

WAS IT SUICIDE?

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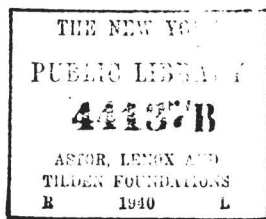
ELLA WHEELER WILCOX,

Author of "SWEET DANGER," "POEMS OF PASSION."



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INTRODUCTORY.

Most of Ella Wheeler Wilcox's lines are sounds from the unconscious rather than reflection's echoes. Spiritism might give the key to the psychic phenomenon of the poet's girlhood. At that period, in spite of her incomplete training, or, perhaps thanks to the absence of many traditional fetters—literary and ethical—a little star suddenly appeared and radiated its sympathetic light. With no worldly experience, probably on account of her very innocence, a simple, modest, ingenuous lass moved numberless readers with hymns of three-fold love :

“The brain's response, the warm blood's rapturous glow,
The soul's sweet language”

Material comforts for a mother must be won quickly, and verse after verse flies into editors' mail. Many go to waste-baskets, some are returned, others printed uncredited, and a few bring back a little money to the home that shelters beloved ones. As many as ten poems a day at times go forth from the Western hamlet to edify the great world beyond and to add another leaf to the poet's laurel crown.

So prolific a pen occasionally grows impatient at mechanical trifles. It is no wonder that pedantic critics discover flaws in some of her verses—errors of which they would be incapable because they cannot write except about others' writings—like gnats that do not create, nurture, nor admire flowers, yet gnaw at their tender petals.

These censors forget that the mode of expressing an idea is less important than the idea itself. An imperfect technique would certainly be undesirable; but a perfect one, with nothing more, is useless in the race for literary spurs. Rhetorical ability is attainable by all, save idiots. In fact, our compulsory education has forced every citizen to write, or to imagine he could write, but it has not added one atom of genius to our nation. Perfection of expression is valuable only when the thoughts thus treated are judicious and appropriate. Not even all this, however, could gain entrée into the Court of Letters. When one has nothing new to say, or cannot make his own bouquet of other men's roses, he is a pleb, not a prince.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox has evoked harmonies from every string of the human harp. Out of the mysterious recesses of her spirit, with a well-garnished mind, excited by the ardor of a blood of Saxon origin, yet Latin in warmth, she has fascinatingly sung the whole gamut of life's tones.

LOUIS LOMBARD.

THE WALDORF, NEW YORK, July 15, 1897.

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WAS IT SUICIDE ?

WHY MARRIAGE IS SOMETIMES A FAILURE

Morris Hobart and his wife had separated. After nearly three years of married life they pronounced it a failure, and resolved to walk divided ways.

When the fact finally crept out, the world was divided, as is usual in such cases, into the "Who'd-have-thought-its" and the "I-told-you-sos," the latter force of course the larger. Many women who had vainly angled for Morris in the fish-pond of society, and who had sneered at his marriage with pretty, innocent Maud Clyde, were included among the "I-told-you-sos."

There is nothing which acts so like balm upon the wounds of disappointed love, in the breast of the ordinary woman, as the knowledge that the man is unhappy in his marriage. But the woman who had loved Morris Hobart with all her heart for twelve years, was unable to explain her own emotions when she heard of his separation from his wife.

This woman was Sybl Sanders. Twelve years previous, while they were classmates at college, she

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had fallen desperately in love with Morris Hobart; but he treated her with an air of good comradeship which stung the passionate-hearted girl almost to madness. One day, to arouse him to a sense of her worth, she began a most pronounced flirtation with Morris' room-mate, Joel Sanders. The fellow became her enamored suitor from that hour, and Morris watched the wooing with smiling eyes of approval. Finally, he struck the death-blow to Sybl's last hope by urging her to accept his friend, who, he declared, would make her the best husband in the world.

Sybl married Joel in less than two months after that, and buried her secret from him and all the world. She was just eighteen; and before she was twenty-three Joel had left her a widow, with the memory of five unhappy years of married life, which her youth, her inexperience, and the petty tyranny which usually is their accompaniment, had helped to render altogether unsatisfactory. Sadder and wiser, she now looked her old dream in the eyes and found it just as fascinating as ever. Morris was unmarried, and living alone with servants in the old family mansion on Tenth Street. Stories floated to her ears of the card parties and wine suppers held under that ancestral roof, and she wondered how long he would be contented with that sort of life.

"It all depends on how much of real worth there is in a man," she said to herself, when she had begun



to lighten her widow's black with lavenders and grays. "The duration of a man's bachelorhood is measured by his moral worth, after twenty-five or six, and Morris is twenty-seven. Unless he is very frivolous and easily satisfied with poor pleasures, a man begins to feel restless about that age. He does not know why, but the old delights pall upon him, and he is disgusted with pleasure. At thirty he knows what is the matter with him, but he sees so much unhappiness in married life he is afraid to venture. At thirty-two the sense of dissatisfaction with his life overcomes his fears, and if he is not married at thirty-five, it is owing to some trick of Fate. That is the way I analyze the really worthy young men in whom pleasure has not hypnotized, or vice destroyed, those noble, God-given longings for pure affection, and the desire for offspring. And Morris is twenty-seven, and I am twenty-five." Sybl finished her reverie with a sigh.

Three years later she received the announcement of Morris Hobart's marriage. It had been a bitterer disappointment to her than the first. A woman of twenty-eight loves as much more deeply than a girl of eighteen as her years of power and beauty are fewer. As her perspective shortens, her passions increase, and her emotions strengthen. Morris had called upon her frequently during her widowhood, and, though he had spoken no word of love, his manner had lost the old air of comradeship

that is so fatal to sentiment. Sybl had luxuriated in happy dreams, when one day Morris announced to her a contemplated pedestrian tour, interspersed with hunting and fishing.

"I shall be gone about six weeks," he said, "and when you see me again I shall resemble our original American in complexion."

Three months later she received his wedding-cards. He had married Maud Clyde, a pretty, unsophisticated country-girl of nineteen, whom he had met by chance in his pedestrian tour. In trying to reach the nearest village where hotel accommodations were to be found, and where he wished to pass his Sunday, he had missed his way after night-fall, and had asked for shelter at the door of a commodious country-house, whose surroundings evinced culture and prosperity, and he had remained under the shelter of its restful roof until Monday morning.

The repose of its atmosphere, the fresh beauty of the young girl, her simplicity and naturalness of manner, all refreshed his somewhat *blase* heart, as cool water refreshes the parched throat. He had been thrown in contact all his life with coquettes and sirens, beautiful as dreams, and gifted with every seductive art known to women; but he had laughed at their wiles, and escaped their witcheries heart free. Tired of his freedom and surfeited with the pleasures of a bachelor life, he yet was too suspicious of the sex to place his future happiness in the hands of any woman. He admired Sybl Sanders'

mental accomplishments, and was moved by her voluptuous beauty, but widows had ever been to him special objects of distrust, and he steeled himself against his growing pleasure in her society; and now, swift and unexpected, came Cupid's shaft, through the sweet, untroubled eyes of Maud Clyde.

"Here is Nature's woman," thought the world-sated bachelor—"no dressmaker's creation, no society decoy. Here is a heart to trust, and a soul unspotted by the world." And so he married her three months later, and brought her to reign mistress over his home, so long dumb to the music of a woman's voice.

Undeniable beauty, a quietness of manner that could pass for repose, youth, and the education that comes from books and not from contact with people, were sufficient accomplishments to steer the young bride through the difficult, rock surrounded passages of first introductions to her husband's circle. She did not play, sing, recite, ride, fence, or swim, like most of his former lady friends, as they discovered soon to their secret delight; yet that delight was modified when they stopped to realize that in spite of all their accomplishments they were still single, and this unfinished rustic beauty had won a matrimonial prize.

Maud was looked at, analyzed, discussed pro and con, and very soon forgotten; for Morris seemed to drop curiously out of all social life soon after his marriage. Maud returned but few of the calls his

friends had made her, and exhibited an unmistakable coldness to those upon whom she did call. Sybl found her especially unapproachable; and it was a relief to her, beyond expression, when, six months after Morris' marriage, she was able to go abroad with a younger sister, the wife of a retired physician, for an extended tour.

They had been absent from America more than two years, when one day Sybl and her sister, Mrs. Converse, came face to face with Morris, in a London jewelry establishment.

"And when did you arrive? And how and where is the pretty wife?" queried Sybl, controlling her inward excitement at the sudden encounter, as only a skilled *mondaine* can.

"I arrived day before yesterday, and I left Mrs. Hobart quite well in New York, last week," Morris answered quietly.

"Ah? Then you are only here for a flying business trip, I suppose. I hope you will be able to go back with us the early part of next month?" said Mrs. Converse, who, like most sisters, had never penetrated the inner shrine of Sybl's heart or discovered her secret.

"On the contrary, I am here for a prolonged and possibly continued stay," Morris replied, without meeting her eyes. Then, turning to Sybl, he added, gravely, "May I come and see you? I have something to tell you—something I would rather you should hear from my own lips than in any garbled

form of gossip. We have been friends so long, and you are the only one to whom I could speak of it. May I call to-morrow?"

So on the morrow he called, and Sybl heard, with a torturing medley of emotions, the startling fact that he had separated from his wife.

"Separated! Oh! you would not, could not join that ever-increasing, vulgar horde of people who give their domestic discords to feed the public's depraved appetite?" she cried. "Oh, I cannot imagine you doing such a thing!" Morris winced under her words.

"I hope the public will be cheated of its feast in this case," he answered. "So far, no one but yourself knows of the separation from me, and I am sure no one will hear of it from Maud at once. We talked the matter over very quietly, and Maud decided to remain in the house for several months, simply saying that I am away on business. In June she can close the house, ostensibly for the summer, and go away not to return. She will be well provided for. I have taken the foreign position our house calls for, and shall remain here. Of course if Maud wishes to marry again, she can, after a time, apply for a divorce on the grounds of desertion, and obtain it. No doubt she will; a woman is never content without a lover or a slave to use her tyranny over. I had ceased to be her lover, and I refused to be her slave; but some other man, doubtless, will fill the vacancy. God pity him!" He laughed bitterly.

"Oh, how calmly you say that you 'ceased to be her lover'!" cried Sybl. "Why, that is enough to explain the whole trouble, with the fault all at your door. Did you think because you married her you need not be her lover any longer?" Morris shook his head.

"You misunderstand me," he explained. "I ceased to be her lover because she ceased to be lovable. Although we swear to love a woman forever, we cannot do so if she relinquishes every charm of manner that won that love, and reveals herself to us in a new and disagreeable light; when neatness verges into slovenliness, sweetness into tyranny, amiability into nagging, life becomes a burden to the poor man, and retreat or suicide is his only alternative. I chose the former, as I do not like to go where I am not invited, in this world or the next."

"But would it not have been more manly to stay and overcome such little difficulties as you refer to? Dispositions are like watches, and often need much judicious adjusting before two people can live happily with each other."

"If one disposition only is adjusted, and the other runs wild, both are liable to get sadly out of time," suggested Morris sadly. "I made concession after concession to Maud, but she never made *one* to me. The more I yielded, the more she demanded, and gave nothing in return; and she still continued so complaining and unhappy that I found further effort

useless, so I have left her to undisturbed freedom."

"But I do not understand what it could all be about. What *could* have occurred to induce you to take such a grave step? I am an Episcopalian, and the thought of a separation—a divorce!—is terrible to me. I am sure, with your early training, you must feel the same, and that you had a more serious cause to leave Maud than you have yet explained to me." Sybl's voice trembled with excitement.

"A succession of petty miseries is harder to combat or endure than some great trouble," Morris answered, gravely. "Sybl, I made the great mistake of marrying a young girl who was wholly ignorant of life as it is. I believed I was insuring my happiness: instead, I was forfeiting it. I find it requires something more than beauty and goodness in a wife to keep a man contented. Maud is too good. I had always enjoyed a game of cards: she was horrified at the sight of them, burned every pack in the house before we had been married a week, and to please her I relinquished the companionship of all my card-playing chums—nice fellows, too, every one. She did not seem for one moment to realize that this was any sacrifice on my part. She looked upon it as my duty. Next, she made me understand that all my society lady friends she regarded as intriguing rivals. If I praised a lady, it was a signal for her to attack her with sarcasm. To save scenes I gradually avoided all my old friends. Cigar smoke she abhorred, and I was not permitted to smoke in-

doors. Every hour I passed away from her I was compelled to account for, or to endure a season of pouts or hysteria. Imagine this sort of existence for a man accustomed all his life to do exactly as he pleased! She robbed me of all my old pleasures, and gave me no new ones as a recompense. These may seem small faults; but a swarm of flies can smother a man to death, you know. Life became unendurable; I broke from her restraint and spent most of my time at the clubs. Then I felt ashamed of myself, and resolved one day to go home and begin wooing Maud over again. She met my advances with reproaches. Before twenty-four hours passed she destroyed the last remaining charm she possessed for me, her discretion, by endeavoring to arouse my jealousy. That led to hot words, and to the final deliberate conclusion to separate. So here I am, and there she is, and the story is done."

After a long silence Sybl said slowly, "You must make it all up and return to her."

"Impossible!" he responded firmly. "You do not know Maud, or you would not advise such a course. She would bury me under recriminations and hold the reins the tighter. She is one of those gentle-looking creatures who has a heart as stubborn as a wall of rock; and she has all the narrow prejudices often found in people who have kept unspotted from the world. Ah, Sybl, I used to suspect every society-woman of possible treachery, and the more a woman knew of the world the less faith I had in

her. My God! haven't I been well punished?" he cried. "There is no crafty adventuress who could have more effectually destroyed my domestic life than this guileless girl has done. And, now that it is too late, I realize what happiness I might have had in life—happiness that seems to me like paradise lost."

He was treading on dangerous ground, and Sybl felt her blood surging through her veins like wind-blown river-currents. Here was the look in his eyes, and here was the sound in his voice, for which she had waited twelve years. A fierce joy took possession of her for a moment. In spite of all the barriers which both of them had interposed by their reckless marriages, at last he realized the happiness which her love would have brought him! Then terror and shame succeeded delight, and she said coldly:

"I think we have said all there is to say on this unhappy subject, Morris. I am sorry for both of you. I shall not see you again before we sail, but hope you will feel assured that I shall guard your secret as sacredly as long friendship would demand. Yet you cannot hide marital infelicity from the world, Morris; like a serpent concealed under a box, it will crawl out and leave its venomous trail as it goes."

Sybl spoke with strong emphasis, that she might hide from him her weak heart; but a man of any discernment reads a woman's emotions through any

disguise of words, especially if that woman loves him. Morris saw with clear vision the state of excitement under which Sybl was laboring: her pupils dilated, her bosom heaved, her cheek glowed and then paled with the intensity of her emotion. Morris was in that dangerous sympathy longing mood of a heart on the rebound, which has proven the Waterloo of many a strong principled man and woman similarly situated. Sybl had forgotten her church, her creed, her prudence, in that moment. Twelve years seemed to roll away, and she was again a young girl, and Morris was the youth she adored. He felt the magnetism of her presence like an electric current, and reached out and touched her hand.

"Sybl," he cried, and his voice choked; but his touch and his voice aroused her to a sense of their danger.

"Good night," she said coldly and abruptly, and left the room.

When on the following day she told her sister of Morris' domestic troubles, Mrs. Converse was consumed with that sweet pity and desire to aid which happy young wives often feel for others less fortunate.

"We must go right and call upon Mrs. Hobart as soon as we reach home," she said, "and try and help the poor thing to win her husband back. I am sure all she needs is a little sober thought about the matter."

"But we cannot offer her advice upon this subject," cried Sybl; "indeed, we are not supposed to know that she is in trouble. Morris said that you and the doctor alone were to share his confidence in this matter, and it would never do to speak of it to her."

"Oh, of course not; but we might aid her without speaking of her affairs, you know. I feel as if I must bring them together."

"They should never have come together in the beginning," said Sybl, with a tone in her voice that caused her sister to look at her sharply; and they did not refer to the topic again until they reached New York. Then it was Sybl who renewed it by asking her sister to go with her to make the proposed call upon Morris' wife.

"I have decided to ask her to go with us to the sea-shore this summer," Sybl said. "If she goes with us it will postpone any gossip about her affairs. You know her only relative, a stepmother, died last year. She has no one to go to, and she is so young and pretty she will be sure to excite remark if she lives alone. We owe Morris this much, from our long acquaintance with him."

But in fact Sybl was planning for her own safety. So constantly and persistently did the thought of Morris' look and tone haunt her, that she was frightened at her own peril.

"Unless I take speedy and severe measures with myself," she said frankly to that person, "I shall

soon be one of those common, vulgar women, so frequently met with in these days of easy divorce, who wait for some technicality of law to free the men with whom they are infatuated. Ugh! how I should loathe myself! If I keep Morris' wife before my eyes every day for three months, it will serve to put my mind in a straight-jacket."

When the cards of the sisters were conveyed to Maud her brow contracted, and her color went and came excitedly. Because Morris had praised Sybl highly, she had always regarded her as a rival, and some subtle instinct made her feel a great sense of relief when Sybl went abroad. Tears of anger came to her eyes as she read the names upon the card.

"She has heard some gossip, and she has come to triumph over me. I knew well enough she and Morris were lovers before I met him. But I will go down and meet her, and show her that I am not to be pitied or crushed," she said to herself.

She wiped her eyes and arranged her hair, and assuming the smile with which every woman understands how to mask her heart-ache, she walked into the presence of her rival. Sybl rose to greet her with an expression in her eyes so sincere and kind that Maud was instantly disarmed, and the visitor's succeeding words completed the surrender of arms.

"We have come to ask you if you will not join us in our country home for the summer," Sybl said. "We met Mr. Hobart for just a moment at a Lon-

don jeweler's, as we were leaving, and he said he was to be abroad all summer on business. So my sister and I decided to carry you off by force with us, knowing you to be without near relatives who could combat our claim. Will you go with us? We leave next week."

For answer Maud put her hands to her face and burst into tears. Young Mrs. Converse's arm was about her in a moment.

"There; you are all unnerved already from staying here alone," she said soothingly, "and you need a change. You *must* go, and that decides it, doesn't it, dear?"

"It will be such a relief to go away from this wretched house, I am so miserable!" sobbed Maud.

"Of course you are, with your husband kept away by this tiresome business," interrupted Sybl, who wanted to avoid confidences if possible; and she began a rapid talk about the country-house, and what was necessary for Maud to take there, in the way of wardrobe, until the young wife's composure was quite restored, and when they took their departure the matter was amiably settled.

"It will be especially nice for us to have you with us during these first few weeks, because Dr. Converse is going away on a fishing expedition," was Mrs. Converse's parting remark, "and we shall be forlornly lonely without him."

Dr. Converse and his wife were an ideally happy couple, and during her first three days under their

roof Maud felt a sense of angry resentment at Fate for having robbed her of domestic happiness. "I am just as good a woman as Mrs. Converse," she said to herself. "Why did my husband so soon cease to care for me, and desert me, while hers is all devotion? I wonder what spite heaven has against me?"

The morning of the fourth day Dr. Converse set out upon his fishing and hunting expedition into the mountains. "I wish you all sorts of good luck, and twenty-three hours and three-quarters of happiness each day; but that bad quarter remaining, I hope you will be homesick for me," laughed Mrs. Converse, as she waved her hand from the door-way to her husband in the carriage, and turned back to that most desolate of places, a home from which the strong, masterful force of a good husband is missing. She had been smiling; but as she turned toward her husband's vacant chair she broke into tears, and left the room suddenly.

"Oh! why did she let him go? How could he go away and leave her?" cried Maud, indignantly, as soon as she and Sybl were alone together. "He did not realize how lonely she would be; a man never does realize those things unless he is *made* to. Why did she hide her feelings so before he went?"

"Because she loves him, and therefore wants him to enjoy his vacation," Sybl answered, gently. "If she had loved herself the better of the two, as so many wives do, she would have ruined his pleasure

by an exhibition of the sacrifice she was making in letting him go."

"No man can understand a woman's love, anyway!" continued Maud, whose heart was full of bitter remaiscences. "They are so indifferent to love themselves, they cannot realize all it means to us. They cannot love us as we love them."

"All men are not alike, any more than all women, in this respect," said Sybl softly. "Undoubtedly men find more distraction outside of love than women do. They would not be men if they did not; they would simply be another type of women, and we would not care for them. But being loved is only the second best thing in life, you know. The best thing is loving. I consider that woman highly blessed who finds herself in love with her husband, even if he does not fully reciprocate. It is far the more desirable state than being loved by one she does not care for, and far, far better than loving one who has no right to her affection." There was a tone of bitterness in her words.

"How strangely you talk," said Maud, whose childish mind had never been used to greater exertions than whimsical, fault-finding reveries and conventional ideas of the wrongs of womankind.

"Why, no; it is not strange if you stop to think about it," continued Sybl. "I am sure a woman of any depth would, if she were given her choice, prefer to be half-loved by a man whom she could respect and adore, than to be adored by a man whom she could only half love."

"But a woman would not be satisfied with either condition: we want to be adored by the man we adore," cried Maud. Sybl smiled.

"Naturally that would be the desirable state of things. That would be perfect happiness. But I am talking of those who do not find perfection; and I think to be able to love one's own husband, even if he does not fully reciprocate, would be the next best degree of happiness for a woman. It would give her a chance to win his love by the exhibition of her tact, sense, and charm."

"A man does not appreciate the same qualities in a woman after marriage, which he admires before. He seems to want something novel all the time, to keep him entertained," said Maud sarcastically.

"There is where tact comes in play," suggested Sybl. "There is no beauty that will not pall, no goodness that will not weary the average man of the world; but tact will keep him interested when everything else fails. You have to study a man as a physician studies a patient, if you wish to keep him in good mental and moral condition, and, if need be, change his medicines every hour. The tonic that agreed with his affection yesterday may kill it today, and you must foresee the symptoms and treat him accordingly. There is no disease so complicated as love."

Maud looked curiously at her companion.

"What a very happy marriage yours must have been to teach you all this wisdom," she said. "I am sure you must have made a perfect wife."

"On the contrary, my marriage was a failure, and I made my husband wretched. That was how I came to study human nature. We learn more in a month of sorrow than we do in a year of joy. I learned, when too late, that I had been the cause of my own misery. My husband had been alienated from me by my own petty tyranny, and he had sought the society of other and more agreeable women because I rendered myself disagreeable in small matters. Yet the outside world considered me a martyr to a faithless husband, as it does many a wife who is really the one first at fault. I have an idea that in eight cases out of ten, when a husband ceases to love his wife, the fault *begins* with her. I can see where all my married misery began, and how it could have been averted."

Maud's face darkened.

"I do not agree with you," she said brusquely. "Men are selfish, unsympathetic, and inconstant by nature. We give up everything for them, and they are not willing to give up anything for us."

"On the contrary, marriage, a true, loyal marriage, means more gain and less sacrifice to a woman than to a man," said Sybl. "But we will need another day to discuss that; I am sure I can convince you, if I take time."

"Little fool!" she added to herself, "how in the world could a man like Morris fall in love with such an empty-headed creature! It is no wonder he tired of her."

All that night she lay awake with the most torturing thoughts; she saw Maud in all her pretty inanity and pettiness of mind; she understood the guileless simplicity which had won Morris at first, and had palled upon him, and how wholly she had disillusioned him with her village view of his habits and her small tyrannies. "She can never, never be a mate for him," she said to herself, with a savage joy. "It is useless to try to bring them together; it could only result in renewed misery for both. She has so light a nature she will not be crushed by a final separation. Indeed, I can fancy her taking her troubles into the courts, with a malicious spirit of revenge at his neglect, and rejoicing in her bill of divorce. There are no children to be disgraced or fought over, and why not let the matter take its own course? Morris no longer loves her—indeed, he never loved her. It was a summer fancy for a pretty, unsophisticated girl; but he has never learned the first rudiments of love, and oh! how long and well I have loved him!" She buried her face in her pillow and broke into wild weeping.

In the morning she came down to her guest with the calm light of a new resolve shining in her eyes.

"You are a little pale," she said to Maud at the breakfast table. "I think we both need exercise. Now I propose to teach you to fence while you are here, and that will be great sport for us, and great benefit as well. Will you place yourself under my tuition? I took the prize in my class, years ago, so I am sure I can teach you properly."

"I never cared for those things," Maud replied indolently, "but if it will please you I am willing to learn. I never saw much use for such accomplishments for a woman."

"You will find the benefit to your health, and consequently to your beauty, after you have begun to learn," Sybl answered. "I want you to learn to swim, ride, and fence during this summer. I am going to teach you all three accomplishments. We have a fine surf below us here, and in August the water is delightful. You have no idea how much added pleasure one gets out of life by these accomplishments, and you must not write a word of what you are doing to your husband, but keep it all to surprise him when he comes. I am sure he will be delighted to find you making such good use of your time."

Maud looked steadily at Sybl a moment, and then broke forth suddenly, as if a long-resisted temptation had again seized and overcome all resolution.

"Mrs. Sanders—Sybl—you must not be deceived in my affairs any longer. Morris and I do not correspond. We could not live together happily, and we have separated for good."

"For bad, rather, you should say," replied Sybl gravely. "Married people cannot separate for good. But I must, in my turn, tell you that is no news to me. Mor—your husband intimated as much to us when we met him abroad, and that is why we sought

you out. Both my sister and I felt sure it was all a mistake, and that if we could keep the public from suspecting it, you would come together again and be happy."

"Never!" said Maud, with set lips. "Morris showed too plainly that he did not love or respect me, and that he was tired of me. I could never live with a man who did not love me."

"Make a study of how to win him back, and compel him to fall in love with you over again. That would be a greater triumph than the first. I am sure you merely misunderstood each other. I am determined that you shall surprise him by your increased beauty, your added charms and accomplishments, and your tact, when he next sees you. It seems to me nothing could be so delicious and exciting and triumphal as to win back the heart of a man who believed he had ceased to love you."

Sybl's eyes shone and her cheeks glowed. She inspired Maud with a portion of her own excitement.

"It would be a triumph to win him back only to cast him off. I would like nothing better than to pay him off in his own coin. I think your ideas are worth listening to, if for no other reason than this. I will put myself under your tuition at once. Make me as charming as yourself, and I will be satisfied that I can succeed."

Sybl left the room hastily, and shut herself in her own apartment. She was in a white heat of rage and disgust.

"The small-souled, narrow-minded little idiot!" she gasped. "To think of revenging herself upon the man she loves!—Oh! what a pitiable sort of excuse for love such a heart as hers contains! Only the most ignoble nature could have such an ambition as that. And of all men on earth to think such thoughts of Morris—the noblest of men. Why! if she could win him back she ought to be willing to grovel in the dust at his feet."

She thought of the difference between the wife's love and her own, and cried out against merciless Fate.

"I would die, die so gladly, if I might be his wife for one hour—yes, even his unloved wife," she sobbed. "If I might have the right to show him how deeply I love him, to lavish this pent-up passion at his feet, I would count death an easy price to pay for one such hour of bliss. And she—" Then she started up and caught her breath in sudden shamed terror and self-loathing.

"He is another woman's husband: nothing can ever give me the right to love him but this woman's death," she thought. "I must conquer myself, I must make Maud worthy of him. I *must* reunite them; it is my only safeguard."

II

The next day Maud began her lessons in physical development. In an incredibly short time she became a fearless rider and a fair fencer. A party of gentlemen and ladies came down from the city for a few days in August, and among them was the impressionable managing editor of a daily paper. Among the society personals which appeared in its columns, the following Sunday, was a flattering reference to the beauty and skillful equestrianism of "the lovely young wife of Mr. Morris Hobart."

A marked copy went out in the next foreign mail, addressed to Morris Hobart. The address was in Sybl's hand.

"If he is thinking of any woman aside from his wife, with regret or desire," she said, "this will remind him that he has a wife, and it will tell him that she is my guest."

The newspaper item affected Maud as the first glass of a stimulant sometimes affects a youth. She conceived a strong passion for newspaper notices; and when any woman in private life becomes affected with this fever, she is almost sure to reach the court-room or the stage before very long.

In the beginning the desire for newspaper praise caused Maud to devote herself with great enthusiasm to all her new accomplishments. She longed

to achieve fame as a horsewoman, a swimmer, an athlete. As is often the case when one enterprising reporter has set his seal upon a lady as a "belle," others follow suit; and Sybl was alarmed to find Maud's name in nearly every "woman's column" of the Sunday papers. She was described as young, beautiful, wealthy, accomplished, and vivacious; her costumes and her various achievements as an *equestrienne* and fencer were written about; and Maud suddenly found herself a belle, whom every eye regarded wherever she appeared. She enjoyed it all with the zest of a school-girl, and Sybl regarded her with eyes of astonishment.

"She seems to have utterly forgotten Morris, and is perfectly happy in this silly role of married belle, which has been created for her by a few newspaper items," thought Sybl, with pained surprise.

Among the men who came to the villa was a young Englishman whom Dr. Converse had met abroad, and who had renewed the acquaintance on his arrival in America for a season. He was young, effeminate, and full of affectations. With but a small income he managed to make a fashionable appearance in dress, and lived in a manner calculated to impress Americans with his social eminence. His object in visiting America was to seek a rich heiress and marry her. Maud was one of the first ladies whom he encountered and his attentions to her became so marked in a brief time that Sybl found it necessary to remonstrate with her. Maud broke into tears at the mention of Arnold Crossman's name.

"He is the first man who ever understood me," she sobbed. "He says I am a creature to be loved, petted, cared for, and sheltered like a delicate plant. He says I am made to dwell in old ancestral halls, and to have servants follow me about anticipating every wish, and a noble lover to kneel at my feet, happy if he might kiss my hand. He says I am too sensitive a nature to be mated to a commercial-minded American."

"Oh, hush, hush!" cried Sybl, shocked. "You have no right to listen to such words from any man—no right to repeat them. I had no idea he had dared to talk to you like this. You are a wife; you should not forget that for one moment, Maud."

"A deserted wife. Yes; I have not forgotten it," Maud retorted quickly. "Mr. Crossman says that the man who could desert me must be a brute."

"Oh! Surely you did not tell him of your domestic troubles," cried Sybl aghast. "Surely you did not, Maud."

"It came out so accidentally," explained Maud. "Something he said made me cry, and he was so sympathetic, and then it came out; and he says he felt drawn to me the moment he saw me, and that he never felt the same toward any other woman."

"Oh, don't!" cried Sybl, holding up both hands as if to ward off blows instead of words. "That is all so old, Maud—such worn-out trash, that every woman since Eve has listened to. If you had not been brought up in complete ignorance and inno-

cence you would be a far more discreet wife; and here you are jeopardizing your husband's name and your own reputation by listening to the veriest trash that an oily-tongued foreigner finds you silly enough to believe! Why, Maud, he talks that to every woman he meets; and he is no more in love with you than he is with Mrs. Converse. He is a fortune hunter, and he is merely amusing himself with you."

Before twenty-four hours had passed Maud discovered the truth of Sybl's words. Dr. Converse informed her that Mr. Crossman had been making inquiries of one of the gentlemen in the party regarding Maud's financial condition, and that he had expressed surprise, and something of indignation, at what he chose to term the "deception" that had been practiced upon him regarding Mrs. Hobart.

"I understood that she was very wealthy," he said; "and the lady herself gave me to understand that she was separated from her husband. I took the trouble to sympathize with her sorrows; but really it is not worth a fellow's time, if she has only a beggarly allowance from her husband, and no certainty of more in case of divorce."

Fortunately Mr. Crossman was called suddenly away that same day, and sent his adieux to the ladies through Dr. Converse. But the little affair was ferreted out by one of those spies who infest all circles of society in New York, in the interests of certain low-grade journals, and it appeared a few weeks

later in the "City Sewer" in most sensational paragraphs. No names were used, but everyone knew who was meant by "a certain pretty blonde who came to New York three years ago as the wife of a well-known society man who had long been the despair of designing mammas." The article went on to state how the handsome husband had gone abroad on a supposed business-trip which seemed indefinitely prolonged, and the pretty wife had become the guest of certain well-known ladies, and had blossomed out as the belle of the season at a certain resort not many hours from New York. Indeed, the husband's absence had not seemed to weigh upon the fair young wife's spirits, and she had shown herself so attractive that a certain young English swell had become enamored, and the fair young wife had confessed to him that her husband had gone not to return. But the English swell had set himself, with real foreign thrift, to discover the state of "ye fair ladye's" pocket-book before he caused a suit for incompatibility to come before the courts, and the result of his investigations had proved so disappointing that "ye English swell" had left the resort posthaste, and "ye fair wife" was now without husband or lover.

Fortunately it was the very end of the season when this atrocious article appeared, and Sybl could leave the resort the day after the publication in the "City Sewer," without any appearance of flight; but in reality she left a week sooner than she had an-

anticipated, to escape the gossip she dreaded might result from this scurrilous newspaper attack.

When she showed the article to Maud, that young lady only shrugged her shoulders, and said: "Isn't that horrid!" but with a half-smile upon her lips, which said plainly enough to Sybl that the silly girl was half-flattered by the prominence the paper had given her name.

Sybl was unable to sleep all that night, and her head ached and her eyes burned, as they journeyed back to New York. Her constant thought was of Morris, his chagrin and sorrow at Maud's actions, and his surprise that she had been permitted to make herself a subject of gossip while under her chaperonage. Her only hope was that he might not see the article, and that all gossip over it would die out before his return.

In less than a week after her return she was taken with fever, and it was spring before she left her room. During the first six weeks she was delirious, and Maud was constantly at her bedside. All the best part of Maud's nature was aroused by her friend's dangerous illness. She realized the strength and worth of Sybl's friendship and she devoted herself to her care day and night, until the patient was declared out of danger. During that time she made a startling discovery. In her delirium Sybl had called constantly upon Morris, begged him to return to his wife, cried out to him not to tempt her beyond her strength, and in a thousand

broken sentences betrayed her long-guarded secret.

"Remember my church," she cried once. "I could not be your wife were Maud to be divorced. Do not tempt me, Morris—dear Morris."

Maud's shallow heart was sounded to its depths by this discovery, and all the slumbering, inert love for her husband was awakened to sudden life at the knowledge that Morris was perhaps thinking of making Sybl his wife if she should set him free. As is frequently the case with such natures, the object of another woman's love seemed of greater worth in her eyes than when he was merely her own undisputed property.

In spite of her natural jealousy of disposition and the new fuel this discovery of Sybl's secret gave to the flame, Maud was compelled to admire and respect the nobility of her friend's character. She realized the strength and force which Sybl had exercised to guard her secret from all eyes, and she recalled her many counsels, and each word seemed to possess a new meaning now.

"She tried to make me worthy of being taken back into the heart of the man she loves, when by my final separation from him she might win him," thought Maud, as she leaned over the pallid face of the unconscious sufferer. "She is a noble woman, and a true Christian. I can never be half as good as she is, but I will try. When he comes back Morris shall not find me the same as he left me; and he shall not find me so utterly inferior to Sybl as he no doubt thinks me now."

The thought remained with her constantly, ranking in her bosom night and day, and driving all vanity and folly away. She thought of Morris as a general thinks of some disputed fort, and she realized the strength of her adversary.

"Sybl does not mean to be my adversary," she reasoned, "but if she loves Morris, as I am sure she does, all her religion and honor would fall before him if he once cast me wholly off and were free to woo her. Oh, how blind I have been!"

When Sybl began to convalesce she was surprised to find Maud changed in so many ways. She was earnest where she had been flippant, appreciative where she had been indifferent, thoughtful where she had been shallow. Sybl studied her with a new interest, in which her paradoxical feelings toward the girl were more strongly mixed than ever before. She had been disgusted and angered by Maud's shallowness and frivolity, and now she was irritated by her earnestness and devotion. She had been disappointed in Maud's failures to become the woman worthy to be Morris Hobart's wife, and now she was unhappy to find her liable to become worthy.

Maud was eager to take lessons in singing and French, and Sybl forced herself to encourage her; and as soon as Maud left the room she broke into tears of self-hatred and depreciation.

"I am so weak, so wicked, so selfish," she sobbed. "I said I was pained at Maud's worthlessness, but I was not—I was not. I was secretly glad of it; for

now that she has developed a new character and worth, it hurts me and irritates me. Dear God, have pity on me! My struggle has but just begun." But as her strength of body returned, her strength of will also returned, and she was able to play her old part with her accustomed success. She encouraged Maud in her studies, and aided her in every way to utilize her days to the best advantage.

Sybl was living very quietly, seldom going out, and seeing but few people, and those, old friends. Her illness, from which she was slowly recovering, lent a reasonable excuse for this; but the real cause was the gossip which the newspaper article had caused regarding Maud's estrangement from her husband. Sybl knew that she would be subjected to much unpleasant notoriety if she took Maud out with her. During her long illness, after she had regained consciousness she had resolved to separate from Maud, and to let the young woman work out her own destiny. She had felt a fierce sort of joy in the thought that her efforts had failed, sincere and earnest as they were; and now Morris must accept the destiny he had chosen in marrying such a woman; if she covered his name with disgrace with her folly, he, not Sybl, must hereafter deal with her.

But the great change in Maud rendered it impossible for Sybl to discard her now; so the only thing for her to do was to remain in seclusion with the young wife until Morris could be induced to return

and become reconciled to her. She sang duets, read French with her, and gave her long philosophical counsels, to which she found Maud ever eager to listen, even if she did not at once agree with her arguments.

One day Maud threw herself upon the lounge in Sybl's room after an hour of practice at the piano. Her golden hair was coiled high on her shapely head. Her oval face was far more beautiful than it had ever been before. The look of dull, peevish discontent, which had caused her to fade so quickly after her marriage, was replaced by one of animated interest and robust health. She had gained perceptibly in beauty, grace, and expression, since she had come to dwell with Sybl; but she had never been a tasteful dresser. Her garments were expensive and fashionable, but seldom becoming; and she was indifferent in the matter of hosiery and shoes and skirts.

As she lay stretched upon a lounge in all her grace, beauty, and youth, Sybl's eyes fell upon an inch of wrinkled, faded hose, and a glimpse of a frayed skirt displayed beneath the folds of a rich morning-gown. Her slippers were trodden down at the heel, and rusty at the toes.

"If I were a man," thought Sybl, "and she were my wife, that sight of her feet would send me to the club, I fear. Yes, it might send me to the theater, even, where I would sit in the front row and gaze with zest and appreciation on such glimpses of lace

frounces and trim slippers as were accorded me." She reveled in the thought for a moment, secretly delighted that she had again found Maud below par. Then she conquered herself and spoke.

"Maud, I want you to go with me to-morrow and make some purchases, just to please me. Buy a box of pretty hosiery, and two pair of slippers, and some dainty skirts in cambric, mull, or silk, as you may prefer. Will you?"

Maud lifted her blonde head by means of her two hands clasped under it, and peered down at her feet. "Am I so shabby?" she queried.

"Not absolutely shabby, but certainly not attractive, in some respects," Sybl replied. "Your gown is charming, your nails well kept, your hair well arranged; but your hosiery is faded and carelessly worn, your skirts frayed, your slippers out of shape. Were I a man, and ever so much in love with you, I should be disillusioned if I saw those things."

"Then I fear I should be disillusioned with my ideal of a man I love, if it depended on such poor objects as slippers and hose," responded Maud, with a tinge of sarcasm in her voice. "A man's love ought to be on a stronger basis than that."

"'Ought' and 'is' are different words," replied Sybl. "We take men as they are, when we marry them, and so we must make the best of them. If a man is not to be satisfied with goodness served plainly, we must put on a top salad-dressing of attractiveness, and garnish it with accomplishments."

First of all, we must keep them in love with us. We can do nothing if we lose their love; we can do everything if we keep it. No matter how earthly and unworthy neat slippers and hosiery may seem compared to a tender heart and an intelligent mind and a devoted love, we must cater to a man's appreciation of the former in order to make him value the latter. So long as there are women in the world, on the stage of theaters or elsewhere, who make themselves exquisitely attractive in these ways, for the gaze of masculine eyes, it behooves every wife to not become careless in any detail of her toilet."

"A wife would not like to compare herself to a variety actress," sneered Maud.

"That is just what she wants to avoid having her husband do, in spite of himself, to her disadvantage," retorted Sybl. "The sooner wives think of men as they are, the better for the safety of society. It is almost impossible to keep husbands true through appealing wholly to their mental and spiritual natures. Their physical tastes must be catered to adroitly, their earthly vision pleased. There are women who will think of these things if we do not. A wise wife lets her husband find no pleasing novelty, no fascination outside of his home, that he cannot find within. She makes herself as charming in dress, she renders herself as attractive in deportment, as less worthy women can be, to fascinate him, and she adds to all that the charm of moral worth and exclusiveness. Then she defies compari-

son from every standpoint with others. Eternal vigilance is the price of conjugal happiness."

"One grows careless living alone," said Maud. "You must remember I have had no husband to dress for during the last year."

"Nor I for thirteen years; but see!" and with a finger-tip and thumb Sybl lifted her simple cashmere gown, and displayed a fleeting glimpse of snowy mull, silken hose, and a trim bronze slipper. "If I were shipwrecked on an unpeopled island, I should polish my nails with the palm of my hand, daily," she said. "One should be ever ready, anywhere, to meet the most scrutinizing gaze of the man one loves."

Maud felt a spasm of jealousy contract her heart.

"If Morris, the man we both love, were to see us this minute, I know which would please his masculine taste the better," she thought; and then she said aloud, "I will buy hosiery and shoes by the wholesale to-morrow; and I will learn a few theatrical songs and dances to exhibit them, if you like," she added, laughing nervously.

"You need not go so far as that," replied Sybl. "I sometimes think I would like to start a training-school for young girls—a school to fit them for becoming wives. If they would follow my teachings, I believe eighteen out of every score would keep their husbands loyal and in love. I would have them understand mankind as it is, from the outset, and then I would teach them how to uplift and ex-

noble it. I think my opening address would be something like this. Consider yourself the school, Maud, and me the preceptress. Now listen."

Sybl assumed the school-teacher's air, rose and bowed to an imaginary audience, and began her address.

"Young ladies, you have entered this school to learn the most difficult, as well as the holiest task, that of keeping your husbands true and your homes pure. Let me tell you, to start with, that men are only in a chrysalis state of moral and spiritual development; therefore you must not expect the men you marry to regard all things, immediately, from the same ideal and moral standpoint as yourselves. If you undertake to argue or drive them into moral development, you will fail. They must be led, not driven. The world has allowed and forgiven men their shortcomings as husbands for so many centuries, they are quick to take advantage of this fact on small provocation. Take nothing for granted. Guard against all disillusionment. Keep yourselves models of virtue and constancy, but make yourselves mistresses of every art of entertainment, of every charm which less worthy women perfect themselves in.

"Keep your blood in circulation, study the science of health and every rule of physical development. Do not try to be angels; be perfect women in preference. Angels belong to the realm where there shall be no marrying and giving in marriage; they

are not meant for wives. Cultivate your mind, but do not become aggressively intellectual or argumentative. Seek wisdom rather than knowledge. Be good-natured, and tolerant toward all peculiarities of your husband. Meet irritability with good-humor, indifference with affection. Prove yourselves, each one of you, the most attractive woman, in all respects, that your husband can find, go where you will. Give him liberty of action; be his home-keeper, not his jailer. Let him realize that you need and expect a share of entertainment, and that in return he is to receive his share of liberal treatment and freedom of action. Do not make a scene if he sometimes goes out without you, but go to bed, and go to sleep; and if he wakens you on his return, don't refer to the hour. Tell him you hope he has enjoyed himself and, ten to one, you will find him ready to devote himself to you the following evening, like a lover.

"Learn to sing, and to play on one or two instruments, but be careful that you never sing while he wants to read aloud, and do not play noisy music while he is chatting with someone in the room; be willing to make your music an accompaniment for conversation.

"Appear as cheerful and happy as possible, at all times. A man likes a happy atmosphere, and is attracted to a cheerful woman, even if she is his wife. Study attractive women in all grades of life. Analyze, and adopt, if necessary, their methods of

pleasing, but keep ever in your mind that you must surpass them all in discretion and virtue. Consider no woman too far below you to emulate whatever charm she possesses, and let no woman surpass you in virtue and goodness.

"Let your husband find nowhere such entertainment as he finds at home, and compel him to respect you. Compel other men to make their admiration of you as a woman subservient to their respect for you as a model wife. Any vulgar woman can indulge in vulgar flirtations; prove that you can avoid the semblance of one. Cultivate warm affection and display it at times, no matter how undemonstrative your husband may be. Praise his friends, and cultivate the acquaintance of every lady he admires. Avoid wounding his feelings in small matters, and show a disposition toward economy; yet let him realize that money is necessary to the keeping up of an attractive home. Be modest, but do not be prudes in your homes. Act the prude toward all other men, but occasionally be a little coquettish with your husband, is a safe rule of conduct. Never let him see an action or hear a word that is vulgar, in his home; but do not keep him in a strait-jacket of conventionality. Be—"

"Be perfection, in fact," interrupted Maud, "and then find oneself deserted for the club six nights out of seven, quite likely. You would have a woman a Venus, a Diana, a Circe, a Vesta, all in one, Sybl; and even the Creator did not make such a goddess as that."

"The Creator only began us; we are to finish the work ourselves, with the aid of the god of love. I think a woman might combine the four in one, if, by so doing, she believed she could keep the heart of the man she adored."

"She can try, at least," Maud answered soberly.

A few weeks later a brief epistle crossed the ocean, like a carrier-dove of peace; it was written by Sybl, and was addressed to Morris Hobart. It contained but few lines.

"Your wife has been an inmate of my home for the past year," it said. "During that time she has greatly changed. The barriers of your happiness are broken down. She is no longer a silly, prejudiced village-girl; she is a wise and liberal woman. She loves you, she is lonely for you. Come home to her." No answer came.

In July Mrs. Converse and Sybl proceeded to their seashore cottage at Bedford. Maud accompanied them. A week after their arrival Sybl found it necessary to return to the city for the day on a matter of business. Just as she took her seat in the shore-bound train, toward nightfall, someone spoke her name. Looking up, she met Morris Hobart face to face.

"I posted a letter to you a few hours ago," he said, as they sat down in the same compartment. "I hope no one else will receive it before you arrive. It was

quite personal. I called at the house to see you, and was told that you were at the shore."

"I came in this morning on some business affairs," she explained. "When did you arrive?"

"Almost a week ago."

"So long?" she exclaimed, "and did not let us know of it? O, Morris!"

"I went out to Bedford the day after I arrived in New York," Morris answered gravely. "It was evening when I reached the hotel, but before I dined I walked up to your cottage. The blinds were open, and I saw the interior of the cottage. You sat by yourself, evidently lost in deep thought. Maud—Mrs. Hobart—sat near the open window, singing a plantation melody, and there was a group of gentlemen surrounding her. I came away and returned to the city on a late train. You had awakened in my heart a spark of sympathy for Maud, by your letter describing her loneliness. What I saw fully and forever quenched that spark. I returned to ponder over the situation. While here my attention has been called to a most scandalous article which appeared in the 'City Sewer' last summer. I have also heard the gossip rife about my affairs. I wrote you how I felt on the subject, in the letter just posted. I asked to see you alone. This opportunity has come, and we will understand each other at once. I—"

"Let me explain about the gentlemen who were at the cottage last week," interposed Sybl, excitedly.

"They were a party of strangers, gentlemen from the West, whom Dr. Converse had known at college. They were making a flying trip through the East, and sent their cards to their old comrade. He called upon them at the hotel, and asked them down to the shore as his guest for one day. They dined with us, and after dinner Maud played and sang for them, at Dr. Converse's express wish. This is the truth, Morris."

Morris bowed coldly, with unmoved countenance.

"Yes, I believe you," he said. "But how about the scandal last summer?—before I had been three months absent. I knew Maud was shallow, but I certainly was not prepared to have her conduct herself quite so frivolously so soon. It is no use to argue with me, Sybl. I have appreciated your action in this matter, most highly. You meant to befriend Maud, and to protect her from gossip. You meant to do me a service. But you could not remake a nature like Maud's. I came home thinking that if it were all as you said in your brief letter, I would try to make the best of a bad affair and go back to her, though my heart was dead to the old affection I once entertained for her. It was affection, not love. I know I never loved, never could love but one woman, and that one—yourself. Your devotion to Maud in this crisis of our lives has only added fuel to the flame; and when I saw you sitting apart, looking sad and preoccupied, and Maud laughing and nodding to the half dozen men about her

chair, a great wave of feeling took possession of me, and I said: 'I will not sacrifice my future on the altar of a false duty. I will not let Sybl sacrifice hers on the altar of a false creed. Maud shall have her freedom, and she shall marry whomsoever she will; but I will marry my own true love, whom I ought to have married thirteen years ago.' I am going out to Bedford to have a plain business talk with Maud. She will gladly let me have my freedom, I know; and I can make her a wealthy young *divorcee*, whom all the newspapers will be ready to launch into the notoriety she loves. And you and I will go abroad and live for each other away from it all. Let the world's tongue wag as it will; we have both suffered enough for duty's sake, we will live the rest of our lives for love's sake."

His voice was low and steady; the words poured in a torrent from his lips; his eyes shone; his face was pale with suppressed passion.

Sybl's face was turned toward the window before he had ceased speaking. She closed her eyes and listened like one in a dream. The train rattled a noisy accompaniment to his words; she was conscious of a wish that it might go on forever, only to pause at the station of death. She was steeped in a luxury of the senses. The car was dimly lighted; Morris and she were virtually alone. He was beside her—loved her—he was telling her of a way which seemed to open the doors of Paradise to her tortured heart. Maud would not mind the disappointment

after a little. She would be quite content to pose as a *divorcee*. They would go away and leave all the gossip and the scandal behind them. Other women had married divorced men, and society had forgiven them—other women who had not loved so long and well as she—

"Bed—ford!" cried the brakeman's voice, "Bedford!" and the glaring electric lights of the station shone in upon her, and in its ghastly rays Morris' face looked like the face of the dead.

"Dead to me—dead to me," she said to herself; then, aloud, "It will be all different when you see Maud. I shall not tell her of this meeting. You must send her a note and appoint an interview. However you decide in regard to her, I can never be your wife, Morris. My creed forbids. I should never know a happy hour. Besides, Maud loves you, and will make you a good wife now. I have helped her to understand her duty to you. Good night, Morris."

She glided away from him and was lost in the shadows.



The ladies were leaving the cottage for the bathing-beach the next morning, when a message came for Maud. She read it and turned to Sybl with gleaming eyes.

"Morris is at the hotel, he is coming to see me this afternoon," she whispered. "O, Sybl, pray for

me! Pray that he may not be disappointed in me."

They went down to the beach. The tide was in, and the surf just strong enough for vigorous bathing.

A few people were already disporting themselves in the waves. Sybl seemed excited and full of high spirits.

"Let us go in and have a good swim," she said. "I feel as if I could race with sharks, this morning."

The three ladies were soon in the water. Maud had become an expert swimmer, and she soon caught the infection of her friend's mood.

"Let us have a race," she said, "out to the buoy and back. One—two—three—go!"

They set out with slow, even stroke, shoulder to shoulder. When they reached the buoy Maud was half a head in advance. As they turned for the home-stretch, she gave a sharp cry. Sybl glanced at her and saw her white face distorted with pain. She had been caught with a sudden cramp. At that moment the demon awoke in Sybl's heart and seemed to take mastery of her. She made a long stroke toward shore, calling out to Maud to follow, as if she had not seen her danger. Still another and another stroke, but Maud did not follow.

"Well, what of it? Is it my fault if she is seized with a cramp? How should I know it?—bent upon the race as I am. If I tried to save her we might both drown."

Still another stroke toward shore, where she could see and recognize the people who moved to and fro.

"Sybl! Sybl! save me!" cried the agonized voice behind her; and just at that moment Sybl saw a tall form on the beach, standing beside her sister. It was Morris.

With a swift, dexterous motion of one hand she reversed her position in the water, and with the velocity and grace of some sea-born creature, she glided back to where the almost exhausted form of her companion lay struggling and strangling in the waves. Seizing her by the long, golden braids of hair, which had escaped from their confinement in her struggle for life, she cried out to her to be of good courage, and to remember the rules she had so often impressed upon her mind in their hours of practice.

"Grasp my belt, keep your head above water, and do not impede my movements," she cried. "I will soon land you safely."

She set forth laboriously under the weight of her burden, but she seemed endowed with superhuman power. No one had noticed them thus far, and they were still several yards farther out at sea than any of their companions. It was five minutes before Sybl could make her voice heard above the merry laughter and shouts of the bathers. At length some one saw them, and a man swam rapidly to their assistance.

"Take Mrs. Hobart ashore, I need no help," Sybl said, as she relinquished her charge to his keeping.

"Are you not exhausted—had you not better cling

to me?" he asked. "I can easily carry one upon my back and tow you along beside. I am very strong, and perfectly at home in the water."

"I am not at all exhausted, thank you, I need no aid," Sybl answered. "I will follow you slowly."

But few of the people on shore knew what had occurred until Maud lay fainting from excitement and exhaustion upon the beach. Then a crowd gathered. All thoughts were centered upon Maud. The man who had brought her ashore was lost sight of for some moments, then he was hunted up and questioned. Sybl's part in it was told, and search was made for her. No one could find her.

"She went directly to the cottage to avoid the scene she knew must ensue," Mrs. Converse said. "We will find her there wrapped in hot blankets, drinking ginger-tea, no doubt."

But Sybl was not at the cottage. The waves washed her body ashore next day.

Morris Hobart and his wife Maud sailed for Europe ten days later.

DAVE'S WIFE.

"So Dave has brought his wife home?"

Deacon Somers cut a large chip from the stick he had been whittling down to a very fine point as he answered Deacon Bradlaw's query by the one monosyllable, "Ye-a-s."

"Got home last night, I hear."

"Ye-a-s;" and the stick was coming down to a very fine point now, so assiduously was the deacon devoting all his energies to it.

Deacon Bradlaw waited a moment, with an expectant air; then he clasped one knee with both hands, and leaned forward toward his neighbor.

"Well, what do you think of your boy's choice?" he asked. "What sort of a woman does she seem to be? Think she'll be a help in the church?"

Deacon Somers was silent a moment. Whirling the whittled stick around and around, he squinted at it, with one eye closed, to see if it were perfectly symmetrical. (Deacon Somers had a very mathematical eye, and he liked to have everything "plumb," as he expressed it. He had been known to rise from his knees at a neighbor's house in prayer-meeting time and go across the room and straighten a picture which offended his eye by hang-

ing "askew.") Having convinced himself that the stick was round, the deacon tilted back against the side of the country store where he and his companion were sitting, and began picking his teeth with the aforesaid stick, as he answered Deacon Bradlaw's question by another, and a seemingly irrelevant one.

"Do you remember Dave's hoss trade?"

"No," answered the deacon, surprised at this sudden turn in the conversation, "I can't say I do."

"Wa'al, just after he come home from college, two years ago, he got dreadfully sot against the bay mare I drove. I'd had her for years, and she was a nice, steady-going animal. We had a four-year-old colt, too, that I drove with her. Wa'al, Dave he thought it was a shame and a disgrace to drive such an ill-matched span. The young hoss was right up and off and the bay mare she lagged behind about half a length. The young hoss was a short-stepper, and the bay mare went with a long, easy lope. They wasn't a nice-matched span, I do confess.

"Wa'al, Dave he kept a-talkin' trade to me till I give in. He said he knew of a mighty nice match for the young hoss, and if I would leave it to him he'd make a good trade. So I left it to him, and one day he come driving home in grand style. The old mare was traded off, and a dappled-gray four-year-old was in her place. A pretty creature to look at, but I knew, the minute I sot eyes onto her,

that she'd never pull a plow through the stubble-ground, or haul a reaper up that side-hill o' mine.

"Isn't she a beauty, father?" said Dave.

" 'Yes,' says I; 'but handsome is as handsome does applies to hosses as well as to folks, I reckon. What can this 'ere mare do, Dave?'

"Dave's face was all aglow. 'Do?' says he. 'Why, she can trot a mile in two minutes and three-quarters, father, and I only give seventy-five dollars to boot 'twixt her and the old mare.'

"Wa'al, you see, I was just struck dumb at that there boy's folly, but I knew' twa'n't no use to say a word then. I just waited, and it come out as I expected. The dappled-gray mare took us to church or to town in fine style—passed everything on the road slick as a pin. But she balked on the reaper, and give out entirely on the plow. And I had to buy another mate for the hoss, and let the dappled mare stand in the stable, except when we put her in the carriage."

Deacon Somers paused, and his glance rested on Deacon Bradlaw's questioning, puzzled face.

"Well?" interrogated Deacon Bradlaw.

"Wa'al," continued Deacon Somers, "Dave's marriage is off the same piece as his hoss trade. Pretty creature, and can outstrip all the girls round here in playin' and singin' and paintin' and dressin', but come to washin' and bakin' and steady work—why, we'll hev to get somebody else to do that, and let her sit in the parlor. Mother n' I both see that at a glance;" and the deacon sighed.

"I see, I see," mused Beacon Bradlaw, sympathetically. "Too bad! too bad! Dave knew her at college, I believe?"

"Yes; they graduated in the same class. She carried off all the honors, and the papers give her a long puff about her ellycution. Dave's head was completely turned, and he kept runnin' back and forth to see her, till I thought the best thing for him to do was to marry her and be done with it. But Sarah Jane Graves would have suited mother 'n me better. You know Dave and she was pretty thick before he went off to college."

"She's a powerful homely girl, though," Deacon Bradlaw said; "and the awkwardest critter I ever see stand in a church choir and sing. Seems to be all elbows somehow."

"Ye-a-s—ye-a-s; a good deal like the bay mare Dave was so sot against—awkward, but steady goin' and useful—more for use than show. Wa'al, wa'al, I must be going home; all the chores to do, and Dave's billin' and cooin'. Good afternoon, deacon. Come over and see us."

When Dave Somers and his bride walked up the church aisle the next Sunday morning, over Parson Elliott's congregation there passed that indefinable flutter which can only be compared to a breeze suddenly stirring the leaves of a poplar grove. Every eye was turned upon the handsome, strong-limbed young man, and the fair, delicate girl at his side, who bore the curious glances of all these strangers with quiet, well-bred composure.

After service people lingered in the aisle for an introduction, in the manner of country village churches, where Sunday is the day for quiet sociability and the interchange of civilities. And after the respective friends of the family had scattered to their several homes, Dave's wife was the one universal topic of discussion over the Sunday dinner.

"A mighty pretty girl," "A face like a rose," "Too cute for anything," "Stylish as a fashion plate," "A regular little daisy," were a few of the comments passed by the young men of the congregation. To these remarks the ladies supplemented their critical observations after the manner of women: "Her nose isn't pretty;" "Her mouth is too large;" "Her face was powdered—I saw it;" "Her hat was horrid;" "I don't like to see so much agony in a small place." But Sarah Jane Graves said: "She is lovely. I would give the world to be as pretty as she is. No wonder Dave loved her." And she choked down a lump in her throat as she said it.

All the neighboring people called on Dave's wife during the next month, and, with one or two exceptions, introduced the conversation by the question, "Well, how do you like Somerville?" To the monotony of this query Dave's wife varied her replies as much as was possible without contradicting herself, "I am quite delighted with the fertility of my mind," she laughingly remarked to Dave at the expiration of the first month. "To at least fifteen people who have asked me that one unvaried question I have

invented at least ten different phrases in which to express my satisfaction with Somerville. I have said: 'Very much, thank you;' 'Oh, I am highly pleased;' 'Far better than I anticipated even; 'I find it very pleasant;' 'It has made a very agreeable impression upon me;' and oh, ever so many more changes I have rung on that one idea, Dave!' and the young wife laughed merrily. But under the laugh Dave seemed to hear a minor strain. His face grew grave.

'I fear I did wrong to bring you here among these people," he said. "They are so unlike you—so commonplace. I fear you are homesick already, Madge."

"No, no; indeed you are wrong, Dave; indeed I am happy here, and like your friends," Madge protested, with tender earnestness.

But, as the months went by, it was plain to all eyes that Dave's wife was not happy, that she did not assimilate with her surroundings. She made no intimate friendships; she sat silent at the sewing society, and would not take an interest in the neighborhood gossip which formed the main topic of conversation at these meetings. She would not take a class at Sunday-school, claiming that she was not fitted to explain the Gospel to any unfolding, inquiring mind, as she was not at all sure that she understood it herself.

Dark insinuations were afloat that Dave's wife was an "unbeliever," or at least a Unitarian, and

her fashionable style of dress marked her as "worldly-minded" at all events. Deacon Bradlaw and Deacon Somers held many an interview on the shady side of the village store, and Dave's wife always came up for discussion sooner or later, during those interviews.

"She's settin' a bad example to all of Somerville," Deacon Bradlaw declared. "My gal Arminda's gettin' just as fussy and proud as a young peacock about her clothes; nothin' suits her now unless it looks stylish and citified. And I see there's a deal more extravagance in dress among all the women-folks since Dave's wife came with her high heels and her bustles and her trimmin's. You ought to labor with her, Brother Somers."

Brother Somers sighed. "I do labor with her," he said, "but the poor thing don't know what to do. Her guardian—she was an orphan, you know—give her the little money she had left after her schoolin', to buy her weddin' fixin's. She'd no idea what plain folks she was a-comin' among. So she got her outfit accordin' to the way she'd been brought up. Lord! She's got things enough to last her ten years, and all trimmed to kill, and all fittin' her like a duck's foot in the mud; and what can she do but wear 'em, now she's got 'em, she says; and I can't tell her to throw 'em away and buy new. 'Twouldn't be economy. She's been with us nigh onto a year now, and she's never asked Dave for a cent's worth of anything."

"But she's no worker; anybody can see that. And you've hed to keep a girl half the time since she's been with you," Deacon Bradlaw added, somewhat nettled that his neighbor made any excuses for Dave's wife, whose fair face and fine clothes and quiet reserve had inspired him with an angry resentment from the first.

"Ye-a-s, ye-a-s, that's true," Deacon Somers confessed. "She's no worker. Lord, the way she tried to make cheese; and the cookin' she did! Mother hed to throw the cheese curd into the pig's swill, and the bread and cake she made followed it. More waste from that experiment of hers than we've hed in years; and she was flour from head to foot, and all of a perspiration, and sick in bed from cryin' over her failures into the bargain. The poor thing did try her very best. But it was like the dappled mare tryin' to haul the plow—she couldn't do it, wa'n't built for it."

When Deacon Somers reached home his brow was clouded. His good wife saw it and questioned him as to the cause. He shook his head.

"I'm troubled about church matters, mother," he said. "The debt fur that new steeple and altar, and all the rest of the expense we've bin to the last two years, wears on me night an' day. And Deacon Bradlaw he's gettin' mad at some of the trustees, and says he'll never put another dollar into the church till they come forward and head a paper with fifty dollars apiece subscription. I know 'em all

too well to think they'll ever do that, and Deacon Bradlaw he's a reg'lar mule. So the first we know our church'll be in a stew that will send half its members over to the rival church that's started up at Jonesville, with one o' them sensation preachers that draws a crowd like a circus," and Deacon Somers sighed.

"Isn't there something that can be done to raise the money?" asked Mother Somers, anxiously. "Can't we get up entertainments?"

"That's old, and 'tain't strawberry season," sighed the deacon. "We couldn't charge more'n fifteen or twenty cents at the door, and that wouldn't bring in much fer one entertainment, and nobody would turn out to a second. There don't seem to be no ingenuity among the young folks here 'bout gettin' up anything entertainin'. Our strawberry festival was just a dead failure—barely paid expenses."

Dave's wife, sitting with her pale face, which had grown very thin and wan of late, bent over a bit of sewing, suddenly looked up. Her listless expression gave place to one of animated interest. "Father Somers," she began, timidly, "do you suppose—do you think—I could get up a reading?"

"A what?" and Deacon Somers turned a surprised and puzzled face upon his daughter-in-law. It was so new for her to betray any interest in anything.

"A reading. You know I took the prize for elocution when I graduated. I know ever so many things

I could recite, and it might draw a crowd just from its being something new. We could charge twenty-five cents admission, and it would give the impression of something good at least. After they had heard me once they could decide for themselves if I am worth hearing again."

Deacon Somers looked upon the glowing face and animated mien of Dave's wife with increasing wonder. Was this the listless girl he had seen a few moments before?

"'Pon my soul," he ejaculated, "I don't know but it might draw a crowd, just from curiosity. Everybody would go to see Dave's wife. Not that I hev much of a opinion of readin's; never heard any but once, and then I went to sleep. But it might draw, seein' it's you. You can try it if you want to."

Dave's wife did try it. It was announced before service Sunday morning that Mrs. David Somers would give a reading in the church edifice on Thursday evening; admission twenty-five cents. Proceeds to be applied toward the church debt.

Again there was a breezy stir in the congregation, and scores of eyes were turned upon Dave's wife, who sat in her silent, white composure, with her dark eyes lifted to the face of the clergyman.

But Sarah Jane Graves could not help noticing, as she had not before, the marked change in the young wife's face since the day she entered that church a bride.

"How she is fading! I wonder if she is unhappy?" she thought.

Thursday night came fair and clear. As Deacon Somers had predicted, the announcement that Dave's wife was to give a reading had drawn a house; the church was literally packed. Dave's wife rose before her audience with no words of apology or introduction, and she began the recitation of the old, hackneyed, yet ever beautiful

"Curfew shall not ring to-night."

It was new to most of the audience, and certainly the manner of its delivery was new to them. They forgot themselves, they forgot their surroundings, they forgot that it was Dave's wife who stood before them. They were alone in the belfry tower clinging with bleeding hands to the brazen tongue of the bell as it swung to and fro above the deaf old janitor's head. When the recitation was finished two or three of the audience found themselves on their feet. How they came there they never knew, and they sat down with a shame-faced expression.

Sarah Jane Graves was in tears, and one or two others wiped their eyes furtively, and then the old church walls rang with cheers. So soon as they subsided Dave's wife arose, and with a sudden change of expression and voice, began to give a recital of "An Evening at the Quarters." It was in negro dialect, and introduced one or two snatches of song and a violin air. To the astonishment of her audience Dave's wife picked up a violin at the appropriate time, and played the air through in

perfect time and tune; and then the house resounded to another round of cheers, and the entire audience was convulsed with laughter. Everything which followed, grave or gay, pathetic or absurd, was met nods of approval, or the clapping of hands and the drumming of feet. Somerville had never known such an entertainment before. The receipts for the evening proved to be over forty dollars.

During the next three months Dave's wife gave two more readings, the proceeds of which paid half the church debt, and this so encouraged the members that old grudges and quarrels were forgotten, and Deacon Bradlaw and the elders made up the remaining half, and Somerville church was free from debt.

Yet Deacon Bradlaw was heard to say that while he was glad and grateful for all that Dave's wife had done, he did not in his heart approve of turning the house of God into a "theater." "She performed exactly like them women whose pictures are in the store winders in town," he said, "a-makin' everybody laugh or cry with their monkey-shines. I don't think it a proper way to go on in the house of God. Never would hev given my consent to it ef I'd known what sort of entertainment it was to be."

"Dave's wife ever been a actress?" he asked Deacon Somers when they next met.

"Actress? No! What put that into your head?" answered Deacon Somers, with some spirit.

"Oh, nothin', nothin'; only her readin's seemed a powerful sight like a theater I went to once. Didn't know but she'd been on the stage; it's gettin' fash-i'nable nowadays. Anyway, she's missed her callin.' Wait a minute, neighbor; don't hurry off so. I want to talk church matters."

"Can't," responded Deacon Somers, whipping up his horse. "Dave's wife is sick in bed, and I came to the store to git a few things for her—bitters, and some nourishin' things to eat. She's sort o' run down with the exertion she made in them readin's. She used to be just drippin' with perspiration when she got home."

Dave's wife was ailing for months, unable to do more than sit in her room and paint an hour or two each day. The house was filled with her paintings. They ornamented brackets, and stood in corners, and peeped from the folds of fans, and smiled from Dave's china coffee cup.

One day Dave proposed to his wife that she should go to her old home—the home of her guardian—and make a visit.

"We've been married fifteen months now," he said, "and you've never been away, I think a change will do you good. You seem to be running down every day."

So she went. After an absence of ten days she wrote to Dave to send her paintings to her by express. She had need of them; would explain when she returned. Dave packed them carefully, and sent them with a sigh.

Poor Dave! He had come to realize that his marriage was a great mistake. To be sure, he loved Madge yet, but the romance of his youthful attachment had all passed away in the dull, commonplace routine of his domestic life, where Madge had proved such an inefficient helpmeet.

He had been blindly in love with his divinity; elated with the fact that he had won her away from two or three other suitors. Madge was a brilliant scholar and a belle, and with the blind faith of young love, Dave had believed that she would excel in domestic duties as in intellectual pursuits. Her ignominious failures, her utter uselessness, and his mother's constant and indisputable references to her inefficiency about the farm-work, had presented her to his eyes in a new light. The brilliant girl who was the pride of the college, and the helpless, thriftless wife whose husband was regarded with pity by a sympathetic neighborhood, were two distinct individuals, as were also the young elocutionist carrying off the honors of her class, and the tired, tearful woman weeping over her soggy bread and melted butter.

The success of her readings had revived his old pride in her for a time. But her consequent illness and listlessness had discouraged him.

Mrs. Somers saw the express package, and inquired what it was. Dave told her, remarking at the same time that he did not know what use she intended to make of them.

"Maybe she's going to give 'em away to those who will appreciate 'em," suggested his mother. "I'm sure we've no room for such rubbish. But her time's no more'n a settin' hen's, and she might as well spend it in that way as any other. She can't do nothin' that amounts to anything."

"I think her readings amounted to a good deal," Dave responded, glad that he could once speak authoritatively of his wife's usefulness.

"Oh, yes, for that emergency. But it's steady work that tells. Lor' pity you and father ef I couldn't do nothin' but give readings. Wonder where your meals would come from. Your marriage and your horse trade were 'bout off one piece, Dave. Your wife's pretty in the parlor or on the floor readin', and your mare looks nice and drives nice in the buggy. But they can't work."

Dave's wife came home at the expiration of a month, looking fresher, and feeling stronger, she said. And she did not bring her paintings.

Deacon Somers came into Dave's room the night after her return to talk about a certain piece of land that was for sale. It "cornered on" to the deacon's farm, and a stream of water ran across it.

"It will be worth a mint of money to me," he said, "for I can turn that field into a pasture, and all my stock will water itself. But the man who's sellin' wants a hundred and fifty dollars down. He's goin' West, and must have that amount this week. I don't see the way clear to pay it, for expenses

have been a good deal of late, takin' doctor's bills, and hired help, and all into consideration, and my ready money has run low. Do you think of anybody that'll be likely to lend us that amount for three months, Dave?"

But before Dave could reply, Dave's wife spoke.

"Father Somers," she said, "I can let you have the money—not as a loan, but as a gift. I have been of so little use to you, and have made you so much expense, I shall be very, very happy if you will let me do this for you." And rising up, she came and laid a little silken purse in Deacon Somers' hands.

"But where did you get it, child?" asked the wondering deacon, looking from the plethoric little purse to her face which had flushed a rosy red.

"I sold my paintings," Dave's wife answered. "A gentleman happened to see a little thing I painted, and he said he knew where I could dispose of any quantity of such work. And sure enough, I sold every one of those things I painted when I was sick, for good prices. And I decorated some plates for a lady, who paid me well for it. So I have one hundred and seventy-five dollars in that purse, which you are more than welcome to."

Deacon Somers removed his spectacles and mopped them with his silk handkerchief. "I can't do it, my child," he said; "it wouldn't be right. You must keep your own money."

"But I have no use for it," cried Dave's wife.

"I intended to spend it all in Christmas gifts for the family, but this is better. I have everything I need. All I ask or desire is to be of some use—and to have you all love me," she added, softly.

"A hundred and seventy-five dollars for that trash! Well, the world is full of fools!" Mrs. Somers ejaculated, when she was told of what had occurred. But she looked at Dave's wife with an expression of surprised interest after that, as if it was just dawning upon her that one might be of use in the world who could neither cook nor make cheese.

Deacon Somers' farm boasted a fine stone quarry, and he was very busily at work every spare moment, quarrying stone for the foundation of a new barn he was to build. One day Dave drove to town, ten miles distant, with a load of grain for market. It was September, and the market had risen during the last few days. All the neighboring farmers had turned out and hurried their grain away. Deacon Somers remained at home, quarrying stone. Mrs. Somers rang the great bell at noon-time, but he did not come. Then she grew alarmed.

"Some one must go up to the quarry and see if anything has happened," she said. And Dave's wife was off like a young deer before the words were out of her mouth.

It did not seem three minutes before she stood at the door again, with white lips, her dark eyes large with fright. "Father is wedged in under a great bowlder," she said. "You and the girl must go to

him. Take the camphor and ammonia; it may sustain his strength till I can bring relief. I am going to ride the dappled mare to the village, and rouse the whole neighborhood."

"We have no saddle," gasped Mrs. Somers; "and the mare will break your neck."

"I can ride anything," Dave's wife answered as she sped away. "It was taught me with other useless accomplishments."

A moment later she shot by the door, and down the street toward the village. She had bridled the mare and buckled on a blanket and surcingle. She sat like a young Indian princess, her face white, her eyes large and dark, looking straight ahead, and urging the mare to her highest speed. Faster, faster she went, until the woods and fields seemed flying pictures shooting through the air. Half-way to the village, which was more than two miles distant, she met Tom Burgus, the blacksmith. She reined up the mare so suddenly she almost sat her down on her haunches.

"Deacon Somers has fallen under a boulder in his quarry," she cried. "Go to him—quick! Dave is away." Then she rode on.

At the village she roused half a dozen men, and to the strongest and most muscular she said: "Take this mare, and put her to her highest speed. Tom Burgus is already there. You two can lift the boulder, perhaps. I will ride with Dr. Evans."

The man mounted the mare, and was off like a

great bird swooping close to the earth. He swept away and out of sight.

When Dr Evans reined his reeking horse at the quarry, Tom Burgus, and Jack Smith, who had ridden the mare from the village, were propping up the bowlder with iron bars, while Mrs. Somers and her help were trying to remove the deacon's inanimate form. The doctor and Dave's wife sprang to their assistance. In another moment he was free from his perilous position, and Dr. Evans was applying restoratives. "He will live," he said, "but in five minutes more, if help had not come, he would have been a dead man. It is very fortunate you had a swift horse in the stable, and a rider who could keep her seat," and he glanced around at Dave's wife just in time to see her fall in a limp heap.

Deacon Somers was quite restored to his usual health the following morning. "Dave's wife and the dappled mare saved my life," he said to Deacon Bradlaw, who came to call. "So the boy didn't make so poor a bargain either time, neighbor, as I once thought."

The deacon recovered rapidly, and just as rapidly Dave's wife lost strength and color. She faded before their eyes like some frail plant, and at last, one day, with a tired sigh, she drifted out into the Great Unknown; and with her went the bud of another life, destined never to blossom on earth.

After they came home from the church-yard where

they had left her to sleep, Dave found the dappled mare cast in her stall; her halter-strap had become a noose about her slender throat. She was quite dead.

Over the low mound where "Dave's wife" sleeps, the marble mockery of a tall monument smiles in irony at those who pause to read its flattering inscription. It is so easy to praise the dead! And the memorial window sacred to her memory in Somerville church—a proposition of Deacon Bradlaw's—flushes in crimson shame while suns rise and set.

And a sturdy farm-horse pulls the plow through Dave's stubble-field, and Sarah Jane drives the work in his kitchen.

AN ANGEL'S WHISPER.

It was an angel's whisper that caused such a thought to steal into Maud Whitney's blonde head that day.

It could have been nothing less, for Maud was a selfish, pleasure-loving girl, who seldom troubled herself about other people's sorrows.

She was a goodish sort of a girl, however, you must know; she was a church member in excellent standing, and she paid liberally out of her pocket-money to the missionary cause, and she subscribed more toward the fund for building a new church than any other young lady in the congregation. Yet she was selfish, all the same. Her heart was not open to the cry of the needy, and she seldom thought about the people who did not live on the avenues or boulevards. But you see she had been reared in a large city, and she had grown hardened to tales of suffering. She had been told not to squander her money on street-beggars, as quite frequently the most pitiful appeals came from those who had a snug bank account hidden away somewhere. She had been taught that promiscuous charity only increased pauperism, and she had heard of associated societies who regulated these matters

systematically; so she was quite content to enjoy herself and not invite premature wrinkles to her fair face by worrying over other people's affairs.

But one day an angel whispered in her ear and caused her to conceive a noble thought which resulted in saving a life from ruin and a soul from despair.

It was early in December, and she was counting her Christmas money. Her father had given her fifty dollars that morning, and she had saved up fifty dollars from her allowance. But as she looked down on the one hundred dollars she frowned and tapped her foot impatiently.

"I wanted to give mamma that lovely lace collar I priced yesterday," she mused. "That would be twenty dollars; and I want to give papa a new dressing-gown; that will be twenty-five dollars; and then if I give Frank that set of books, twenty dollars more will go. And Stella Cluet made me such an elegant present last year I ought to give her something as nice this Christmas, and—O dear! I haven't half enough money to spend." She pouted her pretty lip, and the scowl grew deeper between her eyes.

"I am tired of Christmas, any way," she continued. "It is growing to be an awful bore. You always expect nicer things and more of them than you get, and you know you are expected to give more than you can afford, and it's a time of general disappointment all around, I think. It ceases to be nice after one finds out that Santa Claus is a myth." **And just then the angel whispered.**

Suddenly into Maud Whitney's discontented mind flashed a thought of the great, seething masses of people in the city who would suffer for food and fire on Christmas-day.

"O, I wish I could help some one who was really needy and worthy!" she whispered; "how much more fun it would be than giving useless presents to people who have more than they need already." Then she said aloud, "I will do it—if I can only find out how."

She arose and trailed her soft garments across the velvet carpet, walking with a lighter heart and a brighter face than she had carried for many a day. There is nothing like an object in view—a definite purpose—to drive away the blue devils of discontent, and Maud had a very definite purpose in view—viz.: to find a needy and suffering person whose Christmas-day she could render happy.

You may think it was an easy thing for her to do in this great world of misery. But it was not an easy thing for fair Maud Whitney, nineteen years of age, and the only daughter of wealthy parents. She positively did not know of one really suffering person whom she could approach with money. Her father and mother subscribed liberally to the charitable institutions, and they would think her idea Quixotic in the extreme. And Frank—Frank Weber, her promised husband—her one lover, she could not ask him to help her. Somehow she felt sure he would think her ostentatious in her display of sym-

pathy if she told him her newly-formed purpose. No, she could not appeal to Frank. And then, suddenly, she thought of Christina, the laundress, who came every week to wash and iron.

"I am sure she will know of some poor girl whom I can help," she thought, "and I will tell her to keep it a secret from all the world; for somehow I think a really heartfelt charity loses half its force when it is known to a host of people. If I only make some poor girl glad Christmas-day, the knowledge that I have done so is all the glory I desire." And Maud waited for the coming of Monday, and Christina, with more impatience than she had ever awaited the coming of any one, save Frank; and those strange, silent forces we call fate, or destiny, or Providence, were preparing for her a great sorrow, but for another salvation.

At that very hour, in a shabby little room—a room scarcely large enough to contain its cot-bed, its one chair and small table—sat a young girl, perhaps twenty years of age. She was very handsome; her form was exquisitely rounded; and while her delicate mouth and small chin showed a lack of forceful character, they were nevertheless very lovely; and her large and melancholy eyes and the creamy pallor of her complexion, contrasting with her abundant dark hair, completed a picture of rare beauty. She was wrapped in an old shawl, and she shivered as she read over and over a letter that had just been brought to her by a messenger boy. Her room was

heated only by a chimney, and the day was very cold. A vase of costly hot-house flowers on the window-sill looked strangely out of place in the bleak apartment.

"My sweet friend," the letter began, "may I hope for your company this afternoon at a *petit souper*? I have some good news for you. Meet me at O'Neil's at five o'clock sharp. I would call for you gladly if you had not forbidden it. I send you a few flowers to cheer you this gloomy, gray day. Believe me, your honest admirer—Walter."

As Aileen Lewis read the letter over, a series of expressions flitted over her fair face—tenderness gave place to doubt, and pleasure was succeeded by annoyance. "I ought not to go," she sighed; "it is not womanly nor dignified; he ought not to ask me to meet him like this. And yet I have forbidden his calling here, lest it excite remark. So what can he do if he wishes to see me? And he is my only friend." She leaned over the flowers, exhaling their fascinating fragrance. Ah! beautiful, dangerously-beautiful blossoms! Many a woman's conscience has been lulled to silence by your intoxicating perfume! "How good and kind he is," she murmured. "He is always thinking of my comfort and pleasure. And now he has good news for me—I wonder what? And he has planned a little supper"—and then a crimson flush tinged Aileen's cheek with the hue of the rose. She buried her face in her hands. "I am so hungry—O, I am ashamed to

be so hungry," she sobbed, "but I cannot resist the temptation. I will go."

As she dallied over her quail that afternoon at O'Niel's, Walter Branley never for one moment suspected that his companion had tasted nothing since the previous day but a cup of coffee.

"I have good news for you," he said in that wonderfully modulated voice of his that always woke the slumbering chords in a woman's heart.

"So you told me in your letter," she answered, smiling; "and I am, of course, dying to know what it can be."

"Well, I have secured a position for you on the 'Monthly Record.' You are to furnish all the fashion notes, to edit the literary column, and read proofs, etc. You will be certain of a regular salary, and then, too, you will have an opportunity to work yourself into public favor and notice through the influence of this periodical. You are to begin your new duties the first week in January."

The glad tears of surprise and joy filled Aileen's beautiful eyes. "How good, how good you are!" she cried, in a low, tremulous voice. "I never had so good and unselfish a friend in all my life before. How can I ever thank you enough?"

"Simply by being happy," Walter Branley answered, with a smile. And no pang of remorse entered his selfish heart as he looked upon his trusting victim's tear-wet face. No! His thought was: "She is mine! I have only to play a card or two more,

and the game is won! Women are all alike—as vain as they are weak, yet this one is exceptionally handsome and bright. I shall be very fond of her; I have been uncommonly interested in her ever since I first saw her face.”

Yes, Walter Branley was no unusual villain—he was a type of man to be met with almost daily in the “best society.” Men whose pastime consists in amorous intrigue, and to whom moral principle is an unknown term, when applied to *l'affaires du cœur*. Yet men upon whom fair, sheltered women smile and say, “I have found men to be my best friends—I think they are truer than women, somehow.”

Walter walked with his companion to the street door that led up to her shabby room. Then he touched his hat respectfully, pressed her hand gently, and took his departure.

An hour later there was a tap on her door. She opened it and found her landlady, Christina, standing outside, with a cup of tea and a bit of buttered toast upon a tray.

“I thought you might like a bite of something while you were at work to-night,” the woman said kindly. “I am afraid you do not eat enough, miss—you have been growing so pale of late.”

Aileen flushed slightly as she took the tray and asked her visitor to be seated.

“I don't mind telling you the truth, Mrs. Jansen,” she said. “I have been a little short of money lately. After I paid you my month's rent I had a run

of bad luck—I lost one story I wrote in the mails, and another magazine failed, owing me quite a sum. So money I had depended upon I did not receive. I have a good deal due me, but the editors all take their own time to pay, you know. I have had to economize on my meals, but better times are coming. I have a place offered me on a magazine now, at a regular salary. I go to work the first week in January. I will not receive any money until February, but I shall manage to get along until then, somehow, I fancy. A very kind friend invited me out to lunch to-day—so I think Providence is looking out for me."

"Providence or—the devil," muttered Christina, as she went downstairs to look after her invalid child—the child who had seen from his window "the handsome gentleman" walk home with Miss Aileen, and had reported the fact to his mother.

And so when Maud Whitney made Christina the confidant of her new resolve that good woman was not long in selecting an object for her charity.

"I want a real needy and worthy person," Maud said. "Some one who actually suffers for food and fire; and I want to give her (I prefer it should be a woman) a real happy Christmas."

"Well, miss, I know that very person," Christina had replied. "She has my upstairs room—the little, wee room I rent to transients. She is as pretty and as young as yourself, miss. And she writes for the papers, and a sorry time she has of it, writing away

until near morning, and then waiting six months maybe before she gets a cent of pay. And often she never goes out of her room for a bite of anything but once a day, and her underclothing, miss (I wash for her, you know), is as thin as tissue-paper and patched over and over. And lately there's a fine gentleman coming to see her, and I hear he means her no good; and likely as not you are a good angel the Lord has sent to her rescue."

Maud was deeply interested in the description, and before Christina left the house her plans were all arranged. Maud was to purchase a nice outfit of warm underclothing, and a sumptuous supply of eatables, and she was to carry them to Christina's house on Christmas-eve, at half-past five o'clock. Christina was to be in her lodger's room and detain her there, when a knock would sound on her door and she would open it to find all those gifts on the landing, while the happy donor fled back to her carriage and home.

But nothing ever occurs just as we plan it, and a very unexpected circumstance was destined to change Maud Whitney's plans for Christmas-eve—and indeed for life.

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All the day before Christmas Aileen Lewis had huddled in her room, trying to look her future in the face. She had just received word that the magazine on which she was expecting to secure a situa-

tion had suspended publication. One of its stockholders had failed, and the enterprise was necessarily abandoned, wrecking the hopes of unnumbered literary aspirants who had hoped to sail through its columns to the sea of glory which shines so fair and golden in the distance, but on which no mariner ever yet found an island of rest.

Aileen had been reviewing her life, as so many of us do on those saddest days in the year—the holidays. Sitting with her chin resting on her slender hands, her melancholy eyes looking out in the dreary street, she went back to her desolate, loveless childhood. She had been the oldest of four children—and she had never known what it was to receive one caress since she had been pushed out of her mother's arms by a younger sister. We use the terms "mother," "love," as if the two words were synonyms; yet there are mothers—God forgive them—who seem utterly devoid of love or tenderness. Aileen's mother was one of these; a hard, cold, coarse woman, who ruled her children with a blow and a command. Her meek and broken-spirited husband hurried into his grave before Aileen was ten years old, and left his widow and children penniless. Aileen acted as a nurse-girl during four years in a haughty family who left her to the companionship of servants. Four loveless, lonely years, in which her hungry heart was expanding into a woman's, craving for love. Then she went into a printing-office, and learned to set type; and while

there the knowledge came upon her that she possessed talents—and she began to write little verses and stories, which attracted attention and admitted her into a new dream world. She was elevated to the position of proof-reader, and might have attained a permanent and lucrative income had she not resented the lover-like attentions of the one in authority, who, upon rejection of his suit, immediately caused her discharge. She went home to her mother for a year then, and tried various methods of earning a livelihood, but her mother's continual "nagging" and the fact that she had been discharged from the "Evening Star" office rendered her life hard and her efforts almost futile. Finally, in desperation she left her wretched home, and, renting a small room, began to struggle against fate and poverty with no weapon but her pen.

She had been fighting the battle a whole year. In all that time she had found but one being who seemed to really feel an unselfish friendship for her. People were so full of their own joys and sorrows that they had no time to think of one poor girl, who, with thousands of others, was struggling with the wolf of poverty.

But Walter Branley had proven himself her friend by a score of kind acts. Their meeting had been somewhat romantic; he had rescued her from under the feet of a runaway horse, one day in the early autumn, and carried her to her humble lodgings. He interested himself in her welfare immediately,

and had won her confidence and gratitude by attentions as delicate as thoughtful. Her eyes filled with tears as she thought it all over—the one green spot in her desert of a life. Just then a boy brought her a note from him.

"Dear Aileen," she read, "this is a sad day for you, I know, because you have heard of the failure of the "Record." Never mind, dear girl, *I love you!* and I have determined to give you the happiest Christmas of your life. We will forget everything but our love, for I am sure you *do* love me, Aileen. I shall call for you to-night at five o'clock to take you to pleasant apartments I have prepared for you. Be happy and cheerful, and trust yourself to your impatient lover,

WALTER."

As Aileen finished the letter she fell on her knees sobbing wildly. "O God! I thank thee!" she cried; "he loves me. At last some one loves me! Thank God! Thank God!" And the angels covered their eyes and wept in pity while they listened.

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Maud made her purchases for Christmas with more delight than she had experienced in years; and she drove to Christina's home at the appointed hour, with a heart full of childish glee, in the thought of the pleasure she was about to confer. As she groped her way up the dark stairway that led to Aileen's room, walking on tiptoe to make no noise, she did not see the figure of a man stand-

ing on the landing above, and she did not hear his light tap upon the door. Consequently she was overcome with confusion when the door opened before she could give her prearranged signal, and the light from within streamed out upon the face of—Frank Weber, her lover!

Christina had been detained below with her invalid child, who was more than usually ill; Aileen was alone, and she sprang forward with a glad cry to the outstretched arms of her lover, when she suddenly caught sight of Maud. The young man saw her glance and turned to face his promised bride.

"Great God! how came you here?" he cried fiercely, the brutal temper she had never before seen flaming out and distorting his handsome features. "I can tell you, girl, at once and forever, I am not a man to be followed and watched. I won't have any woman spying on my actions."

"Frank! Frank! what have I done—what do you mean?" cried Maud, frightened at his voice and face.

"Frank!" repeated Aileen, wonderingly. "Why, Mr. Branley—Walter, who is this woman, and what does all this mean?"

A sudden recollection of something Christina once said of a danger which menaced Aileen flashed into Maud's tortured mind, making the cruel truth plain to her. She threw an arm about Aileen's waist, and her voice was very calm as she answered:

"It means, dear, that the man you see standing there is Frank Weber by name, and he *was* my

plighted husband a few moments ago; he is nothing to me now, but he is your worst enemy. Thank God I came in time to save both our lives from the ruin he would have made of them."

Frank Weber turned away with a muttered curse, and as he went Christina appeared upon the scene. Aileen was wildly sobbing.

"Will you bring those parcels back to the carriage?" Maud said quietly. "I am going to take Aileen home with me, Christina." But instead of obeying, Christina reached out her brawny arms just in time to save the inanimate form of Miss Maud from contact with the floor.

She was ill for months—the blow was so sudden and so cruel. But to day, as she and Aileen sit in their sheltered homes, both anchored in the haven of true hearts, they know it was an angel's whisper that saved them from lives of misery.

DICK'S FAMILY.

When Dick, the little deformed invalid, hobbled from his bed into his chair-lounge at the window, where he reclined all day long, he saw a rosy-cheeked young woman polishing the windows across the street.

His pale face tinged with a sudden glow, and his painfully brilliant eyes shone with an increased luster.

"Well, I declare if my house isn't occupied!" he cried, and he lifted the window and peered across the way with such an excited countenance, that the young woman opposite paused in her work to regard him. But after a moment's observation the startled look in her face gave place to pity, for she saw that the great shining eyes were those of an invalid—an invalid child, she thought.

"Poor child; poor little fellow," she said to herself; "and such a pretty face, too!"

But Dick was twenty-two years old, with a man's heart and a man's longings shut up in his deformed body. But since he was compelled to pass his days between a bed and a chair, with an occasional hour down on the curbing, in the sunlight of a warm day, he found his whole enjoyment in his imagination.

And wonderful flights it took, flights and freaks suspected by no one save good old Dr. Griffin, his one confidant.

He had known Dick ever since his advent into his life of misery. Dick's mother had been the beauty of the street more than a score of years ago. Old Benjamin Levy, her father, was a hard man, and to escape the barren home and dreary life, pretty Josie eloped with a handsome Christian whom she had met while promenading on the street. Her father had uttered a terrible curse when the knowledge of her flight came to him; and scarce two years later the curse had fallen, for pretty Josie came home to die, and to leave her invalid baby as the constant reminder of the fulfillment of his curse, to her father.

Dr. Griffin had been retained during all these years as Dick's physician; for the one thing in which old Benjamin showed no parsimony was in the care of this little deformed grandchild. A little shop where he sold second-hand clothing, and a couple of small rooms above it for living purposes, constituted his *menage*.

Directly opposite was a three-story and basement brick house, which had in its day been a semi-fashionable private residence. But as trade encroached upon the street this building had degenerated to an apartment house.

While the house stood tenantless Dick amused himself by imagining that it was his own residence.

"It is my house," he would say, "and I am traveling abroad, and it is closed. By and by I shall come home and there will be a great housewarmin', and lights in every window and flower-pots on the sills, and pretty curtains and life and fun; for I am a very rich young man with lots of money, and I always have everything very gay around me."

Dr. Griffin used to encourage the boy in his fancies, thinking they relieved the monotony of his dreary life. "Well, I see you are still traveling abroad, Dick," he used to say. "That house of yours is still closed. No idea when you will return, have you?"

"No, I'm havin' too good a time to come back yet awhile," Dick would answer. "Haven't half seen the world yet."

But one day there were people moving about on the ground-floor of the house, and Dick heard his grandfather say it was to be made into flats, and let to separate families.

The next time Dr. Griffin called, he greeted the boy with—

"Hello! Dick, welcome home! I see you have returned from abroad."

Dick shook his head soberly. "Oh, no!" he replied, "I am not back yet. But I got tired of havin' my house stay empty—thought I might as well let it help pay my expenses (it's awful expensive travelin', you know,) so I've got some tenants in the house. Goin' to let each floor separate, 'cause it is

too expensive a house for anybody to take whole, 'cept some rich feller like me."

During the last six months the floor exactly opposite Dick's window had been vacant. After three months had passed without a tenant, he told Dr. Griffin that he had decided to reserve that floor for his own use.

"I'm goin' to come home pretty soon and settle down, you see," he said, "and so I thought I'd keep that floor for myself. I don't need the whole house, and I can just as well let the other tenants stay."

And now, after three months more had passed, here were people moving into his apartments!

Dr. Griffin called that very afternoon, and found Dick looking unusually animated.

"Well, well, Dick!" he exclaimed. "So, after all you've decided to rent your apartments? You have neighbors, I see. I fear you will never return now and settle down as you intended."

"Why, that's no neighbors, doctor," replied Dick, contemptuously; "that's my family. I've come home to stay, and brought my family, you see."

"You don't tell me so! Why, what a stupid old fellow I am, to be sure!" cried the doctor, with feigned self-scorn. "How large a family have you, Dick?"

"Well, only—only one, as I care specially about. Look—look at her, doctor!" catching the doctor's hand and leaning forward in his chair. "See her a-fixin' the nice little curtain at the window? She's

a regular neat one, she is, my little woman over there. She was a-cleanin' the windows and things this morning with her hair so slick, and a span clean apron on. That's the kind of girl I like. I allers liked that kind. Isn't she the right kind, eh, doctor?"

Dr. Griffin saw a trim young woman with rosy cheeks, looping back scrim curtains with pink ribbons. He nodded gravely.

"From my brief acquaintance, I should say she was," he answered. "I congratulate you on your good luck. With such a family as that, you ought to be a happy fellow!"

"Queer little fellow; queer little fellow," he said to himself, as he went down the stairs. "Strange notion that about his home and family."

When Dick awoke the following day he felt a new sense of happiness in the thought of his neighbor opposite. He hurried through his tedious ceremony of dressing, ate his frugal breakfast, hobbled into his invalid-chair, and gave an eager glance across the street. Yes, there were the dainty curtains still at the window, so it was no dream. He watched for a glimpse of the occupant, but she did not appear. Then he laughed a little softly to himself.

"Of course, she wouldn't be hangin' around the window at all hours; she isn't that sort; and, of course, I'm over there now, and she's a-pourin' coffee for me; we take breakfast sort of late to-day, 'cause we're just home from Europe, and I haven't

gone down to the office yet. After I get off she'll brush around and set things to right, and—hello! I must have gone now, you know, for there she is a-whiskin' the dust off the window-sill as pretty as ever, and as neat as a pin. All the time I'm down at the office with them pesky clerks of mine a-both-erin' me I'll be thinkin' of that sweet little woman up here waitin' for me."

"We do have very sociable times," Dick told the doctor a month later. "That little woman and I seem made for each other. She's just the right sort. We never have no fusses, and things go so comfortable-like all the time."

"And how do you like the other party? There's a man there also I see. How do you like him?"

Dick flushed painfully, and a deep frown settled on his face. There was a man whom he saw from time to time sitting at the window after the dinner-hour, reading his paper. But the moment he made his appearance, Dick closed his eyes or left the window seat. He regarded the man as an intruder—a shadow upon his home life, a serpent in his Eden.

Sunday was a day of restlessness and discontent, because the man was there all day long, and on Sundays he avoided the invalid chair, which was his seat on all other days. Now, when he heard Dr. Griffin speak of the man as a real being, he suffered all the bitter and mortifying pangs of jealousy which might come to a man who hears a stranger give words to a suspicion of his wife's **disloyalty to which he has striven to blind himself.**

"A man—a—yes—there's a man there sometimes," Dick stammered; "he's a—a sort of poor relative, don't you know. One of my relations, you see, and I can't very well turn him off."

"Oh, I see," answered the doctor, noticing Dick's confusion and hastening to help him out. "Well, everybody has some one of that sort. I've half a dozen poor relatives who live on me. Some one of them is with us most of the time. A little uncomfortable occasionally may be, because every man's house is his castle, where he wants to be alone at times. But we who have homes have no right to be selfish; we must share them with less fortunate people. Happiness must not make us selfish."

Dick's face brightened. His heart had grown light and happy while the doctor spoke.

"That's just what I tell myself and the little woman," he said. "Often she doesn't like to have the fellow droppin' in and spoilin' our chats" (Dick felt an immense satisfaction in saying this), "but I tell her with just our two selves we'd get selfish with happiness unless we had somethin' to do for another. But he does break up our Sundays awfully—scarcely can get a word alone, that fellow's pokin' around so."

"Oh, well, you can afford him one day in the week, and I would not let him bother me; just be as happy as if he wasn't around."

Somehow Dick felt much better after this talk. He had tried to ignore the presence of the man oppo-

site, but now he could acknowledge it, and definitely locate the man in his thought as a poor dependent, who was benefited by his bounty. He enjoyed thinking that the little woman objected more or less to the fellow, and that she allowed him so much liberty only to please Dick. As the weeks rolled on he confessed to the doctor that the fellow was really useful at times.

"Rainy days he goes to market for the little woman," he said, "and often runs out on errands for us."

"Dick's house" had been occupied six months, when a whole week passed without his seeing his "little woman" at the window. During that six months there had scarcely been an afternoon during which she had not sat for an hour or two at the window sewing. Dick had grown to think of that hour as the bright spoke in the wheel of the day. She looked at him so kindly and gently, and he used to imagine he was lying on a lounge in the room, reading aloud to her as she sewed, and that her kind, warm smile was one of love, not of pity. And when a whole week passed without his once seeing her, Dick found himself in a nervous fever, with a blinding headache from having gazed so eagerly and anxiously across the street, and Grandfather Levy sent for Dr. Griffin.

"There's something the matter over the way," whispered Dick, as soon as the doctor was alone with him. "I haven't seen her for a whole week;

there's a strange woman there, and I'm sure she's sick. I couldn't sleep all last night for worrying about her."

Dr. Griffin went to the window and looked out. Then he took a magnifying-glass from his pocket, and deliberately stared into the window opposite.

Then he went back to Dick. "My dear fellow," he said, "you are to be congratulated. You are a father. I saw the nurse walking up and down the room with the child in her arms. It is a bad habit, by the way, and you must tell her not to teach it to the child. You can't begin too young with them."

After the doctor went away, Dick buried his face in his pillow and wept softly.

"A little baby—yes, my little baby," he whispered. "God bless the little woman. Some day she will sit with it at the window, and I shall have them both for company."

And then one day, a soft, warm day, late in May, there she sat at the window again with lilies instead of roses in her cheeks, and the bundle of flannel in her arms. She smiled at Dick, and tears of joy and love welled up in his eyes as he gazed upon the two.

"I've got two of 'em for company now, the little woman and the baby," he whispered.

After that the days seemed very happy and bright, and Dick thought himself the richest man on earth. Only he wondered why the roses did not come back to the little woman's cheeks.

"She doesn't look as well as she ought to," he told the doctor, one day in June, and the doctor, peering over his spectacles, shook his head as he looked at her, but Dick did not see it.

Passing down the block one day, Dr. Griffin came face to face with a little girl who wheeled a baby carriage, and, as he glanced under the awning, he was startled to see two weirdly brilliant eyes, the very counterpart of Dick's, gazing up at him.

"Whose child is this? Does it live over in the brick flats there?" queried the doctor.

The little girl nodded.

"Second flight up?"

"Yes, sir."

"Queer enough, queer enough," he mused, as he walked on.

"Your baby has eyes exactly like you, Dick," said the doctor, a few days later. "Honestly, no joking; I saw the little fellow on the street and knew him by his eyes."

After that Dick's heart went out to the baby more and more, and he was eager to see it. One day he saw the little nurse-girl wheeling the carriage, and as fast as his lame body would permit he hurried and hobbled down to the street, hoping it would pass near him. Sure enough it did, and Dick's heart jumped into his throat as he leaned on his cane and peered into the carriage to catch his first glimpse of the baby he had grown to think of as his own. Yes, those were his own eyes—his very own—gaz-

ing up at him, and he touched the little hand with reverence and awe. The baby laughed and twisted its small, soft fingers about his thumb, and clung to his hand as if unwilling to let him go. For weeks after that he would wake at night, thinking he felt that clinging touch upon his hand; and those great, dark, startled eyes, the very counterpart of his own, seemed illuminating the night for him.

It was early November when he failed to see the baby at the window or on the street; nor did the mother appear at the window for four days. The morning of the fifth day, Dick saw, from his window, a little white hearse drawn by white ponies pause at the house opposite, and then some one came out with a small casket followed by the "male relative" and a few sad-faced friends.

That day Dick entered Gethsemane, and the mourners who followed the little baby to its last resting-place shed no bitterer tears than he. Mixed with his keen anguish for the loss of the child was fear for the life of the mother, who was too ill to attend the burial.

That night Dr. Griffin was sent for, and he found Dick so ill and feverish that he was alarmed. His tears mingled with Dick's, when the poor boy told him of the baby's death, and begged him to go over and inquire after the "little woman."

"You can ask the janitor, doctor; just say friends opposite want to inquire after her; you needn't say no more."

The doctor did as Dick desired, and came back shortly, making an effort to speak cheerfully.

"The janitor says Mrs.—"

"The little woman," interrupted Dick. "Yes, yes; how is she?" Not for worlds would he have heard her name spoken.

"She is ill, suffering from a prostration caused by grief," the doctor replied. "But she is young, and she will rally in a few weeks, no doubt. You must brace up, old man, and be ready to comfort her. If you don't look after yourself a little better I won't promise for the consequences to your health. You've overtaxed yourself lately, and you must keep very quiet now for a few days."

But each day Dick dragged himself to the window to see if the little woman was visible. And on the tenth day after the baby's funeral, a black hearse, with nodding black plumes, and black horses with jet harness and dangling black tassels, stood at the house opposite; and Dick, with panting breath and wild eyes, crawled down the stairs, and out upon the street, for he seemed choking in the house, and he thought he must hinder those cruel people from taking away the little woman. He could not, could not let her go from him forever, and when he saw them lifting the casket into the hearse, he reached out his arms, tried to cry out and stop them, and then he fell over, weak and helpless, with strange sounds ringing in his ears and warm blood spurting from his mouth. When he

awoke to consciousness he was lying on his couch, and Dr. Griffin and Grandfather Levy were bending over him with tears in their eyes.

He tried to speak, and with each syllable the blood gushed again from his lips.

"You mustn't talk," said the doctor. "You are very weak and it may be fatal to you if you do not keep quiet."

He drew the doctor's head down close to his lips.

"It's no use tryin' to save me," he whispered. "I'd rather go—I couldn't stand it livin' on with both of 'em gone. I've nothin' to live for now—no ambition or pleasure left. I've had all the pleasure I'll ever get out of life, doctor, this year back. It's kinder to let me go—and—follow my family."

The hemorrhage set in anew, and with the red gushing tide, Dick's soul passed out to seek those of the little woman and the baby.

THE OLD MAN'S CHRISTMAS.

Though there was wrong on both sides, they never would have separated had it not been for the old man.

He was Ben's father, and Ben was an only child—a spoiled, selfish, high-tempered lad, who had grown up with the idea that his father, Anson English, or the "old man," as his dutiful son called him, was much richer than he really was, and that he had no need of any personal effort—any object in life, aside from the pursuit of pleasure.

Ben's mother had died when he was fifteen years old and his father had never married again. Yet it was not any allegiance to her memory which had kept Anson English from a second marriage. He remembered her, to be sure, and scarcely a day passed without his mentioning her. But after her death, as during her weary life, he used her name as a synonym for all that was undesirable. He compared everybody to "Liz'beth," and always to her disadvantage. He had a word of praise and encouragement and approval for every housewife in the neighborhood except—his own. Whatever went wrong, indoors or out, "Liz'beth" was the direct or indirect cause.

During the first five years of her married life, Elizabeth made strenuous exertions to please her husband. She wept her sweet eyes dim over her repeated failures. Then she found that she had been attempting an impossible labor, and grew passively indifferent—an indifference which lasted until death kindly released her.

Elizabeth had been a tidy housekeeper during these first years.

"You'd scrub and scour a man out 'er house an' home!" was all the praise her husband gave her for her order and cleanliness; and to his neighbors, to whom he was fond of paying informal visits, he would often say—"Liz'beth's at it again—sweepin' and cleanin', so I cleared out. Never see her without a broom in her hand. I'd a good deal rather have a little more dirt, than so much tearin' round. Liz'beth tires me with her ways."

Yet when, in the indifference of despair which seized upon Elizabeth before her death, she allowed her house to look after itself, Anson was no better satisfied.

"I've come over to find a place to set down," he would tell his neighbors. "Liz'beth's let things 'cumulate till the house is a sight to see—she's getting dreadful slack, somehow. A man likes order when he goes home to rest from all his cares."

Even when she died she displeased him by choosing a busy season for the occasion.

"Just like Liz'beth to die in hayin' time," he

said. "Everything got to stop—hay spoilin'—men idle. Women never seem to have no system about work matters—no power of plannin' things, to make it convenient like for men folks."

Yet after she was gone, Anson found how much help she had been to him, how wonderful her economy had been, how light her expenditures. He knew he never could find any one to replace her, in these respects, and as money considerations were the main ones in his mind, he believed it would be the better economy to remain a widower, and hire his work done.

So during those most critical years of Ben's life, he had been without a woman's guidance or care.

At eighteen, he was all that arrogance, conceit, selfishness, and high-temper could render him. Yet he was a favorite with the fair sex for all that, as he had a manly figure, and a warm, caressing way when he chose, that won their admiration and pleased their vanity.

Anson English favored early marriages, and began to think it would be better all around if Ben should bring a wife home.

She could do the work better than hired help, and keep the money in the family. And Ben would not waste his time and means on half a dozen, as he was now doing, but would stay at home, no doubt, and settle down into a sensible, practical, business man. Yes, Ben ought to marry, and his father told him so.

Ben smiled.

"I'm already thinking of it," he said. He had expected opposition from his father, and was surprised at his suggestion.

"Yes," continued the "old man," as Ben already designated him, "I'd like to see you settled down before you're twenty-one. But you want to make a good choice. There's Abby Wilson, now. She's got the muscle of a man, and ain't afraid of anything. And her father has a fine property—a growin' property. Abby'll make a man a good, vigorous help-mate, and she'll bring him money in time. You'd better shine up to Abby, Ben."

Ben gave a contemptuous laugh. "I'd as soon marry a dressed-up boy," he said. "She's more like a boy than a girl in her looks and in her ways. I have other plans in my mind, father, more to my taste. I mean to marry Edith Gilman, if she'll take me, and I think she will."

A dark frown contracted Anson English's brow.

"Edith Gilman?" he repeated; "why, that puny school-ma'am, with her baby face and weak voice, 'll never help you to get a livin', Ben. What are you thinkin' of?"

"Of love, father, I guess. I love her, and that's all there is of it. And I shall marry her, if she'll take me, and you can like it or lump it, as you please. She's a good girl, and if she's treated well all round, she'll make a good wife, and she's the only woman that can put the check-rein on me,

when I get in my tempers. She'll make a man of me yet."

"But she can't work," insisted his father. "She looks as white and puny as Liz'beth did the year she died."

"She's overworked in the school-room. I mean to take her home, and give her a rest. I don't ask any woman to marry me and be my drudge. I expect my wife will keep help."

The old man groaned aloud. Ben's ideas were positively ruinous. If he married this girl, it would add to, not decrease, the family expenses. But it was useless to oppose. Ben would do as he pleased, the old man saw that plainly, and he might as well submit.

He did submit, and Ben married Edith on his twenty-first birthday, and brought her home.

Edith was a quiet little creature, with a soft voice, and a pale, sweet face, and frail figure. She came up to Anson English when she entered the house, and put her hands timidly upon his arms.

"I want you to love me," she said; "I have had no father or mother since I can remember. I want to call you father, and I want to make you happy if I can."

"Well, I'll tell you how," the old man retorted. "Discharge the hired girl, and make good bread. That'll make me happy,"—and he laughed harshly.

Edith shrank from his rough words, so void of the sympathy and love she longed for. But she dis-

charged the girl within a week, and tried to make good bread. It was not a success, however, and the old man was not slow to express his dissatisfaction. Edith left the table in tears.

"Another dribbler—'Liz'beth was always a cryin' just that way over every little thing," sighed the old man.

Edith eventually conquered the difficulties of bread-making, and became a famous cook. But she did not please her husband's father any better by this achievement.

"You're always a fixin' up some new sort of trash for the table," he said to her one day. "Dessert is it, you call it? 'Nuff to make a man's patience desert him, to see sugar and flour wasted so. Liz'beth liked your fancy cooking, but I cured her of it."

"Yes, and you killed her, too," cried Edith, for the first time since her marriage losing control of her temper, and answering back. "Everybody says you worried her into the grave. But you won't succeed so well with me. I will live just to defy you, if no more. And I'll show you that I'll not bear everything, too."

It was over in a moment, and it was not repeated. Indeed, Edith was kinder and gentler and more submissive in her manner after that for days, as sweet natures always are when they have once broken over the rules which govern their lives.

Yet the old man always spoke of Edith as a virago after that.

"She's worse'n 'Liz'beth," he said, "and she had a temper of her own at times that would just singe things."

Ben passed most of his evenings and a good part of his days at the village "store." He came home the worse for drink occasionally, and he was absolutely indifferent to all the work and care of the farm and family.

"She's just like 'Liz'beth," the old man said to his neighbors; "she don't make home entertainin' for her husband. But Ben isn't balanced like me, and he goes wrong. He's excitable. I never was. The right kind of a woman would keep him at home."

After a child came to them matters seemed to mend for a time. So long as the infant lay pink and helpless in its mother's arms, or in its crib, it was a bond to unite them all.

As soon as it began to be an active child, with naughty ways which needed correction, it was another element of discord.

The old man did not think Edith capable of controlling the child, and Ben was hasty and harsh, and he did not like to hear the baby cry. So he stayed more and more at the store, and was an object of fear to the child, and of reproach to the mother, when he did return.

They drifted farther apart, and the old man constantly widened the breach between them. They had been married six years, and the baby girl was four years old, when Ben struck Edith a blow, one

day, and told her to take her child and leave the house.

In less than an hour she had gone, no one knew whither.

"She'll come back, more's the pity," the old man said. "Liz'beth, she started off to leave me once, but she concluded to come back and try it over again."

But Edith did not come back. Months afterwards they heard of her in a distant part of the state teaching school, and supporting her child.

Ben applied for a divorce on the plea of desertion. Edith never appeared against him, and he obtained it.

One year from the time Edith left him, he married Abby Wilson. She had grown into a voluptuous though coarse maturity, and was dashing in dress and manner. Her father had recently died, leaving her a fine property. She had always coveted Ben, and did not delay the nuptials from any sense of delicacy, but rather hastened the hour which should make him legally her own. The old man was highly pleased at the turn affairs had taken. After all these years Ben was united to the woman he had chosen for him so long ago, and now surely Ben would settle down, and take care off his shoulders—shoulders which were beginning to feel the weight of years of labor. In truth, the old man was breaking down.

He fell ill of a low fever soon after Ben's second

marriage, and when he rose from his bed he seemed to have grown ten years older. He was more childish in his fault-finding, and more irritable than ever before, and this new wife of Ben's had little patience with him. She was not at all like Edith. She bullied him, and frightened him into silence when he began to find fault with her extravagance. For she was extravagant—there was no denying that. She cared only for show and outward appearance. She neglected her home duties, and often left the old man to prepare his own food, while she and Ben dashed over the country, or through the neighboring villages, behind the blooded span she had insisted upon his purchasing soon after their marriage.

Poor old Anson English! He was nearing his sixtieth year now, and he looked and seemed much older. Ben was his only earthly tie, and the hope and stay of his old age. And he was but a reed—a reed. His father saw that at last. Ben would never develop into a practical business man. He was unstable, lazy, and selfish. And this new wife seemed to encourage him in every extravagant folly, instead of restraining him as the old man had hoped. And some way Ben had never been the same since Edith went away. He had been none too good or kind to his father before that! but since then—well, when she went, it seemed to Anson that she took with her whatever of gentleness or kindness lurked in Ben's nature, and left only its brutality and selfishness.

And strive as he would to banish the feeling, the old man missed the child.

Ah, no! he was not happy in this new state of affairs, which he had so rejoiced over at first. He grew very old during the next two years. Like all men who worry the lives of women in the domestic circle, he was cowardly at heart. And Ben's wife frightened him into silent submission by her masculine assumption of authority and her loud voice and well-defined muscle.

He spoke little at home now, but he still paid frequent visits to his neighbors, and he remained firm in the Adam-like idea that Elizabeth had been the root of all evil in his life.

"Yes, Ben's lettin' the place run down pretty bad," he confessed to a neighbor who had broached the subject. "Ben's early trainin' wasn't right. 'Liz'beth, she let him do 'bout as he pleased. 'Liz'beth never had no notions of how a boy should be trained. He'd a come out all right if I'd 'a managed him from the start."

Strange to say, he never was known to speak one disparaging word of Abby, Ben's second wife. Her harshness and neglect were matters of common discussion in the neighborhood, but the old man, who had been so bitter and unjust toward his own wife and Edith, seemed to feel a curious respect for this Amazon who had subjugated him. Or, perhaps, he remembered how eager he had been for the marriage, and his pride kept him silent. Certain it is

that he bore her neglect, and, later, her abuse, with no word of complaint, and even spoke of her sometimes with praise.

"She's a brave one, Abby is," he would say. "She ain't afraid of nothin' or nobody. Ef she'd been a man, she'd a made a noise in the world."

Ben drank more and more, and Abby dressed and drove in like ratio. The farm ran down and debts accumulated—debts which Abby refused to pay with her money, and the old man saw the savings of a long life of labor squandered in folly and vice.

People said it was turning his brain, for he talked constantly of his poverty, often walking the streets in animated converse with himself. And at length he fell ill again, and was wildly delirious for weeks. It was a high fever and when it left him, he was totally blind, and quite helpless.

He needed constant care and attention. He could not be left alone even for an hour. Ben was seldom at home, and Abby rebelled at the confinement and restraint it imposed upon her. Hired help refused to take the burden of the care of the troublesome old man without increased wages, and Ben could not and Abby would not incur this added expense. Servants gave warning; Ben drank more deeply, and prolonged his absences from home, and Abby finally carried out a resolve which had at first caused even her hard heart some twinges.

She made an application to the keeper of the County Poor to admit her husband's father to the

department of the incurably insane, which was adjacent to the Poor House.

"He's crazy," she said, "just as crazy as can be. We can't do anything with him. He needs a strong man to look after him. Ben's never at home, and he has everything to look after any way and can't be broken of his rest, and the old man talks and cries half the night. I'm not able to take care of him—I seem to be breaking down myself, with all I have to endure, and besides it isn't safe to have him in the house. I think he's getting worse all the time. He'd be better off, and we all would, if he was in the care of the county."

The authorities looked into the matter, and found that at least a portion of the lady's statements were true. It was quite evident that the old man would be better off in the County House than he was in the home of his only son. So he was taken away, and Abby had her freedom at last.

"We are going to take you where you will have medical treatment and care; it is your daughter's request," they told him in answer to his trembling queries.

"Oh! yes, yes—Abby thinks I'll get my sight back, I suppose, if I'm doctored up. Well, may be so, but I'm pooty old—pooty old for the doctors to patch up. But Abby has a powerful mind to patch things—a powerful mind. 'Liz'beth never would a thought of sending me away—'Liz'beth was so easy like. Abby ought to a been a man, she had. She'd

a flung things." So he babbled on, as they carried him to the Poor House.

It was November, and the holidays were close at hand, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year. Abby meant to enjoy them, and invited all her relatives to a time of general feasting and merry-making.

"I feel as if a great nightmare were lifted off my heart and brain, now the old man has gone," she said. "He will be so much better off, and get so much more skillful treatment, you know, in a place like that. They are very kind in that institution, and so clean, and nice, and he will have plenty of company to keep him from being lonesome. We have been all through it, during the last year, or else we never should have sent him there. It is really an excellent home for him."

It was just a year later when a delicate, sweet-faced woman was shown through the wards of that "excellent home" for the poor and unfortunate. She walked with nervous haste, and her eyes glanced from room to room, and from face to face, as if seeking, yet dreading, some object.

Presently the attendant pushed open a partly closed door, which led into a small room, ventilated only by one high, narrow window.

"This is the room, I believe," he said, and the lady stepped in and paused. The air was close and impure, and almost stifled her.

On the opposite side of the room she saw a large crib with a cover or lid which could be closed and locked when necessary, but which was now raised. In this crib upon a hard mattress and soiled pillows, lay the emaciated form of an old man. He turned his sightless eyes toward the door as he heard the sound of footsteps.

"What is wanted?" he asked feebly; "does anybody want me? Has anybody come for me?"

"O father, father!" cried the woman in a voice choked with sobs. "Don't you know me? It is I—and I have come to take you away—to take you away home with me. Will you go?"

A glow of delight shone over the old man's wasted face, like the last rays of the sunlight over a winter landscape. He half rose upon his elbow, and leaned forward as if trying to see the speaker.

"Why, it's Abby, it's Abby, come at last!" he said. "You called me father, didn't you—and you was crying, and it made your voice sound kind of strange and broken like. But you must be Abby come to take me home. Oh, I thought you'd come at last, Abby. It seems a long, long time since I came away. And you've never been to see me; no, nor Ben, either. But you've come at last, Abby, you've come at last. Let me take your hand, daughter, for I can't see yet. They don't seem to help me here as you thought they would. And I'm so hungry, Abby!—do you think you could manage to get the old man a little something to eat before we start home?"

The woman had grown paler and paler as she listened to these words, which the old man poured out in eager haste, like one whose thoughts and feelings, long pent within himself for want of a listener, now rushed forth pell-mell into speech.

"He does not know me," she whispered—"he does not know me. I will not undeceive him now. He is happy in this delusion,—let him keep it for the present." Then, aloud, she said:

"You are hungry, father? Do you not have food enough here?"

"Oh, I have my share, Abby; I have my share. But my appetite's varying, and sometimes when they bring it, I can't eat it, and then when I want it most I can't get it. I'm one of many here, and I've been so lonesome, Abby. But then I knew you'd come for me all in good time. And Ben—how is Ben, Abby? Does he want to see his old father again? Ah, Ben was a nice little boy—a nice little boy. But 'Liz'beth wan't no kind of a mother for such a high-strung lad. And then he hadn't oughter married that sickly sort of girl that ran off an' left him. Sakes alive! what a temper she had! It sort of broke Ben down living with her as long as he did. But he remembers his old father at last, don't he? And he wants to have me home to die. Ah, Ben has a good heart after all!"

"I must not tell him; I must not," whispered the woman as she listened. "Bitter to me as this deception is, I must let him remain in it." Then

with a sudden bracing of the nerves and a visible effort, she said:

"Ben is away from home now, father. He will not be there to meet you, but you'll not mind that. I shall make you so comfortable; I want you at home during the holidays."

So he went out from the horror and loneliness and gloom of the Poor House, to the comfortable home which Edith had provided for herself and child in the years since she left Ben. Eva was a precocious little maiden of nine now, wise and womanly beyond her years. So soon as Edith learned of the old man's desolate fate, she resolved to bring him home. Eva could attend to his wants during the day, while she was in the school room, and the interrupted studies could be pursued in the evening. Or she could hire assistance if he was as troublesome as report had said. He had been a harsh old man, and had helped to widen the breach between her and Ben. But he was the father of the man she had married, and she could not let him die in the Poor House. So she brought him home.

"Don't I hear a child's voice?" he asked, as Eva came dancing out to greet them. "Who is it, Abby?"

"Why, it's your own little granddaughter, Eva," cried the child, clasping his withered hand in her two soft palms. "Don't you remember me? Mamma says you used to love me."

Edith's heart stood still. Surely now he would understand. And would he be angry and harsh with her?

The old man's face lighted.

"Ah, I see, I see," he said, musingly, "Abby and Ben have taken the little one home. It must be Edith is dead. She was such a puny thing." Then turning his face to the woman who was guiding his faltering footsteps, he asked:

"And is Edith dead?"

"Yes," she answered, quietly, "Edith is dead." And added "to you," in a whisper.

"He must never be undeceived," she thought. "It would be too severe a blow; the truth might kill him." And to Eva she said, a little later:

"Dear, your grandfather is very ill, and not quite right in his mind. He thinks my name is Abby, and you must not correct him or dispute any strange thing he may say."

The journey left the old man very weak indeed, but he talked almost constantly.

"It was so good of you, Abby, to take the little girl home," he would say. "But I knowed you had a good heart and Ben, too. He was fond of his old father, spite of his rough ways. It was pooty lonesome—pooty lonesome, off there at that place—that Institute where you sent me. Some folks said it was the Poor House, but I knew better—I knew better—I knew better. Ben an' you would never a sent me there. I s'pose it was a good place, but they had too many patients. Sometimes I was cold and hungry and all alone for hours and hours. Oh, it's good to be back home with you—you, Abby—but why don't Ben come?"

"Ben is away, father."

"Oh, yes, yes. Business, I suppose. Ben'll turn out all right at last. I always thought so. After he sort o' outgrows 'Liz'beth's trainin'. But I hope he'll get back for Christmas. Somehow I've been thinkin' lately 'bout the Christmas days when Ben was a little boy. We allus put somethin' in his stockin' that night, no matter if 'twan't no more'n a sweet cake. Sakes alive! how he prized things he found in his stockin' Christmas mornin's! I got to thinkin' 'bout it all last Christmas out at that there Institute, and I just laid an' bawled like a baby, I was so homesick like. Seemed to me if I could just see Ben's face again, I'd ask nothin' more of heaven. And now I think if I can just hear his voice again, it'll be enough. Do you think he'll git home for Christmas, Abby!"

"I hope so, dear father, but I cannot tell," Edith answered softly, her heart seeming to break in her breast as she listened.

She knew very well that Ben would not go across the street to see the father he had deserted, and that she could never send for him to come to her house, to pay even a last visit of mercy.

"What will I do—how can I explain to him, when Christmas comes and Ben does not appear?" she thought.

But the way was shown to her by that great Peace-maker who helps us out of all difficulties at last.

Christmas eve, the old man's constant chatter grew flighty and incoherent. He talked of people

and things unknown to Edith, and spoke his mother's name many times. Then he fell asleep. In the morning he seemed very weak, and his voice was fainter.

"Such a strange dream as I have had, 'Liz'beth," he said, as Edith put her hand on his brow, and smoothed back the thin, white hair.

"Such a strange dream. I thought Ben had grown into a man, and had left me alone—all alone to die. I'm so glad to be awake, and find it isn't true. How dark it is, and how long the night seems! Tomorrow is Christmas. Did you put something in Ben's stockin', 'Liz'beth? I have forgotten."

"Yes," answered Edith, in a choked voice.

"And it's gettin' colder, 'Liz'beth. Hadn't you better look after Ben a little? See if he's covered up well in his crib. You're so careless, 'Liz'beth, the boy'll take his death of cold yet. And he's all I've got. He'll make a fine man, a fine man if you don't spoil him, 'Liz'beth. But you hain't no real sense for trainin' a boy, somehow. Is he covered up? It's bitter, bitter cold."

"He is well covered," Edith answered. The old man seemed to doze again. Then he roused a little.

"It's dawn," he said. "I see the light breaking. Little Ben'll be crawling out for his stockin' pooty quick. I oughter had the fire made afore this to warm his little toes. Strange you couldn't a waked me, 'Liz'beth! You don't never seem to have no foresight."

Then the old man fell back on Edith's arm, dead.

NANCE.

The first day that McAllister was able to sit out in the sunshine, after his illness, he saw a curious object.

It was a man of goodly stature and young in years striding up the street, or rather loping, with that loose amble peculiar to the native of Southern Illinois. But it was not the man's gait which struck McAllister's eye—it was his costume.

He was attired in a long robe, fashioned something like a gentleman's dressing-gown, and the material was a calico patchwork bed-quilt, which had done faithful service in the first period of its existence before it assumed its present character. Upon his head appeared something resembling a silk hat—its missing top supplied by a handful of twisted hay. The face underneath was a handsome face, despite its leathery hue—which told of "ager chills," as its owner expressed it—and its masses of unkempt black beard and hair.

"Great heavens! Watkins," cried Mac, addressing mine host of the Dieckman House, who stood smoking his cigar on the hotel veranda, "will you be kind enough to tell me what that is passing up the street on the opposite side?"

Watkins laughed as he puffed out the smoke and expectorated, preparatory to a reply.

"That," he said, glancing across at the curious figure, "that is Sol—a veritable Illinois Sucker*—a true type of the native. Everybody knows Sol hereabouts."

"I should think likely," laughed Mac. "His costume would mark him anywhere. What sort of regimentals are those, anyway?"

"Oh, that's Sol's economy. He doesn't believe in costly apparel. That old bed-quilt he cut and sewed into a garment which he called a coat three years ago, and he has worn it every spring, fall, and winter since. In the summer he wears—well, Sol dresses very lightly in the summer season; and you ought to see his dug-out."

"His what?"

"His dug-out—the house he lives in. It is a hole dug in the side hill, half a dozen miles south of Vandalia, and a little roof and covering built out over the door. Here Sol dwells in bachelor state."

"But I thought the country about here was rich and thrifty?"

"So it is, in the main. But some of the old settlers keep their primitive ways of living, and have reared their children in the same habits. Sol's parents came here years ago, with only a yoke of oxen, and half a dozen children to support. They made a living, and managed to feed the hungry

* Sucker—a native of Illinois.—*Webster's Colloquial Dict.*

mouths dependent upon them for support, but there were no luxuries, I assure you. Sol was the youngest child—and he is now thirty-five. He keeps the family mansion—the ‘ancestral estate’—and dwells there; and he keeps the frugal habits of his parents who are dead and gone. One of his brothers, however, has gone North, and is said to be living handsomely there. The sisters are all married—mostly in this section of country—and they all dress and keep their persons better than Sol. He remains true to the old Sucker education—lives on hog and hominy, with an occasional drink of ‘old rye’ to wash it down. Is honest, and kind hearted, and indolent, and aguish, as you can see by his countenance.”

In the meantime the subject under discussion had rounded the square, made one or two halts, and now approached the Dieckman House.

Mr. Watkins accosted him pleasantly.

“Hello, Sol! Glad to see you in town to-day. How are you feeling?”

“Right smart, thank ye, sir,” Sol responded. “Had a spell o’ the shakes last month, whilst it was so rainy, that ’bout loosened every tooth in my head, and made me feel like I didn’t keer whether school kept or not. But I’m on my pins agin now all right, and ready fer the corn-shuckin’ season.”

“How’s Nancy, Sol? I hear you are rather smitten in that direction, eh?”

A sudden color stained the dead yellow of Sol's hairy cheek.

"Nance? Oh, she's real peart. She's shuckin' corn now, day in and day out. A right smart girl, Nance is."

"Yes, and a handsome one, too. You'll get a treasure in her, Sol."

"Thank ye, sir, but it 'pears like I hain't got her yet. Well, good day, sir," and Sol loped away, and McAllister went up to his room to lie down.

He found the days of convalescence very dull and long at Vandalia. He was an actor—played light melodrama in a certain combination company, which made a starring tour of the West and South not many years ago, drawing very good houses for a season.

McAllister had felt weak and languid for a week before the company went to Vandalia. There he was taken seriously ill—too ill to go on. So the company had to go on without him—for they were billed for weeks ahead—and another man was telegraphed for to supply his place. Now at the end of ten days he found himself convalescing from an attack of typhoid pneumonia—feeling very weak and lifeless, and wretchedly lonesome.

"I will get away in a few days more," he said, as he awoke the next morning after the day on which he had seen Sol the Sucker. "And to-day I will get a horse and ride out into the country to pass away the time. I never saw a dug-out; it will be a new experience."

The afternoon was bright and beautiful, a perfect September day; and McAllister looked very picturesque and interesting as he galloped along the level Illinois prairies, on a handsome black horse, dressed in his jaunty stage equestrian suit, and with the dark melancholy of his eyes heightened by the pallor of his face. McAllister was always the interesting villain in the play, who won all the hearts in the audience with his handsome face, and he had never in his life looked handsomer than now.

As he galloped along, he saw at some distance ahead of him another equestrian. It was a woman. He touched his horse with the whip and soon overtook her, and, as he approached, a smile of amusement brought a twinkle into the dark, melancholy eyes.

"Here's another native," he murmured; "a companion for Sol the Sucker. Is not she a figure for an artist? I wish I could see her face."

The figure was that of a medium-sized woman, dressed in a calico gown and sun-bonnet, seated on a mule. The short print skirt revealed one bare foot, which was small, but not shapely—as it showed no arch of instep. With one hand she held the reins, and with the other carefully balanced a covered pail, which seemed to contain something.

"Either breakable or spillable," the actor concluded by the care she exercised in managing it.

He rode along for some distance behind her, growing more and more curious to see her face.

Finally she reined her mule into a path that led through a bar-way, and was about to dismount, when McAllister anticipated her.

"Allow me," he said; and, springing down, he slid the bars back and stood with uncovered head while she rode through the opening.

"Thank you," she said, with a little nod of the sun-bonnet, and, at the same instant, the mule gave a sudden and vicious kick of his heels in the direction of Mac's head which served to knock off his hat and unseat the fair rider at the same time—for she was fair. This the actor discovered, as he sprang to her assistance and raised her on his arm with tender solicitude. Her skin was pure olive, with a peach-like richness in the full lips; her eyes were dark and long-lashed; her hair a warm brown; her brow low and full.

"Are you hurt?" queried Mac, in that wonderfully modulated voice of his, which fell on the girl's ear like the strain of a pipe-organ she had once heard.

But to this tender solicitude the pretty girl responded by the most matter-of-fact reply possible: "No, I ain't hurt; but I've spilt the buttermilk;" and she withdrew from his embrace and looked ruefully at the empty pail and the retreating mule, who was pursuing his way homeward, satisfied with the mischief he had accomplished.

"Will you get a scolding for it?" queried Mac. "If so, I had better accompany you home and take

all the blame. I will see you home, at all events. I am very thirsty—and very tired, and would like to rest awhile before I ride back to town. I am only just up from a severe illness.”

“I thought you looked mighty pale, Mister,” the girl said, with a look of sympathy at the handsome stranger; “and you’d better take a good rest afore you go back. You go right into the settin’-room and lie down; ma’am she’s out in the corn-field, and pa he’s in town, and I’ve got to get the grub ready for ’em both. So, stranger, you’ll excuse me, and make yerself comfortable. I’ll put your horse in the barn and give him his feed.”

Mac, who found himself strangely tired, dragged himself into the little hut—which was scarcely more, though it boasted two rooms and a loft—and threw himself down upon a rude lounge in one corner of the room. Every bone seemed to be aching with weariness. He fell asleep—and awoke in a high fever an hour later to find a yellow old lady moving about the room on tiptoe, setting cups and plates on a table which was drawn into the center of the room and covered with a white cloth.

Mac rose hastily, his head swimming dizzily.

“Madam, I fear I am intruding,” he began. “But I felt too ill to return to the city without resting, and your daughter kindly allowed me to rest here.”

“Eh?” responded the old lady, putting one hand to her ear; “I’m a little hard o’ hearin’, but it’s all right I reckon. Nance said as how there was a

fine-haired stranger took sick out'n the road, and he'd come in to rest up. Won't you hitch up and hev a mouthful o' hominy to stay yer stomick?"

But Mac was too ill to partake of the hospitality proffered, and too ill to return to town that night. A drizzling rain set in and he gave up all idea of it.

"Only, what will I do about the horse," he sighed. "It's from the livery—hired for the afternoon!"

"Never mind about that, stranger," chirped Nance, cheerily, as she entered the room just in time to hear this last sentence. "I'll look after the horse to-night, and ef ye'r too sick to ride back to town to-morrow, we'll git Sol to take the horse in."

"Sol?" repeated Mac—"Sol the Sucker—who wears a patchwork bed-quilt dressing-gown?"

"The same, Mister—why, you don't know Sol, do you?"

"I've seen him—and to see him was to love him," Mac laughingly responded. "So you are Sol's sweetheart, are you, Nance? But you are too pretty a girl to marry Sol and live in a dug-out. You're pretty enough to live in a city and wear fine clothes, my dear."

"Sol has money laid up," Nance answered, blushing rosily. "Only he don't put on no airs—he ain't one of yer fine haired kind. But then"—with a toss of her bright head and an arch look at the stranger—"but then Sol's nothing to me—I've made

him no promise, ef he has been hangin' round me more'n a year."

"Let him hang, but don't you go and hang yourself in the matrimonial noose with him," said Mac, with a soft glance from his dark eyes—the glance that had misled many a wiser heart than poor foolish Nance's. "You are far too pretty, my dear, to tie yourself to that variety show—that Japanese patterned concern—that lout of a Sucker."

Nance flushed.

"I'm a Sucker, too," she said. "I was raised down here in Southern Illinois, just the same as Sol was."

Mac smiled again, and reached out and took Nance's brown hand as she passed by him.

"Well," he said, "there are suckers and suckers. The leech sucks poison, and the bee sucks honey. You are the honey bee—fed on sweets, and your lips, I know, are sweeter than honey. No, I don't know,"—and he sighed—"but I suppose Sol does."

Nance lifted her head proudly.

"No, he don't know!" she said hastily. "No man in these yere parts or anywhar else ever got around me to that extent, Mister. I'm not one o' the free kind."

Mac's eyes glittered with something more than the brilliancy of fever.

"No, you are not one of the free kind," he said softly, still holding her hand, "a man must work hard who wins your heart; but once won,—great heavens, what happiness will be his!"

"Nance! Yer dad is comin' and the hominy's burnin'!" cried the old woman from the kitchen; and Nance darted away.

Mac turned on his hard couch with a light laugh.

"The old story," he sighed; "she is mine for the taking; but I will let her alone—leave her in peace to Sol the Sucker. I will do the fair thing once in my life."

But, like most of McAllister's good resolutions, this resolve was afterward re-considered. He was ill almost a week—too ill to return to town. And several times after he did return he rode out to call upon his fair nurse, Nance—for it was she who had cared for him through his relapse. Four whole weeks passed by since their first meeting and then Mac went to rejoin his company, somewhere in the far West. And Nance? How white she grew after he went away! how large and dark her eyes! how silent and grave she was! and sometimes how she wept. And Sol and she did not speak to each other; and by and by there were strange tales afloat which no man dared repeat in the hearing of Sol.

It was little more than two years later—in November—when the Certain Combination Company was billed at Vandalia again.

As McAllister walked up from the station to the Dieckman House, a flood of memories came over him—memories which had scarcely occurred to him during his two years' wanderings. For McAllister's

conscience, never an active or accusing one, had become wholly blunted by his constant and repeated lapses from the ways of truth and principle.

It was no remorseful memory that came to him now; only a vague sense of curiosity concerning the girl who had amused him for a few weeks, and the man he had wronged.

"I wonder if Sol still wears his coat of many colors?" he queried; "and if he still dwells in the ancestral mansion. I must ask mine host Watkins."

But he found the old Dieckman House in new hands. The clerk, however, knew Sol the Sucker.

"Oh, no, he doesn't live in the dug-out," he replied in answer to Mac's query, "and he has discarded the bed-quilt dressing-gown. He has built a new house and bought a new suit of ready-mades—and to-day his beard and hair made the acquaintance of scissors."

"And he still lives?" laughed Mac. "I should have fancied the shock would have been the death of him."

"He still lives—two of him in fact; for Sol was married to-day. He and his bride are stopping at the house here on their honeymoon trip."

"Married! Sol married!" repeated Mac; "you surprise me. And who is the bride? I hope he did well."

"That depends on how you look at it," the clerk responded. "It's quite a dramatic story—and, since you have an interest in Sol, I'll tell it. He was

very much interested in a pretty brunette neighbor of his, who lived near his dug-out; a handsome, active, good girl, Nance was, and she would have married Sol two years ago and lived happily with him forever afterward, no doubt, but for one of those freaks of fate. Some stranger—and by the way I believe he, too, was an actor—fell sick out here, and was taken care of for a few weeks by Nance. He was a man of the world, and a scamp into the bargain. And, of course Nance believed his flattering words, and you can imagine the result. He went away, and, as the poet has said,

“ ‘ The lover roved away;
 With breaking heart and falling tear
 She sat the livelong day.
 Alas, alas! for breaking hearts
 When lovers rove away.’ ”

“She had snubbed Sol after the stranger came. Sol kept his distance after the stranger went. By and by the talk began, and then Sol showed the stuff he was made of. He knocked down two or three men who used the girl’s name lightly, and he stood by the family through it all. He boldly declared that Nance was his affianced wife, and that he had the right to protect her. And it seems he wanted to marry her there and then, and have the legal right to defend her; but Nance would not consent. However, he won her consent at last, and now, after another year, and the old scandal has ceased to interest people, he has built a nice new home, bought him some new clothes, shaved

up, and made Nance his wife. She is handsomer than ever—with a pale, sad, thoughtful sort of look that is very becoming. Everybody is kind to her, and her one weakness and indiscretion seems to be forgotten, and I prophesy a happy life for them. And the whole town is enthusiastic over Sol's conduct. He is one in a thousand, you know."

"Oh, yes," McAllister answered, nonchalantly. "Women do that sort of thing every day—marry a *roué* to reform him, and nobody thinks it a heroic act. But it is only now and then we find a man willing to take an erring woman for his wife. And what of the villain in this little drama? He never came back, I suppose?"

"No, and it would not be healthy for him to put in an appearance, if Sol was around."

"You think Sol would show fight? He didn't strike me as a dangerous character at all."

"Well, I wouldn't like to be in that fellow's place if Sol got hold of him—that's all."

Mac arose, stifling a yawn.

"I am sure your little story is quite romantic, and I'm much obliged to you for telling it. I must go and prepare for my evening's duties at the hall. I think it quite time, by the way, that Vandalia afforded a better opera house."

McAllister did not appear in the play until the second act; so he took his time to dress, and went down the stairway leisurely, and leisurely out to the corner. The hall where the play was enacted was

just across the street, diagonally. He had not noticed a man who rose as he came through the hotel office and followed him down the stairs and walked close behind him to the corner of the street. But as he came into the light of the street lamp, the man stepped forward and in front of him.

"I'd like a word with you, Mister," he said in a low, suppressed voice. Mac glanced up—for the man towered a head and shoulders above him—and saw a smoothly shaven face of a pale yellow hue, a pair of dark glittering eyes and thin lips, between which gleamed large white teeth. The man was dressed in a suit of dark blue cloth, and his hands were thrust into his pockets. There was an expression about the face which rendered the actor uncomfortable, and he drew back a pace.

"I beg you will excuse me," he said, "I am in great haste. I am due at the hall yonder in eight minutes and I have to make some preparations after arriving there. Let me pass, please." But the man did not stir. He stood directly in front of McAllister, and seemed to grow in size and stature with every moment.

"I reckon you won't pass till I've had a word with you, Mister," he said. "If you pass afore I git ready for ye to, it'll be over my dead carcass. Just you wait now."

McAllister looked curiously at the man, at the same time reaching cautiously into his breast pocket for his revolver. He was aware that Van-

dalia possessed some desperate characters, and that this "corner" between the hotel and the hall was the scene of many a struggle and brawl; perhaps this was some drunken loafer, who was attracted by his diamond pin. The only thing to do was to intimidate him at once. He drew his revolver.

"Fellow!" he said, "who are you? Don't you know better than to waylay a gentleman like this? Get out of my path at once."

But instead of obeying, the man came nearer yet and looked steadily into the actor's face.

"Who am I?" he repeated; "I'm Sol; maybe you've heard of me? I've heard of you—and I've saw you in days gone by. I've been lookin' for ye ever since. I see you're armed—so be I. Now one of us must die right here; we two can't live in this town to-night. I'd serve ye right to shoot ye down like a dog—but I'll give ye fair play. I'll count ten, and then shoot; be ready and shoot at the word ten, or you're a dead man, sure." He took a few paces back and leveled his revolver at McAllister's heart. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten." Then there was a flash, a report—a woman's shriek—and both men, and a dozen more who seemed to spring up from the earth, gathered around the prostrate form of—Nance, Sol's bride.

"My God! where did she come from?" cried Sol, white, and shaking in every limb. "I left her in the parlor upstairs."

"The window was open to air the room," gasped Nance, suddenly rising on her elbow; "I stood there—I saw ye, Sol, following this man—and I came down and listened. I knew what 'twas all about—'twas all about me; and there wa'n't no stoppin' the bloodshed—that I seen plain enough. But if blood must flow, then let it be mine, I said—mine and not his'n. I hain't worth no man's life—and I'm better out o' the world than in it—oh, Sol, don't cry—I'm not worth your tears. I'd a' been a good, true wife to you if I'd a' lived, but I saved him—bless God, I saved him—kiss me, Mac—Oh!" and with a long moan Nance fell dead in her husband's arms.

"She was ramblin' in her talk," Sol said afterward; "she didn't know what she was doin' or sayin'; she only meant to stop the duel; and thank God no man living knows which ball killed her."

It was just as well that Sol should think so. But everybody else knew very well that it was McAllister's life that the girl had meant to save, and that it was Sol's shot that had entered her breast; and everybody else knew, too, that it was McAllister's name that merciful death had cut short on her lips.

The play was delayed half an hour, but went on unbrokenly after the second act began. Fights and shooting affrays were not so infrequent in this region that they disturbed the usual current of affairs when they took place. Yet there was unusual excitement following this; but no arrests were

made, since Sol was the offending party and was suffering the heaviest possible punishment for his disregard of law; it was supposed by all save an intimate few that Sol had taken a little more "rye" upon his bridal trip than was good for him, had picked a quarrel with a stranger, and his bride, interfering, had received an accidental shot.

Sol disappeared soon after the burial of his bride. Six months later he came back and settled down in the old "family mansion," the ancestral "dug-out," and there he dwells to-day.

And McAllister? He was said to have been dirked one night, just after he had played to a full house in Chicago. He was about to enter his carriage, and the unknown assassin fled in the darkness and was never discovered.

"An attempt at robbery," the reporters said.

"AN IDEAL HEAD."

Mrs. Lewellyn was nearly demented. She had charge of the entertainments at the church fair, and she had exhausted her ingenuity in planning "new features." Charades, tableaux, pantomimes, were all arranged, and still there was a vacancy in the programme.

"I will talk it over with Mrs. Sinclair," she said at last. "She is so very ingenious, I am sure she will help me to think."

Within half an hour she was sitting in Mrs. Sinclair's boudoir trying to make that lady understand her dilemma; but Mrs. Sinclair's baby Madge was the possessor of a pair of lungs which rendered the talk a difficult one just at that time.

Mrs. Sinclair rang the bell. The nurse-girl appeared.

"Panquite, take Madge away for half an hour," Mrs. Sinclair said. As she departed Mrs. Lewellyn seized her friend's arm.

"I have the idea already!" she said. "My dear Mrs. Sinclair, I never saw anything so exquisite in my life as that nurse-girl's face. I am going to borrow her for the church fair."

"Borrow her—borrow Panquite! What do you mean?" asked her friend, wonderingly. Then Mrs.

Lewellyn made herself understood, and when she left Mrs. Sinclair's house an hour later, Panquite's destiny for life was decided, quite unconsciously to that young person.

When the church fair entertainment occurred, the success of the evening was a series of "Living Pictures." The fair was held in the opera house, and the "Living Pictures" were displayed in one of the boxes.

The curtains were drawn aside and for one moment the audience gazed first upon "The Goddess of Liberty" and then upon "St. Cecilia," "The Sistine Madonna," "After the Ball" and an "Ideal Head."

The Juno-like form of Mrs. Sinclair revealed itself through the well adjusted draperies of the stately goddess.

The clergyman's beautiful young daughter was recognized in the lifted eyes of "St. Cecilia." One of the reigning belles of the season was the "Madonna," and the athletic tenor of the church choir, attired in a base-ball costume and holding a lifted bat in his hands, was declared an excellent travesty on "After the Ball."

But—whose was the "Ideal Head?" No one could tell.

It was only the head and shoulders of a beautiful girl, displayed in a large gilt frame for one second—then again and still again, as storm after storm of applause echoed from all portions of the house. But a head so faultless in contour, a face so perfect in

beauty, a neck so exquisitely molded that it almost shamed the ideals of the great masters.

Rupert Lewellyn held his breath with delight as he gazed. Here was his dream of female loveliness realized. Here was the face he had seen smiling from the window of his castle in Spain. Who was she? He would never rest until he found the original.

He said this to madame, his mother, as they drove homeward. Madame laughed. "You foolish dreamer," she said. "Your awakening must be rude and cruel—the usual fate of dreamers. The Ideal Head belongs to Mrs. Sinclair's nurse girl—a young person by the name of Panquite. It seems a misfortune for nature to waste so much beauty on one in her station, doesn't it?"

Rupert made no reply.

But six weeks later society was electrified at a piece of gossip which crept out.

Rupert Lewellyn, the handsome, rich young bachelor, had sent Panquite away to be educated, and upon her return from school he was to make her his wife.

People said it was "terrible," "scandalous," "Quixotic," until Panquite's history, adroitly related by Mrs. Lewellyn, modified their censure into interest, and finally merged it into admiration.

Panquite was the daughter of a New Orleans family—one of the old Creole families. They had all died during a yellow fever epidemic, and she

had been taken by relatives, who defrauded her of her property and made a servant of her, until in desperation she ran away with a Northern family. She had been in service only two years, and really Rupert was restoring her to the position where she belonged by birth.

This was Madame Lewellyn's little romance. The facts were somewhat more rude. Panquite had been found one day by the sexton lying at the base of one of the oldest tombs in those strange cities of the dead in New Orleans. She was scarcely a week old—and there was no clue to her identity. The old sexton carried her to his priest, and the priest found a home for her in a wealthy and childless family. They had given her the name inscribed on the tomb in the shadow of which she lay when found—Panquite.

This family had died of the fever when Panquite was nine years old; relatives had claimed the property of her deceased foster parents, and Panquite had been thrown upon the world, going out to service until she finally came North with friends of the Sinclairs as nurse girl.

She was only sixteen years of age, wonderfully bright, and with that gift which is greater, or at least more useful, often, than talent itself—a wonderfully retentive memory. And when, after two years, she was introduced to society as Mrs. Rupert Lewellyn, it received the beautiful and accomplished young woman with open arms, and she became the sen-

sation of the hour. Her musical gifts were fairly astonishing. It was plain to see that she had patrician blood in her veins, everybody said; the refinement and beauty of those old Creole families spoke in her wonderful eyes and delicate mouth—oh, yes, Rupert's wife was from fine old stock, no doubt. She was a real gem, which Rupert had found and reset in its proper setting of fine gold.

* * * * *

It was nearing the holiday season, and Rupert came home one day and told her to put on her hat and cloak and come with him.

"We will spend the whole day in shopping," he said. "I want you to help me select those duty gifts I must make, of course. I wonder if anybody ever gave a Christmas gift with as much pleasure as at any other time of year."

"I don't know. I never made a Christmas gift in my life," Panquite answered. "It will be a great novelty to me."

She was too happy that day, and she told Rupert so as they set forth on their shopping expedition. Rupert laughed, as he answered, "Too happy? There's no such phrase permissible in this life, Panquite! One cannot be too happy."

"Oh, but one can—it is not safe to be very, very happy—so happy your heart fairly bursts with joy, as mine does to-day, Rupert. It always foretells sorrow. Just as a day of such heavenly beauty and

brightness as this is, always foretells a storm. It is certain to rain to-morrow, and I am sure to cry about something."

"No, no, you have all done with tears, Panquite," Rupert insisted. "There is nothing for you to weep about any longer, now that you are my cherished little wife. I am to shield you from every trouble that threatens in the future, and I will buy you a new silk umbrella to-day, to shield you from the rain if it storms to-morrow, as you predict."

Panquite laughed as gleefully as a child. Rupert always made her laugh, in her soberest or most sentimental moods, with some unexpected ending to his gravest speeches.

They had been married only a few months, these two. It seemed like a dream to her. She could not realize it. Her life had been such a strange one, so full of sorrow and loneliness. Was it true that this handsome, noble fellow at her side was her own for life? Her companion, protector and guide? She had never known the love of father, mother, sister or brother, and somehow it seemed to her that no woman who had been blessed with these ties could love a husband as she loved Rupert. As she looked up at him she felt sure that no other people in the world were ever so fond of each other as they.

Just as she thought this, Rupert said, "Look, Panquite! Did you ever see a husband and wife so attached as that couple you see—they are completely

bound together, more closely even than we are!"

Panquite looked, and saw two traveling musicians, a man and woman, wretchedly clothed, with poverty and misery written on every feature of their faces, and, worst of all, that bracelet of shame, a handcuff, tightly locking their wrists together.

"How can you make sport of those poor creatures, Rupert!" she cried, the tears of sympathy springing to her eyes. "And see! they are getting into the very car that we must take. Oh, Rupert, how terrible it is that the world is so full of such misery! I feel as if I had no right to be so happy."

Rupert found the car too crowded to permit him to sit down, and as he stood on the platform he heard the conductor quizzing the officer in charge of the handcuffed Italians.

"They are up for larceny," the officer said. "They broke into a baker's shop last night—drunk, both of them, and hungry, too, no doubt. But they are old offenders—we have them up every few months. The woman is sick, and her case ought to be reported. But she clings to that drunken husband and I doubt if she would leave him, even to be restored to health."

A hacking cough from the woman proved the officer's statement of her enfeebled condition, and the pathos of her face was fairly heart-breaking, it seemed to Panquite. As she saw all eyes fixed upon her, with a quick movement of her free hand she tried to draw her ragged shawl more closely about

her face—a face which had once been beautiful, and was still delicate and sweet.

Panquite's heart seemed breaking with sympathy for this poor woman. She could not endure the sight, and pulling the strap she made her way to the platform and whispered to Rupert, "I could not sit there any longer and see that poor woman, Rupert. I would rather walk than witness such misery."

But, greatly to her surprise, the officer and the prisoners left the car also, walking immediately in front of her. The woman was weeping softly and the man was gazing before him with stolid indifference.

Panquite's eyes were full of tears.

"Rupert," she said suddenly, "will you go with me to the station-house? Somehow I feel as if I could not enjoy one minute of this day if I did not do something to alleviate that poor creature's misery. Let us go and see if we cannot make her a little more comfortable for the night. Perhaps if we interceded for her we might cause the authorities to give her a little softer pillow for her head, a soothing syrup for her cough—oh, Rupert, I must, I must do something for that poor creature! Think of the dreadful holidays in store for her, and we—so blest!"

And so it was through Panquite's strange and sudden sympathy that the poor culprit slept in the hospital that night instead of in the station house. She was so feeble she could scarcely speak above a

whisper; but as Panquite turned away she caught her sleeve and drew her closer.

"I want to know your name, Miss," she whispered. "I may die to-night—or to-morrow—and I have something—a confession—I shall want to leave it in good hands when I am gone—but not before; oh, not before."

"Drunk," said the officer, who stood near. "She always talks of a 'confession' when she is drunk. She has been sent up before, you know."

Panquite gave the woman her card and address, and told her she would do all that she could to make her comfortable while she lived.

But in the morning, when Panquite drove out to the hospital to see her pensioner, she found that the poor woman had died in the night. And she had left a soiled and blurred paper, that looked as if it had been sewed inside the folds of a garment for years, and marked "Confession."

Panquite carried it home and went up in the solitude of her room to read it.

The day had clouded since early morning, and a storm was gathering in the west.

When Rupert came home to dinner the streets were running with water and the rain was falling in sheets. He remembered Panquite's words of the previous day: "It is certain to rain to-morrow—and I am sure to cry."

"Half of her prophecy has come true," he thought, as he let himself in with a latch-key. "I hope the remainder will not."

But as he entered his wife's apartments he found her with her face buried in her hands, sobbing wildly.

"My darling," he cried in alarm, "what is the matter?"

She held out the soiled and worn paper, as she answered between her sobs:

"Rupert, the woman who was in handcuffs yesterday died in the hospital last night—and, Rupert, she was my mother!"

JOHN SMITH'S THANKSGIVING.

It was the night before Thanksgiving. Aunt Tabitha sat knitting a blue woolen sock. Uncle Joel was poring over the column of patent-medicine advertisements, which he found a never-failing source of entertainment and delight. Janet, their spinster daughter, was washing the supper dishes, and the rattling of teacups and saucers, spoons and forks, mingled with the click of Aunt Tabitha's needles and made a sort of domestic melody, which was presently interrupted by a long-drawn sigh, and an ejaculation from the lips of Miss Janet of—"Oh, yes!"

Now, as no one had spoken for full five minutes, such an exclamation seemed somewhat irrelevant, and one needing an explanation. But neither Uncle Joel nor Aunt Tabitha expressed any surprise, or indeed seemed to notice Janet's ejaculation. The truth was, this was but one of the many idiosyncrasies of this most peculiar family.

Aunt Tabitha Smith was designed by heaven for the sphere of an old maid. Her prim ideas of propriety, her severe criticisms, her aggressive cleanliness and order, and her limited idea of human nature and needs, all fitted her for the calling of a spinster of the most approved pattern.

In some moment of weakness, never accounted for, and through some impulse inexplicable to himself and to all who knew him, Uncle Joel Smith had persuaded her to forsake her predestined vocation and assume the duties of a wife and mother.

But as is frequently the case with a career cut short or turned aside from its natural course, or with talents hindered and restrained in one generation, they culminate and flower in the next.

Aunt Tabitha had not been allowed to fulfill her destiny; but her daughter Janet was completing it for her in the most approved manner. A more perfect specimen of the spinster it would be difficult to conceive.

To be sure she was only twenty-five—an age which in these days is considered the very morning of youth; an age far more attractive to the average man of the period than sixteen or eighteen—just as the ripe peach is more appetizing than its fair blossom.

But Janet had been a spinster at fifteen; at twenty she was a confirmed old maid. She cared nothing for the pleasures of youth, preferring her daily routine of home life and her round of domestic duties to any festivity; and by her primness, her reserve, and her odd little whims, keeping all possible suitors at a safe distance, and when I say "safe," I mean it in the full sense of the term. For it would have been a rash and reckless youth who had ventured into the presence of "Aunt Tabitha,"

as Mrs. Smith was generally known, to woo her daughter.

Despite the evident fact that she had herself been wooed and won, Aunt Tabitha denounced all lovers as "miserable fools," and she received the reports of neighborhood marriages with the same denunciatory phrases which she bestowed upon other crimes. For Aunt Tabitha seemed to have little pity in her composition for the world of misdoers. She was of the severest type of grim old Puritan stock. She planned and executed her life on the most austere principles, and felt no sympathy for those who deviated in the least from her sense of propriety.

Endearing words or caresses between friends or members of a family she considered weak, if not vulgar; and Janet would as soon thought of striking her mother as kissing her. Uncle Joel, who had once been a man of warm affections, had learned years ago to repress any impulse of demonstration toward wife or children.

After a child could walk and talk, Aunt Tabitha considered it too old to kiss or fondle; and, rather than listen to her caustic criticisms and sarcastic rebukes, he concealed his natural feelings of affection, even toward his own children, and turned his thoughts—like many a woman—for lack of anything else to occupy his mind, to his physical ailments.

He was a man of delicate physique and his aches and pains became his pets, which he could coddle

to his heart's content, in spite of Aunt Tabitha.

Janet—who had cut her life by the pattern of her mother's ideas, was, according to Aunt Tabitha's thinking, a model personage, sensible, and free from all nonsense.

If Janet ever had longings or aspirations beyond her narrow and colorless life, no one knew it.

And her frequent and audible ejaculation of "Oh, yes!" seemed an utterance of approval and satisfaction at her own discreet and orderly existence.

As she wiped the last dish out of scalding water, Uncle Joel read: "Over ten thousand testimonials have been received from sufferers who have been cured by the 'Gallop-in' Pain Pacifier.' Over ten thousand! That is a great many people to be cured by one remedy. There must be something in it if it cures ten thousand suffering people!"

"They ought to be ashamed of themselves!" exclaimed Aunt Tabitha, who had no patience with Uncle Joel's patent-medicine mania.

There was a quick step on the walk, a mellow whistle in the hallway, and the door burst open as if a strong wind had blown it. A handsome, stalwart young man of twenty, with curling chestnut hair and warm brown eyes, strode across the room, after banging the door behind him, and throwing his cap into the corner and clasping Janet about the neck, placed a sounding kiss upon either cheek.

Janet gave a little feminine shriek and struggled to free herself. "For shame, John," cried Aunt

Tabitha, "what coarse manners you have fallen into lately! You should treat your sister with more respect."

John's boyish face clouded, and a suspicious mist came into his brown eyes. He threw himself face downward on a lounge which stood at one end of the room.

"A nice greeting for a fellow who has been gone two weeks from home," he said. "A sweet scolding to give him because he kisses his own sister."

"You are too old to conduct yourselves like children," Aunt Tabitha answered sternly. "I think kissing and hugging altogether out of place among grown people, and very coarse and underbred. You could shake hands with Janet and show your pleasure at seeing her quite as well."

John lay in a moody silence, his handsome mouth quivering.

"Who is coming here to-morrow?" he asked presently.

"Oh, Aunt Mary, Uncle John, Cousin Sarah and her children—that's all, I believe."

"Why don't you invite Gerty Denvers?" John ventured in a low voice. "She has no home and no relatives, and it will be a dull day for her."

"Well, then, it better be," spoke Aunt Tabitha, making a great clatter with her knitting-needles. "What is she to us, I'd like to know? I think you have made the family conspicuous enough by racing around with that dressmaker's apprentice during the

last two months, without our inviting her here to Thanksgiving."

John rose to a sitting posture, the mist in his eyes dried by their flashing fire.

"She is a sweet, beautiful girl if she is a dress-maker's apprentice," he said, "and I love her with all my heart."

"Should try 'Gallopin' Pain Pacifier," read Uncle Joel aloud to himself. He was so accustomed to these tilts between John and his mother, that he paid little attention to them.

For John was wholly unlike Janet, and the trial of Tabitha's life. He was full of warm young blood, and craving for affection, demonstrative and irrepressible. The strict home rules oppressed him and depressed him. He wanted more sunlight, more mirth, more gayety, and more love in the household. But his mother rebuked him, and Janet shrieked if he offered her a brotherly caress. Never since he was-four years old, and donned his first pair of trousers, had his mother ever kissed him voluntarily.

She cooked, baked, washed and ironed for him, she took care of his body and his brain, but she let his heart starve within him, and was angry that it cried aloud for food, and because it was not given him at home, he sought for it abroad.

At first he fed the fire of his boyish heart with companions of his own sex. Tom and Bill and Charley all reigned their season as his dearest friends and comrades, who shared his full heart's wealth of

affection. Why should he so idealize and idolize these common boys, and seek their society and sing their praises, Aunt Tabitha could not understand. She did not realize that his heart craved more than was given by that cold Puritan household, and that he must seek it elsewhere.

But by and by, when he transferred his worship to idols of the opposite sex, and sang their praises, and became their abject slave, Aunt Tabitha's indignation knew no bounds.

"That a son of mine should become such a spooney," she would cry. "Runnin' after girls at his age, sittin' round with 'em evenin's when he ought to be abed and asleep—it's a shame an' a disgrace."

But the more Aunt Tabitha scolded and railed at John and his inamoratas, the less he remained at home. He worked diligently in the field by day, ate his meals in silence, and was off to the village in the evening. And all Tabitha's sarcasms were of no avail. As for Uncle Joel, his sympathies were with John. He had once been young himself, and he had been fond of youthful sports, and a great gallant among the girls. Yet he had too great a fear of Tabitha's tongue to venture a voice in the matter. He did not like to take any responsibility upon his shoulders which he could avoid. And so he kept discreetly silent, and let the war rage as it would, while he found refuge behind the column of newspaper advertisements.

Aunt Tabitha's face flushed angrily as John made

the bold assertion of his love for Gerty Denvers.

"You'd better make yourself still more ridiculous," she said, "and announce your passion to the girl. She may be fool enough to marry you, and then you will reach the end of your folly, and come to your senses, perhaps. I'm sick of having you run after her."

"If I got any love at home, maybe I would not have to seek abroad for it," John said, as he seized his hat and left the house.

They did not see him again until next morning—Thanksgiving morning. Then he stood before them tall, handsome, pale, determined.

"I am going to take your advice, mother," he said, "and marry Gerty Denvers. The minister is waiting to perform the ceremony now. She has no home and no friends and we love each other. Do you want me to bring my wife home to Thanksgiving dinner? She doesn't expect to live here; she is going to stay in the shop and keep at work."

Aunt Tabitha grew pale with anger.

"I want you to take your simpleton of a wife, and go where I will never see you again," she said. "If you choose to disgrace us, I don't want to have the evidence before my eyes daily."

"Very well, I will go!" he said. He turned and left the house. Twenty-four hours later he and his young bride had left the place.

Janet broke into tears when the report was brought to them.

"John did nothing so very wrong, mother," she sobbed, "that he should have been turned out of doors."

"Wrong!" Aunt Tabitha responded sternly. "He has disgraced himself and us by marrying at his age. Why could he not have behaved himself as you have done? Why did he need love that he could not get here, any more than *you* need it? Were you not children of the same parents? He was always defying me, always neglecting his home for other people, always going against my rules. He was never a proper child like you. Let him make a home for himself, and don't let me see you shedding tears over him again."

So Janet said no more about him, only sighed "Oh, yes," more frequently over her dishes and mending; for now she knew that, despite her disapproval of his demonstrative manner, John had been necessary to her happiness, and she was lonely without him.

Uncle Joel grew more and more in the habit of petting his ailments and talking of his complaints, and studying the advertisements for remedies. And he aged rapidly after John went away.

The old farm ran down, the place grew sadly out of repair. Uncle had never been a very energetic man, and he seemed to have lost all ambition when John left him alone. Aunt Tabitha urged him to repair the fence, and repaint the house, and stay the little leaks which were reducing them from in-

dependence to poverty. But Uncle Joel said, "Wait till next year, Tabby." And to Janet and some of his confidential neighbors he added, "John will be coming home pretty soon, and he'll fix things up."

But John did not come.

So the years went by, until nearly fifteen had gone since that Thanksgiving morning so long ago. And they had never heard from John in all those years.

It was October. There was a shadow of gloom over the Smith household. Uncle Joel had become thoroughly shiftless and inefficient, thinking only of his aches and pains.

Aunt Tabitha's vigorous constitution seemed breaking down, and all the work and care of farm and household rested upon Janet's shoulders.

She stood washing the supper dishes again, while her mother lay half asleep in her easy chair, and Uncle Joel was whispering behind his newspaper.

Janet had changed the least of the three during this decade and a half of years. She was the same prim, precise little old maid that she had been during her whole life. Perhaps there was a line or two more about the mouth and eyes, but never having had any youth or freshness, she had none to lose.

"We need somebody to husk the corn and dig the potatoes, father," she said presently. "It is getting late in the year. I wish we could have help for a few weeks. I can't do everything."

"Tabby, didn't I hear you complaining of feeling a pain in your back and limbs this morning?" asked Uncle Joel from behind his newspaper.

"Yes, I don't understand it," Aunt Tabitha responded from the depths of her great chair. "I feel so dull and lifeless too."

"Well, I have just found a new and infallible remedy for those symptoms—'The Electric Eradicator.' Only one dollar a bottle; for sale by all druggists. You might send down and see if Johnson keeps it at the village. I know he used to keep a supply of the 'Gallop-in' Pain Pacifier,' but the 'Electric Eradicator' is said to be much better. It has cured thousands who suffer as you do."

"They were great fools to be cured by the stuff," was Aunt Tabitha's reply. "All I need is a little mint tea."

A timid knock sounded at the door. Janet wiped her hands on her apron, and opened the door cautiously a little way.

Janet always responded to a knock, night or day, in that cautious fashion, as if she feared being seized bodily and carried away after the manner of the Sabine women, by the person without.

But it was a very small and weary-looking Roman whom she espied through the crack of the door to-night. A moment's conversation ensued, then Janet closed the door and spoke to her mother.

"A little boy wants lodging and supper," she said. "He has walked a long distance to-day, and is looking for work."

"Some young tramp, I suppose, who will murder us all in our beds," responded Aunt Tabitha. "He ought to be in better business than wandering about the country."

"He is trying to *get* into better business," said Janet, whose heart was more easily touched than her mother's. "He looks as if he needed rest and food."

"Can be restored by 'The Electric Eradicator,'" continued Uncle Joel, unmindful of the parley at the door, so occupied was he with testimonials of sufferers.

"Guess he'd better come in," said Janet; "he may be willing to husk our corn;" and she opened the door just wide enough to admit an undersized boy of twelve or fourteen years, and then quickly closed it, lest the regiment of ferocious Romans should follow.

"Take a chair, little boy, and I will get you a bite of something."

"There's the moldy cheese I said was spoiling to-day—put that on," said Aunt Tabitha, whose economy had grown into parsimony with adversity. And then, as if ashamed of herself, and moved by some sudden impulse of pity toward the tired stranger, she arose, and with her own hands prepared him a generous repast.

"What might your name be, and where have you traveled from?" asked Uncle Joel, laying aside his interesting documents to question the boy.

"My name's John Smith, sir, and I came from town this morning."

"John Smith, hey? Well, that's a good enough name," laughed Uncle Joel. "Though I should hate to advertise ye, hoping to find ye by that name alone, ef I lost ye. A good many men have had that name. An orphan?"

"My mother is alive. She's sewing in town. I couldn't get work there, and mother thought the winter was coming on, an' I'd better try an' get a place on a farm, to work for my board maybe till spring. It's awful expensive living in town."

"Father's dead, I suppose?"

"We fear so, sir. It's nine years since mother saw him. He went to California to seek his fortune. He sent mother money off an' on till two years ago. Since then she's never heard from him. We think he must be dead. Mother gets along with her sewing, but she is not very well now, an' she's always worryin' about me. She's afraid she'll die an' leave me alone in the city; an' so she told me to go out in the country an' learn to farm."

"Better keep him to do chores this winter, father," whispered Janet. "We need help, and we can't afford to hire."

"Well, just as you an' mother say," responded Uncle Joel, returning to his newspaper, glad to avoid this responsibility, as he had all others possible through life.

"Poor shiftless creeters, his parents, not to have

anything saved up," muttered Tabitha. "But you'd better keep him. He'll be handy, an' it'll save payin' anything out; and a growin' boy'll eat most anything."

So John stayed, and wonderfully "handy" he did become, outdoor and in, until each of the trio wondered how they had lived without him.

And John grew fat and rosy in spite of Aunt Tabitha's economy.

Janet rejected a sun-browned potato one day which she had taken upon her plate.

"If you can't eat it, save it for John," said Tabitha. Yet when John came in, tired and hungry, she again prepared him a generous supper.

"Somehow John's face reminds me of some one," mused Uncle Joel one evening. "Doesn't it you, Tabby?"

But Tabitha only answered abruptly: "Don't be a fool, Joel," and knit with more than usual vigor, while Janet heaved a sigh over her mending and said, "Oh, yes!"

But Tabitha was more than usually kind, almost tender in her manner to John that night.

The day before Thanksgiving found Aunt Tabitha in a high fever. She grew delirious, and wanted John constantly in her sight, and she talked wildly.

"I am glad you came back," she said, over and over again. "It has been a long time since you went away, and I have missed you so all these years. You must promise me never to go again, John, never."

And little John would promise, wondering.

The village physician shook his head and was puzzled when questioned by Uncle Joel.

"She seems to be breaking down," he said, "as if under a long mental strain."

"Nerves, I suppose," Uncle Joel said; "women are made of nerves, and this new discovery, this Electric Eradicator, is just the thing for nervous complaints. Thousands give their testimonials. But Tabitha is dreadfully sot against patent medicines."

"She's sensible there," responded the physician. "Poisonous drugs kill more people every year than—"

"Than the doctors?" queried Uncle Joel, with a chuckle.

"Very good, very good, Uncle Joel," laughed the doctor. "You are not so slow after all. But about your good wife, her case puzzles me. I really am alarmed about her. Medicine does not seem to reach her disease. That boy seems to remind her of something or somebody. Let him stay by her. Sometimes the mind is so centred upon some object of the affections that nothing else can fill the place."

"Oh, yes," sighed Janet, coming up from the cellar with a pan of potatoes, and thinking what a dreary, dreary Thanksgiving it was to be.

Somebody rapped. The doctor, standing near the door, opened it. A big man rushed in, and clasped Janet in his arms, kissing her most vigorously.

Janet screamed and struggled feebly. The thought flashed through her mind that her hour had come. In allowing the doctor to go to the door, caution had been forfeited, and the Sabine maiden, so long protected by Providence and her own prudence, was captured at last. All this flashed through Miss Janet's mind in a second's time, of course, as dying people recall the events of a lifetime.

In another second, Janet found herself free, and gazing into the face of—John Smith, her brother! It was not a Roman soldier after all.

"Here's something better than 'The Electric Eradicator,' Tabitha," said Uncle Joel, as he led John to the bedside.

"There, I never believed father would own anything was better than his last new patent medicine," half-sobbed Janet. "You are wonderfully complimented, John." And Aunt Tabitha actually clung about John's neck and kissed him—an act which caused Uncle Joel to stare in amazement.

"If you'd only done that years ago, he'd never have gone away," he muttered *sotto voce*, as he turned away. "Affection and kisses are as necessary to some natures—as—as—"

"As sunlight to plants," suggested the doctor, helping him out with a simile and looking at Janet.

"Oh, yes," sighed Janet.

And just then, little John Smith, who had been sent out on an errand, returned, and big John Smith caught him in his arms, crying out, "My boy, my darling boy!"

And then everybody began to ask questions, and pretty soon they were all made to understand that little John Smith was big John Smith's son, and that little John Smith had been sent out into the country by his mother, hoping he would find a place in the hearts of his grandparents before she died and left him an orphan; and that big John Smith had miraculously returned with pockets full of gold after his long exile from his home, to find his wife grieving for him as for one dead, and she had sent him to bring back her boy; but instead she was brought back to the old homestead; and such a happy, happy Thanksgiving day as it proved to them all!

And Aunt Tabitha recovered, and kissed big John and little John every day of her life afterward. For she and Uncle Joel went to live with them—John and his wife would have it so.

And Janet? Why, the good old doctor, who was a lonely widower, admiring Janet's thrift and energy, proposed to her that very Thanksgiving day to come and cheer his declining years; and Janet, in spite of her hereditary aptitude for the sphere of a spinster, sighed "Oh, yes," and the doctor accepted it as an answer to his proposal, whether Janet had meant it so or not.

When she was married and about to leave her old home and go with her husband, Uncle Joel took her aside.

"Here is a bottle of 'The Electric Eradicator,'"

he said in a confidential tone. "Your man, being a doctor, is dreadfully sot against such things, and likely as not you might be pizened with a lot of his long-named drugs, when a leetle dose of this would be all you needed. So I thought I'd give you a bottle to keep. Needn't say nothing to the doctor about it, you know."

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