with a spiteful sound that seemed to her hearers to be an echo of her whining voice. She expatiated upon the deplorable effects of her daughter-in-law's fearful outbreak of the morning, and warned her that no man on earth was called on to put up with such tantrums, and that if she was locked up in the lunatic asylum it would be no more than she had a right to expect.

Amanda put a severe break upon her imperious spirit and said no more words in reply until at last Mrs. Thomas brought out her final taunt, that she had only run away for the purpose of getting Vivian to come after her and bring her back; and for this time she was mistaken. She would have to stay away a mighty long while if she waited for him to fetch her, and she'd be glad to creep home again by the time everybody cried shame upon her.

Then Amanda arose and stood before her adversary, tall and majestic, with her arms folded across her swelling chest, and her black brows bent in such a frown as made Jane Thomas' cowardly heart flutter, until she thought of the impossibility of a personal encounter with this woman, whom she would have given half her possessions to conquer and humiliate.

"I say to you here and now," said Amanda, using unconsciously an orotund quality of voice that, together with her pose, rendered her delivery so forceful that her words stamped themselves upon the memory of both her hearers: "I have left Vivian Thomas' roof forever. Spread the fact as fast as you please; gloat upon the scandal it will create in this gossiping little place, and tear my reputation to pieces as fast as you want to. No power under Heaven can make me look upon that man's face again, or pass a moment in his company!"

For a few seconds there was a hush in the air, as if a missile had been thrown, and an effect was looked for. People often experience this momentary apprehension when some peculiarly definite and emphatic stand has been taken by anyone; as if definiteness, in this changing world, was a crime to bring down punishment.

But effects rarely follow so swiftly as those that came upon the heels of Amanda's declaration. Hardly had her voice died away when her mother arose hastily, crying:

"Hark, what's that?"

There were sounds of dogs barking, voices exclaiming, and the quick, irregular gallop of a horse's feet coming up to the front porch. The three women stood looking at each other, when a wild figure with eyes starting out of its head, wool standing on end, and gown half torn from its back, burst into the room, and Admonia cried out in a hoarse voice:

"Mis' Mandy, Mis' Mandy! Fur de Lawd's sake, Mis' Mandy—Mr. Vivian done fell off'n he's horse inter Mowbry Gulch an' b'oke he's neck!"

III.

Mowbray Gulch was a danger-pit lying midway between Sampson's Tavern and Benvenew. The road narrowed after passing Bloomdale, and wound around the spur of the Blue Ridges known as Round Peak, in a manner only a native could have understood. Vivian had traversed the narrow bridle-path thousands of times without a thought of danger, galloping past at night in that spirit of confidence characteristic of a Virginia boy, said to be "born on horseback."

The accident must have occurred early in the evening, for a passer-by on his way home to supper found a hat and whip on the road near the edge of the Gulch, and looking down, discovered a man's form on the rocks, twenty feet below, lying perfectly motionless, with a white face upturned to the sky.

At least three hours had intervened between that and Admonia's alarm, and when the three women arrived in Jane Thomas' wagon (she had wept, and abused her daughter-in-law all the way) they had found many neighbors upon the scene, and the doctor bending over something stretched out on a mattress by the road-side.

"He is living," were the words they heard as they came up, and Mrs. Thomas broke out into wails of thankfulness, while Mrs. Powell breathed more quietly a prayer as grateful. Amanda said no word, but a deep sigh exhaled from her burdened chest, and she tried to draw nearer. A friendly hand held her back. Edgar Chamblin's blue eyes glimmered anxiously in the light of the lantern he was holding, and he said with kindly insistence:

"I wouldn't go nigh him jes' yet, Mis' Mandy. We're goin' ter tote him ovah t' cousin Evy Smith's. Her'n is the nighest house, an' Doctor Sowers says he must be taken ter the ve'y nighest place."

"Can't he be taken *home*?" wailed Vivian's mother. "I mean to *my* house whar he kin be taken cyar uv?" with a spiteful look at her daughter-in-law.

The doctor looked up anxiously. Vivian's closed lids had quivered for a second and a look of consciousness appeared, then faded away. With tender hands he was laid on the cot that now arrived and carried over the field to Miss Eva Smith's cottage, where the little bedroom off the parlor had been made ready for him, and the best bed was spread with every dainty piece of linen the spinster could draw from her treasured store.

So it was upon a lace-trimmed, hemstitched pillow-slip that the beautiful head of the injured man reposed, and over him was spread a silk quilt that had long been the pride of Miss Evy's maiden heart, and which she now brought forth with a solemn sense of consecration.

Miss Evy was a thin, fragile woman, with a figure that had once been willowy, but was now angular; blue eyes that once were like forget-me-nots, contrasting with tender, coral lips and baby blond hair; but tears shed in secret had washed the blue from her eyes and the peachy bloom from her oval cheeks, until only a faint reminiscence remained of the beauty which had captivated Vivian Thomas' boyish fancy. One of the peculiarities of Vivian's fortune was that the women he had wooed and forsaken remained faithful to him till death, cherishing no resentment and seeking no retaliation; but, instead, biding the time when by some act of service they could prove the strength of an affection that always had in it an element of maternal fondness.

Why some men whose paths through life are marked by the broken hearts of women should experience from those they injure the tenderness and leniency seldom or never accorded to better but rougher men is something only to be explained by the waywardness of feminine nature. The majority of women like to be martyred, but resent frank abuse. The weakly child of

the flock easily converts his mother into a slave, even though she perceives through the veil of feebleness the force of egotism. And in the same way the man of soft manners, winning voice, and insinuating tongue, may play the tyrant at his pleasure, and be admired and adored by women whose slavishness is a conscious concession to some imagined delicacy that appeals to their maternal instinct.

In the humble heart of Miss Evy her girlhood's hero had maintained his place, notwithstanding her conscientious efforts after Vivian's marriage to think of him as something entirely apart from her life. Thinking of him was a privilege she allowed herself under certain restrictions. She thought of him when she prayed, when she sang in the choir on Sunday and Wednesday nights, and when she worked in her flower-garden. Most of all then, for long ago he had been used to stop his horse and stand outside the low stone fence, with his arm through the bridle-rein, and talk with her in a playfully sentimental way that she had thought the prettiest sort of love-making. And so, to keep him out of her mind when she tended her spotted lilies and trained the purple wistaria, was as impossible as it would have been to avoid the connection between the sky and the gracious heaven lying beyond.

It was an innocent indulgence that did not infringe upon the rights of Vivian's wife, and did no harm to the gentle woman herself; for it kept alive her faith in human nature and trust in the compensations Providence has in store for those who have been denied their heart's desire in this world. And these are feelings that die out in most of us under the scourge of disappointment and leave something worse than heartache in their room.

There had been days when the loneliness of her self-chosen, single lot had been too hard to be borne, and sometimes then Miss Evy would steal to the window of her little spare front room, and peep guiltily through a slit in the blue shade to watch for a sight of Vivian riding past, and when the longed-for vision appeared, she would start back with her hand on her heart and a hot color in her delicate cheek, but he never saw her, nor ever dreamed of her observation. If he had he would have dismounted and chatted with her for a few minutes at the gate; for Vivian was ever tender toward the women who worshiped him, and he would have valued the eloquent if silent appreciation of this faithful heart, and taken comfort in the sympathy she would have expressed at least in looks; rumor having carried to her news of scenes at Benvenew, little to Amanda's credit.

As she stood back behind the door, and watched from this little distance hands that had a better right than her own minister to the man she loved, a pang of jealousy sent its jarring quiver through all her nerves; but the next instant it was succeeded by the thankful feeling that it was hers to extend hospitality, to furnish the means of comfort, and mayhap, her privilege, while others rested, to help nurse him back to health.

There was something for everyone to do that night, for the country doctor worked with the bustle that grows out of the necessity of finding occupation for the officious onlookers who must not be offended. Something for everybody excepting Jane Thomas, whose hysterical condition made her such a nuisance that even Dr. Sowers could think of no more diplomatic suggestion than that she should go somewhere and lie down—and take some warm water and brandy.

"And me a Blue Ribboner!" she moaned resentfully.

Amanda was a born nurse; self-restrained, level-headed, tender and strong, she won golden laurels in the doctor's opinion as she quietly took her place at his side, and intelligently carried out his wishes without comment or question. Her mother went home at nine o'clock to take care of little Nellie, the doctor having stated his opinion that although there was concussion of the brain, Vivian's hurt would not necessarily prove fatal. The state of coma might be followed by brain fever, but with good nursing his fine constitution would bring him through.

"It's sartenly a special Providence," thought Mrs. Powell, when Amanda told her that she should stay at the cottage. "Don't you take a mite o' fear 'bout Nellie; you know she'd stay with me contented fur any length o' time," she said, as she left.

"But you'll bring her over to see me for a few minutes when you come to-morrow," Amanda urged, and her mother answered: "Uv coas, honey, we'll come over right 'arly. Don't you get wore out now; you and Miss Evy take tu'ns settin' up."

It had required considerable effort to induce Mrs. Thomas to see things in the light of her uselessness, and it was the doctor himself who finally carried her off and left the house to Miss Evy and Amanda. It was late when they found themselves alone in the little room where lay the still form of the man who was dearer than her heart's best blood to the one woman, and to the other—who shall say whether dear, or no?

Amanda had never been in love with the all-conquering hero of Fauquier County. At eighteen she had been in love with love; and Vivian was nearer the embodiment of her ideal than any other whom she knew. The highest powers of our nature remain latent in most of us for lack of opportunity to develop. It may be a talent, it may be a virtue that stays in the germ throughout all the ups and downs of our career, and that we pass on to our children to come out in them as practical capacity.

Although Amanda had in her nature a rare power of wifely devotion, it was of the royal order; it could not stoop, and so it died away. And in its stead had grown to mighty proportions the mother-love that extends in women of a high type beyond the instinctive care of her own young, to an all-embracing tenderness toward feeble creatures of every degree. The little ones, the helpless, the sick appealed to this strong, self-poised woman in a way that called out every

capacity for self-sacrifice that lay in her, and she would have wrestled with death and all the evil powers to save from harm anything which confided itself to her protection.

The vigorous, healthy Vivian, contemptuously setting at naught her standards of duty, and wounding her dignity in a hundred ways, was so repulsive to her moral sense that she was ready to fly from him as from a pestilence. But Vivian cast down from his height of graceful insolence and dependent upon her kind offices, had claims before which every critical faculty bowed itself. All she thought of now was how to help him.

"Do you think he'll come to in his right mind?" asked Miss Evy in a low murmur, after half an hour had passed in silence. She could not stand it any longer. She felt as if she must say something. That handsome, calm woman seated at the head of the bed awed her, and at the same time irritated her. In some vague way she felt that Amanda was to blame for Vivian's accident. Like Mrs. Thomas she felt that if the wife had fallen into spasms of self-reproach it would have been more fitting than this display of courage and energy. Yet she was glad, too, for his sake that there was some one at hand able to "take holt and do whatever wuz needed."

Amanda looked over at the gentle spinster pleasantly, but replied only by a faint shake of the head. Her watch lay open upon the stand beside a glass of medicine, covered with a hymn book. Upon the book lay a thin silver spoon marked with the initials of Miss Evy's grandmother. It was one of six, and Miss Evy only used them upon rare occasions.

Amanda still wore her black silk, and over it she had tied one of her hostess' white aprons, made of fine nainsook and trimmed with a deep border of home-made lace. Aprons are the least neutral of garments, for they have the effect of bringing into view certain values in their wearer. By this touchstone some women are instantly proclaimed dowdies; others approved as domestic, and still others marked out as queens or fairies masquerading. The natural servant wears her apron smartly; the born chatelaine with an inimitable grace. Upon Amanda's magnificent figure the garment assumed the air of the imperial purple, and Miss Evy, watching her meekly, acknowledged in her successful rival some rare quality which she could not name, but which seemed to account for and justify the ascendancy she was said to exercise over all her family.

At midnight Vivian opened his eyes. "Whoa, Sultan!" he uttered in feeble tones, and made a motion with his hand as if he pulled upon the reins. Miss Evy started, but Amanda laid her finger on her lips and bending over him, said softly:

"Drink this, Vivian," putting a glass to his lips. He drank all she gave him eagerly, then his head fell back upon the pillow, and he slept till dawn.

Miss Evy was persuaded to retire toward morning. She would have preferred to sit there and watch, but she could not say so, and she was compelled to steal away upstairs, and leave Vivian to his wife, who kept unwinking vigil until the first glimmer of light shot through the closed blinds of the east window. Then she arose and put out the lamp, and noiselessly raising the window let the pure, fresh mountain air into the little room. During her watchful night her mind had been entirely occupied with Vivian's condition; she had not thought of herself. But now, as the sun touched the tip of Round Peak and crept downward till the whole valley was illumined with the light of a perfect October day, she became conscious, with a thrill of pain, of that feeling of personal life and identity which is so strong and vivid when, in some beautiful spot isolated from the whirl of cities, we open our eyes upon a new day.

There is no other joy so fine and none so fleeting, perhaps, as this stirring of our individual energies by the breath of that mighty living force that recreates us each morning after the apathy of night. At this instant of recognition the day belongs to us and the air resounds with a pæan of wonderful hopes and promises, as if our single personality were the only concern of nature. Soon the responsibilities of our relations to others crowd out this sense of individual life and the momentary Sabbath-peace of the soul is broken up by the work-a-day hum of jarring machinery. So, swift upon the exaltation aroused in Amanda by the influence of an unshared sunrise, came the disappointing sense of check and defeat to her own purposes and plans, which had been wrought within the last few hours. None of the reasons that led to her decision to go away and begin a new life remote from these surroundings had altered. Fauquier County was still limited, narrow, and hostile to Nellie's mental development; Benvenew was still poverty-stricken, and no new resources suggested themselves. And Vivian was still the old Vivian, with all his vices upon his head, and likely with the first hour of returning health to repel and disgust her, just as he had been doing all along. Every condition she had dwelt upon as urgent cause of flight was unchanged; and yet, with lightning swiftness was accomplished that resolution, paralleled in the experience of every one of us, by which the one whose offenses had banished him from her consideration, was made through sudden appeal to pity, the object of first importance to her.

As Amanda turned from the window and approached the bed where Vivian was now opening eyes in which the light of reason was absent, she turned her back upon all the rosy hopes that had been dwelling in her imagination, and took up the burden of a hard and painful duty. For she was aware through the prophetic insight that flashes through our acts into the region of remote consequences, that out of the immediate obligation of nursing her husband back to health and strength, would grow ties that would cramp and fetter all her future. Her only defense against whatever his will might impose upon her had been in her feeling of antagonism. For, strong and self-poised as she was, she had the woman's weak-point of an intense susceptibility, and if she had achieved the wish to be hard as nails, the first touch from a beseeching hand would inevitably break through the crust and betray the lurking softness beneath.

It was with a quiver of fright that she realized, as she raised Vivian's head upon her arm and felt

him weakly recline against it, that the barriers would soon be broken down between them, and that there might enter into her heart, destitute of respect and esteem that pitiful substitute for true affection, a self-immolating tenderness that leads judgment into abysses where poisonous plants grow, exhaling odors detrimental to sanity and health. The flash of fear came and went, and no one, save her mother, ever knew what Amanda's concession meant to her, and what it involved.

Miss Evy had passed a sleepless night, and at six o'clock she crept softly down to the door of Vivian's bedroom and stood for a moment before she knocked, listening for sounds that she dreaded to hear, the sound of incoherent murmuring, in femininely sweet tones.

"Come in," Amanda called, and she entered, with a scared, anxious face and timid step.

"He's out of his mind, ain't he?" she queried pitifully, and Amanda made an assenting movement of the head.

Vivian's delirium was not violent at first, and he submitted to requirements with a gentleness that was like his ordinary courtesy. But he recognized no one for many days, showing a preference, however, for Amanda and her mother, over all the others who came in to offer their services. His wife seemed to have a peculiarly soothing effect upon him, and with another variation from his attitude when in health, he was impatient and fretful whenever his mother appeared. Mrs. Thomas took this hard, and in the parlor of the cottage, where she sat most of the time seeing callers, she bewailed the ingratitude of her son, and whispered dark sayings against Amanda —"who wuz tryin' now to throw dust in people's eyes by makin' out she was dreadful fond o' him, when if the truth wuz told—"

It seemed as if everybody within ten miles around came with offers of help and utterances of sympathy; the last delivered only to Mrs. Thomas and Miss Evy, for few persons saw Amanda. For ten days she watched by Vivian's bedside with a devotion that completely revolutionized all Miss Evy's ideas of her, and astonished even her mother. And when, from the very jaws of death, Vivian came slowly back to life, he had become to her like a dear child, whom it was her duty to shield and minister to, and treat with a tenderness unmingled with criticism. Whether this mental attitude would continue was a question. Mrs. Powell held counsel about it with herself, and made it a subject of prayer: "That Mandy would go on bein' forgivin' an' lovin' an' that all'd go well betwixt her an' her husband."

The exquisite season of Indian Summer, the fifth season of the year in the mountain region of Virginia, set in early, and one morning when the air was so soft that it brought to the surface all the gentle, kindly impulses of hearts that stiffen and congeal under the rough touch of frost, Amanda found herself curiously moved as she stepped lightly about Vivian's room, waiting for him to awake.

It often happens that a mental preparation unconsciously takes place in us for events about to happen. A letter is on its way to us, and we think of the writer, sometimes expressing a solicitude the letter's contents justify. A friend visits us and we meet him with the remark that we were at that moment longing for his presence. Some catastrophe takes place that we were anticipating, and if a pleasure is in the air its approach is heralded by a peculiar elation and excitement that our occupations cannot account for.

These are more tangible things, and easier to understand than the subtle atmospheric changes that pass along from heart to heart. How can we explain the power affection has to send its prophet before to prepare for its coming? In some unexpected hour a certain something tugs at our heart-strings and tunes them up so that when the right hand is extended a melody is evoked that we did not think of or intend.

Amanda was a practical woman, not an emotional one, but she was not therefore any the less alive to fine shades of feeling. She dusted the bedroom with a piece of dampened cheese-cloth, set carefully upon the stand the slender necked Bohemian vase of flowers that were Miss Evy's morning tribute, and laid out clean towels beside the basin of fresh water upon the chair by the bed, as methodically as usual. Yet she was conscious of being in a state of expectancy, as if she stood upon the eve of something.

Vivian opened his eyes, larger and clearer for his three weeks' illness, and looked in her face with that solemn expression that accompanies the return of consciousness after the delirium of fever, and she trembled under the rush of tenderness that his gaze awakened.

"Amanda!" he said feebly, "you in here! Aren't you up early?"

"Not so very early, dear," she responded, very gently. "It's you who have slept late."

"Strange I don't feel more like getting up," he remarked. Then his gaze wandered over the room, and came back in perplexity to her face.

"Are you the genii?" he asked with a little smile.

"Am I what?" She thought his wits were wandering again.

"The genii. I must be Prince Camaralzaman. I went to sleep in my own room last night, and wake up in this, which I vow I never saw before."

"You were indeed brought here, but not from your own room. You have been here three weeks, Vivian. You fell from your horse into Mowbray Gulch and hurt your head, and you have had brain fever."

She spoke slowly, and he followed her words attentively, closing his eyes when she was through,

and lying perfectly quiet for a minute. Then he said:

"Where is 'here?'"

"We are at Miss Evy Smith's. Her house was the nearest place, you know, and you had to be brought here."

"Evy Smith's!" he repeated, with a strange little laugh. "That's singular." After an interval, he added:

"Has she been nursing me?"

"She helped. She has been very, very kind. A sister could not have done more."

"She was always sweet and obliging," he observed. "But—Amanda, come sit down on the bed, won't you? My voice seems mighty weak, somehow."

"I mustn't let you talk," Amanda said. She sat down on the edge of the bed, and as she did so a flush settled upon her firm cheek and stayed there. Not for three years had she been so close to him. Perhaps he remembered, too. What he said was:

"So it is you who have been taking care of me? It was good of you, Amanda. I think you must have grown rather fond of me while I've been at your mercy here."

That unerring tact of his suggested exactly the right thing to say. Not a word to jar the delicate springs of feeling that had been set at work in her, and not a sign that he meant to take advantage of her changed attitude.

He was too weak to think such matters out. He merely obeyed the keen instinct that belongs to natures like his, in emphasizing by this casual allusion the leniency and indulgence she must naturally feel toward him under the circumstances.

Some people have the faculty of making us feel grateful to them for permitting us to serve them. Vivian had it. Amanda was so delighted to see him recovering that she almost felt like thanking him for it. Perhaps one reason for this humility was that she had not been free throughout his illness from the sting of self-reproach. Outwardly she had ignored Jane Thomas' bitter charge that her violent conduct had indirectly caused Vivian's accident. But in secret her conscience had taken her to task again and again for her severity toward him. If it had led to this she felt that blame should rightly fall upon her.

No faculty of our nature brings to us keener suffering than our sense of justice. Suppressed, it cries out continually; exercised, it leads to acts too positive to be endured in retrospect; and this relenting of a strong nature, this going back upon itself and its principles, is a common occurrence in daily life.

Great risk attends such changes of mental attitude, for character is built upon a belief in the correctness of our own judgment. If we ever come to a point where it appears probable that everything we have held to and believed in is a mistake, God help us!

Now, the strong point in Amanda's character was her unflinching uprightness. She had always dared tell the truth to herself, using no palliations. And in this way she felt certain of her ground. But now, for the first time, the demon of self-distrust had entered into her mind, and all her ideas and opinions became affected by it.

If she had been to blame in her attitude toward Vivian, how far was she to blame? In what respect was she right? Poor Amanda was now in a condition where Jane Thomas' stinging remarks could cause her discomfort. Strangely enough, her greatest consolation was in the attachment Miss Evy had formed for her.

"I don't know how I could ever have let myself think of you as I used to think, Mrs. Thomas," the gentle spinster had said once, when they were upon confidential terms. "I'm shore you're anything but unfeeling."

"Am I called that?" Amanda asked, not without a pang. She was no longer above caring what people said about her.

"Well, you know some people must have something to say about everybody," Miss Evy said, apologetically. "But since I know you, why, I think you're real good; even good enough for Mr. Thomas."

Amanda looked at her when she said that. Something occurred to her that she had heard a long time ago and forgotten.

"Thank you," she said, quite gently, and turned away.

Miss Evy's hospitality had not been worn out by the severe test made of it. As a convalescent Vivian had been endearing to the last degree. It was congenial to him to be waited upon, and the one severe and immitigable suffering incidental to his illness (and for which he secretly promised himself royal amends) was almost made up for by the knowledge that he had at last discovered Amanda's weak point, and could hereafter, at least in a measure, hold his own. Vivian did not put it just this way to himself. He had as great a genius for embroidering facts as Amanda had for truth. What he said was that he was glad to find that his wife was fond of him, after all. And in a beautiful spirit he forgave her, and took her to his heart.

This is what Fauquier County understood. But it did not forgive Amanda.

A year later the county might have forgiven her, if she had borne the misfortune that came to her more meekly. But revolutions of character are seldom permanent, and Amanda, after

compromising with her own judgment because it found her consistently severe, entered into that debatable territory where we are swayed alternately by a desire to be gentle and an impulse to be sharp.

"I don't mean to reproach ye, honey," her mother said, one day when Amanda was spending the day with her; "but somehow, yo' temper ain't so even as it used to be. You wuz always high—wantin' things yo' own way. It ain't so much that now. But you's mo' easy upset than you used to be."

Amanda turned her dark eyes upon her mother. They were beautiful still. But that crisis of a woman's life when her beauty begins to fade had come to her early.

Upon her lap lay a three months' old baby. It had a look of vigor, and a certain weird beauty about its little face; but not for an instant during her almost passionate care of it had Amanda been able to forget something that the flowing robes concealed from casual glances. The child was hopelessly deformed.

"Yes, dearie, I know," said Mrs. Powell, her gaze following Amanda's as it was bent upon the sleeping infant. "I know it's a trial. And I'm ashamed I said anything. Nobody need t' wonder at yo' bein' a mite out o' gear. But trust the good Laud, Mandy, and He'll bring everything out right, yit."

"Will He straighten baby's back, do you think, mother? Or do you mean that He will make things right by letting it die?"

Mrs. Powell's color arose, and she did not venture to reply. Could any one but a mother wish the child to live?

"He will not die," said Amanda, laying her hand softly on the baby's thick golden hair. There was intense feeling in the low tone, but with her next words her voice took on a hard quality that Mrs. Powell had learned to associate with acute distress. "He will live," she cried, but not loudly; "live to reproach his father for a sin so dark that no one can name it. Aye, we must hush it up. This is a 'visitation of Providence,' in the opinion of our good friends. Well, I don't call it that. The truth is that it's a visitation of *liquor*, of——"

"Hush, hush, Mandy!"

"Excuse my lack of delicacy," said Amanda, with biting scorn. Not scorn of her mother, but of the idea of the county as reflected in her mother. She leaned back and drew a fleecy white shawl carefully over the baby's shoulders, then resumed sadly:

"I could stand it better, if I was free from blame in my own eyes. I tell you, mother, the only real hell is in knowing you're wrong, and feeling, to the bottom of your heart that you've brought suffering upon others by being wrong."

"My dear child," quavered good Mrs. Powell, "you's morbid. Yo' notion ain't the right notion at all. How could you ahelped the pore child's bein' so?"

"By standing to my colors. By obeying my own conscience, no matter what the world said."

"Mandy, yo' own sense must tell you't you couldn't ahelped it, noway. Even if you'd kept on thinkin' 's you done. It wuz took out'n yo' hands. You done yo' duty in stayin' by Vivian when he wuz laid low, an' nobody kin do mo'n their duty."

"It was my duty to nurse him. And after that—after he was *well*, I should have—gone."

"Now, I reely thought you got fond o' Vivian, an' I wuz thankin' the Laud for it."

"Oh, women are mostly fools," answered Amanda, sweepingly. "But don't thank the Lord for it, mother. The fruits of folly are more bitter than the fruits of wilful sins, I think."

"Mandy," said Mrs. Powell, rising in all the might of her sensible, hearty, well-balanced nature; "it won't do to be furever dwellin' 'pon what we've failed to do, an' what we ought to adone. This world ain't heaven, and we's right to rejoice with tremblin'; but there's a sayin' I want to recommend to yo' pore, worn heart: 'Again I say unto ye, rejoice.' That's it, honey. Stop worryin' an' frettin' an' leave things you can't alter if you wuz to kill yo'self tryin'.

"An' now I'm a-goin' to hev Liza make a co'n pudden' an' whip up cream fur the peaches, an' you must please me by puttin' away everything else an' givin' yo' mind to enjoyin' a right good dinner. Thar's miseries in the world, to be shore, but thar's comfort too, an' to my thinkin' it's mighty good common sense to take our fill o' creature comforts as we go along, fur we's only got a certain length o' time to stay 'pon this 'arth, an' we might as well make the best on it."

"There are some things that have no best side," said Amanda; but she said it rather faintly. After all, there was logic in what her mother expressed. She knew that nothing in the world now could alter her opinion of Vivian; nothing should ever again alter her attitude toward him. But was there any comfort or happiness to be got out of life still?

Mrs. Powell had left the room, after pressing a kiss upon her daughter's cheek, and another upon the hair of the sleeping baby.

Through the window came the sound of Nellie's voice, exclaiming to her little colored playmates in vivacious accents: "There's papa coming! Grandma said he was coming to dinner;" and in another moment she skipped into the room with her hand in that of the fine-looking man who appeared before his wife hat in hand, wearing a gentle, deprecating smile.

Amanda arose quickly, pressing her baby to her breast, and stood looking at him with fire in her

eyes. Am I never to be safe from your intrusion? her look said. But her lips were mute, and with a lately learned self-control she remained silent, while he filled in the embarrassing moment with the graceful, fluent phrases ever at his command.

"What a magnificent woman she is," thought Vivian, as he threw himself into a chair, and began to entertain little Nellie with some funny anecdote, intensely conscious all the while of the stately, stern presence that ignored him.

Suddenly her gown brushed his knees as she passed him on her way to the door, and he glanced up rather uneasily.

"I'm only going to lay baby on the bed," she said in a low tone, not without the trace of contempt she could never nowadays keep out of her voice when speaking to him. But in the other room, while she was bending over her little one, there came to her one of those humorous suggestions that visit us now and then, to lighten our periods of depression.

"Man is, after all, only a kind of stomach, and friendship but an eating together." The sentence was from Carlyle, perhaps; anyway, it was applicable to the situation. What was the use of making such a serious affair out of living?

"Oh, yes, it is easy enough to be upon friendly terms 'if friendship is but an eating together,'" Amanda said to herself, grimly.

Half an hour later Mrs. Powell, sitting, flushed and anxious at the head of her hospitable table, rejoiced at the amenities that passed between her two guests, and whispered to her own heart that everything was coming out right, in the end. And to this determined optimism Amanda, who interpreted her mother's beaming looks perfectly, made no sign of dissent. But Vivian, even with his facile acceptance of all things in his favor, could not help but realize to-day, very strongly, that Amanda would never be to him, so long as she lived, anything but an icicle. With her temper, it might have been worse than that.

PETER WEAVER. [2]

I.

Sneaking Creek Church had an unusually full attendance on the Sunday morning that saw Miles Armstrong's first wrestle with his Satanic majesty, in the interests of that congregation.

He was a well-grown boy of twenty, or so, with the look of an eager colt scenting its first honors in the wind, and determined to strain every nerve to come in ahead at the finish. The bright, brown eye, large and deep, turning here and there with a half-timid, half-bold gaze, the quivering nostril and tossing chestnut mane over his long head gave him a likeness to a high-bred horse, scarcely broken yet, and destined to kick the traces somewhat before settling down to a steady pace.

The accommodations offered by the Second Baptist Church to its preachers were not luxurious. A straight-backed cane chair, and a small square table holding a bible and a pitcher of water were the creature comforts that stole gently upon the senses of young Armstrong after his ten-mile gallop over Fauquier County roads that morning.

Nothing cared he for creature comforts. Nothing either, for the fact that the congregation facing him was composed of Fauquier County's choicest and best in the line of hereditary sinners; clothed in fine raiment and conscious of waiting carriages and servants outside, and of choice viands upon solid silver dishes at the end of their journey homeward after they had listened to the sermon. To him all these personages, in rustling silks and fine broadcloth, all these Haywoods, and Gordons, and Dudleys were so many sick souls, needing the cordial of the true gospel; so many criminally blind beings with feet turned toward destruction, careless of the light and life they might have by an effort that, to him, in his young zeal, seemed so simple and slight; to them, perhaps, involving sacrifices beyond his experience and power to imagine.

Immediately in front of the platform stood the organ, and seated bolt upright before this was Miss Lavinia Powell, in a green silk waist with skin-tight sleeves that prevented her raising her arms to her head to twist up the wisp of gray hair straggling from her door-knob *coiffeur*, and which consequently held the uneasy attention of a nervous woman in her rear all church time. Had the hair belonged to anybody else than Miss Lavinia Powell, the neighbor would have ventured to reach over and adjust it. But no one ever performed familiar offices for Miss Powell. She was the quintessence of spinsterhood, and her weapons of defense were two gray eyes like a ferret's; of offense—a tongue unparalleled for point.

Two-thirds of the people were wondering what Miss Lavinia thought of the new preacher. He was not yet permanently engaged. Underneath all his concentrated purpose to utter telling truths this morning, lurked the consciousness that he was on probation. He felt, even though it was impossible that he could have heard the whisper that was running around the church while he gave out the first hymn. It began in the pew occupied by a couple of girls who were visiting old Mrs. Powell, who sat with her sweet, serene face turned toward the young preacher with a look of beautifully blended respect and benevolence. She heard none of the gossip carried on by her nieces.

"Is he ordained?"

"No, indeed. Not a minister at all yet."

"He's experienced sanctification, though."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, but he fell from grace, they say. Perhaps that's why he looks so melancholy."

"Do you think he looks melancholy? To me he just looks earnest. He's got splendid eyes, but they're awfully deep. I'd be proud of a man with eyes like that, wouldn't you?"

A smothered giggle, and a murmur to a friend in the next pew.

"Do you believe in sanctification? The preacher's experienced it."

Nellie Thomas heard the last remark, and from that moment her reverential gaze was fixed upon the thin, earnest face of the youthful preacher. Her heart bowed before the spiritual power abiding in him. She received the sermon as a divine message, humbly responsive to the persuasive words that sought to arouse a conviction of sin in all hearers.

"We are all of us in the mire of sin," uttered the clear young voice in solemn accents. "Every one of us should take shame to himself for his sins. You that wear elegant clothes and live in great houses are no better than the beggar—the tramp—that goes from one back door to another—in the matter of sin. The back door of the Father's house is the door we'll have to go to when we want to enter into heaven. If you are proud and lofty-minded, and think yourself good enough to be admitted at the front door it is all the more certain that you'll be turned away and made to go around to the back entrance, and made to wait there knocking a long time before you are let in. And good enough for you, too. Are any one of us fit to enter into the presence of the Lord? If any one of us thinks so he ought to take shame to himself for the notion. If I had such a false notion in my own head I'd take shame to myself for it."

The sermon went on, the emphatic voice falling at the end of every sentence as if the speaker had the intent to drive home his argument by verbal knocks. The respectable audience was browbeaten and held up to ridicule for its pretensions to virtue; it was proved conclusively that not a hope of salvation could be reasonably cherished by a single person present. Proved to the general mind. A few persons remained in doubt, and one—a man seated with folded arms in the middle of the church—continued utterly skeptical. He had attended closely to the sermon, his broad, ruddy face expressing throughout a kindly sympathy with the preacher, curiously mingled with concern. Now and then he had allowed a great sigh to escape him, and once he moved restlessly as if impelled to utter a protest. But he mastered the impulse and kept quiet until the final word was said, and the preacher in an agitated voice gave out the last hymn. All the hymns had been mournful. This was brighter. Perhaps the congregation embraced the opportunity for a change of mood, for the hymn swelled out with unwonted vigor, nearly every one falling in with the second stanza.

A powerful bass voice projected itself from the lungs of the good-humored-looking skeptic. Throwing back his head he roared forth a melodious bellow that drowned all other individual accents—save one. Nellie Thomas' bird-like tones thrilled their roundelay of worship with the silvery clearness of the skylark. With the freshness and innocence of some lark reared on the top bough of a giant tree, high above the strife and guilt of the world. The throb of feeling in the tones came from the same source that a child's emotions of worship come from; an awed sense of personal inferiority to some element of perfection dwelling somewhere in the universe, and approached on timid wings of faith. Unconscious of self, her sweet voice brightened and strengthened until the mass of sound outside seemed but a great accompaniment, the mighty single bass bearing her up as if it held her aloft in its arms.

This was what Peter Weaver came to church for. Singing devotional songs with little Nellie was the crown and cap-sheaf of the week's silent, unrecognized worship that was carried on with the generous abandonment of a mind seeking no reward beyond the privilege of devoting itself to its cherished object. The simple, brave soul lodged in Peter's huge frame joyed in surrounding the young girl with a protecting fondness that was like an invisible shield interposed between her and harm. He had never cared for any other girl, and he had cared for her ever since she—a radiant maid of six years in a pink lawn frock and white sun-bonnet—entered the old school-house door one morning twelve years before, and transformed the loutish boy puzzling over sums, into a poet and a knight-errant, bound forever to her service. During all these years that he had carried her school-books, gathered wild-flowers for her from dangerous mountain crevasses, and catered to her gentle whims in every way a man might, who bore her continually in his heart and studied how best to give her pleasure, Peter had never broken in upon this friendship by a word of the sentiment of which his poet-soul was full. Nellie, called by her admirers the beauty of Virginia, was to him the living embodiment of the sweetbriar rose, too delicate, too sensitive to be plucked and worn, even by one worthy of that distinction. Himself, he thought scarce worthy

to tie her little shoe.

And yet, except in contrast with this Dresden china creature, with her skin of milk and roses, her golden brown eyes so soft and shy, and her cloud of sunny curls, fine as floss, the modest farmer-poet, tied by circumstances to homely tasks, was not a man to be despised. His height, which was six feet two inches, was sustained by good breadth of shoulder and shapeliness of limb. His round head, covered with short, crisp, black locks, was well set, and his pleasant eyes, of an opaque blue like the hue of old Dutch pottery, looked out at you with a frank and honest expression. There was too much color in his cheek, but it was a clear, bright red, showing healthy blood beneath, as free from venom as his nature. He was now thirty-two years old, and his philosophical temperament, not wanting in capacity for deep thinking, made his years set lightly upon him. He was still rather a great boy than a mature man, in the opinion of most people, and perhaps of all the men and women in Fauquier County who knew and liked Peter Weaver, but one person recognized and appreciated the sound, sane mind, the capacity for heroic action that lay beneath his eccentricities and commonplace, almost awkward bearing. This friend was Amanda Thomas, the widowed mistress of Benvenew, called Mistress Amanda, to distinguish her from old widow Thomas, her mother-in-law.

Mistress Amanda's strong character rather than any external advantages had made her an important personage in the county. Her kinsfolk, the Powells, were impoverished, and her husband, the bright particular star of the sporting set, had left her an affectionate legacy of debts, together with an invalid child whose malady set him apart from the working world and enshrined him in his mother's heart as something to be tenderly cherished at any cost to herself or others. This boy was never seen out of his home, and people whispered dark stories of his strange and dangerous moods, in which no one could do anything with him save Peter Weaver.

No wonder, then, that Peter Weaver, whose oddities were not upheld by an ancient Virginia family name, was, nevertheless, welcomed as a favorite guest at Benvenew, where many a proud youngster hung about, thinking himself rewarded for hours of patient homage to the stately mistress, by a glimpse of shy Nellie. He and Mistress Amanda had come to that complete understanding when a glance interchanged means a whole volume of explanation. It was natural for this glance to be interchanged when they differed from prevailing opinions.

Therefore, it was this great lady's gaze that caught and held the doubtful look that Peter threw toward the preacher while the final argument was being made as to the absolute necessity for all of them to be bowed down in humiliation over their sins. Some rapid question and answer seemed to pass between the two that left Peter satisfied. He threw himself into the singing with more than common zeal, and when the moment came for a general relaxing from the stiffness of sermon-tide he walked out of his pew and up toward the front with a fixed purpose plainly written upon his face.

The youthful preacher had stepped down from the platform, and with the step he seemed to become another man. All the severity had vanished both from countenance and manner. Bright, kind, with a suppressed liveliness that became in the passage from heart to tongue cheerful and witty response to the pleasant clamor around him, he was like a man who had thrown off the weight of a heavy responsibility, and got back home again. But outward transformations are not to be taken as signs of deep internal changes. The man who laughs at your dinner table is the same man who refused to abate his stern judgment against your brother yesterday. He is not to be played with because he chooses to be humorous.

Peter Weaver was now standing beside the preacher. Mistress Amanda introduced them, and then turned so that her voluminous draperies made a barrier between the two men and the groups behind.

Young Armstrong's slim hand yielded a ready clasp to the mighty grip of the farmer-poet, who was anxious to express in this greeting more than usual good-will and interest. To balance what he had made up his mind it was his duty to say.

"I'm shore them that have a better right than me to express an opinion have thanked you for your sermon," said Peter. Always slow, his speech was now even ponderous, through anxiety to find appropriate words. Some of his thickness of his Dutch grandfather's tongue had descended to him, along with a short-sighted and earnest devotion to duty.

Armstrong answered by some light word, divining, by that super-sensitiveness of the young enthusiast, that a criticism was in the air. He looked up at the honest red face half a head higher than his own pale one, with a little curiosity. Peter's kindliness was so vast that he felt like a school-boy being forgiven by the professor of moral philosophy. A strange feeling for an expounder of the sacred word to experience in the presence of an apparently commonplace man.

"It was a good sermon," Peter went on; "that is, good because there was an honest purpose in it. But I don't agree with you, sir."

"Don't you?" retorted the preacher, smiling. He was not displeased that his first sermon contained stuff for argument.

"You see, your point of view is the point of view of a well-meaning but inexperienced young man. The world isn't near as bad as you made it out. There's a lot of good in human nature, and you'll find it out after awhile. I'm not afraid but what you'll find it out. But I'd be sorry to have you go on saying all these hard things that don't do any good. The only way to make people better is to take hold of some good thing about 'em and build on it. The world wants to be encouraged, not discouraged, sir!"

Armstrong felt now like a boy in the infant class being lectured by the Sabbath-school superintendent. His white teeth closed down over his lower lip. It galled him to have to look up to meet the eyes of this singular individual. But he rallied himself gallantly.

"Oh, I think very well of human nature," he said, in his strong, clear tones. "But you know we must not look at things from *that* standpoint. Anything short of perfection is rottenness in the eyes of God. And who among us is anywhere near perfect?"

"Still, the world wants encouraging," repeated Peter.

It was the idea he had intended to emphasize. He wished that this fine young man and himself were seated on the porch of his little green cottage, with a pipe apiece, and the afternoon before them to talk the matter out. But nearly everybody had left the church. Only half a dozen or so lingered to exchange a word with the preacher. Courteous Peter felt that he had been to the fore long enough. He extended his hand again, and gave Armstrong's a cordial grip.

"Your face contradicts your preaching," he concluded, backing away reluctantly. "You'll not be so severe when you let yourself be as much in sympathy with people as nature meant you to be!"

He bowed in his ungainly fashion, and walked on out. Armstrong's attention was immediately engaged by Mistress Amanda, who invited him to go home with her to dinner. She had listened with keen interest to the little exchange of views between the preacher and Peter. Her sympathy was with Peter. She had less toleration than he for the intolerance of others. There is no bigotry like the bigotry of an egoistic mind that thinks itself liberal; and Mistress Amanda felt an impatient contempt for the hard and fast Calvinism of the preacher. But personal preferences were not allowed to stand in the way of hospitality. The preacher was pressed to come to Benvenew and stay over until Monday, when he could ride back to Roselawn, the Armstrong dwelling, in the cool air of the morning.

Other persons had felt a sense of their hospitable duties. In fact, Armstrong was half engaged to go to the Gordons. He was turning his gracefully uttered thanks into a refusal, when Mistress Amanda moved toward the pew on her left to pick up her fan, and in so doing gave him a glimpse of Nellie, who had kept modestly behind her mother all this time. Mistress Amanda was tall; Nellie was short and slim; a sylph, a dainty fairy figure, over whose face played the luminous light of the moon as it is reflected in water. Her great soft eyes dwelt upon him with pathetic sympathy. The brightness of partizanship was there, too. A dove whose heart had been moved to side with an eagle engaged in combat with its fellow would probably have looked so. Nellie felt in her gentle bosom the stirring of vindictiveness against Peter's rough hands that had essayed to tear away the veil of sanctity which hung over the Lord's chosen vessel. Her ears still held the echo of those strong, stern words with which the preacher had rebuked sin. She mentally bowed before them. She, too, was a sinner. Oh, that he might lead her into the light!

Armstrong's eyes had found her while these thoughts were writing themselves upon her innocent face. In a second he caught a breath of that incense which filled the heart of the sweetbriar rose. Youth, enthusiasm, worshipful instinct met and united in the one swift glance. The words of excuse died away in Armstrong's throat.

"Let me present you to my daughter, Nellie," said Mistress Amanda carelessly; hearing only a murmured acceptance of her invitation. The young girl bent her head, the rose tint deepening in her cheeks. The preacher bowed as to a queen. His manner seemed a trifle exaggerated to Mistress Amanda, but her critical reading of his character was that he would probably over-do everything.

She moved toward the church door with him, her negligent glance taking in an impression of a rather good-looking, gentlemanly bigot. Such people were bores that good breeding obliged one to suffer patiently.

The church was perfectly quiet by the time they had reached the door, for they were the last. The crowd outside compelled them to stop for an instant in the vestibule.

Suddenly there came to the ears of all three the sound of a long, mournful howl, deeper than that any dog could make; heavy yet tremulous, as of something in great distress.

Peter had been stayed at the door—probably he had loitered to see Nellie—and he, too, heard the sound. His round eyes widened and his mouth opened in astonishment. Without dying away completely the painful bellow was renewed.

It seemed to come from the interior of the church.

II.

Some remarkable epithet rolled from the throat of Peter as he turned his head from side to side in a perplexed grasping after the location of this disturbance.

"It seems to come from the basement," observed Mistress Amanda. Peter strode to the basement door and took hold of the knob. It was locked; an occurrence so unusual as to arouse renewed surprise.

There was now a renewal of the sounds; a succession of low, long-drawn-out bellows, becoming more and more faint, and dying away completely while the four listeners stood looking at each other.

"May not some stray cow have got into the basement or cellar?" Armstrong suggested. It seemed to him that this big farmer showed more annoyance than the occasion demanded. Doubtless the

explanation would prove to be very simple. But he had not Peter's premises to argue from. Mistress Amanda and he both knew that if any animal was imprisoned beneath the church it must have been driven there, and shut in. Why should such a thing be done? There was but one explanation. Over a week ago a fine cow belonging to Peter had bodily disappeared, without leaving a trace to identify the thief. He had had a strong suspicion that the guilt lay at the door of his neighbor, Theodore Funkhausen, one of the richest men in the county, but commonly called "Skunk." Many a quarrel had taken place between "Skunk" and Peter Weaver, in which the generous nature had been the victim. The last one dated a fortnight back, and was about Peter's cattle. Soon afterward the cow had disappeared. Funkhausen's sour visage had worn a particularly malicious look lately, when he and Peter met, a look that one who knew him might interpret as pleasure in an accomplished act of vengeance.

"I'm going to get at the meaning of them noises," said Peter, with mighty emphasis, and he laid violent hands upon the door lock, which was weak and yielded without much resistance. "If it's as I think," he added calmly, "Thed Funkhausen's going to have one thrashing!" He descended the dark stairway, and they heard the crackle of matches as he went. Peter's pipe was not in his pocket when he attended church but his match-box was.

"What does he mean?" asked Armstrong of Mistress Amanda. The boyish liking for an adventure and the instinct of the southerner for a fight struggled in his breast with the severity of the preacher. He had a vague idea that Peter Weaver was one of the unregenerate persons toward whom one's sympathies must not be allowed to flow incautiously. On the other hand, Funkhausen's reputation had reached Roselawn. To the fact that he was a *carpet-bagger*, the true-blooded Virginian laid some contemptible acts which otherwise would have been unaccountable. But there were persons who found the rich man good enough in his way, and he had a certain following, was a school trustee, member of the county jockey-club, and sure of a seat among the judges at the annual fair. Consequently, when he took it into his head to quarrel the possibility of his antagonist being in the wrong naturally presented itself to fair minds.

Armstrong had never heard of Peter Weaver, although the farmer-poet was well known throughout the county, and now that he had made his acquaintance he was not greatly disposed to admire him. There was enough resentment in his mind for the elder man's plain speaking to make neutrality in a quarrel between him and Funkhausen appear a Christian duty. But he could not find fault with any circumstances that led to his standing in the little vestibule close to this wonderfully fair young girl, whose spiritual face wore the far-away look of one whose thoughts are set on things above this earth. Yet Nellie had her practical side. In some things she was more practical than her mother.

Mistress Amanda's commanding bearing, however, was a complete contrast to the young girl's modest, timid mien. Her fine, black eyes rested coldly upon the young man who had put his question to her in a judicial tone. She murmured a few words that were no reply, and busied herself in drawing up the folds of her black satin skirt to sweep out to her carriage. Peter was heard coming up the steps. He emerged with an apoplectic face, breathing hard.

"*Was* it?" asked Mistress Amanda.

He nodded. "Shorely, starved to death—the darned skunk!"

His friend gave him a look expressive of the wisdom of keeping cool and waiting for the right occasion. It was something like throwing water on a red-hot stove. But Peter had unlimited confidence in the good sense of Mistress Amanda. And he bore in mind that it is a man's duty not to show fight in the presence of ladies. So, sighing inwardly, he helped them up the step of the great family coach, where old Mrs. Powell and her niece were seated, waiting; and, mounting his horse, rode off at a pace that harmonized with his feelings.

Peter's bulk was unhandsome on horseback. As young Armstrong lightly vaulted into his saddle and reined his horse beside the window, where Nellie's sweet face peeped out from beneath the shadow of a flower-laden leghorn hat, she silently noted the contrast between the riders.

"What kep' you so, Mandy?" asked old Mrs. Powell, with as near the suspicion of a complaint in her voice as ever got into it.

"Why, something very singular, mother. Would you credit it, that Funkhausen put Peter Weaver's cow under the church and starved it to death! We heard its moans—probably its last ones, and Peter went down and found it. He says he'll thrash Funkhausen, and I think everybody in the county'll stand by him if he does."

"How perfectly dreadful!" chimed in the girls, in thrilled accents.

"Oh, dear, Mandy, that wuz mean indeed of Funkhausen," said the grieved old lady. "And he a member o' the chu'ch, and holdin' to particular redemption, which he oughtn't to dare to do less he's shore he's one o' the elect hisself."

"He'll need all his particular redemption—when Peter gets hold of him," commented Mistress Amanda, who was no Antinomian. She took some pleasure in making remarks like these, less to shock her mother, to whom she was more tenderly deferential than to anybody else in the world, than to enlarge the outlook of Nellie, whose innate bent toward Calvinism irritated her. She disbelieved in the possibility of a woman saint under sixty. Of men, she had been heard to remark that they "only got to heaven through the grace of God and the goodness of women." But while she hated pretensions to special piety she readily pardoned sinners who were confessedly incorrigible. She would overlook all offenses save self-complacency or the possession of a bloodless nature incapable alike of sterling virtues or robust wickedness. There are persons to

whom the touch of velvet is odious. Mistress Amanda detested velvety natures. Some Viking-like quality in the woman, something fierce and grand as the breaking of a storm at sea, threw out a challenge for rough honesty; for the strong hand of untamed manhood to touch and calm her mood. In Peter Weaver she realized her ideal of robust, simple manliness. Twenty years before her maiden fancies would have passed him by with disdain. But there comes a period of life when a second set of desires replace the dreams of youth, unlike them in every respect, especially where "the curse of a granted prayer" has robbed the dreamer of illusions. In so many words, Mistress Amanda had never said to herself since she had been left a widow five years ago,—I like best the man who least resembles my husband:—but her regard involuntarily fell upon everything in the shape of both men and women, who were innocent of the suavity, the grace, and the polished egotism of the late Col. Thomas.

To revise one's personal ideals is sometimes commendable; but a good mother usually reads her new philosophy into the life of her daughter. In Mistress Amanda's hands Nellie had been as ductile as gold foil, showing a fragility, however, that exacted delicate treatment. Here was a sweet, affectionate, domestic disposition, without any of the deep and subtle qualities that had rendered her own life stormy; a nature formed to lean on strength and create a happy home for a good man. And Mistress Amanda had given to Peter's shy wooing an unspoken but emphatic approval. But the sleeping beauty's repose was not yet broken. Nellie's maidenly meditations had still leave to wander where they listed. But one little cloud hung over the rosy sky of Mistress Amanda's hopes: Nellie, always given to shy musings and conscientious scruples—had lately shown a strong bias toward her grandmother's religious convictions. Indeed, it often seemed to Mistress Amanda, whose ambition and passionately maternal nature would have fitted her to be the mother of heroes, that her daughter belonged more to old lady Powell than to herself.

A dear, sweet old lady, with a heart full to overflowing with the milk of human kindness, and yet she had unconsciously become a moral stumbling-block to the one person whose happiness she was in every way most desirous of serving.

Poor Mistress Amanda had never found any aid from nature in carrying out her plans, but she was not the woman to relinquish one on that account. She relied upon the aid of chance to bring that proof to Nellie of Peter Weaver's worth, which would make her tolerant of his rationalism.

A poet and a skeptic! Only in the degree which made it necessary for the solitary man, thinking out all things for himself, and philosophizing upon life with the sky and woods for counselors, to reach conclusions that he could connect with the way things had of turning out. Calvinism did not seem to him to connect with the law of duty to your neighbor as it presented itself to his conception; and his theology took this simple formula: bear and forbear as long as you can, and then strike good blows; leaving alone the consequences.

And Nellie was a very mimosa for sensitiveness, as to the sin of differing from one's spiritual advisers. Mistress Amanda looked at her daughter, a translucent opal set between those gilded spurs, her cousins, and reflected upon the pains nature takes to bring about disharmony in families.

As the carriage approached the gates of Benvenew two little darkies raced out and held them wide open, with a special grin and duck for the gentleman on horseback, whose dimes rolled in the dust, sped by the careless, free hand of one who remembered himself an Armstrong, forgetting the preacher. But the set of the preacher was strong in the man. It was apparent at dinner; that excellent dinner where the golden brown turkey at one end of the table was rivaled by the noble ham at the other end, and where corn-pudding, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes in firm, rose-red slices, were reflected in crystal-clear goblets of cut-glass, standing sentinel-like upon napkins of double-wove Barnsley damask, white as sunbleach and rain water could make them.

Armstrong sat at Mistress Amanda's right hand, with Nellie opposite, her hands constantly busy playing over the jellies and *entrées* set in front of her to serve. Drooping curls half-hid her face, but his eyes dived keenly into the cool, sweet depths of hers when by chance she looked up. And she had the pleasantly fluttered sense of being watched by one curiously sympathetic with her.

"You are like your father," Mistress Amanda was saying. "Like what he was at your age. I met him once at a tournament held over at Purcellville. A pleasant part of the country, and a pleasant time we young people had that day."

"And you was crowned queen o' love and beauty, Mandy," cooed old Mrs. Powell. "I see by your face though, sir, that you don't hold to these fashions?"

"Should I hold to any customs that encourage vanity and display, and un-Christian rivalry?" returned the young preacher. "I understand there is to be a tournament held here in the fall, at Rocky Point. I shall feel it my duty to warn all our young people who have felt the strivings of the Spirit, not to yield to the temptation."

"I am so glad!" the fleeting cry came from Nellie involuntarily, and when Armstrong covered her flushing face with a soft look of encouragement, she continued sedately:

"I think such things take us too far away from our serious duties in life."

"Nellie is passing through one of those phases peculiar to youth," observed her mother. "Attacks of acute religious fanaticism are a sort of moral measles."

"Madam!" uttered Armstrong in a shocked tone, but meeting that calm glance of the elder woman, secure in the dignity of her deeper life experiences, he softened his tone apologetically:

"I beg you will not construe my criticism of the custom of tournaments into a criticism of yourself. Doubtless there was formerly a greater license in the Church concerning these things. Even dancing picnics were tolerated——"

"Why not?" asked the bold lady. "We must have amusements, we southerners. We are not Puritans."

"Shall the Puritans hold their faith more purely than ourselves? I see no reason why the very enthusiasm and eagerness for amusements natural to southerners should not be turned into the channels of a deeper Christianity."

Quite an argument ensued, in which it was notable that the forces were drawn up three to a side; old Mrs. Powell, Nellie, and Armstrong against Mistress Amanda and her two cousins, city-bred girls, desirous of shining in conversation.

Mistress Amanda carried on the battle with one hand behind her, so to speak. She disdained to put forth her full intellectual strength to rout a stripling. And half her mind was wandering abroad in a flight after her hero, pursuing his angry way homeward. Could her imagination have given her a true picture of Peter's adventures on the road, she might have dropped the feint of interest in the dinner-table topics to enjoy the thrill of real feeling, in a more singular and vigorous turn of events than was promised by the mild social elements gathered at Benvenew.

Peter had met his enemy on the lane turning off toward The Oaks, Funkhausen's place. He was driving along at a leisurely pace in his carryall alone, enjoying his meditations, when a fierce-browed horseman reined up beside him and caught the relaxed reins from his hands.

"Git out o' that, Thed Funkhausen," commanded Peter. "I've a word or two with you."

"Hadn't it better keep till another time?" suggested Funkhausen in a tone meant to be pacific.

"No, it won't keep!" thundered Peter, who had no mind to let his present wrath cool into his habitual, easy-going tolerance. And there was a force of circumstances in his having possession of the road and the reins, which compelled Funkhausen to step out; Peter dismounting at the same minute.

"What'd you shut my cow up for and starve her to death?"

A smile of sly enjoyment overspread Funkhausen's face. He did not deny the charge, seeming rather to take pride in an achievement so original. Funkhausen feared his huge antagonist, but beside being a burly man himself, he believed that he was near enough to home for his negroes to be within call; and there was a small army of farm-hands in his service.

So, charges were met by defiance, and Peter's temper ran no risk of dying away without finding vent. It came to blows before many expletives had made the air hot, and, as might have been expected, Funkhausen was tendered to the care of mother earth, with dust for his pillow. But although with that issue Peter began to find forgiveness sprouting in his soul, new complications arose. The farm-hands were within call, taking their ease before their cabin doors, and enjoying the smell of their dinners cooking. At Funkhausen's lusty cries they came pouring down the lane, realizing the duty of obedience to the man who supplied their bread.

"Surround him! Surround the low-lived coon!" yelled Funkhausen, sputtering and winking, wiping the blood from his nose with his best Sunday pocket-handkerchief.

And the negroes closed around the tall figure, standing firm and solid, with nothing but his fists to oppose to the force of numbers.

The negroes numbered fifteen men.

III.

THE sunshine of a perfect October day lay full upon Peter Weaver's great front porch, as he sat in his red armchair, smoking his after-dinner pipe, two months after his encounter with Funkhausen. Behind the porch lay the house; a minor affair, yet comfortable in its way. So long as weather permitted Peter lived upon his porches, the back one, fronting east, in the mornings, and the front one with the western exposure in the afternoon. From it he could see the goose-pond where his flock disported, and the road, not very lively, but with passing features of interest to a society loving mind.

His bachelor housekeeping was simple, his farm small, and the good grandparents had brought with them from Holland a store of Dutch guelders which had been converted into mining stock in due course, and, passing down to Peter, made his living a comfortable one. Had he chosen to loaf all day long upon his porches his income would have enabled him to do so. And old Aunt Vina and her two sons would not have lost their wages, nor the church its annual liberal check. But Peter had an industrious streak in him, and worked with all his might when he did work. Afterwards he indulged himself in spells of meditation and verse-writing.

How he had first gained courage to put himself before the public as a poet is a mystery. Possibly he had hopes of making his name illustrious in little Nellie's eyes. It is certain that a copy of the *Purcellville Banner* with heavy lines in red ink drawn around a sonnet addressed to "A Sweetbriar Rose," and signed "Heinrichs," had reached Benvenew the day after being issued. Since then the poet had branched out in other directions and the *Banner's* columns were enriched with an amount of original matter that led the editor seriously to contemplate the possibility of abandoning a "patent outside," and depending upon home talent to fill his space. Eventually, the disguise maintained by "Heinrichs" was penetrated by his neighbors and Peter was made the

recipient of attentions varying from invitations to dine and display his talent for versification at the Gordons, all the way down to lampoons in chalk upon his barn-door, and hootings from the six red-haired little Clapsaddles.

Pendleton Haywood, riding by one morning, espied the sturdy poet with his sleeves rolled up, deep in molasses-making; and thought it opportune to call out:

"Peter, make me a rhyme!"

With extraordinary quickness this rejoinder was thundered back:

"I'm busy just now,
Stirring my molasses,
I've no time
To make a rhyme
For every fool that passes."

And Pendleton went on his way a sadder man; for the six red-haired little Clapsaddles were as usual hanging about the goose-pond, and had made themselves masters of this colloquy; which, consequently, spread with the rapidity of a Virginia creeper, from Rocky Point to Purcellville.

There is no doubt that Peter's gift was a great comfort to him, and, modest as he was, he accepted the inevitable fame growing out of his contributions to the *Banner* with a certain degree of complacency. The power of looking at the events of life with a view to turning them into poetry invests even common subjects with interest, and when any really exciting thing happens the gifted mind is conscious of a wonderfully uplifting feeling, such as the admiral of a fleet may experience when an enemy's ironclad opens fire. Opportunity is the spur that starts genius into a canter.

Peter sat smoking, and thinking how to turn the fight between himself and Funkhausen into a poem which should arouse the enthusiastic admiration of all readers of the *Banner*; including Mistress Amanda and perhaps Nellie.

When Funkhausen had set his hirelings upon the stalwart Peter he had not taken into account two things: one was that there was not a darkey in the county without a feeling of personal liking for the kind-hearted poet, and the other, that negroes are cowardly except under the influence of excitement. The foremost man in the group happened to be one to whose family Peter had rendered many kindnesses. When the blue eyes of his master's victim looked steadily into his own, Jake felt a curious tremor of mingled superstition and perplexity, which caused him to fall back on his comrades instead of advancing to the attack Funkhausen was doing his best to urge on. Peter's raised fist conveyed reminder as well as menace. That hand had been ready to extend help to those in need, but it was equally ready to strike down an offender. And the negroes did not like the looks of the strong, resolute white man standing upon the defensive, alone, but with right upon his side. They began to mutter and to fall back, until the whole mass had melted away; in some way bearing Funkhausen along with them. Whereupon Peter mounted his horse and quietly rode home.

But the county rang with the affair. As much to vindicate himself as for vengeance, Funkhausen had Peter up before the church for discipline. But to his disgust, and to the delight of everybody else, Deacon Greene declared that Peter had done nothing to be disciplined for; but that "if he hadn't fought Funkhausen the church would have turned him out!"

Mistress Amanda gave a dinner party and made Peter the guest of the occasion. It happened upon Michaelmas and old Aunt Viny insisted, for luck's sake, upon dressing a pair of her master's geese, and sending them to Benvenew. So that Peter had the pleasure of seeing pretty Nellie blush under the sly allusion made by one of the guests to the old proverb about "the maid that eats of the bachelor's goose." But on the other hand, common sense told him that blushing was with Nellie no sign of especial embarrassment. Indeed, it was probable that the proverb was unknown to her. She was much occupied, all dinner-time, with the account young Armstrong—now ordained and installed as the regular preacher for Sneaking Creek church—was giving her of a bush-meeting in the woods back of Purcellville. He was anxious for her mother to take her to the meetings, but Mistress Amanda did not like bush-meetings; and she was not inclined to encourage any species of religious excitement in Nellie. Peter would gladly have offered to drive her but he could not venture to do so in the face of her mother's disapproval. It seemed a little hard to him that he should not be able to avail himself of this little opportunity to please the young girl. And if jealousy had been possible to him he must have felt a twinge of it in seeing how absorbed Nellie was in the talk Armstrong was pouring into her ears. But the time had not yet come for him to recognize the significance of what was going on under his eye. The happenings of our daily life are like the characters at a masked ball. Capering before us, they seem entirely unrelated to ourselves in any particular, and it is only when they unmask that we know them for what they are.

Peter, the dreamer, wove some new fancies about his dainty love as he sat with a writing pad upon his knee, and his short pipe between his lips. The world was very beautiful to him. And to-morrow would be Sunday; the happiest day of all the good week; for he would see Nellie at church.

The collie dog at his feet jumped up and ran down the walk. At the gate stood a shabby phaeton made distinguished by carrying Mistress Amanda. As he hastened out she called in a loud, clear tone:

"Good morning, Mr. Weaver, have you any turkey eggs to spare?"

Her hand, in its old gray gauntlet, was extended, and as he took it for a second in his own she added, lower,

"So much as a concession to our neighbor's greed, yonder!"

Peter looked and saw Elmer Hall approaching, driving a pair of hogs before him. Taking the cue, he talked about turkey eggs until the grunts had died away in the distance.

Then said madam—"I didn't come to talk about turkey eggs."

Peter drew a hand through his handsome hair; looked down reflectively and looked up smiling. "Will you come in?" he suggested. A decided shake of the head answered that. "My five years' seniority wouldn't excuse it—to the Greenes and Aylors! I doubt if even my mother could venture it. We may risk ten minutes here at the gate."

Mistress Amanda began flicking her whip at a thistle; her forehead gathering lines. Suddenly the words shot from her:

"You are a patient man!"

"Well! You haven't come two miles to tell me that?"

"But I have. Patience is a most unusual virtue—in a man, but there is such a thing as having too much of it. Do you remember the story of the fox and the wolf?"

"The nursery tale? Let me see. I think my grandmother used to tell it to me, but that was long ago. I forget the point."

"The wolf bit him—put out his eyes, and so on, the fox simply saying all the time, 'patience!' Till finally the enemy tore his heart out, and the fox found, too late, that patience is the most dangerous of all virtues."

Peter gazed at the narrator of this fable in amazement. For the first time in his life the idea that women are incomprehensible found lodgment in his mind.

"Ah, I see you think me daft," said his friend. And not for the first time in her life, by any means, she found a man dense.

"In so many plain words, then, are you not in love?"

The blood seemed on the point of bursting through Peter's skin; his head weighed a ton; his legs became pipe-stems. He gasped something inarticulately. Then, manly sense asserted itself. His look grew steady and grave and nobody could have found fault with his manner, as he said:

"You know I love your daughter. I reckon everybody knows that."

Mistress Amanda turned impulsively. Her face had been carefully averted during this conversation, but now she let her eyes meet his. There was the emphasis of a kept-down excitement in her tone:

"Everybody except the one person who ought to know it. It is a well-kept secret so far as she's concerned."

"I've only been waiting for the right time—she's so young—such a child!" Things danced in the sunshine before the man's eyes. His long, lovely dream!—this was so sudden a call to hard reality; he could not waken in a minute.

"Nellie is not a girl to be won by accumulated acts of worship," said Mistress Amanda tersely. "Some girls can be won in that way; romantic girls. They would be flattered at being made the subject of verses; would like to feel that a great, powerful creature trembled before them. But Nellie is wonderfully free from that sort of vanity. So far from understanding the real feeling that is at the bottom of all the favors you show her she looks upon you as a sort of good godfather who has a fanciful, half-playful preference for her. You have never come near enough to her to touch the ruling motive of her character."

It sprang to Peter's lips to ask what that was; but he forbore the question. There seemed to him an indelicacy in arriving at a comprehension of his love through another person's perceptions, even if that person was her mother. Mistress Amanda, however, was no muddy stream whence truth must be laboriously filtered out, but a clear fountain, throwing facts high and rapidly in the air for the dullest seer to take in.

"She has a large vein of the practical in her. Probably you think—all you men think—that, with that soaring look, her feet never touch the ground. But you may take sentimental flights into the region of romance for the next ten years without interesting her enough to make her even look to see where you are. Don't woo her with poetry, my friend. She never reads it. I never saw her with any book of verse in her hand except a hymn-book."

A wild idea of putting his talent to this use came to Peter. After a moment's reflection he turned it out, as he would have locked his barn door against a suspicious steed bearing about him marks of gipsy ownership. And herein did my honest hero show his Dutch descent in his characteristic rejection of schemes out of the range of his natural inclination.

"I'm not much of a poet," he said, with an effort at a laugh.

"You look at things rather too much from a sentimental standpoint," observed Mistress Amanda. She had beaten the thistle quite to powder, and, laying down her whip, adjusted her gauntlets and gathered the reins into a firm grasp. Her fine black eyes had a singular expression.

"Not too much for *some* women. The kind of sentiment there is in you is the kind that makes a

man loyal, tender, and—of all things the rarest!—appreciative toward the woman you may marry. I wish girls were able to discriminate between the shepherding qualities in men and the huntsman's qualities. But they like the sound of the horn and the dash of the horses—the fiery eye and the masterful grip! Only after their gallants have thrown aside all their pretty trappings and come down to the plain garb of the household boss do they learn that a little kindness and consideration in a husband outranks all the more showy qualities."

"Nellie certainly ain't one to be taken in by a glittering outside—I sh'd think," Peter remarked.

"Not of the kind you have in your mind. But she is peculiarly constituted—extremely susceptible to anything like an appearance of superiority of the moral sort; or, not so much moral—I wish it was that!—but spiritual sort. Some girls pine for a man to take them in hand and lead them along the straight and narrow path; and a thorny path their saintly director generally manages to make it for them. Bah, I've no patience with the 'Queechy' species of hero!" exclaimed Mistress Amanda, lashing her whip in the air. Her horse, however, had sensibilities of his own, and taking this as a definite appeal to his own intelligence he started down the road at a pretty brisk pace, carrying his mistress off with excellent stage effect, her exit speech vibrating in Peter's astonished ears.

He stood leaning upon the gate, after she had turned the corner of the lane, for fifteen minutes; his cheerful face clouded slightly as he chewed the cud his friend had shown him, gazing, ox-like, at the present surroundings that lay about his feet, and unable to realize, even after some effort, the meaning of the suggestions that had been made as to possible dangers lurking in the future.

There was a placidity about Peter amounting to dulness, when he was pricked upon the matter of threatened changes. Your light-weight men, nervous, springy, and quick-glancing, are full of apprehensions; they believe that it is no more than likely that to-morrow may be doomsday, and they prepare themselves even for the most improbable crises. But two hundred pounds gives a certain faith in the established order of things, and it is a significant fact that bulk and the conceit that the world moves slowly, go together. Foretellers are so apt to have a lean and meagre frame that I should be loth to trust the pretensions of a prophet over-endowed with flesh. So the fact that Peter had a constitutional dislike to being stirred up to initiative acts must be laid to his girth and his double chin; not to any lack of fine feeling. His affection for Nellie had become so much a part of himself that it partook of his temperament, and was deliberate and sober; incapable of sudden transitions. Adoring her at a distance had the charm of familiarity, and although in sentimental moods the man liked to picture his star, his flower, as a little housewife, seated of evenings by his side before the fire, with some sewing in her dainty fingers, and a tenderly inclined ear toward the thing he might like to read to her; still, he had grown so used to thinking of such scenes as afar off that to be suddenly desired to look at the necessity of at once taking steps to make his dream a reality, or else to abandon hope of ever making it one, was to ask too much of his optimistic nature. For what is an optimist but a person who believes that everything will turn out all right; whether he chooses to go to work at dawn or lie in bed till twelve?

But, Peter's indolence had a tinge of nobility in it. He saw a young girl, happy in her ignorance of life's responsibilities, fresh, sweet, and bright, with the reflection of her own innocent and tender fancies shining in her unclouded eyes, and he was loth to interpose his tall shadow between her and the landscape. His wish had been to stand aside until she should come gradually to recognize him as an agreeable feature of it, perhaps to learn to look upon him as something indispensable to her life, making a part—a large part of her happiness. Some men of generous nature prefer to have a woman turn toward them of her own accord rather than to put forth the effort that makes wooing an affair of capture. It is pretty certain to happen, though, that the choice of a man of this view is apt to fall upon a girl whose instinct is not so much womanly as feminine. And those who have studied woman-kind will understand the distinction.

But Mistress Amanda's point had, nevertheless, been made, for she had given Peter to understand that there was a rival in the field. And the most optimistic of men does not fail to experience certain sensations in his brain extending to his strong right arm, when an intruder threatens to snatch away the glass where he is quietly watching the full bead gather and waiting to raise it to his thirsting lips.

IV.

If Peter's thoughts had sought his rival they would have found him at a certain fine old mansion bearing upon the face of the stone gate-post the name Roselawn. A well shaded drive swept up to the doorway, hospitably broad, and in seasonable weather open, giving a view of such a hall as can only be found in an old southern house. Family portraits looked down from the walls upon the carefully preserved furniture, recognizing, it may be, with some satisfaction, the presence of articles that had been in favor during their lifetime.

It was Monday morning, and breakfast time, according to the habits of the Armstrong family. The judge was in his place, his wife, comely, neat, and quiet, was in hers, and the three daughters, Laura, Violet, and Bess, had come in severally, and slipped into their chairs after a warm greeting to their father and a rather less impulsive and loving one to their quiet mother.

"Miles not down?" said Violet, the sprightliest of the sisters; a slim girl with a delicately up-tilted face in which dark eyes and a saucily curved mouth prepared one for good-humored but probably pointed banter.

"Down!" repeated that personage, coming in, and dropping discontentedly into the vacant chair

next to his mother. "If you had been *up* and keeping your chickens in order instead of—whatever else you were doing—I could have got some sleep after four o'clock and been down before. I wish you'd think proper to order that black rooster made into fricassee," he continued to his mother, who had no time to reply, however, for Violet put in an instant protest for her pet Captain Jinks, who was such a darling, and so intelligent he could do everything except talk.

Miles dropped the subject, not caring to compromise his dignity by a dispute over such a trifle, but his entire bearing expressed that appearance of unappreciated worth which is so exasperating to women in a family; divining, as they do, that the root of it is invariably some kind of causeless irritation. The girls discovered in a minute that Miles had "got out of the wrong side of the bed" that morning; this supplying a vague, kindly explanation of his acerbities of temper. Undoubtedly he was cross. It showed in his way of receiving a remark that Laura now made. Laura was of the languid type of fair women; heavy-lidded gray eyes, peachy skin, and flesh all wrought into curving lines. A subdued greed of pleasure is the predominating quality of this sisterhood, often existing under the perfect disguise of plaintive, gentle renunciation. When thoroughly understood they weep the profuse tears of spirits feeling themselves above the comprehension of the ordinary mind.

"Please get Wash to hitch Peg-leg to the phaeton right after breakfast, will you?" Laura said. "I must drive over to Miss Annie's to try on my dress she is making for the tournament."

The light of disapproval kindled in Miles' grave face.

"Are you girls going to persist in attending that silly entertainment?" he inquired.

"You certainly didn't used to think it silly," answered the one chiefly addressed. "Time was—and not so very long ago, either—when you rode at tournaments yourself! I haven't forgotten the tournament at Manasses two years ago, when we were visiting cousin Jennie Davis"——

But Miles' head had disappeared, following his hands in a dive beneath the table for his egg-cup, rolled off by a movement of his arm that would have seemed scarcely accidental could this young gentleman have been suspected of an ulterior wish to cut short some embarrassing allusion. Every one is endowed with some propensity tending to the discomfiture of others. Laura's talent in this direction, unknown to herself, lay in bringing up people's outgrown inclinations; so keeping them to the mortified level of a self they conceived they had risen above and would fain forget. Reminiscences of this kind are peculiarly afflicting to young divines, to whom the problem of preserving an appearance commensurate with the severity of their doctrine is often in danger from the good memories of their intimate friends. Can we wonder that the ordained preacher of twenty-two shrank sensitively from reminders of the peccadilloes committed by the gay youth of twenty?

Miles suffered, in the privacy of family life, from the tendency to treat him as an ordinary young man, whereas, he felt that he had become remarkable. To be informed, at the instant of assuming a superior tone, that he had been used to joining in the customs he condemned was sufficiently humiliating. But Laura's observation held a sting for his irritable conscience that she had no idea of. The dropping of the egg-cup had stopped her slow speech, for she had an acute sense of sympathy for awkwardness in a person ordinarily free from it, being herself studiously graceful.

"Let Sally bring you another egg," she was good enough to suggest. The yellow damsel dawdling against the side table put herself to some trouble to carry out the order, for the admiration that was but lukewarm in the house glowed effulgently in the kitchen; the young preacher being idolized by the negroes.

But Miles' appetite had been satisfied. He pushed back his plate and looked past his offending sister into space; his mind taking a flight in search of consolation ending at Benvenew, making some pretty notes of a pair of confiding eyes and a sweetly deferential tongue that had never uttered a word hurtful to his self-esteem. Of one devout disciple he was sure. Mingled with his triumph in it was a grateful acknowledgment of the immense advantage in this connection of quality over quantity; the sweetbriar rose being worth all the rest of feminine creation.

"What's that about the tournament?" the judge inquired. Three girlish voices chimed an answer of which he extracted the gist at his leisure; managing to arrive at the important item, that Miles was setting himself above all innocent amusements, and declined to accompany his sisters to the tournament.

"Miles' nonsense be damned!" said the head of the house. "I'll be your beau if he won't. I reckon I'm young enough yet to go about with all of you." The judge was forty-five, and excepting for a little too much fulness of chin, and a slight stiffness in his knees, he might have passed for the handsome elder brother of his son. Secretly, he was proud of the boy and looked upon the extreme views he held as the natural excess of an enthusiastic temperament concentrating itself upon theology. He expected Miles to grow more reasonable when his first zeal should have worn off. But his own disposition was choleric, and while he was looking forward to an amelioration of the strict views held by the young preacher he was frequently tempted to bluster a little upon their points of difference.

The Armstrongs were rather given to disputations, and the household atmosphere was not seldom an uncomfortable one for the neutral mother, who had positive opinions upon only two subjects: the flavor of cookery and the good looks of her husband. She was quite satisfied that her son treated her respectfully, that he had good manners, and that his clothes set well; in less important points he was welcome to follow his own inclinations. During little clashes she was accustomed to occupy herself with considerations about the next dinner. Therefore, Miles was

surprised to hear her say:

"I think Miles is very much in the right in not giving his countenance to tournaments. As a minister, he couldn't. They bet on the horses and betting's not right. I heard that Penny Haywood bet fifty dollars last year and lost. I'm sure, Judge, you wouldn't like Miles to bet?"

The judge had given to this unwonted animation the compliment of wide-open eyes and smiling mouth.

"No danger of Miles betting!" he answered, reassuringly. "All I ask is that he shouldn't be so stiff-necked about his sisters taking their enjoyment in the way of all young folks."

Miles had again betrayed singular discomfiture at this new suggestion about himself. The slow, faint color of one who colors seldom and then from mortification, burned in his cheeks, and he arose with a muttered excuse and left the room, turning at the door to say:

"I'll have Peg-Leg put in the phaeton for you, Laura."

The instinct to seek comfort for his wounded self-love would have driven him straight to Benvenew, but it was too early in the day, and he had no excuse. The morning wore away tediously. Unhappily for the young man the things that had once interested him and furnished occupation for his spare hours were now under the ban of his tyrant conscience. He had embraced the course known as "setting a good example," and for the sacrifices involved he found recompense both in his own consciousness of superiority and in the fact that Nellie looked on and admired. Yet, if he was in danger of becoming a prig, there were sound faculties in him that made it quite as probable that some sudden turn would swing him into the path of practical usefulness. At home he met at every turn with just the sort of opposition to confirm his dislike of the easy self-indulgence that swayed the rest.

Everybody else in the Armstrong family did what he or she wished to do; it was for him to do what he thought right, regardless of inclinations. Laura was indolently selfish, Violet energetically set upon carrying out her own plans, and Bess, his junior by a year, was strong-minded; something that in his view was less endurable than pure frivolity. His bitter admiration for her cleverness sometimes found vent in expressions of solicitude for her future husband, to which she always responded that *his* wife would have her profound sympathy, for his ideas of the family state were founded upon Old Testament precedent, to which the new dispensation and womanhood were altogether opposed.

Sauntering discontentedly along the great stretch of piazza Miles heard stray bits of his sisters' talk as they sat at work, and contrasted it with Nellie's sweet, sensible remarks, and the feeling of her perfection grew strong in him. Beginning in agreement of tastes and opinions the intimacy between the two young people had now reached the stage where conscious preference may at any instant change to blind attraction. Sedateness and dignity had marked their intercourse so far; but the impulse Miles felt swelling his breast was the first rise of a wave capable of sweeping away all the pretty dalliances of friendship, and of carrying him out on the swift flowing sea of a great passion. His was a temperament sure to love ardently and he had not dissipated his energies prematurely.

Two o'clock sees our young preacher mounted on his Kentucky thoroughbred mare, Stella, a beautiful chestnut, tractable only with her owner. As he leaped into the saddle she looked so knowing that he, to try her, let the reins hang, and said softly, "To Benvenew!" Whereupon the intelligent creature gave her slender head a light toss, and started off up the slope of the hill at a pace that brought him, in less than an hour, to the grand old park that surrounded that historic mansion.

He had feared to find Nellie, as usual, surrounded by the rest; but as he drew near the little summer-house, covered with a luxuriant grape-vine, now rich in purple clusters, he saw her standing there, a basket on her arm, filling it with the grapes. In a moment he was on the ground beside her, Stella standing still, untied, and docile to his wish as an obedient child.

At the first shy glance she gave him, Miles forgot the smart to his vanity that had sent him to her, forgot everything but that the sweetest girl in the world stood there, blushing under his fixed gaze, her little fingers trembling in his grasp, for when she laid her hand in his he suddenly found it impossible to let it go.

"Come and sit down, please," he said, drawing her inside the bower and seating himself beside her on the rustic bench. "It is an age since I saw you."

"Yesterday?" questioned Nellie, demurely raising her brows.

"I don't count seeing you in a crowd. The last time we really had any time together was at the fair—away back in September. There are so many things I have always wanted to talk with you about. You are the only person that has a real sympathy with me in the work I am trying to do here, Miss Nellie. And you don't know how dearly I value your sympathy."

Now, my innocent, modest beauty had known what it is to hear manly voices sink into tender cadence, declaring her sympathy necessary to all their aims and enterprises in life, nor had the deeper experience of that special pleading, to which this is the preliminary, been wanting. The practical sense her mother had spoken of gave her intimation of the thing that yet lay, half unsuspected, in the depths of Armstrong's mind, like the sweet arbutus under the smothering cedar. The cedar here was the young man's egotism, claiming attention as its right, and some storm wind would have to sweep the prickly covering away before the delicate blossoms of real love revealed themselves.

And the storm wind was even at that moment brewing. It is usually while we are most free from forebodings, most satisfied with ourselves, that the ugly head of misfortune thrusts from around the corner and brings us with a shock to a recognition that the past is perpetually linking itself with the present, and that a forgotten sin is capable of coming to life after we have left it in the desert to starve.

Nellie had begun to murmur that she was happy if anything she could do was a help to him, when her soft speech was interrupted by a flying scout from the house, a small negro boy, whose bare heels scarcely rested upon the ground while he delivered in emphatic voice a message from Mistress Amanda:

"Miss Nell, yo's ter go straight ter th' house, *ef* yo' please, ter say good-by ter Mr. Beeswax afore he leaves. Lemme tote de grapes."

The basket was seized, and the scout began the march, looking back every instant to be assured that the young pair followed.

They followed with vexation in the heart of one, at least. To the other it was more of a habit to submit her will to others, so her face remained calm and her tones gentle as she replied to the slight remarks Armstrong forced himself to make. At the door the scout left them to deposit his burden in the kitchen and go back after Stella, whom he was burning to mount, not dreaming of the experience that was in store for him.

The young pair entered the parlor and found Mistress Amanda and old lady Powell entertaining a short, keen-eyed, sallow man whose age was not to be easily guessed. His occupation might have been set down as mercantile, and he was, in fact, a commercial drummer.

"Mr. Beesly, let me present you to Mr. Armstrong, our minister," said Mistress Amanda, formally.

The stranger bowed with ironical exaggeration. "I have met Mr. Armstrong before," he said, in what struck her as a disagreeably significant tone. She gave a swift, searching look at the young preacher.

Armstrong was standing with a rigid air of dignity that sat not ill on his handsome person. But he had suddenly grown very pale.

V.

It spoke well for Armstrong that, at the very instant of running into a most unexpected and disagreeable dilemma, he did not wish he had been warned so that he might have avoided it. A Gorgon would have been a winning object to him in comparison with the wiry little man now smiling a curiously double-faced smile at him, but beyond the involuntary pallor that had come he gave no sign of discomfiture; and after a sharp glance to see how his salutation had been met, Beesly turned away with a mutter that lost itself in his bushy whiskers, "true grit!" and began to make himself fascinating to Nellie.

She had been sent for to bid this forty-second cousin good-by, but now she was here he seemed in no haste to depart. Leaving Armstrong to the tender mercies of Mistress Amanda, he followed the young girl over to her grandmother's sofa, where she had shyly taken refuge, and drawing up a chair in front of the two, bent himself to entertain.

No men have more facility in this line than "drummers." They learn to observe human nature and become adept at humorous description of adventures, taking pains to tone their note up or down to suit their company. It can be a "bray" among other men, and a "coo" with women. For the chaste ears of old lady Powell, and her innocent granddaughter, Beesly's talk was a light sparkle of harmless fun that drew the laughter of both. Nellie had a sense of fun—not humor—under her demureness, and she was pleased and amused as he meant her to be.

To the investigating glances Armstrong threw toward her corner from time to time, there was presented the singular spectacle of the girl who had, but a few minutes before, been blushing under his words of admiration, seeming wholly content with the exchange of another man's company for his own; even although she must have realized that an interview had been interrupted which promised to be an important one.

Important to the lady, Sir Egoist? Mark her now, leaning back against the red silk cushions, as Beesly bends eagerly forward in the full swing of some fine narrative; the dimpling smile showing a glimpse of even, milk-white teeth behind a bud of a mouth, dewily innocent as a baby's. The light in the wily fellow's eyes is reflected in her hazel ones as she catches the point of his sketch, and now she hides her lovely face against her grandmother's ample bosom, in an outburst of mirth so rare with her as to seem almost indecorous. Has it ever been your good fortune, Miles Armstrong, to arouse so hearty an interest and sway so readily that timid nature? She has certainly forgotten you, and the serious business of life you are so fond of discoursing with her, in the glow of feelings natural to youth and feminine love of enjoyment.

Armstrong's face grew gloomy, and his conversation absent-minded, while Mistress Amanda, taking note of everything, was led to speculate on a set of possibilities that had never before suggested themselves to her astute intellect. Was it possible that the law of contrasts, leading the fancies of men and maidens to attach themselves to the persons most dissimilar, could apply to her daughter Nellie, for whom she had been anticipating a very different inclination! Girls were capable of such freaks. After all, if it were not for Peter Weaver, the idea of Beesly as a permanent member of the family would not be so unwelcome. His shrewd sense and light views formed a very good balance to the over-seriousness of the young girl. Mingled with a pang for her

silent and devoted hero, Mistress Amanda felt a certain satisfaction in this introduction of a new player into her little domestic drama. She became more affable with the young preacher.

These two had never yet been able to strike upon a single topic of mutual interest where the clash of disagreement did not instantly lead to silence.

"Let us harmonize upon the weather," Mistress Amanda had once observed when argument had threatened to become personal. But one cannot always talk about the weather. She tried apples.

"Is your father shipping his usual quantity of golden pippins to England this fall? I hear that he has had the honor of furnishing some to the queen's own table; that her preference is for pippins."

"Three thousand barrels, I believe," said Armstrong, in a lukewarm response.

"Indeed! That means quite a nice return in money;" her tone had a tinge of regret for her own exclusion from so excellent a business arrangement. The orchard at Benvenew was a fairly fine one, but its full resources were undeveloped for lack of capital. If she had the money Mistress Amanda felt sure she might rival the success of the master of Roselawn, who was rolling up a fortune before the admiring eyes of his neighbors. Envy of a neighbor's superior success is not a Virginian trait. All your true Virginian asks for is the tithe due to friendship and he will put hands in pockets and look on while the enterprising compatriot piles up his dollars. But, being a woman, Benvenew's mistress could not and did not try to suppress the emulative instinct that made her long for an opportunity to prove her business capacity.

Beesly's ears, sharp as a hunter's, had caught the word "money," and with his quick way of whirling about, he threw a sentence toward the other guest.

"By the way, talking of money, Armstrong, it's kind of curious, isn't it?—But, never mind, we'll have a chance to discuss that going home. What I was going to tell you was about the wedding of the turkey-girl in the Tennessee mountains," he continued, turning back with equal suddenness to his old and young auditors, who had scarcely had time to follow his flight with their eyes before he was with them again, fluent as a blackbird rehearsing a well-practised theme.

Was it a malicious impulse suddenly checked by compunction for the man he was "cutting out," and toward whom decency demanded at least the avoidance of insult upon the top of injury? Or was it a mere random arrow from his whimsical quiver that had made the young preacher start and redden, while his deep eyes began to burn with an intense fire that promised some strong kind of entertainment for the person proposing to accompany him "home."

Whichever it was, Armstrong now made up his mind that as his object in coming to Benvenew had been defeated, he would, at least, take the initiative in breaking up that little *séance* yonder, toward which he felt unsanctified resentment.

He arose. At the movement old lady Powell, whose pleasure in the vivacity of her entertainer had been more than once disturbed by the feeling that she was not paying proper attention to her minister, gently released herself from her granddaughter's encircling arm, and came towards him.

"You shorely ain't thinkin' o' goin', *yit*, Mr. Armstrong? Why, we hain't seen nothin' o' you yit, and it's seldom enough you come. Stay to tea, now! Mandy, do press Mr. Armstrong to stay to tea!"

"Will sally-lunn tempt you?" smiled Mistress Amanda, choosing always to suppose that the proper appeal to men was through appetite. But she overlooked the counterpoise of sentiment when a man is under twenty-five. Armstrong remained standing. A word from Nellie might have changed his mind, but although she looked at him she did not speak; and, unfortunately, Beesly did. His high-pitched voice made his interference doubly offensive to the young preacher's refined sensibilities.

"Oh, I say, Armstrong, I'm not ready to go. Tea-time at Benvenew has peculiar seductions," and he pointed the remark by a smile at Nellie that some observers might have called frank and kind; others, devilish. So much depends upon the point of view. Armstrong's was that of the harsher criticism; not to be wondered at, considering the difference in his feelings on entering and departing from Benvenew that day.

"I am not aware sir, that my going places any constraint upon you," said Armstrong with the most distant air a man could assume.

Beesly laughed. What defense is dignity against a laugh, with which the company, ignorant of any occult meaning, show an inclination to join, moved both by sympathy with the joker and the polite wish to smooth over a little difficulty between two guests! Armstrong realized keenly that he was at extreme disadvantage, since the animosity that he felt toward Beesly could not be explained and must bear the semblance of ill-temper. That it might be interpreted as jealousy did not occur to him. It was, however, natural that the women should take this view of it.

Now, Nellie, with all her good and sensible qualities, had one little foible. She was not aware of it, and, indeed, her position as the recognized beauty of the county was so certain to develop the trait in any young woman not altogether an angel, that she is excusable for having grown just a little bit vain. Hers was not the vanity of dwelling in thought upon her own attractions, for, in moments of deliberate reflection, she was given to a humble estimate of herself; but it was the innocent, childlike love of notice, and of the subtle flattery conveyed in being sought out and distinguished by attention. Maiden-like, she fled to corners, and woman-like there was pleasure in being followed. The boldest admirer was likely then to gain the ear of modesty that had this susceptible spot in it.

Beesly was wise in making of his small, active person a very bulwark against the outer world; his play of wit so filling the space that the girl only saw dimly what was going on outside her corner. She looked up to find the preacher's fine form drawn up before her. He persisted in going. His somber eyes meant to convey to her that this was something more than an ordinary good-by.

The ubiquitous Beesly gave her no opportunity to realize the situation. A cool clasp of her little fingers, a bow, and Armstrong was gone from the room.

Then Beesly sprang up, with a good-humored show of despair. "Plague the fellow!—if he *will* go, I must tear myself away. I have something particular to say to him, and to-morrow I start for Chicago. I'll be back in a week or so, though, Cousin Amanda, and you can order the sally-lunn then."

He shook hands all around, his jolly, hearty manner contrasting forcibly with the seriousness of the other, and departed, leaving a track of glittering light behind him, as some persons do. What matter if the glitter is a tinsel clap-trap? Nonsense helps to make life cheerful, and a jolly good fellow is especially a boon in country society.

Mistress Amanda went to the window and began dropping the muslin curtains. She liked to put this veil between the outer dusk and the fire-lit room.

"Heigho!" she yawned; "'what fools these men be.'"

"*Mortals*, mamma, I think," was the gentle correction of Nellie.

Her astonished mother stared. "What do you know of Shakespeare?" she ejaculated.

The young girl blushed. "Papa used to read to us in the evenings sometimes. Have you forgotten, mamma? I recollect Midsummer Night's Dream very well."

Her mother spent several minutes in silent reflection, studying her daughter. "I don't know that I understand you as well as I thought I did," she then observed, with unusual softness.

Nellie came around to the back of her chair, putting a soft hand on her shoulder. "But you love me, mamma?"

"Love you?" Mistress Amanda's splendid eyes grew moist. "Yes, dear, I love you dearly. All the good that can come to me in this world is to see you happy."

"That's right, Mandy," said old lady Powell cheerily. "But you's young enough, child, to see a heap o' satisfaction on yo' own account, yit."

A little negro boy, sprawling on the floor of his mammy's cabin, and rubbing his back as he could reach it, might have told Mr. Beesly something about the paces of the mare, Stella, which that gentleman was trying to catch up with. A start of five minutes was too much in Stella's favor, if her master had intended flight from his persistent acquaintance. When the little man swung himself into his saddle, and looked here and there and everywhere in the fast-gathering dusk for the sight of a horseman in the road ahead, there was nothing whatever to be seen.

Beesly was a poor rider, on a strange, borrowed horse, and the country was unfamiliar to him. Twenty paces from Benvenew the road forked, and the commercial traveler had not the slightest idea which path to take. Invoking good luck, he took the one to the left. It went past a farm-house or two, where the hungry fellow saw lights twinkling in kitchens, and smelled—in imagination—the odor of squirrel-stew and corn-pone. After this he passed the old mill, and the outlook grew less promising.

"A plague upon him!" cried the baffled pursuer. "I didn't think Armstrong was the man to run away. What did he take me for, anyway?"

Darkness comes rapidly in these mountains. Beesly found himself skirmishing around in a curiously eccentric style, and the certainty that he was entirely astray gained his slow credence. He was not fortified by a good meal, either, to enjoy the cool night breeze that began to play through his light summer suit.

"Get along! Go somewhere, I don't care where, so it leads to supper!" he apostrophized the horse, and that animal, left to his own judgment, bethought himself of a certain hospitable stable where more than once he had had a good meal when business led him in the direction of its owner. So, taking a start, he cantered along the road at a very creditable pace, and paused of his own accord in front of Peter Weaver's gate.

The front windows of Peter's cottage were wide open, and Beesly had a view of a big man in his shirt-sleeves going around a well-lit room, holding a book in his hand, and singing at the top of an exceedingly powerful voice.

"Hallo! Hallo in there!" shouted Beesly's thin falsetto, and presently it dawned upon Peter's comprehension that somebody outside was trying to make himself heard. He came to the door, holding a lamp high above his head, the light casting into relief his ruddy face and Titan-like frame.

"A handsome fellow, by heaven!" thought the drummer, who never lost a picturesque feature.

"Can a gentleman who has lost his way beg the favor of an hour's rest and a bit of supper?" he sang out toward the Titan, who responded with a hearty:

"Sartain, sir! And most welcome. 'Light and come right in. I'll send a nigger after your horse."

"I'm a distant cousin of Mistress Amanda, up to Benvenew," said Beesly, as he entered the cottage and proceeded to make himself at home in his usual easy fashion. "I insisted on leaving

there before supper, and have been properly punished by losing my way."

"Cousin to Mistress Amanda? That gives you a claim on me, sir, to any extent," said Peter, throwing a log on the fire, and calling out the back door to his cook to hurry up supper.

"You see, sir," he continued, "living all by myself here I've fallen into the way of kind o' having meals at any hour I like, and supper's ruther put back to-night. I'm glad it's so, as I've the good fortune to have yo' company."

"Why, I had an idea that I might take supper along with your preacher here, Mr. Miles Armstrong, but if you'll believe me, he went off and left me in the lurch, although I had something very particular to say to him."

"Possible!" ejaculated Peter, his face becoming thoughtful.

Loquaciousness was Beesly's prime vice. He felt himself aggrieved in this instance, and, convinced by the appearance of a bountiful supper that his host was a good fellow, and entitled to confidence, he poured out a tale that had the unintended effect of impairing Peter's appetite.

"You see—it's this way. Three years back now—Armstrong was a minor, anyway, and not responsible for the money if he chose to put it that way. But he put a bet on Belle Noir—a pretty big bet—we fellows sort o' goaded him to it,—and he lost. Plumb five hundred dollars he lost, sir! And if you'll believe me, he wrote a letter to Keats—Keats backed Charlie Boy—saying he had no mind to ask his governor for the money, that betting was against his conscience, anyway, but that, as his honor demanded that he pay up, he earnestly requested for time to do it in. Well, Keats said he'd give him time. He was going abroad and he'd give him till he came back. Now, sir, that was three years ago, and Armstrong's never given a sign. I met Keats in New York last week, and he said he meant to come down here and see Armstrong. He says he hates a sneak. That's what I meant to tell Armstrong to-night; that Keats is coming here. You see, nobody knows a word about it but us three. By the bye, I guess you'd better not mention it. I don't want to make trouble."

"You certainly have astounded me, sir," affirmed Peter Weaver. "Mr. Armstrong's the very last person I'd have suspected of ever getting into such a box as this. And five hundred dollars, too. That's a mighty big lot of money to throw away."

"If he's saving up his salary to pay it it'll take him rather awhile to get it together," grinned Beesly. "What does he get for preaching?"

"We pay our preacher two hundred and fifty dollars a year, sir. And perquisites," he added, as the drummer gave a significant whistle. "There are perquisites—there'd be more if he got married"—

"Perhaps he will before long. There are pretty gals down here. Cousin Amanda's girl is a thundering beauty. I shouldn't wonder if Armstrong had got his eyes set that way. Little mite strait-laced, though, is Nellie. By George, what'd she say if she knew the preacher used to bet on horses? Reformed, didn't he?"

"Mr. Armstrong's said to have experienced sanctification," said Peter, slowly.

"Oh, come, now, that's too good," shouted the commercial traveler.

"There may be such a thing; I'm called skeptical myself. But whether there is or not, there's goodness. And for my part, I believe Mr. Armstrong's an upright, moral, well-meaning man, and it's the duty of his friends to stand by him," said Peter Weaver. But deep down in his heart was a cry. The preacher was, then, in love with Nellie: did Nellie love the preacher?

VI.

THE hardest thing in the world to bear is self-contempt. The man or woman who has once slipped from his own standard of rectitude—whatever it is—has henceforth in his soul a little Inferno where desperate desire is continually carrying a huge stone up a hill and memory is as continually rolling it down again.

Armstrong's thoughts shaped themselves into some such words as these as he galloped out from Benvenew. He was not running from Beesly through any cowardly impulse; but because he wanted to think the matter all out, alone. The moment he had laid eyes on the fellow he knew that the thing he had been fighting down so long, overlaying by a structure of self-denial and good deeds, had come uppermost in the foreground of his life, and must be faced as a sin freshly committed, because to the present hour concealed. The young man had a strong nature, proud and tender; a little one-sided in its development, and the more likely to cut out intense suffering for itself through the aid of imagination. When conscience lashed he had no instinct to shrink away and make excuse; instead, he cried "Peccavi!" feeling that he deserved the more because no one but himself knew that he deserved it. Herein, although circumstances may have made it appear that he was nearly, if not quite, a hypocrite, Miles Armstrong proved himself none, for he felt that the worst of a sin was in its commission, not in the fact of its being made public. It would have been a relief to him all along if that gambling experience in his past, when, for a brief space he had sowed wild oats, could have been known to all the world; then he might have shouldered blame, lived the matter down, and started afresh, with a clear page for the future. But expediency had been his counselor. She had whispered that his usefulness would be impaired if he let himself appear as a common youth; a preacher should be in a certain sense, immaculate; his faults and follies were between himself and his conscience. What he *had* been was not the world's business; only what he was *now*.

And so Armstrong had concealed his fault and gone on trying to forget it, but never able to do so, until, between looking on the picture of what he was believed to be, and what he was in his own knowledge of himself, the great contrast took the form of an accusation that made him out—liar: of all things the meanest and most despicable when the lie is one which assumes the appearance of a virtue that a man has not.

To the sky the young preacher turned his face, worn in a few hours to the sharp outlines of pain, and in the dusk and loneliness of that mountain path, over which Stella was swiftly bearing him home, he made a vow in his heart that from this hour he would cease to be the slave of the Lie. He would descend, before the eyes of men and women, into the valley of humiliation, that he might emerge a free soul, even if he must in consequence go on with his life stripped of all that made it pleasant and useful.

And then Miles, lifting his hat as if bidding farewell to something beloved, rode calmly on to Roselawn.

Again, the little church beside Sneaking Creek was crowded as upon the Sunday the young preacher had given his first sermon. Some indefinite rumor had got abroad of a surprise in store for the congregation; how started it would be difficult to say, and nobody had the slightest idea of what he expected; only there was an atmosphere of expectancy.

All the Armstrong family were at church, the Judge resplendent with a purple necktie, and his wife in a purple silk; the girls, as usual, attired with taste and at considerable expense. Mistress Amanda and her mother were in their pew, with Nellie between them, charming as the spirit of October, in a carefully turned claret-colored poplin and a toque trimmed with autumn leaves. And Peter Weaver was there; with a dubious expression, and very sore in mind; wishing to believe the best of people under adverse circumstances, and nobly ready to put himself out of the question if he must do so to make little Nellie happy.

There was a peculiar stillness as Armstrong arose after the hymn that heralded the sermon. The young man's pale, tense look produced a general sensation of anxiety. Some good mothers in Israel were for handing him up their smelling salts. Girls scrutinized his features with their mouths falling apart, wondering what dreadful thing had happened to him to make his lips so set and his eyes so deep and black. But all turned their faces toward him with the sure response of sympathy toward unaffected feeling.

"My people!"——

The words were those of an old minister, grown gray in service among loved friends; but they came earnest and unstudied from the heart of the young preacher. Hearts thrilled to him, answering the strangely sweet appeal that breathed through the notes of that fine voice, always beautiful in its modulations, but to-day with a new quality that won without his hearers knowing why.

"You have come for a sermon," Armstrong went on. "I have no sermon to give you. When you elected me to serve as the minister of this church I had joy in taking the place you gave me. I love the work. At this instant, when I am about to give it up, every fibre of my nature clings to it, my heart and my mind as well. Yet I must give it up. I am not worthy to be your minister; nor *now*, to be a minister at all. And the reason is this. Some time ago, before I was ordained, I was for a season given over to ungodliness. I fell into one sin that by heaven's grace did not lead to worse, as it might have done. It was not a thing most of you would call very bad"—the proud Armstrong blood made the speaker's head rear slightly. He felt his father's angry eyes upon him and even imagined he heard the word "fool"; but he sternly went on:

"We southerners are too apt to look with indulgence upon social sins. Horse-racing and gambling are things you might consider excusable in a young man, even in one meaning to be a minister. These were my failings. I don't exaggerate them so much as to say that because I did these things I am unfit to serve as your minister. No; it is not that."

A deep breath labored through his lungs, and the many staring eyes in front of him all seemed to swim together and take on the form of a question. What was it, then? What was to come?

"The first duty of any soul is to be thoroughly honest," continued the young preacher. "He who glosses over his own faults and acts as if he had a guiltless past behind him helps to spread the fell disease of deceit and hypocrisy; the great pest of our times. And of this baseness I have been guilty. I let it be supposed that I had experienced sanctification. I came before you unconfessed and with a semblance of uprightness it was not my privilege to claim. All men are sinners, and it is the nature of some not to feel their sins acutely; they can go about with light hearts, never aware of the yoke a Christian should bear. But others are different. Every man according to his nature. We can only be guided by the light within. But wo to that man who wilfully shuts his eyes to the revelation of his own conscience! St. Paul felt the weight of his sins upon his soul and bravely cried out, 'I am the chief of sinners!' He made the world see him just as he was, not pretending goodness that did not belong to him. This is the right thing to do; above all, the right and only thing for a teacher of men to do. I have always felt this, and have acted contrary to my convictions. I have lived a lie before you. Now, for the first time you see me as I am and know that I am not what you thought me. It is the just punishment of one who 'knows the right and chooses the wrong,' to lose all he has sought to gain. I lose what I value most in giving up my privilege of usefulness among you. But it is my duty to do this, and I dare not shrink from it because it is hard."

Soldiers know that valor is born in the heat of strife, called out by the sight of waving banners,

the note of bugles, and the feeling of a great mass rushing all together against a foe. A far greater effort of courage is made by the man who deliberately stands up before his friends and makes a confession that may in an instant turn their esteem to contempt, and leave him alone and defenseless among a host of accusers. In making his supreme effort Armstrong had not been blind to this probable result. His imagination had vividly pictured the moment of his humiliation. Nerved to carry the thing through, his voice uttered the final word without a falter. Then, stepping back, he sat down.

Every sort of confusion prevailed. The general feeling was that of excitement and astonishment, especially among the younger set. Very few were able to appreciate the strange manifestation of moral greatness that had been made before them; and with these the uppermost sensation was that of awkwardness. Bluff old farmers had grown red and uneasy, aware that their young preacher had climbed to a height where they could not approach him. They shuffled their feet and looked down. The women whispered; some tittered hysterically. One got up and crossed the church to say something to a friend. It was the signal for a general movement, and in a few moments nearly everybody had changed their places. Armstrong, with his fingers over his closed eyes, saw nothing, but he felt terrible vibrations in his brain. He was alone; deserted. In a single moment of suffering years can be compressed, and a sensitive nature grows old fast.

There was a light touch upon his arm, a touch that thrilled him through and through. He looked, and standing beside him was beautiful Nellie; shy, shrinking Nellie, always dreading any conspicuous position, and wont to hide behind her mother's ample shadow. She was upon the platform, holding out her small, ungloved hand, her eyes shining through tears, her cheeks flushed rosy red; forgetful of shyness, all thought of self lost in the outburst of sympathy and reverence that had led her feet straight to him her heart called lover, leader and highest among men.

The young preacher's sunken eyes gleamed with a new, wonderful hope. They devoured the sweet face. Her hand was caught and held, pressed hard while he whispered, "Nellie, love!" and then, mindful of the staring people, Armstrong would have swept her quickly back, but the young girl felt to her very finger-tips the sense of that great stare. Her head dropped, her form trembled, the roses in her cheeks turned to fire, and shrinking, faltering, on the verge of a burst of weeping, she turned and hid her face on the young preacher's breast!

Scarcely a second was given to the people to take this sight in before Peter Weaver's huge form towered on the platform in front of the young pair. He had hastened, almost leaped up the steps, and behind him Nellie fled to the little door at the side of the platform and so out from the church. One great throb of pain had Peter's heart given at sight of Nellie on Armstrong's breast, one strong, silent effort of renunciation of a lifetime's hopes he made, and then self was put behind him, for good and all. He had a duty to perform, and he did it with his might.

"I want to say a word or two!" his great voice sang out, silencing the clamor and confusion in another thrill of curiosity.

"I ain't a speaker, as you all know——"

A comment from the rear chimed in, "You're a poet!" It was Penny Haywood, and Violet Armstrong, hanging upon his arm, quickly forced him to be silent.

"But there air facts in nature that speak for themselves, and don't require eloquent speech-making to get people to understand 'em. One of these facts is a good man. There are lots of good women—God bless 'em!—and some pretty good men in an all 'round way. But the rarest thing on all of God's earth is a thoroughly good, honest man; one whose acts air as transparent as daylight, that stands up before his fellows clean and sound, and dares to father everything he has ever done in his life, without shamming or palliating anything. You know it was this kind of an honest man that old Diogenes went 'round seeking with a lantern and couldn't find. Well, if he'd come seeking him in Fauquier County, Virginia, he'd have found him right here in the Second Baptist church, and his name's Miles Armstrong!"

"Good!" pronounced a woman's voice; Miss Lavinia Powell, not afraid to speak her mind, and esteeming it a rare privilege to assent to a man's common-sense.

"I consider, ladies and gentlemen, that we've had here before us to-day an exhibition of high and fine moral feeling that ought to be a lesson to us all our lives. And as for the modesty of the man that's given it, and his idea of being unworthy to go on preaching to us and all that, why, I say—I say that there ain't another as worthy one to be found anywhere, and if you're of my mind, we'll go right on having Mr. Miles Armstrong preach to us as long as he lives! And what's more," shouted Peter, while he unnecessarily reared himself a-tip-toe, "I'm darned if I think it'll hurt the church a bit if, to crown this occasion, you all join in a cheer of good-will to our preacher, Mr. Miles Armstrong and Miss Nellie Thomas, his wife—that's-to-be!"

Then there was laughing and acclamation, and crowding toward the platform, and the young preacher's hand was seized and wrung until his fingers ached, and his bewildered brain ceased to think at all, but left him altogether at the mercy of his friends, who nearly tore him to pieces in their zeal.

Peter Weaver for once asserted himself and claimed the privilege of driving the young preacher to Benvenew—where he was panting to go after Nellie—in his own high top buggy. He had something to say in private.

"It's this," said Peter, laying his broad hand earnestly on the young man's knee, when they were well along on the road and no one was near. "I knew about the thing you've been taking so hard,

before you told of it to-day. Beesly told me. Now, my dear sir, you want money. You don't want to ask your father for it. No need. You've done enough. Let me help you out o' this leetle scrape. I've more money than I know what to do with. I've got five hundred dollars right here, in this little roll, and I want you to take it. Not as a loan; as a gift. Do, now!"

Armstrong protested, thanked him with no lack of warmest gratitude, but absolutely refused. His father was rich, he said, and would help him. His road was easy before him now, easier than he deserved. All Peter could think of to console himself was that he would buy Nellie a wedding present with the money.

Shame-faced little Nellie, hiding behind the parlor curtains, longing for Armstrong, and fearing to have him come! How quickly he found her and carried her triumphantly to that distant corner where a great black horse-hair sofa swallowed them up; the worn horse-hair so slippery that he had to put his arm around her to hold her on.

Mistress Amanda was a dumfounded woman. So swiftly and suddenly had come the surprises of that morning that all she could do was to contemplate her daughter from a distance, and say "Well!" in a tone that meant resignation to circumstances.

But she had had her proud moment. Her heart—warm and true yet after bitter life-experiences—had leaped with delight when Peter Weaver made the little speech that with her knowledge of him, showed him a hero, capable of the most generous sacrifice it is within the power of a man to make. "Hero," she called him, to honest Peter's immense confusion, as they sat sedately in two armchairs before the fire, with their backs to the young couple in the far corner of the spacious room; talking over the details of the great occurrence.

"For such a sensible woman you air given to making too much of the little things men do that air right to do," said Peter, smiling.

"So few men do the little things that are right," sighed Mistress Amanda, looking at her own past in the bed of fire. "You are the only man I know, Peter, that I would put a heavy stake on to take the straight course every time."

"What, leave out Armstrong?" remonstrated Peter, with a jerk of his head backward toward the corner.

"Armstrong has come upon me too suddenly," complained Mistress Amanda. Then, with the generosity of a candid nature she paid rightful tribute to what commanded her admiration.

"He is certainly an excellent young man," she said. "A noble fellow. I've thought of him more than once as you spoke of him in that speech of yours,—'the man Diogenes sought!' I trust he will make my little Nellie happy."

"She has that within her that ensures happiness," said Peter steadily. "The sweetest, soundest heart ever a woman had. Heaven bless her!"

Mistress Amanda softly stretched out her firm, shapely hand, and laid it on his own as it rested on the arm of the chair. It was a friendly, sympathetic touch. Perhaps unawares, something more went into it than she intended.

Peter looked at her with great kindness.

"You and me air getting to be middle-aged people, Amanda," he said. "The chief thing now is for us to make the young people happy."

But old lady Powell, apparently dozing in her chair on the opposite side of the fire was building a double air-castle. She said to herself that Peter's little green cottage would suit the young preacher and his bride very well, if its master should come to Benvenew to live. Nothing was more likely. And Amanda and Peter would just hit it off together. Everybody could see that. It was perfectly plain.

A HALT AT DAWN [3]

Margaret Danvers stepped aboard the southern-bound sleeper at Chicago one stormy March evening, and as she walked composedly to her berth in the middle of the car, the eyes of every person present were riveted upon her. She wore a closely fitting garment of Russian sable, which enveloped her completely, and a large beaver hat with drooping plumes, and from the single fine diamond flashing at her throat to the tips of her dainty Suéde boots she looked the model of a fashionable beauty. She was the only woman on the car, and before she had fairly settled herself comfortably, all the men had mentally pronounced their opinion of her looks and style, and hazarded a conjecture as to her age. Her attendant, a florid man of middle age, received the

slight degree of attention

justified by his seeming only an adjunct of the moment. As he left her, he put into her hands a bunch of costly roses, which she received with a smile and laid upon the opposite seat the instant he was gone.

Of the score of passengers, two or three knew her by sight, for she was, in a way, a public character, but, as it happened, none were really acquainted with her, and before long even those most deeply interested in her appearance yielded to the apathy peculiar to sleeping-cars, and subsided into their newspapers or their rugs, preparing to wear out the evening until bedtime.

Margaret amused herself in watching the flying snow and in reverie. Too used to traveling to even care to look about her, she yielded to the prevailing somnambulistic influence just enough to dream without sleeping. At first there was in her mind a confusion of events past, present, and to come. Incidents of no importance mingled with greater ones, and her reflections became mixed with little fanciful suggestions of things long since forgotten, or, rather, voluntarily put out of mind. She tried to think of her career, to recall her triumphs, and to dwell upon the possibilities of the future. She told herself that music was her life, that all she had to do with was the beautiful and the divine in art, and that the everyday existence she had struggled to rise above was henceforth nothing more than an unpleasant memory.

At twenty-eight she was her own mistress, earning an independent income through the use of her beautiful voice. The teaching days and the drudgery of the class-room had passed, and as a concert singer she was favorably known in more than one western city noted for its critical taste. After a successful winter in Milwaukee and Chicago, she was now upon her way to fulfil an engagement in Baltimore, which promised more than anything in which she had yet engaged. She was in the heyday of her powers, admired, in radiant health, conscious of her beauty and talent, and entirely satisfied with life. What did it mean that, as she looked from the window with a proud smile upon her lips, some tantalizing thoughts should intrude themselves, and the mind so entirely self-poised should feel, for the first time in years, the weakening influence of some emotional fancies? It was her boast that she was never lonely, never sad, that her whole heart was in the work.

The conductor passed through taking tickets, and brought her back to the present. And after this came the little stir of the porter making up the berths, and she moved to the end of the car. In front two men were talking.

"Never saw a promise of a worse storm," said one. "Shouldn't wonder if the tracks were blocked a little ahead."

"Comes from the southwest," suggested the other. "If necessary, they'll put on another locomotive. We're bound to get through at any rate on this train; that's one comfort."

By nine o'clock Margaret, enveloped in a downy wrapper of dark red, lay courting sleep in her section. Over her was spread the fur ulster, none too warm above the blankets, even for her warm blood. The thermometer outside would have registered zero, and whiffs of icy air found their way every now and then into the car. Everything was quiet save her thoughts, which began to utter themselves with loud, importunate voices, as if answering some call without, independent of her control. "I have happily been able to say all my life that I didn't know what nerves were," said Margaret to herself, "but I begin to think that from some inexplicable cause I am nervous."

"Richard Allen!" She started as if the words had been spoken in her ear. Swiftly memory flew back ten years, and she saw herself standing bareheaded at the gate of her father's house in dear old Leesburg, Virginia, where her childhood had been passed; and beside her, bending tenderly to catch her lightest word, the form of her first lover, then a poor, obscure young lieutenant in the army. With an indifference scarce tinged with pity, since it hardly occurred to her in those days that men could really feel, she had met his pleading affection with an enthusiastic outburst of her ambition to lead the artist's life, to spend her energies in self-development, and show what a woman wholly devoted to an intellectual and artistic career might become. They had sung in the choir together, had mingled their voices in moments when, inspired by devotional ecstasy, it seemed that the two spirits united into one, in that mysterious fellowship which belongs alike to religion and to love. And yet she had no feeling for him above regard: no feeling for any one, for anything, but art.

"You must not think I am deficient in womanly sensibility," she had said to him, with one of those soft glances of the meaning and effect of which she was entirely careless and unconscious. "But some women must remain spinsters, you know, and I think I am meant to be one of the sisterhood."

"You do not know yourself. The day will come when ambition will seem nothing to you; when the homely things, the real things, will take on their true value to your eyes, and a 'career' will seem a mere artificiality that has nothing to do with what is best and sweetest in life."

The words had passed her by as an idle phrase, evoked from disappointment. And she and Richard Allen had parted, he going to his post on the line in Arizona, and she to Italy to study. And yet nothing passes from us entirely. Here, without warning, without her intention, the little scene came up before her eyes; and she saw again the apple-orchard in blossom, the red brick chimney of the school-house across the way looming up in the moonlight, the hills in the distance, the strong, proudly-carried figure at her side. And then scene after scene came up before her, always with the two figures present: the manly, devoted lover, the self-absorbed girl.

Yet she had lived for ambition, and the world had been kind to her, after she had proven her

mettle. She had not lacked lovers, but she had never loved. Her strong will, which had determinedly mapped out an existence entirely free from sentiment, had carried her through every affair triumphantly and untouched. Four or five hours ago she had entered that car as "free from the trammels of passion" as a vestal virgin. What was in the air, what was in the night, that hurried her on into imaginative flights? Constantly, like two stars, two meaning eyes seemed to gleam upon her, and kindle a world of emotion latent and unsuspected in her nature! She tried to be cynical, to laugh, to think of something else; she tried her best to get to sleep, but only her will could sleep, and fancy still rioted. Richard Allen had had the making of a fine man in him: what had become of him,—why had nothing been heard of him? The woman whose religion was success had little patience with patience; it seemed to her that all virtue was embodied in some sort of action. A man who at forty—he must be forty—was still obscure, was not worth a thought. And yet he had possessed a certain sort of strength. She had been forced to admire, in old times, a suggested moral superiority, a higher point of view than she considered practical. If he had brought himself to live up to his own standard, he must have been unable to make necessary concessions. And then, as Margaret recalled some "concessions" she had herself made to success, she felt her cheeks burn in the darkness. How often she had traded upon her own attractions, how often made use of the influence of her personality to bring about certain ends! If she had not lied in words, she had in act. Her present status had not been attained without some sacrifice of scruples.

The woman turned restlessly in her berth, wondering why such ideas should come to her now to interfere with her peace. She was good; she was ashamed of nothing in her past; she was living a high, free, independent life, the life for a woman of intellect and energy to lead. Thank heaven, she was not an emotional creature! Sentiment had been trained out of her. Long after midnight she lost consciousness, and passed a few hours in fitful slumber. It was cruel that she should have to dream of Richard Allen; dream that they were together in an open boat, drifting out to sea, and that his arms were around her, his eyes looking into hers. And she cared for nothing, thought of nothing but that he held her close—how strangely sweet it was!—

A jar, a shock, a sudden stop, as if the train had run against a wall of rock, and Margaret started up and drew the curtain aside instinctively. A fall through space—what was it, oh, where was she! Had the train fallen down an embankment?

After a minute she realized that she had been thrown from her berth across the car, that other persons lay about, some groaning, some hastily picking themselves up. She shut her eyes: there was a sharp pain in her left arm, and a weight upon her side. A falling lamp had struck her, and from some cause she could not rise; her leg must be broken. There was a terrible confusion, much talking, and half-a-dozen people bending over her pityingly and asking her questions.

"What has happened? Is anybody killed?" she asked.

Several persons answered at once. They had run into a freight. The engineer on their own train was killed; no one else. Many were hurt. Could she bear to be moved?

"I must," she returned, setting her lips, for agonizing pains began to shoot through her foot, and the thought of being touched was suffering.

"Fortunately we are just on the outskirts of Frithville—there are houses near." It was the conductor who spoke now, and he at once took charge. She was lifted carefully, wrapped in blankets and carried out. Their car had sustained less damage than any other, being in the rear, and there was no difficulty in getting out.

"If she could stand it to be taken over yonder," said some one, pointing to a house some distance away, "she'd be more comfortable, I reckon."

"Where are we?" asked Margaret, bravely suppressing her pain.

"Somewhere in southern Indiana—a little town called Frithville," a man answered her.

"If she could stand it to be taken over to the doctor's house—" said the persistent first speaker.

"I can stand it," she interposed; "take me there quickly."

They improvised a sort of rough litter of mattresses, and carried her across a field in the open country. The dawn was just breaking, and the pale moon was slowly fading out of view before the great coming light. The air was clear, cold, crisp; and, though there had evidently been a heavy storm during the night, it had cleared completely, and the first ray of sunlight glittered upon banks of frozen snow. The house before which they stopped was a plain, two-storied wooden structure, which seemed at first sight peculiarly barren-looking. Clean white curtains hung in straight, scant folds at the windows. The door had been drab in color, but the paint had been so assiduously scrubbed that one now took its presence on trust. There was a brass knocker and a rush door-mat, on which lay a large black cat with bristling white whiskers.

The door was opened by a severe Swedish girl, whose starched cap and apron suggested careful housekeeping, as her suspicious countenance suggested inhospitality. She made no objections to admitting them, however, and Margaret was carefully deposited upon a couch in the sitting-room to wait the coming of the doctor, who, the maid said, had just left the house to go to the scene of the wreck.

"We'll send him back to you, ma'am, right off," one of the men assured her. "You ought to be 'tended to first."

"Not if others are suffering and need him more," said Margaret faintly.

The ungenial looking Swede proved herself to be not deficient in skill, even though sympathy was in a measure lacking. She made her guest as comfortable as she could. The shoe was cut from the swollen ankle, which was bathed and bandaged, and the hurts upon the shoulder and side were pronounced to be only bruises which "Herr doctor would make-right." And then Margaret was left to herself while the girl went to make the inevitable "cup of tea," which was to set everything straight.

At first she lay perfectly still, seeing nothing, and caring for nothing, her mind full of vexation and impatience over an accident which must delay the fulfilment of her engagement. It did not occur to her that it might have been worse; anything was bad enough.

After awhile her eyes began to wander idly around the room. It seemed half parlor, half study. Folding doors divided it from the office at the back. There was a book-case, well filled; some good engravings on the walls; a few easy-chairs covered with raw silk of a dull hue, much worn; and a writing-table between the windows, half covered with books and magazines. There was something agreeable to her taste in the air of the room. She could imagine it the abode of a man whose very poverty could never become squalid. The great open Franklin stove shone brightly, and the hearth was scrupulously clean. Upon the mantel were a bronze clock and a pair of fine vases, dainty in tone and finish; they were the sole womanly touches about the place. Noting these details half indifferently, she lay back again and closed her eyes.

When she opened them again, they happened to glance directly over to a corner of the room which had before been dim, but was now illuminated by a shaft of sunlight. A carved bracket hung there, and on the shelf lay a singular looking little instrument, shaped like a dagger, of Moorish device, the handle inlaid with gold, left rough and unpolished. When Margaret saw this small object, she gave a little cry and tried to rise, but finding that impossible, she dropped back upon her pillows as if she had been shot, her eyes fixed upon the little instrument with a look of recognition that was half pleasure, half alarm. What strange trick was fate about to play her? How could this thing be possible?

There was a noise: the front door opened, and some one came along the hall with a firm, measured step. Margaret's heart, that well-regulated organ, beat to suffocation. She hardly dared listen or look. She threw her arm up over her forehead, nearly concealing her face. Some one entered the room and paused beside her. A well-remembered voice, graver, deeper than of yore, yet with a cheery ring in it, said, "Let me see what I can do to help you, madam." A chair was drawn up to the side of the couch, a gentle hand took her own. Her pulse was beating furiously; the hand was held rather long, as if something perplexed him. She felt searching eyes bent upon her face, and suddenly threw down her arm. The doctor drew back, his face paling, and the two looked at each other for a minute in silence. She spoke first, putting out her hand timidly.

"Richard, don't you remember me?"

"Remember you? As if I were likely ever to forget you."

She softly touched his empty left sleeve, pinned over his breast, two tears standing in her eyes.

"At Black Gulch," he said. "I have got over minding it. Don't grieve."

"You left the army?"

"Yes, four years ago. My health gave way. I studied medicine in Indianapolis, was invited here by an old friend to become his assistant, and shortly afterward he died. That is all."

"You never—never——"

"Yes; I married."

The words were an unexpected stab. Margaret gasped, amazed that she should care. Her face suddenly became suffused with color, and she turned it away.

"She only lived a year—Margaret," said the doctor, bending down to study the fair, flushed face, suddenly pain-smitten.

"My ankle!" said Margaret faintly, drawing his attention to the lesser hurt.

He was the doctor again at once, and, for the next half hour all professional gravity, and as impersonal as the sphinx; yet the woman felt through every nerve, like a musical vibration, the thrill of his firm, warm fingers, the scrutiny of his eyes. He was changed, worn through suffering rather than years, his face lined, his hair grown gray; with nothing young about him but his eyes, which sparkled with a cheer and brightness no grief could dim, for they mirrored a mind above all personal considerations, concerned with those large, loving interests belonging to humanity.

The woman felt the presence of this spirit, as if something beautiful and good had settled softly down beside her, and mutely besought her attention from herself and her narrow world. She struggled against it, yet it was like a shaft of genial sun heat, entering suddenly some frozen glen; she felt, in a heart purposely hardened against such influences, a stir, a thaw; ice was breaking, and the long-stilled waters of human affection began to flow in gentle currents, inspiring a sensation of delight that astonished and abashed her.

The doctor came and went quietly, her eyes following him. When he intercepted the look, she blushed like a schoolgirl. Too busy all that day to give her more than necessary attention, he yet lost nothing that passed and she had a sense which was oddly pleasant that he understood something of what was passing in her mind. It was terrible, too. There were moments when she wished herself miles away. Besides all the physical pain which she endured that long day, Margaret's soul was the battle-ground of a struggle far more exhausting. Ambition, pride, and

love of the world fought hard against a tender, newly-born impulse, which it seemed that a single breath of reason ought to chill to death.

The coals burned red in the open stove; a little tea-table was set in the middle of the room, and in the easiest chair in the house, piled with all the available cushions, the doctor placed Margaret, taking his position opposite her. The solemn Swedish girl brought in supper, which was well cooked and served with a scrupulous cleanliness that almost atoned for the absence of a more dainty service.

The doctor's face shone with satisfaction, but his manner, although genial, was ceremonious. Margaret felt that, in the few feet intervening between them, there lay years of care and grief and disappointment. She felt a yearning to bridge the chasm, to draw nearer to him, even though she herself had to take the hard steps toward understanding.

Thought the woman: "Does he love me still?" And thought the man: "Is she tired of the world, and could she learn to love me now?"

But they spoke of music; of camp-life on the western frontier; of what they had seen, what they had read. Not a word of what they felt. A few hours later the doctor stood in his bare little soldier's bedroom, and looked in his glass. For five minutes he studied himself, and then he turned away, resolved to let no new hope spring up in his heart. But Margaret slept to dream of him, woke through the night thinking of him, as she could not have thought in the old days, when he wooed her in the confidence of his fresh, hopeful youth.

There was no hotel in the village, and the few scattered houses were crowded with the wounded passengers, lying over till well enough to proceed with their journey. Margaret was not sorry that there was no other place for her than the refuge she had been taken to. "I am thinking that I am singularly fortunate in being in the doctor's house, where I get special attention," she said to him, with a little fluttering smile.

In time these shy looks wrought upon the doctor, and his stern resolution wavered. He found himself sounding her preferences and attachments, with the unconfessed design of extracting some unguarded word that might indicate a change in her old convictions. Carrying on together these two processes—determination to refrain and resolution to pursue, which often accompanies some course of action embraced in accordance with a natural, unworldly judgment, he managed to betray to the eager girl all he wished to conceal and she wished to know. She had telegraphed to Baltimore that she would be there in ten days. Four of them had passed, and she was free from pain and able to put her foot to the ground. The doctor persisted in helping her from her couch to the chair and back again.

"But I can walk alone now," she objected.

"We must be careful. Not until to-morrow." She protested with greater earnestness. "True—I have but one arm," he said, with the first accent of bitterness she had heard from him. Her lips parted to give utterance to a sudden rush of words, but she only looked at him, with eyes so eloquent that he answered the look.

"Margaret, do you care? Dear, I have always loved you, I love you now,—can you care?"

She drooped her head on his shoulder, but said nothing. The doctor held her close for a minute, and then, leaving her, began to walk up and down the room.

"It is impossible!"

"It may be impossible," murmured Margaret with a little blush, "but—it is true."

"It is cruel of me to ask it, dear. You are young, beautiful, brilliant—with success at your feet, and I——"

She put up her hand imploringly. It was caught and held. "And I am poor, obscure and—old," he finished, his eyes upon her face.

"I have come to you, Richard. It seemed strange to me. I cannot explain it, but it seems as if everything the world has to offer me is nothing beside——"

"Beside my love?" he bent on one knee beside her chair and put her hand to his lips.

"I want to share your life," she said, and a new expression grew upon her face, a high, devoted look which was half heroic, all womanly. "I want to learn something of the great things, the true things."

"You have had greater things than I can give you. Think of all you are leaving!"

She made a gesture of renunciation. "It does not seem much to leave—for you."

"Ah, my darling, I am afraid you will regret it. The work-a-day world will be a trial to you. And mine is a veritable work-a-day world."

He kept his eyes on her face, half dreading to see her shrink away. But what woman is not won by an appearance of self-renunciation? Richard could not have let her go now; at the last instant he would have snatched her to his breast, had she drawn away. But the misgiving that rushed over him so fiercely was a real one, a sensible one; he felt it profoundly, and tried to read in her eyes a shadow of this coming regret. But her eyes were clear, loving, radiant. She pressed herself against his breast, and gave him the great gift of her life and her future. Would the shadow ever come?

The moon looked softly in, an hour later, and finding the lovers in that delicious dream which

once in a lifetime comes to most men and women, drew over her face a gray cloud-veil and left them to dream on.

PINK AND BLACK [4]

One bright day in early spring, when the children had begun to hunt in the woods for trailing arbutus, and the Shenandoah River reflected in its clear depths the outlines of the overlooking mountains, a small, straight figure, sensibly habited in a short gray gown, made its way along the single paved street of Bloomdale to the principal store.

Young Heaton Smith, the handsome, blue-eyed son of the proprietor, came forward with a smiling welcome. After a few minutes' preliminary talk, Miss Phillida confessed that she had some notion of buying a dress.

He placed a stool in front of the counter extending along that side of the store which was devoted to dry goods, and, with the air of one

who affords a pleasant surprise, laid before her several rolls of sheer, silky stuff in dainty colorings; the most conspicuous being that which bore bunches of deep pink rosebuds on a light brown ground.

"Beautiful!" murmured Miss Phillida, taking hold of the edge with a delicate, blue-veined hand covered with a network of fine wrinkles. "How Sister Emma would love this pattern!"

"Here's a blue," said Heaton, laying another before her. "Handsome, aren't they? They come ten yards to a piece; just enough for a dress. We only got 'em in yesterday."

"I am mightily taken with this pink, Heaton. But I reckon it's too young-looking for me."

"You don't think yourself old, ma'am? Mother was saying, only the other day, that none of the girls could beat you for complexion."

"Just hear the boy! If it was Sister Emma, you might talk so. I do agree with anybody that calls her a beauty. But I reckon you don't recollect Sister Emma, Heaton? You was a child when she went away."

"I recollect her, though. It's about ten years now, ain't it? I was twelve then. I know I haven't forgot that big wedding-cake with the twelve dozen eggs in it."

"Really, Heaton?" said Miss Phillida, coloring with pleasure. "I was rather proud of that cake. Emma could make nice cake herself. I suppose she's had a chance to forget it. Her time's taken up other ways. Denver's quite a gay place, she says; and of course her husband's position requires her to go out a great deal."

This was uttered in a tone of proud satisfaction. Everybody in Bloomdale knew what a comfort it was to the solitary woman to talk about her sister. The Virginia beauty had married a western millionaire, and when at the monthly sewing society Miss Phillida read aloud her last Denver letter, these staid, but pleasure-loving Virginia matrons listened eagerly.

Young Heaton leaned back against the shelves in an easy, conversational attitude, and looked politely interested.

"Of course you know she's coming home to make a visit, Heaton?" The little lady's joy and yearning brimmed over her mild blue eyes, and she lowered her head, pretending to examine the goods.

"So I heard," said Heaton cordially. "We'll all enjoy seeing her, I'm shore."

"I expect her to-morrow," Miss Phillida cried excitedly. "By the morning train."

A vehicle drew up before the long porch, and the little woman endeavored to seem occupied with her purchase.

"I reckon this black and white'd be more appropriate to my years," she said in a critical tone. "But somehow I'm awfully in the notion of taking that pink."

"Take the pink, Miss Phillidy; and if you change your mind, we'll take it back and give you another in the place of it."

Miss Phillida cast another glance at the black and white, then turned again to the pink.

"I'll take it then, Heaton. I feel somehow as if it'd please Emma to have me get a gown that looked cheerful. And I must be getting young again, for I haven't been so in the notion of dressing up for ages. But, dear me! if I haven't forgot to ask the price! Maybe it's beyond my reach."

"No, indeed, Miss Phillidy, it's a bargain. Five dollars for any pattern. A chance we mayn't be able to offer our customers again."

It was a considerable sum for Miss Phillida to give for a spring dress. She was deep in calculations when a handsome ruddy man of about forty-five entered the store, and greeted her with delightful heartiness.

He called her "Cousin Phillidy," and the cousinship, although very distant, enabled him to do the little woman many a good turn. In his heart, Mr. Ned Miller always looked upon her as the woman who might, but for a chance, have been his sister-in-law. The chance had been Emma Wood's marriage with another man. But that was not his fault. Bloomdale said that Ned Miller was of too affectionate a nature to stay a widower.

As she reflected his sunshiny smile and answered his gay badinage, a strange idea suddenly entered Miss Phillida's head. It made her get up in great haste.

"I—I'll take the pink, Heaton," she said quickly. "I'll carry it right with me."

"My horses air at the door, cousin. Let me drive you up the street."

"It's but a step; I'm obliged to you, Cousin Ned. And it's such a sweet day, I like to walk."

"Well, I'll see you at preaching Sunday, cousin. And your sister, too, I hope. But if I'm in town before, I'll just call in—to see if I can be of any service."

"Thank you," murmured Miss Phillida. "Give my love to all at Maplegrove," and she hastened homeward, amazed at herself, and inclined to believe that the Father of Evil had put that startling notion into her head.

She stopped at the gate of a low, brown house opposite the Methodist Church, and, going through a garden crowded with sweet, old-fashioned flowers, opened the side door into a little entry about six feet square, from which one door on the left led to the sitting-room, and another on the right into a spare bedroom. The kitchen lay beyond the sitting room, and thither Miss Phillida directed her steps. A cup of tea, taken upon the spotless pine table, brought her back to herself. She had spread out the dress pattern over the back of the settee, to look at while she ate her dinner; and after washing up the dishes, she opened a door leading into a chilly bedroom, all dark, rich old mahogany and white draperies, and carefully laid it away in the lower drawer of a capacious bureau.

"I reckon it was extravagant of me," she soliloquized. "But I couldn't shame Emma by appearing out in company with her in old duds."

Emma arrived the next morning. Bloomdale was looking for her when the train stopped at the dilapidated old shed called a "deep-ho." At first Bloomdale thought itself disappointed. It had expected a brilliant young lady accompanied by a quantity of baggage, exhibiting, perhaps, some of the haughtiness of a person used to the homage paid to rank and wealth. Instead, there was left upon the platform, besides a small, plain trunk, a tall woman dressed all in black, her face covered with a heavy veil. She advanced hesitatingly. Miss Phillida, straining her eyes to see through that veil, suddenly pressed forward and fell into her arms.

"It's you, sister! I know you by your walk. Come and get into the carryall, there's room for the trunk at the back."

Bewildered, but energetic, she steered her sister past the little crowd and landed her safely in the old carryall, upon the back of which a strapping negro was already adjusting the trunk. Miss Phillida recognized him as the coachman of Mr. Ned Miller, and the tears came to her eyes as he handed her the reins. To her excited sense, it seemed significant that the first person to show kindness to Emma on her home-coming should be some one belonging to her old lover.

She talked without knowing what she said. So far, Emma had not spoken, after the first low murmur of greeting. Emma!—the gay, sparkling girl whose high spirits and talent for conversation had made her a favorite in county society. For whom could she be in mourning? Miss Phillida racked her brain with conjectures.

When they were inside the house Emma lifted her veil, gazing around like one who had just returned to life from a long trance. Her face, whose beauty was of a grand type, softened and brightened from its look of stern repose, as one by one she recognized objects once loved and familiar.

"Everything is just the same," she said in a low voice, vibrant with feeling. "Grandfather's and father's swords there on the wall, the fox-skin rugs, the horse-hair armchairs, and the dear old brass andirons!—How good of you to have a fire, Phillida, dear! It looks so cheerful. I haven't seen a wood fire on the hearth since I left home."

"You mean home in Denver?" palpitated Miss Phillida, feeling strangely awed by this sister with grave manner and pale face.

"No!" The denial was quick and passionate, more like the fervor of the old Emma. She threw off her bonnet and cloak with rapid movements, and held out her arms to little Miss Phillida. In a moment all constraint had melted away between the long-severed sisters. The tongue of the elder was loosened, and she asked question after question, which, however, Emma parried.

"I have a long story to tell you, dear; but let us wait till evening. When the curtains are drawn and the lamps lit, I shall feel better able to talk. Let me just enjoy being at home, for a little while."

She followed Miss Phillida out to the kitchen and, sitting on a low chair with the big black cat

purring in her lap, watched her fry the chicken and bake the corn cakes for dinner, talking meanwhile, fluently and entertainingly, of life in the West, and of the different cities she had visited. But not a word of herself.

When dinner was over, she insisted upon wiping the dishes; and it was then that Miss Phillida scrutinized her dress, and saw that it was rusty, and not of fine material.

"Oh, just a traveling dress," thought the elder sister, who experienced an odd fluttering of the heart.

The afternoon was consumed in examining the house and garden. Miss Phillida raised her own vegetables, and kept a few chickens, which latter amused themselves by scratching up her seeds and pecking her choicest tomatoes as they ripened. A creek watered the lower end of the garden, and here a half-dozen ducks disported lazily. Under a spreading apple tree was a bench covered with an old buffalo robe, upon which she sat with her sewing on summer afternoons. Surrounded thus by comfort and peace, the gentle spinster had lived her harmless existence, conscious of but one ungratified wish: the longing for her sister. And now that wish was accomplished. With tremors of delight she displayed everything, confiding all her little plans to affectionate, sympathetic ears. Each homely detail gave Emma fresh pleasure. She seemed to desire to penetrate to the heart of this simple home life; to attach herself to it, like one who thirsted for an intimacy with something genuine and natural.

Miss Phillida saw with pleasure that clouds were gathering, and that darkness would come on earlier than usual. Emma became grave again after supper; and when she seated herself in the big rocking-chair before the hearth in the sitting-room, the firelight played over features that wore an expression of noble sadness.

"It is three years since I left Denver," she said, turning her luminous gray eyes upon her sister's bewildered countenance. "I sent my letters to a friend there who mailed them to you. It was not necessary for you to be harassed by a knowledge of my sufferings. You fancied I was living a happy, care-free life with a rich and generous husband. Heavens!—How unsophisticated we are, we country folks in Virginia!

"I can't make it all plain to you, Phillida, for you wouldn't understand without having gone through it, how, little by little, I learned the ways of society, and on what a base foundation the wealth we enjoyed was built. Robert was a speculator, and a reckless, unscrupulous one. And besides this he was not honest in small things. The husband I had imagined a fairy prince, full of noble qualities, was not only false but mean. He gave me whatever was necessary to make a show; nothing for my pleasure. Poor little sister! Don't you suppose I wanted to send you presents? I never had a dollar of my own all those seven years. But finally the end came. Robert failed—and it was a dishonorable failure. He went away in the night, leaving me to bear the brunt of everything."

"Oh, oh!" breathed Miss Phillida. "And didn't he come back?"

"He wrote me a letter from Canada, telling me to come over to him, for he was sick. Well, I went! I nursed him, and worked for him,—and I put up for two years with a life that was Purgatory. You mustn't expect me to be very sorry he died then, Phillida. You wouldn't if you knew all. I did hate to come back to you,—such a failure! But it was a miserable existence all alone there, in Quebec, and—I knew you would be glad to see me, dear!"

For a few moments the sisters wept together. Then Emma raised her head.

"I thought that perhaps I might get a school. Of course I intend to do something."

"No, no!" cried Miss Phillida, wiping her eyes and taking her sister's hand. "You needn't do that, dearest. With the garden and the cow and chickens, there is plenty. And then, you know, the hundred a year that comes from the railroad shares is as much yours as mine. Everything is yours, and, thank heaven, you're at home now, where everybody'll be good to you!"

"The same generous, self-sacrificing little soul! But, dear Phillida, I must work, if only to keep myself happy. I should soon be miserable and restless with nothing to do. Come, make up your mind to let me be a help instead of a burden. I have set my heart upon the school. Tell me, who are the trustees now?"

"Cousin Ned Miller's a trustee," replied Miss Phillida, who had grown thoughtful. "Perhaps you're right, Emma. Maybe you'll be happier with the children to think about. And he'll get you a school, I'm quite sure."

Emma rocked softly back and forth, looking into the fire. Perhaps she saw visions there of a new and happier life, for her face took on an expression of content.

But some little personal worry preyed upon Miss Phillida's mind. She said nothing about it, but one morning when Emma had gone for a drive with one of the neighbors, she took from the bureau drawer the precious parcel reposing there, and with an air of guilt made her way to the store.

"I've brought back this dress," she said confidentially to Heaton. "And if you'll be so kind as to change it, I'll take the black and white piece. I feel it's more suitable, somehow."

He readily obliged her, and the new pattern was deposited in the deep drawer, after which the little woman wore an air of chastened cheerfulness.

Cousin Ned Miller justified Miss Phillida's confidence. He not only promised Emma the school, but offered to get a class in French for her; and he spent time running about, waiting on her, and

cheering her in every way that could suggest itself to his kind heart. His handsome team stood almost every day before the little brown house, while he loitered on the honeysuckle scented porch with the sisters. There was always some plausible excuse for his coming, and the true meaning of his visits did not dawn upon Miss Phillida's mind until one afternoon when she suddenly entered the sitting-room and saw them on the sofa together.

The little woman's face was aflame with joyous excitement, as she ran into the kitchen and began moving things about, without knowing or caring what she did. The happiest outcome!—the most natural, the most comfortable, and most reasonable arrangement that could happen! Emma and Cousin Ned! They were made for each other.

"I really can't keep still," thought Miss Phillida. "I must go somewhere."

As she put on her old gray gown, a thought suddenly flashed into her mind. "Maybe it'll look curious," she reflected. "But I declare if I won't."

Once more she entered the store with a parcel under her cape. Fortunately the accommodating clerk was the only one around.

Miss Phillida blushed as she laid the black and white dress pattern on the counter.

"I'm ashamed to be so changeable, Heaton, indeed I am; but things have altered lately, and—my mind's more given to bright colors, somehow. So, if it won't inconvenience you any, and if you'd really just as lief—I think I'll change back to the pink."

MRS. MAY'S PRIVATE INCOME. [5]

WHEN Laura McHenry quietly turned her back upon the wealthy and desirable suitor her family had decided she should marry, and gave her hand to William May, a middle-aged lawyer of no particular standing or prospects, everybody decided that she had thrown herself away.

Mr. May began his married life upon a wind-fall of fifteen hundred dollars, his largest fee in a dozen years. A pretty house in Richmond was leased for a year, and the delightful experience of buying new furniture and disposing it to the best advantage gave the young wife such happy occupation for the first two months that she was always in a sunny humor, full of brightness and variability, and that kind of independent submissiveness which charms a man who likes

to see a woman much occupied with household affairs, and with himself, as the center of the household. Her pretty show of activity amused him. He said she made occupation for herself in moving the furniture from one place to another and then back again. One of his jokes was to ask her where he should find the bed when he came home. And upon this she would pretend to pout, and then they would kiss each other without the least awkwardness or shame-facedness, and he would go off to his work with a pleasant sense of security in the devotion of his lovely wife, while she would carry in her mind all day long the picture of his smiling face, and love him for every pretty speech and admiring look.

They were really happy. And it lasted quite six months, till all the fifteen hundred dollars had been drawn out of the bank, except the bare moiety necessary to keep the account.

When Dinah's wages were a month over-due, her substantial presence disappeared out of the kitchen, and Laura's dainty white hands made acquaintance with dish-mops, stove-lifters and brooms. Such an ignoramus as she found herself! And with what zeal she bent her mind to the study of cookery books and the household corners of the newspapers. And brains told. She left the flour out of her first cake, but her second one was a triumph of art, and muffins, veal cutlets and custards came out from under her clever fingers with a delicacy and deftness that surprised herself and gratified May immensely. Although he was sorry to have her work in the kitchen, and sorry to find her now too tired to sing to him in the evenings with the same spirit and freshness that used to breathe through her songs. But the worst thing was that fatigue and unending attention to details, united to those perpetual interruptions from the door-bell which drive busy women almost distracted, had their effect upon Laura's delicate frame. She grew "nervous," which is often a misnomer for combined worry and distasteful labors. It will seem to the inexperienced that the housekeeping for two people, in a convenient little house, should have been a mere bagatelle to a clever woman. Perhaps it would have been if Laura had not had her profession to learn as well as practise. She had not been brought up to housework, but to sing. Music had always been so much a part of her life that she no more thought of giving up her daily study hours than she would have thought of giving up her William. It was not that she chose to work at her piano three or four hours a day after her morning housework was done, but that it simply did not occur to her to do otherwise. She usually forgot or neglected to take any lunch, and by dinner time had no appetite, which had its conveniences, for it was rapidly coming to pass that the dinners she could compass upon the scanty and irregular supplies of money she received were scarcely sufficient for more than one person, and she contrived that her husband should be

that person.

She had a thousand devices for inducing him to eat the bit of steak, the single cup-custard, or the slice of fish. He was far from realizing that his delicately fair wife, with her dainty tastes, was illy nourished upon the tea and toast to which she often confined herself. Nor did Laura realize it.

But after all, it was not the housework, the scanty food, nor even the lack of variety and refreshment in her life that was beginning to tell heavily upon her health, that was spoiling her beautiful disposition and making her apprehensive and irritable. It was something more terrible to a loving woman, honoring and admiring her husband with all her soul, than all these things combined.

The third anniversary of their wedding-day came. Laura remembered what day it was as she opened her eyes in the early dawn. A sigh escaped her before she knew it. The tendency to meditate, as Nathaniel Hawthorne observed, makes a woman sad. Laura had always been thoughtful; lately—being much alone and having some matters to think about not tending to raise her spirits, she had insensibly become sober.

She put her feet out of bed into a pair of worn slippers, and shaking down a heavy mass of dark brown hair that matched her eyes in color, made her toilet without waking her husband, who slumbered serenely till within ten minutes of the breakfast hour, when she called him, meeting with a not overgracious response.

The little dining-room had a pleasant and comfortable air this chilly September morning. The little round table bore a glass containing a sprig or two of red geranium from the pot in the window, and the coffee-urn of nickel was polished till it shone like silver.

Mr. May came in after keeping her waiting fifteen minutes, and after helping her and himself to oatmeal, began to read the newspaper that lay at his plate in apparent forgetfulness of everything else. He was a stout, rather short man, with large, luminous brown eyes that never seemed to be looking at anything in particular. A full beard and mustache sprinkled with gray hid a mouth that in his youth had made the lower part of his face strongly resemble that of Peter the Great. There was some quality about him that caused one to dread arousing his anger; a strong sense of his own importance, perhaps. Some persons have the gift of reflecting their own egotism into the minds of others, rendering themselves formidable entirely through an appeal to the imagination.

Laura was a tall, gracefully-formed woman, with a presence that promised to become majestic with increasing years. Yet at heart she was timid and sensitive as a delicate child, needing affection and encouragement in the same measure; the last woman in the world for a man who lived entirely within himself, and to whom a wife was an adjunct, to be put on and off at his pleasure. Yet May had in regard to her—and in regard to all other things—a conscience void of offense. He took credit to himself for having given her her heart's desire in his love.

The door-bell jangled sharply. May looked up.

"If that is the landlord," he said impressively, "I don't want to see him."

"What shall I tell him?" asked Laura.

"Tell him anything you please!" The tone was sternly impatient this time.

She went slowly into the narrow hall, and after a momentary parley with some one who spoke in a high, angry voice, returned with a bill which she laid before him without a word.

"Tell him I will—attend to it."

"He says——" she murmured deprecatingly, but got no further; the lowering expression that came over his face was too lacerating to her feelings. She preferred confronting the irate butcher again.

But there was a lump in her throat as she quietly resumed her seat. One of her ideas of the "protection" promised by the marriage ceremony had been a shielding from the roughness of persons of this sort. Why did he ask her to stand between him and the landlord, the coal man and the butcher? Why, oh, why, was there any necessity for these evasions and subterfuges? She looked at her husband as he arose at last, after a leisurely breakfast hour, and stood by the window finishing a paragraph in his paper. He was a strong, robust man in the prime of life, with a profession and hosts of acquaintances to help on his interests. Why could he not at least make the small income necessary to keep their very modest establishment going?

The explanation lay in a single fact. May was a man of visionary schemes, always chasing some will-o'-the-wisp which promised fortune and distinction, finding his pleasure in holding honorary posts at his political club, which gave him a chance to talk and repaid him in a cheaply gained reputation for ability.

Little by little Laura's idealized vision of her husband had faded before the pressure of facts. But she clung to the shreds of her faith as women do hold to their illusions; as they must if the world is to go on and homes continue to exist. There was something still for her to learn, however, and not the easiest lesson that had been set for her.

She set rather indifferently about her practising that afternoon. It seemed to be no matter whether Chopin or Mendelssohn spoke to her soul; both were alike rendered with a cold brilliancy very far removed from her usual sympathetic interpretation. Her thoughts were far away, wandering amid scenes of her girlhood; a happy time, full of social enjoyment, of affectionate family intercourse, of freedom from care, from make-shifts, from the dishonor of

debt; a dishonor that bore lightly upon May, with his belief in the future, but that was crushing to her sensitive nature. Idly her fingers wandered, swifter her thoughts flew, till all at once a sentence of homely wisdom from a modern novelist came into her mind: "Many women are struggling under the burden of money-saving when they had far rather spend their energies in money-getting."

She arose impetuously, her eyes suddenly full of light. What had she been thinking of? There was a fund of unused wealth in her fine musical education, in her beautiful voice, a little impaired by hardships, but magnificent still. Here was the way out of all this mirage of poverty; with what she could earn by taking a class in Madame Cable's school combined with her husband's earnings, they could live with comparative ease and comfort. Oh, happiness, oh, relief! Laura's hat and cape were on in ten minutes and a car was taking her down-town to the dwelling of her old teacher, sure of a welcome and of aid. Madame had offered her this position five years ago, just after her graduation, but her mother would not hear of it. Now her mother was two thousand miles away, on a frontier post with Major McHenry, entirely ignorant of the state of affairs in her daughter's household.

What a curiously elusive thing courage is! By the time Laura's finger was on the bell at Madame's door, her breath was coming in gasps, and while she waited in the lofty and handsomely furnished parlor for the coming of her old teacher, all the strength went out of her knees, so that she found it difficult to rise when that stately, self-possessed woman came in with a little silken rustle of skirts and extended hand.

It is so hard to say outright to a friend, "Help me!" And yet, is not the opportunity of giving help and comfort one of the rewards of a successful life? Why do we distrust human goodness? It was the pride in Laura's nature that made her talk of everything else rather than the object of her call, that made her tongue falter and her cheek grow paler, when at length she brought herself to her task.

But fate was not ill-disposed. It happened that Madame needed her services. She had come at an opportune moment, and in a few minutes the business was satisfactorily settled.

"At the same time, my dear," said Madame, folding her soft, fat hands and shaking her head till the emerald drops in her ears emitted flashes of green fire, "I must say that I never like to see a married woman set out to earn money. It is apt to spoil her husband. A man should support his wife. It is his duty and it ought to be his pleasure. And another side of the matter is that women to whom the extra income they can gain by their talents means luxury and possibly extravagance, forget that such competition makes it harder for their needy sisters. Money-making is not such a gracious task. It should be left to those who really need the money."

"I am not going to tell you I need it," thought Laura. Aloud, she said with much indifference:

"Madame, have you any one in your mind you would rather get to take your classes—any one you think would do the work better?"

"No," the teacher acknowledged that she knew no other superior to her old pupil. "To tell you the truth, if I did I should feel it a duty to engage the better worker. The principal of a school like this cannot let her feelings guide her, you know."

"Then as the advantage is mutual," said Laura, a smile breaking over her serious face, "my conscience is at rest. It is a matter of the success of the fittest. My needier sister is not so well prepared for the post as I, and so I get it."

"Really, you are right," murmured Madame, with her head on one side. "But," she added as her visitor rose, "take my advice about one thing: keep your earnings for yourself; they belong to you. Don't let your husband find out that there is a—another capable bread-winner in the house."

Madame had not the highest opinion in the world of Mr. William May. But who lays to heart words of selfish caution? Not the wife who in the glow of comfort and peace arising from the prospect of an income of her own, feels all the old confidence and affection return as she explains matters to her husband with a careful avoidance of any wound to his self-love, and a blissful dwelling upon the pleasure and advantage that is to come to herself in the healthful exercise of her accomplishments.

May was a little afraid their social standing would suffer. He certainly did not like the idea of his wife teaching in a school. It was contrary to all his preconceptions of her domestic, home-loving disposition.

"It is a reflection upon me," he said moodily, adding with a little passionate movement that brought her within his arm, her cheek close to his lips: "I didn't marry you to let you work, my darling!"

She might have answered that he had let her work at harder things, but she did not. She dwelt upon the idea of the comfort a regular occupation was to be to her during the long winter days. She would be much happier and less lonely with something to do. Very little said she of the salary that was an item of so much importance in her mind.

But after he had gone out to his club she got out a little blank book and figured it all away for six months to come. She resolved to leave out of consideration the house-rent and the table. Naturally, William would continue to bear the burden of these responsibilities. Her design was to fill in the vacancies which he was indifferent to. So much for the gas bill, so much for laundry, so much for the seats in church. And something over for the indispensable winter clothing and for the joy of giving. She looked forward to the happiness of hanging a new hat upon the rack in

place of dear Will's shabby one, and of supplying a pair of slippers. Bliss and comfort of a little control over circumstances, instead of being compelled to stand helpless and anxious waiting upon the good fortune of another! Could a man have any idea of what this feeling is to a woman? Mr. May could not have had, or he would never have done what he did.

All that first month Laura was buoyed up by the anticipation of that comfortable check she was soon to finger. Cool autumn breezes were beginning to blow, but when first one woman, then another, put on wraps, until her plain undraped gown appeared odd, she merely smiled indifferently and warmed herself with the thought of pay-day. When the farina kettle sprang a leak she laughingly declared it was old enough to be superannuated. A dollar seemed such a trifle to worry over now.

At last it was in her hands. The first earning of her life. With a child's glee she hurried home and displayed it to her husband, enjoying his teasing comments on her sudden accession to wealth. But the dinner had to be cooked, and recalling herself to this duty, she ran into the kitchen, leaving the check behind her on the desk.

"It is all right," said Mr. May, when she looked for it later in the evening. "I put it in my private drawer."

"Oh, yes, it is safer there," she returned easily, and got out her mending basket, humming a gay tune, more light of heart than she had been in many a day.

The next day was Saturday, and she had more morning work to do than usual, but she hurried through it, and by half-past ten she had her hat and gloves on and was rummaging the desk for her check. It was nowhere to be found.

"Impossible that it could have been stolen," she exclaimed. "Impossible! It was not indorsed. No one could use it, even if a thief had made his way in, and that is absurd to think of. It *must* be here."

Only when every paper had been taken out and scrutinized did she desist from her search, and almost crying with vexation, resigned herself to await her husband's return and ask his advice.

"My check!" she cried breathlessly, almost before he was fairly inside the door. "It is gone!"

He turned with a somewhat puzzled expression at her excited manner.

"The check? Oh, why, that is all right. I put it in the bank this morning."

"You put it in the bank?" repeated Laura slowly. "But how could you? It was not indorsed."

"I indorsed it," he answered rather shortly, annoyed at all this explanation about a mere matter of course. Were not he and his wife one, and was not everything in common between them? It had not entered his head for a single instant that there was anything amiss about a procedure that was to Laura a veritable thunderbolt.

She stood for a moment with her eyes lowered, ashamed for him who thought of nothing less than of being ashamed for himself. It was impossible to reproach him; he was a man whom a breath of censure hardened into rock. While the sunshine of applause and sympathy shone upon him he was debonair and charming, but the first chilling breath of blame brought all the ice in his nature to the surface. She had experienced the change; she dared not encounter it. Besides, it was not in this first instant of a new revelation of his creed that she was to feel all the sense of his moral flexibility. That was reserved for later, when her keen instinct of justice and of individual rights had been outraged again and again. She loved him. To win a smile and a kind word from him what would she not have sacrificed? The mere trifle of money was nothing. It was the feeling of having been unfairly treated, of having been not considered at all where she had every right to consideration. And yet the want of that trifle of money was to make her miserable for a long time to come.

It was hard to be sweet and loving all day Sunday, with a weight of suppressed thought upon her mind, but forbearance nourishes affection, and by Monday she was her own tender, submissive self again. Besides, it had occurred to her that the money was not quite out of her reach; William would give her a check if she asked him for it.

When she made the suggestion he readily assented, and made out one to her for five dollars before he left Monday morning. When she timidly broached the subject again he looked annoyed, and said curtly that the landlord had the money.

"But——" began Laura, flushing hotly, then closed her lips and went quietly about her work. What was there to say? The landlord had to be paid, of course. Only somehow, she had thought that her husband would do that, as he had always managed it before.

But the following month brought Mr. May increasing ill-luck. He would have been a generous and kindly man if he had prospered, and with nothing to bring it to the surface he might have gone through life, his lack of sterling principle unsuspected. He could be generous but not just; he could recognize the rights of others—the right of tradesmen to be paid, the rights of his political comrades to a fulfilment of his promises to them—*if* everything went well with himself. But to tell the truth in the teeth of disaster, to face an irate creditor, to climb down from his height of vain ambition and lay to heart that vow of duty his childish lips had uttered at his mother's knee—"To labor truly to get my own living, and do my duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call me"—this was what William May had not it in him to perform. And his wife, with her clear moral sense, her unbending Puritan conscience, was doomed to see him fail.

It was not the loss of her money that pained her so much when on the next pay-day she handed

him her check in very pity and sorrow for his "bad luck." It was the feeling that do what she would, work as she might, they would never be any better off. And the still more dreary revelation that as her energy was more feverishly applied his diminished. The more earnest and eager she grew to pay off their increasing debts and establish system in their ways, the more careless he became.

She furbished up her wedding gown and made engagements to sing at parlor entertainments. She gave private lessons. And she made money. Some of it she handled herself, but most of it was "put in the bank," and drawn out for a strange purpose: one she disapproved and disbelieved in utterly, but could not positively oppose.

He was so boyishly eager about it, so confident of his success. Through activity unprecedented and maneuverings he did not care to remember, Mr. May had been put up for State senator from his district, and in all the bustle of officering small meetings and petty "bossing," his spirits were so high, and he was so good-humored and affectionate that his wife had not the heart to tell him that this was the worst waste of time in which he had yet engaged. For to her sane, cautious mind it was apparent from the first that he had not the shadow of a chance of being elected.

It happened that on the very eve of the election she was engaged to sing at Carnegie Hall. He could not possibly spare time to take her, and she went down alone, in a car. Her eyes were very bright and a spot of color burned in each cheek. She was beautiful, with the beauty of spirit that has triumphed over flesh. But a physician in the audience whispered to his wife that that lovely woman was far along in consumption. "And she will go quick, too, poor thing!"

The troublesome cough which she had neglected all winter annoyed her more than usual going home, but she was rather shocked than grieved when in the middle of the night a hemorrhage came on. Life was growing hard and duty perplexing. But sheer force of will and affection made her seem better next day, and she would not hear of her husband staying with her. He was pledged to appear elsewhere and she made him go. He did not come in till after midnight, and then—she sat up in sudden terror, listening to that stumbling step, those mumbling speeches! It was not only his election that May had lost that night; his manhood had followed.

Laura turned her face to the wall. Was life to hold this new horror? Ah, that she might escape the next day, with its shame, its sorrow and its pitiful regrets. But what she expected did not come. May was constitutionally incapable of confessing himself at fault. He slept off his intoxication and did not get up until he was quite himself again, cool and non-committal.

"Bad luck again, girlie," he said with an assumption of indifference. "I can't make you Mrs. Senator this time."

"Poor Will!" the wife murmured. "I am sorry, dear."

"You are better?" he asked hastily, struck with her expression. "You must have the doctor."

It was a tardy suggestion, and Laura smiled sadly. The doctor came, however. But all he could do was to hold out those vague hopes which are no comfort to anxious hearts. Before long her mother was sent for, but the dread disease did its rapid work. Laura's great trial to the last was the terrible sense of responsibility that haunted her about the expenses that were being incurred.

"When I am not here, mother, what will he do? Poor fellow, nobody understands him but me."

A little while afterwards she aroused herself from a fit of musing and murmured:

"This awful feeling of helplessness!—and I tried so hard to set things right. I thought when I had a little income of my own that everything would go well."

"You have killed yourself," said her mother, darting a look of reproach at the unconscious husband, who entered the room at this moment.

"Oh, no, don't say that," Laura whispered. "I only did what I wanted to do. Will and I have been very happy, only——" But neither the mother nor the husband, bending over the bed, heard the rest of the sentence.

THE LAZIEST GIRL IN VIRGINIA. [6]

UPON the Virginia side of the Potomac River, five miles across from Washington City whose twinkling lights can be distinctly seen by night, lies a little farm of about twenty-five acres, owned by a widow and her three daughters, Caroline, Minnie and Rosa.

The dwelling is a villa rather than a farm-house, with wide verandas that are the favorite sitting-rooms of the family in summer. The glimpse they catch of the river traffic and of the far-off city gives them a cheerful feeling of nearness to active life, while they are removed from its noise and crowds.

Besides this property Widow Jones had found herself possessed, at her husband's death, of an immense tract of unproductive land down on Chesapeake Bay which could not be sold until

Rosa, the younger girl, now eighteen, came of age. Meanwhile, the taxes vexed her soul.

Hospitable, easy-going and accustomed to consider luxuries positive necessities, the family would have been severely straitened if it had not been for the nicety with which their various talents helped one another out.

Caroline had excellent business ability and managed all the outside affairs. She drew the dividends on their railway stock, parleyed with lawyers, and engaged and settled with the hired men. In the burning August weather, when a dozen red-shirted Negroes were to be cared for, this slender young girl, in flaring straw hat and short gingham dress, mounted her horse and rode up and down the fields, a keen-eyed, cheery, sweet-voiced overseer. Regardless of her own meals she helped old black Jessie prepare the meals for the men in the little cabin, and there was no complaint as to quality or quantity under her liberal rule. She did the marketing also and bought the other supplies. Then Mrs. Jones took up the work, and her deft fingers and good taste converted crude materials into food and raiment for the quartet. She was a notable housekeeper and the best of neighbors, her round, jolly visage being sure to appear at every moment of need, and her chicken broth and jellies lingered pleasantly in the memory of the fretful convalescent.

Minnie's function was the care of all the live animals on the farm. She had unerring judgment concerning mules and horses, understood the peculiarities of cows, and knew everything worth knowing about poultry and bees. She was a plump, happy-looking blonde, with a lovely hand, a neat foot, and a playfully witty tongue that, like her own bees, never stung the wise but kept fools at bay. Alert and busy from morning till night she gave no thought to the admirers who sighed for her smiles, but laughingly turned them over to Rosa, who had, she said, nothing else to do but to make herself charming.

Rosa was the strongest possible contrast to her energetic sisters. Rarely beautiful, and gifted with an artistic faculty that nearly approached genius, she was apparently utterly devoid of ambition or sense of responsibility, and was content to be waited upon and cared for as if she was still the petted infant whose graces had at the outset won the willing service of every one about her.

Her form was of medium height, but so symmetrical that she appeared taller than she was. Her head was borne on her full, white throat with a sort of dreamy grace, bent it almost seemed by the weight of her magnificent tresses, the color of ripe wheat when the sun is shining upon it, and falling a quarter of a yard below her waist. Her eyes were of a deep, dark brown, with the softness of a Newfoundland dog's when he is gazing wistfully at his master. It would have been as impossible to say anything harsh to Rosa, when she opened those great dark eyes and looked at you, as it would be to strike a dove or a gazelle or a sweet young baby. Usually the heavy, blue-veined lids half veiled them, and as her seashell cheeks warmed to their pinkest tone, and her exquisite bow of a mouth fell slightly apart, as she lay, as she loved to do, in the hammock on the west veranda, an artist would have thought her the very embodiment of love's young dream of sweet, maidenly beauty.

She seemed all softness and gentleness. Perhaps only her mother knew what strength of will and temper lay behind Rosa's placid brow and square little chin. There had been some stout tussels between a determined little mother and a rosebud of a baby in the years gone by; and although the match might have seemed an unequal one, the result had always been the same. "A compromise," Major Jones had laughingly called it, meaning, as he explained once in a candid moment, that the rosebud had its own way.

Rosa's way was only passively, not actively objectionable. All she asked was to be let alone; allowed to paint undisturbed in her untidy attic studio when the whim seized her, and to lie in the hammock like a kitten, dozing the hours away when she did not choose to exert herself. Occasionally she would have spells of helpfulness, and for several days her stool and box of colors would be set up beside the parlor or dining-room doorway, while she decorated the pannels with sprays of wistaria and masses of fern, so true to nature that one wondered where a little country girl had ever learned to paint after such a manner.

One warm afternoon in early September she was sitting on her stool in the hall, which ran through the middle of the house from end to end, putting slow, effective touches to a border above the dado which she had begun in the spring, and with characteristic indifference had left unfinished until now. Caroline, just in from a tour to the orchard, had thrown herself down upon the settee to rest, and was exchanging remarks with her mother about a certain dress trimming which the elder lady had under way when she suddenly broke off to exclaim:

"If there isn't Mr. Brent coming, and not a speck of meat in the house! Now, I suppose I shall have to go to town to market. I should think it was enough for him to be here every Sunday and Wednesday, without dropping upon us between whiles."

"Let Jessie kill a chicken," suggested Mrs. Jones, soothingly.

"But you know he doesn't eat chickens. If he was like any civilized American he would. But nothing except a round of raw beef satisfies his English appetite!"

But despite this small grumble, she smiled cordially as a good-looking, middle-aged man with a vigorous, florid face, set off by a pair of heavy black whiskers, came briskly up the path and included all of them in a general, informal bow.

"Do you like omelet?" she asked reflectively, as he took a seat near Rosa, and began commenting

upon her work with an easy censorship which was evidently not disagreeable to her.

He gave a little shudder. "'I'll no pullet sperm in my brew,'" he quoted.

"Oh, I might have known you for a Falstaff," retorted Caroline, rising. "Well, Mamma, I'm off."

"Not on my account, Miss Caroline. See here, I've brought my animal diet with me, knowing that you ladies subsist on tea and fruit when I'm not about." And from his coat pocket he drew a roll of brown paper, three-quarters of a yard long, and held it out.

"Prime bologna," he added, complacently, as both mother and daughter laughed heartily, and Rosa turned to give one of her slow, sweet smiles.

Brent was a "family friend." The major had made his acquaintance at his club and brought him home to dine one day when Rosa was a winsome, tumbling baby; and although he had grown grayer and stouter during the years he had been coming out to the farm, ostensibly to oversee Rosa's painting—for which he never would hear of compensation—he had not faltered in a certain purpose conceived soon after that first visit, and as unsuspected by Mrs. Jones and her two elder daughters as it was patent to Rosa herself.

There were some rare affinities between them, even aside from their painting. Brent's British phlegm was mellowed by a luxuriance of imagination that he had inherited from an East Indian mother. His temperament was a mixture of vigor, warmth and languor; and while he was not in the least degree adaptable, he had a faculty of changing the atmosphere of a company to suit himself; so that if others were not pleased it seemed to be they, not he, who was out of place. If they yielded up their individuality to his, well and good; if not, they dropped out of the talk; that was all. Brent was a fluent and entertaining talker. He liked to tell stories of tiger hunts and other jungle pastimes; and Rosa, reclining with her dreamy eyes half shut, liked to listen and feel herself pleasantly thrilled and excited without other necessity than to give up her mind to follow where he led.

Her education had been desultory and superficial. Brent had played the largest part in it, and he had molded her nature at his pleasure by catering to certain biases that he had perceived to be unchangeable, and for the rest giving her the side of life and affairs which he preferred her to believe. What other experiences he had had besides those he chose to tell them, these innocent women neither conjectured nor troubled themselves to inquire. It was enough that he had been "the major's friend."

He had lodgings in town, but his landlady scarcely ever saw him; for when he was not roaming around upon one of his sketching tours he seemed to live in the Corcoran Art Gallery, where Rosa painted under his superintendence several hours each week. He had really devoted himself to the girl's development with a zeal beyond what would have appeared to be necessary in the "family friend." Perhaps Rosa thanked him in private, for she never did so before the others. She treated him always with the same indolent familiarity, and accepted his advice, his help and his devotion as a mere matter of course; but she generally did as he bade her.

This afternoon she continued to fill in her charcoal outlines until she grew tired, and then, dropping her brushes, slipped to a cushion and, crossing her hands behind her head, leaned back and looked up at him like a weary seraph.

"Lazy child," said Brent, smiling, and taking her dropped brushes. "That stem is well done, Rosa; but I want you to leave flowers for a while and begin on that study of the nurse and child. It is time for you to begin to think less of technic and study the masters. I wish you could go abroad now."

"You have made me think of nothing but technic," said the girl.

"Certainly. There are many stages in art, and that is the preliminary one. But you are now to make an advance. How little you realize your advantages. If I had your genius!"

"I realize one advantage—having you for a teacher," she said in a low tone.

The others had dropped away, and they were by themselves.

Brent moved closer to her. "Have you thought of what I talked to you about?"

"It's no use to talk about that; I rather think they expect me to make a great match, some time. Mamma wouldn't consider you eligible, you know," she drawled, softly, with smooth, matchless insolence.

Brent looked at her with an expression she did not understand; but she never troubled herself about what was beyond her easy comprehension. And herein Brent had vastly the advantage; he understood her to the depths of her nature, and he knew perfectly that he had made himself an essential part of her existence. But he was wise enough to be patient. For the present he allowed her to waive the subject aside; nor did he betray even by the quiver of an eyelash that she had wounded his self-love. Indeed, their temperaments were much alike, and neither one was troubled with sensitiveness. Of the two the robust, mastiff-like man had more than the brown-eyed angel, who now took to the hammock and left him to finish her work; for it was as natural for him to work as it was for her to be idle.

"You must get settled in town early this fall," he said to the mother, when the family had assembled again on the veranda after dinner. "I have laid out a good winter's work for Rosa at the gallery, and I want her to start as soon as possible."

"Mr. Brent, I admire your coolness," commented Caroline. "If you expect Rosa to put in a steady

winter's work you must have suddenly created a remarkable change in her."

"I really don't see how we are to go to town at all this winter," said Mrs. Jones, wrinkling her pretty forehead. "The Farleys haven't yet positively pledged themselves to take the place, as we depended on their doing; and of course we can't go unless we let this house."

"Oh, the Farleys will take the place," said Brent confidently. "And there is a nice little house on "H" Street that will be vacant about the first of October. I wish you would go in to-morrow and look at it."

"Give me the address," said Caroline. "I have to go in town to-morrow, and I'll take a peep at it. Then, if it seems worth while for you to take the trouble, mamma dear, you can go in next week."

"Only don't let it slip through your fingers," counseled Brent. "Rosa, don't you want to take a little walk up the hill and see the sunset?"

"Get the wheelbarrow!" said Minnie, briskly. "You'll never get Rosa to climb the hill."

But Brent continued to look smilingly at Rosa, and, somewhat to their surprise, she got up and went with him. As they began to climb the gentle slope he took hold of her arm, and she leaned against him with the same unconcern with which she would have accepted aid from one of her sisters. They were gone half an hour, and when they came back a close observer might have noted a satisfied look in Brent's face. He had made a slight, very slight, advance in his plans, whatever they were.

It was in accordance with them that the family moved into the little house on "H" Street within a fortnight. Every afternoon saw Rosa seated before a Corot in the main gallery of the Corcoran Art Building, and for at least two hours she was busily occupied. Just how it came about no one could have said. Perhaps Rosa herself was not aware of the tightening of a leash which had been woven securely about her, and that had guided and now held her to certain duties. Once, as he sat beside her, painting away upon his small canvas with those minute, exquisite touches which characterized his style, Brent said, with some significance:

"You work very well under direction, Rosa; but you wouldn't set a stroke if I were not here, would you?"

She laughed, and turned her eyes upon him inquiringly. "Wouldn't I?" she asked; "ah, well, perhaps not. But then, you see, you *are* here."

"You have grown so used to having me always at hand, that you couldn't get on at all without me, could you?"

"Get on without you?" she repeated. "Why, I never thought of it."

The next day he let her think of it. For a week he was absent on a sketching tour. When he returned he discovered that she had taken a vacation also; and then, for the first time in her life, he said a few stern words to her. They were very few, and without any hint of anger; but the girl crimsoned, and opened her eyes pathetically. Any other man would have been self-condemned; but Brent, while instantly resuming his usual manner, did not lessen the effect of his rebuke; and from this time her manner toward him began to undergo a change. It was imperceptible to others, but apparent to Brent. She was no longer so sweetly insolent to him; she was more timid, more tractable; and she attended more steadily to her work, seeming to set a new value upon the praise of which he had always been lavish.

The winter passed and the enervating air of April crept over the city. One afternoon Rosa threw down her brushes petulantly, exclaiming that she could not make another stroke.

Brent quietly gathered her implements and his own and stored them neatly away. Then he laid his hand over hers and said, in a perfectly matter-of-fact tone:

"Let's go and get married, Rosa?"

For a minute they looked at one another in silence. Then her eyes dropped to her dress, a pink print, fresh and crisp under the great gray apron which she had begun to untie.

"What! In a calico dress?" she said.

"Yes, just as you are; and now."

"What will they say at home?"

"Think how much trouble we are going to save your mother. We will tell them this evening. Come, Rosa, I have been waiting for you a good many years; don't keep me waiting any longer."

"It is dreadfully absurd," she observed. "What will you do with me?"

"Take you abroad next week, and when we come back settle you down in the prettiest little house you ever saw. I have bought one up on Capitol Hill, and you shall be its little mistress."

"I don't like housekeeping," remarked Rosa; but she was walking with him toward the door. Suddenly she stopped. "We can't get married without a license, can we?"

"I have the license," said Brent, touching his waistcoat pocket. "I got it yesterday."

"It seems to me," she said, pouting a little, "You were rather premature. How did you know I would have you?"

"I believed in my lucky star. We were meant for each other, my dear."

She was silent after this. They walked half-a-dozen squares and stopped before a house next to a

church. As Brent rang the bell he saw that the girl was trembling slightly, and he lost no time in getting her into the parlor, where a puzzled minister came to them a moment or so later. Brent explained and produced the license. Rosa was nineteen and her father was not living. There was no delay, and in the presence of the minister's wife and daughter (who took the bride for a pretty servant girl and were condescending) the ceremony was performed. But for the heavy ring that encircled her finger the girl might have believed that she was dreaming, as Brent drew her out of the house again and hailed a passing horse-car to take them to her mother's house.

Minnie opened the door, and through the dusk her quick eyes perceived something unusual in her sister; but Brent, giving her no time for questions, drew his wife into the little parlor, where the widow sat with her sewing.

"Mrs. Jones," he said calmly, "Rosa and I are married." As she got up hastily, the color rushing to her face, he added, "I believe my old friend the major would not have refused to give me his daughter."

It was a stroke of genius. Instead of uttering the angry words upon her lips the widow fell back upon her chair, crying. The major, dead, was not less the family oracle; and even the girls, who had burst into exclamations, and were not to be repressed for half an hour or so, felt that, irregular and shocking as the affair was, yet there was within it a grain of amelioration.

"But that she should have got married in a sixpenny calico!" exclaimed Caroline, tearfully. "I never shall get over that."

"I will buy her a gown or two in Paris," said the new brother-in-law. "We shall sail next week, and be gone a year, or perhaps longer."

But three years passed before the little house on Capitol Hill had to be vacated by its tenant in favor of the owners, who walked in upon the Jones family one day, when the harvest apples were ripe, and the two girls sat upon the porch of the farm-house paring a bowlful of them for supper.

"What is the change in Rosa?" mother and sisters asked each other when the pair had gone back to town the next morning. Mrs. Brent was even more beautiful than she had been as a girl. She did not look unhappy. Yet there was a difference.

The family found out what it meant when they began to visit the little house in town. Rosa had found another guide than her own sweet will. She no longer idled the days away, but sat patiently upon her little stool and painted from morning till late in the afternoon, while Brent—the personification of vigilance—hovered about, pipe in mouth, seeing to the thousand and one things about the house, which, except for his superintendence, kept itself, and dividing the rest of his attention between Rosa's canvas and his own.

"Do you know," said Caroline, indignantly, "that Rosa—our lazy little Rosa—has made fifteen hundred dollars the past year, while Brent has only made three hundred?"

"That's what he married her for," said Minnie, with a rapid inspiration. "I wondered what impelled him. I thought it wasn't love."

"My dear, he seems very fond of her," said Mrs. Jones, divided between a wish to cry and a wish to make the best of it.

"He *is* fond of her," declared Caroline, "and she's fond of him. But if ever a girl found a master she has. He makes her work as I never expected to see Rosa work. Not at housework, dear me, no! She is not to waste her precious strength on such things. She is to devote herself to art, which is to make *her* reputation and *his* living. That's all there is to it."

"Perhaps it is not the worst thing that could have happened to her," mused Minnie. "There is a kind of nature that needs to be compelled to make the best of itself."

"Don't you want some brute of an Englishman to compel you to make the best of yourself?" snapped Caroline.

"No," answered Minnie, quietly. "What would do for Rosa would never suit me."

"Well, I think we had better go in and take some peaches and straighten up that disorderly house," said the elder sister.

They found Rosa sitting absorbed over a beautiful screen which was a piece of ordered work, to cost a hundred and fifty dollars, while Brent stood at the kitchen door, smoking placidly as he contemplated a tableful of unwashed dishes.

"Come in, sisters both," he said, gaily. "But don't stop Rosa just now; she hates to be interrupted when she is at work."

AN AWAKENING [7]

"And who is that tall young man in the store, who stood there as if nothing could induce him to take his hands from his pockets?"

Miss Stretton's companion looked as if he were mystified by her scornful tone. "That's Albert Johnson," he answered in his matter-of-fact way. "He's only been back hyar about six months. A couple o' years ago he went down to Texas and made about five hundred dollars, and then, all to onct, he turned up hyar again. He's nephew to old Johnson, and stays in th' store, mostly."

"Doing what?" asked Miss Stretton, crisply.

"Why, doin' whatever's to do," answered Jerry Douglas with his thin laugh. He was a tall, bony youth, with gray eyes and a delicate mouth. Although unformed and shy, there

was a hint of character about him; which was the reason why Miss Stretton gave him the honor of her company that morning on his trip to Stoneyton. It was partly in pursuance of her amiable wish to draw him out, and partly because she liked the ride on horseback. She was usually talkative, but now they ambled along the dusty pike in silence.

"Ah—I jest thought of it, Miss Julia," Jerry said suddenly. "Old Johnson's got a nice horse he might let you have. Bert's been ridin' it since he come back, but he can't want it all th' time. I'll see if I kin git it fur you, if you say so."

"Of course I say so, Jerry," retorted Miss Stretton, coming out of her brown study and turning her bright blue eyes upon him. "And why didn't you think of it before? But I know it takes you Virginia young men a long time."

Young Douglas laughed again uneasily. "I s'pose we're ruther backward compared to th' men you know, but you must recollect we've been under a cloud since th' war. We haven't got eddication, and consequently we feel at a disadvantage. Me, now, I've been to school, but what do I know? Th' only thing's fur me to go ter Texas."

"Yes, and make a little money and come back again and loaf around till it is spent," commented the girl inwardly. But she said aloud, "Don't be disheartened, Jerry. It isn't what we know that counts; it's what we do."

"What I want t' do is t' make money," Jerry muttered; "only th' people home won't let me go 'way."

"Your time will come if you don't give up, never fear," she returned kindly, as they rode up to the stile and he awkwardly helped her off the great plow-horse.

She stood at the gate for a minute, watching the angular, boyish figure lead the horse to the stable, heard the rough but not unkindly, "Go in thar, now, Victor—stand, sir!" And then all was still.

In front of the low frame-house was a small, trim garden, with two beds of red geranium bordered by bits of whitened oyster-shells. Behind, lay the fields; to the left, the stable, pig-sty and orchard. On the right, was an unkempt bit of woods, thick with undergrowth. Some day they were going to cut out that undergrowth, which obstructed the fine view of the hills beyond.

"Some day," mused Miss Stretton, "great things are to be done!" And yet she was not without pity as she contemplated the few acres of worn-out land, the meager cattle, the small, uncertain fruit-crop which made the living of the worthy lady, Mrs. Douglas, and her sluggish, semi-invalid husband. This summer they had for the first time followed the example of their neighbors and augmented their income by taking two summer boarders; there was not room for more.

Two or three days went by, and Jerry had apparently done nothing about the horse. Miss Stretton's dearest wish was to hire an animal on which she might take her daily rides with credit to herself and less jarring of her bones. The great beast now at her service resembled some creature in process of transformation to some other species, so shambling, so long-mouthed, so ashamed of his own appearance did he seem. But, rendered desperate by Jerry's procrastination, she mounted Prince one morning and turned toward the village.

"You have shaken me to pieces—you, Prince!" she said reproachfully as she stopped him in front of the store.

Stoneyton was perhaps the very smallest village ever dignified by the name. There was a church, the store, and two neighboring houses, one beside the store and one just across the narrow street. Two swaying elms almost covered this space with their low-hanging branches, and a broken wagon shaft lying in the way made it difficult for a vehicle to turn there. A cart and horse now stood in the road, its driver absent. There was, for a rarity, no one on the stoop; all was unusually still; and Miss Stretton, waiting impatiently until the driver should come out and start off, leaving the road again a thoroughfare, sat still on her tall steed, and let her eyes roam dreamily around on the well-known but ever-pleasing landscape.

The customer came out, and with her came young Mr. Johnson, who stowed away her parcels, helped her into the wagon, and handed her the reins before he turned to the pretty girl with a tinge of color still dyeing his brown cheek.

"Is—your uncle in?" asked Miss Stretton sweetly.

He was very sorry, but his uncle had gone to Port Royal that morning to see a sick sister. Could he do anything for her?

"Well," she said, hesitating, "I suppose you might do just as well, only—I had expected to talk with your uncle."

Young Johnson looked puzzled but admiring. It was the admiration in his splendid dark eyes that embarrassed her. To the city girls who came up to the mountain every one of these little country stores, and every farm which boasted a son or two of some old, impoverished family, furnished an escort to dances and picnics, and the beau of a summer. Miss Stretton was not exempt from girlish weaknesses, and as the handsome countryman stood there waiting for her probable order for ribbons or candy or stationery, she wished that she could settle her little matter of business with some one else.

But she took it like a douche at last, all at once. "Jerry told me that your uncle has a nice riding-horse, and I want one for a month or so. Would he hire it? Could I arrange the matter with you?"

"Well, the horse is mine, in fact. Uncle made a present of it to me," explained Albert, kicking a little stone in the road.

"Oh!" said the young lady. The affair was now a nuisance to both of them. For her part, she felt that, if she proceeded, there must ensue some pecuniary loss in the transaction; she must be large and uncalculating. On the other hand, Albert shrank from the mention of dollars and cents, although if the matter had been conducted through a third party, he would not have hesitated to make something out of the Yankee girl. Being a Virginian, he could not now put a cool, business face upon it. It occurred to him that he would like to drive her down to the hop at Berryville to-morrow night. How would it look to make bargains before tendering an invitation!

He looked up and down the road; the soft breeze from over the hills just rustled the leaves, the low grunt of a porker reached their ears from around the house, a dog barked somewhere, but no figure disturbed the scene; nobody was coming, they must talk it out.

"Well?" she interrogated impatiently. She looked very graceful and saucy. He glanced upward and caught her fleeting smile.

"I'll tell you what, Miss Stretton," he said with the relief of an inspiration, "you mustn't make bargains in the dark. Try my Sultana to-morrow, and if she goes to suit you, we'll talk further."

"All right, Mr. Johnson, and I'm extremely obliged to you." She was grateful for the suggestion; Jerry should be messenger next time.

They were now at ease and could look one another frankly in the face. Each knew the other well by hearsay. Who did not know of the Johnson family, who had lived on the same fine old place for a hundred years and more? And to which of the inquisitive natives was the affable young lady a stranger when she had been staying for a fortnight at the Douglas farm? It was quite conventional for them to call each other by name and to linger a few minutes talking.

She rode off finally, with a charming smile, and Albert went into the dingy store whistling, with his hands in his pockets; handsome and lazy, and with nothing better to do than to recline on the counter and recollect each detail of the conversation.

The next morning he made taking the horse over an excuse for a call, and obtained her promise to go with him to the hop. Every one went; the road was gay with vehicles of every description, and on the ten-mile drive there and back their acquaintance grew old. If Miss Stretton knew how to talk, Albert could listen eloquently.

Afterward she tried to recall something sensible and original in his talk, which would account for the pleasure she had taken in his company, but there was nothing in her memory save confused impressions of what he must have meant.

"What a shame," she said to herself vehemently, "for a young man of intelligence and versatility—he knows many things and could know more if he tried—to be playing fifth wheel to a coach on a stupid country road—clerk in that little store which a girl of twelve could manage alone!"

And as soon as the chance came, she told him this, indirectly, and with many a friendly ameliorating glance. Albert took her lecture meekly. It came one morning when they were riding together. She had found Sultana delightful, and he had made a joking bargain, letting her ride if he might ride with her when he had time and his mother's horse could be spared from the farm. And so this little matter was adjusted without any reference to money.

It was rare pleasure to the city girl to gallop over the open country of a fair August morning before the sun grew red; the fresh breeze from the Blue Ridges colored her cheeks and lighted up her eyes, while it filled her mind with longings, arousing her energy.

"It is energy that you young men lack," she admonished him in a sweet, deferential tone. "Energy! Chalk it up on the fences, and spell it out as you saunter along these dull little country lanes."

Albert thought best to treat it as a joke, but that only made her more earnest. Then he changed his tactics, and met the reproach by a degree of pathetic admission that unsettled her.

She found it a fascinating pastime to chide this handsome idler for making little use of his abilities and she longed to be able to exert a strongly stimulating influence. But when he told her that, on the whole, he enjoyed his life as it was and had no wish to change it, that there was virtue in contentment and that he appreciated his lot, much as she seemed to despise it——

"I didn't say I despised it!" she exclaimed, abashed, her airy ambitions seeming for an instant less grand. But when she looked at her young Alcibiades, lost in the luxury of peace, she pined to

send him forth among men to do battle for the things men care to win. And yet the girl had such tact that her touch did not irritate. The young Southerner felt her thrilling tones move him pleasantly; she cooled his languid breath like a fresh North wind coming in the summer heat. Throughout, his face wore the same look of rich, indolent peace. One day, however, he opened his splendid, dark eyes wide, and asked her just what she would have a man do to prove himself a man.

Miss Stretton was as vague and inexperienced as women usually are who urge extraordinary feats upon men in whom they are interested. But not to seem foolish, she took the matter into consideration.

"I'll give you time," he said, laughing when she hesitated, "but—you have been so hard on me, Miss Julia, that I really must press the question home."

After this she listened to the reports about him, and heard much of his sweet temper under provocation—to which, she owned, she herself could testify—of his kindness of heart, his courage, his goodness to his feeble mother. The country people relied upon him; his moral character was spotless. Yet, even while she learned to admire him, she was not satisfied. Seeing her gem thus proved real, made her the more determined to bring out its luster.

His question was carried gravely in her mind, and she forbore to resume the subject until she could say something wise and practical.

They met often, there were so many affairs during the summer to bring them together, hops, drives, and picnics, and then the camp-meetings, which brought out all the county. She saw him sometimes in attendance on his mother there, always gentlemanly and good, where the other boys were openly rowdy. She saw him in the store, always patient with the freaks of customers and with the cross humors of his uncle.

And one day she met him (and her heart was touched) carrying along the road a little crying child, whose bare toes were crinkled up with the hurt from a sharp stone. The ragamuffin sat perched upon the broad shoulder and peered down at the lady with eyes of cerulean blue. He hugged his friend a little closer but with undiminished confidence. Albert colored slightly, but walked along beside the stylish girl without apologizing for his burden.

"Can't I do something for the little fellow?" she asked gently, and being used to children (she was a school teacher), she saw in a minute what the matter was, and taking from her purse a piece of court-plaster, she made Albert set him down while she applied it to the cut. If her fingers shrank from the dirty little foot neither of her watchers saw it.

"There, little man, does that feel better?"

"I wants ter b' toted," said the urchin, irrelevantly.

"Of course," said Albert, shouldering him again. "Didn't I promise to carry you clear home? But if the lady had done something for me, I'd have thanked her, heh?"

But the child's face expressed only a vacant sort of contentment.

And they all went on together until they reached a poor house where a woman stood at the door, looking anxiously up and down the road. As her boy was brought to her, she caught him up, with a shake and a kiss delivered simultaneously.

"That's jus' like ye, Albert," she said gruffly. "I've been ter'ble worried fur th' past hour—feared he'd got runned over. Yer ma well?"

"Middling, thank you, Mrs. Smithers."

Then he rubbed his handkerchief over his forehead and asked Miss Stretton if she was going "to town" this hot day.

"Yes, I'm trying to walk off a restless fit, and I have a letter to mail."

"Better give that to me. See, I've picked up three or four along the road and got half-a-dozen commissions—hope I shan't forget 'em."

"Are you general errand-boy?" she demanded impatiently.

"You wouldn't want me to be unneighborly? Besides," he added with a twinkle in his eye, "I thought you found fault with me for not being useful!"

"Oh, no, not in that way. Don't you suppose I see that you are useful here, that everybody likes you and depends upon you—but it is such a waste of yourself to be busied with such little things—there are larger places to be filled elsewhere——"

"And larger men to fill them," he said seriously. "There ain't as much to me as you suppose. It seems to me my place is here, right in this little sleepy village. I can be a help to my uncle and to others, and my mother can't do without me."

"Oh!" she cried sharply. This was a stumbling-block she had to recognize. Yet she found that he hardly understood her. She wanted to stir him up to discontent with himself and his surroundings, so that he might be led to enlarge his mental outlook. The thing was for him first to become enlightened, aspiring, superior to his friends—action would follow.

Although it is hard for a man to follow the rapid deviations of a woman's mind, yet the most phlegmatic have their moments of insight. Miss Stretton had revealed a great deal more than she was aware to the young countryman, and he was less dull than he seemed. It came to him that there was something that he wanted to say, but all his ideas grew confused as he thought. He

looked around with an uncertain, wistful gaze. He was only a poor man, surrounded by commonplace, meager things; advantages had been lacking to him; perhaps, as she had said, he had not improved his chances. And yet it seemed to him that he had done his duty.

"I know our farmers' lives up here must seem mean to you," he said slowly, "poor and small. You think we might do more and make more out of ourselves. Well, maybe we might. I think that, after a while, we'll find new things to do. I thought once I'd strike out, and I went to Texas. But can you fancy what life is down there among the cattle-drovers? I couldn't stand it, Miss Stretton. I didn't love money well enough to sink myself quite so low. And so I came back. Maybe you think I lay 'round a heap, but I do all that comes in my way, and somebody'd have to do it. If I was ambitious, I s'pose I'd want to be something else besides a country storekeeper, but it seems to me there's more love in my heart for this poor land and for my neighbors than for anything else. I'm not of a restless disposition, and yet I've got my share of pride. I'm not old yet,"—the fine figure straightening a little, involuntarily—"and maybe after a while something else will come to me that I can do."

"And you are content to wait for it—the chance—to come, are you?" she asked, bending her earnest gaze upon him.

"I won't quote the only bit of Milton I remember, but I believe I serve a useful purpose even while I wait for promotion—that is, what you think promotion."

The girl was silenced. She could not exactly understand how a man could be like this, yet in the midst of her defeat was a feeling of triumph in him. Through the *far niente* her energetic mind had so despised there came the gleam of a fine thought, a real purpose, before which her woman's nature bowed, rejoicing. Obeying a common impulse, they lingered in the lane.

"They need a new teacher in this district," said Albert abruptly, and looking full at her. "If it is your mission to put energy into us, why not begin the missionary work there? Take the boys young."

She had no reply to this but a look of reproach. He had put away her friendship for himself, he recommended her to other matters. Tacitly, he implied that she was incapable of the sacrifice involved in his suggestion. It was ironical.

She turned to walk on, but Albert started and caught her hand. "Don't be angry, Miss Julia! I only meant that it would be less dangerous with them than it has been with me. I—I am more stirred than you would like me to be——"

His blazing eyes transfixed her. For an instant she stared, then drew her hand away and put it up to her face.

"Yes," he continued brokenly, "I know it's no use to speak, you couldn't condescend to this paltry existence—you want the fulness and brightness of the city,—the company of an educated man. There isn't anything about me that's fit to associate with you. Well? I must beg pardon, I s'pose, and yet I couldn't forbear letting you know that, while you've been trying to put some vim into the lazy country fellow, you've waked up his heart, at least."

Miss Stretton uncovered her face. They confronted one another—the bright, sweet girl, the handsome youth, aglow with passion.

The land was poverty-stricken, the promise small, but there was freshness, beauty, peace all about. "He is good, he is noble," she thought. There crept into her face something that amazed him, but he did not stop to wonder at it. He saw fortune sweeping down a shower of gold at his feet, and it was no time to question her beneficence. By a step he lessened the little distance between them, and the two shadows melted into one along the sunny lane.

"You are far brighter than I, Julia," he murmured after a while, "though your reasoning has never moved me any. But if you love me!—I think you will do whatever you wish with me."

"I didn't mean this, at all," she returned, her lovely face sparkling with tears and smiles both at once. In her heart she felt that it was her nature, not his, which the future might change.

Yet, when they concluded to walk on to the store, she looked about with a sense of responsibility and an eye to changes to come, while he—his face flushed with happiness—lounged beside her in the old indolent way—unreproved.

APPLE BLOSSOMS [8]

In the clean, large kitchen of a Virginia farm-house sat an old woman alone, knitting. She had been pretty once; fifty years ago that wrinkled yellow skin had been called "creamy," and the scant gray hair drawn back under the plain cap had been a shower of brown curls. And she had coquetted with Judge Holt and turned away from him at the last to marry plain Nathan Bennett,

living with him in rare contentment for two-score years, and then coming to spend the remnant of her days with her daughter Ann. Now Ann, too, was gone, and only the children were left; Ben and Nancy, and her own adopted child, Lura Ann.

She smoothed down her neat gray cashmere gown, which had been her "second best" dress since Ann's death, and leaned back more comfortably

against the cushioned surface of the splint rocking-chair.

"They're good children," she said to herself,—"excepting Nancy. And she's not so bad as might be." She cast a satisfied glance at the meadows and fields stretching as far as her eyes could reach, and then looked lovingly at the dwarf apple-trees whose branches pressed against the window-shutters. Some of the pink blossoms lay on the ledge. It was May. The flies were buzzing, the sparrows twittering, as they stole cotton from the body of a doll lying in the yard and flew up to the roof with it.

A little girl came around the house and picked up the doll, shook it, looked up at the eaves where the mother sparrow sat, muttered something in an angry tone, and entered the house, singing. She sang: "The apples were ripe and beginning to fall, beginning to fall!"

"Ah, yes," said her grandmother, "you'll see the apples fall a many times, but I shall scarcely see 'em more'n once more—once or twice more, at most. Well, well, I'll be contented to die if only I can live to see my boy and Lura Ann——" then she stopped, meeting the child's bright eyes.

"Lura Ann is going to marry Sackford Moss," said the child.

An angry flush came over the old woman's thin face; she jerked her knitting, and one of her needles fell to the floor.

"Now you're mad, granny, and it's wicked to be mad, so I shan't hand you your knitting-needle," sang the little girl, in a silvery voice.

"Then you'll have no stockings to wear when the biting frost comes; but you don't care—you don't care. 'Tis a generation that thinks not of the future, but works its will in the present," moaned the old woman, folding her hands together hard.

"I'll hand you your needle if you'll tell Lura Ann to make waffles for supper," said the sharp child; but her grandmother looked upon her with disfavor and did not reply. After a moment the little girl came quietly forward and laid the needle on her lap, but the old woman did not resume her knitting. She sat with her hands folded, and looked at intervals out of the window, but with a much-wrinkled brow.

A door opened, and Lura Ann came in with a wide straw hat on. She was tall, slim, and fair, with deep gray eyes, heavy-lidded and long-lashed, and a little red mouth whose short upper lip just raised itself enough to give a glimpse of small, pearly teeth. She looked shy and sweet.

"I am going to town, grandaunt," she said, timidly. "Shall I bring you some more yarn?"

The old woman straightened herself and looked sternly at the maiden. "Be you a-going to marry Sackford Moss?" she asked shrilly.

The pretty lips closed together, and no answer came from them.

"She's going to buy her wedding-gown now," cried the child, getting up quickly from her stool. "Say, Lura Ann, can I go with you?"

"You stay right hyar, Nancy, and take care of granny," said Lura Ann, with some severity. Then she went out, murmuring to herself: "They all think the same thing."

She walked steadily out through the front gate and along the road to town. It was two miles distant, and the air was close and dusty. Her little black shoes were soon specked, and the hem of her dress gathered soil by dipping against them. The blue merino scarf over her shoulders made her too warm, but she did not dare take it off, because it covered a large patch under her arm.

A handsome road-wagon, drawn by a pair of bay horses, dashed up suddenly beside her. The driver leaned forward and touched his hat with an air of devotion.

"Just in time, Lura Ann," he cried, gaily. "Come, get in, and I'll drive you to town and wherever else you want to go."

"No, I thank you," said Lura Ann.

But he got down and urged her cordially. The high, shaded seat looked delightful. The fine horses tossed their heads and pawed impatiently. The long road stretched out, hot and dusty. Walking she would get to town looking like a fright, and it would take much longer. The last consideration had a weight known to nobody but herself. She let Sackford help her up into the seat and draw the linen duster over her knees. Covertly he examined her dress.

"Going to shop?" he asked; adding carelessly: "Burns has got in quite a lot of new goods. My sisters were in last week and bought a carriage load. But they are nothing to what is in the city. I am going to the city soon. Emily has been teasing me to buy her a lace dress. How pretty you would look in a lace dress, Lura Ann, with a little lace bonnet on your soft brown hair, trimmed with rosebuds just the color of your lips!"

Lura Ann's cheeks grew pinker than the bunch of apple blossoms at her throat. "Your sisters and I air different people," she said, in her plaintive, soft voice.

Sackford feasted his eyes in the blush. The veins in his short, thick neck began to swell, and he

shifted the reins to his right hand and laid the left across the back of the seat. But Lura Ann sat up very straight.

"Lean back and be comfortable," he urged.

"Take away your arm then, please," faltered Lura Ann. And just then Ben Falconer, coming across a field in his coarse working clothes, saw her drooping with the blush upon her cheek and Sackford's arm about her waist. He stood still, and looked after the handsome team with a frown and a sigh. Lura Ann had not seen him, but Sackford had, and secretly blessed the hour. Yet he did not dare kiss Lura Ann, as he had intended.

"Where shall I take you first?" he asked, as they entered the town.

"To Mr. Wright's, if you please."

"Of course—he holds some little money belonging to her, I've heard," thought Sackford.

"Don't wait for me," she said, but he waited, and she was gone a long time. When she came out she was pale, as if she had been worried. Yet she looked resolute, and spoke in a tone that had lost all its timidity.

"Take me to the old red brick house at the end of the street," she said, eagerly, "and oh be quick!"

"Why, what's the attraction in that old rookery—a new milliner?" jested Sackford. He could not conceive the idea of a woman's being interested in anything but clothes.

Lura Ann's slim hand closed tightly under her shawl about the old purse that had come out empty and was now full to bursting with currency. Five hundred dollars! She was of age to-day, and had drawn it in her own name, every cent. Milliner! Yes, her hat was shabby, but no matter about that.

Sackford was smiling to himself at her excitement as he helped her out on to the stone step before the old red brick house. She rang the bell, and there was no response. Her courage seemed to be oozing away as she waited.

"Better come back," called Sackford. But she shook her head and applied herself to the bell again. After a moment a shuffling step approached and the door opened a few inches, allowing a man's head to be seen. He was old and grim-looking. Lura Ann said something low and timidly, and after a look of keen scrutiny he let her in.

Sackford felt an indescribable reluctance to have her go in.

After about five minutes she appeared at the door with a paper in her hand, and beckoned him. He sprang out quickly, tied his horses, and stepped into the hall beside her.

"Oh, please see if that is all right," she entreated, putting a legal paper in his hand. "You are a lawyer, and *he*—this gentleman, said to let you see it."

Sackford glanced from it to her, saw her total unconsciousness of anything out of the way, frowned, bit his lip, and examined the document with care.

"It is all right," he then said. "It is a full release. Is this what you want?"

"Yes, oh, yes, thank you! and I am much obliged to you, sir," she added, sweetly, to the grim old man who stood looking on from the background.

He bowed sardonically. "The obligation is on my side, young lady," he said.

"By Jove! It is on somebody else's side," thought Sackford, as he put Lura Ann back into the vehicle; adding, aloud, "I don't like this."

"Ah, but you don't know," said Lura Ann, pleadingly. Her long lashes grew moist. "It is the wish of grandaunt's heart to have the farm free from this mortgage. I always felt as if the debt had been made because of me. She took me when father died—I was a tiny child of three—and oh, they have always been so good to me!"

Sackford's frown did not soften. It was surprising how surly his shrewd, coarse face became. "But whose *is* the farm?" he asked. "That release was made out to Ben Falconer."

"Yes, but it is just the same. Grandaunt made over her share of the farm to him, and he cares for all of us. He is the best man in the world—my cousin Ben."

"The world—what do you know of the world?" said Sackford. "But, see here, Lura Ann, do you understand? You have given away all your little fortune and left yourself penniless."

"Yes," said Lura Ann, simply. There was something in her face that checked further speech upon his part. She was a foolish, improvident child, and rather too confiding toward this cousin Ben of hers, but she was very pretty—wonderfully pretty—and, after all, he had money enough. If five hundred dollars had rid her of her sense of obligation, the price was cheap. A sigh came here, for Sackford Moss did not love to part with money. But feeling that he had better put this subject out of his mind, he smoothed his face and tried to regain his former jovial, easy bearing. Lura Ann heard his talk as if it sounded from a far-off country. But suddenly there was a question; it brought her with a start to a sense of her surroundings. His face was bent down close to hers; his breath—she shuddered and turned her head. Then the answer came, clear and final. What could he do after that but whip up the horses and hasten on?

At the farm gate he let her down and drove away without a backward glance. A spray of withered apple blossoms fell from her dress into the dust, and his wheel passed over it.

But she walked up the path with a step like the toss of thistledown and a heart as light.

The old woman was again looking from the window. She nodded kindly, but her brow was careworn. "Nancy laid the fire," she said. "It's five o'clock. I think it's going to rain. Ben has worked too hard lately. He's in his room with a headache."

"I'll get tea in a minute," said Lura Ann. "But first, grandaunt, look hyar!" She laid off her hat and scarf, and came and knelt on the stool at the old woman's feet. "See," and she opened the paper. "It is a release from the mortgage! It is my gift to you, grandaunt, bought with the money uncle left me. The farm is free!"

The old woman's hands trembled as she laid them on the beautiful young head. "The Lord bless you, child!" she murmured. But in a moment came the after-thought. "Lura Ann, it has taken everything!" she exclaimed. "You haven't a dollar left to buy your wedding-gown!"

The stair door opened, and Ben came down from his room, carrying a little hand-mirror in a carved wooden frame. He was a fine specimen of young manhood, tall, straight, and strong. His dark brown eyes showed intelligence and depth of feeling. Over his features—naturally good—was now cast the reflection of that victory which makes a man "greater than he that taketh a city." He advanced with an air of cheerfulness.

"Lura Ann, I did not forget that this is your birthday. I carved this frame for you myself, and I wish you——"

"Ben!" cried his grandmother. "Lura Ann has bought off the mortgage!"

"And I'm going to light the fire with it," cried Lura Ann a little tremulously, and springing up.

But Ben came and took it from her quickly. He did not comprehend the legal phrases as Sackford had done, but he gathered the sense. His fine eyes began to brighten and glow as they rested on his cousin's face, now averted and blushing.

"Lura Ann, let me see your wedding-gown," exclaimed Nancy, coming in; and Lura Ann grew rose red, but she made a violent effort to free herself from this wretched mistake.

"I haven't got any—I'm not going to have any!" she cried hysterically, turning to strike a match to the fire. "What do I want of a wedding-gown when I'm not going to be married?"

"But Sackford Moss said——" began Nancy, with staring eyes.

"Bother Sackford Moss!" said Lura Ann, pettishly, trembling with nervousness under Ben's grave eyes.

"He said he was going to take you away from us!" finished the persistent child.

"Well, he isn't!" said Lura Ann emphatically. Then she would have liked to flee to her room, but Ben was still standing before her.

"Nancy," he said, in singularly happy tones, "go, get in the young chickens, quick. Don't you see how fast the rain is coming?" And Nancy, who always obeyed her brother, went.

Then Ben, conscious of the whole evening before him, let Lura Ann get supper and clear it away, before supplementing by a single word the tender, hopeful look in his eyes.

But an hour later, when the shower had passed, they stood together on the stoop, which was covered with fallen apple blossoms. The clouds were gone and the sky was clear blue, except for a trail of gold in the west. The fields lay green and wet. They looked at sky and fields, and at last into each other's eyes, and there their gaze rested.

"How sweet the air is after the rain," said the old woman.

"It is the apple blossoms," said Ben, from the stoop; and gathering up a handful he let them fall in a shower over Lura Ann's head.

THE END.

FOOTNOTES:

[6] Copyright, 1896, by "The Independent."

[7] Copyright, 1896, by "The Independent."

[8] Copyright, 1896, by "The Independent."

Transcriber's Note:

- Minor typographical errors have been corrected without note.
- Punctuation and spelling were made consistent when a predominant form was found in this book; otherwise they were not changed.
- Ambiguous hyphens at the ends of lines were retained.
- Duplicated chapter headings have been omitted.
- Footnotes were moved to the end of the book and numbered in one continuous sequence.

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