Homestead on the Hillside eBook

Homestead on the Hillside

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CHAPTER I.

Mrs. *Hamilton*.

For many years the broad, rich acres, and old-fashioned, massive building known as “The Homestead on the Hillside,” had passed successively from father to son, until at last it belonged by right of inheritance to Ernest Hamilton. Neither time nor expense had been spared in beautifying and embellishing both house and grounds, and at the time of which we are speaking there was not for miles around so lovely a spot as was the shady old homestead.

It stood at some distance from the road, and on the bright green lawn in front were many majestic forest trees, on which had fallen the lights and shadows of more than a century; and under whose widespreading branches oft, in the olden time, the Indian warrior had paused from the chase until the noonday heat was passed. Leading from the street to the house was a wide, graveled walk bordered with box, and peeping out from the wilderness of vines and climbing roses were the white walls of the huge building, which was surrounded on all sides by a double piazza.

Many and hallowed were the associations connected with that old homestead. On the curiously-carved seats beneath the tall shade trees were cut the names of some who there had lived, and loved, and passed away. Through the little gate at the foot of the garden and just across the brooklet, whose clear waters leaped and laughed in the glad sunshine, and then went dancing away in the woodland below, was a quiet spot, where gracefully the willow tree was bending, where the wild sweetbrier was blooming, and where, too, lay sleeping those who once gathered round the hearthstone and basked in the sunlight which ever seemed resting upon the Homestead on the Hillside.

But a darker day was coming; a night was approaching when a deep gloom would overshadow the homestead and the loved ones within its borders. The servants, ever superstitious, now whispered mysteriously that the spirits of the departed returned nightly to their old accustomed places, and that dusky hands from the graves of the slumbering dead were uplifted, as if to warn the master of the domain of the desolation; which was to come. For more than a year the wife of Ernest Hamilton had been dying —slowly, surely dying—and though when the skies were brightest and the sunshine warmest she ever seemed better, each morning’s light still revealed some fresh ravage the disease had made, until at last there was no hope, and the anxious group which watched her knew full well that ere long among them would be a vacant chair, and in the family burying ground an added grave.

One evening Mrs. Hamilton seemed more than usually restless, and requested her daughters to leave her, that she might compose herself to sleep. Scarcely was she alone when with cat-like tread there glided through the doorway the dark figure of a

woman, who advanced toward the bedside, noiselessly as a serpent would steal to his ambush. She was apparently forty-five years of age, and dressed in deep mourning, which seemed to increase the marble whiteness of her face. Her eyes, large, black, and glittering, fastened themselves upon, the invalid with a gaze so intense that Mrs. Hamilton's hand involuntarily sought the bell-rope, to summon some one else to her room.

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But ere the bell was rung a strangely sweet, musical voice fell on her ear, and arrested her movements. “Pardon me for intruding,” said the stranger, “and suffer me to introduce myself. I am Mrs. Carter, who not long since removed to the village. I have heard of your illness, and wishing to render you any assistance in my power, I have ventured, unannounced, into your presence, hoping that I at least am not unwelcome.”

Mrs. Hamilton had heard of a widow lady, who with an only daughter had recently removed to the village, which lay at the foot of the long hill on which stood the old homestead. She had heard, too, that Mrs. Carter, though rather singular in some respects, was unusually benevolent, spending much time in visiting the sick and needy, and, as far as possible, ministering to their comfort.

Extending her hand, she said, “I know you by reputation, Mrs. Carter, and feel greatly pleased that you have thought to visit me. Pray be seated.”

This last invitation was superfluous, for with the air of a person entirely at home, the lady had seated herself, and as the room was rather warm, she threw back her bonnet, disclosing to view a mass of rich brown hair, which made her look several years younger than she really was. Nothing could be more apparently kind and sincere than were her words of sympathy, nothing more soothing than the sound of her voice; and when she for a moment raised Mrs. Hamilton, while she adjusted her pillows, the sick woman declared that never before had any one done it so gently or so well.

Mrs. Carter was just resuming her seat when in the adjoining hall there was the sound of a heavy tread, and had Mrs. Hamilton been at all suspicious of her visitor she would have wondered at the flush which deepened on her cheek when the door opened and Mr. Hamilton stood in their midst. On seeing a stranger he turned to leave, but his wife immediately introduced him, and seating himself upon the sofa, he remarked, “I have seen you frequently in church, Mrs. Carter, but I believe I have never spoken with you before.”

A peculiar expression flitted over her features at these words, an expression which Mr. Hamilton noticed, and which awoke remembrances of something unpleasant, though he could not tell what.

“Where have I seen her before?” thought he, as she bade them good night, promising to come again and stay a longer time. “Where have I seen her before?” and then involuntarily his thoughts went back to the time, years and years ago, when, a wild young man in college, he had thoughtlessly trifled with the handsome daughter of his landlady. Even now he seemed to hear her last words, as he bade her farewell: “You may go, Ernest Hamilton, and forget me if you can, but Luella does not so easily forget; and remember, when least you expect it, we shall meet again.”

Could this strange being, with honeyed words and winning ways, be that fiery, vindictive girl? Impossible!—and satisfied with this conclusion Mr. Hamilton resumed his evening paper.

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CHAPTER II.

Lenora and her mother.

From the windows of a small, white cottage, at the extremity of Glenwood village, Lenora Carter watched for her mother's return. "She stays long," thought she, "but it bodes success to her plan; though when did she undertake a thing and fail!"

The fall of the gatelatch was heard, and in a moment Mrs. Carter was with her daughter, whose first exclamation was, "What a little eternity you've been gone! Did you renew your early vows to the man?"

"I've no vows to renew," answered Mrs. Carter, "but I've paved the way well, and got invited to call again."

"Oh, capital!" said Lenora. "It takes you, mother, to do up things, after all; but, really, was Mrs. Hamilton pleased with you?"

"Judging by the pressure of her hand when she bade me good-by I should say she was," answered Mrs. Carter; and Lenora continued: "Did you see old moneybags?"

"Lenora, child, you must not speak so disrespectfully of Mr. Hamilton," said Mrs. Carter.

"I beg your pardon," answered Lenora, while her mother continued: "I saw him, but do not think he recognized me; and perhaps it is as well that he should not, until I have made myself indispensable to him and his family."

"Which you will never do with the haughty Mag, I am sure," said Lenora; "but tell me, is the interior of the house as handsome as the exterior?"

"Far more so," was the reply; and Mrs. Carter proceeded to enumerate the many costly articles of furniture she had seen.

She was interrupted by Lenora, who asked, "How long, think you, will the incumbrance live?"

"Lenora," said Mrs. Carter, "you shall not talk so. No one wishes Mrs. Hamilton to die; but if such an afflictive dispensation does occur, I trust we shall all be resigned."

"Oh, I keep forgetting that you are acting the part of a resigned widow; but I, thank fortune, have no part to act, and can say what I please."

"And spoil all our plans, too, by your foolish babbling," interposed Mrs. Carter.

“Let me alone for that,” answered Lenora. “I haven’t been trained by such a mother for nothing. But, seriously, how is Mrs. Hamilton’s health?”

“She is very low, and cannot possibly live long,” was the reply.

Here there was a pause in the conversation, during which we will take the opportunity of introducing more fully to our readers the estimable Mrs. Carter and her daughter. Mr. Hamilton was right when he associated the resigned widow with his old flame, Luella Blackburn, whom be had never seriously thought of marrying, though by way of pastime he had frequently teased, tormented, and flattered her. Luella was ambitious, artful, and designing. Wealth and position was the goal at which she aimed. Both of these she knew Ernest Hamilton possessed, and she had felt greatly pleased at his evident preference. When, therefore, at the end of his college course he left her with a few commonplace remarks, such as he would have spoken to any familiar acquaintance, her rage knew no bounds; and in the anger of the moment she resolved, sooner or later, to be revenged upon him.

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Years, however, passed on, and a man whom she thought wealthy offered her his hand. She accepted it, and found, too late, that she was wedded to poverty. This aroused the evil of her nature to such an extent that her husband's life became one of great unhappiness, and four years after Lenora's birth he left her. Several years later she succeeded in procuring a divorce, although she still retained his name. Recently she had heard of his death, and about the same time, too, she heard that the wife of Ernest Hamilton was dying. Suddenly a wild scheme entered her mind. She would remove to the village of Glenwood, would ingratiate herself into the favor of Mrs. Hamilton, win her confidence and love, and then when she was dead the rest she fancied would be an easy matter, for she knew that Mr. Hamilton was weak and easily flattered.

For several weeks they had been in Glenwood, impatiently waiting an opportunity for making the acquaintance of the Hamiltons. But as neither Margaret nor Carrie called, Lenora became discouraged, and one day exclaimed, "I should like to know what you are going to do. There is no probability of that proud Mag's calling on me. How I hate her, with her big black eyes and hateful ways!"

"Patience, patience," said Mrs. Carter, "I'll manage it; as Mrs. Hamilton is sick, it will be perfectly proper for me to go and see her," and then was planned the visit which we have described.

"Oh, won't it be grand!" said Lenora that night, as she sat sipping her tea. "Won't it be grand, if you do succeed, and won't I lord it over Miss Margaret! As for that little white-faced Carrie, she's too insipid for one to trouble herself about, and I dare say thinks you a very nice woman, for how can her Sabbath-school teacher be otherwise;" and a satirical laugh echoed through the room. Suddenly springing up, Lenora glanced at herself in the mirror, and turning to her mother, said, "Did you hear when Walter is expected—and am I so very ugly looking?"

While Mrs. Carter is preparing an answer to the first question, we, for the sake of our readers, will answer the last one. Lenora was a little dark-looking girl about eighteen years of age. Her eyes were black, her face was black, and her hair was black, standing out from her head in short, thick curls, which gave to her features a strange witch-like expression. From her mother she had inherited the same sweet, cooing voice, the same gliding, noiseless footsteps, which had led some of their acquaintance to accuse them of what, in the days of New England witchcraft, would have secured their passport to another world.

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Lenora had spoken truthfully when she said that she had not been trained by such a mother for nothing, for whatever of evil appeared in her conduct was more the result of her mother's training than of a naturally bad disposition. At times her mother petted and caressed her, and again, in a fit of ill-humor, drove her from the room, taunting her with the strong resemblance which she bore to the man whom she had once called father! On such occasions Lenora was never at a loss for words, and the scenes which sometimes occurred were too disgraceful for repetition. On one subject, however, they were united, and that was in their efforts to become inmates of the homestead on the hillside. In the accomplishment of this Lenora had a threefold object: first, it would secure her a luxuriant home; second, she would be thrown in the way of Walter Hamilton, who was about finishing his college course; and last, though not least, it would be such a triumph over Margaret, who, she fancied, treated her with cold indifference.

Long after the hour of midnight was rung from the village clock, the widow and her daughter sat by their fireside, forming plans for the future, and when at last they retired to sleep it was to dream of funeral processions, bridal favors, stepchildren, half-sisters, and double connections all around.

CHAPTER III.

One step toward the homestead.

Weeks passed on, and so necessary to the comfort of the invalid did the presence of Mrs. Carter become, that at last, by particular request, she took up her abode at the homestead, becoming Mrs. Hamilton's constant nurse and attendant. Lenora, for the time being, was sent to the house of a friend, who lived not far distant. When Margaret Hamilton learned of the arrangement she opposed it with all her force.

"Send her away, mother," said she one evening; "please send her away, for I cannot endure her presence, with her oily words and silent footsteps. She reminds me of the serpent, who decoyed Eve into eating that apple, and I always feel an attack of the nightmare whenever I know that her big, black eyes are fastened upon me."

"How differently people see!" laughed Carrie, who was sitting by. "Why, Mag, I always fancy *her* to be in a nightmare when your big eyes light upon her."

"It's because she knows she's guilty," answered Mag, her words and manner warming up with the subject. "Say, mother, won't you send her off! It seems as though a dark shadow falls upon us all the moment she eaters the house."

“She is too invaluable a nurse to be discharged for a slight whim,” answered Mrs. Hamilton. “Besides she bears the best of reputations, and I don’t see what possible harm can come of her being here.”

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Margaret sighed, for though she knew full well the “possible harm” which might come of it, she could not tell it to her pale, dying mother; and ere she had time for any answer, the black bombazine dress, white linen, collar, and white, smooth face of Widow Carter moved silently into the room. There was a gleam of intense hatred in the dark eyes which for a moment flashed on Margaret’s face, and then a soft hand gently stroked the glossy hair of the indignant girl, and in the most musical tones imaginable a low voice murmured, “Maggie, dear, you look flushed and wearied. Are you quite well?”

“Perfectly so,” answered Margaret; and then rising, she left the room, but not until she had heard her mother say, “Dear Mrs. Carter, I am so glad you’ve come!”

“Is everybody bewitched,” thought Mag, as she repaired to her chamber, “father, mother, Carrie, and all? How I wish Walter was here. He always sees things as I do.”

Margaret Hamilton was a high-spirited, intelligent girl, about nineteen years of age. She was not beautiful, but had you asked for the finest-looking girl in all Glenwood, Mag would surely have been pointed out. She was rather above the medium height, and in her whole bearing there was a quiet dignity, which many mistook for hauteur. Naturally frank, affectionate, and kind-hearted, she was, perhaps, a little strong in her prejudices, which, when once satisfactorily formed, could not easily be shaken.

For Mrs. Carter she had conceived a strong dislike, for she believed her to be an artful, hypocritical woman, and now, as she sat by the window in her room, her heart swelled with indignation toward one who had thus usurped her place by her mother’s bedside, whom Carrie was learning to confide in, and of whom even the father said, “she is a most excellent woman.”

“I will write to Walter,” said she, “and tell him to come immediately.”

Suiting the action to the word, she drew up her writing desk, and soon a finished letter was lying before her. Ere she had time to fold and direct it, a loud cry from her young brother Willie summoned her for a few moments from the room, and on her return she met in the doorway the black bombazine and linen collar.

“Madam,” said she, “did you wish for anything?”

“Yes, dear,” was the soft answer, which, however, in this case failed to turn, away wrath. “Yes, dear, your mother said you knew where there were some fine bits of linen.”

“And could not Carrie come for them?” asked Mag.

“Yes, dear, but she looks so delicate that I do not like to send her up these long stairs oftener than is necessary. Haven’t you noticed how pale she is getting of late? I shouldn’t be at all surprised—” but before the sentence was finished the linen was found, and the door closed upon Mrs. Carter.

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A new idea had been awakened in Margaret's mind, and for the first time she thought how much her sister really had changed. Carrie, who was four years younger than Margaret, had ever been delicate, and her parents had always feared that not long could they keep her; but though each winter her cough had returned with increased severity, though the veins on her white brow grew more distinct, and her large, blue eyes glowed with unwonted luster, still Margaret had never before dreamed of danger, never thought that soon her sister's voice would be missed, and that Carrie would be gone. But she thought of it now, and laying her head upon the table wept for a time in silence.

At length, drying her tears, she folded her letter and took it to the post-office. As she was returning home she was met by a servant, who exclaimed, "Run, Miss Margaret, run; your mother is dying, and Mrs. Carter sent me for you!"

Swift as the mountain chamois, Margaret sped up the long, steep hill, and in a few moments stood within her mother's sick-room. Supported in the arms of Mrs. Carter lay the dying woman, while her eyes, already overshadowed with the mists of coming death, wandered anxiously around the room, as if in quest of some one. The moment Margaret appeared, a satisfied smile broke over her wasted features, and beckoning her daughter to her bedside, she whispered, "Dear Maggie, you did not think I'd die so soon, when you went away."

A burst of tears was Maggie's only answer, as she passionately kissed the cold, white lips, which had never breathed aught to her save words of love and gentleness. Far different, however, would have been her reply had she known the reason of her mother's question. Not long after she had left the house for the office, Mrs. Hamilton had been taken worse, and the physician, who chanced to be present, pronounced her dying. Instantly the alarmed husband summoned together his household, but Mag was missing. No one had seen her; no one knew where she was, until Mrs. Carter, who had been some little time absent from the room reentered it, saying "Margaret had started for the post-office with a letter when I sent a servant to tell her of her mother's danger, but for some reason she kept on, though I dare say she will soon be back."

As we well know, the substance of this speech was true, though the impression which Mrs. Carter's words conveyed was entirely false. For the advancement of her own cause she felt that it was necessary to weaken the high estimation in which Mr. Hamilton held his daughter, and she fancied that the mother's death-bed was as fitting a place where to commence operations as she could select.

As Margaret hung over her mother's pillow, the false woman, as if to confirm the assertion she had made, leaned forward and said, "Robin told you, I suppose? I sent him to do so."

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Margaret nodded assent, while a deeper gloom fell upon the brow of Mr. Hamilton, who stood with folded arms watching the advance of the great destroyer. It came at last, and though no perceptible change heralded its approach, there was one fearful spasm, one long-drawn sigh, a striving of the eye for one more glimpse of the loved ones gathered near, and then Mrs. Hamilton was dead. On the bosom of Mrs. Carter her life was breathed away, and when all was over that lady laid gently down her burden, carefully adjusted the tumbled covering, and then stepping to the window, looked out, while the stricken group deplored their loss.

Long and bitterly over their dead they wept, but not on one of that weeping band fell the bolt so crushingly as upon Willie, the youngest of the flock, the child four summers old, who had ever lived in the light of his mother's love. They had told him she would die, but he understood them not, for never before had he looked on death; and now, when to his childish words of love his mother made no answer, most piteously rang out the infantile cry, "Mother, oh, my mother, who'll be my mother now?"

Caressingly, a small, white hand was laid on Willie's yellow curls, but ere the words of love were spoken Margaret took the little fellow in her arms, and whispered through her tears, "I'll be your mother, darling."

Willie brushed the tear-drops from his sister's cheek and laying his fair, round face upon her neck, said, "And who'll be Maggie's mother? Mrs. Carter?"

"Never! never!" answered Mag, while to the glance of hatred and defiance cast upon her she returned one equally scornful and determined.

Soon from the village there came words of sympathy and offers of assistance; but Mrs. Carter could do everything, and in her blandest tones she declined the services of the neighbors, refusing even to admit them into the presence of Margaret and Carrie, who, she said were so much exhausted as to be unable to bear the fresh burst of grief which the sight of an old friend would surely produce. So the neighbors went home, and as the world will ever do, descanted upon the probable result of Mrs. Carter's labors at the homestead. Thus, ere Ernest Hamilton had been three days a widower, many in fancy had wedded him to Mrs. Carter, saying that nowhere could he find so good a mother for his children.

And truly she did seem to be indispensable in that house of mourning. 'Twas she who saw that everything was done, quietly and in order; 'twas she who so neatly arranged the muslin shroud; 'twas her arms that supported the half-fainting Carrie when first her eye rested on her mother, coffined for the grave; 'twas she who whispered words of comfort to the desolate husband; and she, too, it was, who, on the night when Walter was expected home, *kindly* sat up until past midnight to receive him!

She had read Mag's letter, and by being first to welcome the young man home, she hoped to remove from his mind any prejudice which he might feel for her, and by her bland smiles and gentle words to lure him into the belief that she was perfect, and Margaret uncharitable. Partially she succeeded, too, for when next morning Mag expressed a desire that Mrs. Carter would go home, he replied, "I think you judge her wrongfully; she seems to be a most amiable, kind-hearted woman."

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"*Et tu, Brute!*" Mag could have said, but 'twas neither the time nor the place, and linking her arm within her brother's she led him into the adjoining room, where stood their mother's coffin.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER THE BURIAL.

Across the bright waters of the silvery lake which lay not far from Glenwood village, over the grassy hillside, and down the long, green valley, had floated the notes of the tolling bell. In the Hamilton mansion sympathizing friends had gathered, and through the crowded parlors a solemn hush had reigned, broken only by the voice of the white-haired man of God, who in trembling tones prayed for the bereaved ones. Over the costly coffin tear-wet faces had bent, and on the marble features of her who slept within it had been pressed the passionate kisses of a long, a last farewell.

Through the shady garden and across the running brook, whose waters this day murmured more sadly than 'twas their wont to do, the funeral train had passed; and in the dark, moist earth, by the side of many other still, pale sleepers, who offered no remonstrance when among them another came, they had buried the departed. From the windows of the homestead lights were gleaming, and in the common sitting-room sat Ernest Hamilton, and by his side his four motherless children. In the stuffed armchair, sacred for the sake of one who had called it hers, reclined the black bombazine and linen collar of Widow Carter!

She had, as she said, fully intended to return home immediately after the burial, but there were so many little things to be seen to, so much to be done, which Margaret, of course, did not feel like doing, that she decided to stay until after supper, together with Lenora, who had come to the funeral. When supper was over, and there was no longer an excuse for lingering, she found, very greatly to her surprise and chagrin, no doubt, that the clouds, which all day had looked dark and angry, were now pouring rain.

"What shall I do?" she exclaimed in great apparent distress; then stepping to the door of the sitting-room, she said, "Maggie, dear, can you lend me an umbrella? It is raining very hard, and I do not wish to go home without one; I will send it back to-morrow."

"Certainly," answered Margaret. "Umbrella and overshoes, too;" and rising, she left the room to procure them.

"But you surely are not going out in this storm," said Mr. Hamilton; while Carrie, who really liked Mrs. Carter, and felt that it would be more lonely when she was gone, exclaimed eagerly, "Oh, don't leave us to-night, Mrs. Carter. Don't."

“Yes, I think I must,” was the answer, while Mr. Hamilton continued: “You had better stay; but if you insist upon going, I will order the carriage, as you must not walk.”

“Rather than put you to all that trouble, I will remain,” said Mrs. Carter; and when Mag returned with two umbrellas and two pairs of overshoes, she found the widow comfortably seated in her mother’s armchair, while on the stool at her side sat Lenora looking not unlike a little imp, with her wild, black face, and short, thick curls.

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Walter Hamilton had not had much opportunity for scanning the face of Mrs. Carter, but now, as she sat there with the firelight flickering over her features, he fancied that he could trace marks of the treacherous deceit of which Mag had warned him; and when the full black eyes rested upon Margaret he failed not to note the glance of scorn which flashed from them, and which changed to a look of affectionate regard the moment she saw she was observed. "There is something wrong about her," thought he, "and the next time I am alone with Mag I'll ask what it is she fears from this woman."

That night, in the solitude of their room, mother and child communed together as follows: "I do believe, mother, you are twin sister to the old one himself. Why, who would have thought, when first you made that *friendly* visit, that in five weeks time both of us would be snugly ensconced in the best chamber of the homestead?"

"If you think we are in the best chamber, you are greatly mistaken," replied Mrs. Carter. "Margaret Hamilton has power enough yet to keep us out of that. Didn't she look crestfallen though, when she found I was going to stay, notwithstanding her very disinterested offer of umbrellas and overshoes? But I'll pay it all back when I become __"

"Mistress of the house," added Lenora. "Why not speak out plainly? Or are you afraid the walls have ears, and that the devoted Mrs. Carter's speeches would not sound well repeated? Oh, how sanctimonious you did look to-day when you were talking pious to Carrie! I actually had to force a sneeze, to keep from laughing outright, though she, little simpleton, swallowed it all, and I dare say wonders where you keep your wings! But really, mother, I hope you don't intend to pet her so always, for 'twould be more than it's worth to see it."

"I guess I know how to manage," returned Mrs. Carter. "There's nothing will win a parent's affection so soon as to pet the children."

"And so I suppose you expect Mr. Hamilton to pet *this* beautiful child!" said Lenora, laughing loudly at the idea, and waltzing back and forth before the mirror.

"Lenora! *behave!* I will not see you conduct so," said the widow; to which the young lady replied, "Shut your eyes, and then you can't!"

Meantime, an entirely different conversation was going on in another part of the house, where sat Walter Hamilton, with his arm thrown affectionately around, Mag, who briefly told of what she feared would result from Mrs. Carter's intimacy at their house.

"Impossible!" said the young man, starting to his feet. "Impossible! Our father has too much sense to marry again anyway, and much more, to marry one so greatly inferior to our own dear mother."

“I hope it may prove so,” answered Mag; “but with all due respect for our father, *you* know and I know that mother’s was the stronger mind, the controlling spirit, and now that she is gone father will be more easily deceived.”

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Margaret told the truth; for her mother had possessed a strong, intelligent mind, and was greatly the superior of her father, who, as we have before remarked, was rather weak and easily flattered. Always sincere himself in what he said, he could not believe that other people were aught than what they seemed to be, and thus oftentimes his confidence had been betrayed by those in whom he trusted. As yet he had, of course, entertained no thought of ever making Mrs. Carter his wife; but her society was agreeable, her words and manner soothing, and when, on the day following the burial, she actually took her departure, bag, baggage, Lenora, and all, he felt how doubly lonely was the old homestead, and wondered why she could not stay. There was room enough, and then Margaret was too young to assume the duties of housekeeper. Other men in similar circumstances had hired housekeepers, and why could not he? He would speak to Mag about it that very night. But when evening came, Walter, Carrie, and Willie all were present, and he found no opportunity of seeing Margaret alone; neither did any occur until after Walter had returned to college, which he did the week following his mother's death.

That night the little parlor at the cottage where dwelt the Widow Carter looked unusually snug and cozy. It was autumn, and as the evenings were rather cool a cheerful wood fire was blazing on the hearth. Before it stood a tasteful little workstand, near which were seated Lenora and her mother, the one industriously knitting, and the other occasionally touching the strings of her guitar, which was suspended from her neck by a crimson ribbon. On the sideboard stood a fruit dish loaded with red and golden apples, and near it a basket filled with the rich purple grapes.

That day in the street Lenora had met Mr. Hamilton, who asked if her mother would be at home that evening, saying he intended to call for the purpose of settling the bill which he owed her for services rendered to his family in their late affliction.

"When I once get him here, I will keep him as long as possible," said Mrs. Carter; "and, Lenora, child, if he stays late, say till nine o'clock, you had better go quietly to bed."

"Or into the next room, and listen," thought Lenora.

Seven o'clock came, and on the graveled walk there was heard the sound of footsteps, and in a moment Ernest Hamilton stood in the room, shaking the warm hand of the widow, who was delighted to see him, but *so* sorry to find him looking pale and thin! Rejecting a seat in the comfortable rocking-chair, which Lenora pushed toward him, he proceeded at once to business, and taking from his purse fifteen dollars, passed them toward Mrs. Carter, asking if that would remunerate her for the three weeks' services in his family.

But Mrs. Carter thrust them aside, saying, "Sit down, Mr. Hamilton, sit down. I have a great deal to ask you about Maggie and dear Carrie's health."

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“And sweet little Willie,” chimed in Lenora.

Accordingly Mr. Hamilton sat down, and so fast did Mrs. Carter talk that the clock was pointing to half past eight ere he got another chance to offer his bills. Then, with the look of a much-injured woman, Mrs. Carter declined the money, saying, “Is it possible, Mr. Hamilton, that you suppose my services can be bought! What I did for your wife, I would do for any one who needed me, though for but few could I entertain the same feelings I did for her. Short as was our acquaintance, she seemed to me like a beloved sister; and now that she is gone I feel that we have lost an invaluable treasure—”

Here Mrs. Carter broke down entirely, and was obliged to raise her cambric handkerchief to her eyes, while Lenora walked to the window to conceal her emotions, whatever they might have been! When the agitation of the company had somewhat subsided, Mr. Hamilton again insisted, and again Mrs. Carter refused. At last, finding her perfectly inexorable, he proceeded to express his warmest thanks and deepest gratitude for what she had done, saying he should ever feel indebted to her for her great kindness; then, as the clock struck nine, he arose to go, in spite of Mrs. Carter’s zealous efforts to detain him longer.

“Call again,” said she, as she lighted him to the door; “call again and we will talk over old times when we were young, and lived in New Haven!”

Mr. Hamilton started, and looking her full in the face, exclaimed, “Luella Blackburn! It is as I at first suspected; but who would have thought it!”

“Yes—I am Luella,” said Mrs. Carter; “though greatly changed, I trust, from the Luella you once knew, and of whom even I have no very pleasant reminiscences; but call again, and I will tell you of many of your old classmates.”

Mr. Hamilton would have gone almost anywhere for the sake of hearing from his classmates, many of whom he greatly esteemed; and as in this case the “anywhere” was only at Widow Carter’s, the idea was not altogether distasteful to him, and when he bade her good night he was under a promise to call again soon. All hopes, however, of procuring her for his housekeeper were given up, for if she resented his offer of payment for what she had already done, she surely would be doubly indignant at his last proposed plan. After becoming convinced of this fact, it is a little strange how suddenly he found that he did not need a housekeeper—that Margaret, who before could not do at all, could now do very well—as well as anybody. And Margaret did do well, both as housekeeper and mother of little Willie, who seemed to have transferred to her the affection he had borne for his mother.

At intervals during the autumn Mrs. Carter called, always giving a world of good advice, patting Carrie’s pale cheek, kissing Willie, and then going away. But as none of her calls were ever returned they gradually became less frequent, and as the winter

advanced ceased altogether; while Margaret, hearing nothing, and seeing nothing, began to forget her fears, and to laugh at them as having been groundless.

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CHAPTER V.

KATE KIRBY.

The little brooklet, which danced so merrily by the homestead burial-place, and then flowed on in many graceful turns and evolutions, finally lost itself in a glossy mill-pond, whose waters, when the forest trees were stripped of their foliage, gleamed and twinkled in the smoky autumn light, or lay cold and still beneath the breath of winter. During this season of the year, from the upper windows of the homestead the mill-pond was discernible, together with a small red building which stood upon its banks.

For many years this house had been occupied by Mr. Kirby, who had been a schoolboy with Ernest Hamilton, and who, though naturally intelligent, had never aspired to any higher employment than that of being miller on the farm of his old friend. Three years before our story opens Mr. Kirby had died, and a stranger had been employed to take his place. Mrs. Kirby, however, was so much attached to her woodland home and its forest scenery that she still continued to occupy the low red house together with her daughter Kate, who sighed for no better or more elegant home, although rumor whispered that there was in store for her a far more costly dwelling, than the "Homestead on the Hillside."

Currently was it reported that during Walter Hamilton's vacations the winding footpath, which followed the course of the streamlet down to the mill-pond, was trodden more frequently than usual. The postmaster's wife, too, had hinted strongly of certain ominous letters from New Haven, which regularly came, directed to Kate, when Walter was not at home; so, putting together these two facts, and adding to them the high estimation in which Mrs. Kirby and her daughter were known to be held by the Hamiltons, it was generally conceded that there could be no shadow of doubt concerning the state of affairs between the heir apparent of the old homestead and the daughter of the poor miller.

Kate was a universal favorite, and by nearly all was it thought that in everything save money she was fully the equal of Walter Hamilton. To a face and form of the most perfect beauty she added a degree of intelligence and sparkling wit, which, in all the rides, parties, and *fetes* given by the young people of Glenwood, caused her society to be chosen in preference to those whose fathers counted their money by thousands.

A few there were who said that Kate's long intimacy with Margaret Hamilton had made her proud; but in the rude dwellings and crazy tenements which skirted the borders of Glenwood village was many a blind old woman, and many a hoary-headed man, who in their daily prayers remembered the beautiful Kate, the "fair forest flower," who came so oft among them with her sweet young face and gentle words. For Kate both Margaret and Carrie Hamilton already felt a sisterly affection, while their father smiled graciously

upon her, secretly hoping, however, that his son would make a more brilliant match, but resolving not to interfere if at last his choice should fall upon her.

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One afternoon, early in April, as Margaret sat in her chamber, busy upon a piece of needlework, the door softly opened, and a mass of bright chestnut curls became visible; next appeared the laughing blue eyes; and finally the whole of Kate Kirby bounded into the room saying, “Good afternoon, Maggie; are you very busy, and wish I hadn’t come?”

“I am never too busy to see you,” answered Margaret, at the same time pushing toward Kate the little ottoman on which she always sat when in that room.

Kate took the proffered seat, and throwing aside her bonnet, began with, “Maggie, I want to tell you something, though I don’t know as it is quite right to do so; still you may as well hear it from me as any one.”

“Do pray tell,” answered Mag, “I am dying with curiosity.”

So Kate smoothed down her black silk apron, twisted one of her curls into a horridly ugly shape, and commenced with, “What kind of a woman is that Mrs. Carter, down in the village?”

Instantly Margaret’s suspicions were aroused, and starting as if a serpent had stung her, she exclaimed, “Mrs. Carter! is it of her you will tell me? She is a most dangerous woman—a woman whom your mother would call a ‘snake in the grass.’”

“Precisely so,” answered Kate. “That is just what mother says of her, and yet nearly all the village are ready to fall down and worship her.”

“Let them, then,” said Mag; “I have no objections, provided they keep their molten calf to themselves. No one wants her here. But what is it about her?—tell me.”

Briefly then Kate told her how Mr. Hamilton was, and for a long time had been, in the habit of spending one evening every week with Mrs. Carter; and that people, not without good cause, were already pointing her out as the future mistress of the homestead.

“Never, never!” cried Mag vehemently. “Never shall she come here. She our mother indeed! It shall not be, if I can prevent it.”

After a little further conversation, Kate departed, leaving Mag to meditate upon the best means by which to avert the threatened evil. What Kate had told her was true. Mr. Hamilton had so many questions to ask concerning his old classmates, and Mrs. Carter had so much to tell, that, though they had worked industriously all winter, they were not through yet; neither would they be until Mrs. Carter found herself again within the old homestead.

The night following Kate’s visit Mag determined to speak with her father; but immediately after tea he went out, saying he should not return until nine o’clock. With a great effort Mag forced down the angry words which she felt rising within her, and then

seating herself at her work she resolved to await his return. Not a word on the subject did she say to Carrie, who retired to her room at half-past eight, as was her usual custom. Alone now Margaret waited. Nine, ten, eleven had been struck, and then into the sitting-room came Mr. Hamilton, greatly astonished at finding his daughter there.

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“Why, Margaret,” said he, “why are you sitting up so late?”

“If it is late for me, it is late for you,” answered Margaret, who, now that the trial had come, felt the awkwardness of the task she had undertaken.

“But I had business,” answered Mr. Hamilton; and Margaret, looking him steadily in the face, asked:

“Is not your business of a nature which equally concerns us all?”

A momentary flush passed over his features as he replied, “What do you mean? I do not comprehend.”

Hurriedly, and in broken sentences, Margaret told him what she meant, and then tremblingly she waited for his answer. Frowning angrily, he spoke to his daughter the first harsh words which had ever passed his lips toward either of his children.

“Go to your room, and don’t presume to interfere with me again. I trust I am competent to attend to my own matters!”

Almost convulsively Margaret’s arms closed round her father’s neck, as she said, “Don’t speak so to me, father. You never did before—never would now, but for *her*. Oh, father, promise me, by the memory of my angel mother, never to see her again. She is a base, designing woman.”

Mr. Hamilton unwound his daughter’s arms from his neck, and speaking more gently, said, “What proof have you of that assertion? Give me proof, and I promise to do your bidding.”

But Mag had no such proof at hand, and she could only reiterate her suspicions, her belief, which, of course, failed to convince the biased man, who, rising, said: “Your mother confided and trusted in her, so why should not you?”

The next moment Margaret was alone. For a long time she wept, and it was not until the eastern horizon began to grow gray in the morning twilight that she laid her head upon her pillow, and forgot in sleep how unhappy she had been. Her words, however, were not without their effect, for when the night came round on which her father was accustomed to pay his weekly visit, he stayed at home, spending the whole evening with his daughters, and appearing really gratified at Margaret’s efforts to entertain him. But, alas! the chain of the widow was too firmly thrown around him for a daughter’s hand alone to sever the fast-bound links.

When the next Thursday evening came Mag was confined to her room by a sick headache, from which she had been suffering all day. As night approached she frequently asked if her father were below. At last the front door opened, and she heard

his step upon the piazza. Starting up, she hurried to the window, while at the same moment Mr. Hamilton paused, and raising his eyes saw the white face of his daughter pressed against the window-pane as she looked imploringly after him; but there was not enough of power in a single look to deter him, and, wafting her a kiss, he turned away. Sadly Margaret watched him until he disappeared down the long hill; then, returning to her couch, she wept bitterly.

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Meantime Mrs. Carter, who had been greatly chagrined at the non-appearance of Mr. Hamilton the week before, was now confidently expecting him. He had not yet asked her to be his wife, and the delay somewhat annoyed both herself and Lenora.

“I declare, mother,” said Lenora, “I should suppose you might contrive up something to bring matters to a focus. I think it’s perfectly ridiculous to see two old crones, who ought to be trotting their grandchildren, cooing and simpering away at each other, and all for nothing, too.”

“Can’t you be easy awhile longer?” asked Mrs. Carter “hasn’t he said everything he can say except ‘will you marry me?’”

“A very important question, too,” returned Lenora; “and I don’t know what business you have to expect anything from him until it is asked.”

“Mr. Hamilton is proud,” answered Mrs. Carter—“is afraid of doing anything which might possibly lower him. Now, if by any means I could make him believe that I had received an offer from some one fully if not more than his equal, I think it would settle the matter, and I’ve decided upon the following plan. I’ll write a proposal myself, sign old Judge B ——’s name to it, and next time Mr. Hamilton comes let him surprise me in reading it. Then, as he is such a *dear*, long-tried friend, it will be quite proper for me to confide in him, and ask his advice.”

Lenora’s eyes opened wider, as she exclaimed, “*My gracious*! who but *you* would ever have thought of that.”

Accordingly the letter was written, sealed, directed, broken open, laughed over, and laid away in the stand drawer.

“Mr. Hamilton, mother,” said Lenora, as half an hour afterward she ushered that gentleman into the room. But so wholly absorbed was the black bombazine and linen collar in the contents of an open letter, which she held in her hand, that the words were twice repeated—“Mr. Hamilton, mother”—ere she raised her eyes! Then coming forward with well-feigned confusion, she apologized for not having observed him before, saying she was sure he would excuse her if he knew the contents of her letter. Of course he wanted to know, and of course she didn’t want to tell. He was too polite to urge her, and the conversation soon took another channel.

After a time Lenora left the room, and Mrs. Carter, again speaking of the letter, begged to make a confidant of Mr. Hamilton, and ask his advice. He heard the letter read through, and after a moment’s silence asked, “Do you like him, Mrs. Carter?”

“Why—no—I don’t think I do,” said she, “but then the widow’s lot is so lonely.”

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“I know it is,” sighed he, while through the keyhole of the opposite door came something which sounded very much like a stifled laugh! It was the hour of Ernest Hamilton’s temptation, and but for the remembrance of the sad, white face which had gazed so sorrowfully at him from the window he had fallen. But Maggie’s presence seemed with him—her voice whispered in his ear, “Don’t do it, father, don’t”—and he calmly answered that it would be a good match. But he could not, no he could not advise her to marry him; so he qualified what he had said by asking her not to be in a hurry—to wait awhile. The laugh through the keyhole was changed to a hiss, which Mrs. Carter said must be the wind, although there was not enough stirring to move the rose bushes which grew by the doorstep!

So much was Mr. Hamilton held in thrall by the widow that on his way home he hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry that he had not proposed. If Judge B—— would marry her she surely was good enough for him. Anon, too, he recalled her hesitation about confessing that the judge was indifferent to her. Jealousy crept in and completed what flattery and intrigue had commenced. One week from that night Ernest Hamilton and Luella Carter were engaged, but for appearance’s sake their marriage was not to take place until the ensuing autumn.

CHAPTER VI.

RAISING THE WIND.

“Where are you going now?” asked Mrs. Carter of her daughter, as she saw her preparing to go out one afternoon, a few weeks after the engagement.

“Going to raise the wind,” was the answer.

“Going to what?” exclaimed Mrs. Carter.

“To raise the wind! Are you deaf?” yelled Lenora.

“Raise the wind!” repeated Mrs. Carter; “what do you mean?”

“Mean what I say,” said Lenora; and closing the door after her she left her mother to wonder “what fresh mischief the little torment was at.”

But she was only going to make a *friendly* call on Margaret and Carrie, the latter of whom she had heard was sick.

“Is Miss Hamilton at home?” asked she of the servant girl who answered her ring, and whom she had never seen before.

“Yes, ma’am; walk in the parlor. What name shall I give her if you please?”

“Miss Carter—Lenora Carter;” and the servant girl departed, repeating to herself all the way up the stairs, “Miss Carther—Lenora Carther!”

“Lenora Carter want to see me!” exclaimed Mag, who, together with Kate Kirby, was in her sister’s room.

“Yes, ma’am; an’ sure ‘twas Miss Hampleton she was wishin’ to see,” said the Irish girl.

“Well, I shall not go down,” answered Mag. “Tell her, Rachel, that I am otherwise engaged.”

“Oh, Maggie,” said Carrie, “why not see her? I would if I were you.”

“Rachel can ask her up here if you wish it,” answered Mag, “but I shall leave the room.”

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“Faith, an’ what shall I do?” asked Rachel, who was fresh from “swate Ireland” and felt puzzled to know why a “silk frock and smart bonnet” should not always be welcome. “Ask her up,” answered Kate. “I’ve never seen her nearer than across the church and have some curiosity—”

A moment after Rachel thrust her head in at the parlor door, saying, “If you please, ma’am, Miss Marget is engaged, and does not want to see you, but Miss Carrie says you may come up there.”

“Very well,” said Lenora; and tripping after the servant girl, she was soon in Carrie’s room.

After retailing nearly all the gossip of which she was mistress, she suddenly turned to Carrie, and said, “Did you know that your father was going to be married?”

“My father going to be married!” said Carrie, opening her blue eyes in astonishment. “My father going to be married! To whom pray?”

“To a lady from the East—one whom he used to know and flirt with when he was in college!” was Lenora’s grave reply.

“What is her name?” asked Kate.

“Her name? Let me see—Miss—Blackwell—Blackmer—*Blackheart*. It sounds the most like Blackheart.”

“What a queer name,” said Kate; “but tell us what opportunity has Mr. Hamilton had of renewing his early acquaintance with the lady.”

“Don’t you know he’s been East this winter?” asked Lenora.

“Yes, as far as Albany,” answered Carrie.

“Well,” continued Lenora, “’twas during his Eastern trip that the matter was settled; but pray don’t repeat it from me, except it be to Maggie, who I dare say, will feel glad to be relieved of her heavy responsibilities—but as I live, Carrie, you are crying! What is the matter?”

But Carrie made no answer, and for a time wept on in silence. She could not endure the thought that another would so soon take the place of her lost mother in the household and in the affections of her father. There was, besides, something exceedingly annoying in the manner of her who communicated the intelligence, and secretly Carrie felt glad that the dreaded “Miss Blackheart” had, of course, no Lenora to bring with her!

“Do you know all this to be true?” asked Kate.

“Perfectly true,” said Lenora. “We have friends living in the vicinity of the lady, and there can be no mistake, except, indeed, in the name, which I am not sure is right!”

Then hastily kissing Carrie, the little hussy went away, very well satisfied with her afternoon’s call. As soon as she was out of hearing Margaret entered her sister’s room, and on noticing Carrie’s flushed cheek and red eyes, inquired the cause. Immediately Kate told her what Lenora had said, but instead of weeping, as Carrie had done, she betrayed no emotion whatever.

“Why, Maggie, ain’t you sorry?” asked Carrie.

“No, I am glad,” returned Mag. “I’ve seen all along that sooner or later father would make himself ridiculous, and I’d rather he’d marry forty women from the East, than one woman not far from here whom I know.”

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All that afternoon Mag tripped with unwonted gaiety about the house. A weight was lifted from her heart, for in her estimation any one whom her father would marry was preferable to Mrs. Carter.

* * * * *

Oh, how the widow scolded the daughter, and how the daughter laughed at the widow, when she related the particulars of her call.

“Lenora, what could have possessed you to tell such a lie?” said Mrs. Carter.

“Not so fast, mother mine,” answered Lenora. “’Twasn’t a lie. Mr. Hamilton *is* engaged to a lady from the East. He *did* flirt with her in his younger days; and, pray, didn’t he have to come East when be called to inquire after his beloved classmates, and ended by getting checkmated! Besides, I think you ought to thank me for turning the channel of gossip in another direction, for now you will be saved from all impertinent questions and remarks.”

This mode of reasoning failed to convince the widow, who felt quite willing that people should know of her flattering prospects; and when a few days after Mrs. Dr. Otis told her that Mrs. Kimball said that Polly Larkins said that her hired girl told her that Mrs. Kirby’s hired girl told her that she overheard Miss Kate telling her mother that Lenora Carter said that Mr. Hamilton was going to be married to her mother’s intimate friend, Mrs. Carter would have denied the whole and probably divulged her own secret, had not Lenora, who chanced to be present, declared, with the coolest effrontery, that ’twas all true—that her mother had promised to stand up with them, and so folks would find it to be if they did not die of curiosity before autumn!

“Lenora, child, how can you talk so?” asked the distressed lady, as the door closed upon her visitor.

Lenora went off into fits of explosive laughter, bounding up and down like an india-rubber ball, and at last condescended to say, “I know what I’m about. Do you want Mag Hamilton breaking up the match, as she surely would do, between this and autumn, if she knew it?”

“And what can she do?” asked Mrs. Carter.

“Why,” returned Lenora, “can’t she write to the place you came from, if, indeed, such a spot can be found?—for I believe you sometimes book yourself from one town and sometimes from another. But depend upon it you had better take my advice and keep still, and in the denouement which follows, I alone shall be blamed for a slight stretch of truth which you can easily excuse as ’one of *dear* Lenora’s silly, childish freaks!’”

Upon second thoughts, Mrs. Carter concluded to follow her daughter's advice, and the next time Mr. Hamilton called, she laughingly told the story which Lenora had set afloat, saying, by way of excuse, that the dear girl did not like to hear her mother joked on the subject of matrimony, and had turned the attention of people another way.

Mr. Hamilton hardly relished this, and half wished, mayhap, as, indeed, gentlemen generally do in similar circumstances, that the little "objection" in the shape of Lenora had never had existence, or at least had never called the widow mother!

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CHAPTER VII.

THE STEPMOTHER.

Rapidly the summer was passing away, and as autumn drew near the wise gossips of Glenwood began to whisper that the lady from the East was in danger of being supplanted in her rights by the widow, whose house Mr. Hamilton was known to visit two or three times each week. But Lenora had always some plausible story on hand. “Mother and the lady had been so intimate—in fact, more than once rocked in the same cradle—and ’twas no wonder Mr. Hamilton came often to a place where he could hear so much about her.”

So when business again took Mr. Hamilton to Albany suspicion was wholly lulled, and Walter, on his return from college, was told by Mag that her fears concerning Mrs. Carter were groundless. During the spring Carrie had been confined to her bed, but now she seemed much better, and after Walter had been at home awhile he proposed that he and his sisters should take a traveling excursion, going first to Saratoga, thence to Lake Champlain and Montreal, and returning home by way of Canada and the Falls, This plan Mr. Hamilton warmly seconded, and when Carrie asked if he would not feel lonely he answered, “Oh, no; Willie and I will do very well while you are gone.”

“But who will stay with Willie evenings, when you are away?” asked Mag, looking her father steadily in the face.

Mr. Hamilton colored slightly, but after a moment replied: “I shall spend my evenings at home.”

“’Twill be what he hasn’t done for many a week,” thought Mag, as she again busied herself with her preparations.

The morning came at last on which our travelers were to leave. Kate Kirby had been invited to accompany them, but her mother would not consent. “It would give people too much chance for talk,” she said; so Kate was obliged to content herself with going as far as the depot, and watching, until out of sight, the car which bore them away.

Upon the piazza stood the little group, awaiting the arrival of the carriage which was to convey them to the station. Mr. Hamilton seemed unusually gloomy, and with folded arms paced up and down the long piazza, rarely speaking or noticing any one.

“Are you sorry we are going, father?” asked Carrie, going up to him. “If you are I will gladly stay with you.”

Mr. Hamilton paused, and pushing back the fair hair from his daughter's white brow, he kissed her tenderly, saying, "No, Carrie; I want you to go. The journey will do you good, for you are getting too much the look your poor mother used to wear."

Why thought he then of Carrie's mother? Was it because he knew that ere his child returned to him another would be in that mother's place? Anon, Margaret came near, and motioning Carrie away, Mr. Hamilton took his other daughter's hand, and led her to the end of the piazza, where could easily be seen the little graveyard and tall white monument pointing toward the bright blue sky where dwelt the one whose grave that costly marble marked.

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Pointing out the spot to Margaret, he said, “Tell me truly, Maggie, did you love your father or your mother best?”

Mag looked wonderingly at him a moment, and then replied, “While mother lived I loved her more than you, but now that she is dead, I think of and love you as both father and mother.”

“And will you always love me thus?” asked he.

“Always,” was Mag’s reply, as she looked curiously in her father’s face, and thinking that he had not said what he intended to when first he drew her there.

Just then the carriage drove up, and after a few good-bys and parting words Ernest Hamilton’s children were gone, and he was left alone.

“Why didn’t I tell her, as I intended to?” thought he. “Is it because I fear her—fear my own child? No, it cannot be—and yet there is that in her eye which sometimes makes me quail, and which, if necessary, would keep at bay a dozen stepmothers. But neither she, nor either one of them, has aught to dread from Mrs. Carter, whose presence will, I think, be of great benefit to us all, and whose gentle manners, I trust, will tend to soften Mag!”

Meantime his children were discussing and wondering at the strange mood of their father. Walter, however, took no part in the conversation. He had lived longer than his sisters—had seen more of human nature, and had his own suspicions with regard to what would take place during their absence; but he could not spoil all Margaret’s happiness by telling her his thoughts, so he kept them to himself, secretly resolving to make the best of whatever might occur, and to advise Mag to do the same.

Now for a time we leave them, and take a look into the cottage of Widow Carter, where, one September morning, about three weeks after the departure of the Hamiltons, preparations were making for some great event. In the kitchen a servant girl was busily at work, while in the parlor Lenora was talking and the widow was listening.

“Oh, mother,” said Lenora, “isn’t it so nice that they went away just now? But won’t Mag look daggers at us when she comes home and finds us in quiet possession, and is told to call you *mother*!”

“I never expect her to do that,” answered Mrs. Carter. “The most I can hope for is that she will call me Mrs. Hamilton.”

“Now really, mother, if I were in Mag’s place, I wouldn’t please you enough to say Mrs. Hamilton; I’d always call you Mrs. Carter,” said Lenora.

“How absurd!” was the reply; and Lenora continued:

“I know it’s absurd, but I’d do it; though if she does, I, as the dutiful child of a most worthy parent, shall feel compelled to resent the insult by calling her father *Mr. Carter*!”

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By this time Mrs. Carter was needed in the kitchen; so, leaving Lenora, who at once was the pest and torment of her mother's life, we will go into the village and see what effect the approaching nuptials was producing. It was now generally known that the "lady from the East" who had been "rocked in Mrs. Carter's cradle," was none other than Mrs. Carter herself, and many were the reproving looks which the people had cast toward Lenora for the trick she had put upon them. The little hussy only laughed at them good-humoredly, telling them they were angry because she had cheated them out of five months' gossip, and that if her mother could have had her way, she would have sent the news to the *Herald* and had it inserted under the head of "Awful Catastrophe!" Thus Mrs. Carter was exonerated from all blame; but many a wise old lady shook her head, saying, "How strange that so fine a woman as Mrs. Carter should have such a reprobate of a daughter."

When, this remark came to Lenora's ears she cut numerous flourishes, which ended in the upsetting of a bowl of starch on her mother's new black silk; then dancing before the highly indignant lady, she said, "Perhaps if they knew what a scapegrace you represent my father to have been, and how you whipped me once to make me say I saw him strike you, when I never did, they would wonder at my being as good as I am."

Mrs. Carter was too furious to venture a verbal reply; so seizing the starch bowl she hurled it with the remainder of the contents at the head of the little vixen, who, with an elastic bound not entirely unlike a somersault dodged the missile, which passed on and fell upon the hearthrug.

This is but one of a series of similar scenes which occurred between the widow and her child before the happy day arrived when, in the presence of a select few of the villagers, Luella Carter was transformed into Luella Hamilton. The ceremony was scarcely over when Mr. Hamilton, who for a few days had been rather indisposed, complained of feeling sick. Immediately Lenora, with a sidelong glance at her mother, exclaimed, "What, sick of your bargain so quick? It's sooner even than *I* thought 'twould be, and I'm sure I'm capable of judging."

"Dear Lenora," said Mrs. Carter, turning toward one of her neighbors, "she has such a flow of spirits that I am afraid Mr. Hamilton will find her troublesome."

"Don't be alarmed, mother; he'll never think of me when you are around," was Lenora's reply in which Mrs. Carter saw more than one meaning.

That evening the bridal party repaired to the homestead, where, at Mr. Hamilton's request, Mrs. Kirby was waiting to receive them. Willie had been told by the servants that his mother was coming home that night, and, with the trusting faith of childhood, he had drawn a chair to the window from which he could see his mother's grave; and there for more than an hour he watched for the first indications of her coming, saying occasionally, "Oh, I wish she'd come. Willie's so sorry here."

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At last growing weary and discouraged, he turned away and said, “No, ma’ll never come home again; Maggie said she wouldn’t.”

Upon the carriage road which wound from the street to the house there was the sound of coming wheels, and Rachel, seizing Willie, bore him to the front door, exclaiming, “An’ faith, Willie, don’t you see her? That’s your mother, honey, with the black gown.”

But Willie saw only the wild eyes of Lenora, who caught him in her arms, overwhelming him with caresses. “Let me go, Leno,” said he, “I want to see my ma. Where is she?”

A smile of scorn curled Lenora’s lips as she released him, and leading him toward her mother, she said, “There she is; there’s your ma. Now hold up your head and make a bow.”

Willie’s lip quivered, his eyes filled with tears, and hiding his face in his apron, he sobbed, “I want my own ma—the one they shut up in a big black box. Where is she, Leno?”

Mr. Hamilton took Willie on his knee, and tried to explain to him how that now his own mother was dead, he had got a new one, who would love him and be kind to him. Then putting him down, he said, “Go, my son, and speak to her, won’t you?”

Willie advanced rather cautiously toward the black silk figure, which reached out its hand, saying, “Dear Willie, you’ll love me a little, won’t you?”

“Yes, if you are good to me,” was the answer, which made the new stepmother mentally exclaim, “A young rebel, I know,” while Lenora, bending between the two, whispered emphatically:

“She *shall* be good to you!”

And soon, in due order, the servants were presented to their new mistress. Some were disposed to like her, others eyed her askance, and old Polly Pepper, the black cook, who had been in the family ever since Mr. Hamilton’s first marriage, returned her salutation rather gruffly, and then, stalking back to the kitchen, muttered to, those who followed her, “I don’t like her face nohow; she looks just like the milk snakes, when they stick their heads in at the door.”

“But you knew how she looked before,” said Lucy, the chambermaid.

“I know it,” returned Polly; “but when she was here nussin’ I never noticed *her*, more I would any on you; for who’d of thought that Mr. Hamilton would marry her, when he knows, or or’to know, that nusses ain’t fust cut, nohow; and you may depend on’t, things ain’t a-goin’ to be here as they used to be.”

Here Rachel started up, and related the circumstance of Margaret's refusing to see "that little evil-eyed-lookin-varmint, with curls almost like Polly's." Lucy, too, suddenly remembered something which she had seen, or heard, or made up—so that Mrs. Carter had not been an hour in the coveted homestead ere there was mutiny against her afloat in the kitchen; "But," said Aunt Polly, "I 'vises you all to be civil till she sasses you fust!"

"My dear, what room can Lenora have for her own?" asked Mrs. Hamilton, as we must now call her, the morning following her marriage.

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“Why, really, I don’t know,” answered the husband; “you must suit yourselves with regard to that.”

“Yes; but I’d rather you’d select, and then no one can blame me,” was the answer.

“Choose any room you please, except the one which Mag and Carrie now occupy, and rest assured you shall not be blamed,” said Mr. Hamilton.

The night before Lenora had appropriated to herself the best chamber, but the room was so large and so far distant from any one, and the windows and fireboard rattled so, that she felt afraid, and did not care to repeat her experiment.

“I ’clar for’t!” said Polly, when she heard of it. “Gone right into the best bed, where even Miss Margaret never goes! What are we all comin’ to? Tell her, Luce, the story of the ghosts, and I’ll be bound she’ll make herself scarce in them rooms!”

“Tell her yourself,” said Lucy; and when, after breakfast, Lenora, anxious to spy out everything, appeared in the kitchen, Aunt Polly called out, “Did you hear anything last night, Miss Lenora?”

“Why, yes—I heard the windows rattle,” was the answer; and Aunt Polly, with an ominous shake of the head, continued:

“There’s more than windows rattle, I guess. Didn’t you see nothin’, all white and corpse-like, go a-whizzin, and rappin’ by your bed?”

“Why, no,” said Lenora; “what do you mean?”

So Polly told her of the ghosts and goblins which nightly ranged the two chambers over the front and back parlors. Lenora said nothing, but she secretly resolved not to venture again after dark into the haunted portion of the house. But where should she sleep? That was now the important question. Adjoining the sitting-room was a pleasant, cozy little place, which Margaret called her music-room. In it she kept her piano, her music stand, books, and several fine plants, besides numerous other little conveniences. At the end of this room was a large closet where, at different seasons of the year, Mag hung away the articles of clothing which she and her sister did not need.

Toward this place Lenora turned her eyes; for, besides being unusually pleasant, it was also very near her mother, whose sleeping-room joined, though it did not communicate with it. Accordingly, before noon the piano was removed to the parlor; the plants were placed, some on the piazza, and some in the sitting-room window, while Margaret and Carrie’s dresses were removed to the closet of their room, which chanced to be a trifle too small to hold them all conveniently; so they were crowded one above the other, and left for “the girls to see to when they came home!”

In perfect horror Aunt Polly looked on, regretting for once the ghost story which she had told.

“Why don’t you take the chamber jinin’ the young ladies? that ain’t haunted,” said she, when they sent for her to help move the piano. “Miss Margaret won’t thank you for scattern’ her things.”

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“You’ve nothing to do with Lenora,” said Mrs. Hamilton; “you’ve only to attend to your own matters.”

“Wonder then what I’m up here for a-h’istin this pianner,” muttered Polly. “This ain’t my matters, sartin’.”

When Mr. Hamilton came in to dinner he was shown the little room with its single bed, tiny bureau, silken lounge and easy chair, of which the last two were Mag’s especial property.

“All very nice,” said he, “but where is Mag’s piano?”

“In the parlor,” answered his wife. “People often ask for music, and it is more convenient to have it there than to come across the hall and through the sitting-room.”

Mr. Hamilton said nothing, but he secretly wished Mag’s rights had not been invaded quite so soon. His wife must have guessed as much; for, laying her hand on his, she, with the utmost deference, offered to undo all she had done, if it did not please him.

“Certainly not—certainly not; it does please me,” said he; while Polly, who stood on the cellar stairs listening, exclaimed, “What a fool a woman can make of a man!”

Three days after Mr. Hamilton’s marriage he received a letter from Walter, saying that they would be at home on the Thursday night following. Willie was in, ecstasies, for though as yet he liked his new mother tolerably well, he still loved Maggie better; and the thought of seeing her again made him wild with delight. All day long on Thursday he sat in the doorway, listening for the shrill cry of the train which was to bring her home.

“Don’t you love Maggie?” said he to Lenora, who chanced to pass him.

“Don’t I love Maggie? No, I don’t; neither does she love me,” was the answer.

Willie was puzzled to know why any one should not like Mag; but his confidence in her was not at all shaken, and when, soon after sunset, Lenora cried, “There, they’ve come,” he rushed to the door, and was soon in the arms of his sister-mother. Pressing his lips to hers, he said, “Did you ’know I’d got a new mother? Mrs. Carter and Leno—-they are in there,” pointing toward the parlor.

Instantly Mag dropped him. It was the first intimation of her father’s marriage which she had received, and reeling backward, she would have fallen had not Walter supported her. Quickly rallying, she advanced toward her father, who came to meet her, and whose hand trembled in her grasp. After greeting each of his children he turned to present them to *his wife*, wisely taking Carrie first. She was not prejudiced, like Mag, and returned her stepmother’s salutation with something like affection, for which Lenora rewarded her by terming her a “little simpleton.”

But Mag—she who had warned her father against that woman—she who on her knees had begged him not to marry her—she had no word of welcome, and when Mrs. Hamilton offered her hand she affected not to see it, though with the most frigid politeness she said, “Good evening, madam; this is, indeed, a surprise!”

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“And not a very pleasant one, either, I imagine,” whispered Lenora to Carrie.

Walter came last, and though he took the lady’s hand, there was something in his manner which plainly said she was not wanted there. Tea was now announced, and Mag bit her lip when, she saw her accustomed seat occupied by another.

Feigning to recollect herself, Mrs. Hamilton, in the blandest tones, said, “Perhaps, dear Maggie, you would prefer this seat?”

“Of course not,” said Mag, while Lenora thought to herself:

“And if she does, I wonder what good it will do?”

That young lady, however, made no remarks, for Walter Hamilton’s searching eyes were upon her and kept her silent. After tea, Walter said, “Come, Mag, I have not heard your piano in a long time. Give us some music.”

Mag arose to comply with his wishes, but ere she had reached the door Mrs. Hamilton gently detained her, saying, “Maggie, dear, Lenora has always slept near me, and as I knew you would not object, if you were here, I took the liberty to remove your piano to the parlor, and to fit this up for Lenora’s sleeping-room. See”—and she threw open the door, disclosing the metamorphose, while Willie, who began to get an inkling of matters, and who always called the piazza “outdoors,” chimed in, “And they throw’d your little trees outdoors, too!”

Mag stood for a moment, mute with astonishment; then thinking she could not “do the subject justice,” she turned silently away. A roguish smile from Walter met her eye, but she did not laugh, until, with Carrie, she repaired to her own room, and tried to put something in the closet. Then coming upon the pile of extra clothes, she exclaimed, “What in the world! Here’s all our winter clothing, and, as I live, five dresses crammed upon one nail! We’ll have to move to the barn next!”

This was too much, and sitting down, Mag cried and laughed alternately.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOMESTIC LIFE AT THE HOMESTEAD.

For a few weeks after Margaret’s return matters at the Homestead glided on smoothly enough, but at the end of that time Mrs. Hamilton began to reveal her real character. Carrie’s journey had not been as beneficial as her father had hoped it would be, and as the days grew colder she complained of extreme languor and a severe pain in her side, and at last kept her room entirely, notwithstanding the numerous hints from her

stepmother that it was no small trouble to carry so many dishes up and down stairs three times a day.

Mrs. Hamilton was naturally very stirring and active, and in spite of her remarkable skill in nursing, she felt exceedingly annoyed when any of her own family were ill. She fancied, too, that Carrie was feigning all her bad feelings, and that she would be much better if she exerted herself more. Accordingly, one afternoon when Mag was gone, she repaired to Carrie's room, giving vent to her opinion as follows: "Carrie," said she (she now dropped the *dear* when Mr. Hamilton was not by), "Carrie, I shouldn't suppose you'd ever expect to get well, so long as you stay moped up here all day. You ought to come down-stairs, and stir around more."

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“Oh, I should be so glad if I could,” answered Carrie.

“Could!” repeated Mrs. Hamilton; “you could if you would. Now, it’s my opinion that you complain altogether too much, and fancy you are a great deal worse than you really are, when all you want is exercise. A short walk on the piazza, and a little fresh air each, morning, would soon cure you.”

“I know fresh air does me good,” said Carrie; “but walking makes my side ache so hard, and makes me cough so, that Maggie thinks I’d better not.”

Mag, quoted as authority, exasperated Mrs. Hamilton who replied rather sharply, “Fudge on Mag’s old-maidish whims! I know that any one who eats as much as you do can’t be so very weak!”

“I don’t eat half you send me,” said poor Carrie, beginning to cry at her mother’s unkind remarks; “Willie ’most always comes up here and eats with me.”

“For mercy’s sake, mother, let the child have what she wants to eat, for ’tisn’t long she’ll need it,” said Lenora, suddenly appearing in the room.

“Lenora, go right down; you are not wanted here,” said Mrs. Hamilton.

“Neither are you, I fancy,” was Lenora’s reply, as she coolly seated herself on the foot of Carrie’s bed, while her mother continued:

“Really, Carrie, you must try and come down to your meals, for you have no idea how much it hinders the work, to bring them up here. Polly isn’t good for anything until she has conjured up something extra for your breakfast, and then they break so many dishes!”

“I’ll try to come down to-morrow,” said Carrie meekly; and as the door-bell just then rang Mrs. Hamilton departed, leaving her with Lenora, whose first exclamation was:

“If I were in your place, Carrie, I wouldn’t eat anything, and die quick.”

“I don’t want to die,” said Carrie; and Lenora, clapping her hands together, replied:

“Why, you poor little innocent, who supposed you did? Nobody wants to die not even *I*, good as I am; but I should expect to, if I had the consumption.”

“Lenora, have I got the consumption?” asked Carrie, fixing her eyes with mournful earnestness upon her companion, who thoughtlessly replied:

“To be sure you have. They say one lung is entirely gone and the other nearly so.”

Wearily the sick girl turned upon her side; and, resting her dimpled cheek upon her hand, she said softly, “Go away now, Lenora; I want to be alone.”

Lenora complied, and when Margaret returned from the village she found her sister lying in the same position in which Lenora had left her, with her fair hair falling over her face, which it hid from view.

“Are you asleep, Carrie?” said Mag; but Carrie made no answer, and there was something so still and motionless in her repose that Mag went up to her, and pushing back from her face the long silken hair, saw that she had fainted.

The excitement of her stepmother’s visit, added to the startling news which Lenora had told her, was too much for her weak nerves, and for a time she remained insensible. At length, rousing herself, she looked dreamily around, saying, “Was it a dream, Maggie —– all a dream?”

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“Was what a dream, love?” said Margaret, supporting her sister’s head upon her bosom.

Suddenly Carrie remembered the whole, but she resolved not to tell of her stepmother’s visit, though she earnestly desired to know if what Lenora had told her were true. Raising herself, so that she could see Margaret’s face, she said, “Maggie, is there no hope for me; and do the physicians say I must die?”

“Why, what do you mean? I never knew that they said so,” answered Mag; and then with breathless indignation she listened, while Carrie told her what Lenora had said. “I’ll see that she doesn’t get in here again,” said Margaret. “I know she made more than half of that up; for, though the physicians say you lungs are very much diseased, they have never saw that you could not recover.”

The next morning, greatly to Mag’s astonishment Carrie insisted upon going down to breakfast.

“Why, you must not do it; you are not able,” said Mag. But Carrie was determined; and, wrapping herself in her thick shawl, she slowly descended the stay though the cold air in the long hall made her shiver.

“Carrie, dear, you are better this morning, and there is quite a rosy flush on your cheek,” said Mrs. Hamilton, rising to meet her. *(Mr.* Hamilton, be it remembered, was present.) But Carrie shrank instinctively from her stepmother’s advances, and took her seat by the side of her father. After breakfast Mag remembered that she had an errand in the village, and Carrie, who felt too weary to return immediately to her room, said she would wait below until her sister returned. Mag had been gone but a few moments when Mrs. Hamilton, opening the outer door, called to Lenora, saying, “Come and take a few turns on the piazza with Carrie. The air is bracing this morning, and will do her good.”

Willie, who was present, cried out, “No—Carrie is sick; she can’t walk—Maggie said she couldn’t,” and he grasped his sister’s hand to hold her. With a not very gentle jerk Mrs. Hamilton pulled him off, while Lenora, who came bobbing and bounding into the room, took Carrie’s arm, saying.

“Oh, yes, I’ll walk with you; shall we have a hop, skip, or jump?”

“Don’t, don’t!” said Carrie, holding back; “I can’t walk fast, Lenora,” and actuated by some sudden impulse of kindness, Lenora conformed her steps to those of the invalid. Twice they walked up and down the piazza, and were about turning for the third time, when Carrie, clasping her hand over her side, exclaimed, “No, no; I can’t go again.”

Little Willie, who fancied that his sister was being hurt, sprang toward Lenora, saying, “Leno, you mustn’t hurt Carrie. Let her go; she’s sick.”

And now to the scene of action came Dame Hamilton, and seizing her young stepson, she tore him away from Lenora, administering at the same time a bit of a motherly shake. Willie's blood was up, and in return he dealt her a blow, for which she rewarded him by another shake, and by tying him to the table.

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That Lenora was not all bad was shown by the unselfish affection she ever manifested for Willie, although her untimely interference between him and her mother oftentimes made matters worse. Thus, on the occasion of which we have been speaking, Mrs. Hamilton had scarcely left the room ere Lenora released Willie from his confinement, thereby giving him the impression that his mother alone was to blame. Fortunately, however, Margaret's judgment was better, and though she felt justly indignant at the cruelty practised upon poor Carrie, she could not uphold Willie in striking his mother. Calling him to her room, she talked to him until he was wholly softened, and offered, of his own accord, to go and say he was sorry, provided Maggie would accompany him as far as the door of the sitting-room, where his mother would probably be found. Accordingly, Mag descended the stairs with him, and meeting Lenora in the hall, said, "Is she in the sitting-room?"

"Is *she* in the sitting-room?" repeated Lenora; "and pray who may *she* be?" then quick as thought she added, "Oh, yes, I know. She is in there telling HE!"

Lenora was right in her conjecture, for Mrs. Hamilton, greatly enraged at Willie's presumption in striking her, and still more provoked at him for untying himself, as she supposed he had, was laying before her husband quite an aggravated case of assault and battery.

In the midst of her argument Willie entered the room, with tear-stained eyes, and without noticing the presence of his father, went directly to his mother, and burying his face in her lap, sobbed out, "Willie is sorry he struck you, and will never do so again, if you will forgive him."

In a much gentler tone than she would have assumed had not her husband been present, Mrs. Hamilton replied, "I can forgive you for striking me, Willie, but what have you to say about untying yourself?"

"I didn't do it," said Willie; "Leno did that."

"Be careful what you say," returned Mrs. Hamilton. "I can't believe Lenora would do so."

Ere Willie had time to repeat his assertion Lenora, who all the time had been standing by the door, appeared, saying, "You may believe him, for he has never been whipped to make him lie. I did do it, and I would do it again."

"Lenora," said Mr. Hamilton, rather sternly, "you should not interfere in that manner. You will spoil the child."

It was the first time he had presumed to reprove his stepdaughter, and as there was nothing on earth which Mrs. Hamilton so much feared as Lenora's tongue, she dreaded the disclosures which further remark from her husband might call forth. So, assuming

an air of great distress, she said, “Leave her to me, my dear. She is a strange girl, as I always told you, and no one can manage her as well as myself.” Then kissing Willie in token of forgiveness, she left the room, drawing Lenora after her and whispering fiercely in her ear, “How can you ever expect to succeed with the son, if you show off this way before the father.”

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With a mocking laugh Lenora replied, “Pshaw! I gave that up the first time I ever saw him, for of course he thinks me a second edition of Mrs. Carter, minus any improvements. But he’s mistaken; I’m not half as bad as I seem. I’m only what you’ve made me.”

Mrs. Hamilton turned away, thinking that if her daughter could so easily give up Walter Hamilton, *she* would not. She was resolved upon an alliance between him and Lenora. And who ever knew *her* to fail in what she undertook?

She had wrung from her husband the confession that “he believed there was a sort of childish affection between Walter and Kate Kirby, though ’twas doubtful whether it ever amounted to anything.” She had also learned that he was rather averse to the match, and though Lenora had not yet been named as a substitute for Kate, she strove in many ways to impress her husband with a sense of her daughter’s superior abilities, at the same time taking pains to mortify Margaret by setting Lenora above her.

For this, however, Margaret cared but little, and it was only when her mother ill-treated Willie, which she frequently did, that her spirit was fully roused.

At Mrs. Hamilton’s first marriage she had been presented with a handsome glass pitcher, which she of course greatly prized. One day it stood upon the stand in her room, where Willie was also playing with some spools which Lenora had found and arranged for him. Malta, the pet kitten, was amusing herself by running after the spools, and when at last Willie, becoming tired, laid them on the stand, she sprang toward them, upsetting the pitcher, which was broken in a dozen pieces. On hearing the crash Mrs. Hamilton hastened toward the room, where the sight of her favorite pitcher in fragments greatly enraged her. Thinking, of course, that Willie had done it, she rudely seized him by the arm, administered a cuff or so, and then dragged him toward the china closet.

As soon as Willie could regain his breath he screamed, “Oh ma, don’t shut me up; I’ll be good; I didn’t do it, certain true; kittie knocked it off.”

“None of your lies,” said Mrs. Hamilton. “It’s likely kittie knocked it off!”

Lenora, who had seen the whole, and knew that what Willie said was true, was about coming to the rescue, when looking up, she saw Margaret, with dilated nostrils and eyes flashing fire watching the proceedings of her stepmother.

“He’s safe,” thought Lenora; “I’ll let Mag fire the first gun, and then I’ll bring up the rear.”

Margaret had never known Willie to tell a lie, and had no reason for thinking he had done so in this instance. Besides, the blows her mother gave him exasperated her, and she stepped forward just as Mrs. Hamilton was about pushing him into the closet. So

engrossed was that lady that she heard not Margaret's approach until a firm hand was laid upon her shoulder while Willie was violently wrested from her grasp, and ere she could recover from her astonishment she herself was pushed into the closet, the door of which was closed and locked against her.

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“Bravo, Margaret Hamilton,” cried Lenora, “I’m with you now, if I never was before. It serves her right, for Willie told the truth. I was sitting by and saw it all. Keep her in there an hour, will you? It will pay her for the many times she has shut me up for nothing.”

Mrs. Hamilton stamped and pushed against the door, while Lenora danced and sang at the top of her voice:

“My dear precious mother got wrathy one day
And seized little Will by the hair;
But when in the closet she’d stow him away,
She herself was pushed headlong in there.”

At length the bolt, yielding to the continued pressure of Mrs. Hamilton’s body, broke, and out came the termagant, foaming with rage. She dared not molest Margaret, of whose physical powers she had just received such mortifying proof, so she aimed a box at the ears of Lenora. But the lithe little thing dodged it, and with one bound cleared the table which sat in the center of the room, landing safely on the other side; and then, shaking her short, black curls at her mother, she said, “You didn’t come it, that time, my darling.”

Mr. Hamilton, who chanced to be absent for a few days, was, on his return, regaled with an exaggerated account of the proceeding, his wife ending her discourse by saying: “If you don’t do something with your upstart daughter I’ll leave the house; yes, I will.”

Mr. Hamilton was cowardly. He was afraid of his wife, and he was afraid of Mag. So he tried to compromise the matter by promising the one that he surely would see to it, and by asking the other if she were not ashamed. But old Polly didn’t let the matter pass so easily. She was greatly shocked at having “such shameful carryin’s on in a decent man’s house.”

“’Clare for’t,” said she, “I’ll give marster a piece of Polly Pepper’s mind the fust time I get a lick at him.”

In the course of a few days Mr. Hamilton had occasion to go for something into Aunt Polly’s dominions. The old lady was ready for him. “Mr. Hampleton,” said she, “I’ve been waitin’ to see you this long spell.”

“To see me, Polly?” said he; “what do you want?”

“What I wants is this,” answered Polly, dropping into a chair. “I want to know what this house is a comin’ to, with such bedivilment in it as there’s been since madam came here with that little black-headed, ugly-favored, ill-begotten, Satan-possessed, shoulder-unj’inted young one of her’n. It’s been nothin’ but a rowdadow the whole time, and you hain’t grit enough to stop it. Madam boxes Willie, and undertakes to shet him up for a

lie he never told; Miss Margaret interferes jest as she or'to, takes Willie away, and shets up madam; while that ill-marnered Lenora jumps and screeches loud enough to wake the dead. Madam busts the door down, and pitches into the varmint, who jumps spang over a four-foot table, which Lord knows *I* never could have done in my spryest days."

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“But how can I help all this?” asked Mr. Hamilton.

“Help it?” returned Polly. “You needn’t have got into the fire in the fust place. I hain’t lived fifty-odd year for nothin’, and though I hain’t no larnin’, I know too much to heave myself away on the fust nussin’ woman that comes along.”

“Stop, Polly; you must not speak so of Mrs. Hamilton,” said Mr. Hamilton; while Polly continued:

“And I wouldn’t nuther, if she could hold a candle to the t’other one; but she can’t. You’d no business to marry a second time, even if you didn’t marry a nuss; neither has any man who’s got grow’d-up gals, and a faithful critter like Polly in the kitchen. Stepmothers don’t often do well, particularly them as is sot up by marryin’.”

Here Mr. Hamilton, who did not like to hear so much truth, left the kitchen, while Aunt Polly said to herself, “I’ve gin it to him good, this time.”

Lenora, who always happened to be near when she was talked about, had overheard the whole, and repeated it to her mother. Accordingly, that very afternoon word came to the kitchen that Mrs. Hamilton wished to see Polly.

“Reckon she’ll find this child ain’t afeared on her,” said Polly, as she wiped the flour from her face and repaired to Mrs. Hamilton’s room.

“Polly,” began that lady, with a very grave face, “Lenora tells me that you have been talking very disrespectfully to Mr. Hamilton.”

“In the name of the Lord, can’t he fight his own battles?” interrupted Polly. “I only tried to show him that he was henpecked—and he is.”

“It isn’t of him alone I would speak,” resumed Mrs. Hamilton, with stately gravity; “you spoke insultingly of me, and as I make it a practise never to keep a servant after they get insolent, I have——”

“For the dear Lord’s sake,” again interrupted Polly, “I ’spect we’s the fust servants you ever had.”

“Good!” said a voice from some quarter, and Mrs. Hamilton continued: “I have sent for you to give you twenty-four hours’ warning to leave this house.”

“I shan’t budge an inch until marster says so,” said Polly. “Wonder who’s the best title deed here? Warn’t I here long afore you come a nussin’ t’other one?”

And Polly went back to the kitchen, secretly fearing that Mr. Hamilton, who she knew was wholly ruled by his wife, would say that she must go. And he did say so, though

much against his will. Lenora ran with the decision, to Aunt Polly, causing her to drop a loaf of new bread. But the old negress chased her from the cellar with the oven broom, and then stealing by a back staircase to Margaret's room, laid the case before her, acknowledging that she was sorry and asking her young mistress to intercede for her. Margaret stepped to the head of the stairs, and calling to her father, requested him to come for a moment to her room. This he was more ready to do, as he had no suspicion why he was sent for, but on seeing old Polly, he half-resolved to turn back. Margaret, however, led him into the room, and then entreated him not to send away one who had served him so long and so faithfully.

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Polly, too, joined in with her tears and prayers, saying, “She was an old black fool anyway, and let her tongue get the better on her, though she didn’t mean to say more than was true, and reckoned she hadn’t.”

In his heart Mr. Hamilton wished to revoke what he had said, but dread of the explosive storm which he knew would surely follow made him irresolute, until Carrie said, “Father, the first person of whom I have any definite recollection is Aunt Polly, and I shall be so lonesome if she goes away. For my sake let her stay, at least until I am dead.”

This decided the matter. “She *shall* stay,” said Mr. Hamilton, and Aunt Polly, highly elated, returned to the kitchen with the news. Lenora, who seemed to be everywhere at once, overheard it, and, bent on mischief, ran with it to her mother. In the meantime Mr. Hamilton wished, yet dreaded, to go down, and finally, mentally cursing himself for his weakness, asked Margaret to accompany him. She was about to comply with his request, when Mrs. Hamilton came up the stairs, furious at her husband, whom she called “a craven coward, led by the nose by all who chose to lead him.” Wishing to shut out her noise, Mag closed and bolted the door, and in the hall the modern Xantippe extended her wrath against her husband and his offspring, while poor Mr. Hamilton laid his face in Carrie’s lap and wept. Margaret was trying to devise some means by which to rid herself of her stepmother, when Lenora was heard to exclaim:

“Shall I pitch her over the stairs, Mag? I will if you say so.”

Immediately Mrs. Hamilton’s anger took another channel, and turning upon her daughter, she said, “What are you here for, you prating parrot? Didn’t you tell me what Aunt Polly said, and haven’t you acted in the capacity of reporter ever since?”

“To be sure I did,” said Lenora, poising herself on one foot, and whirling around in circles; “but if you thought I did it because I blamed Aunt Polly, you are mistaken.”

“What did you do it for, then?” said Mrs. Hamilton; and Lenora, giving the finishing touch to her circles by dropping upon the floor, answered, “I like to live in a hurricane—so I told you what I did. Now, if you think it will add at all to the excitement of the present occasion, I’ll get an ax for you to split the door down.”

“Oh, don’t, Lenora,” screamed Carrie, from within, to which Lenora responded:

“Poor little simple chick bird, I wouldn’t harm a hair of your soft head for anything. But there is a *man* in there, or one who passes for a man, that I think would look far more respectable if he’d come out and face the tornado. She’s easy to manage when you know how. At least Mag and I find her so.”

Here Mr. Hamilton ashamed of himself and emboldened, perhaps, by Lenora’s words, slipped back the bolt of the door, and walking out, confronted his wife.

“Shall I order pistols and coffee for two?” asked Lenora, swinging herself entirely over the bannister, and dropping like a squirrel on the stair below.

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“Is Polly going to stay in this house?” asked Mrs. Hamilton.

“She is,” was the reply.

“Then I leave to-night,” said Mrs. Hamilton.

“Very well, you can go,” returned the husband, growing stronger in himself each moment.

Mrs. Hamilton turned away to her own room, where she remained until supper time, when Lenora asked “If she had got her chest packed, and where they should direct their letters!” Neither Margaret nor her father could refrain from laughter.

Mrs. Hamilton, too, who had no notion of leaving the comfortable Homestead, and who thought this as good a time to veer round as any she would have, also joined in the laugh, saying, “What a child you are, Lenora!”

Gradually the state of affairs at the homestead was noised throughout the village, and numerous were the little tea parties where none dared speak above a whisper to tell what they had heard, and where each and every one were bound to the most profound secrecy, for fear the reports might not be true. At length, however, the story of the china closet got out, causing Sally Martin to spend one whole day in retailing the gossip from door to door. Many, too, suddenly remembered certain suspicious things which they had seen in Mrs. Hamilton, who was unanimously voted to be a bad woman, and who, of course, began to be slighted.

The result of this was to increase the sourness of her disposition; and life at the Homestead would have been one continuous scene of turmoil had not Margaret wisely concluded to treat whatever her stepmother did with silent contempt. Lenora, too, always seemed ready to fill up all vacant niches, until even Mag acknowledged that the mother would be unendurable without the daughter.

CHAPTER IX.

LENORA AND CARRIE.

Ever since the day on which Lenora had startled Carrie by informing her of her danger, she had been carefully kept from the room, or allowed only to enter it when Margaret was present. One afternoon, however, early in February, Mag had occasion to go to the village. Lenora, who saw her depart, hastily gathered up her work, and repaired to Carrie’s room, saying, as she entered it, “Now, Carrie, we’ll have a good time; Mag has gone to see old deaf Peggy, who asks a thousand questions, and will keep her at least two hours, and I am going to entertain you to the best of my ability.”

Carrie’s cheek flushed, for she felt some misgivings with regard to the nature of Lenora’s entertainment; but she knew there was no help for it, so she tried to smile, and said, “I am willing you should stay, Lenora, but you mustn’t talk bad things to me, for I can’t bear it.”

“Bad things!” repeated Lenora; “who ever heard me talk bad things! What do you mean?”

“I mean,” said Carrie, “that you must not talk about your mother as you sometimes do. It is wicked.”

“Why, you dear little thing,” answered Lenora, “don’t you know that what would be wicked for you isn’t wicked for me?”

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“No, I do not know so,” answered Carrie; “but I know I wouldn’t talk about my mother as you do about yours for anything.”

“Bless your heart,” said Lenora, “haven’t you sense enough to see that there is a great difference between Mrs. Hamilton first, and Mrs. Hamilton second? Now, I’m not naturally bad, and if I had been the daughter of Mrs. Hamilton first instead of Widow Carter’s young one, why, I should have been as good as you—no, not as good as *you*, for you don’t know enough to be bad—but as good as Mag, who, in my opinion, has the right kind of goodness, for all I used to hate her so.”

“Hate Margaret!” said Carrie, opening her eyes to their utmost extent. “What did you hate Margaret for?”

“Because I didn’t know her, I suppose,” returned Lenora; “for now I like her well enough—not quite as well as I do you, perhaps; and yet, when I see you bear mother’s abuse so meekly, I positively hate you for a minute, and ache to box your ears; but when Mag squares up to her, shuts her in the china closet, and all that, I want to put my arms right round neck.”

“Why, don’t you like your mother?” asked Carrie, and Lenora replied:

“Of course I do; but I know what she is and I know she isn’t what she sometimes seems. Why, she’d be anything to suit the circumstances. She wanted your father, and she assumed the character most likely to secure him; for, between you and me, he isn’t very smart.”

“What did she marry him for, then?” asked Carrie.

“Marry *him*! I hope you don’t for a moment suppose she married *him*!”

“Why, Lenora, *ain’t they married?* I thought they were. Oh, dreadful!” and Carrie started to her feet, while the perspiration stood thickly on her forehead.

Lenora screamed with delight, saying, “You certainly have the softest brain I ever saw. Of course the minister went through with the ceremony; but it was not your father that mother wanted; it was his house—his money—his horses—his servants, and his name. Now, maybe in your simplicity you have thought that mother came here out of kindness to the motherless children; but I tell you she would be better satisfied if neither of you had ever been born. I suppose it is wicked in me to say so, but I think she makes me worse than I would otherwise be; for I am not naturally so bad, and I like people much better than I pretend to. Anyway, I like you, and *love* little Willie, and always have, since the first time I saw him. Your mother lay in her coffin, and Willie stood by her, caressing her cold cheek, and saying, ’Wake up, mamma, it’s Willie; don’t you know Willie? I took him in my arms, and vowed to love and shield him from the coming evil; for I knew then,

as well as I do now, that what has happened would happen. Mag wasn't there; she didn't see me. If she had, she might have liked me better; now she thinks there is no good in me; and if, when you die, I should feel like shedding tears, and perhaps I shall, it would be just like her to wonder 'what business *I* had to cry—it was none of my funeral!'"

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“You do wrong to talk so, Lenora,” said Carrie; “but tell me, did you never have any one to love except Willie?”

“Yes,” said Lenora; “when I was a child, a little, innocent child, I had a grandmother—my father’s mother—who taught me to pray, and told me of God.”

“Where is she now?” asked Carrie.

“In heaven,” was the answer. “I know she is there, because when she died there was the same look on her face that there was on your mother’s—the same that there will be on yours, when you are dead.”

“Never mind,” gasped Carrie, who did not care to be so frequently reminded of her mortality, while Lenora continued:

“Perhaps you don’t know that my father was, as mother says, a bad man; though I always loved him dearly, and cried when he went away. We lived with grandmother, and sometimes now, in my dreams, I am a child again, kneeling by grandma’s side, in our dear old eastern home, where the sunshine fell so warmly, where the summer birds sang in the old maple trees, and where the long shadows, which I called spirits, came and went over the bright green meadows. But there was a sadder day; a narrow coffin, a black hearse, and a tolling bell, which always wakes me from my sleep, and I find the dream all gone, and nothing left of the little child but the wicked Lenora Carter.”

Here the dark girl buried her face in her hands and wept, while Carrie gently smoothed her tangled curls. After a while, as if ashamed of her emotion, Lenora dried her tears, and Carrie said, “Tell me more of your early life. I like you when you act as you do now.”

“There is nothing more to tell but wickedness,” answered Lenora. “Grandma died, and I had no one to teach me what was right. About a year after her death mother wanted to get a divorce from father; and one day she told me that a lawyer was coming to inquire about my father’s treatment of her. ‘Perhaps,’ said she, ’he will ask if you ever saw him strike me, and you must say that you have a great many times. ‘But never did,’ said I; and then she insisted upon my telling that falsehood, and I refused, until she whipped me, and made me promise to say whatever she wished me to. In this way I was trained to be what I am. Nobody loves me; nobody ever can love me; and sometimes when Mag speaks so kindly to you, and looks so affectionately upon you, I think, what would I not give for some one to love me; and then I go away to cry, and wish I had never been born.”

Here Mrs. Hamilton called to her daughter, and gathering up her work, Lenora left the room just as Margaret entered it, on her return from the village.

CHAPTER X.

DARKNESS.

As the spring opened and the days grew warmer Carrie's health seemed much improved; and, though she did not leave her room, she was able to sit up nearly all day, busying herself with some light work. Ever hopeful, Margaret hugged to her bosom the delusion which whispered, "She will not die," while even the physician was deceived, and spoke encouragingly of her recovery.

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For several months Margaret had thought of visiting her grandmother, who lived in Albany; and as Mr. Hamilton had occasion to visit that city, Carrie urged her to accompany him saying, she was perfectly able to be left alone, and she wished her sister would go, for the trip would do her good.

For some time past Mrs. Hamilton had seemed exceedingly amiable and affectionate, although her husband appeared greatly depressed, and acted, as Lenora said, “Just as though he had been stealing sheep.”

This depression Mag had tried in vain to fathom, and at last, fancying that a change of place and scene might do him good, she consented to accompany him, on condition that Kate Kirby would stay with Carrie. At mention of Kate’s name Mr. Hamilton’s eyes instantly went over to his wife, whose face wore the same stony expression as she answered, “Yes, Maggie, can come.”

Accordingly, on the morning when the travelers would start, Kate came up to the homestead, receiving a thousand and one directions about what to do and when to do it, hearing not more than half the injunctions, and promising to comply with every one. Long before the door the carriage waited, while Margaret, lingering in Carrie’s room, kissed again and again her sister’s pure brow, and gazed into her deep blue eyes, as if she knew that it was the last time. Even when half way down the stairs she turned back again to say good-by, this time whispering, “I have half a mind not to go, for something tells me I shall never see you again.”

“Oh, Mag,” said Carrie, “don’t be superstitious. I am a great deal better, and when you come home you will find me in the parlor.”

In the lower hall Mr. Hamilton caressed his little Willie, who begged that he, too, might go. “Don’t leave, me, Maggie, don’t,” said he, as Mag came up to say good-by.

Long years after the golden curls which Mag pushed back from Willie’s forehead were covered by the dark moist earth, did she remember her baby-brother’s childish farewell, and oft in bitterness of heart she asked, “Why did I go—why leave my loved ones to die alone?”

Just a week after Mag’s departure news was received at the homestead that Walter was coming to Glenwood for a day or two, and on the afternoon of the same day Kate had occasion to go home. As she was leaving the house Mrs. Hamilton detained her, while she said, “Miss Kirby, we are all greatly obliged to you for your kindness in staying with Carrie, although your services really are not needed. I understand how matters stand between you and Walter, and as he is to be here to-morrow; you of course will feel some delicacy about remaining, consequently I release you from all obligations to do so.”

Of course there was no demurring to this. Kate's pride was touched; and though Carrie wept, and begged her not to go, she yielded only so far as to stay until the next morning, when, with a promise to call frequently, she left. Lonely and long seemed the hours to poor Carrie; for though Walter came, he stayed but two days, and spent a part of that time at the mill-pond cottage.

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The evening after he went away, as Carrie lay, half-dozing, thinking of Mag, and counting the weary days which must pass ere her return, she was startled by the sound of Lenora's voice in the room opposite, the door of which was ajar. Lenora had been absent a few days, and Carrie was about calling to her, when some words spoken by her stepmother arrested her attention, and roused her curiosity. They were, "You think too little of yourself, Lenora. Now, I know there is nothing in the way of your winning Walter, if you choose."

"I should say there was everything in the way," answered Lenora. "In the first place, there is Kate Kirby, and who, after seeing her handsome face, would ever look at such a black, turned-up nose, bristle-headed thing as I am? But I perceive there is some weighty secret on your mind, so what is it? Have Walter and Kate quarreled, or have you told him some falsehood about her?"

"Neither," said Mrs. Hamilton. "What I have to say concerns your father."

"My father!" interrupted Lenora; "my own father! Oh, is he living?"

"No, I hope not," was the answer; "it is Mr. Hamilton whom I mean."

Instantly Lenora's tone changed, and she replied, "If you please you need not call that putty-headed man *my* father. He acts too much like a whipped spaniel to suit me, and I really think Carrie ought to be respected for knowing what little she does, while I wonder where Walter, Mag, and Willie got their good sense. But what is it? What have you made Mr. Hamilton do?—something ridiculous, of course."

"I've made him make his will," was the answer; while Lenora continued:

"Well, what then? What good will that do me?"

"It may do you a great deal of good," said Mrs. Hamilton; "that is, if Walter likes the homestead as I think he does. But I tell you, it was hard work, and I didn't know, one while, but I should have to give it up. However, I succeeded, and he has willed the homestead to Walter, provided he marries you. If not, Walter has nothing, and the homestead comes to *me* and my heirs forever!"

"Heartless old fool!" exclaimed Lenora, while Carrie, too, groaned in sympathy. "And do you suppose he intends to let it go so! Of course not; he'll make another when you don't know it"

"I'll watch him too closely for that," said Mrs. Hamilton and after a moment Lenora asked:

"What made you so anxious for a will? Have you received warning of his sudden demise?"

“How foolish!” said Mrs. Hamilton. “Isn’t it the easiest thing in the world for me to let Walter know what’s in the will, and I fancy that’ll bring him to terms, for he likes money, no mistake about that.”

“Mr. Hamilton is a bigger fool, and you a worse woman, than I supposed,” said Lenora. “Do you think I am mean enough to marry Walter under such circumstances? Indeed, I’m not. But how is Carrie? I must go and see her.”

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She was about leaving the room, when she turned back, saying in a whisper, “Mother, mother, her door is wide open, as well as this one, and she must have heard every word!”

“Oh, horror!” exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton; “go in and ascertain the fact, if possible.”

It took but one glance to convince Lenora that Carrie was in possession of the secret. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes wet with tears; and when Lenora stooped to kiss her, she said. “I know it all, I heard it all.”

“Then I hope you feel better,” said Mrs. Hamilton, coming forward. “Listeners never hear any good of themselves.”

“Particularly if it’s Widow Carter who is listened to,” suggested Lenora.

Mrs. Hamilton did not reply to this, but continued speaking to Carrie. “If you have heard anything new you can keep it to yourself. No one has interfered with you, or intends to. Your father has a right to do what he chooses with his own, and I shall see that he exercises that right, too.”

So saying she left the room, while Carrie, again bursting into tears, wept until perfectly exhausted. The next morning she was attacked with bleeding at the lungs, which in a short time reduced her so low that the physician spoke doubtfully of her recovery, should the hemorrhage again return. In the course of two or three days she was again attacked; and now, when there was no longer hope of life, her thoughts turned with earnest longings toward her absent father and sister, and once, as the physician was preparing to leave her, she said, “Doctor, tell me truly, can I live twenty-four hours?”

“I think you may,” was the answer.

“Then I shall see them, for if you telegraph to-night they can come in the morning train. Go yourself and have it done, will you?”

The physician promised that he would, and then left the room. In the hall he met Mrs. Hamilton, who with the utmost anxiety depicted upon her countenance, said, “Dear Carrie is leaving us, isn’t she? I have telegraphed for her father, who will be here in the morning. ’Twas right to do so, was it not?”

“Quite right,” answered the physician. “I promised to see to it myself, and was just going to do so.”

“Poor child,” returned Mrs. Hamilton, “she feels anxious, I suppose. But I have saved you the trouble.”

The reader will not, perhaps, be greatly surprised to learn that what Mrs. Hamilton had said was false. She suspected that one reason why Carrie so greatly desired to see her father was to tell him what she had heard, and beg of him to undo what he had done; and as she feared the effect which the sight and words of his dying child might have upon him, she resolved, if possible, to keep him away until Carrie's voice was hushed in death. Overhearing what had been said by the doctor, she resorted to the stratagem of which we have just spoken. The next morning, however, she ordered a telegram to be despatched, knowing full well that her husband could not reach home until the day following.

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Meantime, as the hour for the morning train drew near, Carrie, resting upon pillows, and whiter than the linen which covered them, strained her ears to catch the first sound of the locomotive. At last, far off through an opening among the hills, was heard a rumbling noise, which increased each moment in loudness, until the puffing engine shot out into the long, green valley, and then rolled rapidly up to the depot.

Little Willie had seemed unwell for a few days, but since his sister's illness he had stayed by her almost constantly, gazing half-curiously, half-timidly into her face, and asking if she was going to the home where his mamma lived. She had told him that Margaret was coming, and when the shrill whistle of the eastern train sounded through the room he ran to the window, whither Lenora had preceded him, and there together they watched for the coming of the omnibus. A sinister smile curled the lips of Mrs. Hamilton who was present, and who, of course, affected to feel interested.

At last Willie, clapping his hands, exclaimed, "There 'tis! They're coming. That's Maggie's big trunk!" Then, noticing the glow which his announcement called up to Carrie's cheek, he said, "She'll make you well, Carrie, Maggie will. Oh, I'm so glad, and so is Leno."

Nearer and nearer came the omnibus, brighter and deeper grew the flush on Carrie's face, while little Willie danced up and down with joy.

"It isn't coming here," said Mrs. Hamilton; "it has gone by," and Carrie's feverish heat was succeeded by an icy chill.

"Haven't they come, Lenora?" she said.

Lenora shook her head, and Willie, running to his sister, wound his arms around her neck, and for several minutes the two lone, motherless children wept.

"If Maggie knew how my head ached she'd come," said Willie; but Carrie thought not of *her* aching head, nor of the faintness of death which was fast coming on. One idea alone engrossed her. Her brother—how would he be saved from the threatened evil, and her father's name from dishonor?

At last Mrs. Hamilton left the room, and Carrie, speaking to Lenora and one of the villagers who was present, asked if they, too, would not leave her alone for a time with Willie. They complied with her request, and then asking her brother to bring her pencil and paper, she hurriedly wrote a few lines to her father telling him of what she had heard, and entreating him, for her sake, and the sake of the mother with whom she would be when those words met his eye, not to do Walter so great a wrong. "I shall give this to Willie's care," she wrote, in conclusion, "and he will keep it carefully until you come. And now, I bid you a long farewell, my precious father—my noble Mag—my darling Walter."

The note was finished, and calling Willie to her, she said, “I am going to die. When Maggie returns I shall be dead and still, like our own dear mother.”

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“Oh, Carrie, Carrie,” sobbed the child, “don’t leave me till Maggie comes.”

There was a footstep on the stairs, and Carrie, without replying to her brother, said quickly, “Take this paper, Willie, and give it to father when he comes; let no one see it—-Lenora, mother, nor any one.”

Willie promised compliance, and had but just time to conceal the note in his bosom ere Mrs. Hamilton entered the room, accompanied by the physician, to whom she loudly expressed her regrets that her husband had not come, saying that she had that morning telegraphed again, although he could not now reach home until the morrow.

“To-morrow I shall never see,” said Carrie, faintly. And she spoke truly, too, for even then death was freezing her life-blood with the touch of his icy hand. To the last she seemed conscious of the tiny arms which so fondly encircled her neck; and when the soul had drifted far out on the dark channel of death the childish words of “Carrie, Carrie, speak once more,” roused her, and folding her brother more closely to her bosom, she murmured, “Willie, darling Willie, our mother is waiting for us both.”

Mrs. Hamilton, who stood near, now bent down, and laying her hand on the pale, damp brow said gently, “Carrie, dear, have you no word of love for this mother?”

There was a visible shudder, an attempt to speak, a low moan, in which the word “Walter” seemed struggling to be spoken; and then death, as if impatient of delay, bore away the spirit, leaving only the form which in life had been most beautiful. Softly Lenora closed over the blue eyes the long, fringed lids, and pushed back from the forehead the sunny tresses which clustered so thickly around it; then, kissing the white lips and leaving on the face of the dead traces of her tears, she led Willie from the room, soothing him in her arms until he fell asleep.

Elsewhere we have said that for a few days Willie had not seemed well; but so absorbed were all in Carrie’s more alarming symptoms that no one had heeded him, although his cheeks were flushed with fever, and his head was throbbing with pain. He was in the habit of sleeping in his parents’ room, and that night his loud breathings and uneasy turnings disturbed and annoyed his mother, who at last called out in harsh tones, “Willie, Willie, for mercy’s sake stop that horrid noise! I shall never get asleep this way. I know there’s no need of breathing like that!”

“It chokes me so,” sobbed little Willie, “but I’ll try.”

Then pressing his hands tightly over his mouth, he tried the experiment of holding his breath as long as possible. Hearing no sound from his mother, he thought her asleep, but not venturing to breathe naturally until assured of the fact, he whispered, “Ma, ma, are you asleep?”

“Asleep! no—and never shall be, as I see. What do you want?”

“Oh, I want to breathe,” said Willie.

“Well, breathe then; who hinders you?” was the reply; and ere the offensive sound again greeted her ear, Mrs. Hamilton was too far gone in slumber to be disturbed.

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For two hours Willie lay awake, tossing from side to side, scorched with fever and longing for water to quench his burning thirst. By this time Mrs. Hamilton was again awake; but to his earnest entreaties for water—"Just one little drop of water, ma"—she answered:

"William Hamilton, if you don't be still I'll move your crib into the room where Carrie is, and leave you there alone!"

Unlike many children, Willie had no fears of the cold white figure which lay so still and motionless upon the parlor sofa. To him it was Carrie, his sister; and many times that day had he stolen in alone, and laying back the thin muslin which shaded her face, he had looked long upon her—had laid his hand on her icy cheek, wondering if she knew how cold she was, and if the way which she had gone was so long and dark that he could never find it. To him there was naught to fear in that room of death, and to his mother's threat he answered eagerly, "Oh, ma, give me some water, just a little bit of water, and you may carry me in there, I ain't afraid and my breathing won't wake Carrie up;" but before he had finished speaking his mother was again dozing.

"Won't anybody bring me some water—Maggie, Carrie—Leno—nobody?" murmured poor Willie, as he Wet his pillow with tears.

At last he could bear it no longer. He knew where the water-bucket stood, and stepping from his bed, he groped his way down the long stairs to the basement. The spring moon was low in the western horizon, and shining through the curtained window, dimly lighted up the room. The pail was soon reached, and then in his eagerness to drink, he put his lips to the side. Lower, lower, lower it came, until he discovered, alas I that the pail was empty.

"What shall I do? what shall I do?" said he, as he crouched upon the cold hearthstone.

A new idea entered his mind. The well stood near the outer door; and, quickly pushing back the bolt, he went out, all flushed and feverish as he was, into the chill night air. There was ice upon the curbstone, but he did not mind it, although his little toes, as they trod upon it, looked red by the pale moonlight. Quickly a cup of the coveted water was drained; then, with careful forethought, he filled it again, and taking it back to his room, crept shivering to bed. Nature was exhausted, and whether he fainted or fell asleep is not known, for never again to consciousness in this world awoke the little boy.

The morning sunlight came softly in at the window, touching his golden curls with a still more golden hue. Sadly over him Lenora bent, saying, "Willie, Willie, wake up, Willie. Don't you know me?"

Greatly Mrs. Hamilton marveled whence came the cup of water which stood there, as if reproaching her for her cruelty. But the delirious words of the dreamer soon told her all.

“Maggie, Maggie,” he said, “rub my feet; they feel like Carrie’s face. The curbstone was cold, but the water was so good. Give me more, more; mother won’t care, for I got it myself, and tried not to breathe, so she could sleep—and Carrie, too, is dead—dead.”

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Lenora fiercely grasped her mother's arm, and said, "How could you refuse him water, and sleep while he got it himself?"

But Mrs. Hamilton needed not that her daughter should accuse her. Willie had been her favorite, and the tears which she dropped upon his pillow were genuine. The physician who was called pronounced his disease to be scarlet fever, saying that its violence was greatly increased by a severe cold which he had taken.

"You have killed him, mother; you have killed him!" said Lenora.

Twenty-four hours had passed since, with straining ear, Carrie had listened for the morning train, and again down the valley floated the smoke of the engine, and over the blue hills echoed the loud scream of the locomotive; but no sound could awaken the fair young sleeper, though Willie started, and throwing up his hands, one of which, the right one, was firmly clinched, murmured, "Maggie, Maggie."

Ten minutes more and Margaret was there, weeping in agony over the inanimate form of her sister, and almost shrieking as she saw Willie's wild eye, and heard his incoherent words. Terrible to Mr. Hamilton was this coming home. Like one who walks in sleep, he went from room to room, kissing the burning brow of one child, and then, while the hot breath was yet warm upon his lips, pressing them to the cold face of the other.

All day Margaret sat by her dying brother, praying that he might be spared until Walter came. Her prayer was answered; for at nightfall Walter was with them. Half an hour after his return Willie died; but ere his right hand dropped lifeless by his side he held it up to view, saying:

"Father—give it to nobody but father."

After a moment Margaret, taking within hers the fast-stiffening hand, gently unclosed the fingers, and found the crumpled piece of paper on which Carrie had written to her father.

CHAPTER XI.

MARGARET AND HER FATHER.

'Twas midnight—midnight after the burial. In the library of the old homestead sat its owner, his arms resting upon the table, and his face reclining upon his arms. Sadly was he reviewing the dreary past, since first among them death had been, bearing away his wife, the wife of his first only love. Now, by her grave there was another, on which the pale moonbeams and the chill night-dews were falling, but they could not disturb the rest of the two who, side by side in the same coffin, lay sleeping, and for whom the father's tears were falling fast, and the father's heart was bleeding.

“Desolate, desolate—all is desolate,” said the stricken man. “Would that I, too, were asleep with my lost ones!”

There was a rustling sound near him, a footfall, and an arm was thrown lovingly around his neck. Margaret’s tears were on his cheek, and Margaret’s voice whispered in his ear, “Dear father, we must love each other better now.”

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Margaret had not retired, and on passing through the hall, had discovered the light gleaming through the crevice of the library door. Knowing that her father must be there, she had come in to comfort him. Long the father and child wept together, and then Margaret, drying her tears said:

“It is right—all right; mother has two, and you have two, and though the dead will never return to us, we, in God’s good time, will return to them.”

“Yes, soon, very soon, shall I go,” said Mr. Hamilton.

“I am weary, weary, Margaret; my life is one scene of bitterness. Oh, why, why was I left to do it?”

Margaret knew well to what he referred, but she made no answer; and after he had become somewhat composed, thinking this a good opportunity for broaching the subject which had so troubled Carrie’s dying moments, she drew from her bosom the soiled piece of paper, and placing it in his hands, watched him while he read. The moan of anguish which came from his lips as he finished made her repent of her act, and, springing to his side, she exclaimed:

“Forgive me, father; I ought not to have done it now. You have enough to bear.”

“It is right, my child,” said Mr. Hamilton; “for after the wound had slightly healed I might have wavered. Not that I love Walter less; but, fool that I am, I fear her who has made me the cowardly wretch you see!”

“Rouse yourself, then,” answered Margaret. “Shake off her chain, and be free.”

“I cannot, I cannot,” said he. “But this I will do. I will make another will. I always intended to do so, and Walter shall not be wronged.” Then rising, he hurriedly paced the room saying, “Walter shall not be wronged, no, no—Walter shall not be wronged.”

After a time he resumed his former seat, and taking his daughter’s hand in his, he told her of all he had suffered, of the power which his wife held over him, and which he was too weak to shake off. This last he did not say, but Margaret knew it and it prevented her from giving him other consolation than that of assuring him of her own unchanged, undying love.

The morning twilight was streaming through the closed shutters ere the conference ended; and then Mr. Hamilton, kissing his daughter, dismissed her from the room, but as she was leaving him he called her back, saying:

“Don’t tell Walter; he would despise me; but he shan’t be wronged—no, he shan’t be wronged.”

Six weeks from that night Margaret stood, with her brother, watching her father as the light from his eyes went out, and the tones of his voice ceased forever. Grief for the loss of his children, and remorse for the blight which he had brought upon his household, had undermined his constitution, never strong; and when a prevailing fever settled upon him it found an easy prey. In ten days' time Margaret and Walter alone were left of the happy band who, two years before, had gathered around the fireside of the old homestead.

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Loudly Mrs. Hamilton deplored her loss, shutting herself up in her room, and refusing to see any one, saying that she could not be comforted, and it was of no use trying! Lenora, however, managed to find an opportunity of whispering to her that it would hardly be advisable to commit suicide, since she had got the homestead left, and everything else for which she had married Mr. Hamilton.

“Lenora, how can you thus trifle with my feelings? Don’t you see that my trouble is killing me?” said the greatly distressed lady.

“I don’t apprehend any such catastrophe as that,” answered Lenora. “You found the weeds of Widow Carter easy enough to wear, and those of Widow Hamilton won’t hurt you any worse, I imagine.”

“Lenora,” groaned Mrs. Hamilton, “may you never know what it is to be the unhappy mother of such a child!”

“Amen!” was Lenora’s fervent response, as she glided from the room.

For three days the body of Mr. Hamilton lay upon the marble center table in the darkened parlor. Up and down the long staircases, and through the silent rooms, the servants moved noiselessly. Down in the basement Aunt Polly forgot her wonted skill in cooking, and in a broken rocking-chair swayed to and fro, brushing the big tears from her dusky face, and lamenting the loss of one who seemed to her “just like a brother, only a little nigher.”

In the chamber above, where six weeks before Carrie had died, sat Margaret—not weeping; she could not do that—her grief was too great, and the fountain of her tears seemed scorched and dried; but, with white, compressed lips, and hands tightly clasped, she thought of the past and of the cheerless future. Occasionally through the doorway there came a small, dark figure; a pair of slender arms were thrown around her neck, and a voice murmured in her ear: “Poor, poor Maggie.” The next moment the figure would be gone, and in the hall below Lenora would be heard singing snatches of some song, either to provoke her mother, or to make the astonished servants believe that she was really heartless and hardened.

What Walter suffered could not be expressed. Hour after hour, from the sun’s rising till its going down, he sat by his father’s coffin, unmindful of the many who came in to look at the dead, and then gazing pitifully upon the face of the living, walked away, whispering mysteriously of insanity. Near *him* Lenora dared not come, though through the open door she watched him, and oftentimes he met the glance of her wild, black eyes, fixed upon him with a mournful interest; then, as if moved by some spirit of evil, she would turn away, and seeking her mother’s room, would mock at that lady’s grief, advising her not to make too much of an effort.

At last there came a change. In the yard there was the sound of many feet, and in the house the hum of many voices, all low and subdued. Again in the village of Glenwood was heard the sound of the tolling bell; again through the garden and over the running water brook moved the long procession to the graveyard; and soon Ernest Hamilton lay quietly sleeping by the side of his wife and children.

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For some time after the funeral nothing was said concerning the will, and Margaret had almost forgotten the existence of one, when one day as she was passing the library door her mother appeared, and asked her to enter. She did so, and found there her brother, whose face, besides the marks of recent sorrow which it wore, now seemed anxious and expectant.

“Maggie dear,” said the oily-tongued woman, “I have sent for you to hear read your beloved father’s last will and testament.”

A deep flush mounted to Margaret’s face, as she repeated somewhat inquiringly, “Father’s last will and testament?”

“Yes, dear,” answered her mother, “his last will and testament. He made it several weeks ago, even before poor Carrie died; and as Walter is now the eldest and only son, I think it quite proper that he should read it.”

So saying, she passed toward Walter a sealed package, which he nervously opened, while Margaret, going to his side, looked over his shoulder, as he read.

It is impossible to describe the look of mingled surprise, anger, and mortification which Mrs. Hamilton’s face assumed, as she heard the will which her husband had made four weeks before his death, and in which Walter shared equally with his sister. Her first impulse was to destroy it; and springing forward, she attempted to snatch it from Walter’s hand, but was prevented by Margaret, who caught her arm and forcibly held her back.

Angrily confronting her stepdaughter, Mrs. Hamilton demanded, “What does this mean?” to which Mag replied:

“It means, madam, that for once you are foiled. You coaxed my father into making a will, the thought of which ought to make you blush. Carrie overheard you telling Lenora, and when she found that she must die she wrote it on a piece of paper, and consigned it to Willie’s care!”

Several times Mrs. Hamilton essayed to speak, but the words died away in her throat, until at last, summoning all her boldness, she said, in a hoarse whisper, “But the homestead is mine—mine forever, and we’ll see how delightful I can make your home!”

“I’ll save you that trouble, madam,” said Walter, rising and advancing toward the door. “Neither my sister nor myself will remain beneath the same roof which shelters you. To-morrow we leave, knowing well that vengeance belongeth to One higher than we.”

All the remainder of that day Walter and Margaret spent in devising some plan for the future, deciding at last that Margaret should on the morrow go for a time to Mrs. Kirby’s, while Walter returned to the city. The next morning, however, Walter did not appear in

the breakfast parlor, and when Margaret, alarmed at his absence, repaired to his room, she found him unable to rise. The fever with which his father had died, and which, was still prevailing in the village, had fastened upon him, and for many days was his life despaired of. The ablest physicians were called, but few of them gave any hope to the pale, weeping sister, who, with untiring love, kept her vigils by her brother's bedside.

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When he was first taken ill he had manifested great uneasiness at his stepmother's presence, and when at last he became delirious he no longer concealed his feelings, and if she entered the room he would shriek "Take her away from me! Take her away! Chain her in the cellar—anywhere out of my sight."

Again he would speak of Kate, and entreat that she might come to him. "I have nothing left but her and Margaret," he would say; "and why does she stay away?"

Three different times had Margaret sent to her young friend, urging her to come, and still she tarried, while Margaret marveled greatly at the delay. She did not know that the girl whom she had told to go had received different directions from Mrs. Hamilton, and that each day beneath her mother's roof Kate Kirby wept and prayed that Walter might not die.

One night he seemed to be dying, and gathered in the room were many sympathizing friends and neighbors. Without, 'twas pitchy dark. The rain fell in torrents and the wind, which had increased in violence since the setting of the sun, howled mournfully about the windows, as if waiting to bear the soul company in its upward flight. Many times had Walter attempted to speak. At last he succeeded, and the word which fell from his lips was "Kate!"

Lenora, who had that day accidentally learned of her mother's commands with regard to Miss Kirby, now glided noiselessly from the room, and in a moment was alone in the fearful storm, which she did not heed. Lightly bounding over the swollen brook, she ran on until the mill-pond cottage was reached. It was midnight, and its inmates were asleep, but they awoke at the sound of Lenora's voice.

"Walter is dying," said she to Kate, "and would see you once more. Come quickly."

Hastily dressing herself, Kate went forth with the strange girl, who spoke not a word until Walter's room was reached. Feebly the sick man wound his arms around Kate's neck, exclaiming, "My own, my beautiful Kate, I knew you would come. I am better now—I shall live!" and as if there was indeed something life-giving in her very presence and the sound of her voice, Walter from that hour grew better: and in three weeks' time he, together with Margaret, left his childhood's home, once so dear, but now darkened by the presence of her who watched their departure with joy, exulting in the thought that she was mistress of all she surveyed.

Walter, who was studying law in the city about twenty miles distant, resolved to return thither immediately, and after some consultation with his sister it was determined that both she and Kate should accompany him. Accordingly, a few mornings after they left the homestead, there was a quiet bridal at the mill-pond cottage; after which Walter Hamilton bore away to his city home his sister and his bride, the beautiful Kate.

CHAPTER XII.

“CARRYING OUT DEAR MR. HAMILTON’S PLANS.”

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One morning about ten days after the departure of Walter the good people of Glenwood were greatly surprised at the unusual confusion which seemed to pervade the homestead. The blinds were taken off, windows taken out, carpets taken up, and where so lately physicians, clergymen, and death had officiated, were now seen carpenters, masons, and other workmen. Many were the surmises as to the cause of all this; and one old lady, more curious than the rest, determined upon a friendly call, to ascertain, if possible, what was going on.

She found Mrs. Hamilton with her sleeves rolled up, and her hair tucked under a black cap, consulting with a carpenter about enlarging her bedroom and adding to it a bathing-room. Being received but coldly by the mistress of the house, she descended to the basement, where she was told by Aunt Polly that "the blinds were going to be repainted, an addition built, the house turned wrong-side out, and Cain raised generally."

"It's a burning shame," said Aunt Polly, warmed up by her subject and the hot oven into which she was thrusting loaves of bread and pies. "It's a burning shame—a tearin' down and a goin' on this way, and marster not cold in his grave. Miss Lenora, with all her badness, says it's disgraceful, but he might ha' know'd it. *I* did. I know'd it the fust time she came here a nussin'. I don't see what got into him to have her. Polly Pepper, without any larnin', never would ha' done such a thing," continued she, as the door closed upon her visitor, who was anxious to carry the gossip back to the village.

It was even as Aunt Polly had said. Mrs. Hamilton, who possessed a strong propensity for pulling down and building up, and who would have made an excellent carpenter, had long had an earnest desire for improving the homestead; and now that there was no one to prevent her, she went to work with a right good will, saying to Lenora, who remonstrated with her upon the impropriety of her conduct, that "she was merely carrying out dear Mr. Hamilton's plans," who had proposed making these changes before his death.

"Dear Mr. Hamilton!" repeated Lenora, "very dear has he become to you, all at once. I think if you had always manifested a little more affection for him and his, they might not have been where they now are."

"Seems to me you take a different text from what you did some months ago," said Mrs. Hamilton; "but perhaps you don't remember the time?"

"I remember it well," answered Lenora, "and quite likely, with your training, I should do the same again. We were poor, and I wished for a more elegant home. I fancied that Margaret Hamilton was proud and had slighted me, and I longed for revenge; but when I knew her I liked her better, and when I saw that she was not to be trampled down by you or me, my hatred of her turned to admiration. The silly man who has paid the penalty of his weakness, I always despised; but when I saw how fast the gray

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hairs thickened on his head; how careworn and bowed down he grew, I pitied him, for I knew that his heart was breaking. Willie I truly, unselfishly loved; and I am charitable enough to think that even *you* loved *him*, but it was through your neglect that he died, and for his death you will answer. Carrie was gentle and trusting, but weak, like her father. I do not think you killed her, for she was dying when we came here, but you put the crowning act of wickedness to your life when you compelled a man, shattered in body and intellect, to write a will which disinherited his only son; but on that point you are baffled. To be sure, you've got the homestead, and for decency's sake I think I'd wait a while longer ere I commenced tearing down and building up."

Lenora's words had no effect whatever upon her mother, who still kept on with her plans, treating with silent contempt the remarks of the neighbors, or wishing, perhaps, that they would attend to their own business, just as she was attending to hers! Day after day the work went on. Scaffoldings were raised—paper and plastering torn off—-boards were seasoning in the sun—shingles lying upon the ground—ladders raised against the wall; and all this while the two new graves showed not a blade of grass, and the earth looked black and fresh as it did when first it was placed there.

When at last the blinds were hung, the house cleaned, and the carpets nailed down, Mrs. Hamilton, who had designed it all the time, called together the servants, whom she had disliked on account of their preference for Margaret, and told them to look for new places, as their services were no longer needed there.

"You can make out your bills," said she, at the same time intimating they hadn't one of them more than earned their board, if they had that! Polly Pepper wasn't of material to stand by and hear such language from one whom she considered beneath her.

"Hadn't she as good a right there as anybody? Yes, indeed, she had! Wasn't she there a full thirty year before any of your low-lived trash came round a nussin'?"

"Polly," interposed Mrs. Hamilton, "leave the room instantly, you ungrateful thing!"

"Ungrateful for what?" said Polly. "Haven't I worked and slaved like an old nigger, as I am? and now you call me ungrateful, and say I hain't arnt my bread. I'll sue you for slander;" and the enraged Polly left the room, muttering, "half arnt my board, indeed! I'll bet I've made a hundred thousan' pies, to say nothin' of the puddings, *I* not arn my board!"

When again safe in what for so many years had been her own peculiar province, she sat down to meditate. "I'd as good go without any fuss," thought she, "but my curse on the madam who sends me away!"

In the midst of her reverie, Lenora entered the kitchen, and to her the old lady detailed her grievances, ending with, “Pears like she don’t know nothin’ at all about etiquette, nor nothin’ else.”

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“Etiquette!” repeated Lenora. “You are mistaken, Polly; mother would sit on a point of etiquette till she wore the back breadth of her dress out. But it isn’t that which she lacks—it’s decency. But, Polly,” said she, changing the subject, “where do you intend to go and how?”

“To my brother Sam’s,” said Polly. “He lives three miles in the country, and I’ve sent Robin to the village for a horse and wagon to carry my things.”

Here Mrs. Hamilton entered the kitchen, followed by a strapping Irish girl, nearly six feet in height. Her hair, flaming red, was twisted round a huge back comb; her faded calico dress came far above her ankles; her brawny arms were folded one over the other; and there was in her appearance something altogether disagreeable and defiant. Mrs. Hamilton introduced her as Ruth, her new cook, saying she hoped she would know enough to keep her place better than her predecessor had done.

Aunt Polly surveyed her rival from head to foot, and then glancing aside to Lenora, muttered, “Low-lived, depend on’t.”

Robin now drove up with the wagon, and Mrs. Hamilton and Lenora left the room, while Polly went to prepare herself for her ride. Her sleeping apartment was in the basement and communicated with the kitchen. This was observed by the new cook, who had a strong dislike of negroes, and who feared that she might be expected to occupy the same bed.

“An’ faith,” said she, “is it where the like of ya have burrowed that I am to turn in?”

“I don’t understand no such low-flung stuff,” answered Polly, “but if you mean you are to have this bedroom, I suppose you are.”

Here Polly had occasion to go up-stairs for something, and on her return she found that Ruth, during her absence, had set fire to a large linen rag, which she held on a shovel and was carrying about the bedroom, as if to purify it from every atom of negro atmosphere which might remain. Polly was quick-witted, and instantly comprehending the truth, she struck the shovel from the hands of Ruth, exclaiming, “You spalpeen, is it because my skin ain’t a dingy yaller and all freckled like yourn? Lord, look at your carrot-topped cocoanut, and then tell me if wool ain’t a heap the most genteel.”

In a moment a portion of the boasted wool was lying on the floor, or being shaken from the thick, red fingers of the cook, while Irish blood was flowing freely from the nose which Polly, in her vengeful wrath, had wrung. Further hostilities were prevented by Robin, who screamed that he couldn’t wait any longer, and shaking her fist fiercely at the red-head, Polly departed.

That day Lucy and Rachel also left, and their places were supplied by two raw hands, one of whom, before the close of the second day, tumbled up-stairs with the large soup tureen, breaking it in fragments and scalding the foot of Mrs. Hamilton, who was in the rear, and who, having waited an hour for dinner, had descended to the kitchen to know why it was not forthcoming, saying that Polly had never been so behind the time.

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The other one, on being asked if she understood chamber work, had replied, “Indade, and it’s been my business all my life.” She was accordingly sent to make the beds and empty the slop. Thinking it an easy way to dispose of the latter, she had thrown it from the window, deluging the head and shoulders of her mistress who was bending down to examine a rose bush which had been recently set out. Lenora was in ecstasies, and when at noon her mother received a sprinkling of red hot soup, she gravely asked her “which she relished most, cold or warm baths!”

CHAPTER XIII.

RETRIBUTION.

Two years have passed away, and again we open the scene at the homestead, which had not proved an altogether pleasant home to Mrs. Hamilton. There was around her everything to make her happy, but she was far from being so. One by one her servants, with whom she was very unpopular, had left her, until there now remained but one. The villagers, too, shunned her, and she was wholly dependent for society upon Lenora, who, as usual, provoked and tormented her.

One day Hester, the servant, came up from the basement, saying there was a poor old man below, who asked for money.

“Send him away; I’ve nothing for him,” said Mrs. Hamilton, whose avaricious hand, larger far than her heart, grasped at and retained everything.

“But, if you please, ma’am, he seems very poor,” said Hester.

“Let him go to work, then. ’Twon’t hurt him more than ’twill me,” was the reply.

Lenora, whose eyes and ears were always open, no sooner heard that there was a beggar in the kitchen than she ran down to see him. He was a miserable-looking object, and still there was something in his appearance which denoted him to be above the common order of beggars. His eyes were large and intensely black, and his hair, short, thick, and curly, reminded Lenora of her own. The moment she appeared a peculiar expression passed for a moment over his face, and he half started up; then resuming his seat he fixed his glittering eyes upon the young lady, and seemed watching her closely.

At last she began questioning him, but his answers were so unsatisfactory that she gave it up, and, thinking it the easiest way to be rid of him, she took from her pocket a shilling and handed it to him, saying, “It’s all I can give you, unless it is a dinner. Are you hungry?”

Hester, who had returned to the kitchen, was busy in a distant part of the room, and she did not notice the paleness which overspread Lenora's face at the words which the beggar uttered when, she presented the money to him. She caught, however, the low murmur of their voices, as they spoke together for a moment, and as Lenora accompanied him to the door, she distinctly heard the words, "In the garden."

"And maybe that's some of your kin; you look like him," said she to Lenora, after the stranger was gone.

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“That’s my business, not yours,” answered Lenora, as she left the kitchen and repaired to her mother’s room.

“Lenora, what ails you?” said Mrs. Hamilton to her daughter at the tea-table that night, when, after putting salt in one cup of tea, and upsetting a second, she commenced spreading her biscuit with cheese instead of butter. “What ails you? What are you thinking about? You don’t seem to know any more what you are doing than the dead.”

Lenora made no direct reply to this, but soon after she said, “Mother, how long has father been dead—my own father I mean?”

“Two or three years, I don’t exactly know which,” returned her mother, and Lenora continued:

“How did he look? I hardly remember him.”

“You have asked me that fifty times,” answered her mother, “and fifty times I have told you that he looked like you, only worse, if possible.”

“Let me see, where did you say he died?” said Lenora.

“In New Orleans, with yellow fever, or black measles, or smallpox, or something,” Mrs. Hamilton replied, “but mercy’s sake! can’t you choose a better subject to talk about? What made you think of him? He’s been haunting me all day, and I feel kind of nervous and want to look over my shoulder whenever I am alone.”

Lenora made no further remark until after tea, when she announced her intention of going to the village.

“Come back early, for I don’t feel like staying alone,” said her mother.

The sun had set when Lenora left the village, and by the time she reached home it was wholly dark. As she entered the garden the outline of a figure; sitting on a bench at its further extremity, made her stop for a moment, but thinking to herself, “I expected it, and why should I be afraid?” she walked on fearlessly, until the person, roused by the sound of her footsteps, started up, and turning toward her, said half-aloud:

“Lenora, is it you?”

Quickly she sprang forward, and soon one hand of the beggar was clasped in hers, while the other rested upon her head, as he said, “Lenora, my child, my daughter, you do not hate me?”

“Hate you, father?” she answered, “never, never.”

“But,” he continued, “has not she—my—no, not my wife—thank Heaven not my wife now—but your mother, has not she taught you to despise and hate me?”

“No,” answered Lenora bitterly. “She has taught me enough of evil, but my memories of you were too sweet, too pleasant, for me to despise you, though I do not think you always did right, more than mother.”

The stranger groaned, and murmured: “It’s true, all true;” while Lenora continued:

“But where have you been all these years, and how came we to hear of your death?”

“I have been in St. Louis most of the time, and the report of my death resulted from the fact that a man bearing my name, and who was also from Connecticut, died of yellow fever in New Orleans about two years and a half ago. A friend of mine, observing a notice of his death, and supposing it to refer to me, forwarded the paper to your mother, who, though then free from me, undoubtedly felt glad, for she never loved me, but married me because she thought I had money.”

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“But how have you lived?” asked Lenora.

“Lived!” he repeated, “I have not lived. I have merely existed. Gambling and drinking, drinking and gambling, have been the business of my life, and have reduced me to the miserable wretch whom you see.”

“Oh, father, father,” cried Lenora, “reform. It is not too late, and you can yet be saved. Do it for my sake, for, in spite of all your faults, I love you, and you are my father.”

The first words of affection which had greeted his ear for many long years made the wretched man weep, as he answered: “Lenora, I have sworn to reform, and I will keep my vow. During one of my drunken revels, in St. Louis, a dream of home came over me, and when I became sober I started for Connecticut. There I heard where and what your mother was. I had no wish ever to meet her again, for though I greatly erred in my conduct toward her, I think she was always the most to blame. You I remembered with love, and I longed to see you once more, to hear again the word ‘father,’ and know that I was not forgotten. I came as far as the city, and there fell into temptation. For the last two months I have been there, gambling and drinking, until I lost all, even the clothes which I wore, and was compelled to assume these rags. I am now without home or money, and have no place to lay my head.”

“I can give you money,” said Lenora. “Meet me here to-morrow night, and you shall have all you want. But what do you purpose doing? Where will you stay?”

“In the village, for the sake of being near you,” said he, at the same time bidding his daughter return to the house, as the night air was damp and chilly.

Within a week from that time a middle-aged man, calling himself John Robinson, appeared in the village, hiring himself out as a porter at one of the hotels. There was a very striking resemblance between him and Lenora Carter, which was noticed by the villagers, and mentioned to Mrs. Hamilton, who, however, could never obtain a full view of the stranger’s face, for without any apparent design, he always avoided meeting her. He had not been long in town before it was whispered about that between him and Lenora Carter a strange intimacy existed, and rumors soon reached Mrs. Hamilton that her daughter was in the habit of frequently stealing out after sunset, to meet the old porter, and that once, when watched, she had been seen to put her arms around his neck. Highly indignant, Mrs. Hamilton questioned Lenora on the subject, and was astonished beyond measure when she replied:

“It is all true. I have met Mr. Robinson often, and I have put my arms around his neck, and shall probably do it again.”

“Oh my child, my child,” groaned Mrs. Hamilton, really distressed at her daughter’s conduct. “How can you do so? You will bring my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.”

“Not if you pull out as many of them as you now do, and use Twiggs Preparation besides,” said Lenora.

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Mrs. Hamilton did not answer, but covering her face with her hands wept, really wept, thinking for the first time, perhaps, that as she had sowed so was she reaping. For some time past her health had been failing, and as the summer days grew warmer and more oppressive she felt a degree of lassitude and physical weakness which she had never before experienced; and one day unable longer to sit up, she took her bed, where she lay for many days.

Now that her mother was really sick, Lenora seemed suddenly changed, and with unwearied care watched over her as kindly and faithfully as if no words save those of affection had ever passed between them. Warmer and more sultry grew the days, and more fiercely raged the fever in Mrs. Hamilton's veins, until at last the crisis was reached and passed, and she was in a fair way for recovery, when she was attacked by chills, which again reduced her to a state of helplessness. One day, about this time, a ragged little boy, whose business seemed to be lounging around the hotel, brought to Lenora a soiled and crumpled note, on which was traced with an unsteady hand, "Dear Lenora, I am sick, all alone in the little attic; come to me, quick; come!"

Lenora was in a state of great perplexity. Her mother, when awake, needed all her care; and as she seldom slept during the day there seemed but little chance of getting away. The night before, however, she had been unusually restless and wakeful, and about noon she seemed drowsy, and finally fell into a deep sleep.

"Now is my time," thought Lenora; and calling Hester, she bade her watch by her mother until she returned, saying, "If she wakes tell her I have gone to the village, and will soon be back."

Hester promised compliance, and was for a time faithful to her trust; but suddenly recollecting something which she wished to tell the girl who lived at the next neighbor's she stole away, leaving her mistress alone. For five minutes Mrs. Hamilton slept on, and then with a start awoke from a troubled dream, in which she had seemed dying of thirst, while little Willie, standing by a hogshead of water, refused her a drop. A part of her dream was true, for she was suffering from the most intolerable thirst, and called loudly for Lenora; but Lenora was not there. Hester next was called, but she, too, was gone. Then, seizing the bell which stood upon the table, she rang it with all her force, and still there came no one to her relief.

Again Willie stood by her, offering her a goblet overflowing with water; but when she attempted to take it, Willie changed into Lenora, who laughed mockingly at her distress, telling her there was water in the well and ice on the curbstone. Once more the phantom faded away, and the old porter was there, wading through a limpid stream and offering her to drink a cup of molten lead.

“Merciful Heaven!” shrieked the sick woman, as she writhed from side to side on her bed, which seemed changed to burning coals; “will no one bring me water, water, water!”

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An interval of calmness succeeded, during which she revolved in her mind the possibility of going herself to the kitchen, where she knew the water-pail was standing. No sooner had she decided upon this than the room appeared full of little demons, who laughed, and chattered, and shouted in her ears:

“Go—do it! Willie did, when the night was dark and chilly; but now it is warm—nice and warm—try it, do!”

Tremblingly Mrs. Hamilton stepped upon the floor, and finding herself too weak to walk, crouched down, and crept slowly down the stairs to the kitchen door, where she stopped to rest. Across the room by the window stood the pail, and as her eye fell upon it the mirth of the little winged demons appeared in her disordered fancy to increase; and when the spot was reached, the tumbler seized and thrust into the pail, they darted hither and thither, shouting gleefully:

“Lower, lower down; just as Willie did. You’ll find it, oh, you’ll find it!”

With a bitter cry Mrs. Hamilton dashed the tumbler upon the floor, for the bucket was empty!

“Willie, Willie, you are avenged,” she said; but the goblins answered:

“Not yet; no, not yet.”

There was no pump in the well, and Mrs. Hamilton knew she had not strength to raise the bucket by means of the windlass. Her exertions had increased her thirst tenfold, and now for one cup of cooling water she would have given all her possessions. Across the yard, at the distance of twenty rods, there was a gushing spring, and thither in her despair she determined to go. Accordingly, she went forth into the fierce noontide blaze, and with almost superhuman efforts crawled to the place. But what! was it a film upon her eyes? Had blindness come upon her, or was the spring really dried up by the fervid summer heat?

“Willie’s avenged! Willie’s avenged!” yelled the imps as the wretched woman fainted and fell backward upon the bank, where she lay with her white, thin face upturned, and blistering beneath the August sun!

Along the dusty highway came a handsome traveling carriage, in which, besides the driver, were seated two individuals, the one a young and elegantly-dressed lady, and the other a gentleman, who appealed to be on the most intimate terms with his companion; for whenever he would direct her attention to any passing object, he laid his hand on hers, frequently retaining it, and calling her “Maggie.”

The carriage was nearly opposite the homestead, when the lady exclaimed, “Oh, Richard, I must stop at my old home once more. Only see how beautiful it is looking!”

In a moment the carriage was standing before the gate, and the gentleman, who was Margaret Hamilton's husband—a Mr. Elwyn, from the city—assisted his young wife to alight, and then followed her to the house. No answer was given to their loud ring, and as the doors and windows were all open, Margaret proposed that they should enter. They did so; and, going first into Mrs. Hamilton's sick-room, the sight of the little table full of vials, and the tumbled, empty bed, excited their wonder and curiosity, and induced them to go on. At last, descending to the kitchen, they saw the fragments of the tumbler lying upon the floor.

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“Strange, isn’t it?” said Margaret to her husband, who was standing in the outer door, and who had at that moment discovered Mrs. Hamilton lying near the spring.

Instantly they were at her side, and Margaret involuntarily shuddered as she recognized her stepmother, and guessed why she was there. Taking her in his arms, Mr. Elwyn bore her back to the house, and Margaret, filling a pitcher with water, bathed her face, moistened her lips, and applied other restoratives, until she revived enough to say:

“More water, Willie. Give me more water!”

Eagerly she drained the goblet which Margaret held to her lips, and was about drinking the second, when her eyes for the first time sought Margaret’s face. With a cry between a groan and a scream she lay back upon her pillows, saying, “Margaret Hamilton, how came you here? What have you to do with me, and why do you give me water? Didn’t I refuse it to Willie, when he begged so earnestly for it in the nighttime? But I’ve been paid—a thousand times paid—left by my own child to die alone!”

Margaret was about asking for Lenora, when the young lady herself appeared. She seemed for a moment greatly surprised at the sight of Margaret, and then bounding to her side, greeted her with much affection; while Mrs. Hamilton jealously looked on, muttering to herself. “Loves everybody better than she does me, her own mother, who has done so much for her.”

Lenora made no reply to this, although she manifested much concern when Margaret told her in what state they had found her mother.

“I went for a few moments to visit a sick friend,” said she, “but told Hester to stay with mother until I returned; and I wonder much that she should leave her.”

“Lenora,” said Mrs. Hamilton, “Lenora, was that sick friend the old porter?”

Lenora answered in the affirmative; and then her mother, turning to Margaret, said:

“You don’t know what a pest and torment this child has always been to me, and now when I am dying she deserts me for a low-lived fellow, old enough to be her father.”

Lenora’s eyes flashed scornfully upon her mother, but she made no answer, and as Mr. Elwyn was in haste to proceed on his journey, Margaret arose to go. Lenora urged them to remain longer, but they declined; and as she accompanied them to the door, Margaret said:

“Lenora, if your mother should die, and it would afford you any satisfaction to have me come, I will do so, for I suppose you have no near friends.”

Lenora hesitated a moment, and then whispering to Margaret of the relationship existing between herself and the old porter, she said, “He is sick and poor, but he is my own father, and I love him dearly.”

The tears came to Margaret’s eyes, for she thought of her own father, called home while his brown hair was scarcely touched with the frosts of time. Wistfully Lenora watched the carriage as it disappeared from sight, and then half-reluctantly entered the sick-room, where, for the remainder of the afternoon, she endured her mother’s reproaches for having left her alone, and where once, when her patience was wholly exhausted, she said:

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“It served you right, for now you know how little Willie felt.”

The next day Mrs. Hamilton was much worse, and Lenora, who had watched and who understood her symptoms, felt confident that she would die, and loudly her conscience upbraided her for her undutiful conduct. She longed, too, to tell her that her father was still living, and one evening when for an hour or two her mother seemed better, she arose, and bending over her pillow, said, “Mother, did it ever occur to you that father might not be dead?”

“Not be dead, Lenora! What do you mean?” asked Mrs. Hamilton, starting up from her pillow.

Cautiously then Lenora commenced her story by referring her mother back to the old beggar, who some months before had been in the kitchen. Then she spoke of the old porter, and the resemblance which was said to exist between him and herself; and finally, as she saw her mother could bear it, she told the whole story of her father’s life. Slowly the sick woman’s eyes closed, and Lenora saw that her eyelids were wet with, tears, but as she made no reply, Lenora ere long whispered, “Would you like to see him, mother?”

“No, no; not now,” was the answer.

For a time there was silence, and then Lenora, again speaking, said, “Mother, I have often been very wicked and disrespectful to you, and if you should die, I should feel much happier knowing that you forgave me. Will you do it, mother—say?”

Mrs. Hamilton comprehended only the words, “if you should die,” so she said: “Die, die! who says that I must die? I shan’t—I can’t; for what could I tell her about her children, and how could I live endless ages without water? I tried it once, and I can’t do it. No, I can’t. I won’t!”

In this way she talked all night; and though in the morning she was more rational, she turned away from the clergyman, who at Lenora’s request had been sent for, saying:

“It’s of no use, no use, I know all you would say, but it’s too late, too late!”

Thus she continued for three days, and at the close of the third it became evident to all that she was dying, and Hester was immediately sent to the hotel, with a request that the old porter would come quickly. Half an hour after Lenora bent over her mother’s pillow, and whispered in her ear, “Mother, can you hear me?”

A pressure of the hand was the reply, and Lenora continued: “You have not said that you forgave me, and now before you die, will you not tell me so?”

There was another pressure of the hand, and Lenora again spoke: “Mother, would you like to see him—my father? He is in the next room.”

This roused the dying woman, and starting up, she exclaimed, “See John Carter! No, child, no! He’d only curse me. Let him wait until I am dead, and then I shall not hear it.”

In ten minutes more Lenora was sadly gazing upon the fixed, stony features of the dead. A gray-haired man was at her side, and his lip quivered, as he placed his hand upon the white, wrinkled brow of her who had once been his wife. “She is fearfully changed,” were his only words, as he turned away from the bed of death.

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True to her promise, Margaret came to attend her stepmother's funeral. Walter accompanied her, and shuddered as he looked on the face of one who had so darkened his home, and embittered his life. Kate was not there, and when, after the burial, Lenora asked Margaret for her, she was told of a little "Carrie Lenora," who with pardonable pride "Walter thought was the only baby of any consequence in the world. Margaret was going on with a glowing description of the babe's many beauties, when she was interrupted by Lenora, who laid her face in her lap and burst into tears.

"Why, Lenora, what is the matter?" asked Margaret.

As soon as Lenora became calm, she answered, "*That name*, Maggie. You have given my name to Walter Hamilton's child, and if you had hated me you would never have done it."

"Hated you!" repeated Margaret; "we do not hate you; now that we understand you, we like you very much, and one of Kate's last injunctions to Walter was that he should again offer you a home with him."

Once more Lenora was weeping. She had not shed a tear when they carried from sight her mother, but words of kindness touched her heart, and the fountain was opened. At last, drying her eyes, she said, "I prefer to go with father. Walter will, of course, come back to the homestead, while father and I shall return to our old home in Connecticut, where, by being kind to him, I hope to atone, in a measure, for my great unkindness to mother."

CHAPTER XIV.

FINALE.

Through the open casement of a small, white cottage in the village of P——, the rays of the September moon are stealing, disclosing to view a gray-haired man, whose placid face still shows marks of long years of dissipation. Affectionately he caresses the black, curly head which is resting on his knee, and softly he says, "Lenora, my daughter, there are, I trust, years of happiness in store for us both."

"I hope it may be so," was the answer, "but there is no promise of many days to any save those who honor their father and mother. This last I have never done, though many, many times have I repented of it, and I begin to be assured that we may be happy yet."

* * * * *

Away to the westward, over many miles of woodland, valley, and hill, the same September moon shines upon the white walls of the "homestead," where sits the owner,

Walter Hamilton, gazing first upon his wife and then upon the tiny treasure which lies sleeping upon her lap.

“We are very happy, Katy darling,” he says, and the affection which looks from her large blue eyes as she lifts them to his face is a sufficient answer. Margaret, too, is there, and though but an hour ago her tears were falling upon the grass-grown graves where slept her father and mother, the gentle Carrie, and golden-haired Willie, they are all gone now, and she responds to her brother’s words, “Yes, Walter, we are very happy.”

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In the basement below the candle is burned to its socket, and as the last ray flickers up, illuminating for a moment the room, and then leaving it in darkness, Aunt Polly Pepper starts from her evening nap, and as if continuing her dream mutters “Yes this is pleasant and something like living.”

* * * * *

And so with the moonlight and starlight falling upon the old homestead, and the sunlight of love falling upon the hearts of its inmates, we bid them adieu.

RICE CORNER

CHAPTER I.

RICE CORNER.

Yes, Rice Corner! Do you think it a queer name? Well, Rice Corner was a queer place, and deserved a queer name. Now whether it is celebrated for anything in particular, I really can’t at this moment think, unless, indeed, it is famed for having been my birthplace! Whether this of itself is sufficient to immortalize a place future generations may, perhaps, tell, but I have some misgivings whether the present will. This idea may be the result of my having recently received sundry knocks over the knuckles in the shape of criticisms.

But I know one thing—on the bark of that old chestnut tree which stands near Rice Corner schoolhouse, my name is cut higher than some of my more bulky contemporary quill—or rather steel—pen-wielders ever dared to climb. To be sure, I tore my dress, scratched my face, and committed numerous other little rompish *miss*-demeanors, which procured for me a motherly scolding. That, however, was of minor consideration when compared with having my name up—in the chestnut tree, at least, if it couldn’t be up in the world. But pardon my egotism, and I will proceed with my story about Rice Corner.

Does any one wish to know whereabout on this rolling sphere Rice Corner is situated? I don’t believe you can find it on the map, unless your eyes are bluer and bigger than mine, which last they can’t very well be. But I can tell you to a dot where Rice Corner should be. Just take your atlas—not the last one published, but Olney’s, that’s the one *I* studied—and right in one of those little towns in Worcester County is Rice Corner snugly nestled among the gray rocks and blue hills of New England.

Yes, Rice Corner was a great place, and so you would have thought could you have seen it in all its phases, with its brown, red, green, yellow, and white houses, each of which had the usual quantity of rose-bushes, lilacs, hollyhocks, and sunflowers. You should have seen my home, my New England home, where once, not many years ago, a happy group of children played. Alas! alas! some of those who gave the sunlight to that spot have left us now forever, and on the bright shores of the eternal river they wait and watch our coming. I do not expect a stranger to love our old homestead as I loved it, for in each heart is a fresh, green spot—the memory of its own early home—where the sunshine was brighter, the well waters cooler, and the song-bird's carol sweeter than elsewhere they are found.

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I trust I shall be forgiven if in this chapter I pause awhile to speak of my home—aye, and of myself, too, when, a light-hearted child, I bounded through the meadows and orchards which lay around the old brown house on my father's farm. 'Twas a large, square, two-storied building, that old brown farmhouse, containing rooms, cupboards, and closets innumerable, and what was better than all, a large airy garret, where on all rainy days and days when it looked as if it would rain, Bill, Joe, Lizzie, and I assembled to hold our noisy revels. Never, since the days of our great-grandmothers, did little spinning wheel buzz round faster than did the one which, in the darkest corner of that garret, had been safely stowed away, where they guessed "the young ones wouldn't find it."

"Wouldn't find it!" I should like to know what there was in that old garret that we didn't find, and appropriate, too! Even the old oaken chest which contained our grandmother's once fashionable attire was not sacred from the touch of our lawless hands. Into its deep recesses we plunged, and brought out such curiosities—the queerest-looking, high-crowned, broad-frilled caps, narrow-gored skirts, and what was funnier than all, a strange-looking thing which we thought must be a side saddle—-anyway, it fitted Joe's rocking horse admirably, although we wondered why so much whalebone was necessary!

One day, in the midst of our gambols, in walked the identical owner of the chest, and seeing the side-saddle, she said somewhat angrily, "Why, children, where upon airth did you find my old stays?" We never wondered again what made grandma's back keep its place so much better than ours, and Bill had serious thoughts of trying the effect of the stays upon himself.

In the rear of our house, and sloping toward the setting sun, was a long, winding lane, leading far down into a widespreading tract of flowery woods, shady hillside, and grassy pasture land, each in their turn highly suggestive of brown nuts, delicious strawberries, and venomous snakes. These last were generally more the creatures of imagination than of reality, for in all my wanderings over those fields, and they were many, I never but once trod upon a green snake, and only once was I chased by a white-ringed blacksnake; so I think I am safe in saying that the snakes were not so numerous as were the nuts and berries, which grew there in great profusion.

A little to the right of the woods, where, in winter, Bill, Joe, Lizzie, and I dragged our sleds and boards for the purpose of riding down-hill, was a merry, frolicking stream of water, over which, in times long gone, a sawmill had been erected; but owing to the inefficiency of its former owner, or something else, the mill had fallen into disuse, and gradually gone to decay. The water of the brook, relieved from the necessity of turning the spluttering wheel, now went gayly dancing down, down, into the depths of the dim old woods, and far away, I never knew exactly where; but having heard rumors of a jumping-off place, I had a vague impression that at that spot the waters of the mill-dam put up!

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Near the sawmill, and partially hidden by the scraggy pine trees and thick bushes which drooped over its entrance, was a long, dark passage, leading underground, not so large, probably, as Mammoth Cave, but in my estimation rivaling it in interest. This was an old mine, where, years before, men had dug for gold. Strange stories were told of those who, with blazing torches, and blazing noses, most likely, there toiled for the yellow dust. The “Ancient Henry” himself, it was said, sometimes left his affairs at home, and joined the nightly revels in that mine, where cards and wine played a conspicuous part. Be that as it may, the old mine was surrounded by a halo of fear which we youngsters never cared to penetrate.

On a fine afternoon an older sister would occasionally wander that way, together with a young M.D., whose principal patient seemed to be at our house, for his little black pony very frequently found shelter in our stable by the side of “old sorrel.” From the north garret window I would watch them, wondering how they dared venture so near the old mine, and wishing, mayhap, that the time would come when I, with some daring doctor, would risk everything. The time *has come*, but alas! instead of being a doctor, he is only a lawyer, who never even saw the old mine in Rice Corner.

Though I never ventured close to the old mine, there was not far from it one pleasant spot where I loved dearly to go. It was on the hillside, where, ’neath the shadow of a gracefully twining grapevine, lay a large, flat rock. Thither would I often repair, and sit for hours, listening to the hum of the running water brook, or the song of the summer birds, who, like me, seemed to love that place. Often would I gaze far off at the distant, misty horizon, wondering if I should ever know what was beyond it. Wild fancies then filled my childish brain. Strange voices whispered to me thoughts and ideas which, if written down and carried out, would, I am sure, have placed my name higher than it was carved on the old chestnut tree.

> “But they came and went like shadows,
> Those blessed dreams of youth,”

I was a strange child, I know. Everybody told me so, and *I* knew it well enough without being told. The wise old men at Rice Corner, and their still wiser old wives, looked at me askance, as ’neath the thorn-apple tree I built my playhouse and baked my little loaves of mud bread. But when, forgetful of others, I talked aloud to myriads of little folks, unseen ’tis true, but still real to me, they shook their gray heads ominously, and whispering to my mother said, “Mark our words, that girl will one day be crazy. In ten years more she will be an inmate of the madhouse!”

And then I wondered what a madhouse was, and if the people there all acted as our school-teacher did when Bill and the big girl said he was mad! The ten years have passed, and I’m not in a madhouse yet, unless, indeed, it is one of my own getting up!

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One thing more about Rice Corner, and then, honor bright, I'll finish the preface and go on with the story. I must tell you about the old schoolhouse, and the road which led to it. This last wound around a long hill, and was skirted on either side with tall trees, flowering dogwood, blackberry bushes, and frost grapevines. Half-way down the hill, and under one of the tallest walnut trees, was a little hollow, where dwelt the goblin with which nurses, housemaids, hired men, and older sisters were wont to frighten refractory children into quietness. It was the grave of an old negro. Alas! that to his last resting-place the curse should follow him! Had it been a white person who rested there, not half so fearful would have been the spot; now, however, it was "the old nigger hole"—a place to run by if by accident you were caught out after dark—a place to be threatened with if you cried in the night and wanted the candle lighted—a landmark where to stop when going part way home with the little girl who had been to visit you, and who, on leaving you, ran no less swiftly than you yourself did, half-fearing that the dusky form in the holly would rise and try his skill at running. Verily, my heart has beat faster at the thoughts of that dead negro than it ever has since at the sight of a hundred live specimens, "'way down south on the old plantation."

The old schoolhouse, too, had its advantages and its disadvantages; of the latter, one was that there, both summer and winter, but more especially during the last-mentioned season, all the rude boys in the place thought they had a perfect right to congregate and annoy the girls in every possible way. But never mind, not a few wry faces we made at them, and not a few "blockheads" we pinned to their backs! Oh! I've had rare times in that old house and have seen rare sights, too, to say nothing of the fights which occasionally occurred. In these last brother Joe generally took the lead of one party, while Jim Brown commanded the other. Dire was the confusion which reigned at such times. Books were hurled from side to side. Then followed in quick succession shovel, tongs, poker, water cup, water pail, water and all; and to cap the climax, Jim Brown once seized the large iron pan, which stood upon the stove, half-filled with hot water, and hurled it in the midst of the enemy. Luckily nobody was killed, and but few wounded.

Years in their rapid flight have rolled away since then, and he, my brother, is sleeping alone on the wild shore of California.

"For scarcely had the sad tones died
  Which echoed the farewell,
When o'er the western prairies
  There came a funeral knell;
It said that he who went from us,
  While yet upon his brow
The dew of youth was glistening,
  Had passed to heaven now."

James Brown, too, is resting in the churchyard, near his own home, and ’neath his own native sky.

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CHAPTER II.

THE BELLE OF RICE CORNER.

Yes, Rice Corner had a belle, but it was not I. Oh, no, nobody ever mistook *me* for a belle, or much of anything else, in fact; *I* was simply “Mary Jane,” or, if that was not concise enough, “Crazy Jane” set the matter all right. The belle of which I speak was a *bona fide* one—fine complexion, handsome features, beautiful eyes, curling hair, and all. And yet in her composition there was something wanting, something very essential, too; for she lacked soul, and would at any time have sold her best friend for a flattering compliment.

Still Carrie Howard was generally a favorite. The old people liked her because her sparkling eye and merry laugh brought back to them a gleam of youth; the young people liked her, because to dislike her would seem like envy; and I, who was nothing, liked her because she was pretty, and I greatly admired beauty, though I am not certain that I should not have liked a handsome rosebud quite as well as I did Carrie Howard’s beautiful face, for beautiful she was.

Her mother, good, plain Mrs. Howard, was entirely unlike her daughter. She was simply “Mrs. Captain Howard,” or, in other words, “Aunt Eunice,” whose benevolent smile and kindly beaming eye carried contentment wherever she went. Really, I don’t know how Rice Corner could have existed one day without the presence of Aunt Eunice. Was there a cut foot or hand in the neighborhood, hers was the salve which healed it, almost as soon as applied. Was there a pale, fretful baby, Aunt Eunice’s large bundle of catnip was sure to soothe it, and did a sick person need watchers, Aunt Eunice was the one who, three nights out of the seven, trod softly and quietly about the sick-room, anticipating each want before you yourself knew what it was, and smoothing your tumbled pillow so gently that you almost felt it a luxury to be sick, for the sake of being nursed by Aunt Eunice. The very dogs and cats winked more composedly when she appeared; and even the chickens learned her voice almost as soon as they did the cluck of their “maternal ancestor.”

But we must stop, or we shall make Aunt Eunice out to be the belle, instead of Carrie, who, instead of imitating her mother in her acts of kindness, sat all day in the large old parlor, thumping away on a rickety piano, or trying to transfer to broadcloth a poor little kitty, whose face was sufficiently indicative of surprise at finding its limbs so frightfully distorted.

When Carrie was fifteen years of age her father, concluding that she knew all which could possibly be learned in the little brown house where Joe and Jim once fought so fiercely, sent her for three years to Albany. It was currently reported that the uncle with whom she boarded received his pay in butter, cheese, potatoes, apples, and other

commodities, which were the product of Captain Howard's farm. Whether this was true or not I am not prepared to say, but I suppose it was, for it was told by those who had no ostensible business except to attend to other people's affairs, and I am sure they ought to have known all about it, and probably did.

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I cannot help thinking that Captain Howard made a mistake in sending Carrie away; for when at the end of three years she had “finished her education,” and returned home, she was not half so good a scholar as some of those who had pored patiently over their books in the old brown house. Even *I* could beat her in spelling, for soon after she came home the boys teased for a spelling school. I rather think they were quite as anxious for a chance to go home with the girls as they were to have their knowledge of Webster tested. Be that as it may, Carrie was there, and was, of course, chosen first; but *I*, “little crazy Jane,” spelled the the whole school down! I thought Carrie was not quite so handsome as she might be, when with an angry frown she dropped into her seat, hissed by a big, cross-eyed, red-haired boy, in the corner, because she *happened* to spell pumpkin, “*p-u-n pun k-i-n kin, punkin*.” I do not think she ever quite forgave me for the pert, loud way in which I spelled the word correctly, for she never gave any more calicos or silks, and instead of calling me “Mollie,” as she had before done, she now addressed me as “Miss Mary.”

Carrie possessed one accomplishment which the other girls did not. She could play the piano most skilfully, although as yet she had no instrument. Three weeks, however, after her return a rich man, who lived in the village which was known as “Over the River,” failed, and all his furniture was sold at auction. Many were the surmises of my grandmother, on the morning of the sale, as to what “Cap’n Howard could be going to buy at the *vandue* and put in the big lumber wagon,” which he drove past our house.

As the day drew to a close I was posted at the window to telegraph as soon as “Cap’n Howard’s” white horses appeared over the hill. They came at last, but the long box in his wagon told no secret. Father, however, explained all, by saying that he had bid off Mr. Talbott’s old piano for seventy dollars! Grandma shook her head mournfully at the degeneracy of the age, while sister Anna spoke sneeringly of Mr. Talbott’s cracked piano. Next day, arrayed in my Sunday red merino and white apron—a present from some cousin out West—I went to see Carrie; and truly, the music she drew from that old piano charmed me more than the finest performances since have done. Carrie and her piano were now the theme of every tongue, and many wondered how Captain Howard could afford to pay for three years’ music lessons; but this was a mystery yet to be solved.

CHAPTER III.

MONSIEUR PENOYER.

When Carrie had been at home about three months all Rice Corner one day flew to the doors and windows to look at a stranger, a gentleman with fierce mustaches, who seemed not at all certain of his latitude, and evidently wanted to know where he was going. At least, if *he* didn’t, they who watched him did.

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Grandma, whose longevity had not impaired her guessing faculties, first suggested that "most likely it was Caroline Howard's beau." This was altogether too probable to be doubted, and as grandmother had long contemplated a visit to Aunt Eunice, she now determined to go that very afternoon, as she "could judge for herself what kind of a match Car'line had made." Mother tried to dissuade her from going that day, but the old lady was incorrigible, and directly after dinner, dressed in her bombazine, black silk apron, work bag, knitting and all she departed for Captain Howard's.

They wouldn't confess it, but I knew well enough that Juliet and Anna were impatient for her return, and when the shadows of twilight began to fall I was twice sent into the road to see if she was coming. The last time I was successful, and in a few moments grandmother was among us; but whatever she knew she kept to herself until the lamps were lighted in the sitting-room, and she, in her stuffed rocking-chair, was toeing off the stocking only that morning commenced. Then, at a hint from Anna, she cast toward Lizzie and me a rueful glance, saying: "There are too many *pitchers* here!" I knew then just as well as I did five minutes after that Lizzie and I must go to bed. There was no help for it, and we complied with a tolerably good grace. Lizzie proposed that we should listen, but somehow I couldn't do that, and up to this time I don't exactly know what grandmother told them.

The next day, however, I heard enough to know that his name was Penoyer; that grandma didn't like him; that he had as much hair on his face as on his head; that Aunt Eunice would oppose the match, and that he would stay over Sunday. With this last I was delighted, for I should see him at church. I saw him before that, however; for it was unaccountable what a fancy Carrie suddenly took for traversing the woods and riding on horseback, for which purpose grandfather's side-saddle (not the one with which Joe saddled his pony!) was borrowed, and then, with her long curls and blue riding-skirt floating in the wind, Carrie galloped over hills and through valleys, accompanied by Penoyer, who was a fierce-looking fellow, with black eyes, black hair, black whiskers, and black face.

I couldn't help fancying that the negro who lay beneath the walnut tree had resembled him, and I cried for fear Carrie might marry so ugly a man, thinking it would not be altogether unlike, "Beauty and the Beast." Sally, our housemaid, said that "most likely he'd prove to be some poor, mean scamp. Anyway, seein' it was plantin' time, he'd better be *to hum* tendin' to his own business, if he had any."

Sally was a shrewd, sharp-sighted girl, and already had her preference in favor of Michael Welsh, father's hired man. Walking, riding on horseback, and wasting time generally, Sally held in great abhorrence. "All she wished to say to Mike on week days, she could tell him milking time." On Sundays, however, it was different, and regularly each Sunday night found Mike and Sally snugly ensconced in the "great room," while under the windows occasionally might have been seen, three or four curly heads, eager to hear something about which to tease Sally during the week.

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But to return to Monsieur Penoyer, as Carrie called him. His stay was prolonged beyond the Sabbath, and on Tuesday I was sent to Captain Howard's on an errand. I found Aunt Eunice in the kitchen, her round, rosy face, always suggestive of seed cake and plum pudding, flushed with exertion, her sleeves tucked up and her arms buried in a large wooden bowl of dough, which she said was going to be made into loaves of 'lection cake, as Carrie was to have a party to-morrow, and I had come just in time to carry invitations to my sisters.

Carrie was in the parlor, and attracted by the sound of music, I drew near the door, when Aunt Eunice kindly bade me enter. I did so, and was presented to Monsieur Penoyer. At first I was shy of him, for I remembered that Sally had said, "he don't know nothin'," and this in my estimation was the worst crime of which he could be guilty. Gradually my timidity gave way, and when, at Carrie's request, he played and sang for me, I was perfectly delighted, although I understood not a word he said.

When he finished Carrie told him I was a little poet, and then repeated some foolish lines I had once written about her eyes. It was a very handsome set of teeth which he showed, as he said, "*Magnifique! Tree bien!* She be another grand *Dr. Wattts!*"

I knew not who Dr. Watts was, but on one point my mind was made up—Monsieur Penoyer knew a great deal! Ere I left Carrie commissioned me to invite my sisters to her party on the morrow, and as I was leaving the room Mr. Penoyer said, "*Ma chere,* Carrie, why vous no invite a petite girl!"

Accordingly I was invited, with no earthly prospect, however, of mother's letting me go. And she didn't either; so next day, after Juliet and Anna were gone, I went out behind the smokehouse and cried until I got sleepy, and a headache too; then, wishing to make mother think I had *run away*, I crept carefully up-stairs to Bill's room, where I slept until Sally's sharp eyes ferreted me out, saying, "they were all scared to death about me, and had looked for me high and low," up in the garret and down in the well, I supposed. Concluding they were plagued enough, I condescended to go down-stairs, and have my head bathed in camphor and my feet parboiled in hot water; then I went to bed and dreamed of white teeth, curling mustaches and "*Parlez vous Francais*."

Of what occurred at the party I will tell you as was told to me. All the *elite* of Rice Corner were there, of course, and as each new arrival entered the parlor, M. Penoyer eyed them coolly through an opera glass. Sister Anna returned his inspection with the worst face she could well make up, for which I half-blamed her and half didn't, as I felt sure I should have done the same under like circumstances.

When all the invited guests had arrived except myself (alas, no one asked why I tarried), there ensued an awkward silence, broken only by the parrot-like chatter of M. Penoyer, who seemed determined to talk nothing but French, although Carrie understood him but little better than did the rest. At last he was posted up to the piano.

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"*Mon Dieu*, it be von horrid tone," said he; then off he dashed into a galloping waltz, keeping time with his head, mouth, and eyes, which threatened to leave their sockets and pounce upon the instrument. Rattlety-bang went the piano—like lightning went monsieur's fingers, first here, then there, right or wrong, hit or miss, and oftener miss than hit—now alighting among the keys promiscuously, then with a tremendous thump making all bound again—and finishing up with a flourish, which snapped two strings and made all the rest groan in sympathy, as did the astonished listeners. For a time all was still, and then a little modest girl, Lily Gordon, her face blushing crimson, said:

"I beg your pardon, monsieur, but haven't you taught music?"

The veins in his forehead swelled, as, darting a wrathful look at poor Lily, he exclaimed, "*Le Diabel!* vat vous take me for? Von dem musique teacher, eh?"

Poor Lily tried to stammer her apologies, while Carrie sought to soothe the enraged Frenchman by saying, that "Miss Gordon was merely complimenting his skill in music."

At this point the carriage which carried persons to and from the depot drove up, and from it alighted a very small, genteel-looking lady, who rapped at the door and asked, "if Captain Howard lived there."

In a moment Carrie was half-stifling her with kisses, exclaiming, "Dear Agnes, this is a pleasant surprise. I did not expect you so soon."

The lady called Agnes was introduced as Miss Hovey, a schoolmate of Carrie's. She seemed very much disposed to make herself at home, for, throwing her hat in one place and her shawl in another, she seated herself at the piano, hastily running over a few notes; then with a gesture of impatience, she said, "Oh, horrid! a few more such sounds would give me the vapors for a month; why don't you have it tuned?"

Ere Carrie could reply Agnes' eyes lighted upon Penoyer, who, either with or without design, had drawn himself as closely into a corner as he well could. Springing up, she brought her little hands together with energy, exclaiming, "Now, Heaven defend me, what fresh game brought you here?" Then casting on Carrie an angry glance, she said, in a low tone, "What does it mean? Why didn't you tell me?"

Carrie drew nearer, and said coaxingly, "I didn't expect you so soon; but never mind, he leaves to-morrow. For my sake treat him decently."

The pressure which Agnes gave Carrie's hand seemed to say, "For your sake I will, but for no other." Then turning to Penoyer, who had risen to his feet, she said, respectfully, "I hardly expected to meet you here, sir."

Her tone and manner had changed. Penoyer knew it, and with the coolest effrontery imaginable he came forward, bowing and scraping, and saying, "*Comment vous portez-*

vous, mademoiselle. Je suis perfaitement delighted to see you," at the same time offering her his hand.

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All saw with what hauteur she declined it, but only one, and that was Anna, heard her as she said, “Keep off, Penoyer; don’t make a donkey of yourself.” It was strange, Anna said, “how far into his boots Penoyer tried to draw himself,” while at each fresh flash of Agnes’ keen black eyes, he winced, either from fear or sympathy.

The restraint which had surrounded the little company gave way beneath the lively sallies and sparkling wit of Agnes, who, instead of seeming amazed at the country girls, was apparently as much at ease as though she had been entertaining a drawing-room full of polished city belles. When at last the party broke up, each and every one was in love with the little Albany lady, although all noticed that Carrie seemed troubled, watching Agnes narrowly; and whenever she saw her *tete-a-tete* with either of her companions she would instantly draw near, and seemed greatly relieved on finding that Penoyer was not the subject of conversation.

“I told you so,” was grandmother’s reply, when informed of all this. “I told you so. I knew Car’line warn’t going to make out no great.”

Juliet and Anna thought so too, but this did not prevent them from running to the windows next morning to see Penoyer as he passed on his way to the cars. I, who with Lizzie was tugging away at a big board with which we thought to make a “see-saw,” was honored with a graceful wave of monsieur’s hands, and the words, “*Au revoir, ma chere Marie*.”

That day Phoebe, Aunt Eunice’s hired girl, came to our house. Immediately Juliet and Anna assailed her a multitude of questions. The amount of knowledge obtained was that “Miss Hovey was a lady, and no mistake, for she had sights of silks and jewelry, and she that morning went with Phoebe to see her milk, although she didn’t dare venture inside the yard. But,” added Phoebe, “for all she was up so early she did not come out to breakfast until that gentleman was gone.”

This was fresh proof that Penoyer was not *comme il faut*, and Anna expressed her determination to find out all about him ere Agnes went home. *I* remembered “*Dr. Watts*” and the invitation to the party, and secretly hoped she would find out nothing bad.

CHAPTER IV.

COUSIN EMMA.

Agnes had been in town about two weeks, when my home was one morning thrown into a state of unusual excitement by the arrival of a letter from Boston, containing the intelligence that Cousin Emma Rushton, who had been an invalid for more than a year, was about to try the effect of country life and country air.

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This piece of news operated differently upon different members of our family. Juliet exclaimed, “Good, good; Carrie Howard won’t hold her head quite so high now, for we shall have a city lady, too.” Anna was delighted, because she would thus have an opportunity of acquiring city manners and city fashions. Sally said snappishly, “There’s enough to wait on now, without having a stuck-up city flirt, faintin’ at the sight of a worm, and screechin’ if a fly comes toward her.” Mother had some misgivings on the subject. She was perfectly willing Emma should come, but she doubted our ability to entertain her, knowing that the change would be great from a fashionable city home to a country farmhouse. Grandmother, who loved to talk of “my daughter in the city,” was pleased, and to console mother, said:

“Never you mind, Fanny, leave her to me; you find victuals and drink, and I’ll do the entertaining.”

Among so many opinions it was hard for me to arrive at a conclusion. On the whole, however, I was glad, until told that during Cousin Emma’s stay our garret gambols must be given up, and that I must not laugh loud, or scarcely speak above a whisper, for she was sick, and it would hurt her head. Then I wished Cousin Emma and Cousin Emma’s head would stay where they belonged.

The letter was received on Monday, but Emma would not come until Thursday; so there was ample time for “fixing up.” The parlor-chamber was repapered, the carpet taken up and shaken, red and white curtains hung at the windows, a fresh ball of Castile soap bought for the washstand, and on Thursday morning our pretty flower beds were shorn of their finest ornaments with which to make bouquets for the parlor and parlor-chamber. Besides that, Sally had filled the pantry with cakes, pies, gingerbread, and Dutch cheese, to the last of which I fancied Emma’s city taste would not take kindly. Then there was in the cellar a barrel of fresh beer; so everything was done which could be expected.

When I went home for my dinner that day I teased hard to be allowed to stay out of school for one afternoon, but mother said “No,” although she suffered me to wear my pink gingham, with sundry injunctions “not to burst the hooks and eyes all off before night.” This, by the way, was my besetting sin; I never could climb a tree, no matter what the size might be without invariably coming down minus at least six hooks and eyes; but I seriously thought I should get over it when I got older and joined the church.

That afternoon seemed of interminable length, but at last I saw father’s carriage coming, and quick as thought I threw my grammar out of the window; after which I demurely asked “to go out and get a book which I had dropped.” Permission was granted and I was out just in time to courtesy straight down, as father pointing to me, said: “There, that’s our little crazy Mollie,” and then I got a glimpse of a remarkably sweet face, which made the tears come in my eyes, it was so pale.

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Perhaps I wronged our school-teacher; I think I did, for she has since died; but really I fancied she kept us longer that night on purpose. At least, it was nearly five before we were dismissed. Then, with my bonnet in hand, I ran for home, falling down once and bursting off the lower hook! I entered the house with a bound, but was quieted by grandmother, who said Emma was lying down, and I mustn't disturb her.

After waiting some time for her to make her appearance, I stole softly up the stairs and looked in where she was. She saw me, and instantly rising, said with a smile that went to my heart:

"And this must be Mary, the little crazy girl; come and kiss your Cousin Emma."

Twining my arms around her neck, I think I must have cried, for she repeatedly asked me what was the matter, and as I could think of no better answer, I at last told her "I didn't like to have folks call me *crazy*. I couldn't help acting like *Sal Furbush*, the old crazy woman, who threatened to toss us up in the umbrella."

"Forgive me, darling," said Emma coaxingly; "I will not do it again;" then stooping down, she looked intently into my eyes, soliloquizing, "Yes, it is wrong to tell her so."

In a few moments I concluded Emma was the most beautiful creature in the world; I would not even except Carrie Howard. Emma's features were perfectly regular, and her complexion white and pure as alabaster. Her hair, which was a rich auburn, lay around her forehead in thick waves, but her great beauty consisted in her lustrous blue eyes, which were very large and dark. When she was pleased they laughed, and when she was sad they were sad too. Her dress was a white muslin wrapper, confined at the waist by a light blue ribbon, while one of the same hue encircled her neck, and was fastened by a small gold pin, which, with the exception of the costly diamond ring on her finger, was the only ornament she wore.

When supper was ready I proudly led her to the dining-room, casting a look of triumph at Juliet and Anna, and feeling, it may be, a *trifle* above grandmother, who said, "Don't be troublesome, child."

How grateful I was when Emma answered for me, "She doesn't trouble me in the least; I am very fond of children."

Indeed, she seemed to be very fond of everybody and everything—all except Sally's Dutch cheese, which, as I expected, she hardly relished. In less than three days she was beloved by all the household, Billy whispering to me confidentially that "never before had he seen any one except *mother*, whom he would like to marry."

Saturday afternoon Carrie and Agnes called on Emma, and as I saw them together I fancied I had never looked on three more charming faces. They appeared mutually

pleased with each other, too, although for some reason there seemed to be more affinity between Emma and Agnes. Carrie appeared thoughtful and absent-minded, which made Anna joke her about her “lover, Penoyer.” As she was about leaving the room she made no reply, but after she was gone Agnes looked searchingly at Anna and said:

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“Is it possible, Miss Anna, that you are so mistaken?”

“How—why?” asked Emma. “Is Penoyer a bad man? What is his occupation?”

“His occupation is well enough,” returned Agnes. “I would not think less of him for that, were he right in other respects. However, he was Carrie’s and my own music teacher.”

“Impossible,” said Anna, but at that moment Carrie reentered the room, and, together with Agnes, soon took her leave.

“Penoyer a music teacher, after all his anger at Lily Gordon for suggesting such an idea!” This was now the theme of Juliet and Anna, although they wondered what there was so *bad* about him—something, evidently, from Agnes’ manner, and for many days they puzzled their brains in vain to solve the mystery.

CHAPTER V.

RICHARD EVELYN AND HARLEY ASHMORE.

Emma had not long been with us ere her fame reached the little “village over the river,” and drew from thence many calls, both from gentlemen and ladies. Among these was a Mr. Richard Evelyn and his sister, both of whom had the honor of standing on the topmost round of the aristocratic ladder in the village. Mr. Evelyn, who was nearly thirty years of age, was a wealthy lawyer, and what is a little remarkable for that craft (I speak from experience), to an unusual degree of intelligence and polish of manners, he added many social and *religious* qualities. Many kind hearted mothers, who had on their hands good-for-nothing daughters, wondered how he managed to live without a wife, but he seemed to think it the easiest thing in nature, for, since the death of his parents, his sister Susan had acted in the capacity of his housekeeper.

I have an idea that grandmother, whose disposition was slightly spiced with a love for match-making, bethought herself how admirably Mr. Evelyn and Emma were suited for each other; for after his calls became frequent I heard her many times slyly hint of the possibility of our being able to keep Emma in town always. *She* probably did not think so; for each time after being teased, she repaired to her room and read for the twentieth time some ominous-looking letters which she had received since being with as.

It was now three weeks since she came, and each day she had gained in health and strength. Twice had she walked to the woods, accompanied by Mr. Evelyn, once to the schoolhouse, while every day she swung under the old maple. About this time Agnes began to think of returning home, so Juliet and Anna determined on a party in honor of her and Emma. It was a bright summer afternoon; and for a wonder I was suffered to remain from school, although I received numerous charges to keep my tongue still, and was again reminded of that excellent old proverb (the composition of some old maid, I

know), “*Children* should be seen and not heard;” so, seated in a corner, my hand pressed closely over my mouth, the better to guard against contingencies, I looked on and thought, with ineffable satisfaction, how much handsomer Cousin Emma was than any one else, although I could not help acknowledging that Carrie never looked more beautiful than she did that afternoon in a neatly-fitting white muslin, with a few rosebuds nestling in her long, glossy curls.

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Matters were going on swimmingly, and I had three times ventured a remark, when Anna, who was sitting near the window, exclaimed, “Look here, girls, did you ever see a finer-looking gentleman?” at the same time calling their attention to a stranger in the street. Emma looked, too, and the bright flush which suffused her cheek made me associate the gentleman with the letters she had received, and I was not surprised when he entered our yard and knocked at our door. Juliet arose to answer his summons, but Emma prevented her, saying;

“Suffer me to go, will you?”

She was gone some time, and when she returned was accompanied by the stranger, whom she introduced as Mr. Ashmore. I surveyed him with childish curiosity, and drew two very satisfactory breaths when I saw that he was wholly unlike Monsieur Penoyer. He was a very fine-looking man, but I did not exactly like the expression of his face. It was hardly open enough to suit me, and I noticed that he never looked you directly in the eye. In five minutes I had come to the conclusion that he was not half so good a man as Mr. Evelyn. I was in great danger, however, of changing my mind, when I saw how fondly his dark eye rested on Emma, and how delighted he seemed to be at her improved health; and when he, without any apparent exertion, kept the whole company entertained, I was charmed, and did not blame Emma for liking him. Anna’s doctor was nothing to him, and I even fancied that he would dare to go *all alone* to the old mine!

Suddenly he faced about, and espying me in the corner, he said, “Here is a little lady I’ve not seen. Will some one introduce me?”

With the utmost gravity Anna said, “It is my sister, little crazy Jane.”

I glanced quickly at him to see how he would receive the intelligence, and when, looking inquiringly first at me and then at Emma, he said, “Is it really so? what a pity!” the die was cast—I never liked him again. That night in my little low bed, long after Lizzie was asleep, I wept bitterly, wondering what made Anna so unkind, and why people called me crazy. I knew I looked like other children, and I thought I acted like them, too; unless, indeed, I climbed more trees, tore more dresses, and burst off more hooks.

But to return to the party. After a time I thought that Mr. Ashmore’s eyes went over admiringly to Carrie more frequently than was necessary, and for once I regretted that she was so pretty. Ere long, Mr. Ashmore, too, went over, and immediately there ensued between himself and Carrie a lively conversation, in which she adroitly managed to let him know that she had been three years at school in Albany. The next thing that I saw was that he took from her curls a rosebud and appropriated it to his buttonhole. I glanced at Emma to see how she was affected, but her face was perfectly calm, and wore the old sweet smile. When the young ladies were about leaving, I was greatly shocked to see Mr. Ashmore offer to accompany Carrie and Agnes home.

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After they were gone grandmother said, “Emma, if I’s you, I’d put a stop to that chap’s flirtin’ so with Car’line Howard.”

Emma laughed gaily as she replied, “Oh, grandma, I can trust Harley; I have been sick so long that he has the privilege of walking or riding with anybody he pleases.”

Grandmother shook her head, saying, “It wasn’t so with her and our poor grandfather;” then I fell into a fit of musing as to whether grandma was ever young, and if she ever fixed her hair before the glass, as Anna did when she expected the doctor! In the midst of my reverie Mr. Ashmore returned, and for the remainder of the evening devoted himself so entirely to Emma that I forgave him for going home with Carrie. Next day, however, he found the walk to Captain Howard’s a very convenient one, staying a long time, too. The next day it was the same, and the next, and the next, until I fancied that even Emma began to be anxious.

Grandma was highly indignant, and Sally declared, “that, as true as she lived and breathed, if Mike should serve her so, he’d catch it.” About this time Agnes went home. The evening before she left she spent at our house with Emma, of whom she seemed to be very fond. Carrie and Ashmore were, as usual, out riding or walking, and the conversation naturally turned upon them. At last, Anna, whose curiosity was still on the alert to know something of Penoyer, asked Agnes of him. I will repeat, in substance, what Agnes said.

It seems that for many years Penoyer had been a teacher of music in Albany. Agnes was one of his pupils, and while teaching her music he thought proper to fall overwhelmingly in love with her. This for a time she did not notice; but when his attentions became so pointed as to become a subject of remark, she very coolly tried to make him understand his position. He persevered, however, until he became exceedingly impudent and annoying.

About this time there came well-authenticated stories of his being not only a professed gambler, but also very dissipated in his habits. To this last charge Agnes could testify, as his breath had frequently betrayed him. He was accordingly dismissed. Still he perseveringly pursued her, always managing, if possible, to get near her in all public places, and troubling her in various ways.

At last Agnes heard that he was showing among her acquaintances two notes bearing her signature. The contents of these notes he covered with his hand, exposing to view only her name. She had twice written, requesting him to purchase some new piece of music, and it was these messages which he was now showing, insinuating that Agnes thought favorably of him, but was opposed by her father. The consequence of this was, that the next time Agnes’ brother met Penoyer in the street, he gave him a sound caning, ordering him, under pain of a worse flogging, never again to mention his sister’s

name. This he was probably more willing to do, as he had already conceived a great liking for Carrie, who was silly enough to be pleased with and suffer his attentions.

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“I wonder, though, that Carrie allowed him to visit her,” said Agnes; “but then I believe she is under some obligations to him, and dare not refuse when he asked permission to come.”

If Agnes knew what these obligations were she did not tell, and grandmother, who, during the narration had knit with unwonted speed, making her needles rattle again, said, “It’s plain to me that Caroline let him come to make folks think she had got a city beau.”

“Quite likely,” returned Agnes; “Carrie is a sad flirt, but I think, at least, that she should not interfere with other people’s rights.”

Here my eye followed hers to Emma, who, I thought, was looking a little paler. Just then Carrie and Ashmore came in, and the latter throwing himself upon the sofa by the side of Emma, took her hand caressingly, saying, “How are you to-night, my dear?”

“Quite well,” was her quiet reply, and soon after, under pretense of moving from the window, she took a seat across the room. That night Mr. Ashmore accompanied Carrie and Agnes home, and it was at a much later hour than usual that old Rover first growled and then whined as he recognized our visitor.

The next morning Emma was suffering from a severe headache, which prevented her from appearing at breakfast. Mr. Ashmore seemed somewhat disturbed, and made many anxious inquiries about her. At dinner-time she was well enough to come, and the extreme kindness of Mr. Ashmore’s manner called a deep glow to her cheek. After dinner, however, he departed for a walk, taking his accustomed road toward Captain Howard’s.

When I returned from school he was still absent, and as Emma was quite well, she asked me to accompany her to my favorite resort, the old rock beneath the grapevine. We were soon there, and for a long time we sat watching the shadows as they came and went upon the bright green grass, and listening to the music of the brook, which seemed to me to sing more sadly than it was wont to do.

Suddenly our ears were arrested by the sound of voices, which we knew belonged to Mr. Ashmore and Carrie. They were standing near us, just behind a clump of alders, and Carrie, in reply to something Mr. Ashmore had said, answered, “Oh, you can’t be in earnest, for you have only known me ten days, and beside that, what have you done with your pale, sick lady?”

Instantly I started up, clinching my fist in imitation of brother Billy when he was angry, but Cousin Emma’s arm was thrown convulsively around me, as drawing me closely to her side she whispered, “Keep quiet.”

I did keep quiet, and listened while Mr. Ashmore replied, “I entertain for Miss Rushton the highest esteem, for I know she possesses many excellent qualities. Once I thought I loved her (how tightly Emma held me), but she has been sick a long time, and somehow I cannot marry an invalid. Whether she ever gets well is doubtful, and even if she does, after having seen you, she can be nothing to me. And yet I like her, and when I am alone with her I almost fancy I love her, but one look at your sparkling, healthy face drives her from my mind—”

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The rest of what he said I could not hear, neither did I understand Carrie's answer, but his next words were distinct, "My dear Carrie forever."

I know the brook stopped running, or at least I did not hear it. The sun went down; the birds went to rest; Mr. Ashmore and Carrie went home; and still I sat there by the side of Emma, who had lain her head in my lap, and was so still and motionless that the dread fear came over me that she might be dead. I attempted to lift her up, saying, "Cousin Emma, speak to me, won't you?" but she made me no answer, and another ten minutes went by. By this time the stars had come out and were looking quietly down upon us. The waters of the mill-dam chanted mournfully, and in my disordered imagination, fantastic images danced before the entrance of the old mine. Half-crying with fear, I again laid my hand on Emma's head. Her hair was wet with the heavy night dews, and my eyes were wet with something else, as I said, "Oh, Emma, speak to me, for I am afraid and want to go home."

This roused her, and lifting up her head I caught a glimpse of a face of so startling whiteness that, throwing my arms around her neck, I cried, "Oh, Emma, dear Emma, don't look so. I love you a great deal better than I do Carrie Howard, and so I am sure does Mr. Evelyn."

I don't know how I chanced to think of Mr. Evelyn, but he recurred to me naturally enough. All thoughts of him, however, were soon driven from my mind by the sound of Emma's voice as she said, "Mollie, darling, can you keep a secret?"

I didn't think I could, as I never had been intrusted with one, so I advised her to give it to Anna, who was very fond of them. But she said, "I am sure you can do it, Mollie. Promise me that you will not tell them at home what you have seen or heard."

I promised, and then in my joy at owning a secret, I forgot the little figures which waltzed back and forth before the old mine, I forgot the woods through which we passed, nor was the silence broken until we reached the lane. Then I said, "What shall we tell the folks when they ask where we have been?"

"Leave that to me," answered Emma.

As we drew near the house we met grandmother, Juliet, Anna and Sally, all armed and equipped for a general hunt. We were immediately assailed with a score of questions as to what had kept us so long. I looked to Emma for the answer, at the same time keeping my hand tightly over my mouth for fear I should tell.

"We found more things of interest than we expected," said Emma, "consequently tarried longer than we should otherwise have done."

“Why, how hoarse you be,” said grandmother, while Sally continued, “Starlight is a mighty queer time to see things in.”

“Some things look better by starlight,” answered Emma; “but we stayed longer than we ought to, for I have got a severe headache and must go immediately to bed.”

“Have some tea first,” said grandmother.

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“And some strawberries and cream,” repeated Sally; but Emma declined both and went at once to her room.

Mr. Ashmore did not come home until late that night, for I was awake and heard him stumbling up-stairs in the dark. I remember, too, of having experienced the very benevolent wish that he would break his neck! As I expected, Emma did not make her appearance at the breakfast table, but about ten she came down to the parlor and asked to see Mr. Ashmore alone. Of what occurred during that interval I never knew, except that at its close cousin looked very white, and Mr. Ashmore very black, notwithstanding which he soon took his accustomed walk to Captain Howard’s. He was gone about three hours, and on his return announced his intention of going to Boston in the afternoon train. No one opposed him, for all were glad to have him go.

Just before he left, grandmother, who knew all was not right, said to him: “Young man, I wish you well; but mind what I say, you’ll get your pay yet for the capers you’ve cut here.”

“I beg your pardon, madam,” he returned, with much more emphasis on *madam* than was at all necessary, “I beg your pardon, but I think she has cut the capers; at least she dismissed me of her own accord.”

I thought of what I had heard, but ’twas a secret, so I kept it safely, although I almost bit my tongue off in my zealous efforts. After Ashmore was gone, Emma, who had taken a violent cold the evening before, took her bed, and was slightly ill for nearly a week. Almost every day Mr. Evelyn called to see how she was, always bringing her a fresh bouquet of flowers. On Thursday, Carrie called, bringing Emma some ice-cream which Aunt Eunice had made. She did not ask to see her, but before she left she asked Anna if she did not wish to buy her old piano.

“What will you do without it?” asked Anna.

“Oh,” said Carrie, “I cannot use two. I have got a new one.”

The stocking dropped from grandmother’s hand as she exclaimed: “What is the world a-comin’ to! Got two pianners! Where’d you get ’em?”

“My new one was a present, and came from Boston,” answered Carrie, with the utmost *sang froid*.

“You don’t say Ashmore sent it to you! How much did it cost?” asked grandma.

“Mr. Ashmore wrote that it cost three hundred and fifty dollars,” was Carrie’s reply.

Grandmother was perfectly horror-stricken; but desirous of making Carrie feel as comfortable as possible, she said, “S’posin somebody should tell him about Penoyer?”

For an instant Carrie turned pale, as she said quickly, “What does any one know about him to tell?”

“A great deal—more than you think they do—yes, a great deal,” was grandma’s answer.

After that Carrie came *very* frequently to see us, always bringing something nice for Emma *or grandma*!

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Meanwhile Mr. Evelyn's visits continued, and when at last Emma could see him I was sure that she received him more kindly than she ever had before. "That'll go yet," was grandma's prediction. But her scheming was cut short by a letter from Emma's father, requesting her immediate return. Mr. Evelyn, who found he had business which required his presence in Worcester, was to accompany her thus far. It was a sad day when she left us, for she was a universal favorite. Sally cried, I cried, and Bill either cried or made believe, for he very industriously wiped his eyes and nasal organ on his shirt sleeves: besides that, things went on wrong side up generally. Grandma was cross—Sally was cross—and the school-teacher was cross; the bucket fell into the well, and the cows got into the corn. I got called up at school and set with some hateful boys, one of whom amused himself by pricking me with a pin, and when, in self-defense, I gave him a good pinch, he actually yelled out: "She keeps a-pinchin' me!" On the whole, 'twas a dreadful day, and when at night I threw myself exhausted upon my little bed I cried myself to sleep, thinking of Cousin Emma and wishing she would come back.

CHAPTER VI.

MIKE AND SALLY.

I have spoken of Sally, but have said nothing of Mike, whom, of all my father's hired men, I liked the best. He it was who made the best cornstalk fiddles, and whittled out the shrillest whistles with which to drive grandma "ravin' distracted." He, too, it was who, on cold winter mornings, carried Lizzie to school in his arms, making me forget how my fingers ached, by telling some exploit of *his* schooldays.

I do not wonder that Sally liked him, and I always had an idea how that liking would end, but did not think it would be so soon. Consequently I suspected nothing when Sally's white dress was bleached on the grass in the clothesyard for nearly a week. One day Billy came to me with a face full of wonder, saying he had just overheard Mike tell one of the men that he and Sally were going to be married in a few weeks.

I knew now what all that bleaching was for, and why Sally bought so much cotton lace of pedlers. I was in ecstasies, too, for I had never seen anyone married, but regretted the circumstance, whatever it might have been, which prevented me from being present at mother's marriage. Like many other children I have been deceived into the belief that the marriage ceremony consisted mainly in leaping the broomstick, and by myself I had frequently tried the experiment, delighted to find that I could jump it at almost any distance from the ground; but I had some misgivings as to Sally's ability to clear the stick, for she was rather clumsy; however, I should see the fun, for they were to be married at our house.

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A week before the time appointed mother was taken very ill, which made it necessary that the wedding should be postponed, or take place somewhere else. To the first Mike would not hear, and as good old Parson S——, whose sermons were never more than two hours long, came regularly every Sunday night to preach in the schoolhouse, Mike proposed that they be married there. Sally did not like this exactly, but grandmother, who now ruled the household, said it was just the thing, and accordingly it took place there.

The house was filled full, and those who could not obtain seats took their station near the windows. Our party was early, but I was three times compelled to relinquish my seat in favor of more distinguished persons, and I began to think that if any one was obliged to go home for want of room, it would be me; but I resolutely determined not to go. I'd climb the chestnut tree first! At last I was squeezed on a high desk between two old ladies, wearing two old black bonnets, their breath sufficiently tinctured with tobacco smoke to be very disagreeable to me, whose olfactories chanced to be rather aristocratic than otherwise.

To my horror Father S—— concluded to give us the sermon before he did the bride. He was afraid some of his audience would leave. Accordingly there ensued a prayer half an hour long, after which eight verses of a long meter psalm were sung to the tune of Windham. By this time I gave a slight sign to the two old ladies that I would like to move, but they merely shook their two black bonnets at me, telling me, in fierce whispers, that "I mustn't stir in meetin'." Mustn't stir! I wonder how I could stir, squeezed in as I was, unless they chose to let me. So I sat bolt upright, looking straight ahead at a point where the tips of my red shoes were visible, for my feet were sticking straight out.

All at once my attention was drawn to a spider on the wall, who was laying a net for a fly, and in watching his maneuvers I forgot the lapse of time, until Father S—— had passed his sixthly and seventhly, and was driving furiously away at the eighthly. By this time the spider had caught the fly, whose cries sounded to me like the waters of the sawmill; the tips of my red shoes looked like the red berries which grew near the mine; the two old ladies at my side were transformed into two tall black walnut trees, while I seemed to be sliding down-hill.

At this juncture, one of the old ladies moved away from me a foot at least (she could have done so before had she chosen to), and I was precipitated off from the bench, striking my head on the sharp corner of a seat below. It was a dreadful blow which I received, making the blood gush from my nostrils. My loud screams brought matters to a focus, and the sermon to an end. My grandmother and one of the old ladies took me and the water pail outdoors, where I was literally deluged; at the same time they called me "Poor girl! Poor Mollie! Little dear," *etc*.

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But while they were attending to my bumped head Mike and Sally were married, and I didn't see it after all! 'Twas too bad!

CHAPTER VII.

THE BRIDE.

After Sally's marriage there occurred at our house an interval of quiet, enlivened occasionally by letters from Cousin Emma, whose health was not as much improved by her visit to the country as she had at first hoped it would be; consequently she proposed spending the winter south. Meantime, from Boston letters came frequently to Carrie Howard, and as the autumn advanced, things within and about her father's house foretold some unusual event. Two dressmakers were hired from the village, and it was stated, on good authority, that among Carrie's wardrobe was a white satin and an elegantly embroidered merino traveling-dress.

Numerous were the surmises of Juliet and Anna as to who and how many would be invited to the wedding. All misgivings concerning themselves were happily brought to an end a week before the time, for there came to our house handsome cards of invitation for Juliet and Anna, and—I could scarcely believe my eyes—there was one for me too. For this I was indebted to Aunt Eunice, who had heard of and commiserated my misfortunes at Sally's wedding.

I was sorry that my invitation came so soon, for I had but little hope that the time would ever come. It did, however, and so did Mr. Ashmore and Agnes. As soon as dinner was over I commenced my toilet, although the wedding was not to take place until eight that evening; but then I believed, as I do now, in being ready in season. Oh, how slowly the hours passed, and at last in perfect despair I watched my opportunity to set the clock forward when no one saw me. For this purpose I put the footstool in a chair, and mounting, was about to move the long hand, when—

But I always was the most unfortunate of mortals, so it was no wonder that at this point the chair slipped, the stool slipped, and I slipped. I caught at the clock to save myself; consequently both clock and I came to the floor with a terrible crash. My first thought was for the hooks and eyes, which undoubtedly were scattered with the fragments of the clock, but fortunately every hook was in its place, and only one eye was straightened. I draw a veil over the scolding which I got, and the numerous threats that I should stay at home.

As the clock was broken we had no means for judging of the time, and thus we were among the first who arrived at Captain Howard's. This gave Juliet and Anna an opportunity of telling Agnes of my mishap. She laughed heartily, and then immediately changing the subject she inquired after Cousin Emma, and when we had heard from

her. After replying to these questions Anna asked Agnes about Penoyer, and when she had seen him.

“Don’t mention it,” said Agnes, “but I have a suspicion that he stopped yesterday at the depot when I did. I may have been mistaken, for I was looking after my baggage and only caught a glimpse of him. If it were he his presence bodes no good.”

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“Have you told Carrie?” asked Juliet.

“No, I have not. She seems so nervous whenever he is mentioned,” was Agnes’ reply.

I thought of the obligations once referred to by Agnes, and felt that I should breathe more freely when Carrie really was married. Other guests now began to arrive, and we who had fixed long enough before the looking-glass repaired to the parlor below. Bill, who saw Sally married, had convinced me that the story of the broomstick was a falsehood, so I was prepared for its absence, but I wondered then, not more than I do now, why grown-up people shouldn’t be whipped for telling untruths to children as well as children for telling untruths to grown-up people.

The parlor was now rapidly filling, and I was in great danger of being thrust into the corner, where I could see nothing, when Aunt Eunice very benevolently drew me near her, saying I should see if no one else did. At last Mr. Ashmore and Carrie came. Anna can tell you exactly what she wore, but I cannot. I only know that she looked most beautifully, though I have a vague recollection of fancying that in the making of her dress the sleeves were forgotten entirely, and the neck nearly so.

The marriage ceremony commenced, and I listened breathlessly, but this did not prevent me from hearing some one enter the house by the kitchen door. Aunt Eunice heard it, too, and when the minister began to say something about Mrs. Ashmore she arose and went out. Something had just commenced, I think they called them congratulations, when the crowd around the door began to huddle together in order to make room for some person to enter. I looked up and saw Penoyer, his glittering teeth now partially disclosed, looking a very little fiendish, I thought. Carrie saw him, too, and instantly turned as white as the satin dress she wore, while Agnes, who seemed to have some suspicion of his errand, exclaimed, “Impudent scoundrel!” At the same time advancing forward, she laid her hand upon his arm.

He shook it off lightly, saying, “*Pardonnez moi, ma chere*; I’ve no come to trouble you.” Then turning to Ashmore he said, pointing to Carrie, “She be your wife, I take it?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Ashmore haughtily. “Have you any objections? If so they have come too late.”

“Not von, not in the least, no sar,” said the Frenchman, bowing nearly to the floor. “It give me one grand plaisir; so now you will please settle von leetle bill I have against her;” at the same time he drew from his pocket a sheet of half-worn paper.

Carrie, who was leaning heavily against Mr. Ashmore instantly sprang forward and endeavored to snatch the paper, saying half-imploringly, “Don’t, Penoyer, you know my father will pay it.”

But Penoyer passed it to Mr. Ashmore, while Captain Howard, coming forward, said, “Pay what? What is all this about?”

“Only a trifle,” said Penoyer; “just a bill for giving your daughter musique lessons three years in Albany.”

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“You give my daughter music lessons?” demanded Captain Howard.

“*Oui*, monsieur, I do that same thing,” answered Penoyer.

“Oh, Carrie, Carrie,” said Captain Howard, in his surprise forgetting the time and place, “why did you tell me that your knowledge of music you acquired yourself, with the assistance of your cousin, and a little help from her music teacher; and why, when this man was here a few months ago, did you not tell me he was your music teacher and had not been paid?”

Bursting into tears Carrie answered, “Forgive me, father, but he said he had no bill against me; he made no charge.”

“But she gave me von big, large mitten,” said the Frenchman, “when she see this man, who has more l’argent; but no difference, no difference, sar, this gentleman,” bowing toward Ashmore, “parfaitement delighted to pay it.”

Whether he were delighted or not, he did pay it, for drawing from his pocket his purse, while his large black eyes emitted gleams of fire, he counted out the required amount, one hundred and twenty-five dollars; then confronting Penoyer, he said fiercely, “Give me a receipt for this instantly, after which I will take it upon me to show you the door.”

“Certainement, certainement, all I want is my l’argent,” said Penoyer.

The money was paid, the receipt given, and then, as Penoyer hesitated a moment, Ashmore said, “Are you waiting to be helped out, sir?”

“No, monsieur, si vous plait, I have tree letters from madam, which will give you one grande satisfaction to read.” Then tossing toward Ashmore the letters, with a malicious smile he left the house.

Poor Carrie! When sure that he was gone she fainted away and was carried from the room. At supper, however, she made her appearance, and after that was over the guests, unopposed, left *en masse*.

What effect Penoyer’s disclosures had on Ashmore we never exactly knew, but when, a few days before the young couple left home, they called at our house, we all fancied that Carrie was looking more thoughtful than usual, while a cloud seemed to be resting on Ashmore’s brow. The week following their marriage they left for New York, where they were going to reside. During the winter Carrie wrote home frequently, giving accounts of the many gay and fashionable parties which she attended, and once in a letter to Anna she wrote, “The flattering attentions which I receive have more than, once made Ashmore jealous.”

Two years from the time they were married Mrs. Ashmore was brought back to her home a pale, faded invalid, worn out by constant dissipation and the care of a sickly baby, so poor and blue that even I couldn't bear to touch it. Three days after their arrival Mr. Evelyn brought to us his bride, Cousin Emma, blooming with health and beauty. I could scarcely believe that the exceedingly beautiful Mrs. Evelyn was the same white-faced girl who, two years before, had sat with me beneath the old grapevine.

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The day after she came I went with her to visit Carrie, who, the physicians said, was in a decline. I had not seen her before since her return, and on entering the sick-room, I was as much surprised at her haggard face, sunken eyes, and sallow skin, as was Mr. Ashmore at the appearance of Emma. "Is it possible," said he, coming forward, "is it possible, Emma—Mrs. Evelyn, that you have entirely recovered?"

I remembered what he had once said about "invalid wives," and I feared that the comparison he was evidently making would not be very favorable toward Carrie. We afterward learned, however, that he was the kindest of husbands, frequently walking half the night with his crying baby, and at other times trying to soothe his nervous wife, who was sometimes very irritable.

Before we left Carrie drew Emma closely to her and said, "They tell me I probably shall never get well, and now, while I have time, I wish to ask your forgiveness for the great wrong I once did you."

"How? When?" asked Emma quickly, and Carrie contined:

"When first I saw him who is my husband, I determined to leave no means untried to secure him for myself; I knew you were engaged, but I fancied that your ill-health annoyed him, and played my part well. You know how I succeeded, but I am sure you forgive me, for you love Mr. Evelyn quite as well, perhaps better."

"Yes, far better," was Emma's reply, as she kissed Carrie's wan cheek; then bidding her good-by she promised to call frequently during her stay in town. She kept her word, and was often accompanied by Mr. Evelyn, who strove faithfully and successfully, too, to lead into the path of peace her whose days were well-nigh ended.

'Twas on one of those bright days in the Indian summer time that Carrie at last slept the sleep that knows no awakening. The evening after the burial I went in at Captain Howard's, and all the animosity I had cherished for Mr. Ashmore vanished when I saw the large tear drops as they fell on the face of his motherless babe, whose wailing cries he endeavored in vain to hush. When the first snowflakes came they fell on a little mound, where by the side of her mother Mr. Ashmore had laid his baby, Emma.

Side by side they are sleeping,
In the grave's dark, dreamless bed;
While the willow boughs seem weeping,
As they bend above the dead.

And now, dear reader, after telling you that, yielding to the importunities of Emma's parents, Mr. Evelyn at last moved to the city, where, if I mistake not, he is still living, my story is finished. But do not, I pray you, think that these few pages contain all that I know of the olden time:

Oh no, far down in memory's well
  Exhaustless stores remain,
From which, perchance, some future day
  I'll weave a tale again.

THE GILBERTS; OR, RICE CORNER NUMBER TWO.

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CHAPTER I.

THE GILBERTS.

The spring following Carrie Howard's death Rice Corner was thrown into a commotion by the astounding fact that Captain Howard was going out West, and had sold his farm to a gentleman from the city, whose wife "kept six servants, wore silk all the time, never went inside of the kitchen, never saw a churn, breakfasted at ten, dined at three, and had supper the next day!"

Such was the story which Mercy Jenkins detailed to us early one Monday morning, and then, eager to communicate so desirable a piece of news to others of her acquaintance, she started off, stopping for a moment as she passed the wash-room to see if Sally's clothes "wan't kinder dingy and yaller." As soon as she was gone the astonishment of our household broke forth, grandma wondering why Captain Howard wanted to go to the ends of the earth, as she designated Chicago, their place of destination, and what she should do without Aunt Eunice, who, having been born on grandma's wedding day, was very dear to her, and then her age was so easy to keep. But the best of friends must part, and when at Mrs. Howard's last tea-drinking with us I saw how badly they all felt, and how many tears were shed, I firmly resolved never to like anybody but my own folks, unless, indeed, I made an exception in favor of Tom Jenkins, who so often drew me to school on his sled, and who made such comical-looking jack-o'-lanterns out of the big yellow pumpkins.

In reply to the numerous questions concerning Mr. Gilbert, the purchaser of their farm, Mrs. Howard could only reply that he was very wealthy and had got tired of living in the city; adding, further, that he wore a "monstrous pair of musquitoes," had an evil-looking eye, four children, smoked cigars, and was a lawyer by profession. This last was all grandma wanted to know about him—"that told the whole story," for there never was but *one* decent lawyer, and that was Mr. Evelyn, Cousin Emma's husband. Dear old lady! when, a few years ago, she heard that I, her favorite grandchild, was to marry one of the craft, she made another exception in his favor, saying that "if he wasn't all straight, Mary would soon make him so!"

Within a short time after Aunt Eunice's visit she left Rice Corner, and on the same day wagon-load after wagon-load of Mr. Gilbert's furniture passed our house, until Sally declared "there was enough to keep a tavern, and she didn't see nothin' where they's goin to put it," at the same time announcing her intention of "running down there after dinner, to see what was going on."

It will be remembered that Sally was now a married woman—"Mrs. Michael Welsh;" consequently, mother, who lived with her instead of her living with mother, did not presume to interfere with her much, though she hinted pretty strongly that she "always

liked to see people mind their own affairs." But Sally was incorrigible. The dinner dishes were washed with a whew, I was coaxed into sweeping the back room—which I did, leaving the dirt under the broom behind the door—while Mrs. Welsh, donning a pink calico, blue shawl, and bonnet trimmed with dark green, started off on her prying excursion, stopping by the roadside where Mike was making fence, and keeping him, as grandma said, "full half an hour by the clock from his work."

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Not long after Sally's departure a handsome carriage, drawn by two fine bay horses, passed our house; and as the windows were down we could plainly discern a pale, delicate-looking lady, wrapped in shawls, a tall, stylish-looking girl, another one about my own age and two beautiful little boys.

"That's the Gilberts, I know," said Anna. "Oh I'm so glad Sally's gone, for now we shall have the full particulars;" and again we waited as impatiently for Sally's return as we had once done before for grandma.

At last, to our great relief, the green ribbons and blue shawl were descried in the distance, and ere long Sally was with us, ejaculating, "Oh, my—mercy me!" *etc*., thus giving us an inkling of what was to follow. "Of all the sights that ever I have seen," said she, folding up the blue shawl, and smoothing down the pink calico. "There's carpeting enough to cover every crack and crevice—all pure bristles, too!"

Here I tittered, whereupon Sally angrily retorted, that "she guessed she knew how to talk proper, if she hadn't studied grarmar."

"Never mind," said Anna, "go on; brussels carpeting and what else?"

"Mercy knows what else," answered Sally. "I can't begin to guess the names of half the things. There's mahogany, rosewood, and marble fixin's—and in Miss Gilbert's room there's lace curtains and silk damson ones—"

A look from Anna restrained me this time, and Sally continued.

"Mercy Jenkins is there, helpin', and she says Mr. Gilbert told 'em, his wife never et a piece of salt pork in her life, and knew no more how bread was made than a child two years old."

"What a simple critter she must be," said grandma, while Anna asked if she saw Mrs. Gilbert, and if that tall girl was her daughter.

"Yes, I seen her," answered Sally, "and I guess she's weakly, for the minit she got into the house she lay down on the sofa, which Mr. Gilbert says cost seventy-five dollars. That tall, proud-lookin' thing they call Miss Adaline, but I'll warrant you don't catch me puttin' on the miss. I called her Adaline, and you had orto seen how her big eyes looked at me. Says she, at last, 'Are you one of pa's new servants?"

"'Servants!' says I, 'no indeed; I'm Mrs. Michael Welsh, one of your nighest neighbors.'

"Then I told her that there were two nice girls lived in the house with me, and she'd better get acquainted with 'em right away; and then with the hatefulest of all hateful laughs, she asked if 'they wore glass beads and went barefoot.'"

I fancied that neither Juliet nor Anna were greatly pleased at being introduced by Sally, the housemaid, to the elegant Adaline Gilbert, who had come to the country with anything but a favorable impression of its inhabitants. The second daughter, the one about my own age, Sally said they called Nellie; “and a nice, clever creature she is, too —not a bit stuck up like t’other one. Why, I do believe she’d walked every big beam in the barn before she’d been there half an hour, and the last I saw of her she was coaxing a cow to lie still while she got upon her back!”

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How my heart warmed toward the romping Nellie, and how I wondered if after that beam-walking exploit her hooks and eyes were all in their places! The two little boys, Sally said, were twins, Edward and Egbert, or, as they were familiarly called, Bert and Eddie. This was nearly all she had learned, if we except the fact that the family ate with silver forks, and drank wine after dinner. This last, mother pronounced heterodox, while I, who dearly loved the juice of the grape and sometimes left finger marks on the top shelf, whither I had climbed for a sip from grandma's decanter, secretly hoped I should some day dine with Nellie Gilbert, and drink all the wine I wanted, thinking how many times I'd rinse my mouth so mother shouldn't smell my breath!

In the course of a few weeks the affairs of the Gilbert family were pretty generally canvassed in Rice Corner, Mercy Jenkins giving it as her opinion that "Miss Gilbert was much the likeliest of the two, and that Mr. Gilbert was cross, overbearing, and big feeling."

CHAPTER II.

NELLIE.

As yet I had only seen Nellie in the distance, and was about despairing of making her acquaintance when accident threw her in my way. Directly opposite our house, and just across along green meadow, was a piece of woods which belonged to Mr. Gilbert, and there, one afternoon early in May, I saw Nellie. I had seen her there before, but never dared approach her; and now I divided my time between watching her and a dense black cloud which had appeared in the west, and was fast approaching the zenith. I was just thinking how nice it would be if the rain should drive her to our house for shelter, when patter, patter came the large drops in my face; thicker and faster they fell, until it seemed like a perfect deluge; and through the almost blinding sheet of rain I descried Nellie coming toward me at a furious rate. With the agility of a fawn she bounded over the gate, and with the exclamation of, "Ain't I wetter than a drownded rat?" we were perfectly well acquainted.

It took but a short time to divest her of her dripping garments, and array her in some of mine, which Sally said "fitted her to a T," though I fancied she looked sadly out of place in my linen pantalets and long-sleeved dress. She was a great lover of fun and frolic, and in less than half an hour had "ridden to Boston" on Joe's rocking-horse, turned the little wheel faster than even I dared to turn it, tried on grandma's stays, and then, as a crowning feat, tried the rather dangerous experiment of riding down the garret stairs on a board! The clatter brought up grandma, and I felt some doubts about her relishing a kind of play which savored so much of what she called "a racket," but the soft brown eyes which looked at her so pleadingly were too full of love, gentleness, and mischief to be resisted, and permission for "one more ride" was given, "provided she'd promise not to break her neck."

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Oh, what fun we had that afternoon! What a big rent she tore in my gingham frock, and what a “dear, delightful old haunted castle of a thing” she pronounced our house to be. Darling, darling Nellie! I shut my eyes and she comes before me again, the same bright beautiful creature she was when I saw her first, as she was when I saw her for the last, last time.

It rained until dark, and Nellie, who confidently expected to stay all night, had whispered to me her intention of “tying our toes together,” when there came a tremendous rap upon the door, and without waiting to be bidden in walked Mr. Gilbert, puffing and swelling, and making himself perfectly at home, in a kind of offhand manner, which had in it so much of condescension that I was disgusted, and when sure Nellie would not see me I made at him a wry face, thereby feeling greatly relieved!

After managing to let mother know how expensive his family was, how much he paid yearly for wines and cigars, and how much Adaline’s education and piano had cost, he arose to go, saying to his daughter, “Come, puss, take off those—ahem—those habiliments, and let’s be off!”

Nellie obeyed, and just before she was ready to start she asked, when I would come and spend the day with her.

I looked at mother, mother looked at Mr. Gilbert, Mr. Gilbert looked at me, and after surveying me from head to foot said, spitting between every other word, “Ye-es ye-es, we’ve come to live in the country, and I suppose” (here he spit three successive times), “and I suppose we may as well be on friendly terms as any other; so, madam” (turning to mother), “I am willing to have your little daughter visit us ocasionally.” Then adding that “he would extend the same invitation to her were it not that his wife was an invalid and saw no company,” he departed.

One morning, several days afterward, a servant brought to our house a neat little note from Mrs. Gilbert, asking mother to let me spend the day with Nellie. After some consultation between mother and grandma, it was decided that I might go, and in less than an hour I was dressed and on the road, my hair braided so tightly in my neck that the little red bumps of flesh set up here and there, like currants on a brown earthen platter.

Nellie did not wait to receive me formally, but came running down the road, telling me that Robin had made a swing in the barn, and that we would play there most all day, as her mother was sick, and Adaline, who occupied two-thirds of the house, wouldn’t let us come near her. This Adaline was to me a very formidable personage. Hitherto I had only caught glimpses of her, as with long skirts and waving plumes she sometimes dashed past our house on horseback, and it was with great trepidation that I now followed Nellie into the parlor, where she told me her sister was.

“Adaline, this is my little friend,” said she; and Adaline replied:

“How do you do, little friend?”

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My cheeks tingled, and for the first time raising my eyes I found myself face to face with the haughty belle. She was very tall and queenlike in her figure, and though she could hardly be called handsome, there was about her an air of elegance and refinement which partially compensated for the absence of beauty. That she was proud one could see from the glance of her large black eyes and the curl of her lip. Coolly surveying me for a moment, as she would any other curious specimen, she resumed her book, never speaking to me again, except to ask, when she saw me gazing wonderingly around the splendidly-furnished room, “if I supposed I could remember every article of furniture, and give a faithful report.”

I thought I was insulted when she called me “little friend,” and now, feeling sure of it, I tartly replied that “if I couldn’t she perhaps might lend me paper and pencil, with which to write them down.”

“Orginally, truly,” said she, again poring over her book.

Nellie, who had left me for a moment, now returned, bidding me come and see her mother, and passing through the long hall, I was soon in Mrs. Gilbert’s room, which was as tastefully, though perhaps not quite so richly, furnished as the parlor. Mrs. Gilbert was lying upon a sofa, and the moment I looked upon her the love which I had so freely given the daughter was shared with the mother, in whose pale sweet face, and soft brown eyes, I saw a strong resemblance to Nellie. She was attired in a rose-colored morning-gown, which flowed open in front, disclosing to view a larger quantity of rich French embroidery than I had ever before seen.

Many times during the day, and many times since, have I wondered what made her marry, and if she really loved the bearish-looking man who occasionally stalked into the room, smoking cigars and talking very loudly, when he knew how her head was throbbing with pain.

I had eaten but little breakfast that morning, and verily I thought I should famish before their dinner hour arrived; and when at last it came, and I saw the table glittering with silver, I felt many misgivings as to my ability to acquit myself creditably. But by dint of watching Nellie, doing just what she did, and refusing just what she refused, I managed to get through with it tolerably well. For once, too, in my life I drank all the wine I wanted; the result of which was that long before sunset I went home, crying and vomiting with the sick headache, which Sally said “served me right;” at the same time hinting her belief that I was slightly intoxicated!

CHAPTER III.

THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

Down our long, green lane, and at the further extremity of the narrow footpath which led to the “old mine,” was another path or wagon road which wound along among the fern bushes, under the chestnut trees, across the hemlock swamp, and up, to a grassy ridge which overlooked a small pond, said, of course, to have no bottom. Fully crediting this story, and knowing, moreover, that China was opposite to us, I have often taken down my atlas and hunted through that ancient empire, in hopes of finding a corresponding sheet of water. Failing to do so I had made one with my pencil, writing against it, “Cranberry Pond,” that being the name of its American brother.

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Just above the pond on the grassy ridge stood an old, dilapidated building which had long borne the name of the “haunted house.” I never knew whether this title was given it on account of its proximity to the “old mine,” or because it stood near the very spot where, years and years ago, the “bloody Indians” pushed those cart-loads of burning hemp against the doors “of the only remaining house in Quaboag”—for which see Goodrich’s Child’s History, page—, somewhere toward the commencement. I only know that ’twas called the “haunted house,” and that for a long time no one would live there, on account of the rapping, dancing, and cutting up generally which was said to prevail, there particularly in the west room, the one overhung with ivy and grapevines.

Three or four years before our story opens a widow lady, Mrs. Hudson, with her only daughter, Mabel, appeared in our neighborhood, hiring the “haunted house,” and, in spite of the neighbors’ predictions to the contrary, living there quietly and peaceably, unharmed by ghost or goblin. At first Mrs. Hudson was looked upon with distrust, and even a league with a certain old fellow was hinted at; but as she seemed to be well disposed, kind, and affable toward all, this feeling gradually wore away, and now she was universally liked, while Mabel, her daughter, was a general favorite. For two years past, Mabel had worked in the Fiskdale factory a portion of the time, going to school the remainder of the year. She was fitting herself for a teacher, and as the school in our district was small, the trustees had this summer kindly offered it to her. This arrangement delighted me; for, next to Nellie Gilbert, I loved Mabel Hudson best of anybody; and I fancied, too, that they looked alike, but of course it was all fancy.

Mrs. Hudson was a tailoress, and the day following my visit to Mr. Gilbert’s I was sent by mother to take her some work. I found her in the little porch, her white cap-border falling over her placid face, and her wide checked apron coming nearly to the bottom of her dress. Mabel was there, too, and as she arose to receive me something about her reminded me of Adaline Gilbert. I could not tell what it was, for Mabel was very beautiful, and beside her Adaline would be plain; still there was a resemblance, either in voice or manner, and this it was, perhaps, which made me so soon mention the Gilberts and my visit to them the day previous.

Instantly Mrs. Hudson and Mabel exchanged glances, and I thought the face of the former grew a shade paler; still I may have been mistaken, for in her usual tone of voice she began to ask me numberless questions concerning the family, which seemed singular, as she was not remarkable for curiosity. But it suited me. I loved to talk then not less than I do now, and in a few minutes I had told all I knew—and more, too, most likely.

At last Mrs. Hudson asked about Mr. Gilbert, and how I liked him.

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“Not a bit,” said I. “He’s the hatefulest, crossest, big-feelingest man I ever saw, and Adaline is just like him!”

Had I been a little older I might, perhaps, have wondered at the crimson flush which my hasty words brought to Mrs. Hudson’s cheek, but I did not notice it then, and thinking she was, of course, highly entertained, I continued to talk about Mr. Gilbert and Adaline, in the last of whom Mabel seemed the most interested. Of Nellie I spoke with the utmost affection, and when Mrs. Hudson expressed a wish to see her, I promised, if possible, to bring her there; then as I had already outstayed the time for which permission had been given, I tied on my sunbonnet and started for home, revolving the ways and means by which I should keep my promise.

This proved to be a very easy matter; for within a few days Nellie came to return my visit, and as mother had other company she the more readily gave us permission to go where we pleased. Nellie had a perfect passion for ghost and witch stories, saying though that “she never liked to have them explained—she’d rather they’d be left in solemn mystery;” so when I told her of the “old mine” and the “haunted house” she immediately expressed a desire to see them. Hiding our bonnets under our aprons the better to conceal our intentions from sister Lizzie, who, we fancied, had serious thoughts of *tagging*, we sent her up-stairs in quest of something which we knew was not there, and then away we scampered down the green lane and across the pasture, dropping once into some alders as Lizzie’s yellow hair became visible on the fence at the foot of the lane. Our consciences smote us a little, but we kept still until she returned to the house; then, continuing our way, we soon came in sight of the mine, which Nellie determined to explore.

It was in vain that I tried to dissuade her from the attempt. She was resolved, and stationing myself at a safe distance I waited while she scrambled over stones, sticks, logs, and bushes, until she finally disappeared in the cave. Ere long, however, she returned with soiled pantalets, torn apron, and scratched face, saying that “the mine was nothing in the world but a hole in the ground, and a mighty little one at that.” After this I didn’t know but I would sometime venture in, but for fear of what might happen I concluded to choose a time when I hadn’t run away from Liz!

When I presented Nellie to Mrs. Hudson she took both her hands in hers, and, greatly to my surprise, kissed her on both cheeks. Then she walked hastily into the next room, but not until I saw something fall from her eyes, which I am sure were tears.

“Funny, isn’t it?” said Nellie, looking wonderingly at me. “I don’t know whether to laugh or what.”

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Mabel now came in, and though she manifested no particular emotion, she was exceedingly kind to Nellie, asking her many questions, and sometimes smoothing her brown curls. When Mrs. Hudson again appeared she was very calm, but I noticed that her eyes constantly rested upon Nellie, who, with Mabel's gray kitten in her lap, was seated upon the doorstep, the very image of childish innocence and beauty. Mrs. Hudson urged us to stay to tea but I declined, knowing that there was company at home, with three kinds of cake, besides cookies, for supper. So bidding her good-by, and promising to come again, we started homeward, where we found the ladies discussing their green tea and making large inroads upon the three kinds of cake.

One of them, a Mrs. Thompson, was gifted with the art of fortune-telling, by means of tea-grounds, and when Nellie and I took our seats at the table she kindly offered to see what was in store for us. She had frequently told my fortune, each time managing to fish up a freckle-faced boy so nearly resembling her grandson, my particular aversion, that I didn't care to hear it again. But with Nellie 'twas all new, and after a great whirling of tea-grounds and staining of mother's best table-cloth, she passed her cup to Mrs. Thompson, confidently whispering to me that she guessed she'd tell her something about Willie Raymond, who lived in the city, and who gave her the little cornelian ring which she wore. With the utmost gravity Mrs. Thompson read off the past and present, and then peering far into the future she suddenly exclaimed, "Oh, my! there's a gulf, or something, before you, and you are going to tumble into it headlong; don't ask me anything more."

I never did and never shall believe in fortune-telling, much less in Granny Thompson's "turned-up cups," but years after I thought of her prediction with regard to Nellie. Poor, poor Nellie!

CHAPTER IV.

JEALOUSY.

On the first Monday in June our school commenced, and long before breakfast Lizzie and I were dressed and had turned inside out the little cupboard over the fireplace where our books were kept during vacation. Breakfast being over we deposited in our dinner-basket the whole of a custard pie, and were about starting off when mother said "we shouldn't go a step until half-past eight," adding further, that "we must put that pie back, for 'twas one she'd saved for their own dinner."

Lizzie pouted, while I cried, and taking my bonnet I repaired to the "great rock," where the sassafras, blackberries, and blacksnakes grew. Here I sat for a long time, thinking if I ever did grow up and get married (I was sure of the latter), I'd have all the custard pie I could eat for once! In the midst of my reverie a footstep sounded near, and looking up I saw before me Nellie Gilbert, with her satchel of books on her arm, and her sunbonnet

hanging down her back, after the fashion in which I usually wore mine. In reply to my look of inquiry she said her father had concluded to let her go to the district school, though he didn't expect her to learn anything but "slang terms and ill manners."

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By this time it was half-past eight, and together with Lizzie we repaired to the schoolhouse, where we found assembled a dozen girls and as many boys, among whom was Tom Jenkins. Tom was a great admirer of beauty, and hence I could never account for the preference he had hitherto shown for me, who my brothers called “bung-eyed” and Sally “raw-boned.” He, however, didn’t think so. My eyes, he said, were none too large, and many a night had he carried home my books for me, and many a morning had he brought me nuts and raisins, to say nothing of the time when I found in my desk a little note, which said—But everybody who’s been to school, knows what it said!

Taking it all round we were as good as engaged; so you can judge what my feelings were when, before the night of Nellie’s first day at school, I saw Tom Jenkins giving her an orange which I had every reason to think was originally intended for me! I knew very well that Nellie’s brown curls and eyes had done the mischief; and though I did not love her the less, I blamed him the more for his fickleness, for only a week before he had praised my eyes, calling them a “beautiful indigo blue,” and all that. I was highly incensed, and when on our way from school he tried to speak good-humoredly, I said, “I’d thank you to let me alone! I don’t like you, and never did!”

He looked sorry for a minute, but soon forgot it all in talking to Nellie, who after he had left us said “he was a cleverish kind of boy, though he couldn’t begin with William Raymond.” After that I was very cool toward Tom, who attached himself more and more to Nellie, saying “she had the handsomest eyes he ever saw;” and, indeed, I think it chiefly owing to those soft, brown, dreamy eyes that I am not now “Mrs. Tom Jenkins of Jenkinsville,” a place way out West, whither Tom and his mother have migrated.

One day Nellie was later at school than usual, giving as a reason that their folks had company—a Mr. Sherwood and his mother, from Hartford; and adding that if I’d never tell anybody as long as I lived and breathed she’d tell me something.

Of course I promised, and Nellie told me how she guessed that Mr. Sherwood, who was rich and handsome, liked Adaline. “Anyway, Adaline likes him,” said she, “and oh, she’s so nice and good when he’s around. I ain’t ‘Nell, you hateful thing’ then, but I’m ’Sister Nellie.’ They are going to ride this morning, and perhaps they’ll go by here. There they are, now!” and looking toward the road I saw Mr. Sherwood and Adaline Gilbert on horseback, riding leisurely past the schoolhouse. She was nodding to Nellie, but he was looking intently at Mabel, who was sitting near the window. I know he asked Adaline something about her, for I distinctly heard a part of her reply—“a poor factory girl,” and Adaline’s head tossed scornfully, as if that were a sufficient reason why Mabel should be despised.

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Mr. Sherwood evidently did not think so, for the next day he walked by alone—and the next day he did the same, this time bringing with him a book, and seating himself in the shadow of a chestnut tree not far from the schoolhouse. The moment school was out, he arose and came forward, inquiring for Nellie, who, of course, introduced him to Mabel. The three then walked on together, while Tom Jenkins stayed in the rear with me, wondering what I wanted to act so for; “couldn’t a feller like more than one girl if he wanted to?”

“Yes, I s’posed a feller could, though I didn’t know, nor care!”

Tom made no reply, but whittled away upon a bit of shingle, which finally assumed the shape of a heart, and which I afterward found in his desk with the letter “N” written upon it, and then scratched out. When at last we reached our house Mr. Sherwood asked Nellie “where that old mine and sawmill were, of which she had told him so much.”

“Right on Miss Hudson’s way home,” said Nellie. “Let’s walk along with her;” and the next moment Mr. Sherwood, Mabel, and Nellie were in the long, green lane which led down to the sawmill.

Oh, how Adaline stormed when she heard of it, and how sneeringly she spoke to Mr. Sherwood of the “factory girl,” insinuating that the bloom on her cheek was paint, and the lily on her brow powder! But he probably did not believe it, for almost every day he passed the schoolhouse, generally managing to speak with Mabel; and once he went all the way home with her, staying ever so long, too, for I watched until ’twas pitch dark, and he hadn’t got back yet!

In a day or two he went home, and I thought no more about him, until Tom, who had been to the post-office, brought Mabel a letter, which made her turn red and white alternately, until at last she cried. She was very absent-minded the remainder of that day, letting us do as we pleased, and never in my life did I have a better time “carrying on” than I did that afternoon when Mabel received her first letter from Mr. Sherwood.

CHAPTER V.

NEW RELATIONS.

About six weeks after the close of Mabel’s school we were one day startled with the intelligence that she was going to be married, and to Mr. Sherwood, too. He had become tired of the fashionable ladies of his acquaintance, and when he saw how pure and artless Mabel was, he immediately became interested in her; and at last, overcoming all feelings of pride, he had offered her his hand, and had been accepted. At first we could hardly credit the story; but when Mrs. Hudson herself confirmed it we gave it up, and again I wondered if I should be invited. All the nicest and best chestnuts

which I could find, to say nothing of the apples and butternuts, I carried to her, not without my reward either, for when invitations came to us I was included with the rest. Our family were the only invited guests, and I felt no fears this time of being hidden by the crowd.

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Just before the ceremony commenced there was the sound of a heavy footstep upon the outer porch, a loud knock at the door, and then into the room came Mr. Gilbert! He seemed slightly agitated, but not one-half so much as Mrs. Hudson, who exclaimed, “William, my son, why are you here?”

“I came to witness my sister’s bridal,” was the answer; and turning toward the clergyman, he said, somewhat authoritatively, “Do not delay for me, sir. Go on.”

There was a movement in the next room, and then the bridal party entered, both starting with surprise as they saw Mr. Gilbert. Very beautiful did Mabel look as she stood up to take upon herself the marriage vow, not a syllable of which did one of us hear. We were thinking of Mr. Gilbert, and the strange words, “my son” and “my sister.”

When it was over, and Mabel was Mrs. Sherwood, Mr. Gilbert approached Mrs. Hudson, saying, “Come, mother, let me lead you to the bride.”

With an impatient gesture she waved him off, and going alone to her daughter, threw her arms around her neck, sobbing convulsively. There was an awkward silence, and then Mr. Gilbert, thinking he was called upon for an explanation, arose, and addressing himself mostly to Mr. Sherwood, said, “I suppose what has transpired here to-night seems rather strange, and will undoubtedly furnish the neighborhood with gossip for more than a week, but they are welcome to canvass, whatever I do. I can’t help it if I was born with an unusual degree of pride, neither can I help feeling mortified, as I many times did, at my family, particularly after she,” glancing at his mother, “married the man whose name she bears.”

Here Mrs. Hudson lifted up her head, and coming to Mr. Gilbert’s side, stood proudly erect, while he continued: “She would tell you he was a good man, but I hated him, and swore never to enter the house while he lived. I went away, took care of myself, grew rich, married into one of the first families in Hartford, and—and—”

Here he paused, and his mother, continuing the sentence, added, “and grew ashamed of your own mother, who many a time went without the comforts of life that you might be educated. You were always a proud, wayward boy, William, but never did I think you would do as you have done. You have treated me with utter neglect, never allowing your wife to see me, and when I once proposed visiting you in Hartford you asked your brother, now dead, to dissuade me from it, if possible, for you could not introduce me to your acquaintances as your mother. Never do you speak of me to your children, who, if they know they have a grandmother, little dream that she lives within a mile of their father’s dwelling. One of them I have seen, and my heart yearned toward her as it did toward you when first I took you in my arms, my first-born baby; and yet, William, I thank Heaven there is in her sweet face no trace of her father’s features. This may sound harsh, unmotherly, but greatly have I been sinned against, and now, just as a brighter day is dawning upon me, why have you come here? Say, William, why?”

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By the time Mrs. Hudson had finished, nearly all in the room were weeping. Mr. Gilbert, however, seemed perfectly indifferent, and with the most provoking coolness replied, “I came to see my fair sister married—to congratulate her upon an alliance which will bring us upon a more equal footing.”

“You greatly mistake me, sir,” said Mr. Sherwood, turning haughtily toward Mr. Gilbert, at the same time drawing Mabel nearer to him; “you greatly mistake me, if, after what I have heard, you think I would wish for your acquaintance. If my wife, when poor and obscure, was not worthy of your attention, *you* certainly are not now worthy of hers, and it is my request that our intercourse should end here.”

Mr. Gilbert muttered something about “extenuating circumstances,” and “the whole not being told,” but no one paid him any attention; and at last, snatching up his hat, he precipitately left the house, I sending after him a hearty good riddance, and mentally hoping he would measure his length in the ditch which he must pass on his way across Hemlock Swamp.

The next morning Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood departed on their bridal tour, intending on their return to take their mother with them to the city. Several times during their absence I saw Mr. Gilbert, either going to or returning from the “haunted house,” and I readily guessed he was trying to talk his mother over, for nothing could be more mortifying than to be cut by the Sherwoods, who were among the first in Hartford.

Afterward, greatly to my satisfaction, I heard that though, motherlike, Mrs. Hudson had forgiven her son, Mr. Sherwood ever treated him with a cool haughtiness, which effectually kept him at a distance.

Once, indeed, at Mabel’s earnest request, Mrs. Gilbert and Nellie were invited to visit her, and as the former was too feeble to accomplish the journey, Nellie went alone, staying a long time, and torturing her sister on her return with a glowing account of the elegantly-furnished house, of which Adaline had once hoped to be the proud mistress.

For several years after Mabel’s departure from Rice Corner nothing especial occurred in the Gilbert family, except the marriage of Adaline with a rich bachelor, who must have been many years older than her father, for he colored his whiskers, wore false teeth and a wig, besides having, as Nellie declared, a wooden leg! For the truth of this last I will not vouch, as Nellie’s assertion was only founded upon the fact of her having once looked through the keyhole of his door, and espied standing by his bed something which looked like a cork leg, but which might have been a boot! What Adaline saw in him to like I could never guess. I suppose, however, that she only looked at his rich gilding, which covered a multitude of defects.

Immediately after the wedding the happy pair started for a two-years’ tour in Europe, where the youthful bride so enraged her bald-headed lord by flirting with a mustached

Frenchman that in a fit of anger the old man picked up his goods, chattels, and wife, and returned to New York within three months of his leaving it!

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CHAPTER VI.

POOR, POOR NELLIE.

And now, in the closing chapter of this brief sketch of the Gilberts, I come to the saddest part—the fate of poor Nellie, the dearest playmate my childhood ever knew, she whom the lapse of years ripened into a graceful, beautiful girl, loved by everybody, even by Tom Jenkins, whose boyish affection had grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength.

And now Nellie was the affianced bride of William Raymond, who had replaced the little cornelian with the engagement ring. At last the rumor reached Tom Jenkins, awaking him from the sweetest dream he had ever known. He could not ask Nellie if it were true, so he came to me; and when I saw how he grew pale and trembled, I felt that Nellie was not altogether blameless. But he breathed no word of censure against her; and when, a year or two afterward, I saw her given to William Raymond, I knew that the love of two hearts was hers; the one to cherish and watch over her, the other to love and worship, silently, secretly, as a miser worships his hidden treasure.

* * * * *

The bridal was over. The farewells were over, and Nellie had gone—gone from the home whose sunlight she had made, and which she had left forever. Sadly the pale, sick mother wept, and mourned her absence, listening in vain for the light footfall and soft, ringing voice she would never hear again.

Three weeks had passed away, and then, far and near the papers teemed with accounts of the horrible Norwalk catastrophe, which desolated many a home, and wrung from many a heart its choicest treasure. Side by side they found them—Nellie and her husband—the light of her brown eyes quenched forever, and the pulses of his heart still in death!

I was present when they told the poor invalid of her loss, and even now I seem to hear the bitter, wailing cry which broke from her white lips, as she begged them to unsay what they had said, and tell her Nellie was not dead—that she would come back again.

It could not be. Nellie would never return; and in six weeks' time the broken-hearted mother was at rest with her child.

THE THANKSGIVING PARTY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

CHAPTER I.

NIGHT BEFORE THANKSGIVING.

“Oh, I do hope it will be pleasant to-morrow,” said Lizzie Dayton, as on the night before Thanksgiving she stood at the parlor window, watching a dense mass of clouds, behind which the sun had lately gone to his nightly rest.

“I hope so, too,” said Lucy, coming forward and joining her sister; “but then it isn’t likely it will be. There has been a big circle around the moon these three nights, and besides that, I never knew it fail to storm when I was particularly anxious that it should be pleasant;” and the indignant beauty pouted very becomingly at the insult so frequently offered by that most capricious of all things, the weather.

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“Thee shouldn’t talk so, Lucy,” said Grandma Dayton, who was of Quaker descent, at the same time holding up between herself and the window the long stocking which she was knitting. “Doesn’t thee know that when thee is finding fault with the weather thee finds fault with Him who made the weather?”

“I do wish, grandma,” answered Lucy, “that I could ever say anything which did not furnish you with a text from which to preach me a sermon.”

Grandma did not reply directly to this rather uncivil speech, but, she continued: “I don’t see how the weather will hurt thee, if it’s the party thee is thinking of, for Mr. Graham’s is only ten rods or so from here.

“I’m not afraid I can’t go,” answered Lucy; “but you know as well as I that if the wind blows enough to put out a candle, father is so old-maidish as to think Lizzie and I must wear thick stockings and dresses, and I shouldn’t wonder if he insisted on flannel wrappers!”

“Well,” answered grandma, “I think myself it will be very imprudent for Lizzie, in her present state of health, to expose her neck and arms. Thy poor marm died with consumption when she wasn’t much older than thee is. Let me see—she was twenty-three the day she died, and thee was twenty-two in Sep—”

“For heaven’s sake, grandmother,” interrupted Lucy, “don’t continually remind me of my age, and tell me how much younger mother was when she was married. I can’t help it if I’m twenty-two, and not married or engaged either. But I will be both before I am a year older.”

So saying, she quitted the apartment, and repaired to her own room.

Ere we follow her thither we will introduce both her and her sister to our readers. Lucy and Lizzie were the only children of Mr. Dayton, a wealthy, intelligent, and naturally social man, the early death of whose idolized, beautiful wife had thrown a deep gloom over his spirits, which time could never entirely dispel. It was now seventeen years since, a lonely, desolate widower, at the dusky twilight hour he had drawn closely to his bosom his motherless children, and thought that but for them he would gladly have lain down by her whose home was now in heaven. His acquaintances spoke lightly of his grief, saying he would soon get over it and marry again. They were mistaken, for he remained single, his widowed mother supplying to his daughters the place of their lost parent.

In one thing was Mr. Dayton rather peculiar. Owing to the death of his wife, he had always been in the habit of dictating to his daughters in various small matters, such as dress, and so forth, about which fathers seldom trouble themselves. And even now he seemed to forget that they were children no longer, and often interfered in their plans in

a way exceedingly annoying to Lucy, the eldest of the girls, who was now twenty-two and was as proud, selfish, and self-willed as she was handsome and accomplished. Old maids she held in great abhorrence, and her great

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object in life was to secure a wealthy and distinguished husband. Hitherto she had been unsuccessful, for the right one had not yet appeared. Now, however, a new star was dawning on her horizon, in the person of Hugh St. Leon, of New Orleans. His fame had preceded him, and half the village of S—— were ready to do homage to the proud millionaire, who would make his first appearance at the Thanksgiving party. This, then, was the reason why Lucy felt so anxious to be becomingly dressed, for she had resolved upon a conquest, and she felt sure of success. She knew she was beautiful. Her companions told her so, her mirror told her so, and her sweet sister Lizzie told her so more then twenty times a day.

Lizzie was four years younger than her sister, and wholly unlike her, both in personal appearance and disposition. She had from childhood evinced a predisposition to the disease which had consigned her mother to an early grave. On her fair, soft cheek the rose of health had never bloomed, and in the light which shone from her clear hazel eye, her fond father read but too clearly “passing away—passing away.”

If there was in Lucy Dayton’s selfish nature any redeeming quality, it was that she possessed for her frail young sister a love amounting almost to adoration. Years before, she had trembled as she thought how soon the time might come when for her sister’s merry voice she would listen in vain; but as month after month and year after year went by, and still among them Lizzie stayed, Lucy forgot her fears, and dreamed not that ere long one chair would be vacant—that Lizzie would be gone.

Although so much younger than her sister, Lizzie, for more than a year, had been betrothed to Harry Graham, whom she had known from childhood. Now, between herself and him the broad Atlantic rolled, nor would he return until the coming autumn, when, with her father’s consent, Lizzie would be all his own.

Alas! alas! ere autumn came
  How many hearts were weeping
For her who ’neath the willow’s shade
  Lay sweetly, calmly sleeping.

CHAPTER II.

THANKSGIVING DAY.

Slowly the feeble light of a stormy morning broke over the village of S——. Lucy’s fears had been verified, for Thanksgiving’s dawn was ushered in by a fierce, driving storm. Thickly from the blackened clouds the feathery flakes had fallen until the earth far and near was covered by a mass of white, untrodden snow.

Lucy had been awake for a long time, listening to the sad song of the wind, which swept howling by the casement. At length, with an impatient frown at the snow which covered the window pane, she turned on her pillow, and tried again to sleep. Her slumbers, however, were soon disturbed by her sister, who arose, and putting aside the curtain, looked out upon the storm, saying half-aloud, “Oh, I am sorry, for Lucy will be disappointed.”

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“I disappointed!” repeated Lucy; “now, Lizzie, why not own it, and say you are as much provoked at the weather as I am, and wish this horrid storm had stayed in the icy caves of Greenland?”

“Because,” answered Lizzie, “I really care but little about the party. You know Harry will not be there, and besides that, the old, ugly pain has come back to my side this morning;” and even as she spoke a low, hacking cough fell on Lucy’s ear like the echo of a distant knell.

Lucy raised herself up, and leaning on her elbow looked earnestly at her sister, and fancied (’twas not all fancy), that her cheeks had grown thinner and her brow whiter within a few weeks. Lizzie proceeded with her toilet, although she was twice obliged to stop on account of “the ugly pain,” as she called it.

“Hurry, sister,” said Lucy, “and you will feel better when you get to the warm parlor.”

Lizzie thought so, too, and she accelerated her movements as much as possible. Just as she was leaving the room Lucy detained her a moment by passing her arm caressingly around her. Lizzie well knew that some favor was wanted, and she said, “Well, what is it, Lucy? What do you wish me to give you?”

“Nothing, nothing,” answered Lucy; “but do not say anything to father about the pain in your side, for fear he will keep you at home, and, worse than all, make me stay, too.”

Lizzie gave the required promise, and then descended to the breakfast parlor, where she found her grandmother, and was soon joined by her sister and father. After the usual salutation of the morning the latter said “There is every prospect of our being alone to-day, for the snow is at least a foot and a half deep, and is drifting every moment.”

“But, father,” said Lucy, “that will not prevent Lizzie and me from going to the party to-night.”

“You mean, if I choose to let you go, of course,” answered Mr. Dayton.

“Why,” quickly returned Lucy, “you cannot think of keeping us at home. It is only distant a few rods, and we will wrap up well.”

“I have no objections to your going,” replied Mr. Dayton, “provided you dress suitably for such a night.”

“Oh, father,” said Lucy, “you cannot be capricious enough to wish us to be bundled up in bags.”

“I care but little what dress you wear,” answered Mr. Dayton, “if it has what I consider necessary appendages, *viz*., sleeves and waist.”

The tears glittered in Lucy’s bright eyes as she said, “Our party dresses are at Miss Carson’s, and she is to send them home this morning.”

“Wear them, then,” answered Mr. Dayton, “provided they possess the qualities I spoke of, for without those you cannot go out on such a night as this will be.”

Lucy knew that her dress was minus the sleeves, and that her father would consider the waist a mere apology for one, so she burst into tears and said, rather angrily, “I had rather stay at home than go rigged out as you would like to have me.”

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“Very well; you can stay at home,” was Mr. Dayton’s quiet reply.

In a few moments he left the room, and then Lucy’s wrath burst forth unrestrainedly. She called her father all sorts of names, such as “an old granny—an old fidget,” and finished up her list with what she thought the most odious appellation of all, “an old maid.”

In the midst of her tirade the door bell rang. It was the boy from Miss Carson’s, and he brought the party dresses. Lucy’s thoughts now took another channel, and while admiring her beautiful embroidered muslin and rich white satin skirt, she forgot that she could not wear it. Grandma was certainly unfortunate in her choice of words, this morning, for when Lucy for the twentieth time asked if her dress were not a perfect beauty, the old Quakeress answered:

“Why, it looks very decent, but it can do thee no good, for thy pa has said thee cannot wear it; besides, the holy writ reads, ’Let your adorning—’”

Here Lucy stopped her ears, exclaiming, “I do believe, grandma, you were manufactured from a chapter in the Bible, for you throw your holy writ into my face on all occasions.”

The good lady adjusted her spectacles, and replied, “How thee talks! I never thought of throwing my Bible at thee, Lucy!”

Grandma had understood her literally.

Nothing more was said of the party until dinner time, although there was a determined look in Lucy’s flashing eye, which puzzled Lizzie not a little. Owing to the storm, Mr. Dayton’s country cousins did not, as was their usual custom, come into town to dine with him, and for this Lucy was thankful, for she thought nothing could be more disagreeable than to be compelled to sit all day and ask Cousin Peter how much his fatting hogs weighed; or his wife, Elizabeth Betsey, how many teeth the baby had got; or, worse than all the rest, if the old maid, Cousin Berintha, were present, to be obliged to be asked at least three times, whether it’s twenty-four or twenty-five she’d be next September, and on saying it was only twenty-three, have her word disputed and the family Bible brought in question. Even then Miss Berintha would demur, until she had taken the Bible to the window, and squinted to see if the year had not been scratched out and rewritten! Then closing the book with a profound sigh she would say, “I never, now! it beats all how much older you look!”

All these annoyances Lucy was spared on this day, for neither Cousin Peter, Elizabeth Betsey, or Miss Berintha made their appearance. At the dinner table Mr. Dayton remarked quietly to his daughters, “I believe you have given up attending the party!”

“Oh, no, father,” said Lucy, “we are going, Lizzie and I.”

“And what about your dress?” asked Mr. Dayton.

Lucy bit her lip as she replied, “Why, of course, we must dress to suit you, or stay at home.”

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Lizzie looked quickly at her sister, as if asking how long since she had come to this conclusion; but Lucy's face was calm and unruffled, betraying no secrets, although her tongue did when, after dinner, she found herself alone with Lizzie in their dressing-room. A long conversation followed, in which Lucy seemed trying to persuade Lizzie to do something wrong. Possessed of the stronger mind, Lucy's influence over her sister was great, and sometimes a bad one, but never before had she proposed an open act of disobedience toward their father, and Lizzie constantly replied, "No, no, Lucy, I can't do it; besides, I really think I ought not to go, for that pain in my side is no better."

"Nonsense, Lizzie," said Lucy. "If you are going to be as whimsical as Miss Berintha you had better begin at once to dose yourself with burdock or catnip tea." Then, again recurring to the dress, she continued, "Father did not say we must not wear them after we got there. I shall take mine, anyway, and I wish you would do the same; and then, if he ever knows it, he will not be as much displeased when he finds that you, too, are guilty."

After a time, Lizzie was persuaded, but her happiness for that day was destroyed, and when at tea-time her father asked if she felt quite well, she could scarcely keep from bursting into tears. Lucy, however, came to her relief, and said she was feeling blue because Harry would not be present! Just before the hour for the party Lucy descended to the parlor, where her father was reading, in order, as she said, to let him see whether her dress were fussy enough to suit him. He approved her taste, and after asking if Lizzie, too, were dressed in the same manner, resumed his paper. Ere long the covered sleigh stood at the door, and in a few moments Lucy and Lizzie were in Anna Graham's dressing-room, undergoing the process of a second toilet.

Nothing could be more beautiful than was Lucy Dayton, after party dress, bracelets, curls, and flowers had all been adjusted. She probably thought so, too, for a smile of satisfaction curled her lip as she saw the radiant vision reflected by the mirror. Her bright eye flashed, and her heart swelled with pride as she thought, "Yes, there's no help for it, I shall win him sure;" then turning to Anna Graham, she asked, "Is that Mr. St. Leon to be here to-night?"

"Yes, you know he is," answered Anna, "and I pity him, for I see you are all equipped for an attack; but," continued she, glancing at Lizzie, "were not little Lizzie's heart so hedged up by brother Hal, I should say your chance was small."

Lucy looked at her sister, and a chill struck her heart as she observed a spasm of pain which for an instant contracted Lizzie's fair, sweet face. Anna noticed it, too, and springing toward her, said, "What is it, Lizzie? are you ill?"

"No," answered Lizzie, laying her hand on her side; "nothing but a sharp pain. It will soon be better;" but while she spoke her teeth almost chattered with the cold.

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Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie!

For a short time, now, we will leave the young ladies in Miss Graham's dressing-room, and transport our readers to another part of the village.

CHAPTER III.

ADA HARCOURT.

In a small and neat, but scantily furnished chamber, a poor widow was preparing her only child, Ada, for the party. The plain, white muslin dress of two years old had been washed and ironed so carefully that Ada said it looked just as well as new; but then everything looked well on Ada Harcourt, who was highly gifted, both with intellect and beauty. After her dress was arranged she went to the table for her old white gloves, the cleaning of which had cost her much trouble, for her mother did not seem to be at all interested in them, so Ada did as well as she could. As she was about to put them on her mother returned from a drawer, into the recesses of which she had been diving, and from which she brought a paper carefully folded.

"Here, Ada," said she, "you need not wear those gloves; see here"—and she held up a pair of handsome mitts, a fine linen handkerchief, and a neat little gold pin.

"Oh, mother, mother!" said Ada joyfully, "where did you get them?"

"I know," answered Mrs. Harcourt, "and that is enough."

After a moment's thought Ada knew, too. The little hoard of money her mother had laid by for a warm winter shawl had been spent for her. From Ada's lustrous blue eyes the tears were dropping as, twining her arm around her mother's neck, she said, "Naughty, naughty mother!" but there was a knock at the door. The sleigh which Anna Graham had promised to send for Ada had come; so dashing away her tears, and adjusting her new mitts and pin, she was soon warmly wrapped up, and on her way to Mr. Graham's.

"In the name of the people, who is that?" said Lucy Dayton, as Anna Graham entered the dressing-room, accompanied by a bundle of something securely shielded from the cold.

The removal of the hood soon showed Lucy who it was, and with an exclamation of surprise she turned inquiringly to a young lady who was standing near. To her look the young lady replied, "A freak of Anna's, I suppose. She thinks a great deal of those Harcourts."

An impatient "pshaw!" burst from Lucy's lips, accompanied with the words, "I wonder who she thinks wants to associate with that plebeian!"

The words, the look, and the tone caught Ada's eye and ear, and instantly blighted her happiness. In the joy and surprise of receiving an invitation to the party it had never occurred to her that she might be slighted there, and she was not prepared for Lucy's unkind remark. For an instant the tears moistened her long silken eyelashes, and a deeper glow mantled her usually bright cheek; but this only increased her beauty, which tended to increase Lucy's vexation. Lucy knew that in her own circle there was none to dispute her claim; but she knew, too, that in a low-roofed house, in the outskirts of the town, there dwelt a poor sewing woman, whose only daughter was famed for her wondrous beauty. Lucy had frequently seen Ada in the streets, but never before had she met her, and she now determined to treat her with the utmost disdain.

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Not so was Lizzie affected by the presence of “the plebeian.” Mrs. Harcourt had done plain sewing for her father, and Lizzie had frequently called there for the work. In this way an acquaintance had been commenced between herself and Ada which had ripened into friendship. Lizzie, too, had heard the remark of her sister, and, anxious to atone as far as possible for the unkindness, she went up to Ada, expressed her pleasure at seeing her there, and then, as the young ladies were about descending to the parlors, she offered her arm, saying, “I will accompany you down, but, I have no doubt scores of beaus will quickly take you off my hands.”

The parlors were nearly filled when our party reached them, and Ada half-tremblingly clung to Lizzie’s arm, while, with queen-like grace and dignity, Lucy Dayton moved through the crowded drawing-room. Her quick eye had scanned each gentleman, but her search was fruitless. *He* was not there, and during the next half-hour she listened rather impatiently to the tide of flattery poured into her ear by some one of her admirers. Suddenly there was a stir at the door, and Mr. St. Leon was announced. He was a tall, fine-looking man, probably about twenty-five years of age. The expression of his face was remarkably pleasing, and such as would lead an entire stranger to trust him, sure that his confidence would not be misplaced. His manners were highly polished, and in his dignified, self-possessed bearing, there was something which some called pride, but in all the wide world there was not a more generous heart than that of Hugh St. Leon.

Lucy for a moment watched him narrowly, and then her feelings became perfectly calm, for she felt sure that now, for the first time, she looked upon her future husband! Ere long Anna Graham approached, accompanied by the gentleman, whom she introduced, and then turning, left them alone. Lucy would have given almost anything to have known whether St. Leon had requested an introduction, but no means of information were at hand, so she bent all her energies to be as agreeable as possible to the handsome stranger at her side, who each moment seemed more and more pleased with her.

Meantime, in another part of the room Lizzie and Ada were the center of attraction. The same kindness which prompted Anna Graham to invite Ada was careful to see that she did not feel neglected. For this purpose Anna’s brother, Charlie, a youth of sixteen, had been instructed to pay her particular attention. This he was not unwilling to do, for he knew no reason why she should not be treated politely, even if she were a sewing woman’s daughter. Others of the company, observing how attentive Charlie and Lizzie were to the beautiful girl, felt disposed to treat her graciously, so that to her the evening was passing very happily.

When St. Leon entered the room the hum of voices prevented Ada from hearing his name; neither was she aware of his presence until he had been full fifteen minutes conversing with Lucy. Then her attention was directed toward him by Lizzie. For a

moment Ada gazed as if spellbound; then a dizziness crept over her, and she nervously grasped the little plain gold ring which encircled the third finger of her left hand!

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Turning to Lizzie, who, fortunately, had not noticed her agitation, she said, “What did you say his name was?”

“St. Leon, from New Orleans,” replied Lizzie.

“Then I’m not mistaken,” Ada said inaudibly.

At that moment Anna Graham approached, and whispered something to Ada, who gave a startled look, saying, “Oh, no, Miss Anna; you would not have me make myself ridiculous.”

“Certainly not,” answered Anna; “neither will you do so, for some of your songs you sing most beautifully. Do come; I wish to surprise my friends.”

Ada consented rather unwillingly, and Anna led her toward the music-room, followed by a dozen or more, all of whom wondered what a sewing woman’s daughter knew about music. On their way to the piano they passed near St. Leon and Lucy, the former of whom started as his eye fell upon Ada.

“I did not think there was another such face in the world,” said he, apparently to himself; then turning to Lucy, he asked who that beautiful girl was.

“Which one?” asked Lucy; “there are many beauties here to-night.”

“I mean the one with the white muslin, and dark auburn curls,” said St. Leon.

Lucy’s brow darkened but she answered, “That? oh, that is Ada Harcourt. Her mother is a poor sewing woman. I never met Ada before, and cannot conceive how she came to be here; but then the Grahams are peculiar in their notions, and I suppose it was a whim of Anna’s.”

Without knowing it, St. Leon had advanced some steps toward the door through which Ada had disappeared. Lucy followed him, vexed beyond measure that the despised Ada Harcourt should even have attracted his attention.

“Is she as accomplished as handsome?” asked he.

“Why, of course not,” answered Lucy, with a forced laugh. “Poverty, ignorance, and vulgarity go together, usually, I believe.”

St. Leon gave her a rapid, searching glance, in which disappointment was mingled, but before he could reply there was the sound of music. It was a sweet, bird-like voice which floated through the rooms, and the song it sang was a favorite one of St. Leon’s, who was passionately fond of music.

“Let us go nearer,” said he to Lucy, who, nothing loath, accompanied him, for she, too, was anxious to know who it was that thus chained each listener into silence.

St. Leon at length got a sight of the singer, and said with evident pleasure, “Why, it’s Miss Harcourt!”

“Miss Harcourt! Ada Harcourt!” exclaimed Lucy. “Impossible! Why, her mother daily toils for the bread they eat!”

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But if St. Leon heard her, he answered not. His senses were locked in those strains of music which recalled memories of something, he scarcely knew what, and Lucy found herself standing alone, her heart swelling with anger toward Ada, who from that time was her hated rival. The music ceased, but scores of voices were loud in their call for another song; and again Ada sang, but this time there was in the tones of her voice a thrilling power, for which those who listened could not account. To Ada the atmosphere about her seemed charmed, for though she never for a moment raised her eyes, she well knew who it was that leaned upon the piano and looked intently upon her. Again the song was finished, and then at St. Leon's request he was introduced to the singer, who returned his salutation with perfect self-possession, although her heart beat quickly, as she hoped, yet half-feared, that that he would recognize her. But he did not, and as they passed together into the next room he wondered much why the hand which lay upon his arm trembled so violently, while Ada said to herself, "'Tis not strange he doesn't know me by this name." Whether St. Leon knew her or not, there seemed about her some strong attraction, which kept him at her side the remainder of the evening, greatly to Lucy Dayton's mortification and displeasure.

"I'll be revenged on her yet," she muttered. "The upstart! I wonder where she learned to play."

This last sentence was said aloud; and Lizzie, who was standing near, replied, "Her father was once wealthy and Ada had the best of teachers. Since she has lived in S —— she has occasionally practised on Anna's piano."

"I think I'd keep a piano for paupers to play on," was Lucy's contemptuous reply, uttered with no small degree of bitterness, for at that moment St. Leon approached her with the object of her dislike leaning upon his arm.

Ada introduced Lizzie to St. Leon, who offered her his other arm, and the three kept together until Lizzie, uttering a low, sharp cry of pain leaned heavily as if for support against St. Leon. In an instant Lucy was at her side; but to all her anxious inquiries Lizzie could only reply, as she clasped her thin, white hand over her side, "The pain—-the pain—take me home."

"Our sleigh has not yet come," said Lucy. "Oh, what shall we do?"

"Mine is here, and at your command, Miss Dayton," said St. Leon.

Lucy thanked him, and then proceeded to prepare Lizzie, who, chilled through and through by the exposure of her chest and arms, had borne the racking pain in her side as long as possible, and now lay upon the sofa as helpless as an infant. When all was ready St. Leon lifted her in his arms, and bearing her to the sleigh, stepped lightly in with her, and took his seat.

“It is hardly necessary for you to accompany us home,” said Lucy, overjoyed beyond measure, though, to find that he was going.

“Allow me to be the judge,” answered St. Leon, and other than that, not a word was spoken until they reached Mr. Dayton’s door. Then, carefully carrying Lizzie into the house, he was about to leave, when Lucy detained him to thank him for his kindness, adding that she hoped to see him again.

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“Certainly, I shall call to-morrow,” was his reply, as he sprang down the steps, and entering his sleigh, was driven back to Mr. Graham’s.

He found the company about dispersing, and meeting Ada in the hall, asked to accompany her home. Ada’s pride for a moment hesitated, and then she answered in the affirmative. When St. Leon had seated her in his sleigh he turned back, on pretext of looking for something, but in reality to ask Anna Graham where Ada lived, as he did not wish to question her on the subject.

When they were nearly home St. Leon said, “Miss Harcourt, have you always lived in S ——?”

“We have lived here but two years,” answered Ada; and St. Leon continued:

“I cannot rid myself of the impression that somewhere I have met you before.”

“Indeed,” said Ada, “when and where?”

But his reply was prevented by the sleigh’s stopping at Mrs. Harcourt’s door. As St. Leon bade Ada good night he whispered, “I shall see you again.”

Ada made no answer, but going into the house where her mother was waiting for her, she exclaimed, “Oh, mother, mother, I’ve seen him!—he was there!—he brought me home!”

“Seen whom?” asked Mrs. Harcourt, alarmed at her daughter’s agitation.

“Why, Hugh St. Leon!” replied Ada.

“St. Leon in town!” repeated Mrs. Harcourt, her eye lighting up with joy.

’Twas only for a moment, however, for the remembrance of what she was when she knew St. Leon, and what she now was, recurred to her, and she said calmly, “I thought you had forgotten that childish fancy.”

“Forgotten!” said Ada bitterly; and then as she recalled the unkind remark of Lucy Dayton she burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

After a time Mrs. Harcourt succeeded in soothing her, and then drew from her all the particulars of the party, St Leon and all. When Ada had finished her mother kissed her fair cheek, saying, “I fancy St. Leon thinks as much of little Ada now as he did six years ago;” but Ada could not think so, though that night, in dreams, she was again happy in her old home in the distant city, while at her side was St. Leon, who even then was dreaming of a childish face which had haunted him six long years.

CHAPTER IV.

LUCY.

We left Lizzie lying upon the sofa, where St. Leon had laid her. After he was gone Lucy proposed calling their father and sending for a physician, but Lizzie objected, saying she should be better when she got warm. During the remainder of that night Lucy sat by her sister's bedside, while each cry of pain which came from Lizzie's lips fell heavily upon her heart, for conscience accused her of being the cause of all this suffering. At length the weary night watches were finished, but the morning light showed more distinctly Lizzie's white brow and burning cheeks. She had taken a severe cold, which had settled upon her lungs, and now she was paying the penalty of her first act of disobedience.

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Mr. Dayton had sent for the old family physician, who understood Lizzie's constitution perfectly. He shook his head as he said, "How came she by such a cold? Did she go to the party?"

"Yes, sir," replied Mr. Dayton.

"And not half-dressed, I'll warrant," said the gruff old doctor.

Lucy turned pale as her father answered, quickly and truthfully as he thought, "No, sir, she was properly dressed."

Lizzie heard it, and though speaking was painful, she said, "Forgive me, father, forgive me; I disobeyed you. I wore the dress you said I must not wear!"

An exclamation of surprise escaped Mr. Dayton, who, glancing at Lucy, read in her guilty face what Lizzie generously would not betray.

"Oh, Lucy, Lucy," said he, "how could you do so?"

Lucy could only reply through her tears. She was sincerely sorry that by her means Lizzie had been brought into danger; but when the doctor said that by careful management she might soon be better, all feelings of regret vanished, and she again began to think of St. Leon and his promise to call. A look at herself in the mirror showed her that she was looking pale and jaded, and she half-hoped he would not come. However, as the day wore on she grew nervous as she thought he possibly might be spending his time with the hated Ada. But he was not, and at about four o'clock there was a ring at the door. From an upper window Lucy saw St. Leon, and when Bridget came up for her, she asked if the parlor was well darkened.

"An' sure it's darker nor a pocket," said Bridget, "an' he couldn't see a haporth was ye twice as sorry lookin'."

So bathing her face in cologne, in order to force a glow, Lucy descended to the parlor, which she found to be as dark as Bridget had said it was. St. Leon received her very kindly, for the devotion she had the night before shown for her sister had partially counterbalanced the spitefulness he had observed in her manner when speaking of Ada at the party. Notwithstanding Bridget's precautions, he saw, too, that she was pale and spiritless, but he attributed it to her anxiety for her sister, and this raised her in his estimation. Lucy divined his thoughts, and in her efforts to appear amiable and agreeable, a half-hour passed quickly away. At the end of that time she unfortunately asked, in a very sneering tone, "how long since he had seen the sewing girl?"

"If you mean Miss Harcourt," said St. Leon coolly, "I've not seen her since I left her last night at her mother's door."

“You must have been in danger of upsetting if you attempted to turn round in Mrs. Harcourt’s spacious yard,” was Lucy’s next remark.

“I did not attempt it,” said St. Leon. “I carried Miss Ada in my arms from the street to the door.”

The tone and manner were changed. Lucy knew it, and it exasperated her to say something more, but she was prevented by St. Leon’s rising to go. As Lucy accompanied him to the door she asked how long he intended to remain in S——.

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“I leave this evening, in the cars for New Haven,” said he.

“This evening?” repeated Lucy in a disappointed tone, “and will you not return?”

“Yes, if the business on which I go is successful,” answered St. Leon.

“A lady in question, perchance,” remarked Lucy playfully.

“You interpret the truth accurately,” said St. Leon, and with a cold, polite bow he was gone.

“Why was he going to New Haven?” This was the thought which now tortured Lucy. He had confessed that a lady was concerned in his going, but who was she, and what was she to him? Anyway, there was a comfort in knowing that Ada Harcourt had nothing to do with it!

Mistaken Lucy! Ada Harcourt had everything to do with it!

CHAPTER V.

UNCLE ISRAEL.

The lamps were lighted in the cars, and on through the valley of the Connecticut the New Haven train was speeding its way. In one corner of the car sat St. Leon, closely wrapped in cloak and thoughts, the latter of which occasionally suggested to him the possibility that his was a “Tomfool’s” errand; “but then,” thought he, “no one will know it if I fail, and if I do not, it is worth the trouble.”

When the train reached Hartford a number of passengers entered, all bound for New Haven. Among them was a comical-looking, middle-aged man, whom St. Leon instantly recognized as a person whom he had known when in college in New Haven, and whom the students familiarly called “Uncle Israel.” The recognition was mutual, for Uncle Israel prided himself on never forgetting a person he had once seen. In a few moments St. Leon was overwhelming him with scores of questions, but Uncle Israel was a genuine Yankee, and never felt happier than when engaged in giving or guessing information.

At length St. Leon asked, “Does Ada Linwood fulfil the promise of beauty which she gave as a child?”

“Ada who?” said Uncle Israel.

“Linwood,” repeated St. Leon, arguing from the jog in Uncle Israel’s memory that all was not right.

“Do you mean the daughter of Harcourt Linwood, he that was said to be so rich?”

“The same,” returned St. Leon. “Where are they?”

Uncle Israel settled himself with the air of a man who has a long story on hand, and intends to tell it at his leisure. Filling his mouth with an enormous quid of tobacco, he commenced: “Better than four years ago Linwood smashed up, smack and clean; lost everything he had, and the rest had to be sold at vandue. But what was worse than all, seein’ he was a fine feller in the main, and I guess didn’t mean to fail, he took sick, and in about a month died.”

“And what became of his widow and orphan?” asked St. Leon eagerly.

“Why, it wasn’t nateral,” said Uncle Israel, “that they should keep the same company they did before, and they’s too plaguy stuck up to keep any other; so they moved out of town and supported themselves by takin’ in sewin’ or ironin’, I forgot which.”

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“But where are they now?” asked St. Leon.

Uncle Israel looked at him for a moment, and then replied, “The Lord knows, I suppose, but Israel don’t.”

“Did they suffer at all?” asked St. Leon.

“Not as long as I stuck to them, but they sarved me real mean,” answered Uncle Israel.

“In what way?”

“Why, you see,” said Uncle Israel, “I don’t know why, but somehow I never thought of matrimony till I got a glimpse of Ada at her father’s vandue. To be sure, I’d seen her before, but then she was mighty big feelin’, and I couldn’t ha’ touched her with a hoe-handle, but now ’twas different. I bought their house. I was rich and they was poor.”

Involuntarily St. Leon clinched his fist, as Uncle Israel continued: “I seen to getting them a place in the country and then tended to ’em generally for more than six months, when I one day hinted to Mrs. Linwood that I would like to be her son-in-law. Christopher! how quick her back was up, and she gave me to understand that I was lookin’ too high! ’Twas no go with Ada, and after awhile I proposed to the mother. Then you ought to seen her! She didn’t exactly turn me out o’ door but she coolly told me I wasn’t wanted there. But I stuck to her and kept kind o’ offerin’ myself, till at last they cut stick and cleared out, and I couldn’t find them, high nor low. I bunted for more than a year, and at last found them in Hartford. Thinkin’ maybe they had come to I proposed again, and kept hangin’ on till they gave me the slip again; and now I don’t know where they be, but I guess they’ve changed their name.”

At this point the cars stopped until the upward train should pass them, and St. Leon, rising, bade his companion good evening, saying, “he had changed his mind and should return to Hartford on the other train.”

CHAPTER VI.

EXPLANATION.

Six years prior to the commencement of our story New Haven boasted not a better or wealthier citizen than Harcourt Linwood, of whose subsequent failure and death we have heard from Uncle Israel. The great beauty of his only child, Ada, then a girl of nearly thirteen, was the subject of frequent comment among the circle in which he moved. No pains were spared with her education, and many were the conjectures as to what she would be when time had matured her mind and beauty.

Hugh St. Leon, of New Orleans, then nineteen years of age, and a student at Yale, had frequently met Ada at the house of his sister, Mrs. Durant, whose eldest daughter, Jenny, was about her own age. The uncommon beauty of the child greatly interested the young Southerner and once, in speaking of his future prospects to his sister, he playfully remarked, “Suppose I wait for Ada Linwood.”

“You cannot do better,” was the reply, and the conversation terminated.

The next evening there was to be a child’s party at the house of Mrs. Durant, and as Hugh was leaving the house Jenny bounded after him, saying, “Oh, Uncle Hugh, you’ll come to-morrow night, won’t you? No matter if you are a grown-up man, in the junior class, trying to raise some whiskers! You will be a sort of restraint, and keep us from getting too rude. Besides, we are going to have tableaux, and I want you to act the part of bridegroom in one of the scenes.”

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“Who is to be the bride?” asked Hugh.

“Ada Linwood. Now I know you’ll come, won’t you?”

“I’ll see,” was Hugh’s answer, as he walked away.

Jenny well knew that “I’ll see” meant “yes,” and tying on her bonnet, she hastened off to tell Ada that Uncle Hugh would be present, and would act the part of bridegroom in the scene where she was to be bride.

“What! that big man?” said Ada. “How funny!”

Before seven the next evening Mrs. Durant’s parlors were filled, for the guests were not old enough or fashionable enough to delay making their appearance until morning. Hugh was the last to arrive, for which Jenny scolded him soundly, saying they were all ready for tableaus. “But come, now,” said she, “and let me introduce you to the bride.”

In ten minutes more the curtain rose, and Hugh St. Leon appeared with Ada on his arm, standing before a gentleman in clerical robes, who seemed performing the marriage ceremony. Placing a ring on Ada’s third finger, St. Leon, when the whole was finished, took advantage of his new relationship, and kissed the lips of the bride. Amid a storm of applause the curtain dropped, and as he led the blushing Ada away he bent down, and pointing to the ring, whispered, “Wear it until some future day, when, by replacing it, I shall make you really my little wife.”

The words were few and lightly spoken, but they touched the heart of the young Ada, awakening within her thoughts and feelings of which she never before had dreamed. Frequently, after that, she met St. Leon, who sometimes teased her about being his wife; but when he saw how painfully embarrassed she seemed on such occasions, he desisted.

The next year he was graduated, and the same day on which he received the highest honors of his class was long remembered with heartfelt sorrow, for ere the city clocks tolled the hour of midnight he stood with his orphaned niece, Jenny, weeping over the inanimate form of his sister, Mrs. Durant, who had died suddenly in a fit of apoplexy. Mr. Durant had been dead some years, and as Jenny had now no relatives in New Haven, she accompanied her uncle to his Southern home. Long and passionately she wept on Ada’s bosom as she bade her farewell, promising never to forget her, but to write her three pages of foolscap every week. To do Jenny justice, we must say that this promise was faithfully kept for a whole month, and then, with thousands of its sisterhood, it disappeared into the vale of broken promises and resolutions.

She still wrote occasionally, and at the end of each epistle there was always a long postscript from Hugh, which Ada prized almost as much as she did Jenny’s whole letter;

and when at last matters changed, the letter becoming Hugh's and the postscript Jenny's, she made no objection, even if she felt any. At the time of her father's failure and death, a long unanswered letter was lying in her portfolio, which was entirely forgotten until weeks after, when,

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in the home which Uncle Israel so *disinterestedly* helped them to procure, she and her mother were sewing for the food which they ate. Then a dozen times was an answer commenced, blotted with tears, and finally destroyed, until Ada, burying her face in her mother's lap, sobbed out, "Oh, mother, I cannot do it. I cannot write to tell them how poor we are, for I remember that Jenny was proud, and laughed at the schoolgirls whose fathers were not rich."

So the letter was never answered, and as St. Leon about that time started on a tour through Europe, he knew nothing of their change of circumstances. On his way home he had in Paris met with Harry Graham, who had been his classmate, and who now won from him a promise that on his return to America he would visit his parents, in S ——. He did so, and there, as we have seen, met with Ada Harcourt, whose face, voice, and manner reminded him so strangely of the Ada he had known years before, and whom he had never forgotten.

As the reader will have supposed, the sewing-woman whose daughter Lucy Dayton so heartily despised was none other than Mrs. Linwood, of New Haven, who had taken her husband's first name in order to avoid the persecutions of Uncle Israel. The day following the party St. Leon spent in making inquiries concerning Mrs. Harcourt, and the information thus obtained determined him to start at once for New Haven, in order to ascertain if his suspicions are correct.

The result of his journey we already know. Still he resolved not to make himself known immediately, but to wait until he satisfied himself that Ada was as good as beautiful. And then?

A few more chapters will tell us what then.

CHAPTER VII.

A MANEUVER.

The gray twilight of a cold December afternoon was creeping over the village of S——, when Ada Harcourt left her seat by the window, where, the livelong day, she had sat stitching till her heart was sick and her eyes were dim. On the faded calico lounge near the fire lay Mrs. Harcourt, who for several days had been unable to work on account of a severe cold which seemed to have settled in her face and eyes.

"There," said Ada, as she brushed from her gingham apron the bits of thread and shreds of cotton, "there, it is done at last, and now before it is quite dark I will take it home."

"No, not to-night," said Mrs. Harcourt; "to-morrow will do just as well."

“But, mother,” answered Ada, “you know Mrs. Dayton always pays as soon as the work is delivered, and what I have finished will come to two dollars and a half, which will last a long time, and we shall not be obliged to take any from the sum laid by to pay our rent; besides, you have had nothing nourishing for a long time; so let me go, and on my way home I will buy you something nice for supper.”

Mrs. Harcourt said no more, but the tears fell from her aching eyes as she thought how hard her daughter was obliged to labor, now that she was unable to assist her. In a moment Ada was in the street. The little alley in which she lived was soon traversed, and she about turning into Main Street, when rapid footsteps approached her, and St. Leon appeared at her side, saying, “Good evening, Miss Harcourt; allow me to relieve you of that bundle.”

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And before she could prevent it he took from her hands the package, while he continued, “May I ask how far you are walking to-night?”

Ada hesitated a moment, but quickly forcing down her pride, she answered, “Only as far as Mr. Dayton’s. I am carrying home some work.”

“Indeed!” said he, “then I can have your company all the way, for I am going to inquire after Lizzie.”

They soon reached their destination, and their ring at the door was not, as usual, answered by Bridget but by Lucy herself, whose sweet smile, as she greeted St. Leon, changed into an angry scowl when she recognized his companion.

“Ada Harcourt!” said she, and Ada, blushing scarlet, began: “I have brought—” but she was interrupted by St. Leon, who handed Lucy the bundle, saying:

“Here is your work, Miss Dayton, and I hope it will suit you, for we took a great deal of pains with it.”

Lucy tried to smile as she took the work, and then opening the parlor door she with one hand motioned St. Leon to enter, while with the other she held the hall door ajar, as if for Ada to depart. A tear trembled on Ada’s long eyelashes, as she timidly asked;

“Can I see your grandmother?”

“Mrs. Dayton, I presume you mean,” said Lucy haughtily.

Ada bowed and Lucy continued: “She is not at home just at present.”

“Perhaps, then, you can pay me for the work,” said Ada.

The scowl on Lucy’s face grew darker as she replied, “I have nothing to do with grandma’s hired help. Come to-morrow and she will be here. How horridly cold this open door makes the hall!”

Ada thought of the empty cupboard at home, and of her pale, sick mother. Love for her conquered all other feeling, and in a choking voice she said, “Oh, Miss Dayton, if you will pay it you will confer a great favor on me, for mother is sick, and we need it so much!”

There was a movement in the parlor. St. Leon was approaching, and with an impatient gesture Lucy opened the opposite door, saying to Ada, “Come in here.”

The tone was so angry that, under any other circumstances, Ada would have gone away. Now, however, she entered, and Lucy, taking out her purse, said, “How much is the sum about which you make so much fuss?”

“Two dollars and a half,” answered Ada.

“Two dollars and a half,” repeated Lucy, and then, as a tear fell from Ada’s eye, she added contemptuously, “It is a small amount to cry about.”

Ada made no reply, and was about leaving the room when Lucy detained her, by saying, “Pray, did you ask Mr. St. Leon to accompany you here and bring your bundle?”

“Miss Dayton, you know better—you know I did not,” answered Ada, as the fire of insulted pride flashed from her dark blue eyes, which became almost black, while her cheek grew pale as marble.

Instantly Lucy’s manner changed, and in a softened tone she said, “I am glad to know that you did not; and now, as a friend, I warn you against receiving any marks of favor from St. Leon.”

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“What do you mean?” asked Ada, and Lucy continued:

“You have sense enough to know that when a man of St. Leon’s standing shows any preference for a girl in your circumstances it can be from no good design.”

“You judge him wrongfully—you do not know him,” said Ada; and Lucy answered:

“Pray, where did you learn so much about him?”

Ada only answered by rising to go.

“Here, this way,” said Lucy, and leading her through an enter passage to the back door, she added, “I do it to save your good name. St. Leon is undoubtedly waiting for you, and I would not trust my own sister with him, were she a poor sewing girl!”

The door was shut in Ada’s face, and Lucy returned to the parlor, where she found her father entertaining her visitor. Seating herself on a crimson ottoman, she prepared to do the agreeable, when St. Leon, rising, said, “Excuse my short call, for I must be going. Where have you left Miss Harcourt?”

“I left her at the door,” answered Lucy, “and she is probably halfway to ‘Dirt Alley’ by this time, so do not be in haste.”

But he was in haste, for when he looked on the fast-gathering darkness without, and thought of the by streets and lonely alleys through which Ada must pass on her way home, he felt uneasy, and biding Miss Dayton good night, he hurried away.

Meantime, Ada had procured the articles she wished for, and proceeded home, with a heart which would have been light as a bird had not the remembrance of Lucy’s insulting language rung in her ears. Mrs. Harcourt saw that all was not right, but she forbore making any inquiries until supper was over. Then Ada, bringing a stool to her mother’s side, and laying her head on her lap, told everything which had transpired between herself, St. Leon, and Lucy.

Scarcely was her story finished when there was a rap at the door, and St. Leon himself entered the room. He had failed in overtaking Ada, and anxious to know of her safe return, had determined to call. The recognition between himself and Mrs. Harcourt was mutual, but for reasons of their own, neither chose to make it apparent, and Ada introduced him to her mother as she would have done any stranger. St. Leon possessed in an unusual degree the art of making himself agreeable, and in the animated conversation which ensued Mrs. Harcourt forgot that she was poor—forgot her aching eyes; while Ada forgot everything save that St, Leon was present, and that she was again listening to his voice, which charmed her now even more than in the olden time.

During the evening St. Leon managed in various ways to draw Ada out on all the prominent topics of the day, and he felt pleased to find that amid all her poverty she did not neglect the cultivation of her mind. A part of each day was devoted to study, which Mrs. Harcourt, who was a fine scholar, superintended.

It was fast merging toward the hour when phantoms walk abroad ere St. Leon remembered that he must go. As he was leaving he said to Ada, “I have a niece, Jenny, about your age, whom I think you would like very much.”

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Oh, how Ada longed to ask for her old playmate, but a look from her mother kept her silent, and in a moment St. Leon was gone.

CHAPTER VIII.

COUSIN BERINTHA AND LUCY'S PARTY.

Cousin Berintha, whom Lucy Dayton so much disliked and dreaded, was a cousin of Mr. Dayton, and was a prim, matter-of-fact maiden of fifty, or thereabout. That she was still in a state of single blessedness was partially her own fault, for at twenty she was engaged to the son of a wealthy farmer who lived near her father. But, alas! ere the wedding day arrived, there came to the neighborhood a young lady from Boston, in whose presence the beauty of the country girl grew dim, as do the stars in the rays of the morning sun.

Berintha had a plain face, but a strong heart, and when she saw that Amy Holbrook was preferred, with steady hand and unflinching nerve, she wrote to her recreant lover that he was free. And now Amy, to whom the false knight turned, took it into her capricious head that she would not marry a farmer—she had always fancied a physician; and if young B—— would win her, he must first secure the title of M.D. He complied with her request, and one week from the day on which he received his diploma Berintha read, with a slightly blanched cheek, the notice of his marriage with the Boston beauty. Three years from that day she read the announcement of Amy's death, and in two years more she refused the doctor's offer to give her a home by his lonely fireside, and a place in his widowed heart. All this had the effect of making Berintha rather cross, but she seldom manifested her spite toward any one except Lucy, whom she seemed to take peculiar delight in teasing, and whose treatment of herself was not such as would warrant much kindness in return.

Lizzie she had always loved, and when Harry Graham went away it was on Berintha's lap that the young girl sobbed out her grief, wondering, when with her tears Berintha's were mingled, how one apparently so cold and passionless could sympathize with her. To no one had Berintha ever confided the story of her early love. Mr. Dayton was a schoolboy then, and as but little was said of it at the time, it faded entirely from memory; and when Lucy called her a "crabbed old maid," she knew not of the disappointment which had clouded every joy and imbittered a whole lifetime.

At the first intelligence of Lizzie's illness Berintha came, and though her prescriptions of every kind of herb tea in the known world were rather numerous, and her doses of the same were rather large, and though her stiff cap, sharp nose, and curious little eyes, which saw everything, were exceedingly annoying to Lucy, she proved herself an invaluable nurse, warming up old Dr. Benton's heart into a glow of admiration of her wonderful skill! Hour after hour she sat by Lizzie, bathing her burning brow, or

smoothing her tumbled pillow. Night after night she kept her tireless watch, treading softly around the sick-room, and lowering her loud, harsh voice to a whisper, lest she should disturb the uneasy slumbers of the sick girl, who, under her skilful nursing, gradually grew better.

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“Was there ever such a dear, good cousin,” said Lizzie, one day, when a nervous headache had been coaxed away by what Berintha called her “mesmeric passes;” and “Was there ever such a horrid bore,” said Lucy, on the same day, when Cousin Berintha “thought she saw a white hair in Lucy’s raven curls!” adding, by way of consolation, “It wouldn’t be anything strange, for I began to grow gray before I was as old as you.”

“And that accounts tor your head being just the color of wool,” angrily retorted Lucy, little dreaming of the bitter tears and sleepless nights which had early blanched her cousin’s hair to its present whiteness.

For several winters Lucy had been in the habit of giving a large party, and as she had heard that St. Leon was soon going South, she felt anxious to have it take place ere he left town. But what should she do with Berintha, who showed no indications of leaving, though Lizzie was much better?

“I declare,” said she to herself, “that woman is enough to worry the life out of me. I’ll speak to Liz about it this very day.”

Accordingly, that afternoon, when alone with her sister, she said, “Lizzie, is it absolutely necessary that Berintha should stay here any longer, to tuck you up, and feed you sage tea through a straw?”

Lizzie looked inquiringly at her sister, who continued: “To tell you the truth, I’m tired of having her around, and must manage some way to get rid of her before next week, for I mean to have a party Thursday night.”

Lizzie’s eyes now opened in astonishment, as she exclaimed, “A party! oh, Lucy, wait until I get well.”

“You’ll be able by that time to come down-stairs in your crimson morning-gown, which becomes you so well,” answered Lucy.

“But father’s away,” rejoined Lizzie; to which Lucy replied:

“So much the better, for now I shan’t be obliged to ask any old things. I told him I meant to have it while he was gone, for you know he hates parties. But what shall I do with Berintha?”

“Why, what possible harm can she do?” asked Lizzie. “She would enjoy it very much, I know; for in spite of her oddities, she likes society.”

“Well, suppose she does; nobody wants her round, prating about white hairs and mercy knows what. Come, you tell her you don’t need her services any longer—that’s a good girl.”

There was a look of mischief in Lizzie's eye, and a merry smile on her lip, as she said, "Why, don't you know that father has invited her to spend the winter, and she has accepted the invitation?"

"Invited her to spend the winter!" repeated Lucy, while the tears glittered in her bright eyes. "What does he mean?"

"Why," answered Lizzie, "it is very lonely at Cousin John's, and his wife makes more of a servant of Berintha than she does a companion, so father, out of pity, asked her to stay with us, and she showed her good taste by accepting."

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“I’ll hang myself in the woodshed before spring—see if I don’t!” and burying her face in her hands, Lucy wept aloud, while Lizzie, lying back upon her pillow, laughed immoderately at her sister’s distress.

“There’s a good deal to laugh at, I think,” said Lucy, more angrily than she usually addressed her sister. “If you have any pity, do devise some means of getting rid of her, for a time, at least.”

“Well, then,” answered Lizzie, “she wants to go home for a few days, in order to make some necessary preparations for staying with us, and perhaps you can coax her to go now, though I for one would like to have her stay. Everybody knows she is your cousin, and no one will think less of you for having her here.”

“But I won’t do it,” said Lucy, “and that settles it. Your plan is a good one, and I’ll get her off—see if I don’t!”

The next day, which was Saturday, Lucy was unusually kind to her cousin, giving her a collar, offering to fix her cap, and doing numerous other little things, which greatly astonished Berintha. At last, when dinner was over, she said, “Come, cousin, what do you say to a sleigh ride this afternoon? I haven’t been down to Elizabeth Betsey’s in a good while, so suppose we go to-day.”

Berintha was taken by surprise, but after a moment she said just what Lucy hoped she would say, *viz*., that she was wanting to go home for a few days, and if Lizzie were only well enough, she would go now.

“Oh, she is a great deal better,” said Lucy, “and you can leave her as well as not. Dr. Benton says I am almost as good a nurse as you and I will take good care of her—-besides, I really think you need rest; so go, if you wish to, and next Saturday I will come round after you.”

Accordingly, Berintha, who suspected nothing, was coaxed into going home, and when at three o’clock the sleigh was said to be ready, she kissed Lizzie good-by, and taking her seat by the side of Lucy, was driven rapidly toward her brother’s house.

* * * * *

“There! haven’t I managed it capitally!” exclaimed Lucy, as she reentered her sister’s room after her ride; “but the bother of it is, I’ve promised to go round next Saturday, and bring not only Berintha, but Elizabeth Betsey, and her twins! Won’t it be horrible! However, the party’ll be over, so I don’t care.”

Cousin Berintha being gone, there was no longer any reason why the party should be kept a secret, and before nightfall every servant in the house was discussing it, Bridget saying: “Faith, an’ I thought it was mighty good she was gettin’ with that woman.”

Mrs. Dayton was highly indignant at the trick which she plainly saw had been put upon Berintha, but Lucy only replied, “that she wished it were as easy a matter to get rid of grandma!”

On Monday cards of invitation to the number of one hundred and fifty were issued, and when Lizzie, in looking them over, asked why Ada Harcourt was left out, Lucy replied, that “she guessed she wasn’t going to insult her guests by inviting a sewing girl with them. Anna Graham could do so, but nobody was going to imitate her.”

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“Invite her, then, for my sake, and in my name,” pleaded Lizzie, but Lucy only replied:

“I shall do no such thing;” and thus the matter was settled.

Amid the hurry and preparation for the party, days glided rapidly away, and Thursday morning came, bright, beautiful, and balmy, almost, as an autumnal day.

“Isn’t this delightful!” said Lucy, as she stepped out upon the piazza, and felt the warm southern breeze upon her cheek. “It’s a wonder, though,” she continued, “that Madam Nature didn’t conjure up an awful storm for my benefit, as she usually does!”

Before night she had occasion to change her mind concerning the day.

Dinner was over, and she in Lizzie’s room was combing out her long curls, and trying the effect of wearing them entirely behind her ears. Suddenly there was the sound of sleigh bells, which came nearer, until they stopped before the door. Lucy flew to the window, and in tones of intense anger and surprise, exclaimed, “Now, heaven defend us! here is Cousin John’s old lumber sleigh and rackabone horse, with Berintha and a hair trunk, a red trunk, two bandboxes, a carpet-bag, a box full of herbs, and a pillowcase full of stockings. What does it all mean?”

She soon found out what it all meant, for Berintha entered the room in high spirits. Kissing Lizzie, she next advanced toward Lucy, saying, “You didn’t expect me, I know; but this morning was so warm and thawing that John said he knew the sleighing would all be gone by Saturday, so I concluded to come to-day.”

Lucy was too angry to reply, and rushing from the room, she closed the door after her, with a force which fairly made the windows rattle. Berintha looked inquiringly at Lizzie, who felt inadequate to an explanation; so Berintha knew nothing of the matter until she descended to the kitchen, and there learned the whole. Now, if Lucy had treated her cousin politely and good-naturedly, she would have saved herself much annoyance, but on the contrary, she told her that she was neither expected nor wanted there; that parties were never intended for “such old things;” and that now she was there, she hoped she would stay in her own room, unless she should happen to be wanted to wait on the table!

This speech, of course, exasperated Berintha, but she made no reply, although there was on her face a look of quiet determination, which Lucy mistook for tacit acquiescence in her proposal.

Five—six—seven—eight—struck the little brass clock, and no one had come except old Dr. Benton, who, being a widower and an intimate friend of the family, was invited, as Lucy said, for the purpose of beauing grandma! Lizzie, in crimson double-gown, and soft, warm shawl, was reclining on the sofa in the parlor, the old doctor muttering about

carelessness, heated rooms, late hours, *etc*. Grandma, in rich black silk and plain Quaker cap, was hovering near her favorite child, asking continually if she were too hot, or too cold or too tired, while Lucy, in white muslin dress and flowing curls, flitted hither and thither, fretting at the servants, or ordering grandma, and occasionally tapping her sister's pale cheek, to see if she could not coax some color into it.

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“You’ll live to see it whiter still,” said the doctor, who was indignant at finding his patient down-stairs.

And where all this time was Berintha? The doctor asked this question, and Lucy asked this question, while Lizzie replied, that “she was in her room.”

“And I hope to goodness she’ll stay there,” said Lucy.

Dr. Benton’s gray eyes fastened upon the amiable young lady, who, by way of explanation, proceeded to relate her maneuvers for keeping “the old maid” from the party.

We believe we have omitted to say that Lucy had some well-founded hopes of being one day, together with her sister, heiress of Dr. Benton’s property, which was considerable. He was a widower, and had no relatives. He was also very intimate with Mr. Dayton’s family, always evincing a great partiality for Lucy and Lizzie, and had more than once hinted at the probable disposal of his wealth. Of course Lucy, in his presence, was all amiability, and though he was usually very far-sighted, he but partially understood her real character. Something, however, in her remarks concerning Berintha displeased him. Lucy saw it, but before she had time for any thought on the subject the door-bell rang, and a dozen or more of guests entered.

The parlors now began to fill rapidly. Ere long St. Leon came, and after paying his compliments to Lucy, he took his station between her and the sofa, on which Lizzie sat. So delighted was Lucy to have him thus near that she forgot Berintha, until that lady herself appeared in the room, bowing to those she knew, and seating herself on the sofa, very near St. Leon. The angry blood rushed in torrents to Lucy’s face, and St. Leon, who saw something was wrong, endeavored to divert her mind by asking her various questions.

At last he said, “I do not see Miss Harcourt. Where is she?”

“She is not expected,” answered Lucy carelessly.

“Ah!” said St. Leon; and Berintha, touching his arm, rejoined:

“Of course you could not think Ada Harcourt would be invited here!”

“Indeed! Why not?” asked St. Leon, and Berintha continued:

“To be sure, Ada is handsome, and Ada is accomplished, but then Ada is poor, and consequently can’t come!”

“But I see no reason why poverty should debar her from good society,” said St. Leon; and Berintha, with an exultant glance at Lucy, who, if possible, would have paralyzed her tongue, replied:

“Why, if Ada were present, she might rival somebody in somebody’s good opinion. Wasn’t that what you said, Cousin Lucy? Please correct me, if I get wrong.”

Lucy frowned angrily, but made no reply, for Berintha had quoted her very words. After a moment’s pause she proceeded: “Yes, Ada is poor; so though she can come to the front door with a gentleman, she cannot go out that way, but must be led to a side door or back door; which was it, Cousin Lucy?”

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” answered Lucy; and Berintha, in evident surprise, exclaimed:

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“Why, don’t you remember when Ada came here with a gentleman—let me see, who was it?—well, no matter who ’twas—she came with a gentleman—he was ushered into the parlor, while you took her into a side room, then into a side passage, and out at the side door, kindly telling her to beware of the gentleman in the parlor, who could want nothing good of sewing girls!”

“You are very entertaining to-night,” said Lucy; to which Berintha replied:

“You did not think I could be so agreeable, did you, when you asked me to keep out of sight this evening, and said that such old fudges as grandma and I would appear much better in our rooms, taking snuff, and nodding at each other over our knitting work?”

Lucy looked so distressed that Lizzie pitied her, and touching Berintha she said, “Please don’t talk any more.”

At that moment supper was announced, and after it was over St. Leon departed, notwithstanding Lucy’s urgent request that he would remain longer. As the street door closed after him she felt that she would gladly have seen every other guest depart also. A moody fit came on, and the party would have been voted a failure had it not been for the timely interference of Dr. Benton and Berintha. Together they sought out any who seemed neglected, entertaining them to the best of their ability, and leaving with every one the impression that they were the best-natured couple in the world. At eleven o’clock, Lizzie, wearied out, repaired to her chamber. Her departure was the signal for others, and before one o’clock the last good night was said, the doors locked, the silver gathered up, the tired servants dismissed, and Lucy, in her sister’s room, was giving vent to her wrath against Berintha, the party, St. Leon, and all.

Scolding, however, could do her no good, and ere long, throwing herself undressed upon a lounge she fell asleep, and dreamed that grandma was married to the doctor, that Berintha had become her stepmother, and, worse than all, that Ada Harcourt was Mrs. St. Leon.

CHAPTER IX.

A WEDDING AT ST. LUKE’S.

The day but one following the party, as Lucy was doing some shopping down street she stepped for a moment into her dressmaker’s, Miss Carson’s, where she found three or four of her companions, all eagerly discussing what seemed to be quite an interesting topic. As Lucy entered, one of them turning toward her said; “Oh, isn’t it strange? Or haven’t you heard?”

“Heard what?” asked Lucy; and her companion replied:

“Why, Ada Harcourt is going to be married. Miss Carson is making her the most beautiful traveling dress, with silk hat to match—”

“Besides three or four elegant silk dresses,” chimed in another.

“And the most charming morning-gown you ever saw—apple green, and dark green, striped—and lined with pink silk,” rejoined a third.

By this time Lucy had sunk into the nearest chair. The truth had flashed upon her, as it probably has upon you; but as she did not wish to betray her real emotions she forced a little bitter laugh, and said, “St. Leon, I suppose, is the bridegroom.”

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“Yes; who told you?” asked her companion.

“Oh, I’ve seen it all along,” answered Lucy carelessly. “He called with her once at our house!”

“But you didn’t invite her to your party,” said mischievous Bessie Lee, who loved dearly to tease Lucy Dayton. “You didn’t invite her to your party, and so he left early, and I dare say went straight to Mrs. Harcourt’s and proposed, if he hadn’t done so before. Now, don’t you wish you’d been more polite to Ada? They say he’s got a cousin South, as rich and handsome as he is, and if you’d only behaved as you should, who knows what might have happened!”

Lucy deigned Bessie no reply, and turning to another young lady, asked, “When is the wedding to be?”

“Next Thursday morning, in the church,” was the answer; and Bessie Lee again interposed, saying, “Come, Lucy, I don’t believe you have ever returned Ada’s call, and as I am going to see her, and inquire all about that Cousin Frank, suppose you accompany me, and learn the particulars of the wedding.”

“Thank you,” said Lucy; “I don’t care enough about it to take that trouble;” and soon rising she left the shop.

If Lucy manifested so much indifference, we wot of some bright eyes and eager ears which are willing to know the particulars, so we will give them as follows: When St. Leon left Mr. Dayton’s it was ten o’clock, but notwithstanding the lateness of the hour he started for the small brown house on “Dirt Alley,” where dwelt the sewing woman and her daughter, who were both busy on some work which they wished to finish that night. Ada had stopped for a moment to replenish the fire when a knock at the door startled her. Opening it she saw St. Leon, and in much surprise said, “Why, I supposed you were at the party.”

“So I have been,” said he; “but I grew weary, and left for a more congenial atmosphere;” then advancing toward Mrs. Harcourt, he took her hand, saying, “Mrs. Linwood, allow me to address you by your right name this evening.”

We draw a veil over the explanation which followed—over the fifty-nine questions asked by Ada concerning Jenny—and over the *one* question asked by St. Leon, the answer to which resulted in the purchase of all those dresses at Miss Carson’s and the well-founded rumor that on Thursday morning a wedding would take place at St. Luke’s church.

Poor Lucy! how disconsolate she felt! St. Leon was passing from her grasp, and there was no help. On her way home she three times heard of the wedding, and of Ada’s real

name and former position in life, and each time her wrath waxed warmer and warmer. Fortunate was it for Berintha and grandma that neither made her appearance until tea-time, for Lucy was in just the state when an explosive storm would surely have followed any remark addressed to her!

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The next day was the Sabbath, and as Lucy entered the church, the first object which met her eye was St. Leon, seated in the sewing woman's pew, and Ada *tolerably* though not *very* near him! "How disgusting!" she hissed between her teeth, as she entered her own richly-cushioned seat, and opened her velvet-bound prayer book. Precious little of the sermon heard she that day, for, turn which way she would, she still saw in fancy the sweet young face of her rival; and it took but a slight stretch of imagination to bring to view a costly house in the far-off "Sunny South," a troop of servants, a handsome, noble husband, and the hated Ada the happy mistress of them all! Before church was out Lucy was really sick, and when at home in her room she did not refuse the bowl of herb tea which Berintha kindly brought her, saying "it had cured her when she felt just so."

The morning of the wedding came, and though Lucy had determined not to be present, yet as the hour approached she felt how utterly impossible it would be for her to stay away; and when at half-past eight the doors were opened she was among the first who entered the church, which in a short time was filled. Nine rang from the old clock in the belfry, and then up the broad aisle came the bridal party, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Graham, Charlie and Anna, Mrs. Harcourt, or Mrs. Linwood as we must now call her, St. Leon and Ada.

"Was there ever a more beautiful bride?" whispered Bessie Lee; but Lucy made no answer, and as soon as the ceremony was concluded she hurried home, feeling almost in need of some more catnip tea!

In the eleven o'clock train St. Leon with his bride and her mother started for New Haven, where they spent a delightful week, and then returned to S——. A few days were passed at the house of Mr. Graham, and then they departed for their southern home. As we shall not again have occasion to speak of them in this story we will here say that the following summer they came North, together with Jenny and Cousin Frank, the latter of whom was so much pleased with the rosy cheeks, laughing eyes, and playful manners of Bessie Lee that when he returned home he coaxed her to accompany him; and again was there a wedding in St. Luke's, and again did Miss Carson make the bridal outfit, wishing that all New Orleans gentlemen would come to S—— for their wives.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE.

"Reuben," said Grandma Dayton to her son one evening after she had listened to the reading of a political article for which she did not care one fig, "Reuben, does thee suppose Dr. Benton makes a charge every time he calls?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Dayton; "what made you ask that question?"

“Because,” answered grandma—and her knitting needles rattled loud enough to be heard in the next room—“because, I think he calls mighty often, considering that Lizzie neither gets better nor worse; and I think, too, that he and Berintha have a good many private talks!”

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The paper dropped from Mr. Dayton's hand, and "What can you mean?" dropped from his lips.

"Why," resumed grandma, "every time he comes he manages to see Berintha alone; and hain't thee noticed that she has colored her hair lately, and left off caps?"

"Yes; and she looks fifteen years younger for it; but what of that?"

Grandma, whose remarks had all been preparatory to the mighty secret she was about to divulge, coughed, and then informed her son that Berintha was going to be married, and wished to have the wedding there.

"Berintha and the doctor! Good!" exclaimed Mr. Dayton. "To be sure, I'll give her a wedding, and a wedding dress, too."

Here grandma left the room, and after reporting her success to Berintha, she sought her granddaughters, and communicated to them the expected event. When Lucy learned of her cousin's intended marriage she was nearly as much surprised and provoked as she had been when first she heard of Ada's.

Turning to Lizzie she said, "It's too bad! for of course we shall have to give up all hopes of the doctor's money."

"And perhaps thee'll be the only old maid in the family, after all," suggested grandma, who knew Lucy's weak point, and sometimes loved to touch it.

"And if I am," retorted Lucy angrily, "I hope I shall have sense enough to mind my own business, and not interfere with that of my grandchildren!"

Grandma made no answer, but secretly she felt some conscientious scruples with regard to Lucy's grandchildren! As for Berintha she seemed entirely changed, and flitted about the house in a manner which caused Lucy to call her "an old fool, trying to ape sixteen." With a change of feelings her personal appearance also changed, and when she one day returned from the dentist's with an entire set of new teeth, and came down to tea in a dark, fashionably-made merino, the metamorphose was complete, and grandma declared that she looked better than she ever had before in her life. The doctor, too, was improved, and though he did not color his hair, he ordered six new shirts, a new coat, a new horse and a pair of gold spectacles!

After a due lapse of time the appointed day came, and with it, at an early hour, came Cousin John and Elizabeth Betsey, bringing with them the few herbs which Berintha, at the time of her removal, had overlooked. These Bridget demurely proposed should be given to Miss Lucy, "who of late was much given to drinking catnip." Perfectly indignant, Lucy threw the herbs, bag and all, into the fire, thereby filling the house with an odor which made the asthmatic old doctor wheeze and blow wonderfully during the evening.

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A few of the villagers were invited, and when all was ready Mr. Dayton brought down in his arms his white-faced Lizzie, who imperceptibly had grown paler and weaker every day, while those who looked at her as she reclined upon the sofa, sighed, and thought of a different occasion when they probably would assemble there. For once Lucy was very amiable, and with the utmost politeness and good nature waited upon the guests. There was a softened light in her eye, and a heightened bloom on her cheek, occasioned by a story which Berintha, two hours before, had told her, of a heart all crushed in its youth, and aching on through long years of loneliness, but which was about to be made happy by a union with the only object it had ever loved! Do you start and wonder? Have you not guessed that Dr. Benton, who that night for the second time breathed the marriage vow, was the same who, years before, won the girlish love of Berintha Dayton, and then turned from her to the more beautiful Amy Holbrook, finding, too late, that all is not gold that glitters? It is even so, and could you have seen how tightly he clasped the hand of his new wife, and how fondly his eye rested upon her, you would have said that, however long his affections might have wandered, they had at last returned to her, his first, best love.

CHAPTER XI.

LIZZIE.

Gathered ’round a narrow coffin,
Stand a mourning, funeral train,
While for her, redeemed thus early,
Tears are falling now like rain.

Hopes are crushed and hearts are bleeding;
Drear the fireside now, and alone;
She, the best loved and the dearest,
Far away to heaven hath flown.

Long, long, will they miss thee, Lizzie,
Long, long days for thee they’ll weep;
And through many nights of sorrow
Memory will her vigils keep.

In the chapter just finished we casually mentioned that Lizzie, instead of growing stronger, had drooped day by day, until to all save the fond hearts which watched her, she seemed surely passing away. But they to whom her presence was as sunlight to the flowers, shut their eyes to the dreadful truth, refusing to believe that she was leaving them. Oftentimes during the long winter nights would Mr. Dayton steal softly to her chamber, and kneeling by her bedside gaze in mute anguish upon the wasted face of his darling. And when from her transparent brow and marble cheek he wiped the deadly

night sweats, a chill, colder far than the chill of death, crept over his heart, and burying his face in his hands he would cry, “Oh, Father, let this cup pass from me!”

As spring approached she seemed better, and the father’s heart grew stronger, and Lucy’s step was lighter, and grandma’s words more cheerful, as hope whispered, “she will live.” But when the snow was melted from off the hillside, and over the earth the warm spring sun was shining, when the buds began to swell and the trees to put forth their young leaves, there came over her a change so fearful that with one bitter cry of sorrow hope fled forever; and again, in the lonely night season, the weeping father knelt and asked for strength to bear it when his best-loved child was gone.

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“Poor Harry!” said Lizzie one day to Anna, who was sitting by her, “Poor Harry, if I could see him again; but I never shall.”

“Perhaps you will,” answered Anna. “I wrote, to him three weeks ago, telling him to come quickly.”

“Then he will,” said Lizzie, “but if I should be dead when he comes, tell him how I loved him to the last, and that the thought of leaving him was the sharpest pang I suffered.”

There were tears in Anna’s eyes as she kissed the cheek of the sick girl, and promised to do her bidding. After a moment’s pause Lizzie added, “I am afraid Harry is not a Christian, and you must promise not to leave him until he has a well-founded hope that again in heaven I shall see him.”

Anna promised all, and then as Lizzie seemed exhausted she left her and returned home. One week from that day she stood once more in Lizzie’s sick-room, listening for the last time to the tones of the dying girl as she bade her friends adieu. Convulsed with grief Lucy knelt by the bedside, pressing to her lips one little clammy hand, and accusing herself of destroying her sister’s life. In the furthest corner of the room sat Mr. Dayton. He could not stand by and see stealing over his daughter’s face the dark shadow which falls but once on all. He could not look upon her when over her soft brown eyes the white lids closed forever. Like a naked branch in the autumn wind his whole frame shook with agony, and though each fiber of grandma’s heart was throbbing with anguish, yet for the sake of her son she strove to be calm, and soothed him as she would a little child. Berintha, too, was there, and while her tears were dropping fast, she supported Lizzie in her arms, pushing back from her pale brow the soft curls which, damp with the moisture of death, lay in thick rings upon her forehead.

“Has Harry come?” said Lizzie.

The answer was in the negative, and a moan of disappointment came from her lips.

Again she spoke: “Give him my Bible—and my curls—when I am dead let Lucy arrange them—she knows how; then cut them off, and the best, the longest, the brightest is for Harry; the others for you all. And tell—tell—tell him to meet—me in heaven—where I’m —going—going.”

A stifled shriek from Lucy, as she fell back fainting, told that with the last word, “going,” Lizzie had gone to heaven!

An hour after the tolling bell arrested the attention of many, and of the few who asked for whom it tolled nearly all involuntarily sighed and said, “Poor Harry! Died before he came home!”

* * * * *

It was the night before the burial, and in the back parlor stood a narrow coffin containing all that was mortal of Lizzie Dayton. In the front parlor Bridget and another domestic kept watch over the body of their young mistress. Twelve o'clock rang from the belfry of St. Luke's church, and then the midnight silence was broken by the shrill scream of the locomotive as the eastern train thundered into the depot. But the senses of the Irish girls were too profoundly locked in sleep to heed that common sound; neither did they hear the outer door, which by accident had been left unlocked, swing softly open, nor saw they the tall figure which passed by them into the next room—the room where stood the coffin.

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Suddenly through the house there echoed a cry, so long, so loud, so despairing, that every sleeper started from their rest, and hurried with nervous haste to the parlor, where they saw Harry Graham, bending in wild agony over the body of his darling Lizzie, who never before had turned a deaf ear to his impassioned words of endearment. He had received his sister's letter, and started immediately for home, but owing to some delay did not reach there in time to see her alive. Anxious to know the worst, he had not stopped at his father's house, but seeing a light in Mr. Dayton's parlors, hastened thither. Finding the door unlocked, he entered, and on seeing the two servant girls asleep, his heart beat quickly with apprehension. Still he was unprepared for the shock which awaited him, when on the coffin and her who slept within it his eye first rested. He did not faint, nor even weep, but when his friends came about him with words of sympathy he only answered, "Lizzie, Lizzie, she is dead!"

During the remainder of that sad night he sat by the coffin pressing his hand upon the icy forehead until its coldness seemed to benumb his faculties, for when in the morning his parents and sister came he scarcely noticed them; and still the world, misjudging ever, looked upon his calm face and tearless eye, and said that all too lightly had he loved the gentle girl whose last thoughts and words had been of him. Ah, they knew not the utter wreck the death of that young girl had made, of the bitter grief, deeper and more painful because no tear-drop fell to moisten its feverish agony. They buried her, and then back from the grave came the two heart-broken men, the father and Harry Graham, each going to his own desolate home, the one to commune with the God who had given and taken away, and the other to question the dealings of that Providence which had taken from him his all.

Days passed, and nothing proved of any avail to win Harry from the deep despair which seemed to have settled upon him. At length Anna bethought her of the soft, silken curl which had been reserved for him. Quickly she found it, and taking with her the Bible repaired to her brother's room. Twining her arms around his neck she told him of the death-scene, of which he before had refused to hear. She finished her story by suddenly holding to view the long, bright ringlet which once adorned the fair head now resting in the grave. Her plan was successful, for bursting into tears Harry wept nearly two hours. From that time he seemed better, and was frequently found bathed in tears, and bending over Lizzie's Bible, which now was his daily companion.

Lucy, too, seemed greatly changed. She had loved her sister as devotedly as one of her nature could love, and for her death she mourned sincerely. Lizzie's words of love and gentle persuasion had not been without their effect, and when Mr. Dayton saw how kind, how affectionate and considerate of other people's feelings his daughter had become, he felt that Lizzie had not died in vain.

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Seven times have the spring violets blossomed, seven times the flowers of summer bloomed, seven times have the autumnal stores been gathered in, and seven times have the winds of winter sighed over the New England hills since Lizzie was laid to rest. In her home there have been few changes. Mr. Dayton's hair is whiter than it was of old, and the furrows on his brow deeper and more marked. Grandma, quiet and gentle as ever, knits on day after day, ever and anon speaking of "our dear little Lizzie, who died years ago."

Lucy is still unmarried, and satisfied, too, that it should be so. A patient, self-sacrificing Christian, she strives to make up to her father for the loss of one over whose memory she daily weeps, and to whose death she accuses herself of being accessory. Dr. Benton and his rather fashionable wife live in their great house, ride in their handsome carriage, give large dinner parties, play chess after supper, and then the old doctor nods over his evening paper, while Berintha nods over a piece of embroidery, intended to represent a little dog chasing a butterfly and which would as readily be taken for that as for anything else, and for anything else as that.

Two years ago a pale young missionary departed to carry the news of salvation to the heathen land. Some one suggested that he should take with him a wife, but he shook his head mournfully, saying, "I have one wife in heaven." The night before he left home, he might have been seen, long after midnight, seated upon a grassy grave, where the flowers of summer were growing. Around the stone which marks the spot rose bushes have clustered so thickly as to hide from view the words there written, but push them aside and you will read, "Our darling Lizzie."