Saxe Holm's Stories eBook

Saxe Holm's Stories by Helen Hunt Jackson

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SAXE HOLM'S STORIES

[by Helen Hunt Jackson]

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Content.

Draxy Miller's Dowry.

Part I.

When Draxy Miller's father was a boy, he read a novel in which the heroine was a Polish girl, named Darachsa. The name stamped itself indelibly upon his imagination; and when, at the age of thirty-five, he took his first-born daughter in his arms, his first words were—"I want her called Darachsa."

"What!" exclaimed the doctor, turning sharply round, and looking out above his spectacles; "what heathen kind of a name is that?"

"Oh, Reuben!" groaned a feeble voice from the baby's mother; and the nurse muttered audibly, as she left the room, "There ain't never no luck comes of them outlandish names."

The whole village was in a state of excitement before night. Poor Reuben Miller had never before been the object of half so much interest. His slowly dwindling fortunes, the mysterious succession of his ill-lucks, had not much stirred the hearts of the people. He was a retice'nt man; he loved books, and had hungered for them all his life; his townsmen unconsciously resented what they pretended to despise; and so it had slowly come about that in the village where his father had lived and died, and where he himself had grown up, and seemed likely to live and die, Reuben Miller was a lonely man, and came and went almost as a stranger might come and go. His wife was simply a shadow and echo of himself; one of those clinging, tender, unselfish, will-less women, who make pleasant, and affectionate, and sunny wives enough for rich, prosperous, unsentimental husbands, but who are millstones about the necks of sensitive, impressionable, unsuccessful men. If Jane Miller had been a strong, determined woman, Reuben would

not have been a failure. The only thing he had needed in life had been persistent purpose and courage. The right sort of wife would have given him both. But when he was discouraged, baffled, Jane clasped her hands, sat down, and looked into his face with streaming eyes. If he smiled, she smiled; but that was just when it was of least consequence that she should smile. So the twelve years of their married life had gone on slowly, very slowly, but still surely, from bad to worse; nothing prospered in Reuben's hands. The farm which he had inherited from his father was large, but not profitable. He tried too long to work the whole of it, and then he sold the parts which he ought to have kept. He sunk a great portion of his little capital in a flour-mill, which promised to be a great success, paid well for a couple of years, and then burnt down, uninsured. He took a contract for building one section of a canal,

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which was to pass through part of his land; sub-contractors cheated him, and he, in his honesty, almost ruined himself to right their wrong. Then he opened a little store; here, also, he failed. He was too honest, too sympathizing, too inert. His day-book was a curiosity; he had a vein of humor which no amount of misfortune could quench; and he used to enter under the head of “given” all the purchases which he knew were not likely to be paid for. It was at sight of this book, one day, that Jane Miller, for the first and only time in her life, lost her temper with Reuben.

“Well, I must say, Reuben Miller, if I die for it,” said she, “I haven’t had so much as a pound of white sugar nor a single lemon in my house for two years, and I do think it’s a burnin’ shame for you to go on sellin’ ’em to them shiftless Greens, that’ll never pay you a cent, and you know it!”

Reuben was sitting on the counter smoking his pipe and reading an old tattered copy of Dryden’s translation of Virgil. He lifted his clear blue eyes in astonishment, put down his pipe, and, slowly swinging his long legs over the counter, caught Jane by the waist, put both his arms round her, and said,—

“Why, mother, what’s come over you! You know poor little Eph’s dyin’ of that white swellin’. You wouldn’t have me refuse his mother anything we’ve got, would you?”

Jane Miller walked back to the house with tears in her eyes, but her homely sallow face was transfigured by love as she went about her work, thinking to herself,—

“There never was such a man’s Reuben, anyhow. I guess he’ll get interest one o’ these days for all he’s lent the Lord, first and last, without anybody’s knowin’ it.”

But the Lord has His own system of reckoning compound interest, and His ways of paying are not our ways. He gave no visible sign of recognition of indebtedness to Reuben. Things went harder and harder with the Millers, until they had come to such a pass that when Reuben Miller went after the doctor, in the early dawn of the day on which little Draxy was born, he clasped his hands in sorrow and humiliation before he knocked at the doctor’s door; and his only words were hard words for a man of sensitiveness and pride to speak:—

“Doctor Cobb, will you come over to my wife? I don’t dare to be sure I can ever pay you; but if there’s anything in the store “—

“Pshaw, pshaw, Reuben, don’t speak of that; you’ll be all right in a few years,” said the kind old doctor, who had known Reuben from his boyhood, and understood him far better than any one else did.

And so little Draxy was born.

“It’s a mercy it’s a girl at last,” said the village gossips. “Mis’ Miller’s had a hard time with them four great boys, and Mr. Miller so behindhand allers.”

“And who but Reuben Miller’d ever think of givin’ a Christian child such a name!” they added.

But what the name was nobody rightly made out; nor even whether it had been actually given to the baby, or had only been talked of; and between curiosity and antagonism, the villagers were so drawn to Reuben Miller’s store, that it began to look quite like a run of custom.

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“If I hold out a spell on namin’ her,” said Reuben, as in the twilight of the third day he sat by his wife’s bedside; “if I hold out a spell on namin’ her, I shall get all the folks in the district into the store, and sell out clean,” and he laughed quizzically, and stroked the little mottled face which lay on the pillow. “There’s Squire Williams and Mis’ Conkey both been in this afternoon; and Mis’ Conkey took ten pounds of that old Hyson tea you thought I’d never sell; and Squire Williams, he took the last of those new-fangled churns, and says he, ’I expect you’ll want to drive trade a little brisker, Reuben, now there’s a little girl to be provided for; and, by the way, what are you going to call her?’

“‘Oh, it’s quite too soon to settle, that,’ said I, as if I hadn’t a name in my head yet. And then Mis’ Conkey spoke up and said: ’Well, I did hear you were going to name her after a heathen goddess that nobody over heard of, and I do hope you will consider her feelings when she grows up.’

“‘I hope I always shall, Mis’ Conkey,’ said I; and she didn’t know what to say next. So she picked up her bundle of tea, and they stepped off together quite dignified.

“But I think we’ll call her Darachsa, in spite of ’em all, Jane,” added Reuben with a hesitating half laugh.

“Oh, Reuben!” Jane said again. It was the strongest remonstrance on which she ever ventured. She did not like the name; but she adored Reuben. So when the baby was three months old, she was carried into the meeting-house in a faded blue cashmere cloak, and baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, “Darachsa Lawton Miller.”

Jane Miller’s babies always thrived. The passive acquiescence of her nature was a blessing to them. The currents of their blood were never rendered unhealthful by overwrought nerves or disturbed temper in their mother. Their infancy was as placid and quiet as if they had been kittens. Not until they were old enough to understand words, and to comprehend deprivations, did they suffer because of their poverty. Then a serious look began to settle upon their faces; they learned to watch their father and mother wistfully, and to wonder what was wrong; their childhood was very short.

Before Draxy was ten years old she had become her father’s inseparable companion, confidant, and helper. He wondered, sometimes almost in terror, what it meant, that he could say to this little child what he could not say to her mother; that he often detected himself in a desire to ask of this babe advice or suggestion which he never dreamed of asking from his wife.

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But Draxy was wise. She had the sagacity which comes from great tenderness and loyalty, combined with a passionate nature. In such a woman's soul there is sometimes an almost supernatural instinct. She will detect danger and devise safety with a rapidity and ingenuity which are incredible. But to such a nature will also come the subtlest and deepest despairs of which the human heart is capable. The same instinct which foresees and devises for the loved ones will also recognize their most hidden traits, their utmost possibilities, their inevitable limitations, with a completeness and infallibility akin to that of God Himself. Jane Miller, all her life long, believed in the possibility of Reuben's success; charged his failures to outside occasions, and hoped always in a better day to come. Draxy, early in her childhood, instinctively felt, what she was far too young consciously to know, that her father would never be a happier man; that "things" would always go against him. She had a deeper reverence for the uprightness and sweet simplicity of his nature than her mother ever could have had. She comprehended, Jane believed; Draxy felt, Jane saw. Without ever having heard of such a thing as fate, little Draxy recognized that her father was fighting with it, and that fate was the stronger! Her little arms clasped closer and closer round his neck, and her serene blue eyes, so like his, and yet so wondrously unlike, by reason of their latent fire and strength, looked this unseen enemy steadfastly in the face, day by day.

She was a wonderful child. Her physical health was perfect. The first ten years of her life were spent either out of doors, or in her father's lap. He would not allow her to attend the district school; all she knew she learned from him. Reuben Miller had never looked into an English grammar or a history, but he knew Shakespeare by heart, and much of Homer; a few odd volumes of Walter Scott's novels, some old voyages, a big family Bible, and a copy of Byron, were the only other books in his house. As Draxy grew older, Reuben now and then borrowed from the minister books which he thought would do her good; but the child and he both loved Homer and the Bible so much better than any later books, that they soon drifted back to them. It was a little sad, except that it was so beautiful, to see the isolated life these two led in the family. The boys were good, sturdy, noisy boys. They went to school in the winter and worked on the farm in the summer, like all farmers' boys. Reuben, the oldest, was eighteen when Draxy was ten; he was hired, by a sort of indenture, for three years, on a neighboring farm, and came home only on alternate Sundays. Jamie, and Sam, and Lawton were at home; young as they were, they did men's service in many ways. Jamie had a rare gift for breaking horses, and for several years the only ready money which the little farm had yielded was the price of the colts which Jamie raised and trained so admirably that they sold

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well. The other two boys were strong and willing, but they had none of their father's spirituality, or their mother's gentleness. Thus, in spite of Reuben Miller's deep love for his children, he was never at ease in his boys' presence; and, as they grew older, nothing but the influence of their mother's respect for their father prevented their having an impatient contempt for his unlikeness to the busy, active, thrifty farmers of the neighborhood.

It was a strange picture that the little kitchen presented on a winter evening. Reuben sat always on the left hand of the big fire-place, with a book on his knees. Draxy was curled up on an old-fashioned cherry-wood stand close to his chair, but so high that she rested her little dimpled chin on his head. A tallow candle stood on a high bracket, made from a fungus which Reuben had found in the woods. When the candle flared and dripped, Draxy sprang up on the stand, and, poised on one foot, reached over her father's head to snuff it. She looked like a dainty fairy half-floating in the air, but nobody knew it. Jane sat in a high-backed wooden rocking-chair, which had a flag bottom and a ruffled calico cushion, and could only rock a very few inches back and forth, owing to the loss of half of one of the rockers. For the first part of the evening, Jane always knitted; but by eight o'clock the hands relaxed, the needles dropped, the tired head fell back against the chair, and she was fast asleep.

The boys were by themselves in the farther corner of the room, playing checkers or doing sums, or reading the village newspaper. Reuben and Draxy were as alone as if the house had been empty. Sometimes he read to her in a whisper; sometimes he pointed slowly along the lines in silence, and the wise little eyes from above followed intently. All questions and explanations were saved till the next morning, when Draxy, still curled up like a kitten, would sit mounted on the top of the buckwheat barrel in the store, while her father lay stretched on the counter, smoking. They never talked to each other, except when no one could hear; that is, they never spoke in words; there was mysterious and incessant communication between them whenever they were together, as there is between all true lovers.

At nine o'clock Reuben always shut the book, and said, "Kiss me, little daughter." Draxy kissed him, and said, "Good-night, father dear," and that was all. The other children called him "pa," as was the universal custom in the village. But Draxy even in her babyhood had never once used the word. Until she was seven or eight years old she called him "Farver;" after that, always "father dear." Then Reuben would wake Jane up, sighing usually, "Poor mother, how tired she is!" Sometimes Jane said when she kissed Draxy, at the door of her little room, "Why don't you kiss your pa for good-night?"

"I kissed father before you waked up, ma," was always Draxy's quiet answer.

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And so the years went on. There was much discomfort, much deprivation in Reuben Miller's house. Food was not scarce; the farm yielded enough, such as it was, very coarse and without variety; but money was hard to get; the store seemed to be absolutely unremunerative, though customers were not wanting; and the store and the farm were all that Reuben Miller had in the world. But in spite of the poor food; in spite of the lack of most which money buys; in spite of the loyal, tender, passionate despair of her devotion to her father, Draxy grew fairer and fairer, stronger and stronger. At fourteen her physique was that of superb womanhood. She had inherited her body wholly from her father. For generations back, the Millers had been marked for their fine frames. The men were all over six feet tall, and magnificently made; and the women were much above the average size and strength. On Draxy's fourteenth birthday she weighed one hundred and fifty pounds, and measured five feet six inches in height. Her coloring was that of an English girl, and her bright brown hair fell below her waist in thick masses. To see the face of a simple-hearted child, eager but serene, determined but lovingly gentle, surrounded and glorified by such splendid physical womanhood, was a rare sight. Reuben Miller's eyes filled with tears often as he secretly watched his daughter, and said to himself, "Oh, what is to be her fate! what man is worthy of the wife she will be?" But the village people saw only a healthy, handsome girl, "overgrown," they thought, and "as queer as her father before her," they said, for Draxy, very early in life, had withdrawn herself somewhat from the companionship of the young people of the town.

As for Jane, she loved and reverenced Draxy, very much as she did Reuben, with touching devotion, but without any real comprehension of her nature. If she sometimes felt a pang in seeing how much more Reuben talked with Draxy than with her, how much more he sought to be with Draxy than with her, she stifled it, and, reproaching herself for disloyalty to each, set herself to work for them harder than before.

In Draxy's sixteenth year the final blow of misfortune fell upon Reuben Miller's head.

A brother of Jane's, for whom, in an hour of foolish generosity, Reuben had indorsed a note of a considerable amount, failed. Reuben's farm was already heavily mortgaged. There was nothing to be done but to sell it. Purchasers were not plenty nor eager; everybody knew that the farm must be sold for whatever it would bring, and each man who thought of buying hoped to profit somewhat, in a legitimate and Christian way, by Reuben's extremity.

Reuben's courage would have utterly forsaken him now, except for Draxy's calmness. Jane was utterly unnerved; wept silently from morning till night, and implored Reuben to see her brother's creditors, and beg them to release him from his obligation. But Draxy, usually so gentle, grew almost stern when such suggestions were made.

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“You don’t understand, ma,” she said, with flushing cheeks. “It is a promise. Father must pay it. He cannot ask to have it given back to him.”

But with all Draxy’s inflexibility of resolve, she could not help being disheartened. She could not see how they were to live; the three rooms over the store could easily be fitted up into an endurable dwelling-place; but what was to supply the food which the farm had hitherto given them? There was literally no way open for a man or a woman to earn money in that little farming village. Each family took care of itself and hired no service, except in the short season of haying. Draxy was an excellent seamstress, but she knew very well that the price of all the sewing hired in the village in a year would not keep them from starving. The Store must be given up, because her father would have no money with which to buy goods. In fact, for a long time, most of his purchases had been made by exchanging the spare produce of his farm at large stores in the neighboring towns. Still Draxy never wavered, and because she did not waver Reuben did not die. The farm was sold at auction, with the stock, the utensils, and all of the house-furniture which was not needed to make the store chambers habitable. The buyer boasted in the village that he had not given more than two thirds of the real value of the place. After Reuben’s debts were all paid, there remained just one thousand dollars to be put into the bank.

“Why, father! That is a fortune,” said Draxy, when he told her. “I did not suppose we should have anything, and it is glorious not to owe any man a cent.”

It was early in April when the Millers moved into the “store chambers.” The buyer of their farm was a hard-hearted, penurious man, a deacon of the church in which Draxy had been baptized. He had never been known to give a penny to any charity excepting Foreign Missions. His wife and children had never received at his hands the smallest gift. But even his heart was touched by Draxy’s cheerful acquiescence in the hard change, and her pathetic attempts to make the new home pleasant. The next morning after Deacon White took possession, he called out over the fence to poor Reuben, who stood listlessly on the store steps, trying not to look across at the house which had been his.

“I say, Miller, that gal o’ your’n is what I call the right sort o’ woman, up an’ down. I hain’t said much to her, but I’ve noticed that she set a heap by this garding; an’ I expect she’ll miss the flowers more’n anything; now my womenfolks they won’t have anythin’ to do with such truck; an’ if she’s a mind to take care on’t jest’s she used ter, I’m willin’; I guess we shall be the gainers on’t.”

“Thank you, Deacon White; Draxy’ll be very glad,” was all Reuben could reply. Something in his tone touched the man’s flinty heart still more; and before he half knew what he was going to say, he had added,—

“An’ there’s the vegetable part on’t, too, Miller. I never was no hand to putter with garden sass. If you’ll jest keep that up and go halves, fair and reg’lar, you’re welcome.”

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This was tangible help. Reuben's face lighted up.

"I thank you with all my heart," he replied. "That'll be a great help to me; and I reckon you'll like our vegetables, too," he said, half smiling, for he knew very well that nothing but potatoes and turnips had been seen on Deacon White's table for years.

Then Reuben went to find Draxy; when he told her, the color came into her face, and she shut both her hands with a quick, nervous motion, which was habitual to her under excitement.

"Oh, father, we can almost live off the garden," said she. "I told you we should not starve."

But still new sorrows, and still greater changes, were in store for the poor, disheartened family. In June a malignant fever broke out in the village, and in one short month Reuben and Jane had laid their two youngest boys in the grave-yard. There was a dogged look, which was not all sorrow, on Reuben's face as he watched the sexton fill up the last grave. Sam and Jamie, at any rate, would not know any more of the discouragement and hardship of life.

Jane, too, mourned her boys not as mothers mourn whose sons have a birthright of gladness. Jane was very tired of the world.

Draxy was saddened by the strange, solemn presence of death. But her brothers had not been her companions. She began suddenly to feel a sense of new and greater relationship to them, now that she thought of them as angels; she was half terrified and bewildered at the feeling that now, for the first time, they were near to her.

On the evening after Sam's funeral, as Reuben was sitting on the store steps, with his head buried in his hands, a neighbor drove up and threw him a letter.

"It's been lyin' in the office a week or more, Merrill said, and he reckoned I'd better bring it up to you," he called out, as he drove on.

"It might lie there forever, for all my goin' after it," thought Reuben to himself, as he picked it up from the dust; "it's no good news, I'll be bound."

But it was good news. The letter was from Jane's oldest sister, who had married only a few years before, and gone to live in a sea-port town on the New England coast. Her husband was an old captain, who had retired from his seafaring life with just money enough to live on, in a very humble way, in an old house which had belonged to his grandfather. He had lost two wives; his children were all married or dead, and in his loneliness and old age he had taken for his third wife the gentle, quiet elder sister who had brought up Jane Miller. She was a gray-haired, wrinkled spinster woman when she went into Captain Melville's house; but their life was by no means without romance.

Husband and home cannot come to any womanly heart too late for sentiment and happiness to put forth pale flowers.

Emma Melville wrote offering the Millers a home; their last misfortune had but just come to her knowledge, for Jane had been for months too much out of heart to write to her relatives. Emma wrote:—

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“We are very poor, too; we haven’t anything but the house, and a little money each year to buy what we need to eat and wear, the plainest sort. But the house is large; Captain Melville and me never so much as set foot up-stairs. If you can manage to live on the upper floor, you’re more than welcome, we both say; and we hope you won’t let any pride stand in the way of your coming. It will do us good to have more folks in the house, and it ain’t as if it cost us anything, for we shouldn’t never be willing, neither me nor Captain Melville, to rent the rooms to strangers, not while we’ve got enough to live on without.”

There was silence for some minutes between Reuben and Jane and Draxy after this letter had been read. Jane looked steadily away from Reuben. There was deep down in the patient woman’s heart, a latent pride which was grievously touched. Reuben turned to Draxy; her lips were parted; her cheeks were flushed; her eyes glowed. “Oh, father, the sea!” she exclaimed. This was her first thought; but in a second more she added, “How kind, how good of Aunt Emma’s husband!”

“Would you like to go, my daughter?” said Reuben, earnestly.

“Why, I thought of course we should go!” exclaimed Draxy, turning with a bewildered look to her mother, who was still silent. “What else is the letter sent for? It means that we must go.”

Her beautiful simplicity was utterly removed from any false sense of obligation. She accepted help as naturally from a human hand as from the sunshine; she would give it herself, so far as she had power, just as naturally and just as unconsciously.

There was very little discussion about the plan. Draxy’s instinct overbore all her father’s misgiving, and all her mother’s unwillingness.

“Oh, how can you feel so, Ma,” she exclaimed more than once. “If I had a sister I could not. I love Aunt Emma already next to you and father; and you don’t know how much we can do for her after we get there, either. I can earn money there, I know I can; all we need.”

Mrs. Melville had written that there were many strangers in the town in the summer, and that she presumed Draxy could soon find all the work she wished as seamstress; also that there were many chances of work for a man who was accustomed to gardening, as, of course, Reuben must be.

Draxy’s sanguine cheerfulness was infectious; even Jane began to look forward with interest to the new home; and Reuben smiled when Draxy sang. Lawton and Reuben were to be left behind; that was the only regret; but it was merely anticipating by a very little the separation which was inevitable, as the boys had both become engaged to

daughters of the farmers for whom they had been working, and would very soon take their positions as sons-in-law on these farms.

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The store was sold, the furniture packed, and Reuben Miller, with his wife and child, set his face eastward to begin life anew. The change from the rich wheat fields and glorious forests of Western New York, to the bare stony stretches of the Atlantic sea-board, is a severe one. No adult heart can make it without a struggle. When Reuben looked out of the car windows upon the low gray barrens through which he was nearing his journey end, his soul sank within him. It was sunset; the sea glistened like glass, and was as red as the sky. Draxy could not speak for delight; tears stood in her eyes, and she took hold of her father's hand. But Reuben and Jane saw only the desolate rocks, and treeless, shrubless, almost—it seemed to them—grassless fields, and an unutterable sense of gloom came over them. It was a hot and stifling day; a long drought had parched and shriveled every living thing; and the white August dust lay everywhere.

Captain Melville lived in the older part of the town near the water. The houses were all wooden, weather-beaten, and gray, and had great patches of yellow lichen on their walls and roofs; thin rims of starved-looking grass edged the streets, and stray blades stood up here and there among the old sunken cobble-stones which made the pavements.

The streets seemed deserted; the silence and the sombre color, and the strange low plashing of the water against the wharves, oppressed even Draxy's enthusiastic heart. Her face fell, and she exclaimed involuntarily, "Oh, what a lonesome place!" Checking herself, she added, "but it's only the twilight makes it look so, I expect."

They had some difficulty in finding the house. The lanes and streets seemed inextricably tangled; the little party was shy of asking direction, and they were all disappointed and grieved, more than they owned to themselves, that they had not been met at the station. At last they found the house. Timidly Draxy lifted the great brass knocker. It looked to her like splendor, and made her afraid. It fell more heavily than she supposed it would, and the clang sounded to her over-wrought nerves as if it filled the whole street. No one came. They looked at the windows. The curtains were all down. There was no sign of life about the place. Tears came into Jane's eyes. She was worn out with the fatigue of the journey.

"Oh dear, oh dear," she said, "I wish we hadn't come."

"Pshaw, mother," said Reuben, with a voice cheerier than his heart, "very likely they never got our last letter, and don't know we were to be here to-day," and he knocked again.

Instantly a window opened in the opposite house, and a jolly voice said, "My gracious," and in the twinkling of an eye the jolly owner of the jolly voice had opened her front door and run bareheaded across the street, and was shaking hands with Reuben and Jane and Draxy, all three at once, and talking so fast that they could hardly understand her.

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“My gracious I my gracious! Won’t Mrs. Melville be beat! Of course you’re her folks she was expecting from the West, ain’t you? I mistrusted it somehow as soon as I heard the big knock. Now I’ll jest let you in the back door. Oh my, Mis’ Melville’ll never get over this; to think of her be’n’ away, an’ she’s been lookin’ and looking and worryin’ for two weeks, because she didn’t hear from you; and only last night Captain Melville he said he’d write to-day if they didn’t hear.’”

“We wrote,” said Draxy, in her sweet, low voice, “we wrote to Aunt Emma that we’d come to-day.”

“Now did you!” said the jolly voice. “Well, that’s jest the way. You see your letter’s gone somewhere else, and now Mis’ Melville she’s gone to”—the rest of the sentence was lost, for the breathless little woman was running round the house to the back door.

In a second more the upper half of the big old-fashioned door had swung open, to Draxy’s great delight, who exclaimed, “Oh, father, we read about such doors as this in that Knickerbocker book, don’t you remember?”

But good Mrs. Carr was drawing them into the house, giving them neighborly welcome, all the while running on in such voluble ejaculatory talk that the quiet, saddened, recluse-like people were overwhelmed with embarrassment, and hardly knew which way to turn. Presently she saw their confusion and interrupted herself with—

“Well, well, you’re jest all tired out with your journey, an’ a cup o’ tea’s the thing you want, an’ none o’ my talk; but you see Mis’ Melville ’n me’s so intimate that I feel’s if I’d known you always, ’n I’m real glad to see you here, real glad; ’n I’ll bring the tea right over; the kettle was a boilin’ when I run out, ’n I’ll send Jim right down town for Captain Melville; he’s sure to be to the library. Oh, but won’t Mis’ Melville be beat,” she continued, half way down the steps; and from the middle of the street she called back, “’an she ain’t coming home till to-morrow night.”

Reuben and Jane and Draxy sat down with as bewildered a feeling as, if they had been transported to another world. The house was utterly unlike anything they had ever seen; high ceilings, wainscoted walls, wooden cornices and beams, and wooden mantels with heads carved on the corners. It seemed to them at first appallingly grand. Presently they observed the bare wooden floors, the flag-bottomed chairs, and faded chintz cushions, the row of old tin utensils, and plain, cheap crockery in the glass-doored cupboard, and felt more at home.

“You know Aunt Emma said they were poor, too,” said Draxy, answering her own unspoken thought as well as her father’s and mother’s.

Reuben pushed his hair off his warm forehead and sighed.

“I suppose we might go up-stairs, mother,” he said; “that’s to be our house, as I understand it”

Draxy bounded at the words. With flying steps she ascended the stairs and opened the first door. She stood still on the threshold, unable to move from astonishment. It was still light enough to see the room. Draxy began to speak, but broke down utterly, and bursting out crying, threw herself into the arms of her father who had just reached the top of the stairs.

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“Oh, father, it’s all fixed for a sitting-room! Father dear, I told you!”

This was something they had not dreamed of. They had understood the offer to be merely of rooms in which they could live rent-free. In fact, that had been Captain Melville’s first intention. But his generous sailor’s heart revolted from the thought of stripping the rooms of furniture for which he had no use. So Emma had rearranged the plain old-fashioned things, and adding a few more which could be spared as well as not, had fitted up a sitting-room and two bed-rooms with all that was needed for comfort. Reuben and Jane and Draxy were all crying when Mrs. Carr came back with her pitcher of smoking tea. Reuben tried to explain to her why they were crying, but she interrupted him with,—

“Well, now, I understand it jest’s if ‘twas to me it’d all happened; an’ I think it’s lucky after all that Mis’ Melville wasn’t here, for she’s dreadful easy upset if people take on. But now you drink your tea, and get all settled down’s quick’s you can, for Captain Melville ’ll be here any minute now I expect, an’ he don’t like tantrums.”

This frightened Draxy, and made a gloomy look come on Reuben’s face. But the fright and the gloom disappeared in one minute and forever when the door burst open, and a red-faced, white-haired old man, utterly out of breath, bounced into the room, and seizing Reuben by the hand gasped out, puffing between the words like a steam-engine:—

“Wreck me, if this isn’t a hard way to make port. Why, man, we’ve been looking for some hail from you for two weeks, till we began to think you’d given us the go-by altogether. Welcome to Melville Harbor, I say, welcome!” and he had shaken Reuben’s hand, and kissed Jane and turned to Draxy all in a breath. At the first full sight of Draxy’s face he started and felt dumb. He had never seen so beautiful a woman. He pulled out a red silk handkerchief and wiped his face nervously as she said, “Kiss me too, uncle,” but her warm lips were on his cheek before he had time to analyze his own feelings. Then Reuben began to say something, about gratitude, and the old sailor swore his favorite oath again: “Now, may I be wrecked if I have a word o’ that. We’re glad enough to get you all here; and as for the few things in the rooms, they’re of no account anyhow.”

“Few things! Oh, uncle,” said Draxy, with a trembling voice, and before he knew what she was about to do she had snatched his fat, weather-beaten old hand and kissed it. No woman had ever kissed John Melville’s hand before. From that moment he looked upon Draxy as a princess who had let him once kiss hers!

Captain Melville and Reuben were friends before bed-time. Reuben’s gentle simplicity and unworldliness, and patient demeanor, roused in the rough sailor a sympathy like that he had always felt for women. And to Reuben the hearty good cheer, and brisk, bluff sailor ways were infinitely winning and stimulating.

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The next day Mrs. Melville came home. In a short time the little household had adjusted itself, and settled down into its routine of living. When, in a few days, the great car-load of the Millers' furniture arrived, Capt. Melville insisted upon its all going to the auction-rooms excepting the kitchen furniture, and a few things for which Jane had especial attachment. It brought two hundred dollars, which, in addition to the price of the farm, and the store and its stock, gave Reuben just nineteen hundred dollars to put in the Savings Bank.

"And I am to be counted at least two thousand more, father dear, so you are not such a very poor man after all," said Draxy, laughing and dancing around him.

Now Draxy Miller's real life began. In after years she used to say, "I was born first in my native town; second, in the Atlantic Ocean!" The effect of the strong sea air upon her was something indescribable; joy seemed to radiate from her whole being. She smiled whenever she saw the sea. She walked on the beach; she sat on the rocks; she learned to swim in one lesson, and swam so far out that her uncle dared not follow, and called to her in imploring terror to return. Her beauty grew more and more radiant every day. This the sea gave to her body. But there was a far subtler new life than the physical, a far finer new birth than the birth of beauty,—which came to Draxy here. This, books gave to her soul. Only a few years before, a free library had been founded in this town, by a rich and benevolent man. Every week hundreds of volumes circulated among the families where books were prized, and could not be owned. When Draxy's uncle first took her into this library, and explained to her its purpose and regulations, she stood motionless for a few moments, looking at him—and at the books: then, with tears in her eyes, and saying, "Don't follow me, uncle dear; don't mind me, I can't bear it," she ran swiftly into the street, and never stopped until she had reached home and found her father. An hour later she entered the library again, leading her father by the hand. She had told him the story on the way. Reuben's thin cheeks were flushed. It was almost more than he too could bear. Silently the father and daughter walked up and down the room, looking into the alcoves. Then they sat down together, and studied the catalogue. Then they rose and went out, hand in hand as they had entered, speaking no word, taking no book. For one day the consciousness of this wealth filled their hearts beyond the possibility of one added desire. After that, Draxy and her father were to be seen every night seated at the long table in the reading-room. They read always together, Draxy's arm being over the back of her father's chair. Many a man and many a woman stopped and looked long at the picture. But neither Draxy nor her father knew it.

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At the end of two years, Draxy Miller had culture. She was ignorant still, of course; she was an uneducated girl; she wept sometimes over her own deficiencies; but her mind was stored with information of all sorts; she had added Wordsworth to her Shakespeare; she had journeyed over the world with every traveller whose works she could find; and she had tasted of Plato and Epictetus. Reuben's unfailing simplicity and purity of taste saved her from the mischiefs of many of the modern books. She had hardly read a single novel; but her love of true poetry was a passion.

In the mean time she had become the favorite seamstress of the town. Her face, and voice, and smile would alone have won way for her; but in addition to those, she was a most dexterous workwoman. If there had only been twice as many days in a year, she would have been—glad. Her own earnings in addition to her father's, and to their little income from the money in the bank, made them comfortable; but with Draxy's expanded intellectual life had come new desires: she longed to be taught.

One day she said to her father, "Father dear, what was the name of that canal contractor who borrowed money of you and never paid it?"

Reuben looked astonished, but told her.

"Is he alive yet?"

"Oh, yes," said Reuben, "and he's rich now. There was a man here only last week who said he'd built him a grand house this year."

Draxy shut her hands nervously. "Father, I shall go and get that money."

"You, child! Why it's two days' journey; and he'd never pay you a cent. I tried times enough," replied Reuben.

"But I think perhaps he would be more likely to pay it to a woman; he would be ashamed," said Draxy, "especially if he is rich now, and I tell him how much we need it."

"No, no, child; I shouldn't hear to your going; no more would mother; and it would be money wasted besides," said Reuben, with sternness unusual for him.

Draxy was silent. The next morning she went to the railway station and ascertained exactly how much the journey would cost. She was disheartened at the amount. It would be difficult for her to save so much out of a whole year's earnings. That day Draxy's face was sad. She was sewing at the house of one of her warmest friends. All her employers were her friends, but this one was a woman of rare intelligence and culture, who had loved Draxy ever since the day she had found her reading a little volume of Wordsworth, one of the Free Library books, while she was eating her dinner in the sewing-room.

Draxy looked her gratitude, but said nothing. Not the least of her charms, to the well-bred people who employed her, was her exquisite reticence, her gentle and unconscious withdrawal into herself, in spite of all familiarity with which she might be treated.

A few days later Mrs. White sent a note to Draxy with the thirty dollars inclosed, and this note to Mr. Miller:—

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"*Mr*. *Miller—dear sir*:—

"This money has been contributed, by Draxy's friends. You do not know how much we all prize and esteem your daughter and wish to help her. I hope you will be willing that she should use this money for the journey on which her heart is so set. I really advise you as a friend to let her make the effort to recover that money; I think she will get it.

"Truly, your friend,

"A. *White*."

This note brought tears of pride to Reuben's eyes. Draxy watched him closely, and said:—

"Father dear, I should like to go to-morrow."

Her preparations had already been made. She knew beforehand that her cause was won; that her father's sense of justice would not let him interfere with her use of the gift for the purpose for which it was made.

It was on a clear cold morning in January that Draxy set out. It was the second journey of her life, and she was alone for the first time; but she felt no more fear than if she had been a sparrow winging its way through a new field. The morning twilight was just fading away; both the east and the west were clear and glorious; the east was red, and the west pale blue; high in the west stood the full moon, golden yellow; below it a long narrow bar of faint rose-color; below that, another bar of fainter purple; then the low brown line of a long island; then an arm of the sea; the water was gray and still; the ice rims stretched far out from the coast, and swayed up and down at the edges, as the waves pulsed in and out. Flocks of gulls were wheeling, soaring in the air, or lighting and floating among the ice fragments, as cold and snowy as they. Draxy leaned her head against the side of the car and looked out on the marvelous beauty of the scene with eyes as filled with calm delight as if she had all her life journeyed for pleasure, and had had nothing to do but feed and develop her artistic sense.

A company of travelling actors sat near her; a dozen tawdry women and coarse men, whose loud voices and vulgar jests made Draxy shudder. She did not know what they could be; she had never seen such behavior; the men took out cards and began to play; the women leaned over, looked on, and clapped the men on their shoulders. Draxy grew afraid, and the expression of distress on her face attracted the conductor's notice. He touched her on the shoulder.

"I'll take you into the next car, Miss, if you don't like to be near these people. They're only actors; there's no harm in them, but they're a rough set."

“Actors,” said Draxy, as the kind conductor lifted her from one platform to another. “I never thought they were like that. Do they play Shakespeare?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure,” said the conductor, puzzled enough: “but I dare say they do.”

“Then I’m glad I never went to the theatre,” thought Draxy, as she settled herself in her new seat. For a few moments she could not banish her disturbed and unhappy feeling. She could not stop fancying some of the grand words which she most loved in Shakespeare, repeated by those repulsive voices.

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But soon she turned her eyes to the kindling sky, and forgot all else. The moon was slowly turning from gold to silver; then it would turn from silver to white cloud, then to film, then vanish away. Draxy knew that day and the sun would conquer. “Oh, if I only understood it,” sighed Draxy. Then she fell to thinking about the first chapter in Genesis; and while she looked upon that paling moon, she dreamed of other moons which no human eyes ever saw. Draxy was a poet; but as yet she had never dared to show even to her father the little verses she had not been able to help writing. “Oh, how dare I do this; how dare I?” she said to herself, as alone in her little room, she wrote line after line. “But if nobody ever knows, it can do no harm. It is strange I love it, though, when I am so ashamed.”

This morning Draxy had that mysterious feeling as if all things were new, which so often comes to poetic souls. It is at once the beauty and the burden, the exhaustion and the redemption of their lives. No wonder that even common men can sometimes see the transfiguration which often comes to him before whose eyes death and resurrection are always following each other, instant, perpetual, glorious. Draxy took out her little diary. Folded very small, and hid in the pocket of it, was a short poem that she had written the year before on a Tiarella plant which had blossomed in her window. Mrs. White had brought it to her with some ferns and mosses from the mountains; and all winter long it had flowered as if in summer. Draxy wondered why this golden moon reminded her of the Tiarella. She did not know the subtle underlying bonds in nature. These were the Tiarella verses:—

My little Tiarella,
If thou art my own,
Tell me how thus in winter
Thy shining flowers have blown.
Art thou a fairy smuggler,
Defying law?
Didst take of last year’s summer
More than summer saw?
Or hast thou stolen frost-flakes
Secretly at night?
Thy stamens tipped with silver,
Thy petals spotless white,
Are so like those which cover
My window-pane;
Wilt thou, like them, turn back at noon
To drops again?

Oh, little Tiarella,
Thy silence speaks;
No more my foolish question
Thy secret seeks.

The sunshine on my window
Lies all the day.
How shouldst thou know that summer
Has passed away?
The frost-flake's icy silver
Is dew at noon for thee.
O winter sun! O winter frost,
Make summer dews for me!

After reading these over several times, Draxy took out her pencil, and very shyly screening herself from all observation, wrote on the other side of the paper these lines:

The Morning Moon.

The gold moon turns to white;
The white moon fades to cloud;
It looks so like the gold moon's shroud,
It makes me think about the dead,
And hear the words I have heard read,
By graves for burial rite.

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I wonder now how many moons
In just such white have died;
I wonder how the stars divide
Among themselves their share of light;
And if there were great years of night
Before the earth saw noons.

I wonder why each moon, each sun,
Which ever has been or shall be,
In this day's sun and moon I see;
I think perhaps all of the old
Is hidden in each new day's hold;
So the first day is not yet done!

And then I think—our dust is spent
Before the balances are swung;
Shall we be loneliest among
God's living creatures? Shall we dare
To speak in this eternal air
The only discontent?

Then she shut the book resolutely, and sat up straight with a little laugh, saying to herself, "This is a pretty beginning for a business journey!"

Far better than you knew, sweet Draxy! The great successes of life are never made by the men and women who have no poetic comprehension in their souls.

Draxy's first night was spent at the house of a brother of Captain Melville's, to whom her uncle had given her a letter. All went smoothly, and her courage rose. The next day at noon she was to change cars in one of the great railroad centres; as she drew near the city she began to feel uneasy. But her directions were explicit, and she stepped bravely out into the dismal, dark, underground station, bought her ticket, and walked up and down on the platform with her little valise in her hand, waiting for the train.

In a few moments it thundered in, enveloped in a blinding, stifling smoke. The crowd of passengers poured out. "Twenty minutes for refreshments," was shouted at each car, and in a moment more there was a clearing up of the smoke, and a lull in the trampling of the crowd. Draxy touched the conductor on the arm.

"Is this the train I am to take, sir?" she said showing him her ticket.

He glanced carelessly at it. "No, no," said he; "this is the express; don't stop there. You must wait till the afternoon accommodation."

“But what time will that train get there?” said Draxy, turning pale.

“About ten o’clock, if it’s on time,” said the conductor, walking away. He had not yet glanced at Draxy, but at her “Oh, what shall I do!” he turned back; Draxy’s face held him spellbound, as it had held many a man before. He stepped near her, and taking the ticket from her hand, turned it over and over irresolutely. “I wish I could stop there, Miss,” he said. “Is it any one who is sick?”—for Draxy’s evident distress suggested but one explanation.

“Oh no,” replied Draxy, trying in vain to make her voice steady. “But I am all alone, and I know no one there, and I am afraid—it is so late at night. My friends thought I should get there before dark.”

“What are you going for, if you don’t know anybody?” said the conductor, in a tone less sympathizing and respectful. He was a man more used to thinking ill than well of people.

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Draxy colored. But her voice became very steady.

“I am Reuben Miller’s daughter, sir, and I am going there to get some money which a bad man owed my father. We need the money, and there was no one else to go for it.”

The conductor had never heard of Una, but the tone of the sentence, “I am Reuben Miller’s daughter,” smote upon his heart, and made him as reverent to the young girl as if she had been a saint.

“I beg your pardon, Miss,” he said involuntarily.

Draxy looked at him with a bewildered expression, but made no reply. She was too childlike to know that for the rough manner which had hurt her he ought to ask such pardon.

The conductor proceeded, still fingering the ticket:—

“I don’t see how I can stop there. It’s a great risk for me to take. If there was only one of the Directors on board now.” Draxy looked still more puzzled. “No,” he said, giving her back the ticket: “I can’t do it no how;” and he walked away.

Draxy stood still in despair. In a few minutes he came back. He could not account for its seeming to him such an utter impossibility to leave that girl to go on her journey at night.

“What shall you do?” said he.

“I think my father would prefer that I should find some proper place to spend the night here, and go on in the morning,” replied Draxy; “do you not think that would be better, sir?” she added, with an appealing, confiding tone which made the conductor feel more like her knight than ever.

“Yes, I think so, and I will give you my card to take to the hotel where I stay,” said he, and he plunged into the crowd again.

Draxy turned to a brakeman who had drawn near.

“Has the conductor the right to stop the train if he chooses?” said she.

“Why yes, Miss, he’s right enough, if that’s all. Of course he’s got to have power to stop the train any minute. But stoppin’ jest to let off a passenger, that’s different.”

Draxy closed her lips a little more firmly, and became less pale. When the conductor came back and gave her his card, with the name of the hotel on it, she thanked him, took the card, but did not stir. He looked at her earnestly, said “Good day, Miss,” lifted

his hat, and disappeared. Draxy smiled. It yet wanted ten minutes of the time for the train to go. She stood still, patiently biding her last chance. The first bell rang—the steam was up—the crowd of passengers poured in; at the last minute but one came the conductor. As he caught sight of Draxy's erect, dignified figure, he started; before he could speak, Draxy said, "I waited, sir, for I thought at the last minute a director might come, or you might change your mind."

The conductor laughed out, and seizing Draxy's valise, exclaimed, "By George, I will stop the train for you, Miss Miller! Hang me if I don't; jump in!" and in one minute more Draxy was whirling out of the dark station into the broad sunlight, which dazzled her.

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When the conductor first—came through the car he saw that Draxy had been crying. “Do her good,” he thought to himself; “it always does do women good; but I’ll be bound she wouldn’t ha’ cried if I’d left her.”

Half an hour later he found her sound asleep, with her head slipping uneasily about on the back of the seat. Half ashamed of himself, he brought a heavy coat and put it under her head for a pillow. Seeing a supercilious and disagreeable smile on the face of a fashionable young man in the seat before Draxy, he said sharply: “She’s come a long journey, and was put under my care.”

“I guess that’s true enough to pass muster,” he chuckled to himself as he walked away. “If ever I’d ha’ believed a woman could make me stop this train for her! An’, by George, without askin’ me to either!”

Draxy slept on for hours. The winter twilight came earlier than usual, for the sky was overcast. When she waked, the lamps were lighted, and the conductor was bending over her, saying: “We’re most there, Miss, and I thought you’d better get steadied on your feet a little before you get off, for I don’t calculate to make a full stop.”

Draxy laughed like a little child, and put up both hands to her head as if to make sure where she was. Then she followed the conductor to the door and stood looking out into the dim light.

The sharp signal for “down brakes,” made experienced passengers spring to their feet. Windows opened; heads were thrust out. What had happened to this express train? The unaccustomed sound startled the village also. It was an aristocratic little place, settled by wealthy men whose business was in a neighboring city. At many a dinner-table surprised voices said: “Why, what on earth is the down express stopping here for? Something must have broken.”

“Some director or other to be put off,” said others; “they have it all their own way on the road.”

In the mean time Draxy Miller was walking slowly up the first street she saw, wondering what she should do next. The conductor had almost lifted her off the train; had shaken her hand, said “God bless you, Miss,” and the train was gone, before she could be sure he heard her thank him. “Oh, why did I not thank him more before we stopped,” thought Draxy.

“I hope she’ll get her money,” thought the conductor. “I’d like to see the man that wouldn’t give her what she asked for.”

So the benediction and protection of good wishes, from strangers as well as from friends, floated on the very air through which Draxy walked, all unconscious of the invisible blessings.

She walked a long way before she met any one of whom she liked to ask direction. At last she saw an elderly man standing under a lamp-post, reading a letter. Draxy studied his face, and then stopped quietly by his side without speaking. He looked up.

“I thought as soon as you had finished your letter, sir, I would ask you to tell me where Stephen Potter lives.”

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It was marvelous what an ineffable charm there was in the subtle mixture of courtesy and simplicity in Draxy's manner.

"I am going directly by his house myself, and will show you," replied the old gentleman. "Pray let me take your bag, Miss."

"Was it for you," he added, suddenly recollecting the strange stopping of the express train, "was it for you the express train stopped just now?"

"Yes, sir," said Draxy. "The conductor very kindly put me off."

The old gentleman's curiosity was strongly roused, but he forbore asking any further questions until he left Draxy on the steps of the house, when he said: "are they expecting you?"

"Oh no, sir," said Draxy quietly. "I do not know them."

"Most extraordinary thing," muttered the old gentleman as he walked on. He was a lawyer, and could not escape from the professional habit of looking upon all uncommon incidents as clews.

Draxy Miller's heart beat faster than usual as she was shown into Stephen Potter's library. She had said to the servant simply, "Tell Mr. Potter that Miss Miller would like to see him alone."

The grandeur of the house, the richness of the furniture, would have embarrassed her, except that it made her stern as she thought of her father's poverty. "How little a sum it must be to this man," she thought.

The name roused no associations in Stephen Potter; for years the thought of Reuben Miller had not crossed his mind, and as he looked in the face of the tall, beautiful girl who rose as he entered the room, he was utterly confounded to hear her say,—

"I am Reuben Miller's daughter. I have come to see if you will pay me the money you owe him. We are very poor, and need it more than you probably can conceive."

Stephen Potter was a bad man, but not a hard-hearted bad man. He had been dishonest always; but it was the dishonesty of a weak and unscrupulous nature, not without generosity. At that moment a sharp pang seized him. He remembered the simple, upright, kindly face of Reuben Miller. He saw the same look of simple uprightness, kindled by strength, in the beautiful face of Reuben Miller's daughter. He did not know what to say. Draxy waited in perfect composure and silence. It seemed to him hours before he spoke. Then he said, in a miserable, shuffling way,—

"I suppose you think me a rich man."

“I think you must be very rich,” said Draxy, gently.

Then, moved by some strange impulse in the presence of this pure, unworldly girl, Stephen Potter suddenly spoke out, for the first time since his boyhood, with absolute sincerity.

“Miss Miller, you are your father over again. I reverenced your father. I have wronged many men without caring, but it troubled me to wrong him. I would give you that money to-night, if I had it, or could raise it. I am not a rich man. I have not a dollar in the world. This house is not mine. It may be sold over my head any day. I am deep in trouble, but not so deep as I deserve to be,” and he buried his face in his hands.

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Draxy believed him. And it was true. At that moment Stephen Potter was really a ruined man, and many others were involved in the ruin which was impending.

Draxy rose, saying gravely, “I am very sorry for you, Mr. Potter. We heard that you were rich, or I should not have come. We are very poor, but we are not unhappy, as you are.”

“Stay, Miss Miller, sit down; I have a thing which might be of value to your father;” and Mr. Potter opened his safe and took out a bundle of old yellow papers. “Here is the title to a lot of land in the northern part of New Hampshire. I took it on a debt years ago, and never thought it was worth anything. Very likely it has run out, or the town has taken possession of the land for the taxes. But I did think the other day, that if worst came to worst, I might take my wife up there and try to farm it. But I’d rather your father should have it if it’s good for anything. I took it for three thousand dollars, and it ought to be worth something. I will have the legal transfer made in the morning, and give it to you before you leave.”

This was not very intelligible to Draxy. The thin and tattered old paper looked singularly worthless to her. But rising again, she said simply as before, “I am very sorry for you, Mr. Potter; and I thank you for trying to pay us! Will you let some one go and show me to the hotel where I ought to sleep?”

Stephen Potter was embarrassed. It cut him to the heart to send this daughter of Reuben Miller’s out of his house to pass the night. But he feared Mrs. Potter very much. He hesitated only a moment.

“No, Miss Miller. You must sleep here. I will have you shown to your room at once. I do not ask you to see my wife. It would not be pleasant for you to do so.” And he rang the bell. When the servant came, he said,—

“William, have a fire kindled in the blue room at once; as soon as it is done, come and let me know.”

Then he sat down near Draxy and asked many questions about her family, all of which she answered with childlike candor. She felt a strange sympathy for this miserable, stricken, wicked man. When she bade him good-night, she said again, “I am very sorry for you, Mr. Potter. My father would be glad if he could help you in any way.”

Stephen Potter went into the parlor where his wife sat, reading a novel. She was a very silly, frivolous woman, and she cared nothing for her husband, but when she saw his face she exclaimed, in terror, “What was it, Stephen?”

“Only Reuben Miller’s daughter, come two days’ journey after some money I owe her father and cannot pay,” said Stephen, bitterly.

“Miller? Miller?” said Mrs. Potter, “one of those old canal debts?”

“Yes,” said Stephen.

“Well, of course all those are outlawed long ago,” said she. “I don’t see why you need worry about that; she can’t touch you.”

Stephen looked scornfully at her. She had a worse heart than he. At that moment Draxy’s face and voice, “I am very sorry for you, Mr. Potter,” stood out in the very air before him.

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“I suppose not,” said he, moodily; “I wish she could! But I shall give her a deed of a piece of New Hampshire land which they may get some good of. God knows I hope she may,” and he left the room, turning back, however, to add, “She is to sleep here to-night. I could not have her go to the hotel. But you need take no trouble about her.”

“I should think not, Stephen Potter,” exclaimed Mrs. Potter, sitting bolt upright in her angry astonishment; “I never heard of such impudence as her expecting”—

“She expected nothing. I obliged her to stay,” interrupted Stephen, and was gone.

Mrs. Potter’s first impulse was to go and order the girl out of her house. But she thought better of it. She was often afraid of her husband at this time; she dimly suspected that he was on the verge of ruin. So she sank back into her chair, buried herself in her novel, and soon forgot the interruption.

Draxy’s breakfast and dinner were carried to her room, and every provision made for her comfort. Stephen Potter’s servants obeyed him always. No friend of the family could have been more scrupulously served than was Draxy Miller. The man-servant carried her bag to the station, touched his hat to her as she stepped on board the train, and returned to the house to say in the kitchen: “Well, I don’t care what she come for; she was a real lady, fust to last, an’ that’s more than Mr. Potter’s got for a wife, I tell you.”

When Stephen Potter went into his library after bidding Draxy good-by, he found on the table a small envelope addressed to him. It held this note:—

“*Mr*. *Potter*:—I would not take the paper [the word ‘money’ had been scratched out and the word ‘paper’ substituted] for myself; but I think I ought to for my father, because it was a true debt, and he is an old man now, and not strong.

“I am very sorry for you, Mr. Potter, and I hope you will become happy again. *Draxy Miller*.”

Draxy had intended to write, “I hope you will be ‘good’ again,” but her heart failed her. “Perhaps he will understand that ‘happy’ means good,” she said, and so wrote the gentler phrase. Stephen Potter did understand; and the feeble outreachings which, during the few miserable years more of his life, he made towards uprightness, were partly the fruit of Draxy Miller’s words.

Draxy’s journey home was uneventful. She was sad and weary. The first person she saw on entering the house was her father. He divined in an instant that she had been unsuccessful. “Never mind, little daughter,” he said, gleefully, “I am not disappointed; I knew you would not get it, but I thought the journey ’d be a good thing for you, may be.”

“But I have got something, father dear,” said Draxy; “only I’m afraid it is not worth much.”

“’Taint likely to be if Steve Potter gave it,” said Reuben, as Draxy handed him the paper. He laughed scornfully as soon as he looked at it. “’Taint worth the paper it’s writ on,” said he, “and he knew it; if he hain’t looked the land up all these years, of course ’twas sold at vendue long ago.”

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Draxy turned hastily away. Up to this moment she had clung to a little hope.

When the family were all gathered together in the evening, and Draxy had told the story of her adventures, Reuben and Captain Melville examined the deed together. It was apparently a good clear title; it was of three hundred acres of land. Reuben groaned, “Oh, how I should like to see land by the acre once more.” Draxy’s face turned scarlet, and she locked and unlocked her hands, but said nothing. “But it’s no use thinking about it,” he went on; “this paper isn’t worth a straw. Most likely there’s more than one man well under way on the land by this time.”

They looked the place up on an atlas. It was in the extreme northeast corner of New Hampshire. A large part of the county was still marked “ungranted,” and the township in which this land lay was bounded on the north by this uninhabited district. The name of the town was Clairvend.

“What could it have been named for?” said Draxy. “How pleasantly it sounds.”

“Most likely some Frenchman,” said Captain Melville. “They always give names that ‘re kind o’ musical.”

“We might as well burn the deed up. It’s nothing but a torment to think of it a lyin’ round with it’s three hundred acres of land,” said Reuben in an impulsive tone, very rare for him, and prolonging the “three hundred” with a scornful emphasis; and he sprang up to throw the paper into the fire.

“No, no, man,” said Captain Melville; “don’t be so hasty. No need of burning things up in such a roomy house’s this! Something may come of that deed yet. Give it to Draxy; I’m sure she’s earned it, if there’s anything to it. Put it away for your dowry, dear,” and he snatched the paper from Reuben’s hands and tossed it into Draxy’s lap. He did not believe what he said, and the attempt at a joke brought but a faint smile to any face. The paper fell on the floor, and Draxy let it lie there till she thought her father was looking another way, when she picked it up and put it in her pocket.

For several days there were unusual silence and depression in the household. They had really set far more hope than they knew on this venture. It was not easy to take up the old routine and forget the air castle. Draxy’s friend, Mrs. White, was almost as disappointed as Draxy herself. She had not thought of the chance of Mr. Potter’s being really unable to pay. She told her husband, who was a lawyer, the story of the deed, and he said at once: “Of course it isn’t worth a straw. If Potter didn’t pay the taxes, somebody else did, and the land’s been sold long ago.”

Mrs. White tried to comfort herself by engaging Draxy for one month’s steady sewing, and presenting her with a set of George Eliot’s novels. And Draxy tried steadily and bravely to forget her journey, and the name of Clairvend.

About this time she wrote a hymn, and showed it to her father. It was the first thing of the kind she had ever let him see, and his surprise and delight showed her that here was one way more in which she could brighten his life. She had not thought, in her extreme humility, that by hiding her verses she was depriving him of pleasure. After this she showed him all she wrote, but the secret was kept religiously between them.

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Draxy's Hymn.

I cannot think but God must know
About the thing I long for so;
I know He is so good, so kind,
I cannot think but He will find
Some way to help, some way to show
Me to the thing I long for so.

I stretch my hand—it lies so near:
It looks so sweet, it looks so dear.
"Dear Lord," I pray, "Oh, let me know
If it is wrong to want it so?"
He only smiles—He does not speak:
My heart grows weaker and more weak,
With looking at the thing so dear,
Which lies so far, and yet so near.

Now, Lord, I leave at thy loved feet This thing which looks so near, so sweet; I will not seek, I will not long— almost fear I have been wrong. I'll go, and work the harder, Lord, And wait till by some loud, clear word Thou callest me to thy loved feet, To take this thing so dear, so sweet.

Part II.

As the spring drew near, a new anxiety began to press upon Draxy. Reuben drooped. The sea-shore had never suited him. He pined at heart for the inland air, the green fields, the fragrant woods. This yearning always was strongest in the spring, when he saw the earth waking up around him; but now the yearning became more than yearning. It was the home-sickness of which men have died. Reuben said little, but Draxy divined all. She had known it from the first, but had tried to hope that he could conquer it.

Draxy spent many wakeful hours at night now. The deed of the New Hampshire land lay in her upper bureau drawer, wrapped in an old handkerchief. She read it over, and over, and over. She looked again and again at the faded pink township on the old atlas. "Who knows," thought she, "but that land was overlooked and forgotten? It is so near the 'ungranted lands,' which must be wilderness, I suppose!" Slowly a dim purpose struggled in Draxy's brain. It would do no harm to find out. But how? No more journeys must be taken on uncertainties. At last, late one night, the inspiration came. Who shall say that it is not an unseen power which sometimes suggests to sorely tried human hearts the one possible escape? Draxy was in bed. She rose, lighted her candle, and wrote two letters. Then she went back to bed and slept peacefully. In the

morning when she kissed her father good-by, she looked wistfully in his face. She had never kept any secret from him before, except the secret of her verses. “But he must not be disappointed again,” said Draxy; “and there is no real hope.”

She dropped her letter into the post-office and went to her work.

The letter was addressed—

“To the Postmaster of Clairvend,

“New Hampshire.”

It was a very short letter.

“*Dear sir*:—I wish to ask some help from a minister in your town. If there is more than one minister, will you please give my letter to the kindest one. Yours truly,

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"*Draxy Miller*."

The letter inclosed was addressed—

"To the Minister of Clairvend."

This letter also was short.

"*Dear sir*:—I have asked the Postmaster to give this letter to the kindest minister in the town.

"I am Reuben Miller's daughter. My father is very poor. He has not known how to do as other men do to be rich. He is very good, sir. I think you can hardly have known any one so good. Mr. Stephen Potter, a man who owed him money, has given us a deed of land in your town. My father thinks the deed is not good for anything. But I thought perhaps it might be; and I would try to find out. My father is very sick, but I think he would get well if he could come and live on a farm. I have written this letter in the night, as soon as I thought about you; I mean as soon as I thought that there must be a minister in Clairvend, and he would be willing to help me.

"I have not told my father, because I do not want him to be disappointed again as he was about the deed.

"I have copied for you the part of the deed which tells where the land is; and I put in a stamp to pay for your letter to me, and if you will find out for us if we can get this land, I shall be grateful to you all my life. *Draxy Miller*."

Inclosed was a slip of paper on which Draxy had copied with great care the description of the boundaries of the land conveyed by the deed. It was all that was necessary. The wisest lawyer, the shrewdest diplomatist in the land never put forth a subtler weapon than this simple girl's simple letter.

It was on the morning of the 3d of April that Draxy dropped her letter in the office. Three days later it was taken out of the mail-bag in the post-office of Clairvend. The post-office was in the one store of the village. Ten or a dozen men were lounging about curiosity about the odd name was soon swallowed up in curiosity as to the contents of the letter. The men of Clairvend had not been so stirred and roused by anything since the fall election. Luckily for Draxy's poor little letter, there was but one minister in the village, and the only strife which rose was as to who should carry him the letter. Finally, two of the most persistent set out with it, both declaring that they had business on that road, and had meant all along to go in and see the Elder on their way home.

Elder Kinney lived in a small cottage high up on a hill, a mile from the post-office, and on a road very little travelled. As the men toiled up this hill, they saw a tall figure coming rapidly towards them.

“By thunder! there’s the Elder now! That’s too bad,” said little Eben Hill, the greatest gossip in the town.

The Elder was walking at his most rapid rate; and Elder Kinney’s most rapid rate was said to be one with which horses did not easily keep up. “No, thank you, friend, I haven’t time to ride to-day,” he often replied to a parishioner who, jogging along with an old farm-horse, offered to give him a lift on the road.

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“Elder! Elder! here’s a letter we was a bringin’ up to you!” called out both of the men at once as he passed them like a flash, saying hurriedly “Good evening! good evening!” and was many steps down the hill beyond them before he could stop.

“Oh, thank you!” he said, taking it hastily and dropping it into his pocket. “Mrs. Williams is dying, they say; I cannot stop a minute,” and he was out of sight while the baffled parishioners stood confounded at their ill-luck.

“Now jest as like’s not we shan’t never know what was in that letter,” said. Eben Hill, disconsolately. “Ef we’d ha’gone in and set down while he read it, we sh’d ha’ had some chance.”

“But then he mightn’t ha’ read it while we was there,” replied Joseph Bailey resignedly; an’ I expect It ain’t none o’ our business anyhow, one way or t’other.”

“It’s the queerest thing’s ever happened in this town,” persisted Eben; “what’s a girl—-that is, if ‘tis a girl—got to do writin’ to a minister she don’t know? I don’t believe it’s any good she’s after.”

“Wal, ef she is, she’s come to the right place; and there’s no knowin’ but that the Lord’s guided her, Eben; for ef ever there was a man sent on this airth to do the Lord’s odd jobs o’ looking arter folks, it’s Elder Kinney,” said Joseph.

“That’s so,” answered Eben in a dismal tone, “that’s so; but he’s dreadful close-mouthed when he’s a mind to be. You can’t deny that!”

“Wal, I dunno’s I want ter deny it,” said Joseph, who was beginning, in Eben’s company, to grow ashamed of curiosity; “I dunno’s it’s anything agin him,” and so the men parted.

It was late at night when Elder Kinney went home from the bedside of the dying woman. He had forgotten all about the letter. When he undressed, it fell from his pocket, and lay on the floor. It was the first thing he saw in the morning. “I declare!” said the Elder, and reaching out a long arm from the bed, he picked it up.

The bright winter sun was streaming in on the Elder’s face as he read Draxy’s letter. He let it fall on the scarlet and white counterpane, and lay thinking. The letter touched him unspeakably. Elder Kinney was no common man; he had a sensitive organization and a magnetic power, which, if he had had the advantages of education and position, would have made him a distinguished preacher. As a man, he was tender, chivalrous, and impulsive; and even the rough, cold, undemonstrative people among whom his life had been spent had, without suspecting it, almost a romantic affection for him. He had buried his young wife and her first-born still-born child together in this little village twelve years before, and had ever since lived in the same house from which they had been carried to the grave-yard. “If you ever want any other man to preach to you,” he said to

the people, “you’ve only to say so to the Conference. I don’t want to preach one sermon too many to you. But I shall live and die in this house; I can’t ever go away. I can get a good livin’ at farmin’—good as preachin’, any day!”

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The sentence, “I am Reuben Miller’s daughter,” went to his heart as it had gone to every man’s heart who had heard it before from Draxy’s unconscious lips. But it sunk deeper in his heart than in any other.

“If baby had lived she would have loved me like this perhaps,” thought the Elder, as he read the pathetic words over and over. Then he studied the paragraph copied from the deed. Suddenly a thought flashed into his mind. He knew something about this land. It must be—yes, it must be on a part of this land that the sugar-camp lay from which he had been sent for, five years before, to see a Frenchman who was lying very ill in the little log sugar-house. The Elder racked his brains. Slowly it all came back to him. He remembered that at the time some ill-will had been shown in the town toward this Frenchman; that doubts had been expressed about his right to the land; and that no one would go out into the clearing to help take care of him. Occasionally, since that time, the Elder had seen the man hanging about the town. He had an evil look; this was all the Elder could remember.

At breakfast he said to old Nancy, his housekeeper: “Nancy, did you ever know anything about that Frenchman who had a sugar-camp out back of the swamp road? I went to see him when he had the fever a few years ago.”

Nancy was an Indian woman with a little white blood in her veins. She never forgot an injury. This Frenchman had once jeered at her from the steps of the village store, and the village men had laughed.

“Know anythin’ about him? Yes, sir. He’s a son o’ Satan, an’ I reckon he stays to hum the great part o’ the year, for he’s never seen round here except jest sugarin’ time.”

The Elder laughed in spite of himself. Nancy’s tongue was a member of which he strongly disapproved; but his efforts to enforce charity and propriety of speech upon her were sometimes rendered null and void by his lack of control of his features. Nancy loved her master, but she had no reverence in her composition, and nothing gave her such delight as to make him laugh out against his will. She went on to say that the Frenchman came every spring, bringing with him a gang of men, some twelve or more, “all sons o’ the same father, sir; you’d know ’em’s far’s you see ’em.” They took a large stock of provisions, went out into the maple clearing, and lived there during the whole sugar season in rough log huts. “They do say he’s jest carried off a good thousand dollar’s worth o’ sugar this very week,” said Nancy.

The Elder brought his hand down hard on the table and said “Whew!” This was Elder Kinney’s one ejaculation. Nancy seldom heard it, and she knew it meant tremendous excitement. She grew eager, and lingered, hoping for further questions; but the Elder wanted his next information from a more accurate and trustworthy source than old Nancy. Immediately after breakfast he set out for the village; soon he slackened his pace, and began to reflect.

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It was necessary to act cautiously; he felt instinctively sure that the Frenchman had not purchased the land. His occupation of it had evidently been acquiesced in by the town for many years; but the Elder was too well aware of the slack and unbusinesslike way in which much of the town business was managed, to attach much weight to this fact. He was perplexed—a rare thing for Elder Kinney. He stopped and sat down on the top of a stone wall to think. In a few minutes he saw the steaming heads of a pair of oxen coming up the hill. Slowly the cart came in sight: it was loaded with sugar-buckets; and there, walking by its side, was—yes! it was—the very Frenchman himself.

Elder Kinney was too much astonished even to say "Whew!"

"This begins to look like the Lord's own business," was the first impulsive thought of his devout heart. "There's plainly something to be done. That little Draxy's father shall get some o' the next year's sugar out o' that camp, or my name isn't Seth Kinney;" and the Elder sprang from the wall and walked briskly towards the Frenchman. As he drew near him, and saw the forbidding look on the fellow's face, he suddenly abandoned his first intention, which was to speak to him, and, merely bowing, passed on down the hill.

"He's a villain, if I know the look of one," said honest Elder. "I'll think a little longer. I wonder where he stores his buckets. Now, there's a chance," and Elder Kinney turned about and followed the plodding cart up the hill again. It was a long pull and a tedious one; and for Elder Kinney to keep behind oxen was a torture like being in a straight waistcoat. One mile, two miles, three miles! the Elder half repented of his undertaking; but like all wise and magnetic natures, he had great faith in his first impulses, and he kept on.

At last the cart turned into a lane on the right-hand side of the road.

"Why, he's goin' to old Ike's," exclaimed the Elder. "Well, I can get at all old Ike knows, and it's pretty apt to be all there is worth knowin'," and Elder Kinney began, in his satisfaction, to whistle

"Life is the time to serve the Lord,"

in notes as clear and loud as a bob-o'-link's.

He walked on rapidly, and was very near overtaking the Frenchman, when a new thought struck him. "Now, if he's uneasy about himself,—and if he knows he ain't honest, of course he's uneasy,—he'll may be think I'm on his track, and be off to his 'hum,' as Nancy calls it," and the Elder chuckled at the memory, "an' I shouldn't have any chance of ketchin' him here for another year." The Elder stood still again. Presently he jumped a fence, and walking off to the left, climbed a hill, from the top of which he

could see old Ike's house. Here, in the edge of a spruce grove, he walked back and forth, watching the proceedings below. "Seems little too much like bein' a spy," thought the good man, "but I never felt a clearer call in a thing in my life than I do in this little girl's letter," and he fell to singing

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"Rise, my soul, and stretch thy wings,"

till the crows in the wood were frightened by the strange sound, and came flying out and flapping their great wings above his head.

The Frenchman drove into old Ike's yard. Ike came out of the house and helped him unload the buckets, and carry them into an old corn-house which stood behind the barn: As soon as the Frenchman had turned his oxen's head down the lane, the Elder set out for the house, across the fields. Old Ike was standing in the barn-door. When he saw the tall figure striding through the pasture, he ran to let down the bars, and hurried up to the Elder and grasped both his hands. Not in all Elder Kinney's parish was there a single heart which beat so warmly for him as did the heart of this poor lonely old man, who had lived by himself in this solitary valley ever since the Elder came to Clairvend.

"Oh, Elder, Elder," said he, "it does me reel good to see your face. Be ye well, sir?" looking closely at him.

"Yes, Ike, thank you, I'm always well," replied the Elder absently. He was too absorbed in his errand to have precisely his usual manner, and it was the slight change which Ike's affectionate instinct felt. But Ike saved him all perplexity as to introducing the object of his visit by saying at once, picking up one of the sugar-buckets which had rolled off to one side, "I'm jest pilin' up Ganew's sugar-buckets for him. He pays me well for storin' 'em, but I kind o' hate to have anythin' to do with him. Don't you remember him, sir—him that was so awful bad with the fever down'n the clearin' five years ago this month? You was down to see him, I know."

"Yes, yes, I remember," said the Elder, with a manner so nonchalant that he was frightened at his own diplomacy. "He was a bad fellow, I thought,"

Ike went on: "Wall, that's everybody's feelin' about him: and there ain't no great thing to show for 't nuther. But they did say a while back that he hadn't no reel right to the land. He turned up all of a sudden, and paid up all there was owin' on the taxes, an' he's paid 'em regular ever sence. But he hain't never showed how the notes come to be signed by some other name. Yes, sir, the hull lot—it's nigh on ter three hundred acres, such's 'tis; a good part on't 's swamp though, that ain't wuth a copper—the hull lot went to a man down in York State, when the Iron Company bust up here, and for two or three year the chap he jest sent up his note for the taxes, and they've a drefful shiftless way o' lettin' things go in this ere town, 's you know, sir; there wan't nobody that knowed what a sugar orchard was a lyin' in there, or there'd been plenty to grab for it; but I don't s'pose there's three men in the town'd ever been over back o' Birch Hill till this Ganew he come and cut a road in, and had his sugar-camp agoin' one spring, afore anybody knew what he was arter. But he's paid all up reg'lar, and well he may, sez everybody, for he can't get his

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sugar off, sly's he is, w'thout folks gettin' some kind o' notion about it, an' they say's he's cleared thousands an' thousands o' dollars. I expect they ain't overshot the mark nuther, for he's got six hundred new buckets this spring, and Bill Sims, he's been in with 'em the last two years, 'n he says there ain't no sugar orchard to compare, except Squire White's over in Mill Creek, and he's often taken in three thousand pounds off his'n."

Ike sighed as he paused, breathless. "It's jest my luck, allers knockin' about 'n them woods 's I am, not to have struck trail on that air orchard. I could ha' bought it's well's not in the fust on't, if it had been put up to vendue, 's't oughter ben, an' nobody knowin' what 'twas wuth."

Elder Kinney was almost overcome by this unhoped-for corroboration of his instincts; clearing up of his difficulties. His voice sounded hoarse in his own ears as he replied: —

"Well, Ike, the longest lane has a turnin'. It's my belief that God doesn't often let dishonest people prosper very long. We shall see what becomes of Ganew. Where does he live? I'd like to see him."

"Well, he don't live nowhere, 's near's anybody can find out. He's in the camp with the gang about six weeks, sometimes eight; they say's it's a kind of settlement down there, an' then he's off again till sugarin' comes round; but he's dreadful sharp and partikler about the taxes, I tell you, and he's given a good deal too, fust and last, to the town. Folks say he wants to make 'em satisfied to let him alone. He's coming up here again to-morrow with two more loads of buckets, sir: if 'twouldn't be too much trouble for you to come here agin so soon," added poor Ike, grasping at the chance of seeing the Elder again.

"Well, I think perhaps I'll come," replied the Elder, ashamed again of the readiness with which he found himself taking to tortuous methods, "if I'm not too busy. What time will he be here?"

"About this same time," said Ike. "He don't waste no time, mornin' nor evenin'."

The Elder went away soon, leaving poor Ike half unhappy.

"He's got somethin' on his mind, thet's plain enough," thought the loving old soul. "I wonder now ef it's a woman; I've allus thought the Elder war'nt no sort of man to live alone all his days."

"Dear, good little Draxy," thought the Elder, as he walked down the road. "How shall I ever tell the child of this good luck, and how shall I manage it all for the best for her?"

Draxy's interests were in good hands. Before night Elder Kinney had ascertained that there had never been any sale of this land since it was sold to "the New York chap," and that Ganew's occupation of it was illegal. After tea the Elder sat down and wrote two letters.

The first one was to Draxy, and ran as follows:—

"*My dear child*:—

"I received your letter last night, and by the Lord's help I have found out all about your father's land today. But I shall write to your father about it, for you could not understand.

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“I wish the Lord had seen fit to give me just such a daughter as you are.

“Your friend,

“*Seth Kinney*.”

The letter to Reuben was very long, giving in substance the facts which have been told above, and concluding thus:—

“I feel a great call from the Lord to do all I can in this business, and I hope you won’t take it amiss if I make bold to decide what’s best to be done without consulting you. This fellow’s got to be dealt with pretty sharp, and I, being on the ground, can look after him better than you can. But I’ll guarantee that you’ll have possession of that land before many weeks.” He then asked Reuben to have an exact copy of the deed made out and forwarded to him; also any other papers which might throw light on the transfer of the property, sixteen years back. “Not that I calculate there’ll be any trouble,” he added; “we don’t deal much in lawyer’s tricks up here, but it’s just as well to be provided.”

The Elder went to the post-office before breakfast to post this letter.
The address did not escape the eyes of the postmaster. Before noon Eben
Hill knew that the Elder had written right off by the first mail to a
“Miss Draxy Miller.”

Meantime the Elder was sitting in the doorway of old Ike’s barn waiting for the Frenchman; ten o’clock came, eleven, twelve—he did not appear.

The Elder’s uneasiness grew great, but he talked on and on till poor Ike was beside himself with delight. At last the distant creak of the wheels was heard. “There he is,” exclaimed Ike. “I’m thinking, sir, that it’s a kind o’ providential dispensation thet’s hendered him all this time; it’s done me such a sight o’ good to hear you talk.”

The Elder smiled tenderly on poor old Ike.

“Everything is a dispensation, Ike, accordin’ to my way o’ thinkin’;” and again he thought involuntarily of “little Draxy.”

Ganew assented with a half-surly civility to Elder Kinney’s proposition to ride down with him.

“I’ve got a matter of business to talk over with you, Mr. Ganew,”—said the Elder, “and I came up here on purpose to find you.”

The man turned his stolid black eyes full on the Elder, but made no reply. It was indeed an evil face. The Elder was conscious that impulses which he feared were unchristian

were rising rapidly in his breast. He had wished a few times before in his life that he was not a minister. He wished it now. He would have liked to open his conversation with Ganew after the manner of the world's people when they deal with thieves. And again he thought involuntarily of "little Draxy," and her touching "we are very poor."

But when he spoke, he spoke gently and slowly.

"I have some news for you which will be very disagreeable, Mr. Ganew." Here the Frenchman started, with such a terrified, guilty, malignant look on his face, that the Elder said to himself: "Good God, I believe the man knows he's in danger of his life. Stealin's the least of his crimes, I'll venture."

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He proceeded still more gently. “The owners of the land which you’ve been using as your own in this town, have written to inquire about it, and have put the business in my hands.”

Ganew was silent for a moment. Then trying to speak in an indignant tone, he said,—

“Using as my own! I don’t know what you mean, Mr. Parson. I have paid my taxes all regular, and I’ve got the title-deeds of the land, every acre of it. I can’t help whoever’s been writing to you about it; it’s all my land.”

But his face twitched with nervous excitement, and the fright and anger in his serpent-like black eyes were ugly to see.

“No, Mr. Ganew, it is not,” said the Elder; “and you know it. Now you jest listen to me; I know the whole truth about the matter, an’ all the time you spend fightin’ off the truth’ll be wasted, besides addin’ lyin’ to havin’ been a thief. The owners of the land’ll be here, I expect before long; but they’ve put it all in my hands, an’ I can let you off if I choose.”

“Let me off! What the devil do you mean?” said Ganew.

“Why, you don’t suppose there’s goin’ to be nothin’ said about all the thousands o’ dollars’ wuth of sugar you’ve carried off here, do”—

The next thing Elder Kinney knew he was struggling up to his feet in the middle of the road; he was nearly blinded by blood trickling from a cut on his forehead, and only saw dimly that Ganew was aiming another blow at him with his heavy-handled ox-goad.

But the Frenchman had reckoned without his host. Elder Kinney, even half stunned, was more than a match for him. In a very few minutes Ganew was lying in the bottom of his own ox-cart, with his hands securely tied behind him with a bit of his own rope and the Elder was sitting calmly down on a big boulder, wiping his forehead and recovering his breath; it had been an ugly tussle, and the Elder was out of practice.

Presently he rose, walked up to the cart, and leaning both his arms on the wheel, looked down on his enemy.

The Frenchman’s murderous little black eyes rolled wildly, but he did not struggle. He had felt in the first instant that he was but an infant in the Elder’s hands.

“Ye poor, miserable, cowardly French,—sinner ye,” said the Elder, struggling for an epithet not unbecoming his cloth. “Did you think you was goin’ to get me out o’ yer way’s easy’s that, ’s I dare say ye have better folks than me, before now!”

Ganew muttered something in a tongue the Elder did not understand, but the sound of it kindled his wrath anew.

“Well, call on your Master, if that’s what you’re doin’, ’s much’s you like. He don’t generally look out for anybody much who’s so big a fool’s you must be, to think you was goin’ to leave the minister o’ this parish dead in a ditch within stone’s throw o’ houses and nobody find you out,” and the Elder sat down again on the boulder. He felt very dizzy and faint; and the blood still trickled steadily from his forehead. Ganew’s face at this moment was horrible. Rage at his own folly, hate of the Elder, and terror which was uncontrollable, all contended on his livid features.

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At last he spoke. He begged abjectly to be set free. He offered to leave the town at once and never return if the Elder would only let him go.

“What an’ give up all your land ye’ve got such a fine clear title to?” said the Elder, sarcastically. “No; we’ll give ye a title there won’t be no disputin’ about to a good berth in Mill Creek jail for a spell!”

At this the terror mastered every other emotion in the Frenchman’s face. What secret reason he had for it all, no one could know but himself; what iniquitous schemes already waiting him in other places, what complications of dangers attendant on his identification and detention. He begged, he besought, in words so wildly imploring, so full of utter unconditional surrender, that there could be no question as to their sincerity. The Elder began, in spite of himself, to pity the wretch; he began also to ask whether after all it would not be the part of policy to let him go. After some minutes he said, “I can’t say I put much confidence in ye yet, Mr. Ganew; but I’m inclined to think it’s the Lord’s way o’ smoothin’ things for some o’ his children, to let you kind o’ slink off,” and somehow Elder Kinney fancied he heard little Draxy say, “Oh, sir, let the poor man go.” There was something marvelous in his under-current of consciousness of “little Draxy.”

He rose to his feet, picked up the heavy ox-goad, struck the near ox sharply on the side, and walking on a little ahead of the team, said: “I’ll just take ye down a piece, Mr. Ganew, till we’re in sight of Jim Blair’s, before I undo ye. I reckon the presence o’ a few folks’ll strengthen your good resolutions.” “An’ I mistrust I ain’t quite equal to another handlin,’” thought the Elder to himself, as he noted how the sunny road seemed to go up and down under his feet. He was really far more hurt than he knew.

When they were in sight of the house, he stopped the oxen, and leaning again on the wheel, and looking down on Ganew, had one more talk with him, at the end of which he began cautiously to untie the rope. He held the ox-goad, however, firmly grasped in his right hand, and it was not without a little tremor that he loosed the last knots. “Suppose the desperate critter sh’d have a knife,” thought the Elder.

He need not have feared. A more crestfallen, subdued, wretched being than Paul Ganew, as he crawled out of that cart, was never seen. He had his own secret terror, and it had conquered him. “It’s more’n me he’s afraid of,” said the Elder to himself. “This is the Lord’s doin’, I reckon. Now, Mr. Ganew, if you’ll jest walk to the heads o’ them oxen I’ll thank ye,” said he: “an’ ‘s I feel some tired, I’ll jump into the cart; an’ I’ll save ye carryin’ the ox-goad,” he added, as he climbed slowly in, still holding the murderous weapon in his hand. Nothing could extinguish Seth Kinney’s sense of humor.

“If we meet any folks,” he proceeded, “we’ve only to say that I’ve had a bad hurt, and that you’re very kindly takin’ me home.”

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Ganew walked on like a man in a dream. He was nearly paralyzed with terror. They met no human being, and very few words passed between them. When the cart stopped at the Elder's door, Ganew stood still without turning his head. The Elder went up to him and said, with real kindness of tone,

"Mr. Ganew, I expect you can't believe it, but I don't bear ye the least ill-will."

A faint flicker of something like grateful surprise passed over the hard face, but no words came.

"I hope the Lord'll bring ye to himself yet," persisted the good man, "and forgive me for havin' had anything but pity for ye from the first on't. Ye won't forget to send me a writing for Bill Sims that the rest of the buckets in the camp belong to me?"

Ganew nodded sullenly and went on, and the Elder walked slowly into the house.

After dark, a package was left at the Elder's door. It contained the order on Bill Sims, and a letter. Some of the information in the letter proved useful in clearing up the mystery of Ganew's having known of this tract of land. He had been in Potter's employ, it seemed, and had had access to his papers. What else the letter told no one ever knew; but the Elder's face always had a horror-stricken look when the Frenchman's name was mentioned, and when people sometimes wondered if he would ever be seen again in Clairvend, the emphasis of the Elder's "Never! ye may rely on that! Never!" had something solemn in it.

In less than forty-eight hours the whole village knew the story. "The sooner they know the whole on't the better, and the sooner they'll be through talkin'," said the Elder, and nobody could have accused him of being "close-mouthed" now. He even showed "the little gal's letter," as the townspeople called it, to anybody who asked to see it. It hurt him to do this, more than he could see reason for, but he felt a strong desire to have the village heart all ready to welcome "little Draxy" and her father when they should come. And the village heart was ready! Hardly a man, woman, or child but knew her name and rejoiced in her good fortune. "Don't yer remember my tellin' yer that night," said Josiah Bailey to Eben Hill, "that she'd come to the right place for help when she come to Elder Kinney?"

When Draxy took Elder Kinney's letter out of the post-office, her hands trembled. She walked rapidly away, and opened the letter as soon as she reached a quiet street. The Elder had not made it so clear as he thought he had, in his letter to the "child," which way matters had gone. Draxy feared. Presently she thought, "He says 'your father's land.' That must mean that we shall have it." But still she had sad misgivings. She almost decided to read the inclosed letter which was unsealed; she could not have her father disappointed again; but her keen sense of honor restrained her.

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Reuben had grown really feeble. There were many days now when he could not work, but sat listlessly on a ledge of rocks near the house, and watched the restless waves with a sense of misery as restless as they. When Draxy reached home this night and found that her father was not in the house, she ran over to the "Black Ledge." There she found him. She sat down by his side, not knowing how to begin. Presently he said: "I wish I loved this water, daughter,—it is very beautiful to look at; but I'm thinkin' it's somethin' like human beings; they may be ever so handsome to look on, but if you don't love 'em you don't, and that's the end on't, an' it don't do ye no sort o' good to be where they are."

"The woods and fields used to do you good, father," said Draxy.

Reuben was astonished. Draxy was not wont to allude to the lost and irrecoverable joys. But he only sighed.

"Read this letter, father dear," said Draxy, hurriedly pushing it into his hand; "I wrote up to a good old minister to find out, and here's his answer."

Reuben looked bewildered. Draxy's words did not make themselves clear. But the first words of Elder Kinney's letter did. The paper fell from his hands.

"Oh, daughter! daughter! it can't be true! It can't!" and Reuben Miller covered his eyes and cried. Draxy did not cry. One of the finest traits in her nature was her instantaneous calmness of exterior under sudden and intense excitement.

"Yes; father, it is true. It must be. I have believed it from the first! Oh do, do read the letter," said Draxy, and she forced the letter into his hands again.

"No, no, daughter. Read it to me. I can't see the words," replied Reuben, still weeping. He was utterly unmanned. Then Draxy read the letter aloud slowly, distinctly, calmly. Her voice did not tremble. She accepted it all, absolutely, unconditionally, as she had accepted everything which had ever happened to her. In Draxy's soul the past never confused the present; her life went on from moment to moment, from step to step as naturally, as clearly, as irrevocably as plants grow and flower, without hinderance, without delay. This it was which had kept her serene, strong: this is true health of nature.

After a time Reuben grew calmer; Draxy's presence always helped him. They sat on the rocks until twilight fell, and the great red lamp in the light-house was lighted.

"Father, dear," said Draxy, "I think there are light-houses all along our lives, and God knows when it is time to light the lamps."

Reuben clasped Draxy's hand tighter, and turned his eyes upon her with a look whose love was almost reverent.

Lights shone until morning from the windows of Captain Melville's house. The little family had sat together until long after midnight, discussing this new and wonderful turn in their affairs. Jane and Reuben were bewildered and hardly happy yet; Draxy was alert, enthusiastic, ready as usual; poor Captain Melville and his wife were in sore straits between their joy in the Millers' good fortune, and their pain at the prospect of the breaking up of the family. Their life together had been so beautiful, so harmonious.

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“Oh, Draxy,” said the Captain, “how shall we ever live without you?”

“Oh! but you will come up there, uncle.” said Draxy; “and we shall keep you after we once get you.”

Captain Melville shook his head. He could never leave the sea. But full well he knew that the very salt of it would have lost its best savor to him when this sweet, fair girl had gone out from his house.

The “good-nights” were sadly and solemnly said. “Oh!” thought Draxy, “does joy always bring pain in this world?” and she fell asleep with tears on her cheeks.

Reuben sat up until near dawn, writing to Elder Kinney. He felt strangely strong. He was half cured already by the upland air of the fields he had never seen. The next morning Draxy said, “Do you not think, father, I ought to write a note too, to thank the kind minister, or will you tell him how grateful I am?”

“Put a postscript to my letter, daughter. That will be better,” said Reuben.

So Draxy wrote at the bottom of the last page:—

“*Dear Mr*. *Kinney*:—I do not know any words to thank you in; and I think you will like it better if I do not try. My father seems almost well already. I am sure it was the Lord that helped you to find out about our land. I hope we can come very soon.

“Your grateful friend,

“*Draxy Miller*.”

When the Elder read this second note of Draxy’s, he said aloud, “God bless her! she’s one o’ His chosen ones, that child is,” and he fell to wondering how she looked. He found himself picturing her as slight and fair, with blue eyes, and hair of a pale yellow. “I don’t believe she’s more than fourteen at most;” thought he, “she speaks so simple, jest like a child; an’ yet, she goes right to the pint, ’s straight’s any woman; though I don’t know, come to think on’t, ’s ever I knew a woman that could go straight to a pint,” reflected the Elder, whose patience was often sorely tried by the wandering and garrulous female tongues in his parish. The picture of “Little Draxy” grew strangely distinct in his mind; and his heart yearned towards her with a yearning akin to that which years before he had felt over the little silent form of the daughter whose eyes had never looked into his.

There was no trouble with the town in regard to the land. If there had been any doubts, Elder Kinney’s vigorous championship of the new claimant would have put them down. But the sympathy of the entire community was enlisted on Reuben’s side. The whole story from first to last appealed to every man’s heart; and there was not a father in town

that did not rest his hand more lovingly on his little girl's head at night, when he sat in his door-way talking over "them Millers," and telling about Draxy's "writin' to th' Elder."

Before the first of May all was settled. Elder Kinney had urged Mr. Miller to come at once to his house, and make it a home until he could look about and decide where he would establish himself.

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“I am a lonely man,” he wrote; “I buried my wife and only child many years ago, and have lived here ever since, with only an old Indian woman to take care of me. I don’t want to press you against your will; and there’s a house in the village that you can hire; but it will go against me sorely not to have you in my house at the first. I want to see you, and to see your little daughter; I can’t help feeling as if the Lord had laid out for us to be friends more than common.”

Reuben hesitated. The shyness of his nature made him shrink from other men’s houses. But Draxy inclined strongly to the Elder’s proposition. “Oh, think father, how lonely he must be. Suppose you hadn’t mother nor me, father dear!” and Draxy kissed her father’s cheek; “and think how glad you have been that you came to live with uncle,” she added.

Reuben looked lovingly at Captain Melville, but said nothing.

“I’ll tell ye what I think, Reuben;” said the Captain. “It’s my belief that you’n that parson’ll take to each other. His letters sound like your talk. Somehow, I’ve got an uncommon respect for that man, considerin’ he’s a parson: it’s my advice to ye, to take up with his offer.”

“And it seems no more than polite, father,” persisted Draxy: “after he has done so much for us. We need not say how long we will stay in his house, you know.”

“Supposin’ you go up first, Draxy,” said Reuben, hesitatingly, “an’ see how ’tis. I always did hate Injuns.”

“Oh!” said Draxy; she had hardly observed the mention of that feature in the Elder’s household, and she laughed outright. Her ideas of the ancestral savage were too vague to be very alarming. “If she has lived all these years with this good old minister, she must be civilized and kind,” said Draxy. “I’m not afraid of her.”

“But I think it would be a great deal better for me to go first,” she continued, more and more impressed with the new idea. “Then I can be sure beforehand about everything, and get things all in order for you; and there’ll be Mr. Kinney to take care of me; I feel as if he was a kind of father to everybody.” And Draxy in her turn began to wonder about the Elder’s appearance as he had wondered about hers. Her mental picture was quite as unlike the truth as was his. She fancied him not unlike her father, but much older, with a gentle face, and floating white hair. Dim purposes of how she might make his lonely old age more cheerful, floated before her mind. “It must be awful,” thought she, “to live years and years all alone with an Indian.”

When Elder Kinney read Reuben’s letter, saying that they would send their daughter up first to decide what would be best for them to do, he brought his hand down hard on the table and said “Whew!” again.

“Well, I do declare,” thought he to himself, “I’m afraid they’re dreadful shiftless folks, to send that girl way up here, all alone by herself; and how’s such a child’s that goin’ to decide anything, I should like to know?”

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He read again the letter Reuben had written. “My daughter is very young, but we lean upon her as if she was older. She has helped us bear all our misfortunes, and we have more confidence in her opinions than in our own about everything.” The Elder was displeased.

“Lean on her;’ I should think you did! Poor little girl! Well, I can look out for her; that’s one comfort.” And the Elder wrote a short note to the effect that he would meet their “child” at the railway station, which was six miles from their town; that he would do all he could to help her; and that he hoped soon to see Mr. and Mrs. Miller under his roof.

The words of the note were most friendly, but there was an indefinable difference between it and all the others, which Draxy felt without knowing that she felt it, and her last words to her father as she bade him good-by from the car window were: “I don’t feel so sure as I did about our staying with Mr. Kinney, father. You leave it all to me, do you, dear, even if I decide to buy a house?”

“Yes, daughter,” said Reuben, heartily; “all! Nothing but good’s ever come yet of your way o’ doin’ things.”

“An’ I don’t in the least hanker after that Injun,” he called out as the cars began to move. Draxy laughed merrily. Reuben was a new man already. They were very gay together, and felt wonderfully little fear for people to whom life had been thus far so hard.

There was not a misgiving in Draxy’s heart as she set out again on a two days’ journey to an unknown place. “Oh how different from the day when I started before,” she thought as she looked out on the water sparkling under the bright May sun. She spent the first night, as before, at the house of Captain Melville’s brother, and set out at eight the following morning, to ride for ten hours steadily northward. The day was like a day of June. The spring was opening early; already fruit-trees were white and pink; banks were green, and birds were noisy.

By noon mountains came in sight. Draxy was spellbound. “They are grander than the sea,” thought she, “and I never dreamed it; and they are loving, too. I should like to rest my cheek on them.”

As she drew nearer and nearer, and saw some tops still white with snow, her heart beat faster, and with a sudden pang almost of conscience-stricken remorse, she exclaimed, “Oh, I shall never, never once miss the sea!”

Elder Kinney had borrowed Eben Hill’s horse and wagon to drive over for Draxy. He was at the station half an hour before the train was due. It had been years since the steady currents of his life had been so disturbed and hurried as they were by this little girl.

“Looks like rain, Elder; I ’spect she’ll have to go over with me arter all,” said George Thayer, the handsomest, best-natured stage-driver in the whole State of New Hampshire. The Elder glanced anxiously at the sky.

“No, I guess not, George,” he replied. “’Twon’t be anything more’n a shower, an’ I’ve got an umbrella and a buffalo-robe. I can keep her dry.”

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Everybody at the station knew Draxy's story, and knew that the Elder had come to meet her. When the train stopped, all eyes eagerly scanned the passengers who stepped out on the platform. Two men, a boy, and three women, one after the other; it was but a moment, and the train was off again.

"She hain't come," exclaimed voice after voice. The Elder said nothing; he had stood a little apart from the crowd, watching for his ideal Draxy; as soon as he saw that she was not there, he had fallen into a perplexed reverie as to the possible causes of her detention. He was sorely anxious about the child. "Jest's like's not, she never changed cars down at the Junction," thought he, "an' 's half way to Montreal by this time," and the Elder felt hot with resentment against Reuben Miller.

Meantime, beautiful, dignified, and unconscious, Draxy stood on the platform, quietly looking at face after face, seeking for the white hair and gentle eyes of her trusted friend, the old minister.

George Thayer, with the quick instinct of a stage-driver, was the first to see that she was a stranger.

"Where d'ye wish to go, ma'am?" said he, stepping towards her.

"Thank you," said Draxy, "I expected some one to meet me," and she looked uneasy; but reassured by the pleasant face, she went on: "the minister from Clairvend village was to meet me here."

George Thayer said, two hours afterward, in recounting his share of the adventure, "I tell ye, boys, when she said that ye might ha' knocked me down with a feather. I hain't never heard no other woman's voice that's got jest the sound to't hern has; an' what with that, an' thinkin' how beat the Elder'd be, an' wonderin' who in thunder she was anyhow, I don't believe I opened my dum lips for a full minute; but she kind o' smiled, and sez she, 'Do you know Mr. Kinney?' and that brought me to, and jest then the Elder he come along, and so I introduced 'em."

It was not exactly an introduction, however. The Elder, entirely absorbed in conjecture as to poor little Draxy's probable whereabouts, stumbled on the platform steps and nearly fell at her very feet, and was recalled to himself only to be plunged into still greater confusion by George Thayer's loud "Hallo! here he is. Here's Elder Kinney. Here's a lady askin' for you, Elder!"

Even yet it did not dawn upon Elder Kinney who this could be; his little golden-haired girl was too vividly stamped on his brain; he looked gravely into the face of this tall and fine-looking young woman and said kindly, "Did you wish to see me, ma'am?"

Draxy smiled. She began to understand. “I am afraid you did not expect to see me so tall, sir,” she said. “I am Reuben Miller’s daughter,—Draxy,” she added, smiling again, but beginning in her turn to look confused. Could this erect, vigorous man, with a half-stern look on his dark-bearded face, be the right Mr. Kinney? her minister? It was a moment which neither Elder Kinney nor Draxy ever forgot. The unsentimental but kindly George gave the best description of it which could be given.

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“I vow, boys, I jest wish ye could ha’ seen our Elder; an’ yet, I dunno’s I do wish so, nuther. He stood a twistin’ his hat, jest like any o’ us, an’ he kind o’ stammered, an’ I don’t believe neither on ’em knew a word he said; an’ her cheeks kep’ gittin’ redder’n redder, an’ she looked’s ef she was ready to cry, and yet she couldn’t keep from larfin, no how. Ye see she thought he was an old man and he thought she was a little gal, an’ somehow’t first they didn’t either of ’em feel like nobody; but when I passed ’em in the road, jest out to Four Corners, they was talkin’ as easy and nateral as could be; an’ the Elder he looked some like himself, and she—wall, boys, you jest wait till you see her; that’s all I’ve got to say. Ef she ain’t a picter!”

The drive to the village seemed long, however, to both Draxy and the Elder. Their previous conceptions of each other had been too firmly rooted to be thus overthrown without a great jar. The Elder felt Draxy’s simplicity and child-like truthfulness more and more with each word she spoke; but her quiet dignity of manner was something to which he was unused; to his inexperience she seemed almost a fine lady, in spite of her sweet and guileless speech. Draxy, on the other hand, was a little repelled by the Elder’s whole appearance. He was a rougher man than she had known; his pronunciation grated on her ear; and he looked so strong and dark she felt a sort of fear of him. But the next morning, when Draxy came down in her neat calico gown and white apron, the Elder’s face brightened.

“Good morning, my child,” he said. “You look as fresh as a pink.” The tears came into Draxy’s eyes at the word “child,” said as her father said it.

“I don’t look so old then, this morning, do I, sir?” she asked in a pleading tone which made the Elder laugh. He was more himself this morning. All was well. Draxy sat down to breakfast with a lighter heart.

When Draxy was sitting she looked very young. Her face was as childlike as it was beautiful: and her attitudes were all singularly unconscious and free. It was when she rose that her womanhood revealed itself to the perpetual surprise of every one. As breakfast went on the Elder gradually regained his old feeling about her; his nature was as simple, as spontaneous as hers; he called her “child” again several times in the course of the meal. But when at the end of it Draxy rose, tall, erect, almost majestic in her fullness of stature, he felt again singularly removed from her.

“’Ud puzzle any man to say whether she’s a child or a woman,” said the Elder to himself. But his face shone with pleasure as he walked by her side out into the little front yard. Draxy was speechless with delight. In the golden east stretched a long range of mountains, purple to the top; down in the valley, a mile below the Elder’s house, lay the village; a little shining river ran side by side with its main street. To the north were high hills, some dark green and wooded, some of brown pasture land.

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“Oh, sir,” said Draxy, “is there any other spot in your mountain land so beautiful as this?”

“No, not one,” said the Elder, “not one;” and he, too, looked out silently on the scene.

Presently Draxy exclaimed, with a sigh, “Oh, it makes me feel like crying to think of my father’s seeing this!”

“Shall I tell you now about my father, sir?” she continued; “you ought to know all about us, you have been so good.”

Then sitting on the low step of the door, while the Elder sat in an arm-chair in the porch, Draxy told the story of her father’s life, and, unconsciously, of her own. More than once the Elder wiped his eyes; more than once he rose and walked up and down before the door, gazing with undefined but intense emotion at this woman telling her pathetic story with the simple-hearted humility of a child. Draxy looked younger than ever curled up in the doorway, with her hands lying idle on her white apron. The Elder was on the point of stroking her hair. Suddenly she rose, and said, “But I am taking too much of your time, sir; will you take me now to see the house you spoke of, which we could hire?” She was again the majestic young woman. The Elder was again thrown back, and puzzled.

He tried to persuade her to give up all idea of hiring the house: to make his house their home for the present. But she replied steadfastly, “I must look at the house, sir, before I decide.” They walked down into the village together. Draxy was utterly unconscious of observation, but the Elder knew only too well that every eye of Clairvend was at some window-pane studying his companion’s face and figure. All whom they met stared so undisguisedly that, fearing Draxy would be annoyed, he said,—

“You mustn’t mind the folks staring so at you. You see they’ve been talkin’ the matter all over about the land, an’ your comin’, for a month, an’ it’s no more than natural they should want to know how you look;” and he, too, looked admiringly at Draxy’s face.

“Oh,” said Draxy (it was a new idea to her mind), “I never thought of that.”

“I hope they are all glad we are coming, sir,” added she, a moment after.

“Oh yes, yes; they’re glad enough. ’Taint often anything happens up here, you know, and they’ve all thought everything of you since your first letter came.”

Draxy colored. She had not dreamed of taking a whole village into her confidence. But she was glad of the friendliness; and she met every inquisitive gaze after this with an open, responsive look of such beaming good-will that she made friends of all whom she saw. One or two stopped and spoke; most were afraid to do so, unconsciously repelled, as the Elder had been at first, by something in Draxy’s dress and bearing which to their extreme inexperience suggested the fine lady. Nothing could have been plainer than Draxy’s cheap gray gown; but her dress always had character: the tiniest knot of ribbon

at her throat assumed the look of a decoration; and many a lady for whom she worked had envied her the expression of her simple clothes.

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The house would not answer. Draxy shook her head as soon as she saw it, and when the Elder told her that in the spring freshets the river washed into the lower story, she turned instantly away, and said, “Let us go home, sir; I must think of something else.”

At dinner Draxy was preoccupied, and anxious. The expression of perplexity made her look older, but no less beautiful. Elder Kinney gazed at her more steadily than he knew; and he did not call her “child” again.

After dinner he took her over the house, explaining to her, at every turn, how useless most of the rooms were to him. In truth, the house was admirably adapted for two families, with the exception that there was but one kitchen. “But that could be built on in a very few days, and would cost very little,” said the Elder eagerly. Already all the energies of his strong nature were kindled by the resolve to keep Draxy under his roof.

“I suppose it might be so built that it could be easily moved off and added to our own house when we build for ourselves,” said Draxy, reflectively.

“Oh, yes,” said the Elder, “no sort o’ trouble about that,” and he glowed with delight. He felt sure that his cause was gained.

But he found Draxy very inflexible. There was but one arrangement of which she would think for a moment. It was, that the Elder should let to them one half of his house, and that the two families should be entirely distinct. Until the new kitchen and out-buildings were finished, if the Elder would consent to take them as boarders, they would live with him; “otherwise, sir, I must find some one in the village who will take us,” said Draxy in a quiet tone, which Elder Kinney knew instinctively was not to be argued with. It was a novel experience for the Elder in more ways than one. He was used to having his parishioners, especially the women, yield implicitly to his advice. This gentle-voiced girl, who said to him, “Don’t you think, sir?” in an appealing tone which made his blood quicken, but who afterward, when she disagreed with him, stood her ground immovably even against entreaties, was a phenomenon in his life. He began to stand in awe of her. When some one said to him on the third day after Draxy’s arrival: “Well, Elder, I don’t know what she’d ha’ done without you,” he replied emphatically, “Done without me! You’ll find out that all Reuben Miller’s daughter wants of anybody is jest to let her know exactly how things lay. She ain’t beholden to anybody for opinions. She’s as trustin’ as a baby, while you’re tellin’ her facts, but I’d like to see anybody make her change her mind about what’s best to be done; and I reckon she’s generally right; what’s more, she’s one of the Lord’s favorites, an’ He ain’t above guidin’ in small things no mor’n in great.”

No wonder Elder Kinney was astonished. In forty-eight hours Draxy had rented one half of his house, made a contract with a carpenter for the building of a kitchen and out-buildings on the north side of it, engaged board at the Elder’s table for her parents and herself for a month, and hired Bill Sims to be her father’s head man for one year. All the

while she seemed as modestly grateful to the Elder as if he had done it all for her. On the afternoon of the second day she said to him:—

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“Now, sir, what is the nearest place for me to buy our furniture?”

“Why, ain’t you goin’ to use mine—at least’s far’s it goes?” said the poor Elder. “I thought that was in the bargain.”

Draxy looked disturbed. “Oh, how careless of me,” she said; “I am afraid nothing was said about it. But we cannot do that; my father would dislike it; and as we must have furniture for our new house, we might as well have it now. I have seven hundred dollars with me, sir; father thought I might decide to buy a house, and have to pay something down.”

“Please don’t be angry with me,” she added pleadingly, for the Elder looked vexed. “You know if I am sure my father would prefer a thing, I must do it.”

The Elder was disarmed.

“Well, if you are set on buyin’ furniture,” he said, “I shouldn’t wonder if you’d have a chance to buy all you’d want cheap down at Squire Williams’s sale in Mill Creek. His wife died the night your first letter came, an’ I heard somebody say he was goin’ to sell all out; an’ they’ve always been well-to-do, the Williamses, an’ I reckon you’d fancy some o’ their things better’n anything you’d get at the stores.”

Already the Elder began to divine Draxy’s tastes; to feel that she had finer needs than the women he had known. In less than an hour he was at the door with Eben Hill’s horse and wagon to take Draxy to Squire Williams’s house.

“Jest more o’ the same Providence that follows that girl,” thought he when he saw Draxy’s eyes fairly dilate with pleasure as he led her into the old-fashioned parlor, where the furniture was piled and crowded ready for the auction.

“Oh, will they not cost too much for me, dear Mr. Kinney?” whispered Draxy.

“No, I guess not,” he said, “there ain’t much biddin’ at these sort of sales up here,” and he mentally resolved that nothing Draxy wanted should cost too much for her.

The sale was to be the next day. Draxy made a careful list of the things she would like to buy. The Elder was to come over and bid them off for her.

“Now you just go over ’em again,” said the Elder, “and mark off what you’d like to have if they didn’t cost anything, because sometimes things go for’s good ’s nothing, if nobody happens to want ’em.” So Draxy made a second list, and laughing a little girlish laugh as she handed the papers to the Elder, pointed to the words “must haves” at the head of the first list, and “would-like-to-haves” at the head of the second. The Elder put them both in his breast-pocket, and he and Draxy drove home.

The next night two great loads of Squire Williams's furniture were carried into Elder Kinney's house. As article after article was taken in, Draxy clapped her hands and almost screamed with delight; all her "would-like-to-haves" were there. "Oh, the clock, the clock! Have I really got that, too!" she exclaimed, and she turned to the Elder, half crying, and said, "How shall I ever thank you, sir?"

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The Elder was uncomfortable. He was in a dilemma. He had not been able to resist buying the clock for Draxy. He dared not tell her what he had paid for it. “She’d never let me give her a cent’s worth, I know that well enough. It would be just like her to make me take it back,” thought he. Luckily Draxy was too absorbed in her new riches, all the next day, to ask for her accounts, and by the next night the Elder had deliberately resolved to make false returns on his papers as to the price of several articles. “I’ll tell her all about it one o’ these days when she knows me better,” he comforted himself by thinking; “I never did think Ananias was an out an’ out liar. It couldn’t be denied that all he did say was true!” and the Elder resolutely and successfully tried to banish the subject from his mind by thinking about Draxy.

The furniture was, much of it, valuable old mahogany, dark in color and quaint in shape. Draxy could hardly contain herself with delight, as she saw the expression it gave to the rooms; it had cost so little that she ventured to spend a small sum for muslin curtains, new papers, bright chintz, and shelves here and there. When all was done, she herself was astonished at the result. The little home was truly lovely. “Oh, sir, my father has never had a pretty home like this in all his life,” said she to the Elder, who stood in the doorway of the sitting-room looking with half-pained wonder at the transformation. He felt, rather than saw, how lovely the rooms looked; he could not help being glad to see Draxy so glad; but he felt farther removed from her by this power of hers to create what he could but dimly comprehend. Already he unconsciously weighed all things in new balances; already he began to have a strange sense of humility in the presence of this woman.

Ten days from the day that Draxy arrived in Clairvend she drove over with the Elder to meet her father and mother at the station. She had arranged that the Elder should carry her father back in the wagon; she and her mother would go in the stage. She counted much on the long, pleasant drive through the woods as an opening to the acquaintance between her father and the Elder. She had been too busy to write any but the briefest letters home, and had said very little about him. To her last note she had added a post-script,—

“I am sure you will like Mr. Kinney, father. He is very kind and very good. But he is not old as we thought.”

To the Elder she said, as they drove over, “I think you will love my father, sir, and I know you will do him good. But he will not say much at first; you will have to talk,” and Draxy smiled. The Elder and she understood each other very well.

“I don’t think there’s much danger o’ my not lovin’ him,” replied the Elder; “by all you tell he must be uncommon lovable.” Draxy turned on him such a beaming smile that he could not help adding, “an’ I should think his bein’ your father was enough.”

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Draxy looked seriously in his face, and said “Oh, Mr. Kinney, I’m not anything by the side of father.”

The Elder’s eyes twinkled.

It was a silent though joyful group which gathered around the Elder’s tea-table that night.

Reuben and Jane were tired, bewildered, but their eyes rested on Draxy with perpetual smiles. Draxy also smiled more than she spoke. The Elder felt himself half out of place and wished to go away, but Draxy looked grieved at his proposal to do so, and he stayed. But nobody could eat, and old Nancy, who had spent her utmost resources on the supper, was cruelly disappointed. She bustled in and out on various pretenses, but at last could keep silence no longer. “Seems to me ye’ve dreadful slim appetites for folks that’s been travellin’ all day. Perhaps ye don’t like yer victuals,” she said, glancing sharply at Reuben.

“Oh yes, madame, yes,” said poor Reuben, nervously, “everything is very nice; much nicer than I am used to.”

Draxy laughed aloud. “My father never eats when he is tired, Nancy. You’ll see how he’ll eat to-morrow.”

After Nancy had left the room, Reuben wiped his forehead, and Draxy laughed again in spite of herself. Old Nancy had been so kind and willing in helping her, she had grown fond of her, and had quite forgotten her father’s dread. When Reuben bade Draxy good-night, he said under his breath, “I like your Elder very much, daughter; but I don’t know how I’m ever goin’ to stand livin’ with that Injun.”

“My Elder,” said Draxy to herself as she went up-stairs, “he’s everybody’s Elder—and the Lord’s most of all I think,” and she went to sleep thinking of the solemn words which she had heard him speak on the last Sunday.

It was strange how soon the life of the new household adjusted itself; how full the days were, and how swift. The summer was close upon them; Reuben’s old farmer instincts and habits revived in full force. Bill Sims proved a most efficient helper; he had been Draxy’s sworn knight, from the moment of her first interview with him. There would be work on Reuben’s farm for many hands, but Reuben was in no haste. The sugar camp assured him of an income which was wealth to their simple needs; and he wished to act advisedly and cautiously in undertaking new enterprises. All the land was wild land—-much of it deep swamps. The maple orchard was the only part immediately profitable. The village people came at once to see them. Everybody was touched by Jane’s worn face and gentle ways; her silence did not repel them; everybody liked Draxy too, and admired her, but many were a little afraid of her. The village men had said that she was

“the smartest woman that had ever set foot in Clairvend village,” and human nature is human nature. It would take a great deal of Draxy’s kindly good-will to make her sister women forgive her for being cleverer than they. Draxy and Reuben were inseparable. They drove; they walked; even into the swamps courageous Draxy penetrated with her father and Bill Sims, as they went about surveying the land; and it was Draxy’s keen instinct which in many cases suggested where improvements could be made.

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In the mean time Elder Kinney's existence had become transformed. He dared not to admit himself how much it meant, this new delight in simply being alive, for back of his delight lurked a desperate fear; he dared not move. Day after day he spent more and more time in the company of Draxy and her father. Reuben and he were fast becoming close friends. Reuben's gentle, trustful nature found repose in the Elder's firm, sturdy downrightness, much as it had in Captain Melville's; and the Elder would have loved Reuben if he had not been Draxy's father. But to Draxy he seemed to draw no nearer. She was the same frank, affectionate, merry, puzzling woman-child that she had been at first; yet as he saw more and more how much she knew of books which he did not know, of people, and of affairs of which he had never heard—how fluently, graciously, and even wisely she could talk, he felt himself cut off from her. Her sweet, low tones and distinct articulation tortured him while they fascinated him; they seemed to set her so apart. In fact, each separate charm she had, produced in the poor Elder's humble heart a mixture of delight and pain which could not be analyzed and could not long be borne.

He exaggerated all his own defects of manner, and speech, and education; he felt uncomfortable in Draxy's presence, in spite of all the affectionate reverence with which she treated him; he said to himself fifty times a day, "It's only my bein' a minister that makes her think anythin' o' me." The Elder was fast growing wretched.

But Draxy was happy. She was still in some ways more child than woman. Her peculiar training had left her imagination singularly free from fancies concerning love and marriage. The Elder was a central interest in her life; she would have said instantly and cordially that she loved him dearly. She saw him many times every day; she knew all his outgoings and incomings; she knew the first step of his foot on the threshold; she felt that he belonged to them, and they to him. Yet as a woman thinks of the man whose wife she longs to be, Draxy had never once thought of Elder Kinney.

But when the new kitchen was finished, and the Millers entered on their separate housekeeping, a change came. As Reuben and Jane and Draxy sat down for the first time alone together at their tea-table, Reuben said cheerily:—

"Now this seems like old times. This is nice."

"Yes," replied Jane. Draxy did not speak. Reuben looked at her. She colored suddenly, deeply, and said with desperate honesty,—

"Yes, father; but I can't help thinking how lonely Mr. Kinney must be."

"Well, I declare," said Reuben, conscience-stricken; "I suppose he must be; I hate to think on't. But we'll have him in here's often's he'll come."

Just the other side of the narrow entry sat the Elder, leaning both his elbows on the table, and looking over at the vacant place where the night before, and for thirty nights before, Draxy had sat. It was more than he could bear. He sprang up, and leaving his supper untasted, walked out of the house.

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Draxy heard him go. Draxy had passed in that moment into a new world. She divined all.

“He hasn’t eaten any supper,” thought she; and she listened intently to hear him come in again. The clock struck ten, he had not returned! Draxy went to bed, but she could not sleep. The little house was still; the warm white moonlight lay like summer snow all over it; Draxy looked out of her window; the Elder was slowly coming up the hill; Draxy knelt down like a little child and said, “God bless him,” and crept back to bed. When she heard him shut his bedroom door she went to sleep.

The next day Draxy’s eyes did not look as they had looked the day before. When Elder Kinney first saw her, she was coming down stairs. He was standing at the foot of the staircase and waited to say “Good morning.” As he looked up at her, he started back and exclaimed: “Why, Draxy, what’s the matter?”

“Nothing is the matter, sir,” said Draxy, as she stepped from the last stair, and standing close in front of him, lifted the new, sweet, softened eyes up to his. Draxy was as simple and sincere in this as in all other emotions and acts of her life. She had no coquetry in her nature. She had no distinct thought either of a new relation between herself and the Elder. She simply felt a new oneness with him; and she could not have understood the suggestion of concealment. If Elder Kinney had been a man of the world, he would have folded Draxy to his heart that instant. If he had been even a shade less humble and self-disrustful, he would have done it, as it was. But he never dreamed that he might. He folded his empty arms very tight over his faithful, aching, foolish heart, and tried to say calmly and naturally, “Are you sure? Seems to me you don’t look quite well.”

But after that morning he never felt wholly without hope. He could not tell precisely why. Draxy did not seek him, did not avoid him. She was perhaps a little less merry; said fewer words; but she looked glad, and more than glad. “I think it’s the eyes,” he said to himself again and again, as he tried to analyze the new look on Draxy’s face which gave him hope. These were sweet days. There are subtle joys for lovers who dwell side by side in one house, together and yet apart. The very air is loaded with significance to them—the door, the window, the stairway. Always there is hope of meeting; always there is consciousness of presence; everywhere a mysterious sense that the loved one has passed by. More than once Seth Kinney knelt and laid his cheek on the stairs which Draxy’s feet had just ascended! Often sweet, guileless Draxy thought, as she went up and down, “Ah, the dear feet that go over these stairs.” One day the Elder, as he passed by the wall of the room where he knew Draxy was sitting, brushed his great hand and arm against it so heavily that she started, thinking he had stumbled. But as the firm step went on, without pausing, she smiled, she

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hardly knew why. The next time he did it she laid down her work, locked and unlocked her hands, and looking toward the door, whispered under her breath, “Dear hands!” Finally this became almost a habit of his; he did not at first think Draxy would hear it; but he felt, as he afterwards told her, “like a great affectionate dog going by her door, and that was all he could do. He would have liked to lie down on the rug.”

These were very sweet days; spite of his misgivings, Elder Kinney was happy; and Draxy, in spite of her unconsciousness, seemed to herself to be living in a blissful dream. But a sweeter day came.

One Saturday evening Reuben said to Draxy,—

“Daughter, I’ve done somethin’ I’m afraid’ll trouble you. I’ve told th’ Elder about your verses, an’ showed him the hymn you wrote when you was tryin’ to give it all up about the land.”

“Oh, father, how could you,” gasped Draxy; and she looked as if she would cry.

Reuben could not tell just how it happened. It seemed to have come out before he knew it, and after it had, he could not help showing the hymn.

Draxy was very seriously disturbed; but she tried to conceal it from her father, and the subject was dropped.

The next morning Elder Kinney preached—it seemed to his people—as he never preached before. His subject was self-renunciation, and he spoke as one who saw the waving palms of the martyrs and heard their shouts of joy. There were few dry eyes in the little meeting-house. Tears rolled down Draxy’s face. But she looked up suddenly, on hearing Elder Kinney say, in an unsteady voice,—

“My bretherin, I’m goin’ to read to you now a hymn which comes nigher to expressin’ my idea of the kind of resignation God likes than any hymn that’s ever been written or printed in any hymn-book;” and then he began:—

“I cannot think but God must know,” *etc*.

Draxy’s first feeling was one of resentment; but it was a very short-lived one. The earnest tone, the solemn stillness of the wondering people, the peaceful summer air floating in at the open windows,—all lifted her out of herself, and made her glad to hear her own hymn read by the man she loved, for the worship of God. But her surprise was still greater when the choir began to sing the lines to a quaint old Methodist tune. They had been provided with written copies of the hymn, and had practiced it so faithfully that they sang it well. Draxy broke down and sobbed for a few moments, so that Elder

Kinney was on the point of forgetting everything, and springing to her side. He had not supposed that anything in the world could so overthrow Draxy's composure. He did not know how much less strong her nerves were now than they had been two months before.

After church, Draxy walked home alone very rapidly. She did not wish to see any one. She was glad that her father and mother had not been there. She could not understand the tumult of her feelings.

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At twilight, she stole out of the back door of the house, and walked down to a little brook which ran near by. As she stood leaning against a young maple tree she heard steps, and without looking up, knew that the Elder was coming. She did not move nor speak. He waited some minutes in silence. Then he said “Oh, Draxy! I never once thought o’ painin’ you! I thought you’d like it. Hymns are made to be sung, dear; and that one o’ yours is so beautiful!” He spoke as gently as her father might, and in a voice she hardly knew. Draxy made no reply. The Elder had never seen her like this. Her lips quivered, and he saw tears in her eyes.

“Oh, Draxy, do look up at me—just once! You don’t know how hard it is for a man to think he’s hurt anybody—like you!” stammered the poor Elder, ending his sentence quite differently from what he had intended.

Draxy smiled through her tears, and looking up, said: “But I am not hurt, Mr. Kinney; I don’t know what I am crying for, sir;” and her eyes fell again.

The Elder looked down upon her in silence. Moments passed. “Oh, if I could make her look up at me again!” he thought. His unspoken wish stirred her veins; slowly she lifted her eyes; they were calm now, and unutterably loving. They were more than the Elder could bear.”

“Oh, Draxy, Draxy!” exclaimed he, stretching out both his arms towards her.

“My heart grows weaker and more weak
With looking on the thing so dear
Which lies so far, and yet so near!”

Slowly, very slowly, like a little child learning to walk, with her eyes full of tears, but her mouth smiling, Draxy moved towards the Elder. He did not stir, partly because he could not, but partly because he would not lose one instant of the deliciousness of seeing her, feeling her come.

When they went back to the house, Reuben was sitting in the porch. The Elder took his hand and said:

“Mr. Miller, I meant to have asked you first; but God didn’t give me time.”

Reuben smiled.

“You’ve’s good’s asked me a good while back, Elder; an’ I take it you haint ever had much doubt what my answer’d be.” Then, as Draxy knelt down by his chair and laid her head on his shoulder, he added more solemnly,—

“But I’d jest like once to say to ye, Elder, that if ever I get to heaven, I wouldn’t ask anythin’ more o’ the Lord than to let me see Draxy ‘n’ you a comin’ in together, an’ lookin’ as you looked jest now when ye come in’t that gate!”

The Elder’s Wife.

Sequel to “Draxy Miller’s Dowry.”

Part I.

Draxy and the Elder were married in the little village church, on the first Sunday in September.

“O Draxy! let it be on a communion Sunday,” the Elder had said, with an expression on his face which Draxy could not quite fathom; “I can’t tell you what it ’ud be to me to promise myself over again to the blessed Saviour, the same hour I promise to you, darling, I’m so afraid of loving Him less. I don’t see how I can remember anything about heaven, after I’ve got you, Draxy,” and tears stood in the Elder’s eyes.

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Draxy looked at him wonderingly and with a little pain in her face. To her serene nature, heaven and earth, this life and all the others which may follow it, had so long seemed one—love and happiness and duty had become so blended in one sweet atmosphere of living in daily nearness to God, that she could not comprehend the Elder's words.

"Why, Mr. Kinney, it's all Christ," she said, slowly and hesitatingly, slipping her hand into his, and looking up at him so lovingly that his face flushed, and he threw his arms around her, and only felt a thousand times more that heaven had come to mean but one thing to him.

"Darling," he whispered, "would you feel so if I were to die and leave you alone?"

"Yes, I think so," said Draxy, still more slowly, and turning very pale. "You never can really leave me, and no human being can be really alone; it would still be all Christ, and it would be living His life and God's still;" but tears rolled down her cheeks, and she began to sob.

"Oh, forgive me, Draxy," exclaimed the Elder, wrung to the heart by the sight of her grief. "I'm nothing but a great brute to say that to you just now; but, Draxy, you don't know much about a man's heart yet; you're such a saint yourself, you can't understand how it makes a man feel as if this earth was enough, and he didn't want any heaven, when he loves a woman as I love you," and the Elder threw himself on the ground at Draxy's feet, and laid his face down reverently on the hem of her gown. There were fiery depths in this man's nature of which he had never dreamed, until this fair, sweet, strong womanhood crossed his path. His love of Draxy kindled and transformed his whole consciousness of himself and of life; it was no wonder that he felt terrors; that he asked himself many times a day what had become of the simple-minded, earnest, contented worker he used to be. He was full of vague and restless yearnings; he longed to do, to be, to become, he knew not what, but something that should be more of kin to this beautiful nature he worshipped—something that should give her great joy—-something in which she could feel great pride.

"It ain't right, I know it ain't right, to feel so about any mortal," he would say to himself; "that's the way I used to feel about Jesus. I wanted to do all for Him, and now I want to do all for Draxy," and the great, tender, perplexed heart was sorely afraid of its new bliss.

They were sitting in the maple grove behind the house. In the tree under which they sat was a yellow-hammer's nest. The two birds had been fluttering back and forth in the branches for some time. Suddenly they both spread their wings and flew swiftly away in opposite directions. Draxy looked up, smiling through her tears, and, pointing to the fast fading specks in the distant air, said,—

“It would be like that. They are both sent on errands. They won’t see each other again till the errands are done.”

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The Elder looked into her illumined face, and, sighing, said: "I can't help prayin' that the Lord'll have errands for us that we can do together as long's we live, Draxy."

"Yes, dear," said Draxy, "I pray for that too," and then they were silent for some minutes. Draxy spoke first. "But Mr. Kinney, I never heard of anybody's being married on Sunday —did you?"

"No," said the Elder, "I never did, but I've always thought it was the only day a man ought to be married on; I mean the most beautiful, the sweetest day."

"Yes," replied Draxy, a solemn and tender light spreading over her whole face, "it certainly is. I wonder why nobody has ever thought so before. But perhaps many people have," she added with a merrier smile; "we don't know everybody."

Presently she looked up anxiously and said:

"But do you think the people would like it? Wouldn't they think it very strange?"

The Elder hesitated. He, too, had thought of this.

"Well, I tell you, Draxy, it's just this way: I've tried more than once to get some of them to come and be married on a Sunday in church, and they wouldn't, just because they never heard of it before; and I'd like to have them see that I was in true earnest about it. And they like you so well, Draxy, and you know they do all love me a great deal more'n I deserve, and I can't help believing it will do them good all their lives by making them think more how solemn a thing a marriage ought to be, if they take it as I think they will; and I do think I know them well enough to be pretty sure."

So it was settled that the marriage should take place after the morning sermon, immediately before the communion service. When Reuben was told of this, his face expressed such absolute amazement that Draxy laughed outright, in spite of the deep solemnity of her feeling in regard to it.

"Why, father," she said, "you couldn't look more surprised if I had told you I was not to be married at all."

"But Draxy, Draxy," Reuben gasped, "who ever heard of such a thing? What will folks say?"

"I don't know that anybody ever heard of such a thing, father dear," answered Draxy, "but I am not afraid of what the people will say. They love Mr. Kinney, and he has always told them that Sunday was the day to be married on. I shouldn't wonder if every young man and young woman in the parish looked on it in a new and much holier light after this. I know I began to as soon as the Elder talked about it, and it wouldn't seem right to me now to be married on any other day," and Draxy stooped and kissed her

father's forehead very tenderly. There was a tenderness in Draxy's manner now towards every one which can hardly be described in words. It had a mixture of humility and of gracious bestowal in it, of entreaty and of benediction, which were ineffably beautiful and winning. It is ever so when a woman, who is as strong as she is

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sweet, comes into the fullness of her womanhood's estate of love. Her joy overflows on all; currents of infinite compassion set towards those who must miss that by which she is thrilled; her incredulity of her own bliss is forever questioning humbly; she feels herself forever in presence of her lover, at once rich and free and a queen, and poor and chained and a vassal. So her largess is perpetual, involuntary, unconscious, and her appeal is tender, wistful, beseeching. In Draxy's large nature,—her pure, steadfast, loving soul, quickened and exalted by the swift currents of an exquisitely attuned and absolutely healthful body,—this new life of love and passion wrought a change which was vivid and palpable to the commonest eyes. Men and women upon whom she smiled, in passing, felt themselves lifted and drawn, they knew not how. A sentiment of love, which had almost reverence in it, grew up towards her in the hearts of the people. A certain touch of sadness, of misgiving, mingled with it.

"I'm afraid she ain't long for this world; she's got such a look o' heaven in her face," was said more than once, in grieving tones, when the Elder's approaching marriage was talked of. But old Ike was farther sighted, in his simplicity, than the rest. "'Tain't that," he said, "that woman's got in her face. It's the kind o' heaven that God sends down to stay'n this world, to help make us fit for the next. Shouldn't wonder ef she outlived th' Elder a long day," and Ike wiped his old eyes slyly with the back of his hand.

The day of the marriage was one of those shining September days which only mountain regions know. The sky was cloudless and of a transcendent blue. The air was soft as the air of June. Draxy's young friends had decorated the church with evergreens and clematis vines; and on each side of the communion-table were tall sheaves of purple asters and golden-rod. Two children were to be baptized at noon, and on a little table, at the right of the pulpit, stood the small silver baptismal font, wreathed with white asters and the pale feathery green of the clematis seed.

When Draxy walked up the aisle leaning on her father's arm, wearing the same white dress she had worn on Sundays all summer, it cannot be denied that there were sighs of disappointment in some of the pews. The people had hoped for something more. Draxy had kept her own counsel on this point closely, replying to all inquiries as to what she would wear, "White, of course," but replying in such a tone that no one had quite dared to ask more, and there had even been those in the parish who "reckoned" that she wouldn't "be satisfied with anythin' less than white satin." Her head was bare, her beautiful brown hair wound tightly round and round in the same massive knot as usual. Her only ornaments were the creamy white blossoms of the low cornel; one cluster in the braids of her hair, and one on her bosom. As she entered the pew and sat down by

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the side of her mother, slanting sunbeams from the southern windows fell upon her head, lighting up the bright hair till it looked like a saintly halo. Elder Kinney sat in the pulpit, with his best loved friend, Elder Williams, who was to preach that day and perform the marriage ceremony. When Draxy and her father entered the door, Elder Kinney rose and remained standing until they reached their pew. As Draxy sat down and the golden sunbeams flickered around her, the Elder sank back into his seat and covered his eyes with his hand. He did not change his posture until the prayers and the hymns and the sermon were over, and Elder Williams said in a low voice,—

“The ceremony of marriage will now be performed.” Then he rose, his countenance glowing like that of one who had come from some Mount of Transfiguration. With a dignity and grace of bearing such as royal ambassadors might envy, he walked slowly down to Reuben Miller’s pew, and, with his head reverently bent, received Draxy from her father’s hands.

Passionate love and close contact with Draxy’s exquisite nature were developing, in this comparatively untrained man, a peculiar courteousness and grace, which added a subtle charm to the simplicity of his manners. As he walked up the aisle with Draxy clinging to his arm, his tall figure looked majestic in its strength, but his face was still bent forward, turned toward her with a look of reverence, of love unspeakable.

The whole congregation rose, moved by one impulse, and the silence was almost too solemn. When the short and simple ceremony was over, the Elder led Draxy to his own pew and sat down by her side.

After the little children had been baptized, the usual announcement of the Lord’s Supper was made, and the usual invitation given. Absolute silence followed it, broken only by the steps of the singers leaving their seats in the gallery to take places below. Not a person moved to leave the body of the house. Elder Williams glanced at Elder Kinney in perplexity, and waited for some moments longer. The silence still remained unbroken; there was not a man, woman, or child there but felt conscious of a tender and awed impulse to remain and look on at this ceremony, so newly significant and solemn to their beloved Elder. Tears came into many eyes as he took the cup of wine from Deacon Plummer’s trembling hands and passed it to Draxy, and many hearts which had never before longed for the right to partake of the sacred emblems longed for it then.

After the services, were ended, just as Elder Williams was about to pronounce the benediction, Elder Kinney rose from his seat, and walking rapidly to the communion table said,—

“My dear friends, I know you don’t look for any words from me to-day; but there are some of you I never before saw at this blessed feast of our Lord, and I must say one

word to you from Him." Then pausing, he looked round upon them all, and, with an unutterable yearning in the gesture, stretched out both his arms and said: "O my people, my people! like as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing, He would have gathered you long ago, but ye would not." Then, still holding out his arms towards them, he pronounced the benediction.

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Silently and solemnly the little congregation dispersed. A few lingered, and looked longingly at Draxy, as if they would go back and speak to her. But she stood with her eyes fixed on the Elder's face, utterly unconscious of the presence of any other human being. Even her father dared not break the spell of holy beatitude which rested on her countenance.

"No, no, ma," he said to Jane, who proposed that they should go back to the pew and walk home with her. "This ain't like any other wedding that was ever seen on this earth, unless, maybe, that one in Cana. And I don't believe the Lord was any nearer to that bridegroom than He is to this one."

So Jane and Reuben walked home from church alone, for the first time since they came to Clairvend, and Draxy and her husband followed slowly behind. The village people who watched them were bewildered by their manner, and interpreted it variously according to their own temperaments.

"You'd ha' thought now they'd been married years an' years to look at 'em," said Eben Hill; "they didn't speak a word, nor look at each other any more 'n old Deacon Plummer 'n his wife, who was joggin' along jest afore 'em."

Old Ike—poor, ignorant, loving old Ike, whose tender instinct was like the wistful sagacity of a faithful dog—read their faces better. He had hurried out of church and hid himself in the edge of a little pine grove which the Elder and Draxy must pass.

"I'd jest like to see 'em a little longer," he said to himself half apologetically. As they walked silently by, old Ike's face saddened, and at last became convulsed with grief. Creeping out from beneath the pines, he slowly followed them up the hill, muttering to himself, in the fashion which had grown upon him in his solitary life:—

"O Lord! O Lord! No such looks as them is long for this earth. O Lord! which is it ye're goin' to take? I reckon it's the Elder. I reckon 'tis. That woman's goin' to have her heart broke. O Lord! O Lordy me! I can't bear the sight on't!" and he leaped a fence and struck off across the fields towards his house. He did not shut his eyes that night, but tossed and groaned aloud. Towards morning he formed a resolution which calmed him somewhat.

"Ef I kin only be right close to 'em till it comes, p'raps I can be of a little use. Leastways it 'ud be some comfort to try," he said.

As the Elder and Draxy were sitting at breakfast the next day, they caught sight of the old man's bent figure walking up and down outside the gate, and stopping now and then irresolutely, as if he would come in, but dared not.

“Why, there’s old Ike,” exclaimed the Elder, “What on earth can he want at this time of day!”

Draxy looked up with a very tender smile, and said: “I shouldn’t wonder if he wanted just to see how happy you look, Mr. Kinney. Nobody in this world loves you so well as old Ike does.”

“Oh, Draxy!” said the Elder, reproachfully.

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“No, dear, not even I. Old Ike never dreams of receiving any love in return. I have seen his eyes follow you with just such a look as dogs’ eyes have. I wish we could do something for him.”

“We will, dear, we will go and see him often. I own it smites me to the soul sometimes to think how humble he is, and so glad to see me when I haven’t been near him for six months, maybe.”

At this moment Hannah put her head into the door and said, in no pleasant voice:—

“Here’s that Ike Sanborn wantin’ to speak to ye sir, but I telled him”—

“Let him come right in here, Hannah,” said Draxy. “Mr. Kinney and I will be very glad to see him this morning.” Hannah’s face relaxed in spite of herself, in answer to Draxy’s smile, but she could not forgive Ike for what seemed to her a most unwarrantable intrusion, and she was grimmer than ever when she returned to him, saying,—

“They’ll see ye; but I must say, I sh’d ha’ thought ye’d know better’n to be comin’ round here this mornin’ of all mornin’s. Ain’t they to have a minute’s peace to theirselves?”

Ike looked up appealingly at the hard Indian face.

“I wa’n’t goin’ to keep ’em a minute,” he said: “I won’t go in now. I’ll come agin, ef you say so, Hannah.”

“No, no—go in, now ye’re here; ye’ve interrupted ’em, and ye may’s well take the good on’t now,” replied the vengeful Hannah, pushing Ike along towards the sitting-room door.

“Ef there’s anythin’ I do hate, it’s shiftless white folks,” grumbled Hannah as she went back to her work. If poor Ike had known the angry contempt for him which filled Hannah’s heart, he would have felt still less courage for the proposition he had come to make. As it was, he stood in the doorway the very picture of irresolution and embarrassment.

“Come in, come in, Ike,” said the Elder; “you’re the first one of the parish to pay your respects to Mrs. Kinney.” Draxy rose from her seat smiling, and went towards him and said: “And Mrs. Kinney is very glad to see you, Ike.”

This was too much for the loving old heart. He dropped his hat on the floor, and began to speak so rapidly and incoherently that both Draxy and the Elder were almost frightened.

“O Elder! O Miss Kinney!—I’ve been a thinkin’ that p’raps you’d let me come an’ live with you, an’ do all yer chores. I’d bring my two cows, an’ my keepin’ wouldn’t be very

much; an'—oh, sir, ef ye'll only let me, I'll bless ye all the days o' my life," and Ike began to cry.

So did Draxy, for that matter, and the Elder was not very far from it. Draxy spoke first.

"Why, Ike, do you really want so much to live with us?"

Ike's first answer was a look. Then he said, very simply,—

"I've laid awake all night, ma'am, tryin' to get bold enough to come and ask ye."

Draxy looked at her husband, and said in a low voice, "You know what I told you just now, Mr. Kinney?"

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The Elder saw that Draxy was on Ike's side.

"Well, well, Ike," he said, "you shall certainly come and try it. Perhaps you won't like it as well as you think. But don't say anything about it to any one else till you hear from us. You shall come very soon."

Ike turned to go, but lingered, and finally stammered: "I hope, sir, ye don't take it that I'm askin' a charity; I make bold to believe I could be worth to ye's much's my keepin'; I'm considerable handy 'bout a good many things, an' I can do a day's mowin' yet with any man in the parish, I don't care who he is. It's only because—because"—Ike's voice broke, and it was very nearly with a sob that he added, "because I love ye, sir," and he hurried away. Draxy sprang after him.

"I know that very well, Ike, and so does Mr. Kinney, and you will be a great help to us. You are making us the most valuable wedding present we've had yet, Ike," and Draxy held out her hand.

Ike looked at the hand, but he did not touch it.

"Maybe God'll let me thank ye yet, ma'am," he said, and was gone.

As he went through the kitchen a sudden misgiving seized him of terror of Hannah.

"Supposin' she sh'd take into her head to be agin me," thought he. "They say the Elder himself's 'fraid on her. I don't s'pose she'd dare to try to pizen me outright, an' anyhow there's allers eggs an' potatoes. But I'll bring her round fust or last;" and, made wary by love, Ike began on the spot to conciliate her, by offering to bring a pail of water from the well.

This small attention went farther than he could have dreamed. When Draxy first told Hannah that Ike was to come and live with them, she said judiciously,—

"It will make your work much easier in many ways, Hannah."

Hannah answered:—

"Yes, missus. He'll bring all the water I spose, an that alone's wuth any man's keep—-not that I've ever found any fault with the well's bein' so far off. It's 's good water's there is in the world, but it's powerful heavy."

The arrival of the two cows crowned Hannah's liking of the plan. If she had a passion in life it was for cream and for butter-making, and it had been a sore trial to her in her life as the Elder's housekeeper, that she must use stinted measures of milk, bought from neighbors. So when poor Ike came in, trembling and nervous, to his first night's lodging under the Elder's roof, he found in the kitchen, to his utter surprise, instead of a

frowning and dangerous enemy, a warm ally, as friendly in manner and mien as Indian blood would permit.

Thus the little household settled down for the winter: Draxy and the Elder happy, serene, exalted more than they knew, by their perfect love for each other, and their childlike love of God, blending in one earnest purpose of work for souls; Hannah and Ike anything but serene, and yet happy after their own odd fashions, and held together much more closely than they knew by the common bond of their devotion to the Elder and his wife.

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In the other side of the house were also two very thankful and contented hearts. Reuben and Jane were old people now: Reuben's hair was snowy white, and Jane was sadly bent; but the comfort and peace which had come so late into their lives had still come early enough to make the sunset a bright one. It was a sight to do all hearts good to see the two sitting together on the piazza of the house, in the warm afternoons, and gazing in delight at the eastern mountain ranges turning rose-pink, and then fading through shades of purple to dark gray.

"It's a good deal like our life, ma," Reuben said sometimes; "our sun's pretty low—most down, I reckon; it's all rosy-light, just these days; but we shall have to lie down in the shadow presently; but it's all beautiful, beautiful."

Jane did not understand him. She never did. But she loved the sound of his voice best when he said the things which were too subtle for her.

The two households lived separately as before. The Elder had proposed their making one family, and Reuben had wistfully seconded it. But Draxy had firmly said "No."

"I shall be able to do more for you, father dear, if we do not. It will not seem so at first, but I know I am right," she said, and it was a rare wisdom in her sweet soul which led to the decision. At first it was very hard for Reuben to bear, but as the months went on he saw that it was best.

Draxy's loving, thoughtful care of them never relaxed. The excellent woman whom she had secured for their servant went for her orders quite as often to Draxy as to Jane; very few meals were set out for them to which Draxy's hand had not given the last final touch. She flitted back and forth between the two homes, equally of both the guardian angel; but the line of division and separation was just as distinctly drawn as if they had been under different roofs a mile apart. Two or three times in the week they dined and took tea together, but the habit never was formed of doing this on a special day. When Reuben said, "Couldn't ye arrange it so's always to eat your Sunday dinner with us, Draxy?" she replied:

"Sometimes Sunday dinner; sometimes Thursday; sometimes Saturday, father dear. If we make it a fixed day, we shall not like it half so well; any of us. We'll come often enough, you may be sure." And of this, too, Reuben soon saw the wisdom.

"O Draxy, Draxy, my little girl!" he said one day, when, just after breakfast, she ran in, exclaiming,—

"Father dear, we're coming to take dinner with you and ma to-day. It's a surprise party, and the chickens have come first; they're in the kitchen now!"

“O Draxy, Draxy,” he exclaimed, “it’s a great deal nicer not to know it beforehand. How could you be so wise, child?”

Draxy put her arms round his neck and did not speak for a moment. Then she said, “I don’t think it is wisdom, dear. Real true love knows by instinct, just as the bee does, which shaped cell will hold most honey. I’m only a honey-maker for my darlings.”

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Jane looked mystified, but Reuben's face quivered with pleasure.

"That you are, you blessed child," he said, and as, hearing the Elder's step in the hall, she flew out of the room, Reuben covered his eyes with his hand.

Happy years leave slender records; but for suffering and sin there would not be history. The winter came, and the spring came, and the summer and the autumn, and no face in the quiet little parsonage looked a shade older for the year that had gone; no incident had taken place which could make a salient point in a story, and not one of the peaceful hearts could believe that a twelvemonth had flown. Elder Kinney's pathetic fears lest he might love his Saviour less by reason of his new happiness, had melted like frost in early sunlight, in the sweet presence of Draxy's child-like religion.

"O Draxy!" he said again and again, "seems to me I never half loved all these souls we are working for, before I had you. I don't see how I could have been so afraid about it before we were married."

"Do I really help you, Mr. Kinney?" Draxy would reply, with a lingering emphasis on the "really," which made her husband draw her closer to him and forget to speak: "It seems very strange to me that I can. I feel so ignorant about souls. It frightens me to answer the smallest question the people ask me. I never do, in any way except to tell them if I have ever felt so myself, and how God seemed to help me out."

Blessed Draxy! that was the secret of her influence from first to last: the magnetic sympathy of a pure and upright soul, to whose rare strength had been added still rarer simplicity and lovingness. Old and young, men as well as women, came to her with unhesitating confidence. Before her marriage, they had all felt a little reserve with her, partly because she was of finer grain than they, partly because she had, deep down in her soul, a genuine shyness which showed itself only in quiet reticence. But now that she was the Elder's wife, they felt that she was in a measure theirs. There is a very sweet side, as well as an inconvenient and irritating one, to the old-fashioned rural notion that the parish has almost as much right to the minister's wife as to the minister. Draxy saw only the sweet side. With all the loyalty and directness which had made her, as a little girl, champion and counselor and comfort to her father, she now set her hand to the work of helping her husband do good to the people whom he called his children.

"If they are yours, they must be mine, too, Mr. Kinney," she would say, with a smile half arch, half solemn. "I hope I shan't undo on week-days what you do on Sundays."

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“What I do on Sundays is more’n half your work too, Draxy,” the Elder would make reply; and it was very true. Draxy’s quicker brain and finer sense, and in some ways superior culture, were fast moulding the Elder’s habits of thought and speech to an extent of which she never dreamed. Reuben’s income was now far in advance of their simple wants, and newspapers, magazines, and new books continually found their way to the parsonage. Draxy had only to mention anything she desired to see, and Reuben forthwith ordered it. So that it insensibly came to pass that the daily life of the little household was really an intellectual one, and Elder Kinney’s original and vigorous mind expanded fast in the congenial atmosphere. Yet he lost none of his old quaintness and simplicity of phrase, none of his fervor. The people listened to his sermons with wondering interest, and were not slow to ascribe some of the credit of the new unction to Draxy.

“Th’ Elder’s getting more’n more like Mis’ Kinney every day o’ his life,” they said: “there’s some o’ her sayin’s in every sermon he writes.

“And no wonder,” would be added by some more enthusiastic worshipper of Draxy’s. “I guess he’s got sense enough to know that she’s got more real book-learnin’ in her head than he has, twice over. I shouldn’t wonder if she got to writin’ some of his sermons for him out’n out, before long.”

Dear Draxy’s reverent wifehood would have been grieved and dismayed if she had known that her efforts to second her husband’s appeals to his people were sometimes so eloquent as to make the Elder’s words forgotten. But she never dreamed of such a thing; she was too simple hearted and humble.

In the early days of the second winter came the Angel of the Annunciation, bearing a white lily to Draxy. Her joy and gratitude were unspeakable, and the exquisite purity and elevation of her nature shone out transcendent in the new experience.

“Now I begin to feel surer that God really trusts me,” she said, “since he is going to let me have a child of my own.”

“O my dear friends!” she exclaimed more than once to mothers, “I never dreamed how happy you were. I thought I knew, but I did not.”

Draxy’s spontaneous and unreserved joy of motherhood, while yet her babe was unborn, was a novel and startling thing to the women among whom she lived. The false notions on this point, grown out of ignorant and base thoughts, are too wide-spread, too firm-rooted, to be overthrown in an hour or a day, even by the presence of angelic truth incarnate. Some of Draxy’s best friends were annoyed and disquieted by her frankness and unreserve of delight. But as the weeks went on, the true instinct of complete motherhood thrilled for the first time in many a mother’s heart, under Draxy’s glowing

words, and women talked tearfully one with another, in secret, with lowered voices, about the new revelation which had come to them through her.

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“I’ve come to see it all quite different, since I’ve talked with Mis’ Kinney,” said one young married woman, holding her baby close to her breast, and looking down with remorseful tenderness on its placid little face. “I shan’t never feel that I’ve quite made it up to Benjy, never, for the thoughts I had about him before he was born. I don’t see why nobody ever told us before, that we was just as much mothers to ’em from the very first as we ever could be,” and tears dropped on Benjy’s face; “an’ I jest hope the Lord’ll send me’s many more’s we can manage to feed’n clothe, ’n I’ll see if lovin’ ’em right along from the beginnin’, with all my heart, ’ll make ’em beautiful an’ happy an’ strong an’ well, ‘s Mis’ Kinney sez. I b’lieve it’s much’s ef ’twas in the Bible, after all she told me, and read me out of a Physiology, an’ it stands to natur’, which’s more’n the old way o’ talkin did.”

This new, strong current of the divinest of truths, stirred the very veins of the village. Mothers were more loving and fathers more tender, and maidens were sweeter and graver—all for the coming of this one little babe into the bosom of full and inspired motherhood.

On the morning when Draxy’s son was born, a stranger passing through the village would have supposed that some great news of war or of politics had arrived. Little knots of people stood at gates, on corners, all talking earnestly; others were walking rapidly to and fro in the street. Excitement filled the air.

Never was heir to royal house more welcomed than was the first-born son of this simple-minded, great-hearted woman, by the lowly people among whom she dwelt.

Old Ike’s joy was more than he could manage. He had sat on the floor all night long, with his head buried in his hands.

The instinct of grief to come, which not even all these long peaceful months had been able to wholly allay in his faithful heart, had sprung into full life at the first symptom of danger to Draxy.

“P’raps it’s this way, arter all, the Lord’s goin’ to do it. O Lord! O Lord! It’ll kill Mr. Kinney, it’ll kill him,” he kept repeating over and over, as he rocked to and fro. Hannah eyed him savagely. Her Indian blood hated groans and tears, and her affection for her master was angered at the very thought of his being afflicted.

“I wish it had pleased yer Lord to give ye the sense of a man, Mr. Sanborn,” she said, “while He was a makin’ on ye. If ye’d go to bed, now, instead o’ snivelin’ round here, you might be good for somethin’ in the mornin’, when there’ll be plenty to do. Anyhow, I’m not goin’ to be pestered by the sight on ye any longer,” and Hannah banged the kitchen-door violently after her.

When poor Ike timidly peered into the sitting-room, whither she had betaken herself, he found her, too, sitting on the floor, in an attitude not unlike the one she had so scorned in him. But he was too meek to taunt her. He only said,—

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“I’m goin’ now, Hannah, so ye needn’t stay out o’ the kitchen for me,” and he climbed slowly up the stairs which led to his room.

As the rosy day dawned in the east, Draxy’s infant son drew his first mortal breath. His first quivering cry, faint almost as a whisper, yet sharp and piteous, reached old Ike’s ears instantly. He fell on his knees and remained some minutes motionless, then he rose and went slowly down-stairs. Hannah met him at the door, her dark face flushed with emotion which she vainly tried to conceal by sharp words.

“Hope ye’ve rested well, Mr. Sanborn. Another time, mebbe ye’ll have more sense. As fine a boy’s ye ever see, and Mis’ Kinney she’s a smilin’ into its face, as nobody’s never seen her smile yet, I tell you.”

Ike was gone,—out into the fields, over fences, over brooks, into woods, trampling down dewy ferns, glistening mosses, scarlet cornels, thickets of goldenrod and asters,—he knew not where, muttering to himself all the while, and tossing his arms into the air. At last he returned to the house saying to himself, “P’raps th’ Elder ’ll like to have me go down into the village an’ let folks know.”

Elder Kinney was standing bareheaded on the door-steps. His face looked like the face of a man who had come off a battle-field where victory had been almost as terrible as defeat. As soon as he saw old Ike running across the field towards him, he divined all.

“Loving old heart!” he thought, “Draxy was right,” and he held out both his hands to the old man as he had never done before, and spoke a few affectionate words, which made tears run down the wrinkled cheeks. Then he sent him on the errand he knew he craved.

“You’d better give the news first to Eben Hill, Ike,” he called after him. “It’ll be of more use to him than to anybody in the parish.”

It was just two years from Draxy’s wedding day, when she stood again in the aisle of the little village church, dressed in pure white, with the southern sunlight resting on her beautiful hair. Her husband stood by her side, holding their infant son in his arms. The child had clear, calm blue eyes like Draxy’s, and an expression of serenity and radiant joy on his tiny face, which made the people wonder.

“Reuben Miller Kinney” was his name; and though the parish had hoped that the child would be named for his father, when they looked at Reuben Miller’s sweet, patient, noble face, and saw its intense happiness as the words were spoken, they felt that it was better so.

Again swift months rolled on, and peace and joy brooded over the parsonage. Draxy’s life with her child was something too beautiful to be told in words; her wifehood was

lovely, was intense; but her motherhood was greater. Day and night her love for her boy protected and guided him, like pillar of cloud, like pillar of fire. She knew no weariness, no feebleness; she grew constantly stronger and more beautiful, and

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the child grew stronger and more beautiful, with a likeness to her and a oneness with her which were marvelous. He was a loving and affectionate boy to all; his father, his grandparents, old Ike, and swarthy Hannah,—all alike sunned themselves in the delight of his beautiful childhood. But wherever he was—however amused and delighted—-even in his father's arms—his eyes sought his mother's eyes, and the mute interchange between them was subtle and constant as between lovers. There was but one drawback on Draxy's felicity now. She was afraid of her love for her boy.

"O Seth!" she said,—after little Reuben's birth she for the first time called her husband by this name; before that, although she lavished on him all words of endearment, she had never found courage to call him Seth,—"O Seth!" she said, "I feel now as you did about me before we were married. I can't make myself think about anything but Reuby. O darling! you don't think God would take him away from you to punish me, do you?" The Elder could not comfort her when she was in this frame of mind; in fact, he himself was sometimes afraid, seeing her utter absorption in the child. Yet it never for one instant warped her firmness or judiciousness of control. Draxy could not have comprehended that type of love which can lose sight for one instant of the best good of the loved one. Her control, however, was the control of a wise and affectionate companion, never that of the authoritative parent. Little Reuben never heard the words, "You must not do thus and so." It was always, "You cannot, because it is not safe, best, or proper," or, "because if you do, such and such things will happen."

"Draxy," said Reuben to her one day, "you never tell Reuby to do anything without giving him a reason for it. He's the best boy that ever lived, I do believe, but 'tain't just my idea of obedience for all that."

Draxy smiled. "I never said a word to him about obeying me in his life; I never shall. I can't explain it, father dear, but you must let me do my way. I shall tell him all I know about doing right, and he will decide for himself more and more. I am not afraid."

She need not have been. Before Reuby was seven years old his gentle manliness of behavior was the marvel of the village. "It beats all how Mis' Kinney's brought that boy o' hern up," was said in the sewing-circle one day. "She told me herself that she's never so much's said a sharp word to him; and as for whipping she thinks it's a deadly sin."

"So do I," spoke up young Mrs. Plummet, the mother of Benjy. "I never did believe in that; I don't believe in it, even for hosses; it only gets 'em to go a few rods, and then they're lazier'n ever. My father's broke more colts than any man in this county, an' he'd never let 'em be struck a blow. He said one blow spiled 'em, and I guess ye've got more to work on in a boy than ye have in a colt."

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These discussions often ran high and waxed warm. But Draxy's adherents were a large majority; and she had so patiently and fully gone over these disputed grounds with them that they were well fortified with the arguments and facts which supported her positions. Indeed, it was fast coming to pass that she was the central force of the life of the village. "Let me make the songs of the community, and I care not who makes its laws," was well said. It was song which Draxy supplied to these people's lives. Not often in verse, in sound, in any shape that could be measured, but in spirit. She vivified their every sense of beauty, moral and physical. She opened their eyes to joy; she revealed to them the sacredness and delight of common things; she made their hearts sing.

But she was to do more yet for these men and women. Slowly, noiselessly, in the procession of these beautiful and peaceful days, was drawing near a day which should anoint Draxy with a new baptism,—set her apart to a holier work.

It came, as the great consecrations of life are apt to come, suddenly, without warning. While we are patiently and faithfully keeping sheep in the wilderness, the messenger is journeying towards us with the vial of sacred oil, to make us kings.

It was on a September morning. Draxy sat at the eastward bay-window of her sitting-room, reading to Reuby. The child seemed strangely restless, and slipped from her lap again and again, running to the window to look out. At last Draxy said, "What is it, Reuby? Don't you want to hear mamma read any longer?"

"Where is papa?" replied Reuby. "I want to go and find papa."

"Papa has gone way down to the Lower Mills, darling; he won't come home till dinner," said Draxy, looking perplexedly at Reuby's face. She had never known him to ask for his father in this way before. Still his restlessness continued, and finally, clasping his mother's hand, he said earnestly,—

"Come and find papa."

"We can't find him, dear," she replied; "it is too far for Reuby to walk, but we will go out on the same road papa has gone, and wait for papa to come;" so saying, she led the child out of the house, and rambled slowly along the road on which the Elder would return. In a few moments she saw moving in the distance a large black object she could not define. As it came nearer she saw that it was several men, walking slowly and apparently bearing something heavy between them.

Little Reuby pulled her hand and began to run faster. "Come and find papa," he said again, in a tone which struck terror to Draxy's heart. At that instant the men halted. She hurried on. Presently she saw one man leave the rest and run rapidly towards her. It was old Ike. The rest still remained motionless and gathered closer around what they were carrying.

“O Reuby!” groaned Draxy. “Come quicker; find papa,” he replied, impatiently; but old Ike had reached them, and wringing his hands, burst into tears. “O my Lord!—O Mis’ Kinney, yer must go back; they can’t bring him along, an’ you ‘n’ the boy standin’ here. O my Lord! O Mis’ Kinney, come right back!” And Ike took hold of her shoulder and of her gown and almost turned her around.

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“Is Mr. Kinney hurt?” said Draxy in a strange voice, high pitched and metallic. “I shall not go back. Tell the men to hurry. How dare they lose time so?” and Draxy tried to run towards them. Old Ike held her by main force. Sobs choked his voice, but he stammered out: “O Mis’ Kinney, ef ye love Mr. Kinney, go back. He’d tell ye so himself. He won’t know ye; the men won’t never move a step till they see you ‘n’ Reuby goin’ first.”

Draxy turned instantly and walked toward the house so swiftly that little Reuby could not keep up with her. He followed her crying aloud, but she did not heed him. She flew rather than ran into the house, into the Elder’s study, and dragged a lounge to the very threshold of the door. There she stood, whiter than any marble, and as still, awaiting the slow, toiling steps of the overburdened men. Little Reuben stumbled on the steps and she did not help him. As he came close, clutching her dress in his pain and terror, she said in a low whisper, “Reuby, it will trouble papa if he sees us cry. Mamma isn’t going to cry.” The child stopped instantly and stood by her side, as calm as she for a moment, then bursting out again into screams, said: “O mamma, I can’t help crying, I can’t; but I’ll run away. Don’t tell papa I cried.” And he ran up-stairs. Draxy did not see which way he went. Her eyes were fixed on the doorway which Ike had that moment reached; the men bearing the Elder’s body were just behind him.

“O Mis’ Kinney! can’t yer go away jest while we lay him down?” gasped Ike. “Seem’s ef ’twouldn’t be so hard.”

Draxy looked past him, as not hearing a word.

“Bring him in here and lay him on this lounge,” she said, in tones so clear and calm they sent both courage and anguish into every heart.

Panting, and with grief-stricken faces, the men staggered in and laid the tall, majestic figure down. As they lifted the head tenderly and propped it by pillows, Draxy saw the pale, dead face with the sunken eyes and set lips, and gave one low cry. Then she clasped both hands tight over her heart and looked up as if she would pierce the very skies whither her husband had gone.

“We sent for the doctor right off; he’ll be here’s soon’s he can get here.”

“He never spoke a word arter we lifted him up. He couldn’t ha’ suffered any, Mis’ Kinney.”

“P’raps, Mis’ Kinney, it’d be a good plan to ondo his clothes afore the doctor gits here,” came in confused and trembling tones from one after another of the men who stood almost paralyzed in presence of Draxy’s terrible silence.

“O Mis’ Kinney, jest speak a word, can’t ye? O Lord! O Lord! she’ll die if she don’t. Where’s Reuby? I’ll fetch him,” exclaimed Ike, and left the room; the men followed him irresolutely, looking back at Draxy, who still stood motionless, gazing down into the Elder’s face.

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“Do not look for Reuby—he has hid,” came in a slow, measured whisper from her lips. “And leave me alone.” “Yes, I know. You need not be afraid. I understand that Mr. Kinney is dead,” she added, as the men hesitated and looked bewilderedly in her face. “I will stay alone with him till the doctor comes,” and Draxy gently closed the door and locked it. In a short time the little hall and door-yard were crowded with sobbing men and women. There was little to be told, but that little was told over and over. The Elder had walked down to the village store with old Ike, and had just given him some parcels to carry home, saying, “Tell Mrs. Kinney,”—when a runaway horse had come dashing furiously down the street, drawing a wagon in which clung, rather than sat, a woman holding a baby in her arms. The Elder had sprung into the middle of the road, and caught the horse by the bridle as he swerved a little to one side; but the horse was too strong and too much frightened to be held by any man’s strength. Rearing high, he had freed his head, and plunging forward had knocked the Elder down in such a way that both wagon-wheels had run over his neck, breaking it instantly.

“He never talked so much like an angel from heaven’s he did this mornin’,” sobbed Ike, who looked already decrepit and broken from this sudden blow. “He was a tellin’ me about suthin’ new that’s jest been discovered in the sun; I couldn’t rightly make it out; but says he, ’Ike, how glorious ’twill be when we can jest fly from one sun to another, all through this universe o’ God’s, an’ not be a tryin’ in these poor little airthly ways to understand ‘bout things.’”

That Draxy should be all this time alone with her husband’s body seemed dreadful to these sympathizing, simple-hearted people. No sound came from the room, though the windows were all wide open.

“O Mr. Miller! don’t ye think some on us had better try to git in to her,” said the women; “she don’t make no noise.”

“No.” replied Reuben, feebly. He, too, was prostrated like Ike by the fearful blow, and looked years older within the hour. “No: Draxy knows what’s best for her. She’s spoke to me once through the door. She hasn’t fainted.”

“When the doctor came, Reuben called to Draxy,—

“Daughter, the doctor’s come.”

The door opened instantly, but closed as soon as the doctor had entered. In a few moments it opened again, and the doctor handed a slip of paper to Reuben. He unfolded it and read it aloud:—

“Father dear, please thank all the people for me, and ask them to go home now. There is nothing they can do. Tell them it grieves me to hear them cry, and Mr. Kinney would not wish it.”

Slowly and reluctantly the people went, and a silence sadder than the sobs and grieving voices settled down on the house. Reuben sat on the stairs, his head leaning against the study-door. Presently he heard a light step coming down. It was young Mrs. Plummer, the mother of Benjy. She whispered, “I’ve found Reuby. He’s asleep on the garret floor. He’d thrown himself down on some old carpet, way out in the darkest corner, under the eaves. I’ve covered him up, an’ I’m goin’ to sit by him till he wakes up. The longer he sleeps the better. You tell her where he is.”

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Reuben nodded; his dulled senses hardly heard the words. When the study-door next opened, Draxy herself came out, walking with a slow, measured step which transformed her whole bearing. Her face was perfectly calm, but colorless as white stone. At sight of her father her lips quivered, and she stretched out both hands to him; but she only said, “Where is Reuby?” And as soon as she heard she went quickly up the stairs, adding, “Do not follow me, father dear; you cannot help me.”

Mrs. Plummer sat in the dark garret, leaning her head against the dusty rafters, as near as she could get to poor little Reuby. Her eyes were shut, and tears stood on her cheeks. Suddenly she was startled by Draxy’s low voice, saying,—

“Thank you very much, Mrs. Plummer; it was very kind in you to stay here and not wake him up. I will sit by him now.”

Mrs. Plummer poured forth incoherent words of sympathy and sorrow, but Draxy hardly seemed to hear her. She stood quietly, making no reply, waiting for her to go.

“O Mis’ Kinney, Mis’ Kinney, do cry a little, can’t ye?” exclaimed the warm-hearted woman; “it scares us to death to see ye this way.”

Draxy smiled. “No, my dear friend. I cannot cry now. I suppose I shall sometimes, because I am very selfish, and I shall be so lonely; but just now I am only thinking how happy he is in these first hours in heaven.” The tears stood in her eyes, but her look was as of one who gazed rapturously inside the pearly gates. Mrs. Plummer stole softly away, overawed and afraid. As she went out of the house, she said to Reuben: “Mis’ Kinney ain’t no mortal woman. She hain’t shed a tear yet, and she jest looks as glorified as the Elder can this minute in sight o’ God’s very throne itself. O Mr. Miller, I’m afraid she’ll break down. This kind o’ grief is what kills folks.”

“No,” said Reuben, “you don’t know Draxy. She won’t break down. She’ll take care on us all jest the same, but ye won’t never see again the same face you used to see. Oh, I can’t be reconciled, I can’t!” And Reuben groaned aloud.

The next morning, when Draxy came out of the study, her hair was white as snow. As her father first caught sight of her, he stared wildly for a moment as at some stranger; then crying out, “O Draxy! O my little girl!” he tottered and would have fallen if she had not caught him and led him to a chair.

“O father dear,” she exclaimed, “don’t feel so! I wouldn’t call him back this minute if I could,” and she smiled piteously.

“O Draxy—’tain’t that,” gasped Reuben. “O daughter! you’re dyin’ and never lettin’ us know it. Your hair’s as white’s mine.” Draxy gave a startled glance at the mirror, and said, in a much more natural tone than she had hitherto spoken in: “I don’t think that’s

strange. It's happened before to people in great trouble. I've read of it: you'll get used to it very soon, father dear. I'm glad of it; I'll be all in white now," she added in a lower tone, speaking dreamily, as if to herself,—"they walk in white; they walk in white."

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Then Reuben noticed that she was dressed in white. He touched her gown, and looked inquiringly. “Yes, father dear,” she said, “always.”

On the day of the funeral, when Draxy entered the church leading little Reuby by the hand, a visible shudder ran through the congregation. The news had run like wildfire through the parish, on the morning after the Elder’s death, that Mrs. Kinney’s hair had all turned gray in the night. But nobody was in the least prepared for the effect. It was not gray—it was silver-white; and as it retained all the silken gloss which had made it so beautiful the shining of it was marvelous. It kindled her beauty into something superhuman. The color had left her cheeks also, but in its place was a clear soft tint which had no pallor in it. She was dressed in pure white, so also was little Reuby; but for this the parish were prepared. Very well they knew Draxy’s deep-rooted belief that to associate gloom with the memory of the dead was disloyal alike to them and to Christ; and so warmly had she imbued most of the people with her sentiment, that the dismal black garb of so-called mourning was rarely seen in the village.

Bareheaded, Draxy and her little son walked from the church to the grave; their faces the calmest, their steps the steadiest there. Reuben and Jane walked behind them, bent over and sobbing, and half the congregation were weeping uncontrollably; but the widowed woman and the fatherless boy walked with uplifted glances, as if they saw angel-forms in the air by their side.

“Tain’t nateral; ’tain’t noways nateral; thet woman hain’t got any nateral feelin’ in her,” said Eben Hill, leaning against a grave-stone, and idly chewing a spray of golden-rod. George Thayer turned upon him like a blazing sword.

“Hev ye got any nateral feelin’ yourself, Eben Hill, to say that, standin’ here an’ lookin’ at that woman’s white hair an’ cheeks, ‘n’ only last Sunday she was ‘s handsome a pictur’s ye ever see, her hair a twinklin’ in the sun like a brown beech-tree, an’ her cheeks jest like roses? Nateral feelin’s! It’s enough to make the Elder rise up afore ye, to hear ye say sech a thing, Eben Hill; ‘n’ ef ’twan’t jest the funeral that ’tis, I b’leeve I’d thrash ye right an’ left, here’n sight o’ yer own mother’s tombstone, ye miserable, sneakin’ fool. Ef there was ever a woman that was carryin’ a hull town straight into the Lord’s heaven on her own shoulders, it’s Mis’ Kinney, an’ that blessed boy o’ her’n ‘s goin’ to be jest like her. Look at him now, a workin’ his poor little mouth an’ lookin’ up to her and tryin’ not to cry.”

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Poor little Reuby! when the first shovelful of earth fell on the coffin, his child's heart gave way, and he broke into loud crying, which made the roughest men there hide their eyes. Draxy caught him up in her arms and whispered something which quieted him instantly. Then she set him down, and he stood till the end, looking away from the grave with almost a smile on his face. He told some one, the next day, that he kept saying over to himself all that time: "Beautiful gates of precious stones and angels with harps."—- "That's the city, you know, where my papa has gone. It's not half so far off as we think; and papa is so happy there, he don't even miss us, though he can see us every minute. And mamma and I are going there pretty soon; next summer perhaps."

Part II.

For the first few days after the funeral, Draxy seemed to sink; the void was too terrible; only little Reuby's voice roused her from the apathetic silence in which she would sit by the hour gazing out of the east bay-window on the road down which she had last seen her husband walk. She knew just the spot where he had paused and turned and thrown kisses back to Reuby watching him from the window.

But her nature was too healthy, too full of energy, and her soul too full of love to remain in this frame long. She reproached herself bitterly for the sin of having indulged in it even for a short time.

"I don't believe my darling can be quite happy even in heaven, while he sees me living this way," she said sternly to herself one morning. Then she put on her bonnet, and went down into the village to carry out a resolution she had been meditating for some days. Very great was the astonishment of house after house that morning, as Draxy walked quietly in, as had been her wont. She proposed to the mothers to send their younger children to her, to be taught half of every day.

"I can teach Reuby better if I have other children too," she said. "I think no child ought to be sent into the district school under ten. The confinement is too much for them. Let me have all the boys and girls between six and eight, and I'll carry them along with Reuby for the next two or three years at any rate," she said.

The parents were delighted and grateful; but their wonder almost swallowed up all other emotions.

"To think o' her!" they said. "The Elder not three weeks buried, an' she a goin' round, jest as calm 'n' sweet's a baby, a gettin' up a school!"

"She's too good for this earth, that's what she is," said Angy Plummer. "I should jest like to know if anybody'd know this village, since she came into 't. Why we ain't one of us the same we used to be. I know I ain't. I reckon myself's jest about eight years old, if I

have got three boys. That makes me born the summer before her Reuby, ’an that’s jest the time I was born, when my Benjy was seven months old!”

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“You’re jest crazy about Mis’ Kinney, Angy Plummer,” said her mother. “I b’lieve ye’d go through fire for her quicker ’n ye would for any yer own flesh an’ blood.”

Angy went to her mother and kissed the fretful old face very kindly. “Mother, you can’t say I hain’t been a better daughter to you sence I’ve knowed Mis’ Kinney.”

“No, I can’t,” grumbled the old woman, “that’s a fact; but she’s got a heap o’ new fangled notions I don’t believe in.”

The school was a triumphant success. From nine until twelve o’clock every forenoon, twelve happy little children had a sort of frolic of learning lessons in the Elder’s sacred study, which was now Draxy’s sitting-room. Old Ike, who since the Elder’s death had never seemed quite clear of brain, had asked so piteously to come and sit in the room, that Draxy let him do so. He sat in a big chair by the fire-place, and carved whistles and ships and fantastic toys for the children, listening all the time intently to every word which fell from Draxy’s lips. He had transferred to her all the pathetic love he had felt for the Elder; he often followed her at a distance when she went out, and little Reuby he rarely lost sight of, from morning till night. He was too feeble now to do much work, but his presence was a great comfort to Draxy. He seemed a very close link between her and her husband. Hannah, too, sometimes came into the school at recess, to the great amusement of the children. She was particularly fond of looking at the blackboard, when there were chalk-marks on it.

“Make a mark on me with your white pencil,” she would say, offering her dark cheek to Reuby, who would scrawl hieroglyphics all over it from hair to chin.

Then she would invite the whole troop out into the kitchen to a feast of doughnuts or cookies; very long the recesses sometimes were when the school was watching Hannah fry the fantastic shapes of sweet dough, or taking each a turn at the jagged wheel with which she cut them out.

Reuben also came often to the school-room, and Jane sometimes sat there with her knitting. A strange content had settled on their lives, in spite of the sorrow. They saw Draxy calm; she smiled on them as constantly as ever; and they were very old people, and believed too easily that she was at peace.

But the Lord had more work still for this sweet woman’s hand. This, too, was suddenly set before her. Late one Saturday afternoon, as she was returning, surrounded by her escort of laughing children, from the woods, where they had been for May-flowers, old Deacon Plummer overtook her.

“Mis’ Kinney, Mis’ Kinney,” he began several times, but could get no further. He was evidently in great perplexity how to say the thing he wished.

“Mis’ Kinney, would you hev—

“Mis’ Kinney, me and Deacon Swift’s been a sayin’—

“Mis’ Kinney, ain’t you got—”

Draxy smiled outright. She often smiled now, with cordial good cheer, when things pleased her.

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“What is it, Deacon? out with it. I can’t possibly tell unless you make it plainer.”

Thus encouraged, good Deacon Plummer went on: “Well, Mis’ Kinney, it’s jest this: Elder Williams has jest sent word he can’t come an’ preach to-morrer, and there ain’t nobody anywhere’s round thet we can get; and De’n Swift ‘n me, we was a thinkin’ whether you wouldn’t be willin’ some of us should read one o’ the Elder’s old sermons. O Mis’ Kinney, ye don’t know how we all hanker to hear some o’ his blessed words agin.”

Draxy stood still. Her face altered so that the little children crowded round her in alarm, and Reuby took hold of her hand. Tears came into her eyes, and she could hardly speak, but she replied,—

“Yes, indeed, Mr. Plummer, I should be very glad to have you. I’ll look out a sermon to-night, and you can come up to the house in the morning and get it.”

“O Mis’ Kinney, do forgive me for speakin’. You have allers seem so borne up, I never mistrusted that’t’d do any harm to ask yer,” stammered the poor Deacon, utterly disconcerted by Draxy’s tears, for she was crying hard now.

“It hasn’t done any harm, I assure you. I am very glad to do it,” said Draxy.

“Yes, sir, my mamma very often cries when she’s glad,” spoke up Reuby, his little face getting very red, and his lips quivering. “She’s very glad, sir, if she says so.”

This chivalrous defense calmed poor Draxy, but did not comfort the Deacon, who hurried away, saying to himself,—

“Don’t believe there was ever such a woman nor such a boy in this world before. She never shed a tear when we brought the Elder home dead, nor even when she see him let down into the very grave; ‘n’ I don’t believe she’s cried afore anybody till to-day; ‘n’ that little chap a speakin’ up an’ tellin’ me his ma often cried when she was glad, an’ I was to believe her spite of her crying! I wish I’d made Job Swift go arter her. I’ll make him go arter that sermon anyhow. I won’t go near her agin ’bout this bisness, that’s certain;” and the remorse-stricken, but artful deacon hastened to his brother deacon’s house to tell him that it was “all settled with Mis’ Kinney ‘bout the sermon, an’ she was quite willin’;” and, “O,” he added, as if it were quite a second thought, “ye’d better go up an’ git the sermon, Job, in the mornin,’ ye’re so much nearer, an’ then, ‘s ye’ve to do the readin,’ maybe she’ll have somethin’ to explain to ye about the way it’s to be read; th’ Elder’s writin’ wan’t any too easy to make out, ’s fur ’s I remember it.”

Next morning, just as the first bells were ringing, Deacon Swift knocked timidly at the door of the Elder’s study. Draxy met him with a radiant face. She had been excited by reading over the sermon she had after long deliberation selected. The text was,—

“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.” The sermon had been written soon after their marriage, and was one of her husband’s favorites. There were many eloquent passages in it, which seemed now to take on a new significance, as coming from the lips of the Elder, absent from his flock and present with Christ.

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“O Mis’ Kinney, I recollect that sermon ’s if ’twas only yesterday,” said Deacon Swift. “The hull parish was talkin’ on’t all the week; ye couldn’t have picked out one they’d be so glad to hear; but dear me! how I’m ever goin’ to read it in any kind o’ decent way, I don’t know; I never was a reader, anyhow, ‘n’ now I’ve lost my front teeth, some words does pester me to git out.”

This opened the way for Draxy. Nearly all night she had lain awake, thinking how terrible it would be to her to hear her husband’s beloved words indistinctly and ineffectively read by Deacon Swift’s cracked and feeble voice. Almost she regretted having given her consent. At last the thought flashed into her mind, “Why should I not read it myself? I know I could be heard in every corner of that little church.” The more she thought of it, the more she longed to do it, and the less she shrank from the idea of facing the congregation.

“‘It’s only just like a big family of children,’ Seth always used to say, ’and I’m sure I feel as if they were mine now, as much as ever they were his. I wish I dared do it. I do believe Seth would like it,’ and Draxy fell asleep comforted by the thought. Before breakfast she consulted her father, and he approved it warmly.

“I believe your mission isn’t done yet, daughter, to these people of your husband’s. The more you speak to ’em the better. It’ll be jest like his voice speaking from heaven to ’em,” said Reuben, “an’ I shouldn’t wonder if keepin’ Elder Williams away was all the Lord’s doin’, as the blessed saint used to say.”

Reuben’s approval was all that Draxy needed to strengthen her impulse, and before Deacon Swift arrived her only perplexity was as to the best way of making the proposition to him. All this difficulty he had himself smoothed away by his first words.

“Yes, I know, Deacon Swift,” she said. “I’ve been thinking that perhaps it would tire you to read for so long a time in a loud voice; and besides, Mr. Kinney’s handwriting is very hard to read.”

Draxy paused and looked sympathizingly in the deacon’s face. The mention of the illegible writing distressed the poor man still more. He took the sermon from her hand and glanced nervously at the first page.

“Oh my! Mis’ Kinney,” he exclaimed, “I can’t make out half the words.”

“Can’t you?” said Draxy, gently. “It is all as plain as print to me, I know it so well. But there are some abbreviations Mr. Kinney always used. I will explain them to you. Perhaps that will make it easier.”

“O Mis’ Kinney, Mis’ Kinney! I can’t never do it in the world,” burst out the poor deacon. “O Mis’ Kinney, why can’t you read it to the folks? They’d all like it, I know they would.”

“Do you really think so, Mr. Swift?” replied Draxy; and then, with a little twinge of conscience, added immediately, “I have been thinking of that very thing myself, that perhaps, if it wouldn’t seem strange to the people, that would be the best way, because I know the handwriting so well, and it really is very hard for a stranger to read.”

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“Yes, yes, that’s the very thing,” hastily exclaimed the relieved deacon,—“that’s it, that’s it. Why, Mis’ Kinney, as for their thinkin’ it strange, there ain’t a man in the parish that wouldn’t vote for you for minister twice over if ye wuz only a man. I’ve heerd ’em all say so more ’n a thousand times sence.” Something in Draxy’s face cut the Deacon’s sentence short.

“Very well, Mr. Swift,” she said. “Then I will try, since you think it best. My father thought it would be a good plan too, or else I should not have been willing,” she added, gently.

“Reuben Miller’s daughter” was still as guileless, reverent, potent a thought in Draxy’s heart as when, upon her unconscious childish lips, the words had been a spell, disarming and winning all hearts to her.

The news had gone all through the village on Saturday night, that Deacon Swift was to read one of Elder Kinney’s sermons the next day. The whole parish was present; not a man, not a woman was missing except those who were kept at home by sickness. A tender solemnity was in every face. Not often does it happen to a man to be so beloved by a whole community as was Elder Kinney by this people.

With some embarrassment and hesitation, Deacon Swift read the hymns and made one of the prayers; Deacon Plummer made the other. Then there came a pause. Draxy flushed scarlet and half rose in her pew. She had not thought to tell the Deacon that he must explain to the people beforehand why she read the sermon. She had taken it for granted that he would do so; but he did not comprehend that he ought, and only looked nervously towards her, waiting for her to come forward. This was the one moment which tried Draxy’s soul; there was almost vexation in her look, as hastily laying aside her bonnet she walked up to the table in front of the pulpit, and, turning towards the people, said in her clear, melodious voice,—

“Dear friends, I am sorry Deacon Swift did not explain to you that I was to read the sermon. He asked me to do so because Mr. Kinney’s handwriting is very hard for a stranger to read.”

She paused for a second, and then added:

“The sermon which I have chosen is one which some of you will remember. It was written and preached nine years ago. The text is in the beautiful Gospel of St. John, the 14th chapter and the 27th verse,—

“‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you.’”

After pronouncing these words, Draxy paused again, and looking towards her pew, made a slight sign to Reuby. The child understood instantly, and walked swiftly to her.

“Sit in this chair here by mamma, Reuby darling,” she whispered, and Reuby climbed up into the big chair on her right hand, and leaned his fair golden head against the high mahogany back. Draxy had become conscious, in that first second, that she could not read with Reuby’s wistful face in sight. Also she felt a sudden yearning for the support of his nearer presence.

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“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you,” she repeated, and went on with the sermon. Her tones were low, but clear, and her articulation so perfect that no syllable was lost; she could have been distinctly heard in a room twice as large as this. The sight was one which thrilled every heart that looked on it; no poor laboring man there was so dull of sense and soul that he did not sit drinking in the wonderful picture: the tall, queenly woman robed in simple flowing white, her hair a coronet of snowy silver; her dark blue eyes shining with a light which would have been flashingly brilliant, except for its steadfast serenity; her mouth almost smiling, as the clear tones flowed out; sitting quiet, intent, by her side, the beautiful boy, also dressed in white, his face lighted like hers by serene and yet gleaming eyes; his head covered with golden curls; his little hands folded devoutly in his lap. One coming suddenly upon the scene might well have fancied himself in another clime and age, in the presence of some rite performed by a mystic priestess clothed in samite. But the words which fell from the lips were the gentlest words of the gentlest religion earth has known; and the heart which beat under the clinging folds of the strange white garb was no priestess’ heart, but a heart full, almost to breaking, of wifehood, of motherhood.

It does not need experience as an orator to give significance to the magnetic language of upturned faces. Before Draxy had read ten pages of the sermon, she was so thrilled by the consciousness that every heart before her was thrilled too, that her cheeks flushed and her whole face glowed.

The sermon had sounded eloquent when the Elder preached it; but now, from Draxy’s lips, it was transcendent. As she read the closing paragraph,—

“His peace He leaves with us: his peace He gives unto us: not such peace as He knew on earth: such peace as He knows now in heaven, on the right hand of His Father; even that peace He bids us share—that peace, the peace of God which passeth understanding,”—she seemed to dilate in stature, and as she let the sermon fall on the table before her, her lifted eyes seemed arrested in mid air as by a celestial vision.

Then in a second more, she was again the humble, affectionate Draxy, whom all the women and all the little children knew and loved; looking round on them with an appealing expression, she said,—

“Dear friends, I hope I have not done wrong in standing up here and taking it upon me to read such solemn words. I felt that Mr. Kinney would like to speak to you once more through me.”

Then taking little Reuby by the hand, she walked slowly back to her pew.

Then Deacon Swift made sad work of reading the hymn,—

“Blest be the tie that binds,”

And the choir made sad work of singing it. Nobody's voice could be trusted for many syllables at a time, but nobody listened to the music. Everybody was impatient to speak to Draxy. They clustered round her in the aisle; they crowded into pews to get near her: all the reticence and reserve of their New England habit had melted away in this wonderful hour. They thanked her; they touched her; they gazed at her; they did not know what to do; even Draxy's calm was visibly disturbed by the atmosphere of their great excitement.

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“O Mis’ Kinney, ef ye’ll only read us one more! just one more! won’t ye, now? Do say ye will, right off, this arternoon; or read the same one right over, ef that’s any easier for ye. We’d like to hear jest that ‘n’ nothin’ else for a year to come! O Mis’ Kinney! ‘twas jest like hearin’ the Elder himself.”

Poor Draxy was trembling. Reuben came to her rescue.

“I hope you won’t take it unkindly of me,” he said, “but my daughter’s feeling more than’s good for her. She must come home now.” And Reuben drew her hand into his arm.

The people fell back sorry and conscience-stricken.

“We orter ha’ known better,” they said, “but she makes us forgit she’s flesh ‘n’ blood.”

“I will read you another sermon some time,” said Draxy, slowly. “I shall be very glad to. But not to-day. I could not do it to-day.” Then she smiled on them all, with a smile which was a benediction, and walked away holding Reuby’s hand very tightly, and leaning heavily on her father’s arm.

The congregation did not disperse; nothing since the Elder’s death had so moved them. They gathered in knots on the church steps and in the aisles, and talked long and earnestly. There was but one sentiment, one voice.

“It’s a thousand shames she ain’t a man,” said some of the young men.

“It ’ud be a thousand times more ef she wuz,” retorted Angy Plummer. “I’d like to see the man that ‘ud do what she does, a comin’ right close to the very heart o’ yer’s ef she was your mother ‘n’ your sister ‘n’ your husband, and a blessed angel o’ God, all ter once.”

“But Angy, we only meant that then we could hev her for our minister,” they replied.

Angy turned very red, but replied, energetically,—

“There ain’t any law agin a woman’s bein’ minister, thet I ever heerd on. Howsomever, Mis’ Kinney never’d hear to anythin’ o’ that kind. I don’ no’ for my part how she ever mustered up courage to do what she’s done, so kind o’ backward ‘n’ shy’s she is for all her strength. But for my part, I wouldn’t ask for no other preachin’ all the rest o’ my life, than jest to hear Mis’ Kinney read one o’ her husband’s sermons every Sunday.”

“Why, Angy Plummer!” burst from more lips than one. But the bold suggestion was only the half-conscious thought of every one there, and the discussion grew more and more serious. Slowly the people dispersed to their homes, but the discussion still continued. Late into night, by many a fireside, the matter was talked over, and late the next night, and the next, until a vague hope and a still vaguer purpose sprang up in the parish.

“She said she’d read another some day,” they reiterated. “Most likely she’d ’s soon do it next Sunday, ‘n’ sooner, ’cause she’d be more used to’t than ef she waited a spell between.”

“But it won’t do to take it for granted she’s goin’ to, ‘n’ not git anybody,” said Deacon Swift, in great perplexity. “I think Brother Plummer ‘n’ me’d better go ‘n’ ask her.”

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“No,” said Angy, “let me go. I can talk it over better’n you can. I’ll go.”

And Angy went. The interview between the two women was long. Angy pleaded as nobody else in the parish could have done; and Draxy’s heart was all on her side. But Draxy’s judgment was unconvinced.

“If I could be sure, Angy, that it would be best for the people, I should not hesitate. But you know very well, if I begin I shall keep on,” she said.

She consulted Reuben. His heart, too, was on the people’s side, but his judgment was like hers, perplexed.

“One thing’s very certain, daughter: there is not anybody they can ever find to settle here, or that they are likely to, who can preach as the Elder did. His old sermons are worlds better than any new ones they’ll get.”

“Yes, indeed, I know that,” said Draxy. “That’s what makes me feel as if I must do it.”

This had been her strongest motive. Only too well she knew what would be the probable calibre of a man who would come to this poor and lonely little village which she so loved.

At last she consented to make the experiment. “I will read for you every Sunday, two sermons of Mr. Kinney’s,” she said, “until you hear of some one whom you would like to settle for your minister.”

Angy Plummer, clapped her hands when her father repeated at tea on Thursday evening what “Mis’ Kinney” had said.

“That’s good’s settlin’ her,” she exclaimed. “Oh, I never thought she’d come to it,” and real tears of joy stood in Angy’s eyes.

“I don’t know ’bout that, Angy,” replied the Deacon; “there’s a good deal to be thought on, fust ‘n’ last. Folks ‘11 talk like everythin’, I expect, ‘n’ say we’ve got a woman preacher. It wouldn’t never do for any great length o’ time; but it will be a blessin’ to hear some th’ Elder’s good rousin’ comfortin’ sermons for a spell, arter the stuff we hev been a havin’, ‘n’ they can’t say she’s any more ‘n’ a reader anyhow. That’s quite different from preachin’.”

“Of course it is,” said Angy, who was wise enough to keep some of her thoughts and hopes to herself; “they’re’s different’s any other two things. I don’t suppose anybody’d say you was a settin’ up to preach, if you’d ha’ read the sermons, ‘n’ I don’t see why they need to any more o’ Mis’ Kinney.” And so, on the next Sunday Draxy’s ministry to her husband’s people began. Again with softened and gladdened faces the little congregation looked up to the fair, tall priestess with her snow-white robes and snow-

white hair, and gleaming steadfast eyes, standing meekly between the communion-table and the chair in which sat her golden-haired little son. Her voice was clearer and stronger than ever; and there was a calm peacefulness in her whole atmosphere which had not been there at first.

Again the people crowded around, and thanked her, and clasped her hands. This time she answered them with cordial good cheer, and did not tremble. To little Reuby also they spoke gratefully.

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“You help too, Reuby, don’t you?” said Angy Plummer,—“do you like it?”

“Very much, ma’am; mamma says I help, but I think she’s mistaken,” replied the little fellow, archly.

“Yes you do, you darling,” said Mrs. Plummer, stooping and kissing him tenderly. Angy Plummer loved Reuby. She never looked at him without thinking that but for his existence the true mother-heart would perhaps never have been born in her bosom.

The reading of the sermons grew easier and easier to Draxy, Sunday by Sunday. She became conscious of a strange sense of being lifted out of herself, as soon as she began to speak. She felt more and more as if it were her husband speaking through her; and she felt more and more closely drawn into relation with the people.

“Oh, father dear,” she said more than once, “I don’t know how I shall ever give it up when the time comes. It makes me so happy: I feel almost as if I could see Seth standing right by me and holding my gown while I read. And father, dear,” she proceeded in a lower, slower voice, “I don’t know but you’ll think it wrong; I’m almost afraid to tell you, but sometimes I say words that aren’t in the sermons; just a sentence or two, where I think Seth would put it in if he were here now; and I almost believe he puts the very words into my head.”

She paused and looked anxiously and inquiringly at her father.

“No, Draxy,” replied Reuben solemnly, “I don’t think it wrong. I feel more and more, every Sunday I listen to you, as if the Lord had set you apart for this thing; and I don’t believe he’d send any other angel except your husband on the errand of helpin’ you.”

The summer passed, and the parish gave no signs of readiness for a new minister. When Draxy spoke of it, she was met by such heartfelt grief on all sides that she was silenced. At last she had a long, serious talk with the deacons, which set her mind more at rest. They had, it seemed, consulted several neighboring ministers, Elder Williams among the number, and they had all advised that while the congregation seemed so absorbed in interest, no change should be made.

“Elder Williams he sez he’ll come over regular for the communion,” said Deacon Plummer, “and for baptisms whenever we want him, and thet’s the main thing, for, thank the Lord, we haint many funerals ’n course of a year. And Mis’ Kinney, ef ye’ll excuse my makin’ so bold, I’ll tell ye jest what Elder Williams said about ye: sez he, It’s my opinion that ef there was ever a woman born thet was jest cut out for a minister to a congregation, it’s that Elder’s wife o’ your’n; and sez we to him ’Thet’s jest what the hull town thinks, sir, and it’s our opinion that ef we should try to settle anythin’ in the shape of a man in this parish, there wouldn’t be anythin’ but empty pews for him to preach to, for the people’d all be gone up to Mis’ Kinney’s.’”

Draxy smiled in spite of herself. But her heart was very solemn.

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“It is a great responsibility, Deacon Plummer,” she said, “and I feel afraid all the time. But my father thinks I ought to do it, and I am so happy in it, it seems as if it could not be a mistake.”

As months went on, her misgivings grew less and less; and her impulses to add words of her own to her husband’s sermons grew more and more frequent. She could not but see that she held the hearts of the people in her hands to mould them like wax; and her intimate knowledge of their conditions and needs made it impossible for her to refrain from sometimes speaking the words she knew they ought to hear. Whenever she did so at any length, she laid her manuscript on the table, that they might know the truth. Her sense of honesty would not let her do otherwise. It was long before anybody but Angy Plummer understood the meaning of these intervals. The rest supposed she knew parts of the sermon by heart.

But at last came a day when her soul was so stirred within her, that she rose up boldly before her people and said,—

“I have not brought any sermon of Mr. Kinney’s to read to you to-day. I am going to speak to you myself. I am so grieved, so shocked at events which have taken place in this village, the past week, that I cannot help speaking about them. And I find among Mr. Kinney’s sermons no one which meets this state of things.”

The circumstances to which Draxy alluded had been some disgraceful scenes of excitement in connection with the Presidential election. Party spirit had been growing higher and higher in Clairvend for some years; and when, on the reckoning of the returns on this occasion, the victorious party proved to have a majority of but three, sharp quarreling had at once broken out. Accusations of cheating and lying were freely bandied, and Deacon Plummer and George Thayer had nearly come to blows on the steps of the Town House, at high noon, just as the school-children were going home. Later in the afternoon there had been a renewal of the contest in the village store, and it had culminated in a fight, part of which Draxy herself had chanced to see. Long and anxiously she pondered, that night, the question of her duty. She dared not keep silent.

“It would be just hypocrisy and nothing less,” she exclaimed to herself, “for me to stand up there and read them one of Seth’s sermons, when I am burning to tell them how shamefully they have behaved. But I suppose it will be the last time I shall speak to them. They’ll never want to hear me again.”

She did not tell her father of her resolution till they were near the church. Reuben started, but in a moment he said, deliberately,—

“You’re quite right, daughter; may the Lord bless you!”

At Draxy's first words, a thrill of astonishment ran over the whole congregation. Everybody knew what was coming. George Thayer colored scarlet to the roots of his hair, and the color never faded till the sermon was ended. Deacon Plummer coughed nervously, and changed his position so as to cover his mouth with his hand. Angy put her head down on the front of the pew and began to cry.

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“Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s,” came in clear ringing tones from Draxy’s lips. Then she proceeded, in simple and gentle words, to set forth the right of every man to his own opinions and convictions; the duty of having earnest convictions and acting up to them in all the affairs of life. George Thayer and the Deacon looked easier. Her words seemed, after all, rather a justification of their vehemence of feeling.

But when she came to speak of the “things that are God’s,” her words pierced their very souls. The only thing that enabled George Thayer to bear up under it at all was, as he afterwards said in the store, keeping his “eyes fixed steady on old Plummer,” “’cause, you know, boys, I never jined the church nor made any kind o’ profession o’ goin’ in for any things o’ God’s, nohow; not but what I’ve often wished I could see my way to: but sez I to myself, ef he kin stan’ it I kin, an’ so I held out. But I tell you, boys, I’d rather drive the wust six-hoss team I ever got hold on down Breakneck Hill ’n the dark, than set there agin under thet woman’s eyes, a blazin’ one minnit, ‘n fillin’ with tears the next: ‘n’ I don’t care what anybody sez; I’m a goin’ to see her an’ tell her that she needn’t be afeard o’ ever hevin to preach to me s’ good s’ by my name, in the meeting ’us agin, by thunder!”

“Suppose the blessed Saviour had come walking through our streets, looking for his children last Wednesday,” said Draxy, “He would say to himself, ’I shall know them, wherever I find them: I have given them so many badges, they will be sure to be wearing some of them. They suffer long and are kind; they envy not, vaunt not, are not puffed up: they are not easily provoked, think no evil, seek not their own, rejoice in the truth; they do not behave unseemly.’ Alas, would the dear Jesus have turned away, believing Himself a stranger and friendless in our village? Which one of you, dear men, could have sprung forward to take him by the hand? What terrible silence would have fallen upon you as he looked round on your angry faces!”

Tears were rolling down little Reuby’s face. Slyly he tried to wipe them away, first with one hand, then with the other, lest his mother should see them. He had never in his life seen such an expression of suffering on her face. He had never heard such tones of pain in her voice. He was sorely perplexed; and the sight of his distressed little face was almost more than the people could bear.

When Draxy stopped speaking, Deacon Plummer did a manly thing. He rose instantly, and saying “Let us pray,” poured out as humble and contrite a petition for forgiveness as ever went up on wings of faith to Heaven. It cleared the air, like sweet rain; it rolled a burden off everybody’s heart—most of all, perhaps, off Draxy’s.

“He is not angry, after all,” she said; “God has laid it to his heart;” and when, at the end of the services, the old man came up to her and held out his hand, she took it in both of hers, and said, “Thank you, dear Deacon Plummer, thank you for helping me so much

to-day. Your prayer was better for the people than my little sermon, a great deal." The deacon wrung her hands, but did not speak a word, only stooped and kissed Reuby.

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After this day, Draxy had a new hold on the people. They had really felt very little surprise at her speaking to them as she did. She had slowly and insensibly to herself grown into the same place which the Elder had had in their regard; the same in love and confidence, but higher in reverence, and admiration, for although she sympathized just as lovingly as he in all their feelings, they never for a moment ceased to feel that her nature was on a higher plane than his. They could not have put this in words, but they felt it.

“Donno, how ‘tis,” they said, “but Mis’ Kinney, even when she’s closest to ye, an’ a doin’ for ye all the time, don’t seem just like a mortal woman.”

“It’s easy enough to know how ’tis,” replied Angy Plummer, once, in a moment of unguarded frankness, “Mis Kinney is a kind o’ daughter o’ God, somthin’ as Jesus Christ was His Son. It’s just the way Jesus Christ used to go round among folks, ’s near ’s I can make out; ‘n’ I for one, don’t believe that God jest sent Him, once for all, ‘n’ haint never sent anybody else near us, all this time. I reckon He’s a sendin’ down sons and daughters to us oftener ‘n’ we think.”

“Angy Plummer, I call that downright blasphemy,” exclaimed her mother.

“Well, call it what you’re a mind to,” retorted the crisp Angy. “It’s what I believe.”

“‘Tis blasphemy though, to be sayin’ it to folks that can’t understand,” she muttered to herself as she left the room, “ef blasphemy means what Mis’ Kinney sez it does, to speak stupidly.”

Three years had passed. The novelty of Draxy’s relation to her people had worn off. The neighboring people had ceased to wonder and to talk; and the neighboring ministers had ceased to doubt and question. Clairvend and she had a stout supporter in old Elder Williams, who was looked upon as a high authority throughout the region. He always stayed at Reuben Miller’s house, when he came to the town, and his counsel and sympathy were invaluable to Draxy. Sometimes he said jocosely, “I am the pastor of Brother Kinney’s old parish and Mis’ Kinney is my curate, and I wish everybody had as good an one.”

It finally grew to be Draxy’s custom to read one of her husband’s sermons in the forenoon, and to talk to the people informally in the afternoon. Sometimes she wrote out what she wished to say, but usually she spoke without any notes. She also wrote hymns which she read to them, and which the choir sometimes sang. She was now fully imbued with the feeling that everything which she could do, belonged to her people. Next to Reuben, they filled her heart; the sentiment was after all but an expanded and exalted motherhood. Strangers sometimes came to Clairvend to hear her preach, for of course the fame of the beautiful white-robed woman-preacher could not be confined to her own village. This always troubled Draxy very much.

“If we were not so far out of the world, I should have to give it up,” she said; “I know it is proper they should come; but it seems to me just as strange as if they were to walk into the study in the evening when I am teaching Reuby. I can’t make it seem right; and when I see them writing down what I say, it just paralyzes me.”

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It might have seemed so to Draxy, but it did not to her hearers. No one would have supposed her conscious of any disturbing presence. And more than one visitor carried away with him written records of her eloquent words.

One of her most remarkable sermons was called “The Gospel of Mystery.”

The text was Psalm xix. 2:—

“Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.”

First she dwelt on the sweet meaning of the word Gospel. “Dear friends,” she said, “it is a much simpler word than we realize; it is only ’good news,’ ‘good tidings.’ We get gospels every day. Our children send us good news of their lives. What gospels of joy are such letters! And nations to nations send good news: a race of slaves is set free; a war has ended; shiploads of grain have been sent to the starving; a good man has been made ruler; these are good tidings—gospels.”

After dwelling on this first, simplest idea of the word, until every one of her hearers had begun to think vividly of all the good tidings journeying in words back and forth between heart and heart, continent and continent, she spoke of the good news which nature tells without words. Here she was eloquent. Subtle as the ideas were, they were yet clothed in the plain speech which the plain people understood: the tidings of the spring, of the winter, of the river, of the mountain; of gold, of silver, of electric fire; of blossom and fruit; of seed-time and harvest; of suns and stars and waters,—these were the “speech” which “day uttered unto day.”

But “knowledge was greater” than speech: night in her silence “showed” what day could not tell. Here the faces of the people grew fixed and earnest. In any other hands than Draxy’s the thought would have been too deep for them, and they would have turned from it wearily. But her simplicity controlled them always. “Stand on your door-steps on a dark night,” she said,—“a night so dark that you can see nothing: looking out into this silent darkness, you will presently feel a far greater sense of how vast the world is, than you do in broad noon-day, when you can see up to the very sun himself.”

More than one young face in the congregation showed that this sentence struck home and threw light on hitherto unexplained emotions. “This is like what I mean,” continued Draxy, “by the Gospel of Mystery, the good tidings of the things we cannot understand. This gospel is everywhere. Not the wisest man that has ever lived can fully understand the smallest created thing: a drop of water, a grain of dust, a beam of light, can baffle his utmost research. So with our own lives, with our own hearts; every day brings a mystery—sin and grief and death: all these are mysteries; gospels of mystery, good tidings of mystery; yes, good tidings! These are what prove that God means to take us into another world after this one; into a world where all things which perplexed us here will be explained.... O my dear friends!” she exclaimed at last, clasping her hands

tightly, “thank God for the things which we cannot understand: except for them, how should we ever be sure of immortality?”

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Then she read them a hymn called “The Gospel of Mystery.” Coming after the sermon, it was sweet and clear to all the people’s hearts. Before the sermon it would have seemed obscure.

The Gospel of Mystery.

Good tidings every day,
God’s messengers ride fast.
We do not hear one half they say,
There is such noise on the highway,
Where we must wait while they ride past.

Their banners blaze and shine
With Jesus Christ’s dear name,
And story, how by God’s design
He saves us, in His love divine,
And lifts us from our sin and shame.

Their music fills the air,
Their songs sing all of Heaven;
Their ringing trumpet peals declare
What crowns to souls who fight and dare,
And win, shall presently be given.

Their hands throw treasures round
Among the multitude.
No pause, no choice, no count, no bound,
No questioning how men are found,
If they be evil or be good.

But all the banners bear
Some words we cannot read;
And mystic echoes in the air,
Which borrow from the songs no share,
In sweetness all the songs exceed.

And of the multitude,
No man but in his hand
Holds some great gift misunderstood,
Some treasure, for whose use or good
His ignorance sees no demand.

These are the tokens lent
By immortality;

Birth-marks of our divine descent;
Sureties of ultimate intent,
God's Gospel of Eternity.

Good tidings every day.
The messengers ride fast;
Thanks be to God for all they say;
There is such noise on the highway,
Let us keep still while they ride past.

But the sermon which of all others her people loved best was one on the Love of God. This one she was often asked to repeat,—so often, that she said one day to Angy, who asked for it, "Why, Angy, I am ashamed to. Everybody must know it by heart. I am sure I do."

"Yes, that's jest the way we do know it, Mis' Kinney, by heart," said the affectionate Angy, "an' that's jest the reason we want it so often. I never told ye what George Thayer said the last time you read it to us, did I?"

"No, Angy," said Draxy.

"Well, he was singing in the choir that day, 'n place o' his brother, who was sick; 'n' he jumped up on one o' the seats 'n' swung his hat, jest 's you was goin' down the aisle, 'n' we all ketched hold on him to pull him down, 'n' try to hush him; for you can't never tell what George Thayer'll do when his blood's up, 'n' we was afraid he was agoin' to holler right out, 's ef he was in the town-'us; but sez he, in a real low, trembly kind o' voice,

"'Ye needn't be afraid, I ain't agoin' to whoop;—taint that way I feel,—but I had to do suthin' or I should bust': 'n' there was reel tears in his eyes—George Thayer's eyes, Mis' Kinney! Then he jumped down, 'n' sez he, 'I'll tell ye what that sermon's like: it's jest like one great rainbow all round ye, and before 'n' behind 'n' everywheres, 'n' the end on't reaches way to the Throne; it jest dazzles my eyes, that's what it does.'"

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This sermon had concluded with the following hymn, which Draxy had written when Reuby was only a few weeks old:—

The Love of God.

Like a cradle rocking, rocking,
  Silent, peaceful, to and fro,
Like a mother's sweet looks dropping
  On the little face below,
Hangs the green earth, swinging, turning,
  Jarless, noiseless, safe and slow;
Falls the light of God's face bending
  Down and watching us below.

And as feeble babes that suffer,
  Toss and cry, and will not rest,
Are the ones the tender mother
  Holds the closest, loves the best,
So when we are weak and wretched,
  By our sins weighed down, distressed,
Then it is that God's great patience
  Holds us closest, loves us best.

O great Heart of God! whose loving
  Cannot hindered be nor crossed;
Will not weary, will not even
  In our death itself be lost—
Love divine! of such great loving,
  Only mothers know the cost—
Cost of love, which all love passing,
  Gave a Son to save the lost.

There is little more to tell of Draxy's ministry. It closed as suddenly as it had begun.

It was just five years after the Elder's death that she found herself, one Sunday morning, feeling singularly feeble and lifeless. She was bewildered at the sensation, for in her apparent health she had never felt it before. She could hardly walk, could hardly stand. She felt also a strange apathy which prevented her being alarmed.

"It is nothing," she said; "I dare say most women are so all the time; I don't feel in the least ill;" and she insisted upon it that no one should remain at home with her. It was a communion Sunday and Elder Williams was to preach.

“How fortunate it is that Mr. Williams was here!” she thought languidly, as she seated herself in the eastern bay-window, to watch Reuby down the hill. He walked between his grandparents, holding each by the hand, talking merrily and looking up into their faces.

Draxy watched them until their figures became dim, black specks, and finally faded out of sight. Then she listened dreamily to the notes of the slow-tolling bell; when it ceased she closed her eyes, and her thoughts ran back, far back to the days when she was “little Draxy” and Elder Kinney was only her pastor. Slowly she lived her life since then over again, its joy and its sorrow alike softened in her tender, brooding thoughts. The soft whirring sound of a bird’s wings in the air roused her: as it flew past the window she saw that it was one of the yellow-hammers, which still built their nests in the maple-grove behind the house.

“Ah,” thought she, “I suppose it can’t be one of the same birds we saw that day. But it’s going on errands just the same. I wonder, dear Seth, if mine are nearly done.”

At that instant a terrible pain shot through her left side and forced a sharp cry from her lips. She half rose exclaiming, “Reuby, oh, darling!” and sank back in her chair unconscious.

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Just as Elder Williams was concluding the communion service, the door of the church was burst open, and old Ike, tottering into the aisle, cried out in a shrill voice:—

“Mis’ Kinney’s dead! Mis’ Kinney’s dead!”

The scene that followed could not be told. With flying feet the whole congregation sped up the steep hill—Angy Plummer half lifting, half dragging Reuby, and the poor grandparents supported on each side by strong men. As they drew near the house, they saw Draxy apparently sitting by the open window.

“O mamma! why that’s mamma,” shrieked Reuby, “she was sitting just so when we came away. She isn’t dead.”

Elder Williams reached the house first, Hannah met him on the threshold, tearless.

“She dead, sir. She’s cold as ice. She must ha’ been dead a long time.”

Old Ike had been rambling around the house, and observing from the outside that Draxy’s position was strange, had compelled Hannah to go into the room.

“She was a smilin’ just’s you see her now,” said Hannah, “‘n’ I couldn’t ha’ touched her to move her more’n I could ha’ touched an angel.”

There are griefs, as well as joys, to which words offer insult. Draxy was dead!

Three days later they laid her by the side of her husband, and the gray-haired, childless old people, and the golden-haired, fatherless and motherless boy, returned together broken-hearted to the sunny parsonage.

On the village a terrible silence, that could be felt, settled down; a silence in which sorrowing men and women crept about, weeping as those who cannot be comforted.

Then week followed after week, and soon all things seemed as they had seemed before. But Draxy never died to her people. Her hymns are still sung in the little lonely church; her gospel still lives in the very air of those quiet hills, and the people smile through their tears as they teach her name to little children.

Whose Wife Was She?

I was on my knees before my chrysanthemum-bed, looking at each little round tight disk of a bud, and trying to believe that it would be a snowy flower in two weeks. In two weeks my cousin Annie Ware was to be married: if my white chrysanthemums would only understand and make haste! I was childish enough to tell them so; but the childishness came of love,—of my exceeding, my unutterable love for Annie Ware; if flowers have souls, the chrysanthemums understood me.

A sharp, quick roll of wheels startled me. I lifted my head. The wheels stopped at our gate; a hurried step came down the broad garden-path, and almost before I had had time to spring to my feet, Dr. Fearing had taken both my hands in his, had said,—“Annie Ware has the fever,”—had turned, had gone, had shut the garden gate, and the same sharp quick roll of wheels told that he was far on his way to the next sufferer.

I do not know how long I stood still in the garden. A miserable sullenness seemed to benumb my faculties. I repeated,—

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“Annie Ware has the fever.” Then I said,—

“Annie Ware cannot die; she is too young, too strong, and we love her so.”

Then I said again,—

“Annie Ware has the fever,” and all the time I seemed not to be thinking about her at all, but about the chrysanthemums, whose tops I still idly studied.

For weeks a malignant typhus fever had been slowly creeping about in the lower part of our village, in all the streets which had been under water in the spring freshet.

These streets were occupied chiefly by laboring people, either mill-operatives, or shopkeepers of the poorer class. It was part of the cruel “calamity” of their “poverty” that they could not afford to have homesteads on the high plateau, which lifted itself quite suddenly from the river meadow, and made our village a by-word of beauty all through New England.

Upon this plateau were laid out streets of great regularity, shaded by grand elms, many of which had been planted by hands that had handled the ropes of the *Mayflower*. Under the shade of these elms stood large old-fashioned houses, in that sort of sleepy dignity peculiar to old New England. We who lived in these houses were also sleepy and dignified. We knew that “under the hill,” as it was called, lived many hundreds of men and women, who were stifled in summer for want of the breezes which swept across our heights, cold in winter because the wall of our plateau shut down upon them the icy airs from the frozen river, and cut off the afternoon sun. We were sorry for them, and we sent them cold meat and flannels sometimes; but their life was as remote from our life as if they never crossed our paths; it is not necessary to go into large cities to find sharp lines drawn between the well-to-do and the poverty-stricken. There are, in many small villages, “districts” separated from each other by as distinct a moral distance as divides Fifth Avenue from the Five Points.

And so it had come to pass that while for weeks this malignant fever had been creeping about on the river shore, we, in our clearer, purer air, had not felt even a dread of it. There had not been a single case of it west of the high water mark made by the terrible freshet of the previous spring. We sent brandy and wine and beef-tea into the poor, comfortless, grief-stricken houses; and we said at tea-time that it was strange, people would persist in living down under the bank: what could they expect? and besides, they were “so careless about drainage and ventilation.”

Now, on the highest and loveliest spot, in the richest and most beautiful house, the sweetest and fairest girl of all our village lay ill of the deadly disease.

“Annie Ware has the fever.” I wondered if some fiend were lurking by my side, who kept saying the words over and over in my ear. With that indescribable mixture of dulled and preternaturally sharpened sense which often marks the first moments of such distress, I walked slowly to my room, and in a short time had made all the necessary preparation for leaving home. I felt like a thief as I stole slowly down the stairs, with my travelling-bag in my hand. At the door I met my father.

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“Hey-day, my darling, where now? Off to Annie’s, as usual?”

He had not heard the tidings! Should I tell him? I might never see him again; only too well I knew the terrible danger into which I was going. But he might forbid me.

“Yes, off to Annie’s,” I said in a gay tone, and kissing him sprang down the steps.

I did not see my father again for eighteen days.

On the steps of my uncle’s house I met old Jane, a colored woman who had nursed Annie Ware when she was a baby, and who lived now in a little cottage near by, from whose door-steps she could see Annie’s window, and in whose garden she raised flowers of all sorts, solely for the pleasure of carrying them to Annie every day.

Jane’s face was positively gray with sorrow and fear. She looked at me with a strange sort of unsympathizing hardness in her eyes. She had never loved me. I knew what she thought. She was saying to herself: “Why not this one instead of the other?”

“O auntie!” I said, “I would die for Annie; you know I would.”

At this she melted. “O honey! don’ ye say that. The Lord”—but she could say no more. She threw her apron up over her head and strode away.

The doors of the house stood open. I walked through room after room, and found no human being. At last, at the foot of the stairs in the back part of the house, I came upon all the servants huddled together in a cowering, weeping group. Flat on the floor, with his face to the wall, lay black Caesar, the coachman. I put my hand on his shoulder. He jerked away impatiently.

“Yer jest lemme lone, will yer?” he said in a choking voice; then lifting up his head, and seeing it was I, he half sprang to his feet, with a look of shame and alarm, and involuntarily carrying his hand to his head, said:—

“O miss! who’s gwine to think yer”—here he too broke down, and buried his face in his great hands.

I did not speak, but the little group instinctively opened to let me pass up the stairs. I had a vague consciousness that they said something as I turned into a little cross-hall which led to Annie’s room; but without attending to their words I opened her door. The room was empty; the bed stripped of clothes; the windows wide open. I sank into a chair, and looked from side to side. I was too late, after all! That was why none of the servants dared speak to me. A little slipper of Annie’s lay on the floor by the bed. I took it up and turned it over and over in my hands. Then I became conscious that my Aunt Ann was speaking to me,—was calling me by name, earnestly, repeatedly, with terror in her voice.

“My dear, dear child; Helen, Helen, Helen, she is not dead. She is in my room. Come and see for yourself.”

I had seen my Aunt Ann every day for nineteen years,—I never knew her until that moment; I never saw her real face until that moment.

I followed her slowly through rooms and passageways till she reached her own chamber. The door was open; the room was very dark. On the threshold she paused, and whispered, “You must not be frightened, darling. She will not know you. She has not known any one for six hours.”

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I knelt down by the bed. In a few moments my eyes became used to the darkness, and I saw Annie's face lying motionless on the farther edge of the bed, turned to the wall. It was perfectly white except the lips, which were almost black, and were swollen and crusted over with the fearful fever. Her beautiful hair fell in tangled masses, and half covered her face.

"She seems to be lying very uncomfortably," said Aunt Ann, "but the doctor ordered that she should not be disturbed in any way."

I looked at my aunt's face and listened to her voice in bewilderment. The whole world had for years called her, and with apparent justice, "a hard and unsympathizing woman." No human being had ever seen a really free unconstrained smile on her face, or heard from her lips an impulsive word. When it was known that the genial, rollicking, open-hearted Henry Ware was to marry her, everybody shuddered. As years went on, everybody who sat by Henry Ware's fireside, and was kindled and made welcome by his undiminished and unconquerable cheeriness, felt at the same time chilled and paralyzed by the courteous, unexceptionable dignity of Mrs. Ware. Even I, having the freedom of a daughter in their house, and loving my uncle hardly less than I loved my father, had never once supposed that anybody could love Aunt Ann, or that she would permit it. I always felt a little terror when I saw Annie kiss her, or my uncle put his arm around her. My own loving, caressing, over-flowing mother had given me by inheritance, and had taught me by example, a type of love which knew no life without expression. And very well I knew that that sweet mother of mine, whom the whole town loved, and who herself loved the whole world, seemed always turned into stone by the simple presence of Aunt Ann.

And now Aunt Ann was sitting on the floor by my side, clinging to my hand, resting my head on her bosom, and, as I felt instantly and instinctively, revealing in her every tone, look, word, such intensity and passionateness of feeling as I had never in my whole life seen before. I saw then that she had always held me side by side with her own child in her heart, and that she knew the rare quality of the love I had for Annie.

"I ought not to have let you come here," she said, more as if speaking to herself than to me; "they, too, have but one."

"But, Aunt Ann, you could not have kept me out," I whispered.

"Yes, I knew that, my child," she replied; "but no one else would know it."

From that moment there was between my Aunt Ann and me a subtle bond which partook of all the holiest mysteries of love. There were both motherhood and the love of lovers in my love for Annie. Annie's mother felt them, and was willing to have her own motherhood added to and ministered to by them. From that moment I believe not even her husband seemed so near to her in her relation with her child as I.

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I will not write out the record of the next two weeks. They seemed, as they passed, a thousand years; and yet, in looking back on them, they seem only like one terrible breathless night. My aunt and I alone did all that was done for Annie. There were whole days and whole nights during which she talked incessantly, sometimes with such subtle semblance of her own sweet self that we could hardly believe she did not know what she said; sometimes with such wild ravings that we shook in terror, and could not look at her nor at each other. There were other days and nights through which she lay in a sleep, which seemed-no more like real sleep than the shrill voice of her ravings had seemed like her real voice. These were most fearful of all. Through all these days and nights, two men with white faces and folded arms walked up and down in the rooms below, or crouched on the thresholds of our doors, listening for sign or word from us. One was Annie's father, and the other was her lover, George Ware. He was her second cousin, fifteen years older than she, and had loved her since the day she was one year old, when at the ceremony of her christening, he, a proud shy boy of sixteen, had been allowed to carry her up-stairs with her sweet name resting fresh and new on her little dewy forehead. Ah, seldom does such love spring and grow and blaze on this earth as had warmed the very air around Annie from the moment of her birth. George Ware was a man of rare strength, as this love showed; and with just such faithfulness as his faithfulness to Annie, he had loved and cared for his mother, who had been for twenty years a widow. They lived on the outskirts of the town, in a small house almost buried in the heart of a pine wood. The wood was threaded in all directions by miles of narrow paths which shone in the shaded sunlight as if they were satin-floored. For nineteen years it had been George Ware's joy to roam these paths with his cousin Annie; first, the baby whom he drew in her wicker wagon; next, the wayward little child who walked with stumbling steps and clung to his finger; next, the gay school-girl who brought all her perplexities and all her joys to be confided to him under the pines; next, the shyer and more silent maiden who came less often, but lingered helplessly until twilight made the fragrant aisles solemn and dim as cloisters; at last, the radiant, the child-like woman, the promised wife!

No winter could set a barrier across these pine-wood paths. When the whole country about lay blocked and drifted, and half buried with snow, all these spicy foot-roads were kept clear and level, and ready for Annie's feet. Whole days of George Ware's strength went into the work and the joy of doing this. In open spaces where the snow had drifted deep, he wrought it into solid walls almost as high on either hand as Annie's head. In dark nooks, where the spreading pines and hemlocks lay low and wide, he tossed the snow into fantastic and weird masses on the right and left, and cleared great spaces where he knew the partridge-berry would be ready with a tiny scarlet glow to light up the spot.

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This was George Ware's wooing. It never stepped into the glare, the contention of profaner air. It was not a seeking, a finding, a conquest; but a slow, sure growth of possession, which had as eternal foundation and seemed as eternally safe as the results of organic law.

George's picture hung in Annie's room, opposite the foot of her bed. Opposite the foot of the bed in her mother's room hung a large engraving of the Sistine Madonna. I fancied that in Annie's quieter moments her eyes rested with a troubled look upon this picture, and one day, when she was in a deep sleep, I exchanged the pictures. I felt as if even lifeless canvas which had George's face painted upon it, might work her good.

At last there came a night,—they said it was the fourteenth, but the words conveyed no meaning to me,—there came a night when Dr. Fearing, who had been sitting by Annie's bed for two hours, watching her every breath, sprang suddenly to his feet, and beckoned to my aunt and me to follow him into the next room. He shut the door, walked very swiftly up to us, looked first into her face then into mine; then felt her pulse, and then mine, and then turning to me, said,—

"It will have to be you." We looked at him in sudden terror. The tears were rolling down his wrinkled cheeks.

"What is it, William?" gasped Aunt Ann.

"It will have to be you," he went on, looking me in the face, and taking no notice of her question; "your pulse can be trusted. There has been a change. When Annie wakes out of this sleep she will know you. It may be in two hours, and it may not be for six. But if in that first moment she is alarmed, or agitated in any way, she will die."

"O William, let me stay. I will be calm," moaned my poor aunt.

Then I observed, for the first time, that she had called him "William." And then, for the first and last time, I heard Dr. Fearing call my Aunt Ann "darling," and I remembered in that instant that it had been said once in my hearing, that it was because of his love for Mrs. Henry Ware that Dr. William Fearing had lived and would die a lonely man.

"Darling," he said, and put one hand on her shoulder, "you would kill your child. I forbid you to cross the threshold of that room till I come back. You will thank me to-morrow. Can you not trust me, Ann?" and he looked down from his full height, this brave old man, into the face of the woman he had loved, with a look like the look of one who dies to save another. It was but for one second, and then he was again the physician, and turning to me, went on, "I have another patient to whom I must instantly go, and whom I may not be able to leave for hours. You can do all that I would do,—I believe,"—then he felt my pulse again, and nodding his head with a sort of grim professional satisfaction, which no amount of emotion could wholly divert from its delight in the steady nerves and

undisturbed currents of a healthy body,—resumed, “You have but one thing to do: when she wakes, look perfectly composed; if she speaks, answer her in a perfectly natural voice; give her two drops of this medicine, and tell her to go to sleep again. If you do this, she will fall asleep at once. If you show the least agitation, she may die,—probably will!”—and Dr. Fearing was gone.

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My aunt sat silently weeping. I kissed her without speaking, and went back to my chair by Annie's bed. I dropped the two drops of medicine into a spoon, and propped the spoon carefully on a little silver tray, so that I could reach it instantly. It was just three o'clock in the morning. Hour after hour passed. I could not hear Annie's breath. My own dinned in my ears like the whir of mills. A terror such as I can never describe took possession of me. What if I were to kill Annie? How could I look composed? speak naturally? What would she say? If I could but know and have my answer ready!

I firmly believe that the dawn of light saved my senses and Annie's life. When the first red beam shot through the blinds at the farther end of the room, tears came into my eyes. I felt as if angels were watching outside. A tiny sunbeam crept between the slats and fell on the carpet. It was no more than a hair's breadth, but it was companionship to me. Slowly, steadily it came towards me. I forgot all else in watching it. To this day I cannot see a slow-moving sunbeam on a crimson floor without a shudder. The clock struck six, seven, eight, nine. The bells rang for schools; the distant hum of the town began. Still there was no stir, no symptom of life, in the colorless face on the pillow. The sunbeam had crept nearly to my feet. Involuntarily I lifted my right foot and stretched it out-to meet the golden messenger. Had I dared to move I should have knelt and reached my hand to it instead. Perhaps even the slight motion I did make, hastened Annie's waking, for at that instant she turned her head uneasily on the pillow and opened her eyes. I saw that she knew me. I wondered how I could have distrusted my own strength to meet her look. I smiled as if we were at play together, and said,—

"Good morning, dear."

She smiled languidly and said, "How came I in mamma's bed?"

I said, quietly, "Take this medicine, darling;" and almost before the drops had passed her lips her eyes closed, and she had fallen asleep again.

When Dr. Fearing came into the room at noon, he gave one swift, anxious glance at her face, and then fell on his knees and folded his face in his hands. I knew that Annie was safe.

Then he went into the next room, silently took Aunt Ann by the hand, and leading her back to Annie's bedside, pointed to the little beads of moisture on her forehead and said,—

"Saved!"

The revulsion was too much for the poor mother's heart. She sank to the floor. He lifted her in his arms and carried her out, and for the rest of that day my Aunt Ann, that "hard and unsympathizing woman," passed from one strange fainting-fit into another, until we were in almost as great fear for her life as we had been for Annie's.

At twilight Annie roused from her sleep again. She was perfectly tranquil, but too weak to lift even her little hand, which had grown so thin and so wrinkled that it looked like a wilted white flower lying on the white counterpane.

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Hour by hour she gained strength under the powerful restoratives which were used, and still more from the wonderful elasticity of her temperament. From the very first day, however, an indefinable terror of misgiving seized me as often as I heard her voice or looked into her eyes. In vain I said to myself: "It is the weakness after such terrible illness;" "it is only natural." I felt in the bottom of my heart that it was more.

On the fourth day she said suddenly, looking up at the picture of George Ware,—

"Why! Why is Cousin George's picture in here? Where is the Madonna?"

I replied: "I moved it in here, dear, for you. I thought you would like it."

"No," she said, "I like the Madonna best: the dear little baby! Please carry George back into my room where he belongs."

My heart stood still with terror. She had never called George Ware her cousin since their engagement. She especially disliked any allusion to their relationship. This was her first mention of his name, and it was in all respects just what it would have been a year before. Dr. Fearing had forbidden us to allude to him, or to her wedding-day, or, in fact, to any subject calculated to arouse new trains of thought in her mind. I wondered afterward that we did not understand from the first how he had feared that her brain might not fully recover itself, as the rest of her exquisitely organized body seemed fast doing.

Day after day passed. Annie could sit up; could walk about her room; she gained in flesh and color and strength so rapidly that it was a marvel. She was gentle and gay and loving; her old rare, sweet self in every little way and trait and expression; not a look, not a smile, not a tone was wanting; but it was the Annie of last year, and not of this. She made no allusion to her wedding, the day for which had now passed. She did not ask for George. The whole year had dropped out of her memory; part of her brain was still diseased. No human touch could venture to deal with it without the risk of the most terrible consequences.

Dr. Fearing's face grew day by day more and more anxious; he was baffled; he was afraid. He consulted the most eminent physicians who had had experience in diseases of the brain. They all counseled patience, and advised against any attempt to hasten her recollections upon any point; they all had known similar cases, but never one so sharply defined or so painful as this. Still they were unanimous in advising that nothing should be said to startle her; that all must be trusted to time.

Through these terrible days George Ware was braver than any one else. His faith in the absoluteness of his hold on Annie was too great to be disturbed. He was by nature as patient as he was resolute. He had not wooed his wife for eighteen years to lose her now in any way except by death, he thought. He comforted us all.

“Do be brave, sweet mother of Annie,” he used to say to my poor Aunt Ann; “all will be well. It is nothing to me to wait another year, after having waited all these. It is not even hard for me to go without seeing her, if that is best.”

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Nevertheless, his face grew thin and his eye heavy and his form bent, as week after week passed, and he came daily to the house, only to be told the same weary thing, that Annie had not asked for him. The physicians had said that it would be better that she should not see him until she had of her own accord mentioned his name. Her nerves were still in such a state that any surprise threw her into palpitation and alarm which did not pass off for hours. No human being could tell how great might be the shock of seeing his face; how much it might recall to her; and whether, if it recalled all, she could bear it. From the outset George believed the physicians were wrong in this; but he dared not urge his instinct against their knowledge; and he was patient of nature, and so the days went on, on, on; and there was no change except that Annie grew steadily better and our hearts grew steadily sicker and sicker until we almost looked back with longing on the days when we feared she would die. And yet in every respect, except the memory of her lover, Annie was the same as before. The closest scrutiny could discover no other change in her, except perhaps that she seemed even gayer than she used to seem, and a shade less tender, but this also was as she had been before she had promised to be George Ware's wife.

One morning George brought me a small bunch of lovely wild things from the pine woods, Tiarella leaves just tipped with claret color by the early frosts, sprays of Linnea, two or three tiny white maiden's hair ferns, all tied by a knot of patridge-berry vines thick-set with scarlet berries.

"Give these to Annie for me, will you, dear Helen?" he said, "and observe very carefully how she is affected by them."

I remembered that it was just one year ago that day, that he had asked her to be his wife, and I trembled to think of what hidden meanings I might be messenger in carrying her this silent token. But I too felt, as George did, that she was drifting farther and farther away from the memories we desired she should regain; and that no physician's knowledge could be so true as love's instinct; and I asked no counsel of any one, but went swiftly to Annie with the leaves in my hand.

"O you darling! How perfectly lovely," she exclaimed with a laugh of delight. "Why these must have come from George's woods. Have you been up there?"

"No, dear," I said, "George brought them for you, this morning."

"Oh, the good darling!" she exclaimed. "Is it decided about his going to India?"

I could not repress a little cry of anguish and terror. A year before, there had been a plan for his going out to India on a mercantile venture, which promised great profit. It had been given up, partly because his mother felt that she could not live without him, partly because he felt that he could not longer live without Annie.

“What is it, dear?” she said, in her softest, most sympathizing voice, with a little flush of alarm on her pale cheek; “what hurt you? are you ill? Oh, my poor Helen, you are all worn out with nursing me. I will nurse you presently.”

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“Only a little twinge of my old neuralgia, dear,” I said faintly; “these autumn winds are setting it at work again.”

She looked anxiously at me for a few seconds, and then began to untie the bunch of leaves, and spread out the long vines on the bed.

“Oh, if I only had some moss,” she said.

I ran to the green-house and brought her handfuls of beautiful dripping mosses from the rocks in the fernery. She filled a saucer with them, putting the Tiarella leaves all round the rim, and winding the Linnea vines in and out as they grow in the woods. Then she leaned back on her pillows and began breaking the partridge-berry vines into short bits, each with a scarlet berry on it. These she set upright in the moss, changing and rearranging them so often that I wondered what could be her purpose, and leaned forward to see.

“No, no,” she said playfully, pushing me back, “not till it is done.”

Presently she said, “Now look!”

I looked and saw a perfect, beautifully formed G made by the scarlet berries on the green moss.

“There,” she said, “I’ll send that back to George, to show him that I have found him in the berries; or, no,” she added, “we’ll keep it till he comes to see me. The doctor said I could be carried down-stairs to-morrow, and then I shall begin to ‘receive,’” and she laughed a gay little laugh, and sank back tired.

That moment stands out in my memory as the saddest, hardest one of all. I think at that moment hope died in my heart.

When I told George of this, and showed him the saucer of moss—for she had ordered it to be set on the drawing-room table, saying, “It is too pretty to stay up here with bottles and invalids,”—he buried his face in his hands for many minutes. When he lifted it, he looked me steadily in the eye, and said,—

“She has utterly forgotten this whole year. But I will win her again.”

Then he knelt down and kissed every little leaf and berry which her hands had touched, and went away without speaking another word.

It was decided after this that it could do no harm for him to see her. Indeed, he now demanded it. His resolution was taken.

“You need not fear,” he said to Dr. Fearing, “that I shall agitate her by approaching her as if she were my own. She is not my own. But she will be!”

We all sat with trembling hands and beating hearts as the hour approached at which we knew the experiment was to be made.

Annie had been carried down-stairs, and laid upon a lounge in the western bay-window of the library. The lounge was covered with dark green damask. Old Caesar had so implored to be allowed to carry her down, that Annie had insisted that he should be gratified; and she went down as she had so often done in her childhood, with her soft white face lying close to his shining black one.

As he put her down, in her rose-colored wrapper, on the dark green damask, he knelt before her and burst out in spite of himself, into a sort of wild chant of thanksgiving; but as we entered the door he sprang up ashamed, and turning to Aunt Ann, said: “Beg pardon, missis, but this rose yere was too much pink rose for old Caesar!”

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It was “too much pink rose” for any human eyes to see unmoved. We all cried: and Annie herself shed a few tears, but finally helped us all by saying gayly,—

“You’ll make me ill again if you all go on like this. I hate people that cry.”

No stranger’s eye would have detected the thousandth part of a second’s pause which George Ware’s feet made on the threshold of that room when his eyes first saw Annie. Before the second had ended he was simply the eager, glad, affectionate cousin, and had taken calmly and lovingly the child’s kiss which Annie gave him as she had given it every day of her life.

We could not speak. My uncle tried to read his newspaper; my aunt’s hands shook in their pretense of sewing; I threw myself on the floor at the foot of Annie’s lounge and hid my face in its cushions.

But George Ware’s brave voice went steadily on. Annie’s sweet glad tones, weak and low, but still sweeter than any other tones I ever heard, chimed in and out like fairy bells from upper air. More than an hour passed. I do not know one word that we said.

Then George rose, saying: “I must not tire you, little Annie, so I am going now.”

“Will you come, again to-morrow?” she asked as simply as a little child.

“Yes, dear, if you are not the worse for this,” he replied, and kissed her forehead and walked very quickly away without looking back. I followed him instantly into the hall, for I had seen that in his face which had made me fear that, strong man as he was, he would fall. I found him sitting on the lowest step of the staircase, just outside the door.

“My God, Helen,” he gasped, “it isn’t only this last year she has forgotten. She has gone back five years.”

“Oh no, dear George,” I said; “you are mistaken. She remembers everything up to a year ago. You know she remembered about your going to India.”

“That is nothing,” he said impatiently. “You can’t any of you, see what I mean, I suppose. But I tell you she has forgotten five years of me. She is to me just as she was when she was fourteen. Do you think I don’t know the face and voice and touch of each day of my darling’s life? oh, my God! my God!” and he sank down on the stair again in a silence which was worse than groans. I left him there and went back to Annie.

“How old Cousin George looks,” she was saying, as I entered the room; “I didn’t remember that he was so old. Why, he looks as old as you do, sweet papa. But then,” reflectively, “after all, he is pretty old. He is fifteen years older than I am—and I am nineteen: thirty-four! that is old, is it not papa?” said she, half petulantly. “Why don’t you speak, any of you?”

“You are getting too tired, my darling,” said her father, “and now I shall carry you up-stairs.”

After Annie was asleep, my Aunt Ann and I sat for hours in the library, going over and over and over, with weary hopelessness, all her words and looks, and trying to comfort each other. I think each knew the utter despair of the other’s heart.

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From this time George came and went with all his old familiarity: not a day passed without his seeing Annie, and planning something for her amusement or pleasure. Not a day passed without her showing in many ways that he made a large part of her life, was really a central interest in it. Even to us who knew the sad truth, and who looked on with intentness and anxiety hardly less than those with which we had watched her sick-bed weeks before—even to us it seemed many times as if all must be right. No stranger but would believe them lovers; not a servant in the house dreamed but that Miss Annie was still looking forward to her wedding. They had all been forbidden to allude to it, but they supposed it was only on account of her weakness and excitability.

But every day the shadow deepened on George Ware's face. I could see, though he would not admit it, that the same despair which filled my soul was settling down upon his. Dr. Fearing, too, who came and spent long evenings with us, and cautiously watched Annie's every tone and look, grew more and more uneasy. Dr. ——, one of the most distinguished physicians of the insane, in the country, was invited to spend a few days in the house. He was presented to Annie as an old friend of her father's, and won at once her whole confidence and regard. For four days he studied her case, and frankly owned himself baffled, and unable to suggest any measure except the patient waiting which was killing us all.

To tell this frail and excitable girl, who had more than once fainted at a sudden noise, that this man whom she regarded only as her loving cousin had been her promised husband—and that having been within two weeks of her wedding-day, she had now utterly forgotten it, and all connected with it—this would be too fearful a risk. It might deprive her forever of her reason.

Otherwise, she seemed in every respect, even in the smallest particular, herself. She recollected her music, her studies, her friends. She was anxious to resume her old life at all points. Every day she made allusions to old plans or incidents. She had forgotten absolutely nothing excepting the loverhood of her lover. Every day she grew stronger, and became more and more beautiful, There was a slight under-current of arch mischievousness and half petulance which she had never had before, and which, added to her sweet sympathetic atmosphere, made her indescribably charming. As she grew stronger she frolicked with every human being and every living thing. When the spring first opened and she could be out of doors, she seemed more like a divine mixture of Ariel and Puck than like a mortal maiden.

I found her one day lying at full length on the threshold of the greenhouse. Twenty great azaleas were in full bloom on the shelves—white, pink, crimson. She had gathered handfuls of the fallen blossoms, and was making her gray kitten, which was as intelligent and as well trained as a dog, jump into the air to catch them as she tossed them up. I sat down on the grass outside and watched her silently.

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“Oh, you sober old Helen,” she said, “you’ll be an owl for a thousand years after you die! Why can’t you caper a little? You don’t know how nice it is.”

Just then George came slowly walking down the garden path, his hands clasped behind him, his head bent forward, and his eyes fixed on the ground.

He did not see us. Annie exclaimed,—

“There’s Cousin George, too! Look at him! Wouldn’t you think he had just heard he was to be executed at twelve to-day! I don’t see what ails everybody.”

“George, George,” she called, “come here. For how many years are you sentenced, dear, and how could you have been so silly as to be found out?” And then she burst into a peal of the most delicious laughter at his bewildered look.

“I don’t know, darling, for how many years I am sentenced. We none of us know,” he said, in a tone which was sadder than he meant it should be, and sobered her loving heart instantly. She sprang to her feet, and threw both her arms around his right arm, a pretty trick she had kept from her babyhood, and said,—

“Oh you dear, good darling, does anything really trouble you? How heartless I am. But you don’t know how it feels to have been so awfully ill, and then to get well again. It makes one feel all body and no soul; but I have soul enough to love you all dearly, you know I have; and I won’t have you troubled; tell me what it is this minute;” and she looked at him with tears in her eyes.

One wonders often if there be any limit to human endurance. If there be, who can say he has reached it? Each year we find that the thing which we thought had taken our last strength, has left us with strength enough to bear a harder thing. It seemed so with such scenes as this, in those sunny spring days when Annie Ware first went out into life again. Each day I said, “There can never be another moment quite so hard to meet as this!” and the next day there came a moment which made me forget the one which had gone before.

It was an ill fortune which just at this time made it imperatively necessary for George to go to the West for three months. He had no choice. His mother’s whole property was at stake. No one but he could save it; it was not certain that he could. His last words to me were,—

“I trust more in you, Helen, than in any other human being. Keep my name constantly in her thought; write me everything which you would tell me if I were here.”

It had become necessary now to tell the sad story of the result of Annie’s illness to all those friends who would be likely to speak to her of her marriage. The whole town knew what shadow rested on our hearts; and yet, as week after week went by, and the

gay, sweet, winning, beautiful girl moved about among people again in her old way, people began to say more and more that it was, after all, very foolish for Annie Ware's friends to be so distressed about her; stranger things had happened; she was evidently a perfectly well woman; and as for the marriage, they had never liked the match—-George Ware was too old and too grave for her; and, besides, he was her second cousin.

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Oh, the torture of the “ante-mortems” of beloved ones, at which we are all forced to assist!

Yet it could not be wondered at, that in this case the whole heart of the community was alive with interest and speculation.

Annie Ware’s sweet face had been known and loved in every house in our village. Her father was the richest, most influential man in the county, and the most benevolent. Many a man and woman had kissed Henry Ware’s baby in her little wagon, for the sake of Henry Ware’s good deeds to them or theirs. And while Mrs. Ware had always repelled persons by her haughty reticence, Annie, from the first day she could speak until now, had won all hearts by her sunny, open, sympathizing nature. No wonder that now, when they saw her again fresh, glad, beautiful, and looking stronger and in better health than she had ever done, they said that we were wrong, that Annie and Nature were right, and that all would be well!

This spring there came to our town a family of wealth and position who had for many years lived in Europe, and who had now returned to make America their home. They had taken a furnished house for a year, to make trial of our air, and also, perhaps, of the society, although rumor, with the usual jealousy, said that the Neals did not desire any intimacy with their neighbors. The grounds of the house which they had hired joined my uncle’s, and my Aunt Ann, usually averse to making new acquaintances, had called upon them at once, and had welcomed them most warmly to her house. The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Neal and two sons, Arthur and Edward. They were people of culture, and of wide experience; but they were not of fine organization nor of the highest breeding; and it will ever remain a mystery to me that there should have seemed to be, from the outset, an especial bond of intimacy between them and my uncle and aunt. I think it was partly the sense of relief with which they welcomed a new interest—a little break in the monotony of anxiety which had been for so many months corroding their very lives.

Almost before I knew that the Neals were accepted as familiar friends, I was startled one morning, while we were at breakfast, by the appearance of Annie on her pony, looking in at our dining-room window. She had a pretty way of riding up noiselessly on the green grass, and making her pony, which was tame as a Newfoundland dog, mount the stone steps, and tap with his nose on the panes of the long glass door till we opened it.

I never saw her so angelically beautiful as she was this morning. Her cheeks were flushed and her dark blue eyes sparkled like gems in the sun. Presently she said, hesitating a little,—

“Edward Neal is at the gate; may I bring him in? I told him he might come, but he said it was too like burglary;” and she cantered off again without waiting to hear my mother’s permission.

All that morning Annie Ware and Edward Neal sat with me on our piazza. I looked and listened and watched like one in a dream, or under a spell. I foresaw, I foreknew what was to come; with the subtle insight of love, I saw all.

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Never had I seen Annie so stirred into joyousness by George's presence as she seemed to be by this boy's. The two together overflowed in a sparkling current of gayety, which was irresistible. They seemed two divine children sent out on a mission to set the world at play. What Edward Neal's more sensuous and material nature lacked, was supplied by the finer, subtler quality of Annie's. From that first day I could never disguise from myself that they seemed, so far as mere physical life goes, the absolute counterparts of each other.

I need not dwell on this part of my story. When young hearts are drawing together, summer days speed on very swiftly. George Ware, alas! was kept at the West week after week, until it came to be month after month. My uncle and aunt seemed deliberately to shut their eyes to the drift of events. I think they were so thankful to watch Annie's bounding health and happiness, to hear glad voices and merry laughs echoing all day in their house, that they could not allow themselves to ask whether a new kernel of bitterness, of danger, lay at the core of all this fair seeming. As for the children, they did not know that they were loving each other as man and woman. Edward Neal was only twenty-one, Annie but nineteen, and both were singularly young and innocent of soul.

And so it came to be once more the early autumn; the maple leaves were beginning to be red, and my chrysanthemums had again set their tiny round disks of buds. Edward, and Annie had said no word of love to each other, but the whole town looked on them as lovers, and people began to reply impatiently and incredulously to our assurances that no engagement existed.

Early in October George came home, very unexpectedly, taking even his mother by surprise. He told me afterwards that he came at last as one warned of God. A presentiment of evil, against which he had struggled for weeks, finally so overwhelmed him that he set off for home without half an hour's delay. I found him, on the night after his arrival, sitting in his old place in the big arm-chair at the head of Annie's lounge; she still clung to some of her old invalid ways, and spent many evenings curled up like a half-shut pink rose on the green damask cushions. He looked worn and thin, but glad and eager, and was giving a lively account of his Western experiences when the library door opened, and coming in unannounced, with the freedom of one at home, Edward Neal entered.

"O Edward, here is Cousin George," exclaimed Annie, while a wave of rosy color spread over her face, and half rising, she took George's hand in hers as she leaned towards Edward.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Ware," said Edward, with that indefinable tone of gentle respect which marks a very young man's recognition of one much older, whom he has been led to admire. "Annie has been talking to me about you all summer. I feel as if I knew you almost as well as she does. I'm heartily glad to see you."

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A man of finer grain than Edward Neal would have known the whole truth in that first second, by the blank stern look which spread like a cloud over George Ware's face; but the open-hearted fellow only thought that he had perhaps seemed too familiar and went on,—

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Ware. It must appear strange to you that I took the liberty of being so glad; but you don't know how kindly I have been allowed to feel that your friends here would permit me to call all their friends mine," and he glanced lovingly and confidently at my aunt and uncle, who answered by such smiles as they rarely gave. Oh, no wonder they loved this genial, frank sunny boy, who had brought such light into their life.

In a moment George was his courteous self again, and began to express his pleasure at meeting Mr. Neal, but Annie interrupted him.

"Oh, now don't be tiresome; of course you are to be just as good friends with Edward as you are with me: sit down, Edward. He is telling us the most delicious stories. He is the dearest Cousin George in the world," she added, stroking his hand which she still kept in hers.

It gave Edward no more surprise to see her do this than it would have done to see her sit in her father's lap. Even I felt with a sudden pang that George Ware seemed at that moment to belong to another generation than Edward and Annie.

Edward seated himself on a low cricket at the foot of the lounge, and, looking up in George's face, said most winningly,—

"Please go on, Mr. Ware." Then he turned one full, sweet look of greeting and welcome upon Annie, who beamed back upon him with such a diffused smile as only the rarest faces have. Annie's smile was one of her greatest charms. It changed her whole face; the lips made but a small part of it; no mortal ever saw it without smiling in answer.

It was beyond George Ware's power long to endure this. Probably his instinct felt in both Edward's atmosphere and Annie's more than we did. He rose very soon and said to me, "If you are going home to-night, Helen, will you let me walk up with you? I have business in that part of the town; but I must go now. Perhaps that will hurry you too much?" he added, with a tone which was almost imploring.

I was only too glad to go. Our leave-taking was very short. A shade of indefinable trouble clouded every face but Edward's and Annie's.

George did not speak until we had left the house. Then he stopped short, took both my hands in his, with a grasp that both hurt and frightened me, and exclaimed,—

"How dared you keep this from me! How dared you!"

“O George,” I said, “there was nothing to tell.”

“Nothing to tell!” and his voice grew hoarse and loud. “Nothing to tell! Do you mean to say that you don’t know, have not known that Annie loves that boy, that puppy?”

I trembled from head to foot. I could not speak. He went on:—

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“And I trusted you so; O Helen, I can never forgive you.”

I murmured, miserably, for I felt myself in that moment really guilty,—

“What makes you think she loves him?”

“You cannot deceive me, Helen,” he replied. “Do not torture me and yourself by trying. Tell me now, how long this ‘Edward’ has been sitting by her lounge. Tell me all.”

Then I told him all. It was not much. He had seen more that evening, and so had I, than had ever existed before. His presence had been the one element which had suddenly defined that which before had been hardly recognized.

He was very quiet after the first moment of bitterness, and asked me to forgive his impatient words. When he left me he said,—

“I cannot see clearly what I ought to do. Annie’s happiness is my only aim. If this boy can create it, and I cannot—but he cannot: she was as utterly mine as it is possible for a woman to be. You none of you knew how utterly! Oh, my God, what shall I do!” and he walked away feebly and slowly like an old man of seventy.

The next day Aunt Ann sent for me to come to her. I found her in great distress. George had returned to the house after leaving me, and had had almost a stormy interview with my uncle. He insisted upon asking Annie at once to be his wife; making no reference to the past, but appearing at once as her suitor. My uncle could not forbid it, for he recognized George’s right, and he sympathized in his suffering. But his terror was insupportable at the thought of having Annie agitated, and of the possible results which might follow. He implored George to wait at least a few weeks.

“What! and see that young lover at my wife’s feet every night!” said George, fiercely. “No! I will risk all, lose all, if need be. I have been held back long enough,” and he had gone directly from my uncle’s room to Annie herself.

In a short time Annie had come to her mother in a perfect passion of weeping, and told her that Cousin George had asked her to be his wife; and that she had never dreamed of such a thing; and she thought he was very unkind to be so angry with her; how could she have supposed he cared for her in that way, when he had been like her elder brother all his life.

“Why, he seems almost as old as papa,” said poor Annie, sobbing and crying, “and he ought to have known that I should not kiss him and put my arms around him if—if”—she could not explain; but she knew!

Annie had gone to her own room, ill. My aunt and I sat together in the library silently crying; we were wretched. “Oh, if George would only have waited,” said Aunt Ann.

“I think it would have made no difference, aunty,” said I.

“No, I am afraid not,” replied she, and each knew that the other was thinking of Edward Neal.

George Ware left town the next day. He sent me a short note. He could not see any one, he said, and begged me to give a farewell kiss for him to “the sweet mother of my Annie. For mine she is, and will be in heaven, though she will be the wife of Edward Neal on earth.”

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When I next saw our Annie she was Edward Neal's promised bride. A severe fit of illness, the result of all these excitements, confined me to my room for three weeks after George's departure; and I knew only from Aunt Ann's lips the events which had followed upon it.

George Ware's presence on that first evening had brought revelation to Edward Neal as well as to all the other members of that circle. That very night he had told his parents that Annie would be his wife.

The next night, while poor George was swiftly borne away, Edward was sitting in my uncle's library, listening with a blanched cheek to the story of Annie's old engagement. My uncle's sense of honor would not let him withhold anything from the man seeking her for his wife. The pain soon passed by, when he was told that she had that very day refused her cousin, and betrayed almost resentment at his offer. Edward Neal had not a sufficiently subtle nature, nor acquaintance enough with psychological phenomena to be disturbed by any fears for the future. He dismissed it all as an inexplicable result of the disease, but a fixed fact, and a great and blessed fortune for him. My uncle, however, was less easily assured. He insisted upon delay, and upon consulting the same physicians who had studied Annie's case before. They all agreed that she was now a perfectly healthy and strong woman, and that to persist in any farther recognition of the old bond, after she had so intelligently and emphatically repudiated all thought of such a relation to her cousin, was absurd. Dr. Fearing alone was in doubt, He said little; but he shook his head and clasped his hands tight, and implored that at least the marriage should be deferred for a year.

Annie herself, however, refused to consent to this: of course no satisfactory reason could be alleged for any such delay; and she said as frankly as a little child, "Edward and I have loved each other almost from the very first; there is nothing for either of us to do in life but to make each other happy; and we shall not leave papa and mamma: so why should we wait?"

They were not married, however, until spring. The whole town stood by in speechless joy and delight when those two beautiful young beings came out from the village church man and wife. It was a scene never to be forgotten. The peculiar atmosphere of almost playful joyousness which they created whenever they appeared together was something which could not be described, but which diffused itself like sunlight.

We all tried resolutely to dismiss memory and misgiving from our hearts. They seemed disloyalty and sin. George Ware was in India. George Ware's mother was dead. The cottage among the pines was sold to strangers, and the glistening brown paths under the trees were neglected and unused.

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Edward and Annie led the same gay child-like lives after their marriage that they had led before: they looked even younger and gayer and sunnier. When they dashed cantering through the river meadows, she with rosy cheeks and pale brown curls flying in the wind, and he with close crisp black hair, and the rich, dark, glowing skin of a Spaniard, the farming men turned and rested on their tools, and gazed till they were out of sight. Sometimes I asked myself wonderingly, “Are they ever still, and tender, and silent?” “Is this perpetual overflow the whole of love?” But it seemed treason to doubt in the presence of such merry gladness as shone in Annie’s face, and in her husband’s too. It was simply the incarnate triumph and joy of young life.

The summer went by; the chrysanthemums bloomed out white and full in my garden; the frosts came, and then the winter, and then Annie told me one day that before winter came again she would be a mother. She was a little sobered as she saw the intense look on my face.

“Why, darling, aren’t you glad? I thought you would be almost as glad as I am myself?” Annie sometimes misunderstood me now.

“Glad! O Annie,” was all I could say.

From that day I had but one thought, Annie’s baby. Together we wrought all dainty marvels for its ward-robe; together we planned all possible events in its life: from the outset I felt as much motherhood to the precious little unseen one as Annie did. She used to say to me, often,—

“Darling, it will be half my baby, and half yours.”

Annie was absolutely and gloriously well through the whole of those mysterious first months of maternity which are to so many women exhausting and painful. Every nerve of her body seemed strung and attuned to normal and perfect harmony. She was more beautiful than ever, stronger than ever, and so glad that she smiled perpetually without knowing it. For the first time since the old days, dear Dr. Fearing’s face lost the anxious look with which his eyes always rested upon her. He was more at ease about her now.

Before light one Sunday morning in December, a messenger rang furiously at our bell. We had been looking for such tidings and were not alarmed. It was a fearful storm; wind and sleet and rain and darkness had attended the coming of Annie’s little “Sunday child” into its human life.

“A boy—and Miss Annie’s all right,” old Caesar said, with a voice almost as hoarse as the storm outside; and he was gone before we could ask a question farther.

In less than an hour I stood on the threshold of Annie’s room. But I did not see her until noon. Then, as I crept softly into the dimly-lighted chamber, the whole scene so

recalled her illness of two years before that my heart stood still with sudden horror, in spite of all my joy. Now, as then, I knelt silently at her bedside, and saw the sweet face lying white and still on the pillow.

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She turned, and seeing me, smiled faintly, but did not speak.

At her first glance, a speechless terror seized me. This was my Annie! The woman who for two years had been smiling with my Annie's face had not been she! The room grew dark. I do not know what supernatural power came to my aid that I did not faint and fall.

Annie drew back the bed-clothes with a slow, feeble motion of her right hand, and pointed to the tiny little head nestled in her bosom. She smiled again, looked at me gently and steadily for a second, and then shut her eyes. Presently I saw that she was asleep; I stole into the next room and sat down with my face buried in my hands.

In a moment a light step aroused me. Aunt Ann stood before me, her pale face all aglow with delight.

"O Helen my darling! She is so well. Thank God! thank God!" and she threw her arms around me and burst into tears.

I felt like one turned to stone. Was I mad, or were they?

What had I seen in that one steady look of Annie's eyes? Was she really well? I felt as if she had already died!

Agonizingly I waited to see Dr. Fearing's face. He came in before tea, saw Annie for a few minutes, and came down-stairs rubbing his hands and singing in a low tone.

"I never saw anything like that child's beautiful elasticity in my life," he said. "We shall have her dancing down-stairs in a month."

The cloud was utterly lifted from all hearts except mine. My aunt and uncle looked at each other with swimming eyes. Edward tried to laugh and look gay, but broke down utterly, and took refuge in the library, where I found him lying on the floor, with his face buried in Annie's lounge.

I went home stupefied, bewildered. I could not sleep. A terror-stricken instinct told me that all was not right. But how should I know more than physician, mother, husband?

For ten days I saw my Annie every day for an hour. Her sweet, strange, gentle, steady look into my eyes when we first met always paralyzed me with fear, and yet I could not have told why. There was a fathomless serenity in her face which seemed to me super-human. She said very little. The doctor had forbidden her to talk. She slept the greater part of the time, but never allowed the baby to be moved from her arms while she was awake.

There was a divine ecstasy in her expression as she looked down into the little face; it never seemed like human motherhood.

One day Edward came to me and said,—

“Do you think Annie is so well as they say? I suppose they must know; but she looks to me as if she had died already, and it were only her glorified angel-body that lies in that bed?”

I could not speak to him. I knew then that he had seen the same thing that I had seen: if his strong, rather obtuse material nature had recognized it, what could so blind her mother and father and the doctor? I burst into tears and left him.

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At the end of a week I saw a cloud on Dr. Fearing's face. As he left Annie's room one morning, he stopped me and said abruptly,—

"What does Annie talk about?"

"She hardly speaks at all," I said.

"Ah," he said. "Well, I have ordered her not to talk. But does she ask any questions?" he continued.

"No," I said; "not of me. She has not asked one."

I saw then that the same vague fear which was filling my heart was taking shape in his.

From that moment, he watched her hourly, with an anxiety which soon betrayed itself to my aunt.

"William, why does not Annie get stronger?" she said suddenly to him one day.

"I do not know why," he answered, with a solemn sadness and emphasis in his tone which was, as I think, he intended it to be, a partial revelation to her, and a warning. Aunt Ann staggered to a chair and looked at him without a word. He answered her look by one equally agonized and silent, and left the room.

The baby was now two weeks old. Annie was no stronger than on the day of his birth. She lay day and night in a tranquil state, smiling with inexpressible sweetness when she was spoken to, rarely speaking of her own accord, doing with gentle docility all she was told to do, but looking more and more like a transfigured saint. All the arch, joyous, playful look was gone; there was no added age in the look which had taken its place; neither any sorrow; but something ineffably solemn, rapt, removed from earth. Sometimes, when Edward came to her bedside, a great wave of pitying tenderness would sweep over her face, giving it such a heavenly look that he would fall on his knees.

"O Helen," he said once, after such a moment as this, "I shall go mad if Annie does not get well. I do not dare to kiss even her hand. I feel as if she never had been mine."

At last the day and the hour and the moment came which I had known would come. Annie spoke to me in a very gentle voice, and said,—

"Helen, darling, you know I am going to die?"

"Yes dear, I think so," I said, in as quiet a voice as hers.

"You know it is better that I should, darling?" she said with a trembling voice.

“Yes, dear, I know it,” I replied.

She drew a long sigh of relief. “I am so glad, darling; I thought you knew it, but I could not be sure. I think no one else understands. I hope dear mamma will never suspect. You will not let her, if you can help it, the dear doctor will not tell her; he knows, though. Darling, I want you to have my baby. I think Edward will be willing. He is so young, he will be happy again before long; he will not miss him. You know we have always said it was partly your baby. Look at his eyes now, Helen,” she said, turning the little face towards me, and into a full light.

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I started. I had never till that moment seen in them a subtle resemblance to the eyes of George Ware. We had said that the baby had his mother's eyes—so he had; but there had always been a likeness between Annie's eyes and George's though hers were light-blue, and his of a blue so dark that it was often believed to be black. All the Wares had a very peculiar luminousness of the eye; it was so marked a family trait that it had passed into almost proverbial mention, in connection with the distinguished beauty of the family. "The Ware eye" was always recognizable, no matter what color it had taken from the admixture of other blood.

At that moment I saw, and I knew that Annie had seen, that the baby's eyes were not so much like her own as like the deeper, sadder, darker eyes of her cousin—brave, hopeless, dear George, who was toiling under the sun of India, making a fortune for he knew not whom.

We neither of us spoke; presently the little unconscious eyes closed in sweet sleep, and Annie went on, holding him close to her heart.

"You see, dear, poor mamma will not be able to bear seeing him after I die. Common mothers would love him for my sake. But mamma is not like other women. She will come very soon where I am, poor mamma; and then you will have to take papa home to your house, and papa will have comfort in little Henry. But he must be your baby, Helen. I shall speak to Edward about it soon."

She was not strong enough to talk long. She shed no tears, however, and looked as calm as if she were telling me of pleasant plans for a coming earthly summer. I also was perfectly calm, and felt strangely free from sorrow. Her absolute spirituality bore me up. It was as if I spoke with her in heaven, thousands of centuries after all human perplexities had passed away.

After this day she grew rapidly weaker. She had no pain. There was not a single physical symptom in her case which the science of medicine could name or meet. There was literally nothing to be done for her. Neither tonic nor stimulant produced the least effect. She was noiselessly sinking out of life, as very old people sometimes die, without a single jar, or shock, or struggle. Her beautiful serenity and entire freedom from suffering blinded Aunt Ann's eyes to the fact that she was dying. This was a great mercy, and we were all careful not by a word or look to rouse her to the truth. To all her mother's inquiries Annie invariably replied, "Better, dear mamma, better, only very weak," and Aunt Ann believed, until the very last, that the spring would make her well again.

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Edward Neal's face during these weeks was like the face of a man lost in a trackless desert, seeking vainly for some sign of road to save his life. Sickness and death were as foreign to the young, vital, irrepressible currents of his life, as if he had been a bird or an antelope. But it was not now with him the mere bewildered grief of a sensuous animal nature, such as I should have anticipated that his grief would be. He dimly felt the truth, and was constantly terrified by it. He came into Annie's presence more and more reverently each day. He gazed speechlessly into her eyes, which rested on him always with angelic compassion and tenderness, but with no more look of human wifely thought than if he and she were kneeling side by side before God's white throne. Sometimes he dared not touch even so much as the hand on which his own wedding-ring rested. Sometimes he would kneel by the bedside and bury his face and weep like a little child. Then he would throw himself on his horse and gallop away and not come home until twilight, when he was always found on Annie's lounge in the library. One night when I went to him there he said, in a tone so solemn that the voice did not sound like his,—

"Helen, there is something I do not understand about Annie. Do people always seem so when they are going to die? I do not dare to ask her if she loves me. I feel just as much awe of her as if she had been in heaven. It seems sometimes as if I must be going mad, for I do not feel in the least as if she had ever been my wife."

"She never has, poor boy," I thought, but I only stroked his hair and said nothing; wondering in my heart at the certainty with which in all natures love knows how to define, conquer, reclaim his own.

The day before Annie died she asked for her jewel-case, and spent several hours in looking over its contents and telling me to whom they should be given. I observed that she seemed to be searching uneasily for something she could not find.

"What is it, dear?" I said. She hesitated for a secondhand then replied,—

"Only a little ring I had when I was a girl."

"When you were a girl, my darling!" I exclaimed. She smiled gently and said,—

"I feel like an old woman now. Oh, here it is," she added, and held it out to me to open for her the tiny padlock-shaped locket which hung from it. It had become so tightly fastened together that it was with great difficulty I could open it. When I did so, I saw lying in the hollow a little ring of black hair, and I remembered that Annie had worn the ring when she was twelve years old.

She asked me to cut a few of the silky hairs from the baby's head, and then one little curl from her own, and laying them with the other, she shut the locket and asked for a piece of paper and pencil. She wrote one word with great difficulty, folded the ring in the

paper, wrote another word on the outside, and laid it in a corner of the jewel-case. Then she sank back on the pillows, and slipping her left hand under her cheek said she was very tired, and almost instantly fell into a gentle sleep. She did not wake until twilight. I was to sleep on the lounge in her room that night, and when she woke I was preparing it.

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“Darling,” she said, “could you sleep as well in my big chair, which can be tipped back?”

“Certainly, sweet,” I said; “but why?”

“Because that can be drawn up so much nearer me; it will be like sleeping together.”

At nine o’clock the nurse brought the baby in and laid him in Annie’s bosom, sound asleep. Annie would not let him lie anywhere else, and was so grieved at any remonstrance, that the doctor said she must be indulged in the desire. When she was awake and was not speaking to us, her eyes never left the baby’s face.

She turned over, with her face to the chair in which I lay, and reached out her left hand towards me. I took it in mine, and so, with our hands clasped above the little sleeping baby, we said “good-night” to each other.

“I feel much better to-night than I have for some days, dear Helen,” she said; “I should not wonder if we all three slept until morning.”

Very soon I saw that she was asleep. I watched her face for a long time; it was perfectly colorless and very thin, and yet there was not a look of illness on it. The ineffable serenity, the holy peace, made it look like the face of one who had been transfigured, translated; who had not known and who never could know any death. I cannot account for the sweet calm which I felt through all these weeks. I shed no tears; I did not seem even to sorrow. I accepted all, as Annie herself accepted it, without wonder, without murmur. During the long hours of this last night I lived over every hour of her precious, beautiful life, as I had known and shared it, until the whole seemed to me one fragrant and perfect flower, ready to be gathered and worn in the bosom of angels. At last I fell asleep.

I was wakened by a low murmur from the baby, who stirred uneasily. Annie’s hand was still locked in mine; as I sought to disengage it cautiously, I felt, with a sudden horror, that the fingers were lifeless. I sprang to my feet and bent over her; she did not breathe. Out of that sweet sleep her body had passed into another which would know no waking, and her soul had awakened free. Slowly I withdrew the little sleeping baby from her arms and carried it to the nurse. Then I went to Dr. Fearing’s room; he had slept in the house for a week; I found him dressed, but asleep on a lounge. He had lain in this way, he told me, for four nights, expecting that each would be the last. When I touched him on the shoulder he opened his eyes, without surprise or alarm, and said, —

“Did she wake?”

“No,” I replied, and that was all.

The day was just breaking: as the dark gray and red tints cleared and rolled away, and left a pale yellow sky, the morning star, which I could see from Annie's bedside, faded and melted in the pure ether. Even while I was looking at it it vanished, and I thought that, like it, Annie's bright soul, disappearing from my sight, had blended in Eternal Day.

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This was four years ago. My Aunt Ann died, as Annie had said she would, in a very few months afterward. My uncle came, a broken and trembling man, to live with us, and Edward Neal gladly gave his little son into my hands, as Annie had desired. He went abroad immediately, finding it utterly impossible to bear the sight of the scenes of his lost happiness. He came back in two years, bringing a bright young wife with him, a sunny-haired English girl, who, he said, was so marvelously like Annie. She is like the Annie whom he knew!

Every day their baby boy is brought to our house to see his brother; but I think two children of one name never before looked so unlike.

My little Henry is the centre of his grandfather's life and of mine. He is a pensive child, and has never been strong; but his beauty and sweetness are such that we often tremble when we look in his face and remember Annie.

George Ware is still in India. Every ship brings brave sweet letters, and gifts for the baby. I sent him the little paper which I found in the corner of Annie's jewel-case, bearing his name. I knew that it was for him when I saw her feeble hands laying the baby's hair and hers together in the locket.

In November Annie's grave is snowy with white chrysanthemums. She loved them better than any other flowers, and I have made the little hillock almost into a thicket of them.

In George Ware's last letter he wrote:—

"When the baby is ten years old I shall come home. He will not need me till then; till then, he is better in your hands alone; after that I can help you."

The One-Legged Dancers.

Very early one morning in March, ten years ago, I was sitting alone on one of the crumbling ledges of the Coliseum: larks were singing above my head; wall-flowers were waving at my feet; a procession of chanting monks was walking slowly around the great cross in the arena below. I was on the highest tier, and their voices reached me only as an indistinct wail, like the notes of a distant Aeolian harp; but the joyous sun and sky and songs, were darkened and dulled by their presence. A strange sadness oppressed me, and I sank into a deep reverie. I do not know how long I had been sitting there, when I was suddenly roused by a cry of pain, or terror, and the noise of falling stones. I sprang to my feet and, looking over, saw a young and beautiful woman lying fearfully near the edge of one of the most insecure of the projecting ledges on the tier below me

—the very one from which I had myself nearly fallen, only a few days before, in stretching over after some asphodels which were beyond my reach.

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I ran down as fast as possible, but when I reached the spot she had fainted, and was utterly unconscious. She was alone; I could see no other human being in the Coliseum. The chanting monks had gone; even the beggars had not yet come. I tried in vain to rouse her. She had fallen so that the hot sun was beating full on her face. I dared not leave her there, for her first unconscious movement might be such that she would fall over the edge. But I saw that she must have shade and water, or die. Every instant she grew whiter and her lips looked more rigid. I shouted aloud, and only the echoes answered me, as if in mockery. A little lark suddenly flew out from a tuft of yellow wall-flower close by, and burst into a swift carol of delight as he soared away. At last, with great efforts, I succeeded in dragging her, by her feet—for I dared not venture out so far as the spot on which her head lay—to a safer place, and into the partial shade of a low bush. As I did this, one of her delicate hands was scratched and torn on the rough stones, and drops of blood came to the surface. In the other hand were crushed a few spikes of asphodel, the very flowers, no doubt, which had lured me so near the same dangerous brink. It seemed impossible to go away and leave her, but it was cruel to delay. My feet felt like lead as I ran along those dark galleries and down the stone flights of giddy stairs. Just in the entrance stood one of those pertinacious sellers of old coins and bits of marble. I threw down a piece of silver on his little stand, seized a small tin basin in which he had his choicest coins, emptied them on the ground, and saying, in my poor Italian, “Lady—ill—water,” I had filled the basin at the old stone fountain near by, and was half way up the first flight of stairs again, before he knew what had happened.

When I reached the place where I had left the beautiful stranger she was not there. Unutterable horror seized me. Had I, after all, left her too near that crumbling edge? I groaned aloud and turned to run down. A feeble voice stopped me—a whisper rather than a voice, for there was hardly strength to speak,—

“Who is there?”

“Oh, thank God,” I exclaimed, “you are not dead!” and I sprang to the next of the cross corridors, from which the sound had come.

She was there, sitting up, leaning against the wall. She looked almost more terrified than relieved when she saw me. I bathed her face and hands in the water, and told her how I had found her insensible, and had drawn her away from the outer edge before I had gone for the water. She did not speak for some moments, but looked at me earnestly and steadily, with tears standing in her large blue eyes.

Then she said, “I did not know that any one but myself ever came to the Coliseum so early. I thought I should die here alone; and Robert was not willing I should come.”

“I owe you my life,” she added, bursting into hysterical crying.

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Then in a few moments she half laughed, as if at some droll thought, and said, “But how could you drag me? You are not nearly so big as I am. The angels must have helped you;” and holding up the poor crushed asphodels, she went on: “As soon as I came to myself, I saw the asphodels in my hand, and I said, ‘Asphodel for burial;’ and tried to throw them away, so that if Robert came he would not find me dead with them in my hand, for only yesterday he said to me, ’Please never pick an asphodel—I can’t bear to see you touch one.’”

Slowly I soothed her and she recovered her color and strength. The owner of the basin, followed by a half-dozen chattering vetturini, had climbed up to us, but we had peremptorily sent them all away. It was evident that she was not seriously hurt. The terror, rather than the fall, had caused her fainting. It was probably a sudden dizziness which had come as she drew back and turned after picking the flowers. Had she fallen in the act of picking them she must have been dashed to the ground below. At the end of an hour she was so nearly well, that she walked slowly down the long stairs, leaning on my arm, and taking frequent rests by the way. I was about to beckon to one of the vetturini, when she said, “Oh no! my own carriage is near here, up by the gate of the Palace of the Caesars. I rambled on, without thinking at first of coming to the Coliseum: it will do me good to walk back; every moment of the air makes me feel better.”

So we went slowly on, up the solemn hill, arm in arm like friends, sitting down now and then on old fallen columns to rest, and looking back at the silent, majestic ruins, which were brightened almost into a look of life under the vivid sun. My companion spoke little; the reaction after her fearful shock had set in; but every few moments her beautiful eyes would fill with tears as she looked in my face and pressed my arm. I left her at her apartment on the Via Felice; my own was a mile farther on, in the Piazza del Popolo, and I would not let her drive so far.

“It grieves me not to go with you to your door,” she said, as she bade me good-bye, “but I shall come and see you to-morrow and bring my husband.”

“No, you must not,” I replied. “To-morrow you will be wise enough—or, if you are not wise enough, you will be kind enough to me because I ask it—to lie in bed all day, and I shall come very early in the morning to see how you are.”

She turned suddenly on the carriage-steps, and, leaning both her hands on my knees, exclaimed, in a voice full of emotion.

“Will you let me kiss you? Not even my mother gave me what you have given. For you have given me back life, when it was too infinitely precious to lose. Surely you will not think me presuming?” and her cheek flushed a little.

“Presuming! my dear child, I loved you the first moment I saw you lying there on the stones; and I am almost old enough to be your mother, too,” I replied, and I kissed her sweet face warmly.

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This was the beginning of my acquaintance and friendship with Dora Maynard.

At eleven o'clock the next morning I went to see her. I was shown into a room, whose whole air was so unlike that of a Roman apartment, that I could scarcely believe I had not been transported to English or American soil. In spite of its elegance, the room was as home-like and cozy as if it nestled in the Berkshire hills or stood on Worcestershire meadows. The windows were heavily curtained, and the furniture covered with gay chintz of a white ground, with moss-rose buds thickly scattered over it between broad stripes of rose-pink. The same chintz was fluted all around the cornice of the room, making the walls look less high and stately; the doorways, also, were curtained with it. Great wreaths and nodding masses of pampas grass were above the doors; a white heron and a rose-colored spoonbill stood together on a large bracket in one corner, and a huge gray owl was perched on what looked like a simple old apple-tree bough, over an inlaid writing-table which stood at an odd slant near one of the windows. Books were everywhere—in low swinging shelves, suspended by large green cords with heavy tassels; on low bracket shelves, in unexpected places, with deep green fringes or flutings of the chintz; in piles on Moorish stools or old Venice chests. Every corner looked as if somebody made it a special haunt and had just gone out. On a round mosaic table stood an exqusite black-and-gilt Etruscan patera filled with white anemones; on another table near by stood a silver one filled with the same flowers, pink and yellow. Each was circled round the edge with fringing masses of maiden-hair fern. Every lounge and chair had a low, broad foot-stool before it, ruffled with the chintz; and in one corner of the room were a square pink and white and green Moorish rug, with ten or a dozen chintz-covered pillows, piled up in a sort of chair-shaped bed upon it, and a fantastic ebony box standing near, the lid thrown back, and battledoors and shuttlecocks, and many other gay-colored games, tossed in confusion. The walls were literally full of exquisite pictures; no very large or rare ones, all good for every-day living; some fine old etchings, exquisite water-colors, a swarthy Campagna herds-boy with a peacock feather and a scarlet ribbon in his black hat, and for a companion-picture, the herds-boy of the mountains, fair, rosy, standing out on a opaline snow-peak, with a glistening Edelweiss in his hand; opposite these a large picture of Haag's, a camel in the desert, the Arab wife and baby in a fluttering mass of basket and fringe and shawl and scarf, on his back; the Arab father walking a few steps in advance, playing on musical pipes, his tasseled robe blowing back in the wind; on one side of this a Venice front, and on another a crag of Norway pines; here and there, small leaves of photographs from original drawings by the old masters, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian, and Luini; and everywhere, in all possible and impossible

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places, flowers and vines. I never saw walls so decorated. Yellow wall-flowers waved above the picture of the Norway pines; great scarlet thistles branched out each side of the Venetian palace; cool maiden-hair ferns seemed to be growing all around the glowing crimson and yellow picture of the Arabs in the Desert. Afterward I learned the secret of this beautiful effect; large, flat, wide-mouthed bottles, filled with water, were hung on the backs of the picture frames, and in these the vines and flowers were growing; only a worshipper of flowers would have devised this simple method of at once enshrining them, and adorning the pictures.

In one of the windows stood a superbly-carved gilt table, oblong, and with curiously-twisted legs which bent inward and met a small central shelf half-way between the top and the floor, then spread out again into four strange claw-like vases, which bore each two golden lilies standing upright. On this stood the most singular piece of wood-carving I ever saw. It was of very light wood, almost yellow in tint; it looked like rough vine trellises with vines clambering over them; its base was surrounded by a thick bed of purple anemones; the smaller shelf below was also filled with purple anemones, and each of the golden lilies held all the purple anemones it could—not a shade of any other color but the purple and gold—and rising above them the odd vine trellises in the pale yellow wood. As I stood looking at this in mute wonder and delight, but sorely perplexed to make out the design of the carving, I heard a step behind me. I turned and saw, not my new friend, as I had expected, but her husband. I thought, in that first instant, I had never seen a manlier face and form, and I think so to-day. Robert Maynard was not tall; he was not handsome; but he had a lithe figure, square-shouldered, straight, strong, vitalized to the last fibre with the swift currents of absolutely healthy blood, and the still swifter currents of a passionate and pure manhood. His eyes were blue, his hair and full beard of the bright-brown yellow which we call, rightly or wrongly, Saxon. He came very quickly toward me with both hands outstretched and began to speak. “My dear madam,” he said, but his voice broke, and with a sudden, uncontrollable impulse, he turned his back full upon me for a second, and passed his right hand over his eyes. The next instant he recovered himself and went on.

“I do not believe you will wonder that I can’t speak, and I do not believe you will ever wonder that I do not thank you—I never shall,” and he raised both my hands to his lips.

“Dora is in bed as you bade her to be,” he continued. “She is well, but very weak. She wants to see you immediately, and she has forbidden me to come back to her room without you. I think, perhaps,” he added hesitatingly, “she is not quite calm enough to talk long. Forgive me for saying it. I know you love her already.”

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“Indeed I do,” replied I, “as if I had known her all my life. I will not stay long;” and I followed him through a small dining-room, also gay with flowers and vines, to a little room which had one side almost wholly of glass and opened on a *loggia* full of orange-trees and oleanders, geraniums and roses. I will not describe Dora Maynard’s bed-room. It was the dainty room of a dainty woman, but spiritualized and individualized and made wonderful, just as her sitting-room was, by a creative touch and a magnetic presence such as few women possess. I believe that she could not be for twenty-four hours in the barrenest and ugliest room possible, without contriving to diffuse a certain enchantment through all its emptiness.

She looked far more beautiful this morning than she had looked the day before. I never forgot the picture of her face as I saw it then, lying on the white pillow and turned toward the door, with the eager expression which her waiting for me had given it. Neither of us spoke for some seconds, and when we did speak we took refuge in commonplaces. Our hearts were too full—mine with a sudden and hardly explicable overflow of affection toward this beautiful being whom I had saved from dying; hers with a like affection for me, heightened a thousand fold by the intense love of love and of living that filled her whole soul and made her gratitude to me partake almost of the nature of adoration. I think it was years before she could see me without recalling the whole scene so vividly that tears would fill her eyes. Often she would suddenly seize both my hands in hers, kiss them and say, “Oh! but for these dear, strong, brave little hands, where should I be!” And whenever we parted for a length of time she was overshadowed by presentiment. “I know it is superstitious and silly,” she would say, “but I cannot shake off the feeling that I am safer in the same town with you. I believe if any harm were to threaten me you would be near.”

But the story I am to tell now is not the story of Dora Maynard’s life after I knew her, nor of our friendship and love for each other, rare and beautiful as they were. It is the story of her girlhood, and of the strange wood-carving which stood on the gilded table in the bed of purple anemones.

One morning in April, as I climbed the long stone stairs which led to her apartment, I met Anita, the flower-woman who carried flowers to her every day. Anita looked troubled.

“What is the matter, my Anita?” said I; “is the Signora ill?”

“Ah no, thank the Blessed Virgin!” said Anita; “the dearest, most beautiful of Signoras is well, but I am obliged to tell her to-day that there are no more anemones. Biagio went yesterday to the farthest corner of the Villa Doria, to a dark shady spot beyond the Dove-Cote, which the strangers know not, hoping to find some; but the heavy rains had beaten them all down—there is no longer one left. And the Signora had tears in her eyes when I told her; and she did not care for all the other beautiful flowers; she said

none of them could go on the gold table; never yet has the Signora put any flowers on the gold table except the purple anemones," and real tears stood in old Anita's eyes.

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“Why, Anita,” said I, “I am sure some other flowers would look very pretty there. I do not believe the Signora will be unhappy about it.”

Anita shook her head and half smiled with a look of pitying compassion.

“But, Signora, you do not know; that dearest and most beautiful of Signoras has visions from the angels about her flowers. Holy Virgin! if she would but come and hang flowers around the Bambino in our church! None of the Holy Sisters can so weave them as she does; she makes Festa forever in the house for the Signor; and I think, Signora,” crossing herself and looking sharply at me, “perhaps the gold table is the shrine of her religion: does the Signora know?”

I could not help laughing. “Oh no, Anita,” I said; “we do not have shrines in our religion.”

Anita’s face clouded. “Iddio mio!” she said, “but the Virgin will keep the dearest Signora Maynardi. Biagio and I have vowed to keep a candle always burning for her in Ara Coeli! The dearest, most beautiful of Signoras;” and Anita walked disconsolately on, down the stairs.

I found Dora kneeling before the “gold table,” arranging great masses of maiden-hair fern around the wood carving and in the shelf below. As I saw the rapt and ecstatic expression of her face, I understood why Anita had believed the gold table to be a shrine.

“They do not suit it like the anemones,” said she, sadly; “and I can have no more anemones this year.”

“So poor Anita told me just now on the stairs,” replied I. “She was almost crying, she was so sorry she could not get them for you. But I am sure, dear, the ferns are beautiful on it. I think the pale green looks even better than the purple with the gold and the pale yellow wood.”

“I like the purple best,” said Dora; “besides, we always had purple at home,” and her eyes filled with tears. Then, turning suddenly to me, she said, “Why have you never asked me what this is? I know you must have wondered: it looks so strange—this poor little clumsy bit of American pine, on my gilt table shrined with flowers!”

“Yes, I have wondered, I acknowledge, for I could not make out the design,” I replied; “but I thought it might have some story connected with it, which you would tell me if you wished I should know. I did not think it clumsy; I think it is fantastic, and has a certain sort of weird life-likeness about it.”

“Do you really think it has any life-like look about it?” and Dora’s face flushed with pleasure. “I think so, but I supposed nobody else could see anything in it. No one of my acquaintance has ever alluded to it,” continued she, half laughing, half crying, “but I

see them trying to scrutinize it slyly when they are not observed. As for poor old Anita, I believe she thinks it is our Fetish. She walks round it on tiptoe with her hands clasped on her apron."

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“But now,” she continued, “I will show you the same design in something else;” and she led the way through her own bedroom to Robert’s, which was beyond. On the threshold she paused, and kissing me, said: “If you can stay with me to-day, I will tell you the whole story, dear; but I want you to look at this chintz first.” Then she walked to the window, and drawing out one of the curtains to its full width, held it up for me to see. It was a green and white chintz, evidently of cheap quality. At first I did not distinguish any meaning in the pattern; presently I saw that the figures were all of vines and vine-leaves, linked in a fantastic fashion together, like those in the wood-carving on the gold table.

“Oh, yes,” I said, “I see; it is exactly like the carving, only it looks different, being on a flat surface.”

Dora did not speak; she was gazing absently at the chintz she held in her hand. Her face looked as if her soul were miles and years away. Presently I saw a tear roll down her cheek. I touched her hand. She started, and smiling sweetly, said: “Oh! forgive me. Don’t think I am crying for any sorrow; it is for joy. I am so happy, and my life has been so wonderful. Now would you really have patience to listen to a long story?” she said, beseechingly; “a long story all about me—and—Robert? I have been wanting to tell you ever since I knew you. I think you ought to know all about us.”

For my answer, I sank into a large chair, drew her down into my lap, and said: “Begin, you dearest child. Nothing could give me such pleasure. Begin at the beginning.”

She slipped from my lap to a low footstool at my feet, and resting both her arms on my knees in a graceful way she had, looked up into my face, and began by a sentence which made me start.

“I used to work in a factory.” My start was so undisguised, so uncontrollable, that Dora drew back and her cheeks turned red.

“Perhaps I ought to have told you before.”

“Oh, my dear, beautiful, marvellous child!” I exclaimed; “you cannot so misjudge me. I was startled only because you had always seemed to me so much like one born to all possible luxury. I supposed you had been nurtured on beauty.”

“So I have been,” she replied, earnestly, smiling through tears; “nevertheless, three years ago I was working in a factory in America.”

I did not interrupt her again; hour after hour passed by; not until twilight was deepening into dusk did the story come to end. I shall try to give it in Dora’s own words—their simplicity adds so much to it; but I cannot give the heightened effect with which they fell upon my ears as I looked down into her sweet child-woman’s face.

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“I do not remember much about mamma. It is strange, too, that I do not, because I was thirteen when she died; but I always loved papa best, and stayed all the time I could in his study. Mamma was very pretty; the prettiest woman I ever saw; but I don’t know how it was, all her prettiness did not seem to make papa care about her. He was a clergyman—an Episcopal clergyman—and his father and his father’s father had been too; so you see for three whole generations it had been all books and study in the family; but mamma’s father was a farmer, and mamma was stronger than papa; she liked to live in the country and be out of doors, which he hated. I think I know now just how it all was; but it used to puzzle me till I grew up. When I was sixteen, my Aunt Abby, papa’s sister, told me that mamma was said to be the most beautiful girl in the whole State, and that papa fell so in love with her when he was just out of college, that he came very near dying because his father did not wish them to be married. Poor papa! it was just so always with him; he had such a poor feeble body that any trouble or worry made him ill. I can see now that it was because he and all his family had been such scholars, and lived in the house, and sat still all their lives; their bodies were not good for anything: and I am thankful enough that my body is like mamma’s; but I don’t know what good it would do me, either, if dear papa hadn’t taught me all his ways of seeing things and feeling things. Mamma never seemed to care much about anything, except when Dick or Abby were sick, and she always used to go to sleep in church while papa was saying the most beautiful things; sometimes it used to make me almost hate her. I hated everybody that didn’t listen to him. But Aunt Abby said once that very few people could understand him, and that was the reason we never stayed long in one place. People got tired of hearing him preach. This made me so angry I did not speak to Aunt Abby for two years, except when I was obliged to. But I see now that she was right. As I read over papa’s sermons I see that they would seem very strange to common men and women. He saw much more in every little thing than people generally do. I used to tell him sometimes he ‘saw double,’ and he would sigh and say that the world was blind, and did not see half; he never could take any minute by itself; there was the past to cripple it and the future to shadow it. Poor, poor papa! I really think I have learned in a very strange way to understand his capacity for sadness. I understand it by my own capacity for joy. I often smile to think how I used to accuse him of seeing double, for it is the very thing which Robert says to me again and again when a sight or a sound gives me such intense pleasure that I can hardly bear it. And I see that while I have nearly the same sensitiveness to all impressions from things or from people which he had, my body compels the impressions to be joyous. This is what I owe mamma. If papa could have been well and strong, he would have sung joy such as no poet has ever sung since suns began to shine.

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“But most that he wrote was sad; and I am afraid most that he taught the people was sad too, or, at any rate, not hopeful as it ought to be in this beautiful, blessed world, which ‘God so loved’ and loves. So perhaps it was better for people that papa never preached in any one parish more than three or four years. Probably God took care to send next a man who would make everybody take courage again. However, it was very hard for mamma, and very hard for us; although for us there was excitement and fun in getting into new houses and getting acquainted with new people; but the worst thing was that we had very little money, and it used it up so to move from place to place, and buy new things. I knew all about this before I was ten years old as well as if I had been forty; and by the time I was twelve, I was a perfect little miser of both clothes and money—I had such a horror of the terrible days, which sometimes came, when we sorely wanted both.

“Early in the spring after I was thirteen—my birthday was in December—we went to live in a little place called Maynard’s Mills. It was a suburban village near the largest manufacturing town in the State. The other two homes which I could remember had been very small country villages, where none of the people were rich, and only a few attended the Episcopal church. In Maynard’s Mills there were many rich people, and almost everybody went to our church. The whole place was owned by Mr. Maynard, Robert’s father. He had gone out there to live near his mills, and the place was so beautiful that family after family of the rich mill-owners had moved out there. At first they used to go into town to church; but it was a long drive, cold in winter and hot in summer, and so Mr. Maynard built a beautiful chapel near his house and sent for papa to come and preach in it. Mr. Maynard had been his classmate in college and loved him very much, just because they were ‘so different,’ papa said, and I think it must have been so, for Mr. Maynard is the merriest man I ever saw. He laughs as soon as he sees you, whether there is anything to laugh at or not, and he makes you feel just like laughing yourself, simply by asking you how you do. I never saw papa so happy as he was the day Mr. Maynard’s letter came asking him to go there.

“It was a very kind letter, and the salary, of which Mr. Maynard spoke almost apologetically, saying that it would be increased in a few years as the village grew, was more than twice as large as papa had ever received, and there was a nice parsonage besides.

“We moved in April. I always associate our moving with blue hepaticas, for I carried a great basketful of them, which I had taken up roots and all, in the woods, the morning we set out; and what should I find under papa’s study window but a great thicket of wild ferns and cornel bushes growing—just the place for my hepaticas, and I set them out before I went into the house. The house was very small,

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but it was so pretty that papa and I were perfectly happy in it. Poor mamma did not like the closets and the kitchen. The house we had left was a huge, old-fashioned house, with four square rooms on a floor; one of these was the kitchen, and mamma missed it very much. But she lived only a few days after we moved in. I never knew of what disease she died. She was ill but a few hours and suffered great pain. They said she had injured herself in some way in lifting the furniture. It was all so sudden and so terrible, and we were surrounded by such confusion and so many strange faces, that I do not remember anything about it distinctly. I remember the funeral, and the great masses of white and purple flowers all over the table on which the coffin stood, and I remember how strangely papa's face looked.

"And then Aunt Abby came to live with us, and we settled down into such a new, different life, that it seemed to me as if it had been in some other world that I had known mamma. My sister Abby was two years old, and my darling brother Nat was ten, when mamma died. It is very hard to talk about dear Nat, I love him so. He is so precious, and his sorrow is so sacred, that I am hardly willing to let strangers pity him, ever so tenderly. When he was a baby he sprang out of mamma's lap, one day, as she was reaching up to take something from the mantel piece. He fell on the andiron-head and injured his spine so that he could never walk. He is twenty years old now; his head and chest and arms are about as large as those of a boy of sixteen, but all the rest of his poor body is shrunken and withered; he has never stood upright, and he cannot turn himself in his chair or bed. But his head and face are beautiful. It is not only I who think so. Artists have seen him sitting at the window, or being drawn about in his little wagon, and have begged permission to paint his face, for the face of a saint or of a hero, in their pictures. It is the face of both saint and hero; and after all that must be always so, I think; for how could a man be one without being the other? I know some very brave men have been very bad men, but I do not call them heroes. Nat is the only hero I ever knew; if I were a poet I would write a poem about him. It should be called '*the* CROWNLESS *king*.' Oh, how he *does* reign over suffering, and loss, and humiliation, and what a sweet kingdom spreads out around him wherever he is! He does everybody good, and everybody loves him. Poor papa used to say sometimes, 'My son is a far better preacher than I; see, I sit at his feet to learn;' and it was true. Even when he was a little fellow Nat used to keep up papa's courage. Many a time, when papa looked dark and sad, Nat would call to him, 'Dear papa, will you carry me up and down a little while by the window? I want the sky.' Then, while they were walking, Nat would say such sweet things about the beauty of the sky, and the delight it gave him to see it, that the tears would come into papa's eyes, and he would say, 'Who would think that we could ever forget for a moment this sky which is above us?' and he would go away to his study comforted.

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“As I said, when mamma died, Nat was ten and I was thirteen. From that time I took all the care of him. Aunt Abby, was not strong, and she did not love children. She was just, and she meant to be always kind to us; but that sort of kindness is quite different from loving-kindness. Poor Nat never could bear to have her do anything for him, and so it very soon came about that I took all the care of him. It was not hard, for he was never ill; he suffered constant pain but in spite of it he was always cheerful, always said he felt well, and never had any of the small ailments and diseases which healthy children are apt to have. ’I shouldn’t know what to do without the ache, Dot,’ he said to me one day when he was only twelve years old. ’I’ve got so used to it, I should miss it as much as I should miss you said it helps me to be good. I don’t think I should dare have it go away.’ A few years later he wrote some lovely little verses called ‘The Angel of Pain,’ which I will show you. Our life after mamma died was very happy and peaceful. It makes me grieve for her, even now, to think how little she was missed. We had all loved her. She was always pleasant and good, and took the best possible care of us and of everything; but she was not one of those persons whose presence makes itself necessary to people. It seems hardly right to say such a thing, but I really think papa seemed more cheerful without her, after the first. I think that while she lived he was always groping and reaching after something in her which did not exist. The hourly sight of her reminded him hourly of his ideal of what a wife might be, and he was forever hoping that she might come a little nearer to it—enter a little more into his world of thought and feeling. This is how it has looked to me since I have been married, and can understand just how terrible it must be to have the person whom you love best, disappoint you in any way.

“Nat was in all my classes in school. Although he was three years younger he was much cleverer than I, and had had nothing to do, poor dear, all his life, but lie in his chair and read. I used to draw him to and from school in a little wagon; the boys lifted it up and down the steps so carefully it did not jar him; and papa had a special desk built for him, so high that part of the wagon could roll under it, and the lid could rest just wherever Nat needed it for writing or studying. When we went home, there was always a sort of procession with us; a good many of the children had to go in the same direction, but many went simply to walk by Nat’s wagon and talk with him. Whenever there was a picnic or a nutting frolic, we always took him; the boys took turns in drawing him; nobody would hear a word of his staying at home; he used to sit in his wagon and look on while the rest played, and sometimes he would be left all alone for a while, but his face was always the happiest one there. At school the boys used to tell him everything, and leave things

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to his decision. Almost every day, somebody would call out, at recess or intermission, 'Well, I'll leave it to Nat'—or 'I'll tell Nat.' One day somebody shouted, 'Take it before the king—let's call him King Nat.' But it almost made Nat cry. He exclaimed, 'Oh, boys, please don't ever say that again;' and they never did. He had a great deal more influence over them than any teacher. He could make them do anything. Sometimes the teachers themselves used to come to him privately and tell him of things they did not like, which the boys were getting into the way of doing, and ask him to try to stop them. If Nat had not been a saint, as I said before, all this would have spoiled him; but he never thought of its being any special power in him. He used to think it was only because the boys were so kind-hearted that they could not bear to refuse any request which a poor cripple made.

"When I think how happy those days were and how fast the darkest days of our lives were drawing near, it makes me shrink from happiness almost as much as from grief. It seems only grief's forerunner. On the evening of my sixteenth birthday, we were all having a very merry time in papa's study, popping corn over the open fire. We had wheeled Nat near the fire, and tied the corn-popper on a broom-handle, so that he could shake the popper himself; and I never saw him laugh so heartily at anything. Papa laughed too, quite loud, which was a thing that did not happen many times a year. It was the last time we heard the full sound of dear papa's voice. Late that night he was called out to see a poor man, one of the factory operatives, who was dying. It was a terrible snow-storm, and papa had been so heated over the fire and in playing with us that he took a severe cold. The next morning he could not speak aloud. The doctor said it was an acute bronchitis and would pass off; but it did not, and in a very few weeks it was clear that he was dying of consumption. Probably the cold only developed a disease which had been long there.

"I can't tell you about the last months of papa's life. I think I shall never be able to speak of them. We saw much worse days afterward, but none that seemed to me so hard to bear; even when I thought Nat and I would have to go to the almshouse it was not so hard. The love which most children divide between father and mother I concentrated on my father. I loved him with an adoration akin to that which a woman feels for her husband, and with the utmost of filial love added. Nat loved him almost as much. The most touching thing I ever saw was to see Nat from his wagon, or wheeled chair, reaching out to take care of papa in the bed. Nobody else could give him his medicine so well; nobody could prepare his meals for him, after he was too weak to use a knife and fork, so well as Nat. How he could do all this with only one hand—for he could not bend himself in his chair enough to use the hand farthest from the bed—nobody could understand; but he did, and the very last mouthful of wine papa swallowed he took, the morning he died, from poor Nat's brave little hand, which did not shake nor falter, though the tears were rolling down his cheeks.

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“Papa lived nearly a year; but the last nine months he was in bed, and he never spoke a loud word after that birthday night when we had been so happy in the study. He died in November, on a dreary stormy day. I never shall forget it. He had seemed easier that morning, and insisted on our all going out to breakfast together and leaving him alone, the doors being open between the study and the dining-room. We had hardly seated ourselves at the table when his bell rang. Aunt Abby reached him first. It could not have been a minute, but he did not know her. For the first and only time in my life I forgot Nat, and was out of the room when I heard him sob. Dear Nat! not even then would he think of himself. I turned back. ’Oh, don’t stop to take me, Dot,’ he said. ‘Run!’ But I could not; and when I reached the door, pushing his chair before me, all was over. However, the doctor said that, even if we had been there at the first, papa could not have bid us good-by; that the death was from instantaneous suffocation, and that he probably had no consciousness of it himself. Papa’s life had been insured for five thousand dollars and he had saved, during the three years we had lived at Maynard’s Mills, about one thousand more. This was all the money we had in the world.

“Mr. Maynard had been very kind throughout papa’s illness. He had persuaded the church to continue the salary; every day he had sent flowers, and grapes, and wine, and game, and everything he could think of that papa could eat; and, what was kindest of all, he had come almost every day to talk with him and cheer him up. But he did not mean to let his kindness stop here. The day after the funeral he came to see us, to propose to adopt me. I forgot to say that Aunt Abby was to be married soon and would take little Abby with her; so they were provided for, and the only question was about Nat and me.

“Fortunately, dear Nat was in the dining-room and did not see Mr. Maynard when he came. I have told you what a merry man Mr. Maynard is, and how kind he is, but he is also a very obstinate and high-tempered man. He had never loved Nat; I do not know why; I think he was the only human being who ever failed to love him. He pitied him, of course; but he was so repelled by his deformity that he could not love him. As soon as Mr. Maynard said, ’Now, my dear child, you must come to my house and make it your home always,’ I saw that he intended to separate me from Nat.

“I replied, ’I cannot leave Nat, Mr. Maynard. I thank you very much; you are very good; but it would break my heart to leave him, and I am sure papa would never forgive me if I should do it.’

“He made a gesture of impatience. He had foreseen this, and come prepared for it; but he saw that I promised to prove even more impracticable than he had feared.

“’You have sacrificed your whole life already to that miserable unfortunate boy,’ he said, ’and I always told your father he ought not to permit it.’

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“At this I grew angry, and I replied:—

“’Mr. Maynard, Nat does more for us all, every hour of his life, than we ever could do for him: dear papa used to say so too.’

“No doubt papa had said this very thing to Mr. Maynard often, for tears came into his eyes and he went on:—

“’I know, I know—he is a wonderful boy, and we might all learn a lesson of patience from him; but I can’t have the whole of your life sacrificed to him. I will provide for him amply; he shall have every comfort which money can command.’

“’But where?’ said I.

“’In an institution I know of, under the charge of a friend of mine.’

“’A hospital!’ exclaimed I; and the very thought of my poor Nat, who had been the centre of a loving home-circle, of a merry school playground, ever since he could remember—-the very thought of his finding himself alone among diseased people, and tended by hired attendants, so overcame me that I burst into floods of tears.

“Mr. Maynard, who hated the presence of tears and suffering, as mirthful people always do, rose at once and said kindly, ’Poor child, you are not strong enough to talk it over yet; but as your aunt must go away so soon, I thought it better to have it all settled at once.’

“’It is settled, Mr. Maynard,’ said I, in a voice that half frightened me. ‘I shall never leave Nat—never, so long as I live.’

“’Then you’ll do him the greatest unkindness you can—that’s all,’ replied Mr. Maynard angrily, and walked out of the room. I locked myself up in my own room and thought the whole matter over. How I could earn my own living and Nat’s, I did not know. We should have about four hundred dollars a year. I had learned enough in my childhood of poverty to know that we need not starve while we had that; but simply not starving is a great way off from really living; and I felt convinced that it would be impossible for me to keep up courage or hope unless I could contrive, in some way, to earn money enough to surround our home with at least a semblance of the old atmosphere. We must have books; we must have a flower sometimes; we must have sun and air.

“At last an inspiration came to me. Down stairs, in the saddened empty study, sat little Miss Penstock, the village dressmaker, sewing on our gloomy black dresses. She lived all alone in a very small house near Mr. Maynard’s mill. I remembered that I had heard her say how lonely she found it living by herself since her married sister, who used to live with her, had gone to the West. Since then, Miss Penstock had sometimes consented to go for a few days at a time to sew in the houses of her favorite employers,

just to keep from forgetting how to speak,' the poor little woman said. But she disliked very much to do this. She was a gentlewoman; and though she accepted with simple dignity the necessity of earning her bread, it was bitterly disagreeable to her to sit as a hired sewer in other people's houses.

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She liked to come to our house better than to any other. We also were poor. My Aunt Abby was a woman of great simplicity, and a quiet, stately humility, like Miss Penstock's own; and they enjoyed sitting side by side whole days, sewing in silence. Miss Penstock had always spoken with a certain sort of tender reverence to Nat, and I remembered that he liked to be in the room where she sewed. All these thoughts passed through my mind in a moment. I sprang to my feet and exclaimed, 'That is it—-that is it!' and I ran hastily down to the study. Miss Penstock was alone there. She looked up in surprise at my breathlessness and my red eyes. I knelt down by her side and took the work out of her hands.

"'Dear Miss Penstock,' said I, 'would you rent part of your house?'

"She looked up reflectively, took off her spectacles with her left hand, and tapped her knees slowly with them, as she always did when puzzling over a scanty pattern.

"'I don't know, Dora, but I might; I've thought of it; it's awful lonely for me as 'tis. But it's such a risk taking in strangers; is it any friends of yours you're thinking of?'

"'Nat and me,' said I, concisely. Miss Penstock's spectacles dropped from her fingers, and she uttered an ejaculation I never heard from her lips on any other occasion. 'Good Heavens!'

"'Yes,' said I, beginning to cry, 'Nat and me! I've got to take care of Nat, and if you would only let us live with you I think I could manage beautifully.' Then I told her the whole story of Mr. Maynard's proposal. While we were talking Aunt Abby came in. The problem was no new one to her. Papa and she had talked it over many a time in the course of the past sad year. It seemed that he had had to the last a strong hope that Mr. Maynard would provide for us both. Poor papa! as he drew near the next world, all the conventionalities and obligations of this seemed so small to him, he did not shrink from the thought of dependence upon others as he would have done in health.

"'But I always told him,' said Aunt Abby, 'that Mr. Maynard wasn't going to do anything for Nat beyond what money'd do. He'd give him a thousand a year, or two, if need be, but he'd never set eyes on him if he could help it.'

"'Aunt Abby,' exclaimed I, 'please don't say another word about Mr. Maynard's helping Nat. I'd die before Nat should touch a cent of his money.'

"'There is no use talking that way,' said Aunt Abby, whose tenderest mercies were often cruelly worded. 'Mr. Maynard's a good, generous man, and I'm sure he's been the saving of us all. But that's no reason he should set up to take you away from Nat now; and I know well enough Nat can't live without you; but I don't see how it's to be

managed. And Aunt Abby sighed. Then I told her my plans; they grew clearer and clearer to me as I unfolded them; the two gentle-faced spinster women looked at me with surprise. Miss Penstock wiped her eyes over and over.

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"'If I could only be sure I wasn't going against your best interests to let you come,' said she.

"'Oh, Miss Penstock,' exclaimed I, 'don't think so—don't dare to say no for that reason; for I tell you, I shall go away to some other town with Nat if you don't take us; there is no other house here that would do; think how much better it would be for Nat to stay among friends.'

"'It's lucky I am their guardian,' said Aunt Abby, with an unconscious defiance in her tone. 'There can't anybody hinder their doing anything I am willing to have them do. My brother wanted to have Mr. Maynard, too; but I told him no; I'd either be whole guardian or none.'

"'I think good Aunt Abby had had a dim foreboding that Mr. Maynard's kindness might take a shape which it would be hard to submit to. Great as her gratitude was, her family pride resented dictation, and resented also the implied slight to poor Nat. As I look back now, I can see that, except for this reaction of feeling, she never would have consented so easily to my undertaking all I undertook, in going to housekeeping alone with that helpless child, on four hundred dollars a year. Before night it was all settled, and Miss Penstock went home two hours before her time, 'so stirred up, somehow,' as she said, 'to think of those blessed children's coming to live in my house, I couldn't see to thread a needle.' After tea Mr. Maynard came again: Aunt Abby saw him alone. When she came up-stairs she had been crying, but her lips were closed more rigidly than I ever saw them. Aunt Abby could be as determined as Mr. Maynard. All she said to me of the interview was, 'I don't know now as he'll really give in that he can't have things as he wants to. For all his laughing and for all his goodness, I don't believe he is any too comfortable to live with. I shouldn't wonder if he never spoke to one of us again.'

"But Mr. Maynard was too well-bred a man for any such pettiness as that. His resentment showed itself merely in a greater courtesy than ever, combined with a careful absence of all inquiries as to our plans. It hurt me very much, for I knew how it would have hurt dear papa. But I knew, too, that I was right and Mr. Maynard was wrong, and that comforted me.

"Four weeks from the day papa was buried, the pretty parsonage was locked up, cold, dark, empty. Aunt Abby had gone with little Abby to her new home, and Nat and I were settled at Miss Penstock's. The night before we moved, Mr. Maynard left a note at the door for me. It contained five hundred dollars and these words:—

"'Miss Dora will not refuse to accept this from one who hoped to be her father.'

"But I could not take it. I sent it back to him with a note like this:—

"'*Dear Mr*. *Maynard*:—I shall never forget that you were willing to be my father, and I shall always be grateful to you; but I cannot take money from one who is displeased with me for doing what I think right. I promise you, however, for papa's sake and for Nat's, that if I ever need help I will ask it of you, and not of any one else.'

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“The next time I saw Mr. Maynard he put both his hands on my shoulders and said: ’You are a brave girl; I wish I could forgive you; but remember your promise.’ And that was the last word Mr. Maynard spoke to me for three years.

“Our new home was so much pleasanter than we supposed it could be, that at first, in spite of our grief, both Nat and I were almost gay. It was like a sort of picnic, or playing at housekeeping. The rooms were sunny and cozy. Rich people in splendid houses do not dream how pleasant poor people’s little rooms can be, if the sun shines in and there are a few pretty things. We kept all the books which could ever be of use to Nat, and a picture of the Sistine Madonna which Mr. Maynard had given us on the last Christmas Day, and papa’s and mamma’s portraits. The books, and these, made our little sitting-room look like home. We had only two rooms on the first floor; one of these was a tiny one, but it held our little cooking-stove and a cupboard, with our few dishes; the other we called ‘sitting-room;’ it had to be dear Nat’s bedroom also, because he could not be carried up and down stairs. But I made a chintz curtain, which shut off his bed from sight, and really made the room look prettier, for I put it across a corner and had a shelf put up above it, on which Nat’s stuffed owl sat. My room was over Nat’s, and a cord went up from his bed to a bell over mine, so that he could call me at any moment if he wanted anything in the night. Then we had one more little chamber, in which we kept the boxes of papa’s sermons, and some trunks of old clothes, and things which nobody wanted to buy at the auction, and papa’s big chair and writing-table. We would not sell those. I thought perhaps some day we should have a house of our own—I could not imagine how; but if we did we should be glad of that chair and table, and so Aunt Abby let us keep them, though they were of handsome wood, beautifully carved, and would have brought a good deal of money. For these four rooms we paid Miss Penstock three dollars a month; the rent would have been a dollar a week, but she said it was really worth a dollar a month to her to have people who would not trouble her nor hurt the house; and as Aunt Abby thought so too, I believed her.

“My plan was to have Nat keep on at school, and to take in sewing myself, or to work for Miss Penstock. For the first year all went so smoothly that I was content. I used to draw Nat to and from school twice a day, and that gave me air and exercise. Everybody was very kind in giving me sewing, and I earned four and five dollars a week. We did not have to buy any clothes, and so we laid up a little money. But the next year people did not give me so much sewing; they had given it to me the first year because they were sorry for us, but now they had forgotten. Very often I would sit idle a whole week, with no work. Then I used to read and study, but I could not enjoy anything,

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because I was so worried. I felt that trouble was coming. Early in the fall dear Nat was taken ill—the first illness of his life. It was a slow fever. He was ill for three months. I often wonder how I lived through those months. When he recovered he seemed better than ever. The doctor said he had passed a sort of crisis and would always be stronger for it. The doctor was very kind. Several nights he sat up with Nat and made me go to bed, and he would not let me pay him a cent, though he came every day for weeks. When I urged him to let us pay the bill he grew half angry, and said, 'Do you think I am going to take money from your father's daughter?' and then I felt more willing to take it for papa's sake. But the medicines had cost a great deal, and I had not earned anything; and so, at the end of the second year, we had been obliged to take quite a sum out of our little capital. I did not tell Nat, and I did not go to Mr. Maynard. I went on from day to day, in a sort of stupor, wondering what would happen next. I was seventeen years old, but I knew of nothing I could do except to sew; I did not know enough to teach. All this time I never once thought of the mills. I used to watch the men and women going in and out, and envy them, thinking how sure they were of their wages; and yet it never crossed my mind that I could do the same thing. I am afraid it was unconscious pride which prevented my thinking of it.

"But the day came. It was in the early spring. I had been to the grave-yard to set out some fresh hepaticas on papa's grave. His grave and mamma's were in an inclosure surrounded by a high, thick hedge of pines and cedars close to the public street As I knelt down, hidden behind the trees, I heard steps and voices. They paused opposite me. The persons were evidently looking over the fence. Then I distinguished the voice of our kind doctor.

"'Poor Kent!' he said, 'how it would distress him to see his children now! That Nat barely pulled through his fever; but he seems to have taken a new turn since then and is stronger than ever. But I am afraid they are very poor.'

"To my astonishment, the voice that replied was Mr. Maynard's.

"'Of course they are,' said he impatiently; 'but nobody will ever have a chance to help them till the last cent's gone. That Dora would work her fingers off in the mills rather than ask or receive help.'

"'But good heavens! Maynard, you'd never stand by and see Tom Kent's daughter in the mills?' exclaimed the doctor.

"I could not hear the reply, for they were walking away. But the words 'in the mills' rang in my ears. A new world seemed opening before me. I had no particle of false pride; all I wanted was to earn money honestly. I could not understand why I had never thought of this way. I knew that many of the factory operatives, who were industrious and

economical, supported large families of children on their wages. 'It would be strange enough if I could not support Nat and myself,' thought I, and I almost ran home, I was so glad. I said nothing to Nat; I knew instinctively that it would grieve him.

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“The next day after I left him at school I went to the largest mill and saw the overseer. He was a coarse, disagreeable man; but he had known my father and he treated me respectfully. He said they could not give me very good wages at first; but if I learned readily, and was skillful in tending the looms, I might in time make a very good living. The sums that he named seemed large, tried by my humble standard. Even at the beginning I should earn more than I had been able to for many months at my needle. After tea I told Nat. He lay very still for some moments; the tears rolled down his cheeks; then he reached up both hands and drew my face down to his, and said, ’Dear sister, it would be selfish to make it any harder for you than it must be at best. But oh, Dot, Dot! do you think you can dream what it is for me to have to lie here and be such a burden on you?’

“‘Oh, Nat!’ I said, ’if you don’t want to break my heart, don’t speak so. I don’t have to earn any more for two than I should have to alone; it does not cost anything for you; and if it did, you darling, don’t you know that I could not live without you? you are all I have got in the world.’ Nat did not reply; but all that evening his face looked as I never saw it before. Nat was fifteen; instinct was beginning to torture him with a man’s sense of his helplessness, and it was almost more than even his childlike faith and trust could bear.

“The next day I told Miss Penstock. She had been as kind to us as a mother through this whole year and a half, and I really think we had taken the place of children in her lonely old heart. But she never could forget that we were her minister’s children; she always called me Miss Dora, and does to this day. She did not interrupt me while I told her my plan, but the color mounted higher and higher in her face. As soon as I stopped speaking, she exclaimed:—

“’Dora Kent, are you mad—a girl with a face like yours to go into the mills? you don’t know what you’re about.’

“‘Yes I do, dear Pennie,’ I said (Nat had called her Pennie ever since his sickness, when she had taken tender care of him night and day). ’I know there are many rude, bad men there, but I do not believe they will trouble me. At any rate I can but try. I must earn more money, Pennie; you know that as well as I do.’

“She did indeed know it; but it was very hard for her to give approbation to this scheme. It was not until after a long argument that I induced her to promise not to write to Aunt Abby till I had tried the experiment for one month.

“The next day I went to the mill. Everything proved much better than I had feared. Some of the women in the room in which I was placed had belonged to papa’s Sunday-school, and they were all very kind to me, and told the others who I was; so from the outset I felt myself among friends. In two weeks I had grown used to the work; the noise of the looms did not frighten or confuse me, and it did not

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tire me to stand so many hours. I found that I should soon be able to do most of my work mechanically, and think about what I pleased in the mean time. So I hoped to be able to study at home and recite my lessons to myself in the mill. The only thing that troubled me was that I could not take Nat to and from school, and he had to be left alone sometimes. But I found a very pleasant and faithful Irish boy, who was glad to earn a little money by drawing him back and forth, often staying with him after school till I came home at six o'clock. This boy was the son of the Irish gardener on the overseer's place. The overseer was an Englishman; his name was Wilkins. He is the only human being I ever disliked so that it was hard to speak to him. His brother, too, the agent who had charge of all Mr. Maynard's business, was almost as disagreeable as he. They both looked like bloated frogs; their wide, shapeless mouths, flat noses, and prominent eyes, made me shudder when I looked at them.

"Little Patrick soon grew fond of Nat, as everybody did who came into close contact with him; and he used often to stay at our house till late at night, hearing Nat's stories, and watching him draw pictures on the blackboard. One of the things I had kept was a great blackboard which papa had made for him. It was mounted on a stout standard, so that it could be swung close in front of his chair or wagon, and he would lie there and draw for hours together. Some of the pictures he drew were so beautiful I could not bear to have them rubbed out. It seemed almost like killing things that were alive. Whenever I dared to spend a penny for anything not absolutely needful, I always bought a sheet of drawing-paper or a crayon; for Nat would rather have them than anything else in the world—even than a book—unless the book had pictures.

"One night, when I went home, I found him sitting up very straight in his wagon, with his cheeks crimson with excitement. Patrick was with him, and the table and the whole floor were covered with queer, long, jointed paste-board sheets, with pieces of gay-colored calicoes, pasted on them. Patrick looked as excited as Nat, and as soon as I opened the door he exclaimed, 'Och, Miss Dora, see how he's plazed with um.' I was almost frightened at Nat's face. 'Why Nat, dear,' said I, 'what are they? I don't think they are very pretty;' and I picked up one of the queer things and looked at it. 'The colors are bright and pretty, but I am sure almost all the patterns are hideous.'

"'Of course they are,' shouted Nat hysterically. 'That's just it. That's what pleases me so,' and he burst out crying. I was more frightened still. Trampling the calicoes under my feet, I ran and knelt by his chair, and put my arms around him. 'Oh, Nat, Nat, what is the matter?' cried I. 'Patrick, what have you done to him?' Poor Patrick could not speak; he was utterly bewildered; he began hastily picking up the prints and shuffling them out of sight.

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"'Don't you touch one!' screamed Nat, lifting up his head again, with tears rolling down his cheeks. 'Dot, Dot,' he went on, speaking louder and louder, 'don't you see? those are patterns; Patrick says Mr. Wilkins buys them. I can earn money too; I can draw a million times prettier ones than those.'

"Like lightning the thing flashed through my brain. Of course he could. He drew better ones every day of his life, by dozens, on the old blackboard, with crumbling bits of chalk. Again and again I had racked my brains to devise some method by which he might be taught, as artists are taught, and learn to put his beautiful conceptions into true shapes for the world to see. But I knew that materials and instruction were both alike out of our reach, and I had hoped earnestly that such longing had never entered his heart. I sat down and covered my face with my hands.

"'You see, sister,' said Nat in a calmer tone, sobered himself by my excitement—'you see, don't you?'

"'Yes, dear, I do see,' said I; 'you will earn much more money than I ever can, and take care of me, after all.'

"To our inexperience, it seemed as if a mine had opened at our feet. Poor Patrick stood still, unhappy and bewildered, twisting one of the pattern-books in his hand.

"'An' is it these same that Misther Nat'll be afther tryin' to make?' said he.

"'Oh no, Patrick,' said Nat, laughing, 'only the pictures from which these are to be made.'

"Then we questioned Patrick more closely. All he knew was that Mr. Wilkins' sister made many of the drawings; Patrick had seen them lying in piles on Mr. Wilkins' desk; some of them colored, some of them merely in ink. The pieces of paper were about the size of these patterns, some six or eight inches square.

"'Will I ask Miss Wilkins to come and show yees?' said Patrick.

"'No, no,' said we both, hastily; 'you must not tell anybody. Of course she would not want other people to be drawing them too.'

"'Especially if she can't make anything better than these,' said Nat, pityingly. Already his tone had so changed that I hardly recognized it. In that moment the artist-soul of my darling brother had felt its first breath of the sweetness of creative power.

"Patrick promised not to speak of it to a human being; as he was going out of the door he turned back, with a radiant face, and said: 'An 'twas meself that only thought maybe the calikers'd amuse him for a minnit with their quare colors,' and he almost somerseted off the door-steps, uttering an Irish howl of delight.

“’You’ve made our fortunes! there’ll always be calicoes wanted, and I can draw fifty patterns a day, and I’ll give you half of the first pay I get for them,’ called the excited Nat; but Patrick was off.

“We sat up till midnight. I was scarcely less overwrought than Nat. He drew design after design and rejected them as not quite perfect.

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"'You know,' he said, 'I must send something so very good to begin with, that they can't help seeing at first sight how good it is.'

"'But not so good that you can't ever make another equal to it,' suggested I out of my practical but inartistic brain.

"'No danger of that, Dot,' said Nat, confidently. 'Dot, there isn't anything in this world I can't make a picture of, if I can have paper enough, and pencils and paint.'

"At last he finished three designs which he was willing to send. They were all for spring or summer dresses. One was a curious block pattern, the blocks of irregular shapes, but all fitting into each other, and all to be of the gayest colors. Here and there came a white block with one tiny scarlet dot upon it; 'That's for a black-haired girl, Dot,' said Nat; 'you couldn't wear it.'

"The second was a group of ferns tied by a little wreath of pansies; nothing could be more beautiful. The third was a fantastic mixture of pine-tassels and acorns. I thought it quite ugly, but Nat insisted on it that it would be pretty for a summer muslin; and so it was the next year, when it was worn by everybody, the little plumy pine-tassels of a bright green (which didn't wash at all), and the acorns all tumbling about on your lap, all sides up at once.

"It was one o'clock before we went to bed, and we might as well have sat up all night, for we did not sleep. The next morning I got up before light and walked into town, to a shop where they sold paints. I had just time to buy a box of water-colors and get back to the mill before the bell stopped ringing. All the forenoon the little white parcel lay on the floor at my feet. As often as I looked at it, I seemed to see Nat's pictures dancing on the surface. I had given five dollars for the box; I trembled to think what a sum that was for us to spend on an uncertainty; but I had small doubt. At noon I ran home; I ate little dinner—Nat would not touch a mouthful. 'You must see the pansies and ferns done before you go,' he said.

"And before my hour was up they were so nearly done that I danced around Nat's chair with delight.

"'I know Mr. Wilkins never saw anything so pretty in his life,' said Nat, calmly.

"The thought of Mr. Wilkins was a terrible damper to me. Nat had not seen him: I had.

"'Nat,' said I, slowly, 'Mr. Wilkins won't know that it is pretty. He is not a man; he is a frog, and he looks as if he lied. I believe he will cheat us.'

"Nat looked shocked. 'Why Dora, I never in my life heard you speak so. You shall not take them to him. I will have Patrick take me there.'

"'No, no, dear,' I exclaimed, 'I would not have you see Mr. Wilkins for the world. He is horrible. But I am not afraid of him.'

"I meant that I would not for the world have him see Nat. He was coarse and brutal enough to be insulting to a helpless cripple, and I knew it. But Nat did not dream of my reason for insisting so strongly on going myself, and he finally yielded.

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“I took the pictures to the overseer’s office at noon. I knew that ’Agent Wilkins,’ as he was called to distinguish him from his brother, was always there at that time. He looked up at me, as I drew near the desk, with an expression which almost paralyzed me with disgust. But for Nat’s sake I kept on. I watched him closely as he looked at the pictures. I thought I detected a start of surprise, but I could not be sure. Then he laid them down, saying carelessly, ’I am no judge of these things; I will consult some one who is, and let you know to-morrow noon if we can pay your brother anything for the designs.’

“’Of course you know that the market is flooded with this sort of thing, Miss Kent,’ he added, as I was walking away. I made no reply; I was already revolving in my mind a plan for taking them to another mill in town, whose overseer was a brother of one of papa’s wardens. The next day at noon I went to the office; my heart beat fast, but I tried to believe that I did not hope. Both the brothers were there. The overseer spoke first, but I felt that the agent watched me sharply.

“‘So your lame brother drew these designs, did he, Miss Dora?’

“’My brother Nat drew them, sir; I have but one brother, said I, trying hard to speak civilly.

“‘Well’ said he, ’they are really very well done—quite remarkable, considering that they are the work of a child who has had no instruction; they would have to be rearranged and altered before we could use them, but we would like to encourage him and to help you too,’ he continued, patronizingly, ‘and so we shall buy them just as they are.’

“‘My brother Nat is not a child,’ replied I, ’and we do not wished to be helped. If the designs are not worth money, will you be so good as to give them back to me?’ and I stepped nearer the desk and stretched out my hand toward the pictures which were lying there. But Agent Wilkins snatched them up quickly, and casting an angry glance at his brother, exclaimed:—

“’Oh, you quite mistake my brother, Miss Kent; the designs are worth money and we are glad to buy them; but they are not worth so much as they would be if done by an experienced hand. We will give you ten dollars for the three,’ and he held out the money to me. Involuntarily I exclaimed, ’I had not dreamed that they would be worth so much.’ Nat could earn then in four hours’ work as much as I could in a week; in that one moment the whole of life seemed thrown open for us. All my distrust vanished. And when the agent added, kindly, ’Be sure and bring us all the designs which your brother makes. I think we shall want to buy as many as he will draw; he certainly has rare talent,’—I could have fallen on the floor at his feet to thank him, so grateful did I feel for this new source of income for us, and still more for the inexpressible pleasure for my poor Nat.

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“From that day Nat was a changed boy. He would not go to school in the afternoons, but spent the hours from two till five in drawing. I had a cord arranged from our room to Miss Penstock’s, so that he could call her if at any moment he needed help, and she was only too glad to have him in the house. When I reached home at six, I always found him lying back in his chair with his work spread out before him, and such a look of content and joy on his face, that more than once it made me cry instead of speaking when I bent over to kiss him. ‘Oh, Dot—oh, Dot!’ he used to say sometimes, ’it isn’t all for the sake of the money, splendid as that is; but I do feel as if I should yet do something much better than making designs for calicoes. I feel it growing in me. Oh, if I could only be taught; if there were only some one here who could tell me about the things I don’t understand!’

“‘But you shall be taught, dear,’ I replied; ’we will lay up all the money you earn. I can earn enough for us to live on, and then, with your money, in a few years we can certainly contrive some way for you to study.’

“It seemed not too visionary a hope, for Nat’s designs grew prettier and prettier, and the agent bought all I carried him. One week I remember he paid me thirty dollars; and as he handed it to me, seeing how pleased I looked, he said,—

“‘Your brother is getting quite rich, is he not, Miss Kent?’ Something sinister in his smile struck me at that moment as it had not done for a long time, and I resolved to go more seldom to the office.

“We did not lay up so much as we hoped to; we neither of us had a trace of the instinct of economy or saving. I could not help buying a geranium or fuchsia to set in the windows; Nat could not help asking me to buy a book or a picture sometimes, and his paints and pencils and brushes and paper cost a good deal in the course of six months. Still we were very happy and very comfortable, and the days flew by. Our little room was so cozy and pretty, that Miss Penstock’s customers used often to come in to see it; and if they happened to come when Nat was there, they almost always sent him something afterward; so, at the end of two years you never would have known the bare little room. We had flowers in both windows, and as each window had sun, the flowers prospered; and we had a great many pretty pictures on the walls, and Nat’s sketches pinned up in all sorts of odd places. A big beam ran across the ceiling in the middle, and that was hung full of charcoal sketches, with here and there a sheet just painted in bars of bright color—no meaning to them, except to ‘light up,’ Nat said. I did not understand him then, but I could see how differently all the rest looked after the scarlet and yellow were put by their side. Some of our pictures had lovely frames to them, which Nat had carved out of old cigar-boxes that Patrick brought him. Sometimes he used to do nothing but carve for a week, and he would say, ’Dot, I do not believe drawing is the thing I want to do, after all. I want more; I hate to have everything flat.’ Then he would get discouraged and think all he had done was good for nothing. ’I

never can do anything except to draw till I go somewhere to be taught,' he would say, and turn back to the old calico patterns with fresh zeal.

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“One day a customer of Miss Penstock’s brought Nat a book about grapes, which had some pictures of the different methods of grape-culture in different countries. One of these pictures pleased him very much. It showed the grape-vines looped on low trees, in swinging festoons. He had the book propped up open at that picture day after day, and kept drawing it over and over on the blackboard and on paper till I was tired of the sight of it. It did not seem to me remarkably pretty. But Nat said one day, when I told him so,—

“’It isn’t the picture itself, but what I want to make from it. Don’t you see that the trees look a little like dancers whirling round, holding each other by the hand—one-legged dancers?’

“I could not see it. ‘Well,’ said Nat, ’look at this, and see if you can see it any better;’ and he drew out of his portfolio a sheet with a rough charcoal sketch of six or seven low, gnarled, bare trees, with their boughs inter-locked in such a fantastic manner that the trees seemed absolutely reeling about in a crazy dance. I laughed as soon as I saw it. ‘There!’ said Nat triumphantly; ’now, if I can only get the vines to go just as I want them to, in and out, you see that will dress up the dancers.’ He worked long over this design. The fancy seemed to have taken possession of his brain. He gave names to the trees, but he called them all men: ‘It’s a jolly crew of old kings,’ he said; ’that’s Sesostris at the head, and there’s Herod; that old fellow with the gouty stomach under his left arm.’ Nat was now so full of freaks and fun, that our little room rang with laughter night after night. Patrick used to sit on the floor sometimes, with his broad Irish mouth stiffened into a perpetual grin at the sight of the mirth, which, though he could not comprehend it, he found contagious.

“‘But what will you do with it, Nat?’ said I. ’It will never do for a calico pattern.’

“‘I don’t know,’ said he reflectively; ’I might make it smaller and hide the faces, and not make the limbs of the trees look so much like legs, and call it the “vine pattern,” and I guess old Wilkins would think it was graceful, and I dare say Miss Wilkins would wear it, if nobody else did.’

“‘Oh! Nat, Nat, how can you,’ exclaimed I, ’when they have been so good to pay us so much money?’

“‘I know it,’ said Nat, ’it’s too bad; I’m ashamed now. But doesn’t this look like the two Wilkins brothers? You said they looked like frogs?’ he ran on, holding up a most ludicrous picture of two tall, lank frogs standing behind a counter, and stretching out four front legs like greedy hands across the counter, with a motto coming out of the right-hand frog’s mouth: ’More designs, if you please, Mr. Kent—something light and graceful for summer wear.’

“These were the words of a note which Mr. Wilkins had sent to Nat a few weeks before. I laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks, for really the frogs did look like the brothers Wilkins. The picture haunted my mind for weeks afterward, and seemed somehow to revive my old distrust of them.

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“A few days after this Nat had finished a set of designs ’for summer wear,’ as the order said, and among them he had put in the ’One-Legged Dancers.’

“‘It’ll do no harm to try it,’ said he. ’I think it would be lovely printed in bright-green on a white ground, and nobody but you and me would ever see the kings’ legs in it.’

“It really was pretty; still I could not help seeing legs and heads and King Herod’s stomach in it; and, moreover, it was entirely too large a figure for that year’s fashions in calico or muslin. However, I said nothing and carried it with the rest. When I went the next day, Mr. Wilkins said, as he handed me the money,—

“’Oh, by the way, Miss Kent, one of the drawings has been mislaid. I suppose it is of no consequence; we could not use it; it was quite too large a figure, and seemed less graceful than your brother’s work usually is; it was a picture of grape-vines.’

“‘Oh,’ said I, ’I told Nat I didn’t believe that would be good for anything. No, it is not of the least consequence.’

“When I repeated this to Nat, he did not seem surprised at their refusal of the design; they had already refused several others in the course of the year. But he seemed singularly disturbed at the loss of the drawing. At last he urged me to go and ask if it had not been found.

“‘I may do something with it yet, Dot,’ he said. ’I know it is a good design for something, if not for calico, and I don’t believe they have lost it. It is very queer.’

“But Mr. Wilkins assured me, with great civility and many expressions of regret, that the design was lost: that they had made careful search for it everywhere.

“The thing would have passed out of my mind in a short time but for Nat’s pertinacious reference to it. Every few days he would say, ’It is very queer, Dot, about the One-Legged Dancers. How could such a thing be lost? They never lost a drawing before. I believe Miss Wilkins has got it, and is going to paint a big picture from it herself!’

“‘Why, Nat!’ I exclaimed, ‘aren’t you ashamed? that would be stealing.’

“‘I don’t care, Dot,’ he said again and again, ’I never shall believe that paper was lost.’

“I grew almost out of patience with him; I never knew him to be unjust to any one, and it grieved me that he should be so to people who had been our benefactors.

“About four months later, one warm day in April, I walked over to the town after my day’s work was done, to buy a gown for myself, and a new box of paints for Nat. I did not go to town more than two or three times a year, and the shop-windows delighted me as much as if I had been only eleven years old. As I walked slowly up and down, looking at

everything, I suddenly started back at the sight of a glossy green and white chintz, which was displayed conspicuously in the central window of one of the largest shops. There they were, just as Nat had drawn them on the

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missing paper, 'The One-Legged Dancers!' Nat was right. It was a pretty pattern, a very pretty pattern for a chintz; and there was—I laughed out in spite of myself, as I stood in the crowd on the sidewalk—yes, there was the ugly great knot in one of the trees which had made King Herod's stomach. But what did it mean? No chintzes were made in any of Mr. Maynard's mills, nor, so far as I knew, in any mill in that neighborhood. I was hot with indignation. Plainly Nat's instinct had been a true one. The Wilkinses had stolen the design and had sold it to some other manufacturers, not dreaming that the theft could ever be discovered by two such helpless children as Nat and I.

"I went into the shop and asked the price of the chintz in the window.

"'Oh, the grape-vine pattern? that is a new pattern, just out this spring; it is one of the most popular patterns we ever had. A lovely thing, miss,' said the clerk, as he lifted down another piece of it.

"'I will take one yard,' said I with a choking voice. I was afraid I should cry in the shop. 'Do you know where this chintz is made?' I added.

"The clerk glanced at the price-ticket and read me the name. It was made by a firm I had never heard of, in another State. No wonder the Wilkinses thought themselves safe.

"When I showed Nat the chintz he seemed much less excited than I expected. He was not so very much surprised; and, to my great astonishment, he was not at first sure that it would be best to let the Wilkinses know that we had discovered their cheating. But I was firm; I would have no more to do with them. My impulse was to go to Mr. Maynard. Although during these three years he had never come to see us, I felt sure that, in the bottom of his heart, there still was a strong affection for us; and, above all, he was a just man. He would never keep in his employ for one day any person capable of such wrong as the Wilkinses had done us.

"'But,' persisted Nat, 'you do not know that either of the Mr. Wilkinses had anything to do with it. They may both have honestly supposed it was lost. It's much more likely that their sister stole it.'

"I had not thought of this before. Poor Miss Wilkins! Nat's artistic soul had been so outraged by some of her flagrant calicoes that he believed her capable of any crime.

"At last I consented to go first to the Wilkinses themselves, and I promised to speak very calmly and gently in the beginning, and betray no suspicion of them. I carried the chintz. When I entered the office, the overseer was talking in one corner with a gentleman whose back was turned to me. The agent sat by the counter.

"'Mr. Wilkins,' said I, 'do you remember the grape-vine pattern my brother drew last winter—the one which you refused?'

"The instant I spoke, I saw that he did remember. I saw that he was guilty, and I saw it all with such certainty that it enabled me to be very calm.

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"'Let me see,' said he, trying to pretend to be racking his memory; 'the grape-vine pattern? It seems to me that I do recall something about a design with that name. Did you say we refused it?'

"'Yes, you refused it, but you did not return the drawing. You said it had been lost,' I replied.

"'Ah, yes, yes—now I recollect,' he said, recovering himself somewhat; 'we made great search for the drawing; I remember all about it now;' and he paused as if waiting civilly to know what more there could possibly be to be said on that point. But I watched him closely and saw that he was agitated. I looked him steadily in the eye and did not speak, while I slowly opened my little bundle and unrolled the piece of chintz.

"'Can you possibly explain this mystery, then, sir, that here is my brother's design printed on this chintz?' said I, in a clear, distinct tone, holding out the yard of chintz at its full length. As I said the words 'my brother's design,' the gentleman who had been talking with the overseer turned quickly round, and I saw that it was Mr. Maynard's youngest son Robert, who a year before had come home from Germany, and had recently been taken into the firm as partner. He stepped a little nearer me, and was evidently listening to my words.

"'Come into this room, Mr. Maynard, if you please, and we will finish discussing the matter we were speaking of,' said Overseer Wilkins, turning pale, and speaking very hurriedly, and trying to draw Mr. Maynard into the inner office-room.

"'And—if you will call some other time, Miss Kent,' said Agent Wilkins, turning away from me and walking toward Mr. Maynard, in his anxiety to prevent my being seen or heard, 'I will try to attend to this matter; but just now I have not another moment to spare,' and he began at once to talk in a loud and voluble manner.

"I do not know how I had strength and courage to do what I did then; I do not know where the voice came from with which I spoke then; Robert has always said that I looked like a young lioness, and that my voice sounded like the voice of one crying 'fire.' I stepped swiftly up to him, and before the astounded Wilkins could speak a word, I had held up the chintz and exclaimed, 'But Mr. Maynard will have time to spare, and I thank God he is here. Mr. Maynard, this design is one of my brother's drawing; he has made most of the calico designs printed in your father's mills for a year and a half: I brought this one to the agent; he said it was not good for anything, but he stole the paper and sold it, and here it is!' and then suddenly my strength all disappeared, great terror seized me, and I burst into tears. Both the agent and the overseer began to speak at once.

"'Be silent,' thundered Robert, in the most commanding tone I ever heard out of human lips. 'Be silent, both of you!' Then he took the chintz away from me, and taking both my

hands in his, led me to a chair, saying, in a voice as sweet and gentle as the other was terrible, 'Pray be calm, my dear young lady—this matter shall be looked into. Sit down and do not try to speak for a few minutes.'

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“Then he walked over to the brothers; even through my tears I could see how terrified they looked; they seemed struck dumb with fright; he spoke to them now in the most courteous manner, but the courtesy was almost worse than the anger had been before.

“‘I shall have to ask you for the use of the office for a short time, gentlemen. This is an affair I prefer to investigate immediately, and I would like to see this young lady alone.’ They both began to speak again, but he interrupted them.

“‘I will send for you presently; not a word more now, if you please;’ and in spite of themselves they were obliged to walk out of the room. As they turned to shut the door their faces frightened me.

“‘Oh!’ I exclaimed; ’oh, Mr. Maynard, they will kill Nat I must go home at once,’ and I rose trembling in every nerve. He made me sit down again, and brought me a glass of wine, and said, ’Do not be afraid, my dear child, they will not dare harm your brother. Drink this, and tell me your whole story.’

“Then I told him all. He interrupted me only once, to ask me about the prices paid us for two or three especial patterns which he happened to recollect. When I stopped, he jumped up from his chair and walked up and down in front of me, ejaculating, ’By Jove! this is infernal—I never heard of such a contemptible bit of rascality in my life. I have told my father ever since I came home that these men had bad faces, and I have looked carefully for traces of cheating in their accounts. But they were too cowardly to try it on a large scale.’

“He then told me that the originality and beauty of the designs which the Wilkinses had furnished the firm of late had attracted general attention; that they had said the best ones were the work of a sister in England, the others of the sister living with them. When he told me the prices which had been paid for them, I could not help groaning aloud and burying my face in my hands. ‘Oh, my poor Nat!’ I exclaimed, ’you might have had everything you wanted for that.’

“‘But he shall have it still, Miss Kent,’ said Robert—’I shall give you a check for the whole amount before you leave this room, and I do assure you that your brother has a fortune in his talent for drawing. Probably this work is only the beginning of what he will do.’

“As Robert opened the office-door for me to pass out, I saw the two Mr. Wilkinses standing together at the gate through which I must go. Robert answered my look of alarm by saying, ’I shall walk home with you, Miss Kent. They shall not annoy you.’

“As we came near, they both lifted their hats with obsequious, angry bows. Robert did not look at them, but said in a low tone, as we passed, ’Go to the office and wait there till I return.’

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“When he bade me good-by at my door, he said, ’I shall go now to find my father, and if he is at home the brothers Wilkins will be dismissed from our employ in less than one hour,’ I looked after him as long as I could see him. Then I went into our little sitting-room, sank into a chair, and sat motionless, turning the check over and over in my hand, and wondering if I really were awake and alive, or if all were a dream. In a few moments Nat came home. As Patrick lifted the wagon up over the door-steps, and Nat caught sight of my face, he called out, ’Oh, sister, what is the matter—are you ill?’ I ran to him and put the check into his hands, but it was some minutes before I could speak. The wonderful fortune did not overwhelm Nat as it had me. He was much stronger than I. Every stroke of his pencil during the last year had developed and perfected his soul. He was fast coming to have that consciousness of power which belongs to the true artist, and makes a life self-centred.

“‘I have felt that all this would come, dear,’ he said, ’and more than this too,’ he added dreamily, ’we shall go on; this is only the outer gate of our lives,’

“He prophesied more truly than he knew when he said that—my dear blessed artist-souled martyr!

“I need not dwell on the details of the next half-year. A few words can tell them; and then, again, worlds of words could not tell them.

“Three months from the day I carried the piece of chintz into the overseer’s office, Robert and I were married in the beautiful chapel where papa used to preach. All the mills were shut, and the little chapel was crowded with the workmen and workwomen. When we came out they were all drawn up in lines on the green, and Robert and Mr. Maynard both made them little speeches. Nat and Miss Penstock and Patrick were in Mr. Maynard’s carriage, and Robert and I stood on the ground by the carriage-door. After the people had gone, Mr. Maynard came up to me and put both his hands on my shoulders, just as he had done three years before, and said, ’You were a brave girl, but you had to take me for your father, after all.’

“Nat’s wedding-present to me was a wood-carving of the ’One-Legged Dancers’—the one which stands on the little gilt table. I shall never be separated from it.

“When I first found out how very rich Robert was, I was afraid; it seemed to me almost wrong to have so much money. But I hope we shall not grow selfish. And I cannot but be grateful for it, when I see what it has done for my darling brother. He is living now in a beautiful apartment in New York. Patrick is with him, his devoted servant, and Miss Penstock has gone to keep house for them. Nat is studying and working hard; the best artists in the city are his friends, and his pictures are already known and sought. When Robert first proposed this arrangement, Nat said, ’Oh no, no! I cannot accept such a weight of obligation from any man, not even from a brother.’

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“Robert rose and knelt down by Nat’s chair, and even then he was so far above him he had to bend over.

“‘Nat,’ said he, in a low tone, ’I never knelt to any human being before: I didn’t kneel to Dora when I asked her to give herself to me, for I was sure I could so give myself to her as to make her happy; but it is to you, after all, that I owe it that she is mine; I never can forget it for an hour, and I never can repay you—no, not in my whole life-time, nor with all my fortune.’

“Then he told him that the sum which it would need to support him and Miss Penstock and Patrick in this way was so small, in comparison with our whole income, that it was not worth mentioning. ‘And at any rate,’ he said, ’it is useless for you to remonstrate, Nat, for I have already made fifty thousand dollars’ worth of stock so entirely yours, that you cannot escape from it. The papers are all in my father’s hands, and the income will be paid to you, or left subject to your order, quarterly. If you do not spend it, nobody else will;’ and then Robert bent down lower, and lifting Nat’s thin hands tenderly in his, pressed them both against his check, in the way I often did. It was one of the few caresses Nat loved. I stood the other side of the chair, and I stooped down and kissed him, and said:—

“‘And, Nat, I cannot be quite happy in any other way.’

“So Nat yielded.

“It was hard to come away and leave him. For some time I clung to the hope that he might come with us; but the physicians all said it would be madness for him to run the risk of a sea-voyage. However, I know that for him, the next best thing to seeing Europe himself is to see it through my eyes. I write to him every week, and I shall carry home to him such art-treasures as he has never dreamed of possessing.

“Next year we shall go home, and then he will come back to Maynard’s Mills and live with us. Robert is having a large studio built for him on the north side of the house, with a bed-room and little sitting-room opening out of it. Miss Penstock, too, will always live with us; we shall call her ‘housekeeper,’ to keep her contented, and Patrick is to stay as Nat’s attendant. Poor fellow, he is not quite full-witted, we think; but he loves Nat so devotedly that he makes a far better servant than a cleverer boy would with a shade less affection.

“And now you have heard the story of my life, dear friend,” said Dora, as she rose from the seat and lighted the rose-colored tapers in two low swinging Etruscan candlesticks just above our heads—“all that I can tell you,” she added slowly. “You will understand that I cannot speak about the happiest part of it. But you have seen Robert. The only thing that troubles me is that I have no sorrow. It seems dangerous. Dear Nat, although he has all he ever hoped for, need not fear being too happy, because he has

the ever-present pain, to make him earnest and keep him ready for more pain. I said so to him the day before I came away, and he gave me those verses I told you of, called 'The Angel of Pain,'"

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Then she repeated them to me:—

The Angel of Pain.

Angel of Pain, I think thy face
Will be, in all the heavenly place,
The sweetest face that I shall see,
The swiftest face to smile on me.
All other angels faint and tire;
Joy wearies, and forsakes desire;
Hope falters, face to face with Fate,
And dies because it cannot wait;
And Love cuts short each loving day,
Because fond hearts cannot obey
That subtlest law which measures bliss
By what it is content to miss.
But thou, O loving, faithful Pain—
Hated, reproached, rejected, slain—
Dost only closer cling and bless
In sweeter, stronger steadfastness.
Dear, patient angel, to thine own
Thou comest, and art never known
Till late, in some lone twilight place
The light of thy transfigured face
Sudden shines out, and, speechless, they
Know they have walked with Christ all day.

When she had done we sat for some time silent. Then I rose, and kissing her, still silent, went out into the unlighted room where the gilt table stood. A beam of moonlight fell, broad and white, across its top, and flickered on the vine-leaves and the ferns. In the dim weird light their shapes were more fantastic than ever.

The door into the outer hall stood open. As I went toward it, I saw old Anita toiling slowly up the stairs, with a flat basket on her head. Her wrinkled face was all aglow with delight. As soon as she reached the threshold she set the basket down, and exclaiming, “Oh look, look, Signora!” lifted off the cover. It was full of fresh and beautiful anemones of all colors. She moved a few on top and showed me that those beneath were chiefly purple ones.

“Iddio mio! will not the dearest of Signoras be pleased now!” she said. “The saints wish that she shall have all she desires; did not my Biagio’s brother come in from Albano this morning? and as I was in the Piazza Navona, buying oranges, I heard him calling from a long way off, ’Ho Anita, my Anita, here are anemones for your beautiful Signora with the bright hair.’

“They grow around an old tomb a mile away from his vineyard, and he set out from his home long before light to get them for me; for he once saw the Signora and he had heard me say that she never could have enough of anemones. Iddio mio! but my heart is glad of them. Ah, the dearest of Signoras!” and, with a tender touch, Anita laid the cool vine-leaves lightly back upon the anemones and hurried on in search of Dora.

How One Woman Kept Her Husband.

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Why my sister married John Gray, I never could understand. I was twenty-two and she was eighteen when the marriage took place. They had known each other just one year. He had been passionately in love with her from the first day of their meeting. She had come more slowly to loving him: but love him she did, with a love of such depth and fervor as are rarely seen. He was her equal in nothing except position and wealth. He had a singular mixture of faults of opposite temperaments. He had the reticent, dreamy, procrastinating inertia of the bilious melancholic man, side by side with the impressionable sensuousness, the sensitiveness and sentimentalism of the most sanguine-nervous type. There is great charm in such a combination, especially to persons of a keen, alert nature. My sister was earnest, wise, resolute. John Gray was nonchalant, shrewd, vacillating. My sister was exact, methodical, ready. John Gray was careless, spasmodic, dilatory. My sister had affection. He had tenderness. She was religious of soul; he had a sort of transcendental perceptivity, so to speak, which kept him more alive to the comforts of religion than to its obligations. My sister would have gone to the stake rather than tell a lie. He would tell a lie unhesitatingly, rather than give anybody pain. My sister lived earnestly, fully, actively, in each moment of the present. It never seemed quite clear whether he were thinking of to-day, yesterday, or to-morrow. She was upright because she could not help it. He was upright,—when he was upright,—because of custom, taste, and the fitness of things. What fatal discrepancies! what hopeless lack of real moral strength, enduring purpose, or principle in such a nature as John Gray's! When I said these things to my sister, she answered always, with a quiet smile, "I love him." She neither admitted nor denied my accusations. The strongest expression she ever used, the one which came nearest to being an indignant repelling of what I had said, was one day, when I exclaimed:—

"Ellen, I would die before I'd risk my happiness in the keeping of such a man."

"My happiness is already in his keeping," said she in a steady voice, "and I believe his is in mine. He is to be my husband and not yours, dear; you do not know him as I do. You do not understand him."

But it is not to give an analysis of her character or of his, nor to give a narrative of their family history, that I write this tale. It is only one episode of their life that I shall try to reproduce here, and I do it because I believe that its lesson is of priceless worth to women.

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Ellen had been married fourteen years, and was the mother of five children, when my story begins. The years had gone in the main peacefully and pleasantly. The children, three girls and two boys, were fair and strong. Their life had been a very quiet one, for our village was far removed from excitements of all kinds. It was one of the suburban villages of ——, and most of the families living there were the families of merchants or lawyers doing business in the town, going in early in the morning, and returning late at night. There is usually in such communities a strange lack of social intercourse; whether it be that the daily departure and return of the head of the family keeps up a perpetual succession of small crises of interest to the exclusion of others, or that the night finds all the fathers and brothers too tired to enjoy anything but slippers and cigars, I know not; but certain it is that all such suburban villages are unspeakably dull and lifeless. There is barely feeling enough of good neighborhood to keep up the ordinary interchange of the commonest civilities.

Except for long visits to the city in the winter, and long journeys in the summer, I myself should have found life insupportably tedious. But Ellen was absolutely content. Her days were unvaryingly alike, a simple routine of motherly duties and housekeeping cares. Her evenings were equally unvaried, being usually spent in sewing or reading, while her husband, in seven evenings out of ten, dozed, either on the sofa, or on one of the children's little beds in the nursery. His exquisite tenderness to the children, and his quiet delight in simply being where they were, were the brightest points in John Gray's character and life.

Such monotony was not good for either of them. He grew more and more dreamy and inert. She insensibly but continually narrowed and hardened, and, without dreaming of such a thing, really came to be less and less a part of her husband's inner life. Faithful, busy, absorbed herself in the cares of each day, she never observed that he was living more and more in his children and his reveries, and withdrawing more and more from her. She did not need constant play and interchange of sentiment as he did. Affectionate, loyal, devoted as she was, there was a side of husband's nature which she did not see nor satisfy, perhaps, never could. But neither of them knew it.

At this time Mr. Gray was offered a position of importance in the city, and it became necessary for them to move there to live. How I rejoiced in the change. How bitterly I regretted it before two years had passed.

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Their city home was a beautiful one, and their connections and associations were such as to surround them at once with the most desirable companionships. At first it was hard for Ellen to readjust her system of living and to accustom herself to the demands of even a moderately social life. But she was by nature very fond of all such pleasures, and her house soon became one of the pleasantest centres, in a quiet way, of the comparatively quiet city. John Gray expanded and brightened in the new atmosphere; he had always been a man of influence among men. All his friends,—even his acquaintances,—loved him, and asked his advice. It was a strange thing that a man so inert and procrastinating in his own affairs, should be so shrewd and practical and influential in the affairs of others, or in public affairs. This, however, was no stranger than many other puzzling incongruities in John Gray's character. Since his college days he had never mingled at all in general society until this winter, after their removal to town; and it was with delight that I watched his enjoyment of people, and their evident liking and admiration for him. His manners were singularly simple and direct; his face, which was not wholly pleasing in repose, was superbly handsome when animated in conversation; its inscrutable reticence which baffled the keenest observation when he was silent, all disappeared and melted in the glow of cordial good-fellowship which lighted every feature when he talked. I grew very proud of my brother as I watched him in his new sphere and surroundings; and I also enjoyed most keenly seeing Ellen in a wider and more appreciative circle. I spent a large part of the first winter in their house, and shared all their social pleasures, and looked forward to ever increasing delight, as my nieces should grow old enough to enter into society.

Early in the spring I went to the West and passed the entire summer with relatives; I heard from my sister every week; her letters were always cheerful and natural, and I returned to her in the autumn, full of anticipations of another gay and pleasant winter.

They met me in New York, and I remembered afterwards, though in the excitement of the moment I gave it no second thought, that when John Gray's eyes first met mine, there was in them a singular and indefinable expression, which roused in me an instant sense of distrust and antagonism. He had never thoroughly liked me. He had always had an undercurrent of fear of me. He knew I thought him weak: he felt that I had never put full confidence in him. That I really and truly loved him was small offset for this. Would it not be so to all of us?

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This part of my story is best told in few words. I had not been at home one week before I found that rumor had been for some months coupling John Gray's name with the name of Mrs. Emma Long, a widow who had but just returned to——, after twelve years of married life in Cuba. John had known her in her girlhood, but there had never been any intimacy or even friendship between them. My sister, however, had known her well, had corresponded with her during all her life at the South, and had invited her to her house immediately upon her return to——. Emma Long was a singularly fascinating woman. Plain and sharp and self-asserting at twenty-two, she had become at thirty-five magnetic and winning, full of tact, and almost beautiful. We see such surprising developments continually: it seems as if nature did her best to give every woman one period of triumph and conquest; perhaps only they know its full sweetness to whom it comes late. In early youth it is accepted unthinkingly, as is the sunshine,—enjoyed without deliberation, and only weighed at its fullness when it is over. But a woman who begins at thirty to feel for the first time what it is to have power over men, must be more or less than woman not to find the knowledge and the consciousness dangerously sweet.

I never knew—I do not know to-day, whether Emma Long could be justly called a coquette. That she keenly enjoyed the admiration of men, there was no doubt. Whether she ever were conscious of even a possible harm to them from their relation to her, there was always doubt, even in the minds of her bitterest enemies. I myself have never doubted that in the affair between her and John Gray she was the one who suffered most; she was the one who had a true, deep sentiment, and not only never meant a wrong, but would have shrunk, for his sake, if not for her own, from the dangers which she did not foresee, but which were inevitable in their intimacy. I think that her whole life afterward proved this. I think that even my sister believed it.

Mrs. Long had spent six weeks in my sister's house, and had then established herself in a very beautiful furnished house on the same street. Almost every day Mrs. Long's carriage was at my sister's door, to take my sister or the children to drive. Almost every evening Mrs. Long came with the easy familiarity of an habituated guest in the house, to sit in my sister's parlor, or sent with the easy familiarity of an old friend for my sister and her husband to come to her, or to go with her to the theatre or to the opera.

What could be more natural?—what could be more delightful, had the relation been one which centred around my sister instead of around my sister's husband? What could be done, what offense could be taken, what obstacle interposed, so long as the relation appeared to be one which included the whole family? Yet no human being could see John Gray five minutes in Emma Long's presence without observing that his eyes, his words, his consciousness were hers. And no one could observe her in his presence without seeing that she was kindled, stimulated, as she was in no other companionship.

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All this the city had been seeing and gossiping over for four months. All this, with weary detail, was poured into my ears by kind friends.

My sister said no word. For the first time in my life there was a barrier between us I dared not pass. Her every allusion to Mrs. Long was in the kindest and most unembarrassed manner. She fell heartily and graciously into every plan which brought them together: she not only did this, she also fully reciprocated all entertainments and invitations; it was as often by Ellen's arrangement as by Mrs. Long's that an evening or a day was spent by the two families together. Her manner to Mrs. Long was absolutely unaltered. Her manner to John was absolutely unaltered. When during an entire evening he sat almost motionless and often quite speechless, listening to Mrs. Long's conversation with others, Ellen's face never changed. She could not have seemed more unconscious if she had been blind. There were many bonds of sympathy between John Gray and Emma Long, which had never existed between him and his wife. They were both passionately fond of art, and had studied it. Ellen's taste was undeveloped, and her instinctive likings those of a child. But she listened with apparent satisfaction and pleasure to long hours of conversation, about statues, pictures, principles of art, of which she was as unable to speak as one of her own babies would have been. Mrs. Long was also a woman who understood affairs; and one of her great charms to men of mind was the clear, logical, and yet picturesque and piquant way in which she talked of men and events. Ellen listened and laughed as heartily as any member of the circle at her repartee, her brilliant characterization, her off-hand description.

To John Gray all this was a new revelation. He had never known this sort of woman. That a woman could be clever as men are clever, and also be graceful, adorned, and tender with womanliness, he had not supposed.

Ah, poor Emma Long! not all my loyalty to my sister ever quite stifled in my heart the question whether there was not in Mrs. Long's nature something which John Gray really needed—something which Ellen, affectionate, wise, upright, womanly woman as she was, could never give to any man.

The winter wore on. Idle and malicious tongues grew busier and busier. Nothing except the constant presence of my sister wherever her husband and Mrs. Long were seen together, prevented the scandal from taking the most offensive shape. But Ellen was so wise, so watchful, that not even the most malignant gossip-monger, could point to anything like a clandestine intercourse between the two.

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In fact, they met so constantly either in Mrs. Long's house or my sister's, that there was small opportunity for them to meet elsewhere. I alone knew that on many occasions when Mrs. Long was spending the evening at our house, Ellen availed herself of one excuse and another to leave them alone for a great part of the time. But she did this so naturally, that is, with such perfect art, that not until long afterward did I know that it had been intentional. This was one great reason of my silence during all these months. In her apparent ignorance and unsuspiciousness of the whole thing, she seemed so gay, so happy, so sweet and loving, how could I give her a pain? And if she did not see it now, she might never see it. It could never surely become any more apparent. No man could give, so far as simple manner was concerned, more unmistakable proof of being absorbed in passionate love for a woman, than John Gray gave in Emma Long's presence. I began to do Ellen injustice in my thoughts. I said, "After all, she has not much heart; no woman who loved a man passionately could look on unmoved and see him so absorbed in another."

How little I knew! Towards spring Ellen suddenly began to look ill. She lost color and strength, and a slight cough which she had had all winter became very severe. Her husband was alarmed. We all were distressed. Our old family physician, Dr. Willis, changed color when he felt Ellen's pulse, and said, involuntarily,—

"My dear child, how long have you had such fever as this?"

Ellen changed color too, under his steady look, and replied,—

"I think, doctor, I have had a little fever for some weeks. I have not felt really well since the autumn, and I have been meaning for some time to have a long consultation with you. But we will not have it now," she added playfully, "I have a great deal to tell you which these good people are not to hear. We will talk it over some other time," and she looked at him so meaningly that he understood the subject must be dropped.

That night she told me that she wished me to propose to John to go over with me and spend the evening at Mrs. Long's; that she had sent for Dr. Willis, and she wished to have a long talk with him without John's knowing it.

"Dear," said I hastily, "I will not go to Mrs. Long's with John. I hate Mrs. Long."

"Why, Sally, what do you mean! I never heard you so unjust. Emma is one of the very sweetest women I ever saw in my life. How can you say such a thing! Everybody loves and admires her. Don't go if you feel so. I never dreamed that you disliked her. But I thought John would be less likely to suspect me of any desire to have him away, if you proposed going there; and I must have him out of the house. I cannot talk with the doctor if he is under the roof." She said these last words with an excited emphasis so unlike her usual manner, that it frightened me. But I thought only of her physical state; I feared that she suspected the existence of some terrible disease.

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I went with John to Mrs. Long's almost immediately after tea. He accepted the proposal with unconcealed delight; and I wondered if Ellen observed the very nonchalant way in which he replied when she said she did not feel well enough to go. He already liked better to see Mrs. Long without his wife's presence, cordial and unembarrassed as her manner always was. His secret consciousness was always disturbed by it.

When we reached Mrs. Long's house, we learned that she had gone out to dinner. John's face became black with the sudden disappointment, and quite forgetting himself, he exclaimed: "Why, what does that mean? She did not tell me she was going."

The servant stared, but made no reply. I was confused and indignant; but John went on: "We will come in and wait. I am sure it is some very informal dinner, and Mrs. Long will soon be at home."

I made no remonstrance, knowing that it might annoy and disturb Ellen to have us return. John threw himself into a chair in front of the fire, and looked moodily into the coals, making no attempt at conversation. I took up a book. Very soon John rose, sauntered abstractedly about the room, took up Mrs. Long's work-basket, and examined every article in it, and at last sat down before her little writing-desk, which stood open. Presently I saw that he was writing. More than an hour passed. I pretended to read; but I watched my brother-in-law's face. I could not mistake its language. Suddenly there came a low cry of delight from the door, "Why, John!"

Mrs. Long had entered the house by a side door, and having met no servant before reaching the drawing-room, was unprepared for finding any one there. From the door she could see John, but could not see me, except in the long mirror, to which she did not raise her eyes, but in which I saw her swift movement, her outstretched hands, her look of unspeakable gladness. In less than a second, however, she had seen me, and with no perceptible change of manner had come rapidly towards me, holding out her left hand familiarly to him, as she passed him. Emma Long was not a hypocrite at heart, but she had an almost superhuman power of acting. It was all lost upon me, however, on that occasion. I observed the quick motion with which John thrust into a compartment of the desk, the sheet on which he had been writing; I observed the clasp of their hands as she glided by him; I observed her face; I observed his; and I knew as I had never fully known before how intensely they loved each other.

My resolution was taken. Cost what it might, come what might, I would speak fully and frankly to my sister the next day. I would not longer stand by and see this thing go on. At that moment I hated both John Gray and Emma Long. No possible pain to Ellen seemed to me to weigh for a moment against my impulse to part them.

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I could not talk. I availed myself of the freedom warranted by the intimacy between the families, and continued to seem absorbed in my book. But I lost no word, no look, which passed between the two who sat opposite me. I never saw Emma Long look so nearly beautiful as she did that night. She wore a black velvet dress, with fine white lace ruffles at the throat and wrists. Her hair was fair, and her complexion of that soft pale tint, with a slight undertone of brown in it, which is at once fair and warm, and which can kindle in moments of excitement into a brilliance far outshining any brunette skin. She talked rapidly with much gesture. She was giving John an account of the stupidity of the people with whom she had been dining. Her imitative faculty amounted almost to genius. No smallest peculiarity of manner or speech escaped her, and she could become a dozen different persons in a minute. John laughed as he listened, but not so heartily as he was wont to laugh at her humorous sayings. He had been too deeply stirred in the long interval of solitude before she returned. His cheeks were flushed and his voice unsteady. She soon felt the effect of his manner, and her gayety died away; before long they were sitting in silence, each looking at the fire. I knew I ought to make the proposition to go home, but I seemed under a spell; I was conscious of a morbid desire to watch and wait. At length Mrs. Long rose, saying,—

“If it will not disturb Sally’s reading, I will play for you a lovely little thing I learned yesterday.”

“Oh, no,” said I. “But we must go as soon as I finish this chapter.”

She passed into the music-room and looked back for John to follow her; but he threw himself at full length on the sofa, and said,—

“No, I will listen here.”

My quickened instinct saw that he dared not go; also that he had laid his cheek in an abandonment of ecstasy on the arm of the sofa on which her hand had been resting. Even in that moment I had a sharp pang of pity for him, and the same old misgiving of question, whether my good and sweet and almost faultless Ellen could be loved just in the same way in which Emma Long would be!

As soon as she had finished the nocturne, a sad, low sweet strain, she came back to the parlor. Not even for the pleasure of giving John the delight of the music he loved would she stay where she could not see his face.

But I had already put down my book, and was ready to go. Our good-nights were short and more formal than usual. All three were conscious of an undefined constraint in the air. Mrs. Long glanced up uneasily in John’s face as we left the room. Her eyes were unutterably tender and childlike when a look of grieved perplexity shadowed them. Again my heart ached for her and for him. This was no idle caprice, no mere entanglement of senses between two unemployed and unprincipled hearts. It was a

subtle harmony, organic, spiritual, intellectual, between two susceptible and intense natures. The bond was as natural and inevitable as any other fact of nature. And in this very fact lay the terrible danger.

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We walked home in silence. A few steps from our house we met Dr. Willis walking very rapidly. He did not recognize us at first. When he did, he half stopped as if about to speak, then suddenly changed his mind, and merely bowing, passed on. A bright light was burning in Ellen's room.

"Why, Ellen has not gone to bed!" exclaimed John.

"Perhaps some one called," said I, guiltily.

"Oh, I dare say," replied he; "perhaps the doctor has been there. But it is half-past twelve," added he, pulling out his watch as we entered the hall. "He could not have stayed until this time."

I went to my own room immediately. In a few moments I heard John come up, say a few words to Ellen, and then go down-stairs, calling back, as he left her room,—

"Don't keep awake for me, wifie, I have a huge batch of letters to answer. I shall not get through before three o'clock."

I crept noiselessly to Ellen's room. It was dark. She had extinguished the gas as soon as she had heard us enter the house! I knew by the first sound of her voice that she had been weeping violently and long. I said,—

"Ellen, I must come in and have a talk with you."

"Not to-night, dear. To-morrow I will talk over everything. All is settled. Good-night. Don't urge me to-night, Sally. I can't bear any more."

It is strange—it is marvellous what power there is in words to mean more than words. I knew as soon as Ellen had said, "Not to-night, dear," that she divined all I wanted to say, that she knew all I knew, and that the final moment, the crisis, had come. Whatever she might have to tell me in the morning, I should not be surprised. I did not sleep. All night I tossed wearily, trying to conjecture what Ellen would do, trying to imagine what I should do in her place.

At breakfast Ellen seemed better than she had seemed for weeks. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks pink; but there was an ineffable, almost solemn tenderness in her manner to John, which was pathetic. Again the suspicion crossed my mind that she knew that she must die. He too was disturbed by it; he looked at her constantly with a lingering gaze as if trying to read her face; and when he bade us good-by to go to the office, he kissed her over and over as I had not seen him kiss her for months. The tears came into her eyes, and she threw both arms around his neck for a second,—a very rare thing for her to do in the presence of others.

“Why, wifie,” he said, “you musn’t make it too hard for a fellow to get off!—Doesn’t she look well this morning, Sally?” turning to me. “I was thinking last night that I must take her to the mountains as soon as it was warm enough. But such cheeks as these don’t need it.” And he took her face in his two hands with a caress full of tenderness, and sprang down the steps.

Just at this moment Mrs. Long’s carriage came driving swiftly around the corner, and the driver stopped suddenly at sight of John.

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“Oh, Mr. Gray, Mr. Gray!” called Emma, “I was just coming to take Ellen and the children for a turn, and we can leave you at the office on our way.”

“Thank you,” said John, “but there are several persons I must see before going to the office, and it would detain you too long. I am already much too late,” and without a second look he hurried on.

I saw a slight color rise in Mrs. Long’s cheek, but no observer less jealous than I would have detected it; and there was not a shade less warmth than usual in her manner to Ellen.

Ellen told her that she could not go herself, but she would be very glad to have some of the children go; and then she stood for some moments, leaning on the carriage-door and talking most animatedly. I looked from one woman to the other. Ellen at that moment was more beautiful than Mrs. Long. The strong, serene, upright look which was her most distinguishing and characteristic expression, actually shone on her face. I wished that John Gray had stopped to see the two faces side by side. Emma Long might be the woman to stir and thrill and entrance the soul; to give stimulus to the intellectual nature; to rouse passionate emotion; but Ellen was the woman on whose steadfastness he could rest,—in the light of whose sweet integrity and transparent truthfulness he was a far safer, and would be a far stronger man than with any other woman in the world.

As the carriage drove away with all three of the little girls laughing and shouting and clinging around Mrs. Long, a strange pang seized me. I looked at Ellen. She stood watching them with a smile which had something heavenly in it. Turning suddenly to me, she said: “Sally, if I were dying, it would make me very happy to know that Emma Long would be the mother of my children.”

I was about to reply with a passionate ejaculation, but she interrupted me.

“Hush, dear, hush. I am not going to die,—I have no fear of any such thing. Come to my room now, and I will tell you all.”

She locked the door, stood for a moment looking at me very earnestly, then folded me in her arms and kissed me many times; then she made me sit in a large arm-chair, and drawing up a low foot-stool, sat down at my feet, rested both arms on my lap, and began to speak. I shall try to tell in her own words what she said.

“Sally, I want to tell you in the beginning how I thank you for your silence. All winter I have known that you were seeing all I saw, feeling all I felt, and keeping silent for my sake. I never can tell you how much I thank you; it was the one thing which supported me. It was an unspeakable comfort to know that you sympathized with me at every point; but to have had the sympathy expressed even by a look would have made it

impossible for me to bear up. As long as I live, darling, I shall be grateful to you. And, moreover, it makes it possible for me to trust you unreservedly now. I had always done you injustice, Sally. I did not think you had so much self-control."

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Here she hesitated an instant. It was not easy for her to mention John's name; but it was only for a second that she hesitated. With an impetuous eagerness unlike herself, she went on.

"Sally, you must not blame John. He has struggled as constantly and nobly as a man ever struggled. Neither must you blame Emma. They have neither of them done wrong. I have watched them both hour by hour. I know my husband's nature so thoroughly that I know his very thoughts almost as soon as he knows them himself. I know his emotions before he knows them himself. I saw the first moment in which his eyes rested on Emma's face as they used to rest on mine. From that day to this I have known every phase, every step, every change of his feeling towards her; and I tell you, Sally, that I pity John from the bottom of my heart. I understand it all far better than you can, far better than he does. He loves her at once far more and far less than you believe, and he loves me far more than you believe! You will say, in the absolute idealization of your inexperienced heart, that this is impossible. I know that it is not, and I wish I could make you believe it, for without believing it you cannot be just to John. He loves me to-day, in spite of all this, with a sort of clinging tenderness born of this very struggle. He would far rather love me with all his nature if he could, but just now he cannot. I see very clearly where Emma gives him what he needs, and has never had in me. I have learned many things from Emma Long this winter. I can never be like her. But I need not have been so unlike her as I was. She has armed me with weapons when she least suspected it. But she is not after all, on the whole, so nearly what John needs as I am. If I really believed that he would be a better man, or even a happier one with her as his wife, I should have but one desire, and that would be to die. But I think that it is not so. I believe that it is in my power to do for him, and to be to him, what she never could. I do not wonder that you look pityingly and incredulously. You will see. But in order to do this, I must leave him."

I sprang to my feet. "Leave him! Are you mad?"

"No, dear, not at all; very sane and very determined. I have been for six months coming to this resolve. I began to think of it in a very few hours after I first saw him look at Emma as if he loved her. I have thought of it day and night since, and I know I am right. If I stay, I shall lose his love. If I go, I shall keep it, regain it, compel it." She spoke here more hurriedly. "I have borne now all I can bear without betraying my pain to him. I am jealous of Emma. It almost kills me to see him look at her, speak to her."

"My poor, poor darling!" I exclaimed; "and I have been thinking you did not feel it!"

She smiled sadly, and tossed back the sleeve of her wrapper so as to show her arm to the shoulder. I started. It was almost emaciated. I had again and again in the course of the winter asked her why she did not wear her usual style of evening dress, and she had replied that it was on account of her cough.

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“It is well that my face does not show loss of flesh as quickly as the rest of my body does,” she said quietly. “I have lost thirty-five pounds of flesh in four months, and nobody observed it! Yes, dear,” she went on, “I have felt it. More than that, I have felt it increasingly every hour, and I can bear no more. Up to this time I have never by look or tone shown to John that I knew it. He wonders every hour what it means that I do not. I have never by so much as the slightest act watched him. I have seen notes in Emma’s handwriting lying on his desk, and I have left the house lest I might be tempted to read them! I know that he has as yet done no clandestine thing, but at any moment I should have led them both into it by showing one symptom of jealousy. And I should have roused in his heart a feeling of irritation and impatience with me, which would have done in one hour more to intensify his love for her, and to change its nature from a pure, involuntary sentiment into an acknowledged and guilty one, than years and years of free intercourse could do. But I have reached the limit of my physical endurance. My nerves are giving away. I am really very ill, but nothing is out of order in my body aside from the effects of this anguish. A month more of this would make me a hopelessly broken-down woman. A month’s absence from the sight of it will almost make me well.”

I could not refrain from interrupting her.

“Ellen, you are mad! you are mad! You mean to go away and leave him to see her constantly alone, unrestrained by your presence? It has almost killed you to see it. How can you bear imagining it, knowing it?”

“Better than I can bear seeing it, far better. Because I have still undiminished confidence in the real lastingness of the bond between John and me. Emma Long would have been no doubt a good, a very good wife for him. But I am the mother of his children, and just so surely as right is right, and wrong is wrong, he will return to me and to them. All wrong things are like diseases, self-limited. It is wrong for a man to love any woman better than he loves his wife; I don’t deny that, dear,” she said, half smiling through her tears at my indignant face; “but a man may seem to do it when he is really very far from it. He may really do it for days, for months—for years, perhaps; but if he be a true man, and his wife a true wife, he will return. John is a true husband and a still truer father: that I am the mother of his five children, he can never forget. If I had had no children, it would be different. If I had ever been for one moment an unloving wife, it would be different; but I am his; I believe that he is mine; and that I shall live to remind you of all these things, Sally, after time has proved them true.”

I was almost dumb with surprise. I was astounded. To me it seemed that her plan was simply suicidal. I told her in the strongest words I could use of the scene of the night before.

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“I could tell you of still more trying scenes than that, Sally. I know far more than you. But if I knew ten times as much, I should still believe that my plan is the only one. Of course I may fail. It is all in God’s hands. We none of us know how much discipline we need. But I know one thing: if I do not regain John in this way, I cannot in any. If I stay I shall annoy, vex, disturb, torture him! Once the barriers of my silence and concealment are broken down, I shall do just what all other jealous women have done since the world began. There are no torments on earth like those which a jealous woman inflicts, except those which she bears! I will die sooner than inflict them on John. Even if the result proves me mistaken, I shall never regret my course, for I know that the worst is certain if I remain. But I have absolute faith,”—and her face was transfigured with it as she spoke,—“John is mine. If I could stay by his side through it all and preserve the same relation with him which I have all winter, all would sooner or later be well. I wish I were strong enough. My heart is, but my body is not, and I must go.”

When she told me the details of her plan, I was more astounded than ever. She had taken Dr. Willis into her full confidence. (He had been to us father and physician both ever since our father’s death.) He entirely approved of her course. He was to say—-which indeed he could do conscientiously—that her health imperatively required an entire change of climate, and that he had advised her to spend at least one year abroad. It had always been one of John’s and Ellen’s air-castles to take all the children to England and to Germany for some years of study. She proposed to take the youngest four, leaving the eldest girl, who was her father’s especial pet and companion, to stay with him. A maiden aunt of ours was to come and keep the house, and I was to stay with the family. This was the hardest of all.

“Ellen, I cannot!” I exclaimed. “Do not—oh, do not trust me. I shall never have strength. I shall betray all some day and ruin all your hopes.”

“You cannot, you dare not, Sally, when I tell you that my life’s whole happiness lies in your silence. John is unobservant and also unsuspicious. He has never had an intimate relation with you. You will have no difficulty. But you must be here,—because, dear, there is another reason,” and here her voice grew very unsteady, and tears ran down her cheeks.

“In spite of all my faith, I do not disguise from myself the possibility of the worst. I cannot believe my husband would ever do a dishonorable thing. I do not believe that Emma Long would. And yet, when I remember what ruin, has overtaken many men and women whom we believed upright, I dare not be wholly sure. And I must know that some one is here who would see and understand if a time were approaching at which it would be needful for me to make one last effort with and for my husband face to face with him.

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Unless that comes, I do not wish you to allude to the subject in your letters. I think I know just how all things will go. I believe that in one year, or less, all will be well. But if the worst is to come, you with your instincts will foresee it, and I must be told. I should return then at once. I should have power, even at the last moment, I believe, to save John from disgrace. But I should lose his love irrecoverably; it is to save that that I go."

I could say but few words. I was lifted up and borne out of myself, as it were, by my sister's exaltation. She seemed more like some angel-wife than like a mortal woman. Before I left her room at noon, I believed almost as fully as she did in the wisdom and the success of her plan.

There was no time to be lost. Every day between the announcement of her purpose and the carrying of it out, would be a fearful strain on Ellen's nerves. Dr. Willis had a long talk with John in his office while Ellen was talking with me. John came home to dinner looking like a man who had received a mortal blow. Dr. Willis had purposely given him to understand that Ellen's life was in great danger. So it was, but not from the cough! At first John's vehement purpose was to go with them. But she was prepared for this. His business and official relations were such that it was next to impossible for him to do it, and it would at best involve a great pecuniary sacrifice. She overruled and remonstrated, and was so firm in her objections to every suggestion of his of accompanying or following her, that finally, in spite of all his anxiety, John seemed almost piqued at her preference for going alone. In every conversation on the subject I saw more and more clearly that Ellen was right. He did love her—love her warmly, devotedly.

Two weeks from the day of my conversation with her they sailed for Liverpool. The summer was to be spent in England, and the winter in Nice or Mentone.

Alice, the eldest daughter, a loving, sunshiny girl of twelve, was installed in her mother's room. This was Ellen's especial wish. She knew that in this way John would be drawn to the room constantly. All her own little belongings were given to Alice.

"Only think, Auntie," said she, "mamma has given me, all for my own, her lovely toilette set, and all the Bohemian glass on the bureau, and her ivory brushes! She says when she comes home she shall refurnish her room and papa's too!"

Oh, my wise Ellen. Could Emma Long have done more subtly!

Early on the first evening after John returned from New York, having seen them off, I missed him. I said bitterly to myself, "At Mrs. Long's, I suppose," and went up-stairs to find Alice. As I drew near her room I heard his voice, reading aloud. I went in. He and

Alice were lying together on a broad chintz-covered lounge, as I had so often seen him and Ellen.

“Oh, Auntie, come here,” said Alice, “hear mamma’s letter to me! She gave it to papa in New York. She says it is like the sealed orders they give to captains sometimes, not to be opened till they are out at sea. It is all about how I am to fill her place to papa. And there are ever so many little notes inside, more orders, which even papa himself is not to see! only I suppose he’ll recognize the things when I do them!”

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At that moment, as I watched John Gray's face, with Alice's nestled close, and his arms clasped tight around her, while they read Ellen's letter, a great load rolled off my heart. I went through many dark days afterward, but I never could quite despair when I remembered the fatherhood and the husbandhood which were in his eyes and his voice that night

The story of the next twelve months could be told in few words, so far as its external incidents are concerned. It could not be told in a thousand volumes, if I attempted to reproduce the subtle undercurrents of John Gray's life and mine. Each of us was living a double life; he more or less unconsciously; I with such sharpened senses, such overwrought emotions, that I only wonder that my health did not give way. I endured vicariously all the suspense and torment of the deepest jealousy, with a sense of more than vicarious responsibility added, which was almost more than human nature could bear. Ellen little knew how heavy would be the burden she laid upon me. Her most express and explicit direction was that the familiar intimacy between our family and Mrs. Long's was to be preserved unaltered. This it would have been impossible for me to do if Mrs. Long had not herself recognized the necessity of it, for her own full enjoyment of John's society. But it was a hard thing; my aunt, the ostensible head of our house, was a quiet woman who had nothing whatever to do with society, and who felt in the outset a great shrinking from the brilliant Mrs. Long. I had never been on intimate terms with her, so that John and Alice were really the only members of the household who could keep up precisely the old relation. And so it gradually came about that to most of our meetings under each other's roofs, strangers were asked to fill up the vacant places, and in spite of all Emma Long's efforts and mine, there was a change in the atmosphere of our intercourse. But there was intimacy enough to produce the effect for which Ellen was most anxious, *i.e*., to extend the shelter of our recognition to the friendship between John and Emma, and to remove from them both all temptation to anything clandestine or secret. They still saw each other almost daily; they still shared most of each other's interests and pleasures; they still showed most undisguised delight in each other's presence. Again and again I went with them to the opera, to the theatre, and sat through the long hours, watching, with a pain which seemed to me hardly less than Ellen's would have been, their constant sympathy with each other in every point of enjoyment, their constant forgetfulness of every one else.

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But there was, all this time, another side to John Gray's life, which I saw, and Emma Long did not see. By every steamer came packages of the most marvelous letters from Ellen: letters to us all; but for John, a diary of every hour of her life. Each night she spent two hours in writing out the record of the day. I have never seen letters which so reproduced the atmosphere of the day, the scene, the heart. They were brilliant and effective to a degree that utterly astonished me; but they were also ineffably tender and loving, and so natural in their every word, that it was like seeing Ellen face to face to read them. At first John did not show them even to me; but soon he began to say, "These are too rare to be kept to myself; I must just read you this account;" or, "Here is a page I must read," until it at last became his habit to read them aloud in the evenings to the family, and even to more intimate friends who chanced to be with us. He grew proud beyond expression of Ellen's talent for writing; and well he might. No one who listened to them but exclaimed, "There never were such letters before!" I think there never were. And I alone knew the secret of them.

But these long, brilliant letters were not all. In every mail came also packages for Alice—secret, mysterious things which nobody could see, but which proved to be sometimes small notes, to be given to papa at unexpected times and places; sometimes little fancy articles, as a pen-wiper, or a cigar-case, half worked by Ellen, to be finished by Alice, and given to papa on some especial day, the significance of which "only mamma knows;" sometimes a pressed flower, which was to be put by papa's plate at breakfast, or put in papa's button-hole as he went out in the morning. I was more and more lost in astonishment at the subtle and boundless art of love which could so contrive to reach across an ocean, and surround a man's daily life with its expression. There were also in every package, letters to John from all the children: even the baby's little hand was guided to write by every mail, "Dear papa, I love you just as much as all the rest do!" or, "Dear papa, I want you to toss me up!" More than once I saw tears roll down John's face in spite of him, as he slowly deciphered these illegible little scrawls. The older children's notes were vivid and loving like their mother's. It was evident that they were having a season of royal delight in their journey, but also evident that their thoughts and their longings were constantly reverting to papa. How much Ellen really indited of these apparently spontaneous letters I do not know; but no doubt their tone was in part created by her. They showed, even more than did her own letters, that papa was still the centre of the family life. No sight was seen without the wish—"Oh, if papa were here!" and even little Mary, aged five, was making a collection of pressed leaves for papa, from all the places they visited. Louise had already great talent for

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drawing, and in almost every letter came two or three childish but spirited little pictures, all labelled “Drawn for papa!” “The true picture of our courier in a rage, for papa to see.” “The washerwoman’s dog, for papa,” *etc*., *etc*. Again and again I sat by, almost trembling with delight, and saw John spend an entire evening in looking over these little missives and reading Ellen’s letters. Then again I sat alone and anxious through an entire evening, when I knew he was with Emma Long. But even after such an evening, he never failed to sit down and write pages in his journal-letter to Ellen—a practice which he began of his own accord, after receiving the first journal-letter from her.

“Ha! little Alice,” he said, “we’ll keep a journal too, for mamma, won’t we! She shall not out-do us that way.” And so, between Alice’s letters and his, the whole record of our family life went every week to Ellen; and I do not believe, so utterly unaware was John Gray of any pain in his wife’s heart about Emma Long, I do not believe that he ever in a single instance omitted to mention when he had been with her, where, and how long.

Emma Long wrote too, and Ellen wrote to her occasional affectionate notes; but referring her always to John’s diary-letters for the details of interest. I used to study Mrs. Long’s face while these letters were read to her. John’s animated delight, his enthusiastic pride, must, it seemed to me, have been bitter to her. But I never saw even a shade of such a feeling in her face. There was nothing base or petty in Emma Long’s nature, and, strange as it may seem, she did love Ellen. Only once did I ever see a trace of pique or resentment in her manner to John, and then I could not wonder at it. A large package had come from Ellen, just after tea one night, and we were all gathered in the library, reading our letters and looking at the photographs—(she always sent unmounted photographs of the place from which she wrote, and, if possible, of the house in which they were living, and the children often wrote above the windows, “*Papa’s* and mamma’s room,” etc, *etc*.)—hour after hour passed. The hall clock had just struck ten, when the door-bell rang violently. “Good heavens!” exclaimed John, springing up, “that must be Mrs. Long; I totally forgot that I had promised to go with her to Mrs. Willis’s party. I said I would be there at nine; tell her I am up-stairs dressing,” and he was gone before the servant had had time to open the door. Mrs. Long came in, with a flushed face and anxious look. “Is Mr. Gray ill?” she said. “He promised to call for me at nine, to go to Mrs. Willis’s, and I have been afraid he might be ill.”

Before I could reply, the unconscious Alice exclaimed,—

“Oh, no; papa isn’t ill; he is so sorry, but he forgot all about the party till he heard you ring the bell. We were so busy over mamma’s letters.”

“John will be down in a moment,” added I. “He ran up-stairs to dress as soon as you rang.”

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For one second Emma Long's face was sad to see. Such astonishment, such pain, were in it, my heart ached for her. Then a look of angry resentment succeeded the pain, and merely saying, "I am very sorry; but I really cannot wait for him. It is now almost too late to go," she had left the room and closed the outer door before I could think of any words to say.

I ran up to John's room, and told him through the closed door. He made no reply for a moment, and then said,—

"No wonder she is vexed. It was unpardonable rudeness. Tell Robert to run at once for a carriage for me."

In a very few moments he came down dressed for the party, but with no shadow of disturbance on his face. He was still thinking of the letters. He took up his own, and putting it into an inside breast-pocket, said, as he kissed Alice, "Papa will take mamma's letter to the party, if he can't take mamma!"

I shed grateful tears that night before I went to sleep. How I longed to write to Ellen of the incident; but I had resolved not once to disregard her request that the whole subject be a sealed one. And I trusted that Alice would remember to tell it. Well I might! At breakfast Alice said,—

"Oh, papa, I told mamma that you carried her to the party in your breast-pocket; that is, you carried her letter!"

I fancied that John's cheek flushed a little as he said,—

"You might tell mamma that papa carries her everywhere in his breast-pocket, little girlie, and mamma would understand."

I think from that day I never feared for Ellen's future. I fancied, too, that from that day there was a new light in John Gray's eyes. Perhaps it might have been only the new light in my own; but I think when a man knows that he has once, for one hour, forgotten a promise to meet a woman whose presence has been dangerously dear to him, he must be aware of his dawning freedom.

The winter was nearly over. Ellen had said nothing to us about returning.

"Dr. Willis tells me that, from what Ellen writes to him of her health, he thinks it would be safer for her to remain abroad another year," said John to me one morning at breakfast.

"Oh, she never will stay another year!" exclaimed I.

"Not unless I go out to stay with her," said John, very quietly.

“Oh, John, could you?” and, “Oh, papa, will you take me?” exclaimed Alice and I in one breath.

“Yes,” and “yes,” said John, laughing, “and Sally too, if she will go.”

He then proceeded to tell me that he had been all winter contemplating this; that he believed they would never again have so good an opportunity to travel in Europe, and that Dr. Willis’s hesitancy about Ellen’s health had decided the question. He had been planning and deliberating as silently and unsuspectedly as Ellen had done the year before. Never once had it crossed my mind that he desired it, or that it could be. But I found that he

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had for the last half of the year been arranging his affairs with a view to it, and had entered into new business connections which would make it not only easy, but profitable, for him to remain abroad two years. He urged me to go with them, but I refused. I felt that the father and the mother and the children ought to be absolutely alone in this blessed reunion, and I have never regretted my decision, although the old world is yet an unknown world to me.

John Gray was a reticent and undemonstrative man, in spite of all the tenderness and passionateness in his nature. But when he bade me good-by on the deck of the steamer, as he kissed me he whispered:—

“Sally, I shall hold my very breath till I see Ellen. I never knew how I loved her before.” And the tears stood in his eyes.

I never saw Emma Long after she knew that John was to go abroad to join Ellen. I found myself suddenly without courage to look in her face. The hurry of my preparations for Alice was ample excuse for my not going to her house, and she did not come to ours. I knew that John spent several evenings with her, and came home late, with a sad and serious face, and that was all. A week before he sailed she joined a large and gay party for San Francisco and the Yosemite. In all the newspaper accounts of the excursion, Mrs. Long was spoken of as the brilliant centre of all festivities. I understood well that this was the first reaction of her proud and sensitive nature under an irremediable pain. She never returned to ——, but established herself in a Southern city, where she lived in great retirement for a year, doing good to all poor and suffering people, and spending the larger part of her fortune in charity. Early in the second year there was an epidemic of yellow fever: Mrs. Long refused to leave the city, and went as fearlessly as the physicians to visit and nurse the worst cases. But after the epidemic had passed by, she herself was taken ill, and died suddenly in a hospital ward, surrounded by the very patients whom she had nursed back to health. Nothing I could say in my own words would give so vivid an idea of the meeting between John Gray and his wife, as the first letter which I received from little Alice:—

“*Darling auntie*,—

“It is too bad you did not come too. The voyage was horrid. Papa was so much sicker than I, that I had to take care of him all the time; but my head ached so that I kept seeing black spots if I stooped over to kiss papa; but papa said, I was just like another mamma.

“Oh, Auntie, only think, there was a mistake about the letters, and mamma never got the letter to tell her that we were coming; and she was out on the balcony of the hotel when we got out of the carriage, and first she saw me; and the lady who was with her said she

turned first red and then so white the lady thought she was sick; and then the next minute she saw papa, and she just fell right down among all the people, and looked as if she was dead; and the very first thing poor papa and I saw, when we got up-stairs, was mamma being carried by two men, and papa and I both thought she was dead; and papa fell right down on his knees, and made the men put mamma down on the floor, and everybody talked out loud, and papa never spoke a word, but just looked at mamma, and nobody knew who papa was till I spoke, and I said,—

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“’That’s my mamma, and papa and I have just come all the way from America,”—and then a gentleman told me to kiss mamma, and I did; and then she opened her eyes; and just as soon as she saw papa, she got a great deal whiter and her head fell back again, and I was so sure she was dying, that I began to cry out loud, and I do think there were more than a hundred people all round us; but Louise says there were only ten or twelve; and then the same gentleman that told me to kiss mamma took hold of papa, and made him go away; and they carried mamma into a room, and laid her on a bed, and said we must all go out; but I wouldn’t: I got right under the bed, and they didn’t see me; and it seemed to me a thousand years before anybody spoke; and at last I heard mamma’s voice, just as weak as a baby’s—but you know nobody could mistake mamma’s voice; and said she, ‘Where is John—I saw John;’ and then the gentleman said,—oh, I forgot to tell you he was a doctor,—he said,—

“’My dear madam, calm yourself’—and then I cried right out again, and crept out between his legs and almost knocked him down; and said I, ’Don’t you try to calm my mamma; it is papa—and me too, mamma!’ and then mamma burst out crying; and then the old gentleman ran out, and I guess papa was at the door, for he came right in; and then he put his arms round mamma, and they didn’t speak for so long, I thought I should die; and all the people were listening, and going up and down in the halls outside, and I felt so frightened and ashamed, for fear people would think mamma wasn’t glad to see us. But papa says that is always the way when people are more glad than they can bear; and the surprise, too, was too much for anybody. But I said at the tea-table that I hoped I should never be so glad myself as long as I lived; and then the old gentleman, —he’s a very nice old gentleman, and a great friend of mamma’s, and wears gold spectacles,—he said, ‘My dear little girl, I hope you *may* be some day just as glad,’ and then he looked at papa and mamma and smiled,—and mamma almost cried again! Oh, altogether it was a horrid time; the worst I ever had; and so different from what papa and I thought it would be.

“But it’s all over now, and we’re all so happy, we laugh so all the time, that papa says it is disgraceful; that we shall have to go off and hide ourselves somewhere where people can’t see us.

“But Auntie, you don’t know how perfectly splendid mamma is. She is the prettiest lady in the hotel, Louise says. She is ever so much fatter than she used to be. And the baby has grown so I did not know her, and her curls are more than half a yard long. Louise and Mary have got their hair cut short like boys, but their gowns are splendid; they say it was such a pity you had any made for me at home. But oh, dear Auntie, don’t think I shall not always like the gowns you made for me. Charlie isn’t here; he’s at some horrid school a great way off; I forget the name of

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the place. But we are all going there to live for the summer. Mamma said we should keep house in an ‘apartment,’ and I was perfectly horrified, and I said, ‘Mamma, in one room?’ and then Louise and Mary laughed till I was quite angry; but mamma says that here an ‘apartment’ means a set of a good many rooms, quite enough to live in. I don’t believe you can have patience to read this long letter; but I haven’t told you half; no, not one half of half. Good-by, you darling aunty. *Alice*.

“P.S.—I wish you could just see mamma. It isn’t only me that thinks she is so pretty; papa thinks so too. He just sits and looks, and looks at her, till mamma doesn’t quite like it, and asks him to look at baby a little!”

Ellen’s first letter was short. Her heart was too full. She said at the end,—

“I suppose you will both laugh and cry over Alice’s letter. At first I thought of suppressing it. But it gives you such a graphic picture of the whole scene that I shall let it go. It is well that I had the excuse of the surprise for my behavior, but I myself doubt very much if I should have done any better, had I been prepared for their coming.

“God bless and thank you, dear Sally, for this last year, as I cannot.

“*Ellen*.”

These events happened many years ago. My sister and I are now old women. Her life has been from that time to this, one of the sunniest and most unclouded I ever knew.

John Gray is a hale old man; white-haired and bent, but clear-eyed and vigorous. All the good and lovable and pure in his nature have gone on steadily increasing: his love for his wife is still so full of sentiment and romance that the world remarks it.

His grandchildren will read these pages, no doubt, but they will never dream that it could have been their sweet and placid and beloved old grandmother who, through such sore straits in her youth, kept her husband!

Esther Wynn’s Love-Letters.

My uncle, Joseph Norton, lived in a very old house. It was one of those many mansions in which that father of all sleepers, George Washington, once slept for two nights. This, however, was before the house came into the possession of our family, and we seldom mentioned the fact.

The rooms were all square, and high; many of the walls were of wood throughout, panelled from the floor to the ceiling, and with curious china tiles set in around the fire-places. In the room in which I always slept when I visited there, these wooden walls

were of pale green; the tiles were of blue and white, and afforded me endless study and perplexity, being painted with a series of half-allegorical, half-historical, half-Scriptural representations which might well have puzzled an older head than mine. The parlors were white, with gold ornaments; the library was of oak, with mahogany wainscoting, and so were the two great central halls, upper and lower. The balustrade

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of the staircase was of apple-tree wood, more beautiful than all the rest, having fine red veins on its dark polished surface. These halls were lined with portraits of dead Nortons, men and women, who looked as much at home as if the grand old house had always borne their name. And well they might, for none of the owners who had gone before had been of as gentle blood as they; and now they would probably never be taken down from the walls, for my uncle had bought the house, and my uncle's son would inherit it; and it had never yet been known that a Norton of our branch of Nortons had lived wastefully or come to want.

My uncle had married very late in life: he was now a gray-haired man, with little children around his knee. It was said once in my presence, by some one who did not know I listened, that his heart had been broken when he was little more than a boy, by the faithlessness of a woman older than himself, and that he would never have married if he had not seen that another heart would be broken if he did not. Be that as it may, his bearing towards his wife was always of the most chivalrous and courteous devotion, so courteous as perhaps to confirm this interpretation of his marriage.

My aunt was an uninteresting woman, of whom, if she were not in sight, one never thought; but she had great strength of affection and much good sense in affairs. Her children loved her; her husband enjoyed the admirably ordered system of her management, and her house was a delightful one to visit. Although she did not contribute to the flavor of living, she never hindered or thwarted those who could. There was freedom in her presence, from the very fact that you forgot her, and that she did not in the least object to being forgotten. Such people are of great use in the world; and make much comfort.

At the time when the strange incidents which I am about to tell occurred, my aunt had been married twelve years, and had four children; three girls, Sarah, Hilda, and Agnes, and a baby boy, who had as yet no name. Sarah was called "Princess," and her real name was never heard. She was the oldest, and was my uncle's inseparable companion. She was a child of uncommon thoughtfulness and tenderness. The other two were simply healthy, happy little creatures, who gave no promise of being any more individual than their serene, quiet mother.

I was spending the winter in the family, and going to school, and between my uncle and me there had grown up an intimate and confidential friendship such as is rare between a man of sixty and a girl of fifteen. I understood him far better than his wife did; and his affection for me was so great and so caressing that he used often to say, laughingly, "Nell, my girl, you'll never have another lover like me!"

We were sitting at breakfast one morning when Princess came in, holding a small letter in her hand.

“Look, papa mia!” she said; “see this queer old letter I found on the cellar stairs. It looks a hundred years old.”

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My uncle glanced up, carelessly at first, but as soon as he saw the paper he stretched out his hand for it, and looked eager. It did indeed seem as if it were a hundred years old; yellow, crumpled, torn. It had been folded in the clumsy old way which was customary before the invention of envelopes; the part of the page containing the address had been torn out. He read a few words, and the color mounted in his cheek.

“Where did you say you found it, Princess?” he said.

“On the cellar stairs, papa; I went down to find Fido, and he was playing with it.”

“What is it, Joseph?” said Aunt Sarah, in tones a shade more eager than their wont.

“I do not know, my dear,” replied my uncle; “it is very old,” and he went on reading with a more and more sobered face.

“Robert,” said he, turning to the waiter, “do you know where this paper could have come from? Have any old papers been carried down from the garret, to light the fire in the furnace?”

“No, sir,” said Robert, “not that I know, sir.”

“There are whole barrels of old papers under the eaves in the garret,” said Aunt Sarah; “I have always meant to have them burned up; I dare say this came out of one of them, in some way;” and she resumed her habitual expression of nonchalance.

“Perhaps so,” said Uncle Jo, folding up the paper and putting it in his pocket. “I will look, after breakfast.”

She glanced up, again surprised, and said, “Why? is it of any importance?”

“Oh, no, no,” said he hastily, with a shade of embarrassment in his voice, “it is only an old letter, but I thought there might be more from the same person.”

“Who was it?” said Aunt Sarah, languidly.

“I don’t know; only the first name is signed,” said he evasively; and the placid lady asked no more. The children were busy with Fido, and breakfast went on, but I watched my uncle’s face. I had never seen it look just as it looked then. What could that old yellow letter have been? My magnetic sympathy with my uncle told me that he was deeply moved.

At dinner-time my uncle was late, and Aunt Sarah said, with a little less than her usual dignity, “I never did see such a man as Mr. Norton, when he takes a notion in his head. He’s been all the morning rummaging in clouds of dust in the garret, to find more of those old letters.”

“Who wrote it, Auntie?” said I.

“Heaven knows,” said she; “some woman or other, fifty years ago. He says her name was Esther.”

“Did you read it?” I asked tremblingly. Already I felt a shrinking sense of regard for the unknown Esther.

Aunt Sarah looked at me with almost amused surprise. “Read it, child? no, indeed! What do I care what that poor soul wrote half a century ago. But your uncle’s half out of his head about her, and he’s had all the servants up questioning them back and forth till they are nearly as mad as he is. Cook says she has found several of them on the cellar stairs in the last few weeks; but she saw they were so old she threw them into the fire, and never once looked at them; and when she said that, your uncle just groaned. I never did see such a man as he is when he gets a notion in his head,”—she repeated, hopelessly.

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My uncle came in flushed and tired. Nothing was said about the letters till, just as dinner was over, he said suddenly:—

“Robert, if you find any more of these old papers anywhere, bring them to me at once. And give orders to all the servants that no piece of old paper with writing on it is to be destroyed without my seeing it.”

“Yes, sir,” said Robert, without changing a muscle of his face, but I saw that he too was of Mrs. Norton’s opinion as to his master’s oddity when he once got a notion in his head.

“Who was the lady, papa?” said little Agnes. “Did you know her?”

“My dear, the letter is as old as papa is himself,” said he. “I think the lady died when papa was a little baby.”

“Then what makes you care so much, papa?” persisted Agnes.

“I can’t tell you, little one,” said he, kissing her, and tossing her up in the air; but he looked at me.

In the early twilight that afternoon I found my uncle lying with closed eyes on the lounge in the library. He was very tired by his long forenoon’s work in the garret. I sat down on the floor and stroked his dear old white hair.

“Pet,” he said, without opening his eyes, “that letter had the whole soul of a woman in it.”

“I thought so, dear,” said I, “by your face.”

After a long interval he said: “I could not find a word more of her writing; I might have known I should not;” and again, after a still longer silence, “Would you like to read it, Nell?”

“I am not sure, Uncle Jo,” I said. “It seems hardly right. I think she would not so much mind your having it, because you are a man; but another woman! no, uncle dear, I think the letter belongs to you.”

“Oh, you true woman-hearted darling,” he said, kissing me; “but some day I think I shall want you to read it with me. She would not mind your reading it, if she knew you as I do.”

Just then Aunt Sarah came into the room, and we said no more.

Several days passed by, and the mysterious letter was forgotten by everybody except my uncle and me.

One bitterly cold night we were sitting around a blazing coal fire in the library. It was very late. Aunt Sarah was asleep in her chair; my uncle was reading. Suddenly the door opened and Robert came in, bringing a letter on his little silver tray: it was past eleven o'clock; the evening mail had been brought in long before.

"Why, what is that, Robert?" said Uncle Jo, starting up a little alarmed.

"One of them old letters, sir," replied Robert; "I just got it on the cellar stairs, sir."

My uncle took the letter hastily. Robert still stood as if he had more to say; and his honest, blank face looked stupefied with perplexity.

"If you please, sir," he began, "it's the queerest thing ever I saw. That letter's been put on them stairs, sir, within the last five minutes."

"Why, Robert, what do you mean?" said my uncle, thoroughly excited.

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“Oh dear,” groaned Aunt Sarah, creeping out of her nap and chair, “if you are going into another catechism about those old letters, I am going to bed;” and she left the room, not staying long enough to understand that this was a new mystery, and not a vain rediscussing of the old one.

It seemed that Robert had been down cellar to see that the furnace fire was in order for the night. As soon as he reached the top of the stairs, in coming up, he remembered that he had not turned the outside damper properly, and went back to do it.

“I wasn’t gone three minutes, sir, and when I came back there lay the letter, right side up, square in the middle of the stairs; and I’d take my Bible oath, sir, as ’twan’t there when I went down.”

“Who was in the hall when you went down, Robert?” said my uncle sternly.

“Nobody, sir. Every servant in the house had gone to bed, except Jane” (my aunt’s maid), “and she was going up the stairs over my head, sir, when I first went down into the cellar. I know she was, sir, for she called through the stairs to me, and she says, ‘Master’ll hear you, Robert.’ You see, sir, Jane and me didn’t know as it was so late, and we was frightened when we heard the clock strike half-past eleven.”

“That will do, Robert,” said Uncle Jo. “You can go,” and Robert disappeared, relieved but puzzled. There seemed no possible explanation of the appearance of the letter there and then, except that hands had placed it there during the brief interval of Robert’s being in the cellar. There were no human hands in the house which could have done it. Was a restless ghost wandering there, bent on betraying poor Esther’s secrets to strangers? What did it, what could it mean?

“Will you read this one with me, Nell?” said my uncle, turning it over reverently and opening it.

“No,” I said, “but I will watch you read it;” and I sat down on the floor at his feet.

The letter was very short; he read it twice without speaking; and then said, in an unsteady voice: “This is an earlier letter than the other, I think. This is a joyous one; poor Esther! I believe I know her whole story. But the mystery is inexplicable! I would take down these walls if I thought I could get at the secret.”

Long past midnight we sat and talked it all over; and racked our brains in vain to invent any theory to account for the appearance of the letters on that cellar stairway. My uncle’s tender interest in the poor dead Esther was fast being overshadowed by the perplexing mystery.

A few days after this, Mary the cook found another of the letters when she first went down-stairs in the morning, and Robert placed it by my uncle’s plate, with the rest of his

mail. It was the strangest one of all, for there was not a word of writing in it that could be read. It was a foreign letter; some lines of the faded old postmarks were still visible on the back. The first page looked as if it had been written over with some sort of sympathetic ink; but not a word could be deciphered. Folded in a small piece of the thinnest of paper was a mouldy and crumbling flower, of a dull-brown color; on the paper was written,—“Pomegranate blossom, from Jaffa,” and a few lines of poetry, of which we could make out only here and there a word.

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Even Aunt Sarah was thoroughly aroused and excited now. Robert had been in the cellar very late on the previous night, and was sure that at that time no papers were on the stairs.

“I never go down them stairs, sir,” said Robert, “without looking—and listening too,” he added under his breath, with a furtive look back at the cook, who was standing in the second doorway of the butler’s pantry. The truth was, Robert had been afraid of the cellar ever since the finding of the second letter: and all the servants shared his uneasiness.

Between eleven at night and seven the next morning, this mute ghostly waif from Palestine, with the half-century old dust of a pomegranate flower in its keeping, had come up that dark stairway. It appeared now that the letters were always found on the fourth stair from the top. This fact had not before been elicited, but there seemed little doubt about it. Even little Princess said,—

“Yes, papa, I am sure that the one I found was on that stair; for I now remember Fido came up with only just one or two bounds to the top, as soon as he saw me.”

We were very sober. The little children chattered on; it meant nothing to them, this breath from such a far past. But to hearts old enough to comprehend, there was something infinitely sad and suggestive in it. I already felt, though I had not read one word of her writing, that I loved the woman called Esther; as for my uncle, his very face was becoming changed by the thought of her, and the mystery about the appearance of the letters. He began to be annoyed also; for the servants were growing suspicious, and unwilling to go into the cellar. Mary the cook declared that on the morning when she found this last letter, something white brushed by her at the foot of the stairs; and Robert said that he had for a long time heard strange sounds from that staircase late at night.

Just after this, my aunt went away for a visit; and several days passed without any further discoveries on the stairs. My uncle and I spent long hours in talking over the mystery, and he urged me to read, or to let him read to me, the two letters he had.

“Pet,” he said, “I will tell you something. One reason they move me so is, that they are strangely like words written by a woman whom I knew thirty years ago. I did not believe two such women had been on the earth.”

I kissed his hand when he said this; yet a strange unwillingness to read Esther’s letters withheld me. I felt that he had right, and I had not.

But the end of the mystery was near. It was revealed, as it ought to have been, to my uncle himself.

One night I was wakened out of my first sleep by a very cautious tap at my door, and my uncle's voice, saying,—

"Nell—Nell, are you awake?"

I sprang to the door instantly.

"O uncle, are you ill?" (My aunt had not yet returned.)

"No, pet. But I want you down-stairs. Dress yourself and come down into the library."

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My hands trembled with excitement as I dressed. Yet I was not afraid: I knew it was in some way connected with “Esther,” though my uncle had not mentioned her name.

I found him sitting before the library table, which was literally covered with old letters, such as we had before seen.

“O uncle!” I gasped as soon as I saw them.

“Yes, dear! I have got them all. There was no ghost!”

Then he told me in few words what had happened. It seemed that he had gone down himself into the cellar, partly to satisfy himself that all was right with the furnace, partly with a vague hope of finding another of the letters. He had found nothing, had examined the furnace, locked the door at the head of the cellar stairs, and gone up to his bed-room. While he was undressing, a strange impulse seized him to go back once more, and see whether it might not happen to him as it had to Robert, to find a letter on returning after a few moments’ interval.

He threw on his wrapper, took a candle, and went down. The first thing he saw, on opening the door, which he had himself locked only five minutes before, was a letter lying on the same fourth stair!

“I confess, Nell,” said he, “for a minute I felt as frightened as black Bob. But I sat down on the upper step, and resolved not to go away till I had discovered how that letter came there, if I stayed till day-light!”

Nearly an hour passed, he said; the cold wind from the cellar blew up and swayed the candle-flame to and fro. All sorts of strange sounds seemed to grow louder and louder, and still he sat, gazing helplessly in a sort of despair at that motionless letter, which he had not lifted from the stair. At last, purely by accident, he looked up to the staircase overhead—the front stairs, down which he had just come from his room. He jumped to his feet! There, up among the dark cobwebbed shadows, he thought he saw something white. He held up the candle. It was, yes, it was a tiny corner of white paper wedged into a crack; by standing on the beam at the side he could just reach it. He touched it,—pulled it;—it came out slowly,—another of Esther’s letters. They were hid in the upper staircase! The boards had been worn and jarred a little away from each other, and the letters were gradually shaken through the opening; some heavier or quicker step than usual giving always the final impetus to a letter which had been for days slowly working down towards the fated outlet.

Stealthily as any burglar he had crept about his own house, had taken up the whole of the front staircase carpet, and had with trouble pried off one board of the stair in which the letters were hid. There had been a spring, he found, but it was rusted and would not

yield. He had carefully replaced the carpet, carried the letters into the library, and come for me; it was now half-past one o'clock at night.

Dear, blessed Uncle Jo! I am an old woman now. Good men and strong men have given me love, and have shown me of their love for others; but never did I feel myself so in the living presence of incarnate love as I did that night, sitting with my white-haired uncle, face to face with the faded records of the love of Esther Wynn.

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It was only from one note that we discovered her last name. This was written in the early days of her acquaintance with her lover, and while she was apparently little more than a child. It was evident that at first the relation was more like one of pupil and master. For some time the letters all commenced scrupulously “my dear friend,” or “my most beloved friend.” It was not until years had passed that the master became the lover; we fancied, Uncle Jo and I, as we went reverently over the beautiful pages, that Esther had grown and developed more and more, until she was the teacher, the helper, the inspirer. We felt sure, though we could not tell how, that she was the stronger of the two; that she moved and lived habitually on a higher plane; that she yearned often to lift the man she loved to the freer heights on which her soul led its glorified existence.

It was strange how little we gathered which could give a clew to her actual history or to his. The letters almost never gave the name of the place, only the day and year, many of them only the day. There was dearth of allusions to persons; it was as if these two had lived in a separate world of their own. When persons were mentioned at all, it was only by initials. It was plain that some cruel, inexorable bar separated her from the man she loved; a bar never spoken of—whose nature we could only guess,—but one which her strong and pure nature felt itself free to triumph over in spirit, however submissive the external life might seem.

Their relation had lasted for many years; so many, that that fact alone seemed a holy seal and testimony to the purity and immortality of the bond which united them. Esther must have been a middle-aged woman when, as the saddened letters revealed, her health failed and she was ordered by the physicians to go to Europe. The first letter which my uncle had read, the one which Princess found, was the letter in which she bade farewell to her lover. There was no record after that; only two letters which had come from abroad; one was the one that I have mentioned, which contained the pomegranate blossom from Jaffa, and a little poem which, after long hours of labor, Uncle Jo and I succeeded in deciphering. The other had two flowers in it—an Edelweiss which looked as white and pure and immortal as if it had come from Alpine snows only the day before; and a little crimson flower of the amaranth species, which was wrapped by itself, and marked “From Bethlehem of Judea.” The only other words in this letter were, “I am better, darling, but I cannot write yet.”

It was evident that there had been the deepest intellectual sympathy between them. Closely and fervently and passionately as their hearts must have loved, the letters were never, from first to last, simply lovers’ letters. Keen interchange of comment and analysis, full revelation of strongly marked individual life, constant mutual stimulus to mental growth there must have been between these two. We were inclined to think, from the exquisitely phrased sentences and rare fancies in the letters, and from the graceful movement of some of the little poems, that Esther must have had ambition as a writer. Then, again, she seemed so wholly, simply, passionately, a woman, to love and be loved, that all thought of anything else in her nature or her life seemed incongruous.

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“Oh,” groaned Uncle Jo, after reading one of the most glowing letters, “oh, was there really ever in any other man’s arms but mine a woman who could say such things as these between kisses? O Nell, Nell, thank God that you haven’t the dower of such a double fire in your veins as Esther had!”

All night we sat reading, and reading, and reading. When the great clock in the hall struck six, we started like guilty persons.

“Oh, my childie,” said Uncle Jo, “how wrong this has been in me! Poor little pale face, go to bed now, and remember, I forbid you to go to school to-day; and I forbid your getting up until noon. I promise you I will not look at another letter. I will lock them all up till to-morrow evening, and then we will finish them.”

I obeyed him silently. I was too exhausted to speak; but I was also too excited to sleep. Until noon I lay wide awake on the bed, in my darkened room, living over Esther Wynn’s life, marvelling at the inexplicable revelation of it which had been put into our hands, and wondering, until the uncertainty seemed almost anguish, what was that end which we could never know. Did she die in the Holy Land? or did she come home well and strong? and did her lover die some day, leaving his secret treasure of letters behind him, and poor stricken Esther to go to her grave in fear lest unfriendly hands might have gained possession of her heart’s records? He was a married man we felt sure. Had the wife whom he did not love paced up and down and up and down for years over these dumb witnesses to that of which she had never dreamed? The man himself, when he came to die, did he writhe, thinking of those silent, eloquent, precious letters which he must leave to time and chance to destroy or protect? Did men carry him, dead, down the very stairs on which he had so often knelt unseen and wafted kisses towards the hidden Esther?

All these conjectures and questions, and thousands more, hurried in wild confusion through my brain. In vain I closed my eyes, in vain I pressed my hands on my eyelids; countless faces, dark, light, beautiful, plain, happy, sad, threatening, imploring, seemed dancing in the air around my bed, and saying, “Esther, Esther!”

We knew she was fair; for there was in one of the letters a tiny curl of pale brown hair; but we believed from many expressions of hers that she had no beauty. Oh, if I could but have known how she looked!

At last I fell asleep, and slept heavily until after dark. This refreshed my overwrought nerves, and when at nine o’clock in the evening I joined my uncle in the library, I was calmer than he.

We said very few words. I sat on his knee, with one arm around his neck, and hand in hand we reverently lifted the frail, trembling sheets.

We learned nothing new; in fact, almost any one of the letters was a rounded revelation of Esther's nature, and of the great love she bore—and there was little more to learn. There were more than a hundred of the letters, and they embraced a period of fifteen years. We arranged them in piles, each year by itself; for some years there were only two or three; we wondered whether during those years they had lived near each other, and so had not written, or whether the letters had been destroyed. When the last letter was laid where it belonged, we looked at each other in silence, and we both sighed.

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Uncle Jo spoke first.

“Childie, what shall we do with them?”

“I do not know, uncle,” I said. “I should feel very guilty if we did not make sure that no one else read them. I should feel very guilty myself, except that I have read them with you. They seem to me to belong to you, somehow.”

Uncle Jo kissed me, and we were silent again. Then he said, “There is but one way to make sure that no human being will ever read them—that is, to burn them; but it is as hard for me to do it as if they had been written to me.”

“Could you not put them back in the stair, and nail it up firmly?” said I.

It was a stormy night. The wind was blowing hard, and sleet and snow driving against the windows. At this instant a terrible gust rattled the icy branches of the syringa-bushes against the window, with a noise like the click of musketry, and above the howling of the wind there came a strange sound which sounded like a voice crying, “Burn, burn!”

Uncle Jo and I both heard it, and both sprang to our feet, white with a nervous terror. In a second he recovered himself, and said, laughing, “Pet we are both a good deal shaken by this business. But I do think it will be safer to burn the letters. Poor, poor Esther. I hope she is safe with her lover now.”

“Oh, do you doubt it?” said I; “I do not.”

“No,” said he, “I do not, either. Thank God!”

“Uncle Jo,” said I, “do you think Esther would mind if I copied a few of these letters, and two or three of the poems? I so want to have them that it seems to me I cannot give them up; I love her so, I think she would be willing.”

The storm suddenly died away, and the peaceful silence around us was almost as startling as the fierce gust had been before. I took it as an omen that Esther did not refuse my wish, and I selected the four letters which I most desired to keep. I took also the pomegranate blossom, and the Edelweiss, and the crimson Amaranth from Bethlehem.

“I think Esther would rather that these should not be burned,” I said.

“Yes; I think so too,” replied Uncle Jo.

Then we laid the rest upon the fire. The generous hickory logs seemed to open their arms to them. In a few seconds great panting streams of fire leaped up and rushed out

of our sight, bearing with them all that was perishable of Esther Wynn's letters. Just as the crackling shadowy shapes were falling apart and turning black, my uncle sprang to an Indian cabinet which stood near, and seizing a little box of incense-powder which had been brought from China by his brother, he shook a few grains of it into the fire. A pale, fragrant film rose slowly in coiling wreaths and clouds and hid the last moments of the burning of the letters. When the incense smoke cleared away, nothing could be seen on the hearth but the bright hickory coals in their bed of white ashes.

"I shall make every effort," said Uncle Jo, "to find out who lived in this house during those years. I presume I can, by old records somewhere."

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“Oh, uncle,” I said, “don’t. I think they would rather we did not know any more.”

“You sweet woman child!” he exclaimed. “You are right. Your instinct is truer than mine. I am only a man, after all! I will never try to learn who it was that Esther loved.”

“I am very glad,” he added, “that this happened when your Aunt Sarah was away. It would have been a great weariness and annoyance to her to have read these letters.”

Dear, courteous Uncle Jo! I respected his chivalrous little artifice of speech, and tried to look as if I believed he would have carried the letters to his wife if she had been there.

“And I think, dear,” he hesitatingly proceeded, “we would better not speak of this. It will be one sacred little secret that you and your old uncle will keep. As no more letters will be found on the stairs, the whole thing will be soon forgotten.”

“Oh yes, uncle,” replied I; “of course it would be terrible to tell. It isn’t our secret, you know; it is dear Esther Wynn’s.”

I do not know why it was that I locked up those four letters of Esther Wynn’s and did not look at them for many months. I felt very guilty in keeping them; but a power I could not resist seemed to paralyze my very hand when I thought of opening the box in which they were. At last, long after I had left Uncle Jo’s house, I took them out one day, and in the quiet and warmth of a summer noon I copied them slowly, carefully, word for word. Then I hid the originals in my bosom, and walked alone, without telling any one whither I was going, to a wild spot I knew several miles away, where a little mountain stream came foaming and dashing down through a narrow gorge to empty itself into our broad and placid river. I sat down on a mossy granite boulder, and slowly tore the letters into minutest fragments. One by one I tossed the white and tiny shreds into the swift water, and watched them as far as I could see them. The brook lifted them and tossed them over and over, lodged them in mossy crevices, or on tree roots, then swept them all up and whirled them away in dark depths of the current from which they would never more come to the surface. It was a place which Esther would have loved, and I wondered, as I sat there hour after hour, whether it were really improbable, that she knew just then what I was doing for her. I wondered, also, as I often before had wondered, if it might not have been by Esther’s will that the sacred hoard of letters, which had lain undiscovered for so many years, should fall at last into the hands of my tender and chivalrous Uncle Jo. It was certainly a strange thing that on the stormy night which I have described, when we were discussing what should be done with the letters, both Uncle Jo and I at the same instant should have fancied we heard the words “Burn, burn!”

The following letter is the earliest one which I copied. It is the one which Robert found so late at night and brought to us in the library:—

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"*Friday evening*.

"*Sweetest*:—It is very light in my room to-night. The full moon and the thought of you! I see to write, but you would forbid me—you who would see only the moonlight, and not the other. Oh, my darling! my darling!

"I have been all day in fields and on edges of woods. I have never seen just such a day: a June sun, and a September wind; clover and butter-cups under foot, and a sparkling October sky overhead. I think the earth enjoyed it as a sort of masquerading frolic. The breeze was so strong that it took the butterflies half off their air-legs, and they fairly reeled about in the sun. As for me, I sat here and there, on hillocks and stones, among ferns, and white cornels, and honey-bees, and bobolinks. I was the only still thing in the fields. I waited so long in each spot, that it was like being transplanted when I moved myself to the north or the south. And I discovered a few things in each country in which I lived. For one thing, I observed that the little busy bee is not busy all the while; that he does a great amount of aimless, idle snuffing and tasting of all sorts of things besides flowers; especially he indulges in a running accompaniment of gymnastics among the grass-stalks, which cannot possibly have anything to do with honey. I watched one fellow to-day through a series of positive trapeze movements from top to bottom and bottom to top of a grass-tangle. When he got through he shook himself, and smoothed off his legs exactly as the circus-men do. Then he took a long pull at a clover well.

"Ah, the clover! Dearest! you should have seen how it swung to-day. The stupidest person in the world could not have helped thinking that it kept time to invisible band-playing, and was trying to catch hold of the buttercups. I lay down at full length and looked off through the stems, and then I saw for the first time how close they were, and that they constantly swayed and touched, and sometimes locked fast together for a second. Stately as a minuet it looked, but joyous and loving as the wildest waltz I ever danced in your arms, my darling. Oh, how dare we presume to be so sure that the flowers are not glad as we are glad! On such a day as to-day I never doubt it; and I picked one as reverently and hesitatingly as I would ask the Queen of the Fairies home to tea if I met her in a wood.

"Laughing, are you, darling? Yes, I know it. Poor soul! You cannot help being a man, I suppose. Nor would I have you help it, my great, strong, glorious one! How I adore the things which you do, which I could not do. Oh, my sweet master! Never fear that I do you less reverence than I should. All the same, I lie back on my ferny hillock, and look you in the eye, and ask you what you think would become of you if you had no little one of my kind to bring you honey! And when I say this—you—ah, my darling, now there are tears in my eyes, and the moonlight grows dim. I cannot bear the thinking what you would do when I said those words! Good-night! Perhaps in my sleep I will say them again, and you will be there to answer. In the morning I shall write out for you to-day's clover song.

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"*Your own*."

The clover song was not in the letter. We found it afterward on a small piece of paper, so worn and broken in the folds that we knew it must have been carried for months in a pocket-book.

A Song of Clover.

I wonder what the Clover thinks?—
Intimate friend of Bob-o-links,
Lover of Daisies slim and white,
Waltzer with Butter-cups at night;
Keeper of Inn for travelling Bees,
Serving to them wine dregs and lees,
Left by the Royal Humming-birds,
Who sip and pay with fine-spun words;
Fellow with all the lowliest,
Peer of the gayest and the best;
Comrade of winds, beloved of sun,
Kissed by the Dew-drops, one by one;
Prophet of Good Luck mystery
By sign of four which few may see;
Symbol of Nature's magic zone,
One out of three, and three in one;
Emblem of comfort in the speech
Which poor men's babies early reach;
Sweet by the roadsides, sweet by sills,
Sweet in the meadows, sweet on hills,
Sweet in its white, sweet in its red,
Oh, half its sweet cannot be said;
Sweet in its every living breath,
Sweetest, perhaps, at last, in death!
Oh, who knows what the Clover thinks?
No one! unless the Bob-o-links!

The lines which were written on the paper inclosing the pomegranate flower from Jaffa we deciphered with great trouble. The last verse we were not quite sure about, for there had been erasures. But I think we were right finally.

Pomegranate blossom! Heart of fire!
  I dare to be thy death,
To slay thee while the summer sun
  Is quickening thy breath;
To rob the autumn of thy wine;—

Next year of all ripe seeds of thine,
That thou mayest bear one kiss of mine
To my dear love before my death.

For, Heart of fire, I too am robbed
Like thee! Like thee, I die,
While yet my summer sun of love
Is near, and warm, and high;
The autumn will run red with wine;
The autumn fruits will swing and shine;
But in that little grave of mine
I shall not see them where I lie.

Pomegranate blossom! Heart of fire!
This kiss, so slow, so sweet,
Thou bearest hence, can never lose
Even in death its heat.
Redder than autumns can run with wine,
Warmer than summer suns can shine,
Forever that dear love of mine
Shall find thy sacred hidden sweet!

The next letter which I copied was one written five years after the first; it is not so much a letter as an allegory, and so beautiful, so weird, that we wondered Esther did not set it to tune as a poem.

"*Sunday morning*.

"*My darling*:—Even this blazing September sun looks dull to me this morning. I have come from such a riotous dream. All last night I walked in a realm of such golden splendor, that I think even in our fullest noon I shall only see enough light to grope by for days and days.

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“I do not know how to tell you my dream. I think I must put it in shape of a story of two people; but you will know, darling, that in my dream it was you and I. And I honestly did dream it, love, every word just as I shall write it for you; only there are no words which so glow and light and blaze as did the chambers through which we walked. I had been reading about the wonderful gold mines of which every one is talking now, and this led to my dream.

“You can laugh if you like, sweet master mine, but I think it is all true, and I call it

“The Mine of Gold.

“There is but one true mine of gold; and of it no man knows, and no woman, save those who go into it. Neither can they who go tell whether they sink into the earth’s heart or are caught up into the chambers of the air, or led to the outer pavilions of the sea. Suddenly they perceive that all around, above, below them is gold: rocks of gold higher than they can see; caves whose depths are bright with gold; lakes of gold which is molten and leaps like fire, but in which flowers can be dipped and not wither; sands of gold, soft and pleasant to touch; innumerable shapes of all things beautiful, which wave and change, but only from gold to gold; air which shines and shimmers like refiner’s gold; warmth which is like the glow of the red gold of Ophir; and everywhere golden silence!

“Hand in hand walk the two to whom it is given to enter here: of the gold, they may carry away only so much as can be hid in their bosoms; grains which are spilled, or are left on their garments, turn to ashes; only to each other may they speak of these mysteries; but all men perceive that they have riches, and that their faces shine as the faces of angels.

“Suddenly it comes to pass that one day a golden path leads them farther than they have ever gone before, and into a vast chamber, too vast to be measured. Its walls, although they are of gold, are also like crystal. This is a mystery. Only three sides are walled. The fourth side is the opening of a gallery which stretches away and away, golden like a broad sunbeam: from out the distance comes the sound of rushing waters; however far they walk in that gallery, still the golden sunbeam stretches before them; still the sound of the waters is no nearer: and so would the sunbeam and the sound of the waters be forever, for they are Eternity.

“But there is a fourth mystery. On the walls of crystal gold, on all sides, shine faces; not dead faces, not pictured faces; living faces—warm, smiling, reflected faces.

“Then it is revealed to the two who walk hand in hand that these are the faces of all who have ever entered in, as they, between the walls of crystal gold; flashing faces of the sons of God looking into eyes of earthly women;—these were the first: and after them, all in their generations until to-day, the sons of men with the women they have loved.

The men’s faces smile; but the faces of the women have in them a joy greater than a smile.

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“Presently the two who walk hand in hand see their own faces added to the others, with the same smile, the same joy; and it is revealed to them that these faces are immortal. Through all eternity they will shine on the walls of crystal gold; and those who have once looked on them can never more see in each other change or loss of beauty.

“If as they walk there, in the broad sunbeam, an angel meets them, bearing the tokens of a golden bowl that is broken and a silver cord that is unloosed, they follow him without grief or fear, thinking on that chamber of crystal gold!

“Good-by, darling!

“*Esther*.”

The third letter was written three years after this one. Sadness was beginning to cloud the free, joyous outpourings of Esther’s heart. Probably this sadness was one of the first symptoms of the failure of her health. It was from this letter chiefly—although there were expressions in others which deepened the impression—that we inferred that her lover had tried to stimulate in her an intellectual ambition.

“*Wednesday evening*.

“*Dear one*:—Your last letter gave me great pain. It breaks my heart to see you looking so earnestly and expectantly into my future. Beloved, that I have grown and developed so much in the last seven years is no proof that I can still keep on growing. If you understood, darling, you would see that it is just the other way. I have grown year by year, hour by hour, because hour by hour I have loved you more. That is all! I have felt the growth. I know it, as clearly as you do. But I know the secret of it as you do not; and I know the limit of it, as you cannot. I cannot love you more, precious one! Neither would I if I could! One heart-beat more in a minute, and I should die! But all that you have so much loved and cared for, dear, calling it intellectual growth and expansion in me, has been only the clearing, refining, and stimulating of every faculty, every sense, by my love for you. When I have said or written a word which has pleased you thus, if there were any special fitness or eloquence in the word, it was only because I sought after what would best carry my thought to you, darling; what would be best frame, best setting, to keep the flowers or the sky which I had to see alone,—to keep them till you could see them too! Oh, dear one, do understand that there is nothing of me except my heart and my love! While they were wonderingly, tremblingly, rapturously growing within me, under the sweet warmth of your love, no wonder I changed day by day. But, precious one, it is ended. The whole solemn, steadfast womanhood within me recognizes it. Beloved master, in one sense you can teach me no more! I am content. I desire nothing. One moment of full consciousness of you, of life, of your love, is more than all centuries of learning, all eternities of inspiration. I would rather at this moment, dear, lay my cheek on your hand, and sit in my old place by your knee, and feel myself the woman you have made me, than know all that God knows, and make a universe!

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“Beloved, do not say such things to me any more; and whenever you feel such ambition and hope stirring in your heart, read over this little verse, and be sure that your child knew what she said when she wrote it:—

“The End of Harvest.

“O Love, who walkest slow among my sheaves,
Smiling at tint and shape, thy smile of peace,
But whispering of the next sweet year’s increase,—
O tender Love, thy loving hope but grieves
My heart! I rue my harvest, if it leaves
Thee vainly waiting after harvests cease,
Like one who has been mocked by title lease
To barren fields.

Dear one, my word deceives
Thee never. Hearts one summer have. Their grain
‘Is sown not that which shall be!’

Can new pain
Teach me of pain? Or any ecstasy
Be new, that I should speak its name again?
My darling, all there was or is of me
Is harvested for thine Eternity!

Esther.”

The fourth letter was the one which Princess had found, the first which my uncle had read—Esther’s farewell to her lover before going abroad. No wonder that it so moved him!

“*Sunday night*.

“*My darling*:—I implore you not to come. Have I not loved you enough, all these years long, for you to trust me, and believe that it is only because I love you so much that I cannot, cannot see you now? Dear, did I ever before ask you to forego your wish for mine? Did I ever before withhold anything from you, my darling? Ah, love, you know—-oh, how well you know, that always, in every blissful moment we have spent together, my bliss has been shadowed by a little, interrupted by a little, because my soul was forever restlessly asking, seeking, longing, for one more joy, delight, rapture, to give to you!

“Now listen, darling. You say it is almost a year since we met; true, but if it were yesterday, would you remember it any more clearly? Why, my precious one, I can see

over again at this moment each little movement which you made, each look your face wore; I can hear every word; I can feel every kiss; very solemn kisses they were too, love, as if we had known.

“You say we may never meet again. True. But if that is to be so, all the more I choose to leave with you the memory of the face you saw then, rather than of the one you would see to-day. Be compassionate, darling, and spare me the pain of seeing your pain at sight of my poor changed face. I hope it is not vanity, love, which makes me feel this so strongly. Being so clearly and calmly conscious as I am that very possibly my earthly days are near their end, it does not seem as if mere vanity could linger in my soul. And you know you have always said, dearest, that I had none. I know I have always wondered unspeakably that you could find pleasure in my face, except occasionally, when I have felt,

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as it were, a great sudden glow and throb of love quicken and heat it under your gaze; then, as I have looked up in your eyes, I have sometimes had a flash of consciousness of a transfiguration in the very flesh of my face, just as I have a sense of rapturous strength sometimes in the very flesh and bone of my right hand, when I strike on the piano some of Beethoven's chords. But I know that, except in the light of your presence, I have no beauty. I had not so much to lose by illness as other women. But, dear one, that little is gone. I can read in the pitying looks of all my friends how altered I am. Even if I did not see it with my own eyes, I should read it in theirs. And I cannot—-oh, I cannot read it in yours!

"If I knew any spell which could make you forget all except some one rare moment in which you said in your heart, 'she never looked so lovely before!' oh, how firmly I would bind you by it! All the weary indifferent, or unhappy looks, love, I would blot out from your memory, and have the thought of me raise but one picture in your mind. I would have it as if I had died, and left of my face no record on earth except one wonderful picture by some great master, who had caught the whole beauty of the one rarest moment of my life. Darling, if you look back, you will find that moment; for it must have been in your arms; and let Love be the master who will paint the immortal picture!

"As for this thin, pale, listless body, which just now answers to the name of me, there is nothing in or about it which you know. Presently it will be carried like a half-lifeless thing on board a ship; the winds will blow roughly on it and it will not care. If God wills, darling, I will come back to you well and strong. If I cannot come well and strong, I hope never to come at all.

"Don't call me cruel. You would feel the same. I also should combat the resolve in you, as you do in me. But in my heart I should understand. I should sympathize, and I should yield.

"God bless you, darling. I believe He will, for the infinite goodness of your life. I thank Him daily that He has given it to me to bless you a little. If I had seen you to say farewell, my beloved, I should not have kissed you many times, as has been our wont. That is for hours of joy. I should have kissed you three times—only three times—on your beautiful, strong, gentle lips, and each kiss would have been a separate sacrament, with a bond of its own. I send them to you here, love, and this is what they mean!

"Three Kisses of Farewell.

"Three, only three my darling,
Separate, solemn, slow;
Not like the swift and joyous ones

We used to know
When we kissed because we loved each other
Simply to taste love's sweet,
And lavished our kisses as the summer
Lavishes heat,—
But as they kiss whose hearts are wrung,
When hope and fear are spent,
And nothing is left to give, except
A sacrament!

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"First of the three, my darling,
  Is sacred unto pain;
We have hurt each other often;
  We shall again,
When we pine because we miss each other,
  And do not understand
How the written words are so much colder
  Than eye and hand.
I kiss thee, dear, for all such pain
  Which we may give or take;
Buried, forgiven, before it comes
  For our love's sake!

"The second kiss, my darling,
  Is full of joy's sweet thrill;
We have blessed each other always;
  We always will.
We shall reach until we feel each other,
  Past all of time and space;
We shall listen till we hear each other
  In every place;
The earth is full of messengers,
  Which love sends to and fro;
I kiss thee, darling, for all joy
  Which we shall know!

"The last kiss, oh, my darling,
  My love—I cannot see
Through my tears, as I remember
  What it may be.
We may die and never see each other,
  Die with no time to give
Any sign that our hearts are faithful
  To die, as live.
Token of what they will not see
  Who see our parting breath,
This one last kiss, my darling, seals
  The seal of death!"

It was on my sixteenth birthday that I copied these letters and poems of Esther Wynn's. I kept them, with a few other very precious things, in a curious little inlaid box, which came from Venice, and was so old that in many places its sides were worm-eaten. It was one of my choicest treasures, and I was never separated from it.

When I was twenty years old I had been for two years a happy wife, for one year a glad mother, and had for some time remembered Esther only in the vague, passing way in which happy souls recall old shadows of the griefs of other hearts. As my boy entered on a second summer he began to droop a little, and the physician recommended that we should take him to the sea-side; so it came to pass that on the morning of my twentieth birthday I was sitting, with my baby in my arms, on a rocky sea-shore, at one of the well-known summer resorts of the New Hampshire coast. Near me sat a woman whose face had interested me strangely ever since my arrival. She seemed an invalid; but there was an atmosphere of overflowing vitality about her, in spite of her feebleness, which made her very presence stimulating and cheering to every one. I had longed to speak with her, but as yet had not done so. While I sat watching her face and my baby's, and the face of the sea, she was joined by her husband, who had just come from a walk in the fields, and had brought her a large bouquet of red clover and feathery grasses. She took it eagerly with great delight, and exclaimed:—

"I wonder what the Clover thinks?
Intimate friend of Bob-o-links!"

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I could not control the sudden start with which I heard these words. Who was this that knew Esther Wynn's verses by heart? I could hardly refrain from speaking to her at once, and betraying all. But I reflected instantly that I must be very cautious; it would be almost impossible to find out what I longed to know without revealing how my own acquaintance with the verses had come about. Days passed before I ventured to allude to the subject; but one evening, as we were walking together, she stooped and picked a clover-blossom, and said,—

"I really think I love red clover better than any wild flower we have."

"I thought so," said I, "when I saw you take that big bunch your husband brought you the other morning. That was before I knew you: I felt almost rude, I watched you so, in spite of myself."

"But I had watched you quite as much," said she, smiling; "I thought then of giving you a part of the clover. Edward always brings me huge bouquets of it every day; he knows so well how I love it."

"I heard you quote a little couplet of verse about it then," said I, looking away from her, that she might not see my face: "I was so near you I could not help hearing what you said."

"Oh, yes," said she,

"I wonder what the Clover thinks?
Intimate friend of Bob-o-links'—

"I do not know but that old clover-song is the real reason I love clover so. My mother taught it to me when I was a little child. It is all very quaint and sweet. Would you like to hear it?"

I felt myself color scarlet, but I replied,—

"Oh, yes, pray repeat it."

When she had repeated the verses she went on speaking, to my great relief, saving me from the necessity of saying anything.

"That was written a great many years ago, by an aunt of my mother's. My mother has a little manuscript book bound in red morocco, very faded and worn, which my grandmother kept on her bureau till she died, last year; and it has in it this little clover-song and several others, with Aunt Esther's diary while she was abroad. She died abroad; died in Jerusalem, and was buried there. There was something mysteriously sad in her life, I think: grandmother always sighed when she spoke of her, and used to read in the little red book every day. She was only her half-sister, but she said she

loved her better than she did any sister of her own. Once I asked grandmamma to tell me about her, but she said, 'There is nothing to tell, child. She was never married: she died the autumn before your mother was born, and your mother looked very much like her when she was young. She is like her, too, in many ways,' and that was all grandmamma would ever say. But we always called her Aunt Esther, and know all her verses by heart, and the diary was fascinating. It seems strange to read such vivid written records of people you never saw; don't you think so?"

"Yes, it must, very," said I.

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She went on: “I always had a very special love for this old Aunt Esther, which I could hardly account for. I am to have the little red book when my mother dies; and”—she hesitated a moment—“and I named my first baby for her, Esther Wynn. The baby only lived to be a few weeks old, and I often think, as I look at her little grave-stone, of the other one, so many thousand miles away, alone in a strange land, bearing the same name.”

On my way home I stopped for a few days’ visit at Uncle Jo’s. Late one night, sitting in my old place at his feet in the library, I told him this sequel to the romance of the letters.

“Oh, childie, how could you help showing that you knew about her?” said he. “You must have betrayed it.”

“No, I am sure I did not,” I said. “I never spoke about it after that day, and she was too absorbed herself in the reminiscences to observe my excitement.”

“What was your friend’s name?” said Uncle Jo.

I told him. He sprang from his chair, and walked rapidly away to the end of the library; presently he came back, and standing before me, said,—

“Nell! Nell! your friend’s mother is the woman of whom I once spoke to you! I might have known that the subtle kinship I felt between Esther Wynn and her was no chance resemblance. I never heard of the name ‘Wynn,’ however. But you said she was only a half-sister; that accounts for it. I might have known! I might have known!” he exclaimed, more to himself than to me, and buried his face in his hands I stole away quietly and left him; but I heard him saying under his breath, “Her aunt! I might have known!”