The Revolt of Mother and Other Stories

Mary E. Wilkins

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A WANDERING SAMARITAN.

A LOW stone wall bordered the lane on either side. There were clumps of tansy and yarrow with straggling bushes of meadow−sweet and hardback clustering closely around the loosely piled rocks. Plenty of poison ivy vines clambered over them too. The lane was narrow and grassy; even the deep wheel−ruts through the center were overgrown with grass. And everything was dusty; there had been a little drought lately; the leaves were powdered thick with dust.

It was a hot day in August, and about four o'clock in the afternoon. Midway of the lane stood an old twisted apple tree. Underneath it was a little circle of shade. An old man sat beneath the tree, with his back against the shaggy, mossy trunk. He was so motionless that a passer through the lane, happening accidentally to glance his way, would have taken in the fact of the proximity of a second animated being with a strange shock.

He looked as much a part of inanimate nature as the stones in the wall. The sudden conviction of the possibility of motion in him was enough to send a startled thrill through one. If his eyes had been closed in sleep, it might have been different; but they were wide open, staring peacefully straight ahead at the flowering bushes opposite. They were of a light blue color, large and clear, and did not look filmy with age, though the man must have been over eighty.

His white hair, as fine and thick as wool, stood out on either side of his placid face. He wore no beard. His mouth was wide and curved slightly, not so much into a smile as into an expression of pleasant serenity. His rusty, black clothes were loose and baggy; an old valise lay on the grass near him, and a stout stick that had evidently been cut for a cane.

He staid there motionless for a half hour or so. No one came through the lane to disturb him. The bees and the butterflies whirred by unceasingly, and the dusty sunbeams, which penetrated the apple−boughs here and there, slanted a little more. Then he arose, took his valise on his arm, and moved slowly up the lane, leaning on his stout stick.

A few rods farther on, the lane inclined slightly to the right, and then a small story−and−a−half white house, which marked its terminus, appeared. The lane merged imperceptibly into the grassy door yard. There was a green curved trellis, which looked like a hood, over the door, and a prairie rose tree clung to it, but the roses were all gone by.

The sun had moved so far toward the west that a cool shadow lay over the front of the house and the yard. There were two windows on each side of the front door. The blinds of one of them were flung wide open, and a light −− haired head of a woman and an arm and hand moving with the regular motion of sewing were visible.

The woman rose quietly and came to the door, when she looked out and saw the old man.

"Is that you, Doctor Ware?" said she.

She was a slim, round−shouldered woman. Her light hair was strained back tightly from a full, blue−veined forehead. There was a sweet expression about her thin, nervous mouth.

"Yes, it's me; I'm on my summer travels ag'in. How's all your folks, Miss Hatton?"

"Well, Mary Anne ain't very smart. I've been wishin' for some time that you'd come along. She's been takin' some doctor's stuff, but it ain't seemed to do her much good, and I thought mebby some of your yerbs would give her a start. Come right in. 'Lijah's out in the field to work, but he'll be real glad to see you. He's said several times lately that it seemed 's if 'twas 'bout time for you to be comin'."

The old man followed her into the cool, sparsely−furnished sitting−room, and seated himself in the large cane−seated rocker that she placed for him.

"Mary Anne!" she called then, standing in the door, "come, come down stairs; there's somebody here wants to see you!"

Mary Anne, a slender girl, who looked like her mother, except that she was younger and sweeter, came down presently. She walked weakly, there was a bright flush on her soft cheeks, and her blue eyes had an eager, inquiring look in them.

"Who is it?" she asked tremulously. "Oh, Doctor Ware!"

All the eagerness faded from her eyes.

"Well, Mary Anne, how air ye?"

"Pretty well, thank you."

"That's what she allers says," remarked her mother. "She ain't well a bit!"

The girl did not contradict her; she dropped listlessly into a chair.

After a little while, her mother beckoned Dr. Ware furtively out of the room, and they had a whispered conference out in the kitchen. Mary Anne crept wearily up stairs and laid down on her bed again. Her mother heard her.

"There she goes to lay down again," said she; "she don't seem to hev no ambition nor interest in anythin'. Her father an' me hev tried an' tried, but we can't rouse her a bit. Here's the water for the yerbs, if you've got 'em ready."

Soon a peculiar, pungent steam from the simmering juices of certain medicinal plants floated through the house. The old man brooded over the bubbling kettle like a benevolent witch.

"There ain't anythin' like this to give anybody an appetite, an' strengthen' of 'em up," he said complacently, as he poured finally the greenish−black decoction into a bowl.

Many such bowls did poor, ailing Mary Anne empty through the following days. She patiently took everything that they gave her.

The itinerant vender of herbs, who might have been ranked as a physician after an innocent, primitive fashion, having a gentle craft in the use of healing plants, staid on. He always stopped awhile with the Hattons while on his summer pilgrimages among these adjoining rural villages.

A good many people welcomed him gladly to their homes, for that matter. They liked to dose their families with his herb teas once a year. Then there was a religious sympathy between them too. Most of them hereabouts were devout Methodists, and he was an ardent member of that denomination.

But Mary Anne, in spite of her long draughts of these bitterish, pungent, aromatic teas, grew no better. Doctor Ware kept up a scrutiny of her that was shrewd from its very simplicity and singleness.

"There ain't much use in givin' medicine to Mary Anne," he told her mother one day; "thar's troubles that nary a yerb that grows on this airth's goin' to cure. Mebbe thar's some in the green fields King David sung about."

"What do you mean?"

"Mary Anne's got somethin' or other on her mind."

Mrs. Hatton's delicate face flushed a burning red.

"You're mistaken about that, Doctor Ware," she said; "I know you are. Mary Anne can't hev nothin' on her mind; she ain't never hed a thing to fret her. Her father an' me hev allers looked out for her, as ef she'd been a cosset−lamb. She ain't never hed to work hard, an' we've bought her everything we could afford."

That afternoon the old man went into one of the neighboring houses. A large, handsome woman, who was a great talker, lived there.

"How do you think Mary Anne is getting along?" said she.

"Well, she's rather slim."

"It'll take more than your herbs to cure her, Doctor Ware," said the woman, with a laugh that was not ill−natured, though unpleasantly knowing. "Medicines for the body don't help the mind, I s'pose you know. You needn't say anythin' about it; her mother'd never forgive me; but the long an' short of the whole business is, Mary Anne Hatton's lost her beau. That's everythin' that ails her. She's goin' into a decline over it."

"Who was her beau?"

"That young Adams feller who lives 'bout a mile below here; you know him. He went with her real stidy last winter and don't come nigh her now."

The old man asked her a few more questions and then took leave. He walked straight down the road to the Adams farm. Just as he approached it, a young man came out of the yard, leading a horse.

"How do you do, Doctor Ware," he said heartily, stopping and shaking hands.

He was a pretty, rather boyish−looking young fellow.

"Well, I'm pretty well, thanky, Henry."

"Coming into the house, ain't you?"

"No, thanky; guess I can't stop. I'll stan' here an' talk a minute. I'm a stoppin' up to 'Lijah Hatton's, mebbe you know."

The other started.

"No, I didn't."

"Yes, I've been thar some days. Mary Anne's pretty miser'ble."

"You don't mean it! I ain't heard of it. She ain't very sick, is she?"

"Well, I don't like to see anybody lookin' the way she does."

"What's the matter?"

"It's pretty hard tellin'."

"Say −− of course she ain't −− I know she ain't. But you don't s'pose she's −− you don't s'pose it's possible she's worryin' over anything, do you?"

"It acts more like that than anythin' else, ef I was to say what I really thought."

The young fellow's fair face was all burning with blushes. He looked at the old man, then away again.

"Look here," he stammered, "you ain't heard anything said, have you? You don't suppose it is anything to do with −− me?"

"Well, I've heard a leetle. Look a'here, Henry, mebbe you think it ain't any of my business, an' it ain't reely; but I'm a−goin' to tell you just what I think. You ain't been showin' out yourself to be the kind of young man I thought you was."

"Then −− you think −− that is it?"

"Well, Henry, I've 'bout come to that conclusion."

The young man groaned out, "Oh dear!" and hid his face for a minute against his horse's neck.

"Look here," said he, raising his head presently. "I ain't meant to do anything mean. Hang it! I ain't that kind of a fellow, you know. But −− I'm young, and I'd been going with Mary Anne pretty steady, and I didn't have much to get married on, and I reckon I got kind of scared, you know. Then mother she talked some; she hadn't a thing against her, but she thought I might wait and do a little better. So I thought maybe I'd better haul off a little while, and see how we both stood it."

"I never heard a word till this minute about her being sick," he continued. "I've been awful busy and I've been away. If I had heard, I guess −− I don't see why mother didn't tell me. She must have known. Well, that's all there is to it. I ain't been any too happy myself lately. Look here, I'll be up there to−night. Poor little thing! I guess if I had known −− "

"Well, don't you go to feelin' too bad. I dassay you didn't mean no harm, an' if you act like a man about it now, 't'll be all right."

That night the old man watched eagerly. He kept sauntering out to the head of the lane and looking, but Henry never came in sight.

Presently the candle−light behind Mary Anne's little curtain went out, and he gave up the watch with gathering indignation.

"He's a mean feller after all," he muttered, plodding heavily through the dewy grass back to the house.

Early the next morning, he set out for the Adams place. As he approached the house, he peered about the yard sharply, but he could see nothing of the delinquent young man. He knocked on the side door, and presently a woman opened it.

She was tall and large, and her blue eyes stared out of her heavy face with a sort of reflective uncertainty, though her mouth was smiling.

"Good evenin', Miss Adams."

"Good mornin'," said she stiffly.

"I guess you don't know who I am, Miss Adams."

"I can't say as I do, jest."

"My name is Ware."

"Oh, yes, I couldn't think for a minute who you was. It's quite a spell since you've been round. Fine weather we're havin', ain't we? Come in, won't you?"

She had a large earthen bowl under her arm, and she was beating eggs in it with a heavy iron spoon as she talked. She beat energetically, and the spoon made a din against the sides of the bowl.

"No, thanky, Miss Adams, I guess I can't stop. I'm a stayin' up to Hatton's, an' I'm goin' to help him a leetle this forenoon whilst the sun's high 'bout spreadin' his hay. Whar's Henry?"

"Henry? Oh, he ain't here."

"Gone far?"

"No, not very far. Well, he's been thinkin' of goin' over to his uncle's in Dover for some time."

"Over to his uncle's, hey? Goin' to stay long?"

"Well, I dunno jest how long."

"Shouldn't think he could leave very well in hayin' time."

"Well, he didn't know how to."

Mrs. Adams screwed up her mouth moodily between her answers, and beat the eggs fiercely.

The old man hesitated.

"Didn't Henry say nothin' 'bout comin' up to our house last evenin'?" he asked finally.

The woman's eyes flashed suddenly under their drooping lids. The iron spoon jumped in her nervous hand.

"Well, I dunno as he did."

"I saw him yesterday afternoon, an' he said he was."

"Did he?"

Doctor Ware stepped up closer to her. His old voice quivered.

"Look a−here, Miss Adams, I'm a−goin' to speak to you 'bout it. You're his mother, an' you'd orter hev some influence over him an' coax him to do what's right, ef he ain't inclined to himself. Mebbe you know somethin' 'bout it. You know your son's been up to see the Hatton girl consider'ble."

"I don't know nothin' about it."

"Well, she got real kind of interested in him, as near as I can make out, an' he ain't been there lately, an' she's worried a good deal. She's real poorly, accordin' to my way of thinkin'."

"I don't want to hear nothin' about it."

"Miss Adams, you don't mean to say you don't want Henry to do what's right?"

"I don't want to talk about it at all!"

"You don't want to see that poor child frettin' herself to death before your face and eyes an' not do anythin' to stop it, when it's your own son's fault?"

"I don't want to say another word about it, an' I ain't goin' to! Henry's got to manage his own affairs."

Suddenly the old man started.

"Hark a minute! What's that?" said he.

Mrs. Adams clattered her spoon furiously.

"What's what?" she asked.

"I thought I heard somebody holler."

"Guess 'twas Mr. Jackson over there with his oxen. He hollers like all possessed at 'em sometimes.

"I've got somethin' in the oven, an' I guess I shall hev to go in."

"Miss Adams!"

But she had fairly shut the door in his face.

That morning, out in the hay field, he asked Mr. Hatton, after a long spell of work and reflection:

"I s'pose you know Miss Adams, down below here, Henry Adams' mother, don't ye?"

"Known her ever since I knew anythin'."

"Good kind of a woman, ain't she?"

"Guess she's good enough; awful set when she gits her mind made up."

"Henry don't look as if he was."

Mary Anne's father turned around and faced the old man fiercely. His dark, leathery face with heavy seams about the mouth and eyes worked. He was a slow, taciturn man, and he had never before mentioned this subject to his visitor.

"I wish the Lord," he said, "I had my hands on that feller sometimes. That's what ails Mary Anne. Come jest long enough to git her to thinkin' consider'ble of him an' then −− She ain't tough like some girls, an' she takes everythin' to heart dreadful. An' there's some things mother an' me can't do for her. We've allers tried to do everythin'. Seems as there ain't no need of it, an' there ain't. Henry Adams ain't the only feller in the world. But that don't make no difference to her. There ain't no use scoldin' her. She's failin' every day."

"You ain't never said anythin' to him?"

"Said anythin'? Guess I shouldn't say much, unless I said it with my fists!"

Mary Anne's poor father bore down upon the sweet, dying clover and grasses with his angry foot, and raked again sternly.

That evening Doctor Ware went down to the Adams house again. As he drew near, he heard a voice singing to a melodeon accompaniment. When he knocked the music ceased a minute, and Mrs. Adams put her head out of the sitting−room window.

"Has Henry got home?" asked he.

"No, he ain't. Won't you come in, Doctor Ware?"

"No, thanky; I jest thought I'd luk round an' see ef he was to home."

The music began again directly. Mrs. Adams had a sweet voice. She had sung in the choir when she was a girl, and had an enduring love for music, which age and prosaicness could not affect. Her melodeon was her dear household god. Her voice rang out sweet and shrill in a psalm tune after Doctor Ware, as he plodded up the road.

The next day he went to Dover, a town about six miles distant. Part of the way he rode, begging lifts from passing teams; part of the way he walked.

In Dover, he found Henry's uncle's house easily enough, but not Henry. He was not there; had not been there at all.

It was late in the afternoon when the old man reached home. He was stiff and tired, but he did not eat or rest. He went straight to the Adams' again. He knocked. No one came to the door, but he heard, like an echo to the knock, the cry that he had heard the other day. The echo was a double and triple one too; it came again and again; it resolved itself into words. He heard distinctly:

"Help! help! Let me out! Let −− me −− o−ut!"

"What's the matter? Who is it?" he shouted back.

"It's me −− Henry. Mother's got me locked down here!"

The poor young fellow, who was hardly more than a boy, was evidently terribly shaken. The words ended in a groan.

"I'll let you out, Henry. Whar air you?"

The old man knelt down on the ground and put his ear close to a tiny grated cellar window. The voice seemed to come from that direction, though from a long distance; it was almost smothered.

"I'm down here −− in the cellar −− in a little room we store things in. Get the key off the kitchen shelf. Oh!"

"Thar, thar, Henry, I'm a comin'."

The house door was not locked. Doctor Ware hastened into the kitchen. There was a bunch of keys on the corner of the high, drab−painted shelf. He caught them up and opened doors till he found the cellar stairs. Henry sang out again when he heard his steps on them:

"Here I am, here! Over to the left!"

The store−room, which had served as a dungeon, was a small apartment staunchly petitioned off in a corner of the cellar. The stone cellar walls formed two of its sides; stout posts and planks the others. The door was thick and firmly hung.

"The little, nasty key!" Henry cried, when he heard his deliverer working at the lock.

"What on airth does all this mean?" asked the old man, when the door was open and the young fellow came out.

The prisoner's face was white, and his blue eyes looked out of it wild and scared. He sank down on the cellar stairs and rested a minute, he trembled so.

"Mother −− she locked me in here night before last."

"What fur?"

"I told her I was goin' over to see Mary Anne. She kinder tried to git me off the notion, and didn't act as ef she cared much. But when I stuck to it I was goin', she got real upset. I didn't think she minded so much either. She wanted me to come down here an' bring her up some pork before I started, and she asked me pleasant enough. She must have come down after me like a cat; I didn't hear her. I was just getting the pork out of the barrel, when I heard the door bang to and the key turn. I'd left it in the lock. I hollered, but she wouldn't say a word. I kept screaming about all night and next day, but she wouldn't let me out, and I couldn't raise anybody else. I'd 'bout given it up when I heard you knock just now. See anything of mother when you come in?"

"No; I guess she's gone out somewhere. Ain't you hungry?"

"No; she left enough for me to eat. There were mince pies stored away there, and a lot of fruit cake. She knew I wouldn't starve. If I'd had a hatchet or something, I could have broken the door down, but I didn't have so much as a jack−knife. Oh!"

"Don't go to feelin' bad, Henry. Le's go up stairs."

"I can't help it. Seems as if I should go crazy −− to think of mother doing such a thing!"

But he arose and went up the stairs inanely, with Doctor Ware following. They had been standing talking in the kitchen a moment, when they heard steps.

"That's mother," whispered Henry, and pulled his companion into the sitting−room. They stood there listening. They heard the door open and the sound of the steps across the kitchen floor. The cellar stairs creaked.

There was a cry from below, and the steps returned rapidly. Mrs. Adams walked into the sitting−room directly, as if she knew they were there.

"Henry!" she gasped.

Then she leaned back against the wall and looked at him.

Through all his life, Henry Adams had never seen fear in his mother's face. He saw it now.

"Mother," he said sternly, "I should like to have you tell me what you mean by such actions."

"I was jest comin' to let you out," she murmured feebly.

"What did you mean by doin' such a thing? Are you crazy?"

"No, I ain't, Henry. Don't be mad. I'll tell you all about it."

She looked at him with abashed, pleading eyes. His boyish face seemed strange to her. Mrs. Adams was a keen, shrewd woman; but one of the simplest of the facts in her daily life, which stood out before her glaringly, she had not noted: her son was no longer her property, but his own. She looked up at him, trembling. He was small, but taller than she.

"Oh, Henry, I was jest a−comin' down to let you out, Henry, I was! I'd been over to the neighborhood meetin', an' they got to talkin' 'bout her, 'bout Mary Anne, you know. I come right home to let you out. I didn't mean no harm no how. Only you're all I've got, and her folks ain't very forehanded, an' she's been petted, an' she ain't very strong. I thought mebbe you could do better."

"But I've been thinkin' of it over this afternoon," she continued, "an' I thought I wouldn't say anythin' more 'bout it. You could do jest as you was a mind to, an' I'd make the best of it. I was comin' right home to let you out. Henry, you ain't goin' to be set against me for it?"

"No, it's all right, mother; we won't say anything more about it."

"I'll give you a bottle of my blackberry wine to carry over to her when you go to−night. It'll do her good."

That night when it was dusk, after tea, Mary Anne and her mother were in the sitting−room by the window. Suddenly Mary Anne gave a little gasping cry:

"Oh, mother, here's Henry!"

Pretty soon the full moon rose. Doctor Ware came down from his chamber and found Mrs. Hatton by the window, leaning out cautiously, her face toward the front door. She drew her head in when he entered.

"Mary Anne's got company," she whispered, her lips trembling into smiles. "Henry Adams."

"I know it. I think she seems consider'ble better. Well, I guess I'll say good−bye, Miss Hatton."

"You ain't goin'?"

"Well, yes; I orter be movin'. I've staid here 'bout long enough. I'm a−goin' to Mr. Thomas' to−night an' on to Somerset to−morrer. I see Thomas this arternoon. I thought 'twould be cooler goin' to−night. You kin tell your husband good−bye. I see him goin' down to the village."

"Yes, I'll tell him. Well, good−bye, Doctor Ware, if you feel as if you must go. I hope you'll feel free to come ag'in any time."

Before he had left the room, she was peeping from the window again, and straining to listen to the low murmur of voices on the doorstep. Her face was alive with the tenderest and sweetest curiosity.

The old herb−man, coming around the house from a side door, glanced at the young couple seated together under the green trellis. They must have seen him as he turned off down the lane, but they never spoke a word. The old man plodded on through the crisp dew−white grass, between the wet bushes, which were bushes of silver in the moonlight.

"When the sick folks get well, the doctor goes," he said to himself.

THE THREE OLD SISTERS AND THE OLD BEAU.

THE three old sisters, Rachel and Nancy and Camilla, lived in the house in which they had been born. They were very old in years −− the youngest was nearly seventy −− but they were, after all, the most youthful maidens in the village. Not a child dragging her doll−carriage past their windows, not a young girl strolling by in the twilight on her lover's arm, was as young as they, for the youth in them had actually triumphed over age, and gained, as it were, a species of immortality in this world.

Did not Camilla and Nancy, the two younger, really play at grace−hoops sometimes of an evening? The fantastic old shadows, with stiff rheumatic gestures, apeing the free motions of youth, and the flying hoops, had been plainly seen on the window curtains after the candles were lighted. The hoops themselves, wound with faded ribbons, the relics of a graceful sport of their graceful girlhood, hung conspicuously over the mahogany table in their front hall.

In this same front hall, large and square, hung with old greenish landscape paper, with a spiral stair winding slowly upward from its midst, the three old sisters were wont to sit in the cool of summer afternoons. At five o'clock the front door, topped with bull's−eyes of dull green glass, was thrown open, and the three appeared, sitting in state with their embroidery−work. They still embroidered, bending their spectacled eyes painfully over scallops and sprigs and eyelet−holes. They had never outgrown the occupations of their youth, as they had scarcely outgrown its amusements. It did not seem impossible that Camilla, the youngest, sometimes nursed her ancient doll in her withered bosom.

However, the strongest evidence of the youth which still survived in their hearts, and answered to their conceptions of themselves and one another, was in their costumes. The three old sisters, Rachel, Nancy, and Camilla, sat in their front hall arrayed in bygone silks and muslins, made after the fashions of their girlhood days, with no alterations.

Scanty ruffled skirts clinging to their wasted limbs the three wore, and low bodices and elbow sleeves, displaying pitilessly their withered necks and arms, from which all the sweet curves of youth had departed.

Their gray and scanty locks were arranged in ringlets, and garnished with shell combs, and sometimes a wreath of faded artificial flowers.

It was inconceivable how one, surveying the others, as they sat there in their gay array, could not have seen in their faces, if not in her looking−glass, the loss of her youth; but if she did, she made no sign. Not one of them seemed to have a suspicion that these old costumes did not become them as fairly as ever, and nobody knew if their illusions ever failed them at the sight of one another's parchment skins, and the hollows between their poor old bones.

Always on a pleasant summer afternoon, as they sat there in their front hall, the old Beau came stepping across the way from his old house, half hidden behind a little grove of pine− trees. He was as old as the eldest sister, but not at all feeble. He carried his handsome white head proudly above his old−fashioned high stock, and had a military set−back to his shoulders.

The old Beau, while looking, in his morning attire, not so very different from the modern man, clung always to his old costumes of state. When he crossed the road to the sisters of an afternoon he wore always his silk bell hat and blue swallow−tail coat, with bright brass buttons, and swung, with a fine courtly flourish of the past, an ancient ivory−headed cane. No one knew which of the sisters possessed the warmest affection of his faithful old heart. He had stepped across the road to visit them ever since people could remember. He had never had any other sweetheart, and they had never had any other beau.

One and then another of the sisters had been supposed to devote her virgin heart to him, and been pining over his long courtship. Nancy, the middle sister, was the one popularly considered to have especially favored him. There were vague whispers of more particular attentions paid her in years gone by. Moreover, she had been the beauty of the family. Tall and willowy in figure, with long brown curls drooping over rose−leaf cheeks, with gentle blue eyes had Nancy been in her youth.

It seemed probable that she had crept the closest to the heart of the old Beau, but no one really knew. He was a close man, and quite a student; he lived in his old library, walled in with musty books, and wrote with his quill pen pages of fine crabbed letters, which no one ever read, nor knew what their subject was. His one outside diversion was his afternoon call upon the three sisters.

Then, seated, in summer−time, in a carved arm−chair in their front hall, and in the winter in their parlor, with a damask napkin over his thin knees, he partook of tea in a blue china cup, and pound−cake in a blue china plate. The sisters' maidservant always passed around a tea−tray in the afternoon −− an old and genteel custom which prevailed nowhere else in the village.

Nancy, the middle sister, died first −− of old age, the town record said, although that seemed impossible, and the other sisters insisted that it was of a cold upon the lungs. "Consumption is in our mother's family, and Nancy was always delicate. I never expected she would live to be old," Rachel told the minister when he called.

After Nancy's death the old Beau drank tea with the other sisters for another summer, then Rachel died, and there was only Camilla left. He did not make his call every afternoon after that. It was understood that she had doubts about the strict propriety of such solitary visits, and had prohibited them.

Then it was that the old Beau manifested symptoms of uneasiness. At the hour when he had been accustomed to call upon his friends he strolled aimlessly about the roads, switching the way−side weeds with his cane. People thought that he was ageing fast.

About three months after Rachel's death, one midsummer Sunday, the old Beau and Camilla walked down the road together to meeting, and it was said that they had gone to the minister's that morning and been married.

The Bridegroom wore his old dress costume of bell hat and blue swallow−tail coat, and held up his handsome white head like a prince in his high stock, and the Bride minced gently at his side in an ample bridal array of a long−past fashion and cut. A white bride−bonnet, white−veiled and crowned with white plumes, adorned the old Bride, and she wore a lustrous white satin gown with a low bodice, a white Canton crape shawl, and white satin shoes. That bridal costume had, beyond doubt, been prepared years and years gone by for one of the sisters, in anticipation of youthful love and wedded bliss; but for which? No one ever knew. Some, indeed, fancied that the white satin breadths were over−long for Camilla, and would better have suited Nancy, who had been taller, but who could say with certainty, since Camilla stooped with age, and must have lost somewhat of her youthful stature?

The old Bride passed up the aisle with her old Bridegroom, and a smile of youth that triumphed over age and memory shone on her old face through her white veil, and no one ever knew whether she wore her own or her sister's wedding−gown, or had wedded her own or her sister's old Beau.

"THE REVOLT OF 'MOTHER.'"

"FATHER!"

"What is it?"

"What are them men diggin' over there in the field for?"

There was a sudden dropping and enlarging of the lower part of the old man's face, as if some heavy weight had settled therein; he shut his mouth tight, and went on harnessing the great bay mare. He hustled the collar on to her neck with a jerk.

"Father!"

The old man slapped the saddle upon the mare's back.

"Look here, father, I want to know what them men are diggin' over in the field for, an' I'm goin' to know."

"I wish you'd go into the house, mother, an' 'tend to your own affairs," the old man said then. He ran his words together, and his speech was almost as inarticulate as a growl.

But the woman understood; it was her most native tongue. "I ain't goin' into the house till you tell me what them men are doin' over there in the field," said she.

Then she stood waiting. She was a small woman, short and straight−waisted like a child in her brown cotton gown. Her forehead was mild and benevolent between the smooth curves of gray hair; there were meek downward lines about her nose and mouth; but her eyes, fixed upon the old man, looked as if the meekness had been the result of her own will, never of the will of another.

They were in the barn, standing before the wide open doors. The spring air, full of the smell of growing grass and unseen blossoms, came in their faces. The deep yard in front was littered with farm wagons and piles of wood; on the edges, close to the fence and the house, the grass was a vivid green, and there were some dandelions.

The old man glanced doggedly at his wife as he tightened the last buckles on the harness. She looked as immovable to him as one of the rocks in his pastureland, bound to the earth with generations of blackberry vines. He slapped the reins over the horse, and started forth from the barn.

"Father! said she.

The old man pulled up. "What is it?"

"I want to know what them men are diggin' over there in that field for."

"They're diggin' a cellar, I s'pose, if you've got to know."

"A cellar for what?"

"A barn."

"A barn? You ain't goin' to build a barn over there where we was goin' to have a house, father?"

The old man said not another word. He hurried the horse into the farm wagon, and clattered out of the yard, jouncing as sturdily on his seat as a boy.

The woman stood a moment looking after him, then she went out of the barn across a corner of the yard to the house. The house, standing at right angles with the great barn and a long reach of sheds and out−buildings, was infinitesimal compared with them. It was scarcely as commodious for people as the little boxes under the barn eaves were for doves.

A pretty girl's face, pink and delicate as a flower, was looking out of one of the house windows. She was watching three men who were digging over in the field which bounded the yard near the road line. She turned quietly when the woman entered.

"What are they diggin' for, mother?" said she. "Did he tell you?"

"They're diggin' for −− a cellar for a new barn."

"Oh, mother, he ain't goin' to build another barn?"

"That's what he says."

A boy stood before the kitchen glass combing his hair. He combed slowly and painstakingly, arranging his brown hair in a smooth hillock over his forehead. He did not seem to pay any attention to the conversation.

"Sammy, did you know father was goin' to build a new barn?" asked the girl.

The boy combed assiduously.

"Sammy!"

He turned, and showed a face like his father's under his smooth crest of hair. "Yes, I s'pose I did," he said, reluctantly.

"How long have you known it?" asked his mother.

"'Bout three months, I guess."

"Why didn't you tell of it?"

"Didn't think 'twould do no good."

"I don't see what father wants another barn for," said the girl, in her sweet slow voice. She turned again to the window, and stared out at the digging men in the field. Her tender sweet face was full of a gentle distress. Her forehead was as bald and innocent as a baby's, with the light hair strained back from it in a row of curl−papers. She was quite large, but her soft curves did not look as if they covered muscles.

Her mother looked sternly at the boy. "Is he goin' to buy more cows?" said she.

The boy did not reply; he was tying his shoes.

"Sammy, I want you to tell me if he's goin' to buy more cows."

"I s'pose he is."

"How many?"

"Four, I guess."

His mother said nothing more. She went into the pantry, and there was a clatter of dishes. The boy got his cap from a nail behind the door, took an old arithmetic from the shelf, and started for school. He was lightly built, but clumsy. He went out of the yard with a curious spring in the hips, that made his loose homemade jacket tilt up in the rear.

The girl went to the sink, and began to wash the dishes that were piled up there. Her mother came promptly out of the pantry, and shoved her aside. "You wipe 'em," said she; "I'll wash. There's a good many this mornin'."

The mother plunged her hands vigorously into the water, the girl wiped the plates slowly and dreamily. "Mother," said she, "don't you think it's too bad father's goin' to build that new barn, much as we need a decent house to live in?"

Her mother scrubbed a dish fiercely. "You 'ain't found out yet we're women−folks, Nanny Penn," said she. "You 'ain't seen enough of men−folks yet to. One of these days you'll find it out, an' then you'll know that we know only what men−folks think we do, so far as any use of it goes, an' how we'd ought to reckon men−folks in with Providence an' not complain of what they do any more than we do of the weather."

"I don't care; I don't believe George is anything like that, anyhow," said Nanny. Her delicate face flushed pink, her lips pouted softly, as if she were going to cry.

"You wait an' see. I guess George Eastman ain't no better than other men. You hadn't ought to judge father, though. He can't help it, 'cause he don't look at things jest the way we do. An' we've been pretty comfortable here, after all. The roof don't leak −− 'ain't never but once −− that's one thing. Father kept it shingled right up."

"I do wish we had a parlor."

"I guess it won't hurt George Eastman any to come to see you in a nice clean kitchen. I guess a good many girls don't have as good a place as this. Nobody's ever heard me complain."

"I 'ain't complained either, mother."

"Well, I don't think you'd better, a good father an' a good home as you've got. S'pose your father made you go out an' work for your livin'? Lots of girls have to that ain't no stronger an' better able to than you be."

Sarah Penn washed the frying−pan with a conclusive air. She scrubbed the outside of it as faithfully as the inside. She was a masterly keeper of her box of a house. Her one livingroom never seemed to have in it any of the dust which the friction of life with inanimate matter produces. She swept, and there seemed to be no dirt to go before the broom; she cleaned, and one could see no difference. She was like an artist so perfect that he has apparently no art. To−day she got out a mixing bowl and a board, and rolled some pies, and there was no more flour upon her than upon her daughter who was doing finer work. Nanny was to be married in the fall, and she was sewing on some white cambric and embroidery. She sewed industriously while her mother cooked, her soft milk−white hands and wrists showed whiter than her delicate work.

"We must have the stove moved out in the shed before long," said Mrs. Penn. "Talk about not havin' things, it's been a real blessin' to be able to put a stove up in that shed in hot weather. Father did one good thing when he fixed that stove−pipe out there."

Sarah Penn's face as she rolled her pies had that expression of meek vigor which might have characterized one of the New Testament saints. She was making mince−pies. Her husband, Adoniram Penn, liked them better than any other kind. She baked twice a week. Adoniram often liked a piece of pie between meals. She hurried this morning. It had been later than usual when she began, and she wanted to have a pie baked for dinner. However deep a resentment she might be forced to hold against her husband, she would never fail in sedulous attention to his wants.

Nobility of character manifests itself at loop−holes when it is not provided with large doors. Sarah Penn's showed itself today in flaky dishes of pastry. So she made the pies faithfully, while across the table she could see, when she glanced up from her work, the sight that rankled in her patient and steadfast soul −− the digging of the cellar of the new barn in the place where Adoniram forty years ago had promised her their new house should stand.

The pies were done for dinner. Adoniram and Sammy were home a few minutes after twelve o'clock. The dinner was eaten with serious haste. There was never much conversation at the table in the Penn family. Adoniram asked a blessing, and they ate promptly, then rose up and went about their work.

Sammy went back to school, taking soft sly lopes out of the yard like a rabbit. He wanted a game of marbles before school, and feared his father would give him some chores to do. Adoniram hastened to the door and called after him, but he was out of sight.

"I don't see what you let him go for, mother," said he. "I wanted him to help me unload that wood."

Adoniram went to work out in the yard unloading wood from the wagon. Sarah put away the dinner dishes, while Nanny took down her curl−papers and changed her dress. She was going down to the store to buy some more embroidery and thread.

When Nanny was gone, Mrs. Penn went to the door. "Father!" she called.

"Well, what is it?"

"I want to see you jest a minute, father."

"I can't leave this wood nohow. I've got to git it unloaded an' go for a load of gravel afore two o'clock. Sammy had ought to helped me. You hadn't ought to let him go to school so early."

"I want to see you jest a minute."

"I tell ye I can't, nohow, mother."

"Father, you come here." Sarah Penn stood in the door like a queen; she held her head as if it bore a crown; there was that patience which makes authority royal in her voice. Adoniram went.

Mrs. Penn led the way into the kitchen, and pointed to a chair. "Sit down, father," said she; "I've got somethin' I want to say to you."

He sat down heavily; his face was quite stolid, but he looked at her with restive eyes. "Well, what is it, mother?"

"I want to know what you're buildin' that new barn for, father?"

"I 'ain't got nothin' to say about it."

"It can't be you think you need another barn?"

"I tell ye I 'ain't got nothin' to say about it, mother; an' I ain't goin' to say nothin'."

"Be you goin' to buy more cows?"

Adoniram did not reply; he shut his mouth tight.

"I know you be, as well as I want to. Now, father, look here" −− Sarah Penn had not sat down; she stood before her husband in the humble fashion of a Scripture woman −− "I'm goin' to talk real plain to you: I never have sence I married you, but I'm goin' to now. I 'ain't never complained, an' I ain't goin' to complain now, but I'm goin' to talk plain. You see this room here, father; you look at it well. You see there ain't no carpet on the floor, an' you see the paper is all dirty, an' droppin' off the walls. We 'ain't had no new paper on it for ten year, an' then I put it on myself, an' it didn't cost but nine−pence a roll. You see this room, father; it's all the one I've had to work in an' eat in an' sit in sence we was married. There ain't another woman in the whole town whose husband 'ain't got half the means you have but what's got better. It's all the room Nanny's got to have her company in; an' there ain't one of her mates but what's got better, an' their fathers not so able as hers is. It's all the room she'll have to be married in. What would you have thought, father, if we had had our weddin' in a room no better than this? I was married in my mother's parlor, with a carpet on the floor, an' stuffed furniture, an' a mahogany card−table. An' this is all the room my daughter will have to be married in. Look here, father!"

Sarah Penn went across the room as though it were a tragic stage. She flung open a door and disclosed a tiny bedroom, only large enough for a bed and bureau, with a path between. "There, father," said she −− "there's all the room I've had to sleep in for forty year. All my children were born there −− the two that died, an' the two that's livin'. I was sick with a fever there."

She stepped to another door and opened it. It led into the small, ill−lighted pantry. "Here," said she, "is all the buttery I've got −− every place I've got for my dishes to set away my victuals in, an' to keep my milk−pans in. Father, I've been takin' care of the milk of six cows in this place, an' now you're goin' to build a new barn, an' keep more cows, an' give me more to do in it."

She threw open another door. A narrow crooked flight of stairs wound upward from it. "There, father!" said she; "I want you to look at the stairs that go up to them two unfinished chambers that are all the places our son an' daughter have had to sleep in all their lives. There ain't a prettier girl in town nor a more ladylike one than Nanny, an' that's the place she has to sleep in. It ain't so good as your horse's stall; it ain't so warm an' tight."

Sarah Penn went back and stood before her husband. "Now, father," said she, "I want to know if you think you're doin' right an' accordin' to what you profess. Here, when we was married, forty year ago, you promised me faithful that we should have a new house built in that lot over in the field before the year was out. You said you had money enough, an' you wouldn't ask me to live in no such place as this. It is forty year now, an' you've been makin' more money, an' I've been savin' of it for you ever since, an' you 'ain't built no house yet. You've built sheds, an' cow−houses an' one new barn, an' now you're goin' to build another. Father, I want to know if you think it's right. You're lodgin' your dumb beasts better than you are your own flesh an' blood. I want to know if you think it's right."

"I 'ain't got nothin' to say."

"You can't say nothin' without ownin' it ain't right, father. An' there's another thing −− I ain't complained; I've got along forty year, an' I s'pose I should forty more, if it wa'n't for that −− if we don't have another house, Nanny she can't live with us after she's married. She'll have to go somewheres else to live away from us, an' it don't seem as if I could have it so, noways, father. She wa'n't ever strong. She's got considerable color, but there wa'n't never any backbone to her. I've always took the heft of everything off her, an' she ain't fit to keep house an' do everything herself. She'll be all worn out inside of a year. Think of her doin' all the washin' an' ironin' an' bakin' with them soft white hands an' arms, an' sweepin'! I can't have it so, noways, father."

Mrs. Penn's face was burning; her mild eyes gleamed. She had pleaded her little cause like a Webster; she had ranged from severity to pathos; but her opponent employed that obstinate silence which makes eloquence futile with mocking echoes. Adoniram arose clumsily.

"Father, 'ain't you got nothin' to say?" said Mrs. Penn.

"I've got to go off after that load of gravel. I can't stan' here talkin' all day."

"Father, won't you think it over, an' have a house built there instead of a barn?"

"I 'ain't got nothin' to say."

Adoniram shuffled out. Mrs. Penn went into her bedroom. When she came out, her eyes were red. She had a roll of unbleached cotton cloth. She spread it out on the kitchen table, and began cutting out some shirts for her husband. The men over in the field had a team to help them this afternoon; she could hear their halloos. She had a scanty pattern for the shirts; she had to plan and piece the sleeves.

Nanny came home with her embroidery, and sat down with her needle−work. She had taken down her curl−papers, and there was a soft roll of fair hair like an aureole over her forehead; her face was as delicately fine and clear as porcelain. Suddenly she looked up, and the tender red flamed all over her face and neck. "Mother," said she.

"What say?"

"I've been thinkin' −− I don't see how we're goin' to have any −− weddin' in this room. I'd be ashamed to have his folks come if we didn't have anybody else."

"Mebbe we can have some new paper before then; I can put it on. I guess you won't have no call to be ashamed of your belongin's."

"We might have the weddin' in the new barn," said Nanny, with gentle pettishness. "Why, mother, what makes you look so?"

Mrs. Penn had started, and was staring at her with a curious expression. She turned again to her work, and spread out a pattern carefully on the cloth. "Nothin'," said she.

Presently Adoniram clattered out of the yard in his two−wheeled dump cart, standing as proudly upright as a Roman charioteer. Mrs. Penn opened the door and stood there a minute looking out; the halloos of the men sounded louder.

It seemed to her all through the spring months that she heard nothing but the halloos and the noises of saws and hammers. The new barn grew fast. It was a fine edifice for this little village. Men came on pleasant Sundays, in their meeting suits and clean shirt bosoms, and stood around it admiringly. Mrs. Penn did not speak of it, and Adoniram did not mention it to her, although sometimes, upon a return from inspecting it, he bore himself with injured dignity.

"It's a strange thing how your mother feels about the new barn," he said, confidentially, to Sammy one day.

Sammy only grunted after an odd fashion for a boy: he had learned it from his father.

The barn was all completed ready for use by the third week in July. Adoniram had planned to move his stock in on Wednesday; on Tuesday he received a letter which changed his plans. He came in with it early in the morning. "Sammy's been to the post−office," said he, "an' I've got a letter from Hiram." Hiram was Mrs. Penn's brother, who lived in Vermont.

"Well," said Mrs. Penn, "what does he say about the folks?"

"I guess they're all right. He says he thinks if I come up country right off there's a chance to buy jest the kind of a horse I want." He stared reflectively out of the window at the new barn.

Mrs. Penn was making pies. She went on clapping the rolling−pin into the crust, although she was very pale, and her heart beat loudly.

"I dunno' but what I'd better go," said Adoniram. "I hate to go off jest now, right in the midst of hayin', but the ten−acre lot's cut, an' I guess Rufus an' the others can git along without me three or four days. I can't get a horse round here to suit me, nohow, an' I've got to have another for all that wood−haulin' in the fall. I told Hiram to watch out, an' if he got wind of a good horse to let me know. I guess I'd better go."

"I'll get out your clean shirt an' collar," said Mrs. Penn, calmly.

She laid out Adoniram's Sunday suit and his clean clothes on the bed in the little bedroom. She got his shaving water and razor ready. At last she buttoned on his collar and fastened his black cravat.

Adoniram never wore his collar and cravat except on extra occasions. He held his head high, with a rasped dignity. When he was all ready, with his coat and hat brushed, and a lunch of pie and cheese in a paper bag, he hesitated on the threshold of the door. He looked at his wife, and his manner was defiantly apologetic. "If them cows come to−day, Sammy can drive 'em into the new barn," said he; "an' when they bring the hay up, they can pitch it in there."

"Well," replied Mrs. Penn.

Adoniram set his shaven face ahead and started. When he had cleared the door−step, he turned and looked back with a kind of nervous solemnity. "I shall be back by Saturday if nothin' happens," said he.

"Do be careful, father," returned his wife.

She stood in the door with Nanny at her elbow and watched him out of sight. Her eyes had a strange, doubtful expression in them; her peaceful forehead was contracted. She went in, and about her baking again. Nanny sat sewing. Her wedding day was drawing nearer, and she was getting pale and thin with her steady sewing. Her mother kept glancing at her.

"Have you got that pain in your side this mornin'?" she asked.

"A little."

Mrs. Penn's face, as she worked, changed, her perplexed forehead smoothed, her eyes were steady, her lips firmly set. She formed a maxim for herself, although incoherently with her unlettered thoughts. "Unsolicited opportunities are the guideposts of the Lord to the new roads of life," she repeated in effect, and she made up her mind to her course of action.

"S'posin' I had wrote to Hiram," she muttered once, when she was in the pantry −− "s'posin' I had wrote, an' asked him if he knew of any horse? But I didn't, an' father's goin' wa'n't none of my doin'. It looks like a Providence." Her voice rang out quite loud at the last.

"What you talkin' about, mother?" called Nanny.

"Nothin'."

Mrs. Penn hurried her baking; at eleven o'clock it was all done. The load of hay from the west field came slowly down the cart track, and drew up at the new barn. Mrs. Penn ran out. "Stop!" she screamed −− "stop!"

The men stopped and looked; Sammy upreared from the top of the load, and stared at his mother.

"Stop!" she cried out again. "Don't you put the hay in that barn; put it in the old one."

"Why, he said to put it in here," returned one of the haymakers, wonderingly. He was a young man, a neighbor's son, whom Adoniram hired by the year to help on the farm.

"Don't you put the hay in the new barn; there's room enough in the old one, ain't there?" said Mrs. Penn.

"Room enough," returned the hired man, in his thick, rustic tones. "Didn't need the new barn, nohow, far as room's concerned. Well, I s'pose he changed his mind." He took hold of the horses' bridles.

Mrs. Penn went back to the house. Soon the kitchen windows were darkened, and a fragrance like warm honey came into the room.

Nanny laid down her work. "I thought father wanted them to put the hay into the new barn?" she said, wonderingly.

"It's all right," replied her mother.

Sammy slid down from the load of hay and came in to see if dinner was ready.

"I ain't goin' to get a regular dinner to−day, as long as father's gone," said his mother. "I've let the fire go out. You can have some bread an' milk an' pie. I thought we could get along." She set out some bowls of milk, some bread,

and a pie on the kitchen table. "You'd better eat your dinner now," said she. "You might jest as well get through with it. I want you to help me afterward."

Nanny and Sammy stared at each other. There was something strange in their mother's manner. Mrs. Penn did not eat anything herself. She went into the pantry, and they heard her moving dishes while they ate. Presently she came out with a pile of plates. She got the clothes−basket out of the shed, and packed them in it. Nanny and Sammy watched. She brought out cups and saucers, and put them in with the plates.

"What you goin' to do, mother?" inquired Nanny, in a timid voice. A sense of something unusual made her tremble, as if it were a ghost. Sammy rolled his eyes over his pie.

"You'll see what I'm goin' to do," replied Mrs. Penn. "If you're through, Nanny, I want you to go up stairs an' pack up your things; an' I want you, Sammy, to help me take down the bed in the bed−room."

"Oh, mother, what for?" gasped Nanny.

"You'll see."

During the next few hours a feat was performed by this simple, pious New England mother which was equal in its way to Wolfe's storming of the Heights of Abraham. It took no more genius and audacity of bravery for Wolfe to cheer his wondering soldiers up those steep precipices, under the sleeping eyes of the enemy, than for Sarah Penn, at the head of her children, to move all her little household goods into the new barn while her husband was away.

Nanny and Sammy followed their mother's instructions without a murmur; indeed, they were overawed. There is a certain uncanny and superhuman quality about all such purely original undertakings as their mother's was to them. Nanny went back and forth with her light loads, and Sammy tugged with sober energy.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the little house in which the Penns had lived for forty years had emptied itself into the new barn.

Every builder builds somewhat for unknown purposes, and is in a measure a prophet. The architect of Adoniram Penn's barn, while he designed it for the comfort of four−footed animals, had planned better than he knew for the comfort of humans. Sarah Penn saw at a glance its possibilities. Those great box−stalls, with quilts hung before them, would make better bedrooms than the one she had occupied for forty years, and there was a tight carriage−room. The harness−room, with its chimney and shelves, would make a kitchen of her dreams. The great middle space would make a parlor, by−and−by, fit for a palace. Up stairs there was as much room as down. With partitions and windows, what a house would there be! Sarah looked at the row of stanchions before the allotted space for cows, and reflected that she would have her front entry there.

At six o'clock the stove was up in the harness−room, the kettle was boiling, and the table set for tea. It looked almost as home−like as the abandoned house across the yard had ever done. The young hired man milked, and Sarah directed him calmly to bring the milk to the new barn. He came gaping, dropping little blots of foam from the brimming pails on the grass. Before the next morning he had spread the story of Adoniram Penn's wife moving into the new barn all over the little village. Men assembled in the store and talked it over, women with shawls over their heads scuttled into each other's houses before their work was done. Any deviation from the ordinary course of life in this quiet town was enough to stop all progress in it. Everybody paused to look at the staid, independent figure on the side track. There was a difference of opinion with regard to her. Some held her to be insane; some, of a lawless and rebellious spirit.

Friday the minister went to see her. It was in the forenoon, and she was at the barn door shelling pease for dinner. She looked up and returned his salutation with dignity, then she went on with her work. She did not invite him in.

The saintly expression of her face remained fixed, but there was an angry flush over it.

The minister stood awkwardly before her and talked. She handled the pease as if they were bullets. At last she looked up, and her eyes showed the spirit that her meek front had covered for a lifetime.

"There ain't no use talkin', Mr. Hersey," said she. "I've thought it all over an' over, an' I believe I'm doin' what's right. I've made it the subject of prayer, an' it's betwixt me an' the Lord an' Adoniram. There ain't no call for nobody else to worry about it."

"Well, of course if you have brought it to the Lord in prayer, and feel satisfied that you are doing right, Mrs. Penn," said the minister, helplessly. His thin gray−bearded face was pathetic. He was a sickly man; his youthful confidence had cooled; he had to scourge himself up to some of his pastoral duties as relentlessly as a Catholic ascetic, and then he was prostrated by the smart.

"I think it's right jest as much as I think it was right for our forefathers to come over from the old country 'cause they didn't have what belonged to 'em," said Mrs. Penn. She arose. The barn threshold might have been Plymouth Rock from her bearing. "I don't doubt you mean well, Mr. Hersey," said she, "but there are things people hadn't ought to interfere with. I've been a member of the church for over forty year. I've got my own mind an' my own feet, an' I'm goin' to think my own thoughts an' go my own ways, an' nobody but the Lord is goin' to dictate to me unless I've a mind to have him. Won't you come in an' set down? How is Mis' Hersey?"

"She is well, I thank you," replied the minister. He added some more perplexed apologetic remarks; then he retreated.

He could expound the intricacies of every character study in the Scriptures, he was competent to grasp the Pilgrim Fathers and all historical innovators, but Sarah Penn was beyond him. He could deal with primal cases, but parallel ones worsted him. But, after all, although it was aside from his province, he wondered more how Adoniram Penn would deal with his wife than how the Lord would. Everybody shared the wonder. When Adoniram's four new cows arrived, Sarah ordered three to be put in the old barn, the other in the house shed where the cooking−stove had stood. That added to the excitement. It was whispered that all four cows were domiciled in the house.

Toward sunset on Saturday, when Adoniram was expected home, there was a knot of men in the road near the new barn. The hired man had milked, but he still hung around the premises. Sarah Penn had supper all ready. There were brown−bread and baked beans and a custard pie; it was the supper that Adoniram loved on a Saturday night. She had on a clean calico, and she bore herself imperturbably. Nanny and Sammy kept close at her heels. Their eyes were large, and Nanny was full of nervous tremors. Still there was to them more pleasant excitement than anything else. An inborn confidence in their mother over their father asserted itself.

Sammy looked out of the harness−room window. "There he is," he announced, in an awed whisper. He and Nanny peeped around the casing. Mrs. Penn kept on about her work. The children watched Adoniram leave the new horse standing in the drive while he went to the house door. It was fastened. Then he went around to the shed. That door was seldom locked, even when the family was away. The thought how her father would be confronted by the cow flashed upon Nanny. There was a hysterical sob in her throat. Adoniram emerged from the shed and stood looking about in a dazed fashion. His lips moved; he was saying something, but they could not hear what it was. The hired man was peeping around a corner of the old barn, but nobody saw him.

Adoniram took the new horse by the bridle and led him across the yard to the new barn. Nanny and Sammy slunk close to their mother. The barn doors rolled back, and there stood Adoniram, with the long mild face of the great Canadian farm horse looking over his shoulder.

Nanny kept behind her mother, but Sammy stepped suddenly forward, and stood in front of her.

Adoniram stared at the group. "What on airth you all down here for?" said he. "What's the matter over to the house?"

"We've come here to live, father," said Sammy. His shrill voice quavered out bravely.

"What" −− Adoniram sniffed −− "what is it smells like cookin'?" said he. He stepped forward and looked in the open door of the harness−room. Then he turned to his wife. His old bristling face was pale and frightened. "What on airth does this mean, mother?" he gasped.

"You come in here, father," said Sarah. She led the way into the harness−room and shut the door. "Now, father," said she, "you needn't be scared. I ain't crazy. There ain't nothin' to be upset over. But we've come here to live, an' we're goin' to live here. We've got jest as good a right here as new horses an' cows. The house wa'n't fit for us to live in any longer, an' I made up my mind I wa'n't goin' to stay there. I've done my duty by you forty year, an' I'm goin' to do it now; but I'm goin' to live here. You've got to put in some windows and partitions; an' you'll have to buy some furniture."

"Why, mother!" the old man gasped.

"You'd better take your coat off an' get washed −− there's the wash−basin −− an' then we'll have supper."

"Why, mother!"

Sammy went past the window, leading the new horse to the old barn. The old man saw him, and shook his head speechlessly. He tried to take off his coat, but his arms seemed to lack the power. His wife helped him. She poured some water into the tin basin, and put in a piece of soap. She got the comb and brush, and smoothed his thin gray hair after he had washed. Then she put the beans, hot bread, and tea on the table. Sammy came in, and the family drew up. Adoniram sat looking dazedly at his plate, and they waited.

"Ain't you goin' to ask a blessin', father?" said Sarah.

And the old man bent his head and mumbled.

All through the meal he stopped eating at intervals, and stared furtively at his wife; but he ate well. The home food tasted good to him, and his old frame was too sturdily healthy to be affected by his mind. But after supper he went out and sat down on the step of the smaller door at the right of the barn, through which he had meant his Jerseys to pass in stately file, but which Sarah designed for her front house door, and he leaned his head on his hands.

After the supper dishes were cleared away and the milk−pans washed, Sarah came out to him. The twilight was deepening. There was a clear green glow in the sky. Before them stretched the smooth level of field; in the distance was a cluster of hay−stacks like the huts of a village; the air was very cool and calm and sweet. The landscape might have been an ideal one of peace.

Sarah bent over and touched her husband on one of his thin, sinewy shoulders. "Father!"

The old man's shoulders heaved: he was weeping.

"Why, don't do so, father," said Sarah.

"I'll −− put up the −− partitions, an' −− everything you −− want, mother."

Sarah put her apron up to her face; she was overcome by her own triumph.

Adoniram was like a fortress whose walls had no active resistance, and went down the instant the right besieging tools were used. "Why, mother," he said, hoarsely, "I hadn't no idee you was so set on't as all this comes to."

AN OLD ARITHMETICIAN.

A STRONG soft south wind had been blowing the day before, and the trees had dropped nearly all their leaves. There were left only a few brownish−golden ones dangling on the elms, and hardly any at all on the maples. There were many trees on the street, and the fallen leaves were heaped high. Mrs. Wilson Torry's little door yard was ankle deep with them. The air was full of their odor, which could affect the spirit like a song, and mingled with it was the scent of grapes.

The minister had been calling on Mrs. Torry that afternoon, and now he stood facing her on the porch, taking leave. He was very young, and this was his first parish. He was small and light and mild−looking; still he had considerable nervous volubility. The simple village women never found him hard to entertain.

Now, all at once, he made an exclamation, and fumbled in his pocket for a folded paper. "There," said he, "I nearly forgot this. Mr. Plainfield requested me to hand this to you, Mrs. Torry. It is a problem which he has been working over; he gave it to me to try, and wanted me to propose, when I called, that you should see what you could do with it."

She seized it eagerly. "Well, I'll see what I can do; but you an' he mustn't make no great calculations on me. You know I don't know anything about the 'rithmetic books an' the rules they hev nowadays; but I'm willin' to try."

"Oh, you'll have it done while Mr. Plainfield and I are thinking of it, Mrs. Torry."

"You 'ain't neither of you done it, then?"

"He had not at last accounts, and −− I have not," replied the young man, laughing, but coloring a little.

The old lady's eyes gleamed as she looked at him, then at the paper. "I dare say I can't make head nor tail of it," said she, "but I'll see what I can do by−an'−by."

She had something of a childish air as she stood there. She was slender, and so short that she was almost dwarfed; her shoulders were curved a little by spinal disease. She had a small round face, and a mouth which widened out innocently into smiles as she talked. Her eyes looked out directly at one, like a child's; over them loomed a high forehead with bulging temples covered with deep wrinkles.

"You have always been very fond of mathematics, haven't you, Mrs. Torry?" said the minister, in his slow retreat.

"Lor', yes. I can't remember the time when I wa'n't crazy to cipher."

"Arithmetic is a very fascinating study, I think," remarked the minister, trying to slide easily off the subject and down the porch steps.

"'Tis to me. An' there's somethin' I was thinkin' about this very forenoon −− seein' all them leaves on the ground made me, I s'pose. It's always been a sight of comfort to me to count. When I was a little girl I'd 'most rather count than play. I used to sit down an' count by the hour together. I remember a little pewter porringer I had, that I used

to fill up with beans an' count 'em. Well, it come into my head this forenoon what a blessed privilege it would be to count up all the beautiful things in this creation. Just think of countin' all them red an' gold−colored leaves, an' all the grapes an' apples in the fall; an' when it come to the winter, all the flakes of snow, an' the sparkles of frost; an' when it come to the spring, all the flowers, and blades of grass, an' the little new light green leaves. I don' know but you'll think it ain't exactly reverent, but it does seem to me that I'd rather do that than sing in the other world. Mebbe somebody does have to do the countin'; mebbe it's singin' for some."

She stared up into the warm blue air, in which the bare branches of the trees glistened, with a sweet, solemn wonder in her old face.

The minister in a bewildered way pondered all the old woman had said, as he rustled down the street. Later, Mr. Plainfield (the young high−school teacher) and he would have discussion over it. They often talked over Mrs. Wilson Torry.

After her caller had gone, the old woman entered the house. On the left of the little entry was the best room, where she had been entertaining the minister; on the right, the kitchen. A young girl was in there eating an apple. She looked up when Mrs. Torry stood in the door.

"He's gone, ain't he?" said she.

"Why, Letty, when did you come?"

"A few minutes ago. School's just out. I came in the back door, and heard him talking, so I kept still."

"Why didn't you come in an' see him?"

"Oh, I didn't want to see him. What you got there, grandma?"

"Nothin' but a sum the minister brought me to do. He an' Mr. Plainfield have been workin' over it."

"Couldn't they do it?"

"Well, he said they hadn't neither of 'em done it yet."

"Is it awful hard?"

"I don' know. I 'ain't looked at it yet."

"Let me see. He didn't get it out of any of our books, I know. We never had anything like this."

"I s'pose it's one he come across somewhere. I guess I'll sit down and look at it two or three minutes."

An old bureau stood against the wall; on it were arranged four religious newspapers in the exact order of their issues, the latest on top, Farmers' Almanacs for the last four years filed in the same way, and a slate surmounted by an old arithmetic. The pile of newspapers was in the middle; the slate and almanacs were on either end.

Letty, soberly eating her apple, watched her grandmother getting out the arithmetic and slate. She was a pretty young girl; her small innocent face, in spite of its youthful roundness and fairness, reminded people of Mrs. Torry's.

"I don't think much of Mr. Plainfield, anyhow," said she, as the click of her grandmother's pencil on the slate began; "and he knows I don't. He overheard me telling Lizzie Bascom so to−day. He came right up behind us on the street, and I know he heard. You ought to have seen his face!"

"I don't see what you've got agin him," remarked Mrs. Torry, absently, as she dotted down figures.

"I haven't much of anything that I know of against him, only I don't think he's much of a teacher. He can't to examples as quickly as you, I know, and I don't think a man has any business to be school−teaching if he can't do examples as quickly as an old lady."

Mrs. Torry stopped her work, and fixed her round unwinking eyes full on the girl's face.

"Letty Torry, there's some things you don't understand. You never will understand 'em, if you live to be as old as Methuseleh, as far as that's concerned. But you'll get so you know the things air. Sometimes it don't make any difference if anybody's ignorant, an' 'ain't got any book−learnin'; air old, an' had a hard−workin' life. There'll be somethin' in 'em that everybody else 'ain't got; somethin' that growed, an' didn't have to be learned. I've got this faculty; I can cipher. It ain't nothin' agin Mr. Plainfield if he 'ain't got it; it's a gift."

Her voice took on a solemn tone and trembled. Letty looked at her with childish wonder. "Well," said she, with a subdued manner, "he has no right to teach, anyhow, without it. I guess I'll have another apple. I was real hungry."

So Letty ate another apple silently while her grandmother worked at the problem again.

She did not solve it as easily as usual. She worked till midnight, her little lamp drawn close to her on the kitchen table; then she went to bed, with the answer still in doubt.

"It ain't goin' to do for me to set up any longer," said she, forlornly, as she replaced the slate on the bureau. "I shall be sick if I do. But I declare I don't see what's got into me. I hope I ain't losin' my faculty."

She could not sleep much. The next morning, as soon as their simple breakfast was eaten and Letty had gone to school, she seated herself with her slate and pencil.

When Letty came home at noon she found her grandmother still at work, and no dinner ready.

"I do declare!" cried the old woman. "You don't mean to say you're home, Letty! It ain't twelve o'clock, is it?"

"Course it is; quarter past."

"I 'ain't got one mite of dinner ready, then. I've been so took up with the sum I hadn't no idea how the time was goin'. I don' know what you will do, child."

"Oh, I'll get some bread and milk, grandma; just as soon have it as anything else. Got the problem done?"

"No, I 'ain't. I feel real bad about your dinner. I'll kindle up a fire now an' fry you an egg −− there be time enough."

"I'd rather have bread and milk."

After Letty had gone to school for the afternoon, and Mrs. Torry had been working fruitlessly for an hour longer, she dropped her pencil.

"I declare," said she, "I'm afraid I am losin' my faculty!"

Tears stood in her eyes. "I won't give up that I am, anyhow," said she, and took the pencil again.

When Letty returned in the latter part of the afternoon, she scarcely knew it, with the full meaning of the word. She saw her, but her true consciousness was so full of figures that Letty's fair face could only look in at the door.

Letty ran in hastily; a young girl was waiting for her outside. "Oh, grandma," cried Letty, "Lizzie's going to Ellsworth to do an errand for her mother; she's coming back on the last train. Can't I go with her?"

Her grandmother stared at her for a minute and made no answer.

"She's got tickets for both of us. Can't I go, grandma?"

"Yes."

Letty smoothed her hair a little, and put on her best hat; then she went.

"Good−by," said she, looking back at the intend old figure; but she got no answer.

"Grandma's so taken up with an example she's got that she doesn't know anything," she told her friend when she was outside. "She didn't answer when I said good−by; she forgot to get dinner to−day too."

Mrs. Torry worked on and on. She never looked up nor thought of anything else until it grew so dark that she could not see her figures. "I'll have to light the lamp," said she, with a sigh.

After it was lit she went to work again. She never thought of wanting any supper, though she had eaten nothing since morning.

The kitchen clock struck seven −− Letty should have been home then −− eight, and nine, but she never noticed it. A few minutes afterward some one knocked on the door. She ciphered on. Then the knocks were repeated, louder and quicker.

"Somebody's knockin', I guess," she muttered, and opened the door. Mr. Plainfield stood there. He was a handsome young man with rosy cheeks; he was always smiling. He looked past her into the room inquiringly. "Is Letty at home?" said he.

"Letty?"

"Yes, Letty. Is she at home?"

"Why, yes, she's here. Letty!"

"Has she gone to bed?"

"Why, yes, I guess she has." Mrs. Torry opened the door at the foot of the stairs. "Letty! Letty!"

"I guess she must be asleep," said she, turning to the young man, who had stepped into the kitchen. "Want me to go up an' see? Did you want anything pertickler?"

He hesitated. "If you had −− just as soon −− I −− had something special −− "

The old woman climbed the steep, uncarpeted stairs, feebly, with a long pat on every step. She came down faster, reckless of her trembling uncertainty. "She ain't there! Letty's gone! Where is she?"

"You knew she went to Ellsworth with Lizzie?"

"No, I didn't."

"Why, she said something to you about it, didn't she?"

"I don't know whether she did or not."

"Lizzie just told me that she missed her in the depot. She left her there for a minute while she went back for something she had forgotten. When she came back she was gone. The train was all ready, and Lizzie thought she must be on it, so she got on herself. She did not see her in the depot here, and has been crying about it, and afraid to tell till just now. I came right over as soon as I knew about it."

"Oh, Letty! Letty! Where's Letty? Oh, Mr. Plainfield, you go an' find her! Go right off! You will, won't you? Letty allers liked you."

"I always liked Letty," said the young man, brokenly. "I'll find her −− don't you worry."

"You'll go right off now?"

"Of course I will; I won't wait a minute."

"Oh, Letty, Letty! Where is she? What shall I do? That little bit of a thing −− and she was always one of the frightened kind −− out all alone; an' it's night! She never went to Ellsworth alone in her hull life. She didn't know nothin' about the town, an' she didn't have a cent of money in her pocket."

"I'll send Mrs. Bascom over to stay with you," Mr. Plainfield called back as he hurried off.

Soon Mrs. Bascom came, poking her white, nervous face in the door inquiringly. "She 'ain't come?"

"No. Oh, Mis' Bascom, what shall I do?"

"Oh, Mis' Torry, I do feel so bad about it I don't know what to do. If Lizzie had only told before! but there she was upstairs crying, and afraid to tell. I've been scolding her, but she felt so bad I had to stop. She called me, an' told me finally; an' I guess 'twa'n't long before Mr. Plainfield started off, to find out if she was home. It was lucky he was boarding with us. He'll find her if anybody can; he's as quick as lightning. He turned white's a sheet when I told him."

"Oh, Mis' Bascom!"

"Now, don't give up so, Mis' Torry. He'll find her. She can't be very far off. You'll see her walking in here first thing you know. He's got a real fast team, an' he's started for Ellsworth now. He went past me like a streak when I was coming up the road. He'll have her back safe and sound before morning."

"Oh, Letty! Letty! Oh, what shall I do? It's my own fault, every mite of it's my own fault. 'Tis; you don't know nothin' about it. The minister brought me a sum, he an' Mr. Plainfield had been workin' on, to do, yesterday afternoon, an' I jest sat an' ciphered half the night, an' all day. I didn't know no more what Letty asked me, when she came in from school, than nothin' at all. I didn't more'n half know when she come. I didn't know nothin' but

them figgers, an' now Letty's lost, an' it's my fault."

"Why, you might have let her gone if you'd known."

"I guess I shouldn't let her gone, all alone with your Lizzie, to come home after dark in the last train, little delicate thing as she was. I guess I shouldn't; an' I guess I should have started up an' done something, if I'd known, when she wasn't here at train time. I didn't get the sum done, an' I'm glad of it; it seems to me jest as if I was losin' my faculty as I'm growin' older, an' I hope I am."

"Now don't talk so, Mis' Torry. Sit down an' try to be calm. You'll be sick."

"I guess there ain't much bein' calm. I tell you what 'tis, Mis' Bascom. I've been a wicked woman. I've been thinkin' so much of this faculty I've had for cipherin' that I've set it afore everything −− I hev. Only yesterday that poor child didn't hev any dinner but crackers an' milk, 'cause I was so took up with the sum that I forgot it. An' she was jest as patient as a lamb about it; said she'd rather hev crackers an' milk than anything else. Oh, dear! dear!"

"Don't cry, Mis' Torry."

"I can't help it. It don't make no difference what folks are born with a faculty for −− whether it's cipherin', or singin', or writin' poetry −− the love that's betwixt human beings an' the help that's betwixt 'em ought to come first. I've known it all the time, but I've gone agin it, an' now I've got my pay. What shall I do?"

Mrs. Bascom remained with her all night, but she could not pacify her in the least. She was nearly distracted herself. She was fearful that her Lizzie might be blamed.

The next day people flocked to the house to inquire if there was any news from Letty, and to comfort her grandmother. Sympathy seemed fairly dripping like fragrant oil from these simple, honest hearts; but the poor old woman got no refreshing influence from it. She kept on her old strain in their ears. She had lost Letty, and it was all her own fault, and what should she do? Mr. Plainfield did not come home. The minister took his place in school. Nothing was heard until noon; then a telegram from the teacher came. He thought he was on Letty's track, he said; they should hear again.

Next day there was a second message: Letty was safe; coming home as soon as possible. The following day passed then, and not another word came. The old grandmother's faith and hope seemed to have deserted her. She knew Letty was not found; she never would be found. She and Mr. Plainfield were both lost now. Something dreadful had happened to both of them.

"The worst of it is," she told Mrs. Bascom one afternoon, with a fierce indignation at herself, "I can't help thinkin' about that awful sum now after all that's happened. Them figgers keep troopin' into my head right in the midst of my thinkin' about Letty. It's all I can do to let that slate alone, an' not take it off the bureau. But I won't −− I won't if it kills me not to. An' all the time I jest despise myself for it; a−lettin' my faculty for cipherin' get ahead of things that's higher an' sacreder. I do think I've lost my faculty now, an' I 'most hope I hev. But it won't make no difference 'bout Letty now. Oh dear! dear! What shall I do?"

On the fourth day after Letty's disappearance, between six and seven o'clock in the evening, Mrs. Torry was sitting alone in her kitchen. The last sympathizer had gone home to eat her supper.

The distressed old woman had drank* a cup of tea; that was all she would touch. The pot was still on the stove. There was a soft yellow light from the lamp over the room. The warm air was full of the fragrance of boiling tea.

Mrs. Torry sat looking over at the bureau. She would have looked the same way if she had been starving and seen food there.

"Oh," she whispered, "if −− I could −− only work on that sum a little while, it does seem as if 'twould comfort me more'n anything. Oh Lord! I wonder if I was to blame? 'Twas the way I was made, an' I couldn't help that. P'rhaps I should hev let Letty gone, an' she'd been lost, anyway. I wonder if I hev lost my faculty?"

She sat there looking over at the slate. At last she rose and started to cross the room. Midway she stopped.

"Oh, what am I doin'? Letty's lost, an' I'm goin' to cipherin'! S'pose she should come in an' ketch me? She'd be so hurt she'd never get over it. She wouldn't think I cared anything about her."

She stood looking at the slate and thinking for a moment. Then her face settled into a hard calm.

"Letty won't come back −− she won't never come back. I might as well cipher as anything else."

She went across the room, got the slate and pencil, and returned to her seat. She had been ciphering for a minute or so when a sound outside caused her to start and stop. She sat with mouth open and chin trembling, listening. The sound came nearer; it was at the door. Of all the sweet sounds which had smote that old woman's ears since her birth −− songs of birds, choral hymns, Sabbath bells −− there had been none so sweet as this. It was Letty's thin girlish treble which she heard just outside the door.

For a second, as she sat listening, her face was rapt, angelic; in spite of its sallowness and wrinkles it might have figured in an altarpiece. Then it changed. The slate was in her lap. What would Letty think?

It was all passing swiftly; the door−latch rattled; she slipped the slate under her gingham apron, and sat still.

"Oh, poor grandma!" cried Letty, running in; "you've been frightened 'most to death about me, haven't you?" She bent over her grandmother and laid her soft pretty cheek against hers.

"Oh, Letty! I didn't think you'd ever come back."

"I have; but I did have the dreadfulest time. I got carried 'way out West on an express train. Just think of it! I got on the wrong train while I was waiting for Lizzie. I was frightened almost to death. But Mr. Plainfield telegraphed ahead. He found out where I was going, and they took me to a hotel; and then he came for me. You haven't said anything to Mr. Plainfield, grandma."

The young man was standing smiling behind Letty. She looked astonished when her grandmother did not rise to speak to him, but sat perfectly still as she uttered some broken thanks.

"Why, grandma, you ain't sick, are you?" said she.

"No −− I ain't sick," said her grandmother, with a meek tone.

When Mr. Plainfield left, in a few moments, Letty gave a half−defiant, half−ashamed glance at her grandmother, and followed him out, closing the door.

When she returned, Mrs. Torry was standing by the table pouring out a cup of tea for her. The slate was in its usual place on the bureau.

"Grandma," said Letty, blushing innocently, "I thought I ought to say something to Mr. Plainfield, you know. I hadn't, and I knew he heard what I said to Lizzie that day. I thought I ought to ask his pardon, when he'd done so much for me. I've made up my mind that I do like him. There's other things besides doing arithmetic examples."

"I guess there is, child. Them things is all second. I think I'd rather have a man who hadn't got any special faculty, if I was goin' to git married."

"Nobody said anything about getting married, grandma."

Pretty soon Letty went to bed. She was worn out with her adventures.

"Ain't you going too, grandma?" asked she, turning around, lamp in hand, at the foot of the stairs.

"Pretty soon, child; pretty soon. I've −− got a little somethin' I want to do first."

The grandmother sat up till nearly morning working over the problem. Once in a while she would lay down her slate and climb upstairs and peep into Letty's little peaceful girl−chamber to see if she was safe.

"If I have got that dear child, and 'ain't lost my faculty, it's more'n I deserve," muttered she, as she took her slate the last time.

The next evening the minister came over. "So Letty's come," he said, when Mrs. Torry opened the door.

"Yes, Letty's come, and −− I've got that sum, you gave me, done."

EMMY

"I DON'T see how you can stand this awful wind."

"Oh, you get used to it. After you'd lived here forty year, an' seen ev'rythin' slantendicular in the wind the whole 'durin' time, you'd get so you wouldn't think much about it. You'd feel slantendicular yourself."

"I do b'lieve you have grown kind of sideways, Lucy Ann. Don't you think she has, Emmeline?"

Mrs. Elkins asked the question of her sister, Mrs. Emmeline Cares. Mrs. Cares kept her fair, large face intent upon her sewing. "I've said she had, time an' time again; but you ain't paid no attention to it," she replied, scarcely opening her fine lips.

"Well, I dunno but you have," Mrs. Elkins said apologetically; "but I ain't realized it till just now. Can't you stand up straighter, Lucy Ann? You hadn't ought to get to loppin' over so."

Mrs. Sands stood at the kitchen table rolling out biscuits for tea. She smiled the shrewdly reflective smile of a philosopher. "Well, mebbe I hadn't ought to," said she; "but I dunno as it makes much difference. I ain't so young as I was once, an' mebbe if I don't lay out any extry strength in holdin' of myself up straight I'll last the longer for 'it."

"I should think you'd have a little more regard for your own looks," said Mrs. Cares in a calm, indignant voice. She took strong, even stitches in her white seam.

"Land! I dunno as I'd know myself if I met myself out a−walkin' on the bluff," returned Mrs. Sands; "I don't think five minutes a day about how I look."

"If you jest tried to think of it, an' stood up straight, an' didn't allow yourself to lean over so, it wouldn't take long," said Mrs. Elkins.

"If folks won't listen to what folks say, an' don't have no regard to how they look, there ain't no use talkin'. I'll give it up," said Mrs. Cares.

Mrs. Sands said no more; she put the pans of biscuit into the oven with a sober air. Her two sisters sat sewing with their nice, voluminous black skirts gathered carefully up from contact with the kitchen floor. They had followed Mrs. Sands into the kitchen when she went out to prepare tea. They came from a town ten miles inland, and were spending the day with her. Their horse and buggy were out in the shed behind the house. The two visiting sisters were trussed up tightly in their fine black gowns, there were gleams of jet upon their high bosoms, there were nice ruffles in their necks and sleeves, their faded light hair was arranged in snugly braided little coronals, and their front locks were crimped.

Mrs. Sands, beside them, showed plainly the marks of the sea upon her; since she had been exposed to the buffetings of its strong salt winds she had changed as much as the coast. Her complexion had been similar to her sisters', fair, although not blonde; now all the fresh tints were gone out of it, and it could well assimilate with the grays and browns of the rocks and seaweeds down on the shore. She was tall and lean, and leaned sideways, as her sister claimed; she wore a loose, limp, brown dress, and her hair had a rough stringiness over her temples.

After she had put the biscuits into the stove oven she sat down for a minute. She could not fry the fish until Emmy returned; she had gone down to the store after some salt−pork. The kitchen had a small, dark interior; it was plastered, and the plaster and unpainted woodwork were brown with smoke. All the color in the room was in a row of tomatoes ripening on the window−sill. The one window looked upon a stretch of wind−swept yard. The edge of the bluff and the sea were upon the other side of the house. The wind was from landward: it beat upon the house in great gusts; now and then a window rattled. The visiting sisters sewed: Mrs. Elkins was using red worsted in some fancy work; Mrs. Cares took nice stitches in some fine white cloth and embroidery. Her daughter was getting ready to be married, and she was doing some needlework for her.

Mrs. Sands kept her eyes fixed upon the work of her sister Mrs. Cares; finally she spoke. "I s'pose you an' Susy have got about all you want to do, with her sewin'?" she said.

"I guess we have," Mrs. Cares assented; "all we can spring to. Susy's about wore out."

"It's a good deal of a strain on a girl, gettin' ready to be married. I dunno how Emmy'd stand it." Mrs. Sands fixed her sober eyes upon the wild sky visible through the window, the corners of her thin mouth curved in a sly smile, but her sisters did not notice it.

Mrs. Cares shook out her work, and took a dainty stitch with a jerk. "I ruther guess it's a strain."

"I guess it would come pretty hard on Emmy."

"It ain't the sewin' alone, neither. She's up pretty late two nights a week, too, an' that tells on her."

"Yes; I dunno of anythin' that tells on anybody's looks quicker than bein' up late nights. Emmy's been up considerable late along back, an' I can see that she shows it."

"Don't you think this is handsome edging on this skirt?" inquired Mrs. Cares.

"Yes, it is real handsome. How much do you get for Susy's skirts, Emmeline? I s'pose I've got to buy some for Emmy before long, most likely."

"Three yards."

"Well, that's about what I thought. Emmy's got to have some new skirts, I s'pose, by an' by."

"I b'lieve I got twelve yards."

"I s'pose Emmy'd take about the same."

"I guess she would. Susy's is most done."

"It's one of the handsomest dresses for a bride to come out in that I ever see," Mrs. Elkins chimed in enthusiastically.

Mrs. Sands took her eyes from the window. She turned them towards her sisters, a dark blush crept over her face, her smile dispersed.

"I don't s'pose you've heard about Emmy," said she.

The sisters stared at her. "Why, no," said Mrs. Cares. "What is it about her?"

"Well −− I −− expect she's got −− somebody waitin' on her."

"Why, you don't say so, Lucy Ann!" cried Mrs. Elkins.

"Well, I must say I never thought Emmy'd get anybody," said Mrs. Cares. "Not that she ain't a real good girl, but she ain't never seemed to me like one that would get married. Who is it, Lucy Ann?"

"He's a real likely young man. He owns a boat; got in yesterday. I s'pose he'll be up to−night."

"Got anythin' laid by?"

"I shouldn't wonder if he had. He's done pretty well, they say, an' he's stiddy as a clock."

"What's his name?" Mrs. Cares asked the question with a frown between her eyes. Mrs. Elkins bent forward, smiling curiously.

"Jim Parsons."

"One of Sam Parson's boys?"

"Yes; the others are dead, you know. He's all the one left of the family. He sold the house last year; now he boards over to Capen's."

"How much did he sell the house for?"

"About nine hundred."

"I s'pose he's got that laid up."

"I rather guess he has."

"Well, that'll set 'em up housekeepin'. When are they goin' to be married?"

Mrs. Sands's face twitched a little. "Well, I dunno," she said. "I dunno as they've got quite so fur as that yet."

"Then it ain't settled?"

"Well, no −− I guess not. I guess they ain't quite settled it betwixt 'em yet."

Mrs. Cares's eyes, fastened upon her sister's, grew sharper. "How long has he been comin' here?"

"Well, I dunno. He's been away a spell now. He come here awhile before he went."

"Three months?"

"No, I guess it wasn't −− hardly three."

"Two?"

"No; I guess not quite."

"Well, he must have been comin' a month if he's been courtin' at all −− if he meant anythin' serious."

"Well, I dunno but 'twas about a month in all; he's been comin' an' goin' with his boat. It's kinder hard to reckon," said Mrs. Sands, feebly.

"Has he ever took her anywhere?"

"He took her ridin' over to Denbury."

"More 'n once?"

Mrs. Sands shook her head.

"Has he give her anythin'?"

"No −− not as I know of. He's brought mack'ral an' perch in sev'ral times."

"Well," said Mrs. Cares, "you take my advice, Lucy Ann, an' don't you be too sure. You can't tell about these young fellers. They're more 'n likely not to mean anythin', an' Emmy's a real good girl; but she ain't one of the kind that young fellers take to, I shouldn't think. Who's comin'?"

"Emmy," said Mrs. Sands, with an attempt at dignity.

The door opened then, and Emmy entered. She had a brown paper parcel, and she handed it at once to her mother.

"Here's the pork, mother," said she.

"I'd like to know where you have been all this time."

"I had to wait. I couldn't help it. The store was full of folks."

Emmy was not as tall as her mother; she was very thin, and there was a little stoop in her slight shoulders. Her young face looked darkly and gravely from under her wind−beaten hat; a draggled plume trailed over the brim, two loops of ribbon stood up grotesquely.

"Do look at Emmy's hat!" said Mrs. Elkins laughing.

"It's all blown to pieces in this wind," remarked Mrs. Sands. She was slicing the pork.

Emmy removed her hat soberly, and straightened the plume and the ribbon. She had a complexion like her mother's, and the winds had beaten all the brightness out of it. Her blue eyes looked as strange in her sallow face as blue violets would have looked in sand. She had tried to curl her front hair, but the wind had taken out all the curls, and the straight locks hung over her temples. She wore a cheap, blue gingham dress; she and her mother had tried to fashion it after the style of some of the cottagers' costumes. There were plaitings and drapery, but it was poor and homely, and beginning to fade.

Emmy's aunts surveyed her sharply; finally Mrs. Elkins spoke with a titter: "Well, Emmy, is he comin' up to−night?"

Emmy gave a great start. She looked scared and pitiful, but she answered rather shortly, "I don't know of anybody that's comin'." Then she went quickly into the sitting−room. Presently her mother followed, and found her smoothing her hair before the looking−glass.

Mrs. Sands walked around, and looked at her with a kind of sharp tenderness. "What is it?" she asked; "what's the matter with you?"

"Nothin'."

"Yes, there is, too. You needn't tell me. I saw the minute you come in somethin' had come across you. What is it?"

"Nothin' has come across me. I wish you wouldn't act so silly, mother."

"Did you see anything of him?" Mrs. Sands's voice dropped to a whisper. Emmy nodded as if she were forced to.

"Where −− "

"In the road. Don't, mother!"

"Walkin'?"

"No."

"Ridin'?"

"Yes."

"Anybody with him?"

"Flora Marsh."

Mrs. Sands stood looking at Emmy. "He'd ought to be ashamed of himself," said she. "Don't you mind nothin' about it, Emmy. He ain't worth it."

Emmy strained back her straggling front hair and pinned it tightly; her full forehead showed, and her face, no longer shaded by the straying locks, had a severe cast.

"I don't know why he ain't worth it," said she. "I don't know why he'd ought to be ashamed of himself goin' to ride with Flora Marsh. I can't hold a candle to her."

"Well, I should think after the way he's been comin' here −− "

"He ain't been here long. He ain't never asked me to have him. He ain't beholden to go with me if he don't want to."

"Emmy Sands, ain't he set up with you?"

"That don't make it out he's got to marry me."

"Well, you can stick up for him if you want to. I ruther guess −− "

"Somebody's comin'," said Emmy; and Mrs. Cares opened the door.

"The pork's burnin'," said she, "an' I guess you'll have to turn it over, Lucy Ann; I'm afraid of its spatterin' on my dress if I try it. What's the matter?"

"Nothin'," answered Mrs. Sands; and she went out and turned the pork and fried the fish. Emmy set the table; her aunts questioned her about her "beau," but got little satisfaction.

"I ain't got any beau," she said; and that was all she would say.

Pretty soon her father came, a large man lumbering wearily across the yard with a wheelbarrow load of potatoes. He was a small farmer. He had a nervous face although it was so fleshy, and he looked at his wife and Emmy with an anxious frown between his eyes. He did not say much to his sisters−in−law: he had been as cordial to them as he was able at noon; company disturbed him.

As soon as he could he beckoned his wife into the sitting−room. "Come in here a minute, Lucy Ann," said he. When he had shut the door he looked at her impressively. "What do ye think I see?" he whispered mysteriously; "young Parsons out ridin' with the Marsh girl."

Mrs. Sands held the knife with which she turned the fish. "I know it," said she, impatiently. "Emmy see 'em."

"She didn't!"

"Yes; she met 'em when she was comin' home from the store. I've got to go an' turn the fish; I can smell 'em burnin' now."

"Did she act as if she minded it much?"

"I couldn't see as she did. She acted kind of touchy. I can't stan' here, or them fish will be burnt to a cinder. You'd better get you out a clean pocket−handkerchief before you come to the table."

Supper, with its company−fare of fried fish, hot biscuits, and a frosted cake, was quite late. The guests had to take their leave directly afterward, as they had a long drive. Mr. Sands brought the horse and buggy around, and Mrs. Sands got out her sisters' bonnets and wraps. She watched them as they put on their little flower−topped bonnets

and adjusted their lace veils over their crimps. She had not had a bonnet so fine for years, but she felt no envy. She seldom looked in the glass, and never except to see if she were tidy. The sea had seemed to cultivate a certain objectiveness in her since she had lived near it. It was as if the relative smallness of her personality beside the infinite had come home to her.

When the sisters were in the buggy they walked the horse across the yard to the road, and Mrs. Sands walked at the side, talking. When she reached the road Mrs. Cares, who was driving, reined in the horse. A young man and woman were passing in a buggy.

"Who's that?" called Mrs. Elkins, after they had passed.

Mrs. Cares turned sharply on her sister: "Ain't that Jim Parsons?"

"Yes, I ruther think 'twas him."

"Who was that with him?"

"I guess 'twas the Marsh girl."

Mrs. Cares tightened the reins. "Well," said she, "I guess you'll find out there's somethin' in what I told you, Lucy Ann. It ain't best to be too sure. Well, mebbe she'll find somebody else, now that the ice is broke. Good−by."

Mrs. Sands stood beside a great wild rose bush and watched her sisters drive down the wood. The twilight was coming fast, but the full moon was rising, and it would be light in spite of the clouds, so there would be no difficulty about the two women driving home.

Mrs. Sands returned to the house, the sweep of the wind strong at her back. Emmy was washing the dishes. "Ain't you goin' to change your dress?" asked her mother.

"No, I guess not."

"Hadn't you better? We might have somebody in, an' that don't look hardly fit."

"I guess we sha'n't have anybody in."

"Well, it ain't best to be too sure."

Emmy said nothing more. She kept on washing and wiping the tea−things. The corners of her mouth dropped, but nerve and resolution were in the motion of her elbows. After the dishes were put away she sat down with some sewing. Her mother sat opposite with her knitting−work. Mrs. Sands knitted fast, pursing her lips tightly and wrinkling her forehead. She and Emmy scarcely spoke during the evening. At nine o'clock there was a step at the door, and a sudden red flamed over Emmy's face; her mother started. "There, I told you to change your dress," she whispered. But the door opened and it was only Isaac Sands. He stepped in cautiously, looked anxiously around the room, and then sat down.

"Well, how are you gettin' along?" he said.

"Pretty well," replied Emmy.

"Anybody been in?" he inquired in a casual voice.

Mrs. Sands shook her head. Pretty soon Emmy laid aside her work and went upstairs to bed in her plain little room. After she was in bed she lay listening to the murmur of her parents' voices in the room below. She knew they were talking about her. She felt intense shame that they should be discussing her love matters. It seemed sometimes to this little soul, setting forth for the first time out of her harbor of youth, as if the friendly watchers on the pier caused her more discomfort than the roughness of the voyage. It seemed to Emmy that her parents talked all night; she was not conscious of any cessation.

When she went down in the morning her mother looked sharply at her. "You don't look as if you'd slept a wink; great hollers under your eyes," said she.

"I've slept enough," replied Emmy.

That morning she went about as usual helping her mother; she was always very quiet. When her father came home at noon he had the news that Jim Parsons was going to stay in town a week. Whether Emmy watched or not, her father and mother watched every day for her recreant lover to come, but he did not. He was seen walking and riding with the other girl. Isaac kept a sharp watch upon him, then came home and reported to his wife. They said little about it to Emmy. Emmy, meek and small and quiet, had little dignity about her, but there was a certain reserve which produced the same effect. Her parents were somewhat shy of imposing upon it.

In the mean time Jim Parsons, a young fellow with eyes as blue and bold as the sea, with a rough, hard grace in his sinewy figure, and a rude, merry way, had troubled himself about Emmy more than people knew. Once or twice he had met her on the bluff, his brown face had blushed darkly, and he had stammered forth some greeting. But Emmy had looked quite soberly and calmly at him and returned his greeting, and he had said to himself that she did not care. If he had been charged with offense he would have believed in his own freedom from guilt; left to himself he was not quite sure, and disliked to meet Emmy on the bluff. He was a strange person to have thought twice of Emmy Sands, but she had had her attraction for him, and she had it now. Many a night Jim Parsons was upon the verge of forsaking his new love and returning to his old, but the beauty and the imperious ways of the new one held him. If Flora Marsh had not been in the village within sight and hearing, Emmy would at any time have regained her lover. Simple and uncritical as she was, she had an intuition of the fact herself.

"It's because Flora came in his way, and she's pretty; if he were only away from her he wouldn't think so much more of her," she used to think to herself when she sat sewing so busily and nobody could tell that she was thinking at all. Emmy had even discovered how Jim's first deflection came about. When he came in from his cruise Flora and some other girls had been down at the landing. There had been joking, and she had as good as asked him in her way, whose prettiness disguised its boldness, to take her to ride. Thus it had gone on.

Jim was to leave on a Thursday, sailing over to Rockland for some stores and a part of his crew, then off the next morning on his fishing cruise. The night before Emmy said to herself, "This is the last night she'll have him."

On Thursday all the sky was red at sunset, the northeast wind blew, and the sea looked beaten flat beneath it; outside the surf it had a metallic calmness. Gulls were flying over a long rock that jutted out into the water a little distance down the coast. Isaac Sands, out early bringing a pail of water over the bluff from a neighbor's well, stopped and looked out to sea.

"Guess we're goin' to have a gale," he remarked when he entered the house. Emmy, helping her mother get breakfast, thought to herself that Jim was going out that afternoon. All that morning she watched the sky. There was a strange, wild glow in it, and the wind increased. There were patches of ghastly green light, like rafts on the sea. At noon when Isaac came home to dinner he had the weather gossip from the store where he had been.

"They say down to Capen's," he reported, "that there's goin' to be the biggest blow of the season. Old Cap'n Lawrence says he ain't never see it look much worse in this part of the world. If he was in the West Indies, he

says, he'd be certain there'd be a hurricane. They say Jim Parsons's goin' over to Rockland this afternoon anyhow, an' they think he's crazy to do it. He ain't got no sense to start out a day like this, nor his crew neither. They're all young fellers as careless as he is. Three on 'em's over to Rockland anyhow. I guess if the rest had any folks here, there'd be a time about their startin'."

"Well, I don't want nobody to get drownded," said Mrs. Sands, "but I must say I wouldn't care if Jim Parsons got pretty well scared."

"I guess there ain't much scare in him; he's a crazy−headed young feller," responded Isaac, grimly.

Emmy said nothing. She did not eat much dinner. Afterward she watched the sky again. Her mother kept watching her with a severe and impatient air. "Emmy Sands, what ails you this afternoon?" she said once, harshly.

"Nothin'," replied Emmy. Then she sewed faster.

About five o'clock her father came in. "Jim Parsons ain't gone yet, an' if he goes to−night he an' his crew will go to the bottom before they ever get to Rockland," said he. "'Tain't far there, but it's one of the roughest little cruises on the coast. He'd ought to have gone in the daytime if he was goin' at all. He's gone to carry that Marsh girl out to ride, and he ain't got home yet. It'll be dark as a pocket before he gets started. Old Cap'n Lawrence says he's been out in about as rough water as anybody, but he'd be hanged if he'd sail that boat over to Rockland to−night. An' there won't none of them other fellers say nothin'; they're hangin' round waitin', an' they look as uneasy as fish out of water, but they ain't goin' to hang back. Young Blake he's the oldest on 'em, an' he ain't over twenty−five. I guess if they had any folks here they wouldn't start out; but they ain't."

"If Jim Parsons don't know no better than to start out to−night he'd ought to be taken up," said Mrs. Sands. "If he wants to go get drownded himself I dunno as anybody'd care much, but when it comes to drowndin' other folks it's a different thing."

"They're all a crazy set," said Isaac. He was not working that afternoon, he was too nervous with the approaching storm. He went back and forth between the house and the store on ostensible errands, but in reality for the gratification of his restless spirit. Pretty soon he arose again. "Well, I s'pose I've got to go down to Capen's again," said he. "I forgot to ask him if he wanted any of them turnips."

After her father had gone Emmy went too, slipping out the front way; her mother was in the kitchen. She pulled her hat down over her ears to keep it on, and went down the little footpath over the crest of the bluff. She had not put on any shawl or sack; her meager little figure, wavering in the blast, stood out darkly against the wild sky. Everything on the bluff looked gigantic in the wind, which seemed to widen and lengthen everything. The fringe of coarse grass on the edge of the bluff looked like a weedy forest. Emmy passed by the row of summer cottages all shut up and deserted now; and the great festoons of spiders' webs on the piazza, oscillating in the wind, held spiders which looked like tropical ones. Emmy went on. There were some sails in the harbor. There was one in the west which she eyed intently. anchored opposite it lay a dory; there were some men on the beach near it. Jim was not among them. Emmy, swaying in the wind, stood on the bluff behind them and made sure of that. She turned and ran back along the bluff. She passed her own house and went on to the store. The rough weather had driven the row of lounging men inside. There was scarcely a clear space between the visitors perched upon boxes and barrels and propped against counters and walls. Emmy's father was sitting on a barrel. She pushed up to him. "Is he goin' to−night, father?" she whispered.

He stared at her. "What?"

"Is he goin' to−night?"

"Who goin' −− Jim?"

"Yes."

"Course he's goin'. He's just come in, an' gone upstairs to pack his things."

Nobody had overheard Emmy's and her father's whispered conversation, but one of the men took it up. It was the topic of the day, coming uppermost in intervals like waves.

"I wouldn't give that for his chances," he exclaimed. "That boat will go to the bottom with all on board afore they heave in sight of Rockland."

Then a chorus arose like the crying of a flock of ominous birds.

Emmy hurried out of the store without another word. Her father called after her, but she did not hear him. She ran along the bluff again. The sun was low in a red glare of sky and ragged violet and orange clouds. The sky and clouds appeared as close to the sea as the coast; it was as if the sun was passing to some infernal shore. Emmy went nearly to her own house, then she struck across lots to the highway. She hurried down the road until she came to the house where Flora Marsh lived. It was a fine house for this little coast village. It had green blinds, and a bay window at one side. Emmy knocked at the front door, and Flora opened it.

"Why, hullo, Emmy!" said she. Then she stood staring at her. There was a soft pink glow all over Flora's delicate blonde face that showed she had just been out in the wind. She was prettily dressed.

"Can't you stop his goin'?" Emmy said in a quick, dry voice.

"What?"

"Can't you stop his goin'?"

"I don't know what you mean, Emmy Sands." Flora's manner was at once pert and confused.

"Can't you stop Jim Parsons's goin' out to−night?"

"Stop his going?"

"Yes; can't you? They say it's awful dangerous. There's a terrible gale comin'. He'll be drowned."

"Oh, I guess there won't be much of a gale. He says it's safe enough."

"It ain't. They all say it ain't. He's terrible careless. He'll be drowned. Can't you stop him?"

Flora looked at her; her sweet, full brows contracted. The wind blew so that the girls could hardly stand against it; their very words seemed to be tossed about passing from one to the other. "Come in a minute," said Flora; "we can't talk here."

"There ain't any time to lose."

"It won't take any longer in the house than it will here. Somebody'll hear us if we talk here, we have to holler so."

Emmy followed Flora into the house, into the parlor. Flora shut the door. "I wish you'd tell me now what you mean −− what you want me to do?" said she.

"Stop his goin' out to−night."

"How can I stop him, I'd like to know?"

"Go down to the shore where his dory is, and when he comes ask him not to go."

Flora hesitated. She fingered a tidy on the back of a chair. "To tell the truth," said she, "I've told him once I didn't think he ought to go; but it didn't do any good. You can't keep him back an inch if you tell him it ain't safe. He ain't afraid of anything. If I ask him to stay because it's dangerous to go it'll just make him all the fiercer for going."

"I know that. Don't ask him not to go because it's dangerous."

"How shall I ask him then, I'd like to know?"

"Tell him you want him to come up and see you to−night."

Flora looked at Emmy. She drew a long breath. "I don't know what to make of you, Emmy Sands."

"He'll be gone if −− you don't go quick," Emmy almost gasped.

"Emmy Sands, how you act! I ain't engaged to him. I can't make him stay any more 'n you can."

"Yes, you can; he likes you. Oh, go quick!"

"Why don't you go yourself and ask him not to go?"

"I ain't no reason to."

There came an odd look into Flora's face. "Look here," said she; "do you know what you're doing? I ain't engaged to him. Jim Parsons is an awful flirt. He's going off to be gone quite awhile. Maybe when he comes back he'll come to see you again. I've bid him good−by, and we ain't engaged. It would be a good deal safer for you if you let him go. There, I like him well enough, but I'm going to tell you the truth about it, anyhow. It would be a good deal safer for you if he didn't come to see me again before he goes. You know what I mean."

Emmy threw her head back; her voice rang out sharply. "What do you suppose I care about that?" said she. "Do you suppose I'm comin' here because I want to marry him? Do you suppose, if he wants you and you want him, I'd lift my finger to get him back? Get him back −− there ain't any gettin' him back; THE CREST OF THE BLUFF.

he ain't never said he thought of marryin' me. Marryin'! What's marryin'? It ain't marryin'; it's life an' death that's to be thought of! What difference do you suppose it makes to me who he marries, if he ain't drowned in that awful sea to−night? Why don't you go if you care anythin' about him? What are you stoppin' for? He'll be gone before you get there."

"You are the strangest girl I ever saw," said Flora.

She went out into the entry and put on her hat and jacket. Emmy opened the outer door and stood waiting. "I don't imagine it'll do any good," Flora said when she came out.

The two girls hurried across to the bluff. Emmy kept looking at Flora. "Tuck up your hair a little under your hat; it's comin' down," she said once as they ran along.

When they reached the bluff Emmy turned towards her own house.

"You're going home?" said Flora.

Emmy nodded.

"Well, I'll do the best I can. If I get him, I'll come up the other steps and go by your house. You watch."

Flora sank from sight directly, going down some steps over the face of the bluff, and Emmy went home. It was time to get supper, but she stole upstairs to her own room and sat down at the window that overlooked the sea. The breakers gleamed out in the dusk like white fire. It was not long before two figures, a man and a woman, passed below her window. The woman uplifted her face and looked at the house.

Mrs. Sands called at the foot of the stairs: "Emmy, where be you? Supper's all ready."

"I'm comin'," answered Emmy. She went down into the lamp−lighted room, and her father and mother looked at her, then at each other. She appeared almost pretty. There was quite a red flush on her sallow cheeks, and her eyes shone like blue stars.

After supper Isaac Sands went down to the store again. Emmy and her mother sat by the kitchen fire and sewed. The gale increased; they could hear the breakers on this side of the house with all the windows closed. "I ruther guess Jim Parsons will wish he'd staid on shore," remarked Mrs. Sands. "Well, if folks will be so headstrong and foolhardy, they've got to take the consequences." There was a grim satisfaction in her tone.

Emmy said nothing.

When Isaac came home he was dripping with rain. "It's an awful night," he burst forth when he opened the door. "Guess it's lucky Jim Parsons didn't go out."

"Didn't he go?" asked Mrs. Sands.

"No. Young Blake was down to Capen's; he said Jim backed out. The Marsh girl come down an' talked to him, an' he guessed she persuaded him not to go. Guessed it would have been his last cruise if he had."

"Served him right if it had been," said Mrs. Sands, severely.

Emmy lighted her lamp and went to bed.

That night the gale was terrific; the rain, driven before it, rattled upon the windows like bullets. The house rocked like a tree. Nobody could sleep much. In the morning it rained still, the spray from the ocean dashed over the footpath on the bluff, the front windows were obscured by a salt mist. Jim Parsons with all his recklessness could not put out to sea that day. It was three days before he could go. Then the sun shone, the sea was calmer, although still laboring with the old swell of the storm, and he went out in the afternoon, steering down the coast to Rockland.

The day after he went Emmy met Flora Marsh on the bluff. She was going by with only a greeting, but Flora stopped her.

"He did stay; you knew, didn't you?" said she.

Emmy nodded. "Yes; I saw you go by with him."

Flora stood before her as if wanting to say something. She blushed and looked confused. Emmy made a motion to pass her.

"I guess he'd run considerable risk if he had gone that night," Flora remarked flutteringly.

"He'd been lost if he had," returned Emmy. Then she passed on. Flora stood aside for her. Suddenly Emmy turned. "You didn't say anythin' to him about me, did you?" said she.

"No, I didn't."

"You won't, will you?"

"No, I won't."

Then the two girls went their ways. It was not long before the news of Flora Marsh's engagement to Jim Parsons was all over the village.

Emmy's father and mother heard it, but they said nothing about it to her; they wondered if she knew. It was said that the couple were to be married when Jim returned from his cruise.

If Emmy knew it, it did not apparently affect her at all. She kept faithfully on in her homely little course. She was interested in all that she had been; there was no indication that any sharp, unsatisfied, new taste had dulled the old ones. Her mother felt quite easy about her, although her pride and indignation rallied whenever she thought of Jim Parsons. When he returned from his cruise, and the wedding was appointed the week after, she was unable not to speak of it to Emmy. The day but one before the wedding she began suddenly in a harsh voice, "I s'pose you've heard the news."

"Yes, I heard it," replied Emmy.

"Well, I hope he'll stick to his wife."

"I don't see why he shouldn't."

"Don't see why he shouldn't after the way he treated you?"

Emmy faced her mother. "Mother, once for all, he didn't treat me bad. I guess I know more about it than you do. There ain't any reason for you to say such things about him."

"Well, if you want to stick up for him, you can. I'm sure it ain't nothin' to me who he marries, if it ain't to you. If you don't feel bad, I'm sure I don't."

"I don't."

"Well, I'm glad of it," said her mother.

It was just after dinner. Emmy went to the door to shake the tablecloth and saw her aunts driving into the yard. They had come to make a visit; they were going to spend the night, and drive home the next morning.

The aunts had not been seated very long before the subject of the wedding was opened. Flora Marsh had been to their town to buy her wedding clothes, the dressmaker there had made her dress, and they had seen it. They knew all about the matter, how it was to be only a family wedding, and how Jim and Flora were going to Boston. Emmy sat and listened quite calmly. Once, when she had gone out of the room for a minute, Mrs. Elkins turned to her sister.

"I forgot he used to go with her once," she whispered. "She don't mind hearin' it, does she?"

"Land, no," replied Mrs. Sands. "She didn't care nothin' about him. Emmy ain't one of the kind to set her heart much on any feller. I'm thankful enough she didn't have him. He ain't got no stability, an' never will have. He wouldn't have made no kind of a husband for her."

The morning of the wedding the Sands family arose early. The aunts wished to start for home in good season. The sun was only a little way above the horizon when Emmy opened her window and looked out. It was a beautiful morning. Over in the east the sun stood; behind him lay what looked like a golden land of glory. The sea was calm, the ripples in the forward path of the sun shone like sapphires and rubies and emeralds.

Emmy's small, plain face looked upon it all from her window. Her cheeks were dull and blue with the chilly air; there was no reflection of the splendid morning in her face. But beneath it, in the heart of this simple, humble young woman of the seaboard, with a monotone of life behind her and one stretching before, was love of the kind, in the world of eternity, that is better than marriage.

Mary E. Wilkins.

A CONFLICT ENDED

IN Acton there were two churches, an Orthodox and a Baptist. They stood on opposite sides of the road, and the Baptist edifice was a little farther down than the other. On Sunday morning both bells were ringing. The Baptist bell was much larger, and followed quickly on the soft peal of the Orthodox with a heavy brazen clang which vibrated a good while. The people went flocking through the street to the irregular jangle of the bells. It was a very hot day, and the sun beat down heavily; parasols were bobbing over all the ladies' heads.

More people went into the Baptist church, whose society was much the larger of the two. It had been for the last ten years −− ever since the Orthodox had settled a new minister. His advent had divided the church, and a good third of the congregation had gone over to the Baptist brethren, with whom they still remained.

It is probable that many of them passed their old sanctuary to−day with the original stubborn animosity as active as ever in their hearts, and led their families up the Baptist steps with the same strong spiritual pull of indignation.

One old lady, who had made herself prominent on the opposition, trotted by this morning with the identical wiry vehemence which she had manifested ten years ago. She wore a full black silk skirt, which she held up inanely in front, and allowed to trail in the dust in the rear.

Some of the stanch Orthodox people glanced at her amusedly. One fleshy, fair−faced girl in blue muslin said to her companion, with a laugh: "See that old lady trailing her best black silk by to the Baptist. Ain't it ridiculous how she holds on showing out? I heard some one talking about it yesterday."

"Yes."

The girl colored up confusedly. "Oh dear!" she thought to herself. The lady with her had an unpleasant history connected with this old church quarrel. She was a small, bony woman in a shiny purple silk, which was strained

very tightly across her sharp shoulder−blades. Her bonnet was quite elaborate with flowers and plumes, as was also her companion's. In fact, she was the village milliner, and the girl was her apprentice.

When the two went up the church steps, they passed a man of about fifty, who was sitting thereon well to one side. He had a singular face −− a mild forehead, a gently curving mouth, and a terrible chin, with a look of strength in it that might have abashed mountains. He held his straw hat in his hand, and the sun was shining full on his bald head.

The milliner half stopped, and gave an anxious glance at him; then passed on. In the vestibule she stopped again.

"You go right in, Margy," she said to the girl. "I'll be along in a minute."

"Where be you going, Miss Barney?"

"You go right in. I'll be there in a minute."

Margy entered the audience−room then, as if fairly brushed in by the imperious wave of a little knotty hand, and Esther Barney stood waiting until the rush of entering people was over. Then she stepped swiftly back to the side of the man seated on the steps. She spread her large black parasol deliberately, and extended the handle toward him.

"No, no, Esther; I don't want it −− I don't want it."

"If you're determined on setting out in this broiling sun, Marcus Woodman, you jest take this parasol of mine an' use it."

"I don't want your parasol, Esther. I −− "

"Don't you say it over again. Take it."

"I won't −− not if I don't want to."

"You'll get a sun−stroke."

"That's my own lookout."

"Marcus Woodman, you take it."

She threw all the force there was in her intense, nervous nature in her tone and look, but she failed in her attempt, because of the utter difference in quality between her own will and that with which she had to deal. They were on so different planes that hers slid by his with its own momentum; there could be no contact even of antagonism between them. He sat there rigid, every line of his face stiffened into an icy obstinacy. She held out the parasol toward him like a weapon.

Finally she let it drop at her side, her whole expression changed.

"Marcus," said she, "how's your mother?"

He started. "Pretty well, thank you, Esther."

"She's out to meeting, then?"

"Yes."

"I've been a−thinking −− I ain't drove jest now −− that maybe I'd come over an' see her some day this week."

He rose politely then. "Wish you would, Esther. Mother'd be real pleased, I know."

"Well, I'll see −− Wednesday, p'rhaps, if I ain't too busy. I must go in now; they're 'most through singing."

"Esther −− "

"I don't believe I can stop any longer, Marcus."

"About the parasol −− thank you jest the same if I don't take it. Of course you know I can't set out here holding a parasol; folks would laugh. But I'm obliged to you all the same. Hope I didn't say anything to hurt your feelings?"

"Oh no; why, no, Marcus. Of course I don't want to make you take it if you don't want it. I don't know but it would look kinder queer, come to think of it. Oh dear! they are through singing."

"Say, Esther, I don't know but I might as well take that parasol, if you'd jest as soon. The sun is pretty hot, an' I might get a headache. I forgot my umbrella, to tell the truth."

"I might have known better than to have gone at him the way I did," thought Esther to herself, when she was seated at last in the cool church beside Margy. "Seems as if I might have got used to Marcus Woodman by this time."

She did not see him when she came out of church; but a little boy in the vestibule handed her the parasol, with the remark, "Mr. Woodman said for me to give this to you."

She and Margy passed down the street toward home. Going by the Baptist church, they noticed a young man standing by the entrance. He stared hard at Margy.

She began to laugh after they had passed him. "Did you see that fellow stare?" said she. "Hope he'll know me next time."

"That's George Elliot; he's that old lady's son you was speaking about this morning."

"Well, that's enough for me."

"He's a real good, steady young man."

Margy sniffed.

"P'rhaps you'll change your mind some day."

She did, and speedily, too. That glimpse of Margy Wilson's pretty, new face −− for she was a stranger in the town −− had been too much for George Elliot. He obtained an introduction, and soon was a steady visitor at Esther Barney's house. Margy fell in love with him easily. She had never had much attention from the young men, and he was an engaging young fellow, small and bright−eyed, though with a nervous persistency like his mother's in his manner.

"I'm going to have it an understood thing," Margy told Esther, after her lover had become constant in his attentions, "that I'm going with George, and I ain't going with his mother. I can't bear that old woman."

But poor Margy found that it was not so easy to thrust determined old age off the stage, even when young Love was flying about so fast on his butterfly wings that he seemed to multiply himself, and there was no room for anything else, because the air was so full of Loves. That old mother with her trailing black skirt and her wiry obstinacy, trotted as unwaveringly through the sweet stir as a ghost through a door.

One Monday morning Margy could not eat any breakfast, and there were red stains around her blue eyes.

"Why, what's the matter, Margy?" asked Esther, eying her across the little kitchen table.

"Nothing's the matter. I ain't hungry any to speak of, that's all. I guess I'll go right to work on Mis' Fuller's bonnet."

"I'd try an' eat something if I was you. Be sure you cut that velvet straight, if you go to work on it."

When the two were sitting together at their work in the little room back of the shop, Margy suddenly threw her scissors down. "There!" said she, "I've done it; I knew I should. I've cut this velvet bias. I knew I should cut everything bias I touched to−day."

There was a droll pucker on her mouth; then it began to quiver. She hid her face in her hands and sobbed. "Oh, dear, dear, dear!"

"Margy Wilson, what is the matter?"

"George and I −− had a talk last night. We've broke the engagement, an' it's killing me. An' now I've cut this velvet bias. Oh, dear, dear, dear, dear!"

"For the land's sake, don't mind anything about the velvet. What's come betwixt you an' George?"

"His mother −− horrid old thing! He said she'd got to live with us, and I said she shouldn't. Then he said he wouldn't marry any girl that wasn't willing to live with his mother, and I said he wouldn't ever marry me, then. If George Elliot thinks more of his mother than he does of me, he can have her. I don't care. I'll show him I can get along without him."

"Well, I don't know, Margy. I'm real sorry about it. George Elliot's a good, likely young man; but if you didn't want to live with his mother, it was better to say so right in the beginning. And I don't know as I blame you much: she's pretty set in her ways."

"I guess she is. I never could bear her. I guess he'll find out −− "

Margy dried her eyes defiantly, and took up the velvet again. "I've spoilt this velvet. I don't see why being disappointed in love should affect a girl so's to make her cut bias."

There was a whimsical element in Margy which seemed to roll uppermost along with her grief.

Esther looked a little puzzled. "Never mind the velvet, child: it ain't much, anyway." She began tossing over some ribbons to cover her departure from her usual reticence. "I'm real sorry about it, Margy. Such things are hard to bear, but they can be lived through. I know something about it myself. You knew I'd had some of this kind of trouble, didn't you?"

"About Mr. Woodman, you mean?"

"Yes, about Marcus Woodman. I'll tell you what 'tis, Margy Wilson, you've got one thing to be thankful for, and that is that there ain't anything ridickerlous about this affair of yourn. That makes it the hardest of anything, according to my mind −− when you know that everybody's laughing, and you can hardly help laughing yourself, though you feel 'most ready to die."

"Ain't that Mr. Woodman crazy?"

"No, he ain't crazy; he's got too much will for his common−sense, that's all, and he will teeter the sense a little too far into the air. I see all through it from the beginning. I could read Marcus Woodman jest like a book."

"I don't see how in the world you ever come to like such a man."

"Well, I s'pose love's the strongest when there ain't any good reason for it. They say it is. I can't say as I ever really admired Marcus Woodman much. I always see right through him; but that didn't hinder my thinking so much of him that I never felt as if I could marry any other man. And I've had chances, though I shouldn't want you to say so."

"You turned him off because he went to sitting on the church steps?"

"Course I did. Do you s'pose I was going to marry a man who made a laughing−stock of himself that way?"

"I don't see how he ever come to do it. It's the funniest thing I ever heard of."

"I know it. It seems so silly nobody 'd believe it. Well, all there is about it, Marcus Woodman's got so much mulishness in him it makes him almost miraculous. You see, he got up an' spoke in that church meeting when they had such a row about Mr. Morton's being settled here −− Marcus was awful set again' him. I never could see any reason why, and I don't think he could. He said Mr. Morton wa'n't doctrinal; that was what they all said; but I don't believe half of 'em knew what doctrinal was. I never could see why Mr. Morton wa'n't as good as most ministers −− enough sight better than them that treated him so, anyway. I always felt that they was really setting him in a pulpit high over their heads by using him the way they did, though they didn't know it.

"Well, Marcus spoke in that church meeting, an' he kept getting more and more set every word he said. He always had a way of saying things over and over, as if he was making steps out of 'em, an' raising of himself up on 'em, till there was no moving him at all. And he did that night. Finally, when he was up real high, he said, as for him, if Mr. Morton was settled over that church, he'd never go inside the door himself as long as he lived. Somebody spoke out then −− I never quite knew who 'twas, though I suspected −− an' says, 'You'll have to set on the steps, then, Brother Woodman.'

"Everybody laughed at that but Marcus. He didn't see nothing to laugh at. He spoke out awful set, kinder gritting his teeth. 'I will set on the steps fifty years before I'll go into this house if that man's settled here.'

"I couldn't believe he'd really do it. We were going to be married that spring, an' it did seem as if he might listen to me; but he wouldn't. The Sunday Mr. Morton begun to preach, he begun to set on them steps, an' he's set there ever since, in all kinds of weather. It's a wonder it 'ain't killed him; but I guess it's made him tough."

"Why, didn't he feel bad when you wouldn't marry him?"

"Feel bad? Of course he did. He took on terribly. But it didn't make any difference; he wouldn't give in a hair's breadth. I declare it did seem as if I should die. His mother felt awfully too −− she's a real good woman. I don't

know what Marcus would have done without her. He wants a sight of tending and waiting on; he's dreadful babyish in some ways, though you wouldn't think it.

"Well, it's all over now, as far as I'm concerned. I've got over it a good deal, though sometimes 't makes me jest as mad as ever to see him setting there. But I try to be reconciled, and I get along jest as well, mebbe, as if I'd had him −− I don't know. I fretted more at first than there was any sense in, and I hope you won't."

"I ain't going to fret at all, Miss Barney. I may cut bias for a while, but I sha'n't do anything worse."

"How you do talk, child!"

A good deal of it was talk with Margy; she had not as much courage as her words proclaimed. She was capable of a strong temporary resolution, but of no enduring one. She gradually weakened as the days without her lover went on, and one Saturday night she succumbed entirely. There was quite a rush of business, but through it all she caught some conversation between some customers −− two pretty young girls.

"Who was that with you last night at the concert?"

"That −− oh, that was George Elliot. Didn't you know him?"

"He's got another girl," thought Margy, with a great throb.

The next Sunday night, coming out of meeting with Miss Barney, she left her suddenly. George Elliot was one of a waiting line of young men in the vestibule. She went straight up to him. He looked at her in bewilderment, his dark face turning red.

"Good evening, Miss Wilson," he stammered out, finally.

"Good evening," she whispered, and stood looking up at him piteously. She was white and trembling.

At last he stepped forward and offered her his arm suddenly. In spite of his resentment, he could not put her to open shame before all his mates, who were staring curiously. When they were out in the dark, cool street, he bent over her. "Why, Margy, what does all this mean?"

"Oh, George, let her live with us, please. I want her to. I know I can get along with her if I try. I'll do everything I can. Please let her live with us."

"Who's her?"

"Your mother."

"And I suppose us is you and I? I thought that was all over, Margy; ain't it?"

"Oh, George, I am sorry I treated you so."

"And you are willing to let mother live with us now?"

"I'll do anything. Oh, George!"

"Don't cry, Margy. There's nobody's looking −− give us a kiss. It's been a long time; 'ain't it, dear? So you've made up your mind that you're willing to let mother live with us?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't believe she ever will, Margy. She's about made up her mind to go and live with my brother Edward, whether or no. So you won't be troubled with her. I dare say she might have been a little of a trial as she grew older."

"You didn't tell me."

"I thought it was your place to give in, dear."

"Yes, it was, it was, George."

"I'm mighty glad you did. I tell you what it is, dear, I don't know how you've felt, but I've been pretty miserable lately."

"Poor George!"

They passed Esther Barney's house, and strolled along half a mile further. When they returned, and Margy stole softly into the house and upstairs, it was quite late, and Esther had gone to bed. Margy saw the light was not out in her room, so she peeped in. She could not wait till morning to tell her.

"Where have you been?" said Esther, looking up at her out of her pillows.

"Oh, I went to walk a little way with George."

"Then you've made up?"

"Yes."

"Is his mother going to live with you?"

"No; I guess not. She's going to live with Edward. But I told him I was willing she should. I've about made up my mind it's a woman's place to give in mostly. I s'pose you think I'm an awful fool."

"No, I don't; no, I don't, Margy. I'm real glad it's all right betwixt you an' George. I've seen you weren't very happy lately."

They talked a little longer; then Margy said "Good−night," going over to Esther and kissing her. Being so rich in love made her generous with it. She looked down into the older woman's thin, red−cheeked face sweetly. "I wish you were as happy as I," said she. "I wish you and Mr. Woodman could make up too."

"That's an entirely different matter. I couldn't give in in such a thing as that."

Margy looked at her; she was not subtle, but she had just come out triumphant through innocent love and submission, and used the wisdom which she had gained thereby.

"Don't you believe," said she, "if you was to give in the way I did, that he would?"

Esther started up with an astonished air. That had never occurred to her before. "Oh, I don't believe he would. You don't know him; he's awful set. Besides, I don't know but I'm better off the way it is."

In spite of herself, however, she could not help thinking of Margy's suggestion. Would he give in? She was hardly disposed to run the risk. With her peculiar cast of mind, her feeling for the ludicrous so keen that it almost amounted to a special sense, and her sensitiveness to ridicule, it would have been easier for her to have married a man under the shadow of a crime than one who was the deserving target of gibes and jests. Besides, she told herself, it was possible that he had changed his mind, that he no longer cared for her. How could she make the first overtures? She had not Margy's impulsiveness and innocence of youth to excuse her.

Also, she was partly influenced by the reason which she had given Margy: she was not so very sure that it would be best for her to take any such step. She was more fixed in the peace and pride of her old maidenhood than she had been in her young, and more shy of disturbing it. Her comfortable meals, her tidy housekeeping, and her prosperous work had become such sources of satisfaction to her that she was almost wedded to them, and jealous of any interference.

So it is doubtful if there would have been any change in the state of affairs if Marcus Woodman's mother had not died toward spring. Esther was greatly distressed about it.

"I don't see what Marcus is going to do," she told Margy. "He ain't any fitter to take care of himself than a baby, and he won't have any housekeeper, they say."

One evening, after Marcus's mother had been dead about three weeks, Esther went over there. Margy had gone out to walk with George, so nobody knew. When she reached the house −− a white cottage on a hill −− she saw a light in the kitchen window.

"He's there," said she. She knocked on the door softly. Marcus shuffled over to it −− he was in his stocking feet −− and opened it.

"Good evening, Marcus," said she, speaking first.

"Good evening."

"I hadn't anything special to do this evening, so I thought I'd look in a minute and see how you was getting along."

"I ain't getting along very well; but I'm glad to see you. Come right in."

When she was seated opposite him by the kitchen fire, she surveyed him and his surroundings pityingly. Everything had an abject air of forlornness; there was neither tidiness nor comfort. After a few words she rose energetically. "See here, Marcus," said she, "you jest fill up that tea−kettle, and I'm going to slick up here a little for you while I stay."

"Now, Esther, I don't feel as if −− "

"Don't you say nothing. Here's the tea−kettle. I might jest as well be doing that as setting still."

He watched her, as she flew about putting things to rights, in a way that made her nervous; but she said to herself that this was easier than sitting still and gradually leading up to the object for which she had come. She kept wondering if she ever could accomplish it. When the room was in order, finally, she sat down again, with a strained−up look in her face.

"Marcus," said she, "I might as well begin. There was something I wanted to say to you to−night."

He looked at her, and she went on:

"I've been thinking some lately about how matters used to be betwixt you an' me, and it's jest possible −− I don't know −− but I might have been a little more patient than I was. I don't know as I'd feel the same way now if −− "

"Oh, Esther, what do you mean?"

"I ain't going to tell you, Marcus Woodman, if you can't find out. I've said full enough; more'n I ever thought I should."

He was an awkward man, but he rose and threw himself on his knees at her feet with all the grace of complete unconsciousness of action. "Oh, Esther, you don't mean, do you? −− you don't mean that you'd be willing to −− marry me?"

"No; not if you don't get up. You look ridickerlous."

"Esther, do you mean it?"

"Yes. Now get up."

"You ain't thinking −− I can't give up what we had the trouble about any more now than I could then."

"Ain't I said once that wouldn't make any difference?"

At that he put his head down on her knees and sobbed.

"Do, for mercy sake, stop. Somebody'll be coming in. 'Tain't as if we was a young couple."

"I ain't going to till I've told you about it, Esther. You ain't never really understood. In the first of it, we was both mad; but we ain't now, and we can talk it over. Oh, Esther, I've had such an awful life! I've looked at you, and −− Oh, dear, dear, dear!"

"Marcus, you scare me to death crying so."

"I won't. Esther, look here −− it's the gospel truth: I 'ain't a thing again' Mr. Morton now."

"Then why on earth don't you go into the meeting−house and behave yourself?"

"Don't you suppose I would if I could? I can't, Esther −− I can't."

"I don't know what you mean by 'can't.'"

"Do you s'pose I've took any comfort sitting there on them steps in the winter snows an' the summer suns? Do you s'pose I've took any comfort not marrying you? Don't you s'pose I'd given all I was worth any time the last ten year to have got up an' walked into the church with the rest of the folks?"

"Well, I'll own, Marcus, I don't see why you couldn't if you wanted to."

"I 'ain't sure as I see myself, Esther. All I know is I can't make myself give it up. I can't. I ain't made strong enough to."

"As near as I can make out, you've taken to sitting on the church steps the way other men take to smoking and drinking."

"I don't know but you're right, Esther, though I hadn't thought of it in that way before."

"Well, you must try to overcome it."

"I never can, Esther. It ain't right for me to let you think I can."

"Well, we won't talk about it any more to−night. It's time I was going home."

"Esther −− did you mean it?"

"Mean what?"

"That you'd marry me anyway?"

"Yes, I did. Now do get up. I do hate to see you looking so silly."

Esther had a new pearl−colored silk gown, and a little mantle like it, and a bonnet trimmed with roses and plumes, and she and Marcus were married in June.

The Sunday on which she came out a bride they were late at church; but late as it was, curious people were lingering by the steps to watch them. What would they do? Would Marcus Woodman enter that church door which his awful will had guarded for him so long?

They walked slowly up the steps between the watching people. When they came to the place where he was accustomed to sit, Marcus stopped short and looked down at his wife with an agonized face.

"Oh, Esther, I've −− got −− to stop."

"Well, we'll both sit down here, then."

"You?"

"Yes; I'm willing."

"No; you go in."

"No, Marcus; I sit with you on our wedding Sunday.

Her sharp, middle−aged face as she looked up at him was fairly heroic. This was all that she could do: her last weapon was used. If this failed, she would accept the chances with which she had married, and before the eyes of all these tittering people she would sit down at his side on these church steps. She was determined, and she would not weaken.

He stood for a moment staring into her face. He trembled so that the by−standers noticed it. He actually leaned over toward his old seat as if wire ropes were pulling him down upon it. Then he stood up straight, like a man, and walked through the church door with his wife.

The people followed. Not one of them even smiled. They had felt the pathos in the comedy.

The sitters in the pews watched Marcus wonderingly as he went up the aisle with Esther. He looked strange to them; he had almost the grand mien of a conqueror.