

AN
HONOR
GIRL



EVELYN
RAYMOND



Class PZ7

Book R 21540

Copyright N^o _____

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

AN HONOR GIRL



Amy eagerly read the card tied to the roses. — Page 13.

AN HONOR GIRL

BY

EVELYN RAYMOND

ILLUSTRATED BY BERTHA G. DAVIDSON



BOSTON
LEE AND SHEPARD
1904

PZ7
R21540

LIBRARY of CONGRESS
Two Copies Received
JUL 30 1904
Copyright Entry
Apr. 29-1904
CLASS a XXc. No.
85691
COPY B

Published, August, 1904
COPYRIGHT, 1904, BY LEE AND SHEPARD

All rights reserved

AN HONOR GIRL

38

BERWICK & SMITH CO.
Norwood Press
Norwood, Mass.
U. S. A.

(((
(((
(((
(((
(((

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. ONE COMMENCEMENT	9
II. THE CAT AND THE ROSES	22
III. THE UNINVITED	36
IV. AN AVERTED TRAGEDY	48
V. IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT	63
VI. THE ISLAND	79
VII. A DAY AND ITS ENDING	95
VIII. THE VALLEY OF DECISION	109
IX. THE PROFESSOR	126
X. THE PLAIN SPEECH OF A FRIEND	140
XI. AT THE STOCK FARM	155
XII. THE USE OF A TALENT	168
XIII. ANXIETIES	186
XIV. A PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS	200
XV. SOME OF THE FACULTY	216
XVI. REUNIONS	229
XVII. A BUSINESS CALL	246
XVIII. FACING THE SITUATION	259
XIX. CONCERNING MADAM	273
XX. FARMER GROWDEN'S OFFER	287
XXI. THE WAY IT ENDED	300

ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
Amy eagerly read the card tied to the roses. (Frontispiece) .	13 ✓
Seated in a child's rocking-chair, a gingham apron tied under his chin	38 ✓
Her brother was beside her, seizing Jean- nette's struggling arms	49 ✓
"Why, this isn't rowing at all!"	88 ✓
"Let's rest a few minutes and let the horses drink."	147 ✓
A heavy hand clutched her shoulder fiercely .	185 ✓
"Why, it's Nugent, isn't it?"	253 ✓
"Oh, Madam, you have done all this for me!" cried the lad	305 ✓

AN HONOR GIRL

CHAPTER I

ONE COMMENCEMENT

ON that warm June evening the large dressing room of the Music Hall was filled with white-gowned girls, chattering after the manner of their kind, while they waited for Commencement exercises to begin. Florists' messengers were continually arriving with some fragrant tribute to a graduate and, as a particularly small boy staggered in with a particularly large armful of American Beauties, Harriet Lord exclaimed:

“Oh! what roses! Whose?”

“Amy Barnard's, of course. I can guess that without looking at the card,” answered Edna Merton.

“I don't know why ‘of course.’ Seems as if she'd had her share.”

“The success of success, I suppose. The

less one needs the more one gets. Now I——” Edna caught a mammoth bunch of pink and white peonies from the long table which was heaped with bouquets, and extended it at arm’s length.

“ Who sent it, Ned? ”

“ Who but I, myself? ”

“ You didn’t! ”

“ Indeed, I did. Do you imagine I’d be the only bloomless maiden in the procession? No, I thank you.”

“ But why peonies, of all flowers? ”

“ Cheapest. Fact. I ransacked every market in the town, for I couldn’t afford a florist’s shop even to one faded carnation, and in these I secured the biggest bargain for the money. So the dealer told me and so I believe. Fifty cents that posy cost me, and I call it ‘sweet pretty.’ Or if I don’t the man did.”

“ But, Edna, with your allowance, you ought to be ashamed.”

“ Yes, Mistress Harriet, I ought to be ashamed most of the time, only I forget it. Ah! here she comes! Isn’t she just too sweet for words? ”

A carriage had drawn up before the wide

entrance and from it now descended a lady and gentleman, a girl in white, and an awkward youth in evening clothes which he wore with the discomfort of a first appearance in such attire. The girl joined her mates in the dressing room, but the others passed through the lobby and were assigned to forward seats in the auditorium.

“Oh, Amy! How dear you look!”

“That’s the true word for you, Miss Lord! Observe the get-up of that organdie. This takes the crispness off my vanity,” said merry Edna, stretching out her own rumpled skirts and viewing them with a comical expression.

Amy laughed and clasped her friend’s waist affectionately. “But you’re looking lovely, dear, and I dare say your clothes cost far more than mine. Oh! what heaps of flowers. More than I’ve ever seen at any Commencement. Isn’t it fine to have our class so far ahead of all the others? I’m so proud of it.”

“And it’s so proud of you. But speaking of flowers—how’s this?” demanded Edna, again seizing her peonies and swinging them about in reckless disregard of her neighbors’ ribbons and ruffles.

“They’re beautiful—to paint.”

“And they’re designed to ‘paint the lily.’ I being the lily. The lily is tall and heads the procession, but the peonies shall head the lily. Thus! But it’s too bad to rouse your envy, poor Amy. Come see your own insignificant bouquets.”

“Have I any? I didn’t expect them; else——” She hesitated, remembering with regret the money expended on the carnations she had brought with her. Then she reflected that it was the only time she would be graduated and that it had given her mother pleasure to furnish her with the flowers, even at the cost of self-denial.

A bevy of classmates gathered about her, their pride and favorite, and one thrust under her nose a cluster of white roses, explaining:

“Mrs. Ripley.”

“The minister’s wife? How kind.”

“Very; yet don’t feel too elated. She’s sent the same to each of us who belongs to her husband’s church. Now these! If the messenger boy had been a trifle smaller and the roses a trifle heavier there’d have been an ambulance call: ‘Crushed to death!’”

Amy eagerly read the card tied to the roses, and, in amazement, cried out:

“My brother Nugent! The darling, extravagant boy! However did he do it!”

“How could he help doing it for such a sister?”

“Easily enough. With his small salary and his own expenses this means positive self-sacrifice. And he’s come to our Commencement, too, though he hates all such affairs. Well, I was happy before, but now I’m overflowing. I must hug somebody.”

Away went the roses upon the table and around the waist of the girl nearest went Amy’s arms. But these were promptly loosed as a sarcastic voice remarked:

“Please excuse me from being that somebody.”

“Why, Jeannette! I thought it was Edna. Beg pardon, of course, if you dislike it. But have you seen my flowers? They are so many, from people whom I did not dream cared at all for me, that my head is fairly turned.”

“I dare say. Light ones are, easily.”

“Jeannette! But I forgive you. Now, where are yours?”

"I have none."

"What? There must be some mistake. Have you looked?"

"No. Why should I? Nobody would remember me," with an unpleasant emphasis upon the "me," "and I'd not buy my own flowers, like silly Ned."

Amy was chilled by the expression which darkened her classmate's face and marred even its extraordinary beauty; but it seemed incredible that there should be no bouquets for Jeannette, who had hosts of relatives, while there were so many for her, who had almost none. She turned again to the table, whence the ushers were rapidly removing the flowers to rearrange them upon the platform of the auditorium, and vainly searched for even one bunch bearing the name of Herburn.

By this time most of the girls had selected such bouquets as they wished to carry and were taking their assigned places in the procession, which Edna was to lead, with her banner and her peonies, providing that even Edna could manage two such burdens. Jeannette and Amy were to follow her, but Amy delayed, stopping an attendant to beg:

“Wait, please. I must have these, and these, and, oh! yes! these.”

The gentleman smiled as the girl measured her “Beauties” against her own slim figure, to find that their heavy heads rested upon her shoulder while the ends of their stalks dragged on the floor.

“My! They quite eclipse poor mother’s delicate carnations, but they must march in the parade, even if they do. These other two bunches, of lilies and of roses, are for you, Jeannette.”

However, Jeannette had now retreated to a window and with folded arms stood silently looking out. Amy crossed to her, saying:

“Here, partner. These are yours.”

“Mine!”

Jeannette whirled about and before Amy could prevent her had caught the presentation cards and read them. Then she almost threw the bouquets to the floor in her impatience, while the disappointment that even her pride could not conceal showed in her averted eyes.

Amy’s arm, that was not filled with flowers, went again about her partner’s waist.

“Jeannette, why keep it up any longer?”

To-night's the last time we shall be in class together. I'm sorry if I ever seemed to crowd you or take away anything you wanted. It's been an even race between us and if—please take these poor little blossoms and bury the hatchet in them."

"But they were given to you."

"Then they are mine—to give to you."

"I would rather not. I—can't."

"And I would rather you did. You—must! See? Look across to that mirror yonder. You are the loveliest girl in the room, dear, and the flowers make you perfect."

It was not the noblest of arguments, Amy felt, but time pressed and, save through her vanity, Jeannette seemed invulnerable. The mirror showed that the argument was working and the innocent casuist followed its advantage.

"Think how monkey-like I should feel, if you carry none and I walk beside you loaded with all these."

"Why do you load yourself, then?"

Amy held forth first one, then another of her bouquets.

"These are my mother's; therefore. These

are my brother's—the first he ever gave me; likewise, therefore. Now, come, be good, and—you will be handsome!”

“Young ladies!”

It was the voice of authority which they had obeyed for the four years that lay behind them, and it was natural that they should obey it now; “for the last time,” thought Amy sadly, as catching Jeannette's hand she led that self-willed maiden to her place behind the leader and fell into step to the music which floated toward them from the great hall.

Edna, the irrepressible, moved forward with great dignity and sweetness of bearing, yet found time, none the less, to whisper over her shoulder:

“Sisters, be on your guard! The ‘Poly’ boys are yon!”

The “Poly,” otherwise Polytechnic, students, indeed; and a goodly number more from every other school of learning in that enterprising town. For the Commencements of the Girls' Latin School were the prettiest of all which crowded the days of early June. Its standard was high, its graduates still in the first flush of youth and enthusiasm, and mostly were

the daughters of parents who were themselves cultured and intellectual.

The stage, whereon were already seated the faculty and guests of honor, seemed a wide garden of palms and towering plants, gay with electric lights and a foreground of the choicest blooms obtainable. Before it the long procession of white-gowned maidens came to a brief halt; then each pair separated and passing to the ends of the platform ascended it from either side, to group themselves in a semicircle about their instructors and friends.

A Commencement similar to countless others with some slight local differences of detail. Jeannette was salutatorian and Amy valedictorian, as befitted their class-standing; though Jeannette felt that these honors should have been reversed, and Amy that she desired neither. Yet both acquitted themselves well; Jeannette's stately greeting suiting her handsome presence as perfectly as the gown she wore, while Amy's little tender word of farewell brought a mist to the eyes which gazed upon her. At Jeannette's conclusion there was an audible "Ah—h!" from the "Poly" boys, followed by a measured stamping and hand-

clapping, which was promptly suppressed by the gentlemen in charge. But when Amy's voice died away in a sort of smothered sob, the applause of not only the students but the whole audience burst forth tumultuously.

"That's for you, darling! and you deserve it!" whispered Edna, with a slight quiver of her own lips.

"No. It's for the whole school. Shh! Professor Gray wants order."

The desired order was long in coming, but it came at last, and the remaining exercises were soon over; yet, having an agreeable surprise in store, Dr. Gray delayed the benediction and raised his hand for further attention. His fine face beamed and his voice was proud as he advanced and addressed his audience, thus:

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

"To-night I have the happiness to inform you that a scholarship at a leading American college for women has been presented to our school. It is a gift for which I have long hoped, but of which I had almost despaired. Even now I am forbidden to make public the

donor's name, though I trust that this ban will some time be removed. The disposal of the scholarship has been left to me and my colleagues; and, after due care and deliberation, we unanimously award it to our beloved valedictorian—Amy Barnard. Miss Barnard will kindly step forward and receive the congratulations of her school and her community.”

For a moment there was absolute silence; then Amy felt herself pushed gently toward the expectant professor, who took her hand and bowed to her with a respect that seemed odd as coming from him. She returned his salutation mechanically, for as yet she realized nothing save that something wonderful and unexpected had befallen her, and that the walls rang with a deafening uproar.

“Barnard! Barnard! Hip-hip-hooray! Barnard has it! Three cheers for Latin Amy! 'Rah, 'rah 'rah! 'Rah, 'rah, 'R-A-H!”

The “Poly” boys began it, of course, and ended it, for that matter. As was quite natural, since the two school playgrounds adjoined each other, and there was always

friendly rivalry—and courtesy—between them. But there were grown-up voices cheering, also, for the honor that had come to their young townswoman was an honor to them all.

Then the silence of dismissal, the kisses and hand-clasps of classmates, the tender embrace of a father, the hearty slap on the shoulder and “Good enough, girlie!” of Nugent, and Amy was in the carriage once more speeding homeward.

Her heart was as full of beautiful dreams as her arms of roses, and she was trying to realize to the fullest the future which opened before her.

“All my life I’ve longed for it, this college course, this higher education, this chance in the world. But I dared not expect it—how dared I? for it’s been all my parents could do to give me these last four years—there’s so little money in their pockets. Now—it’s come, it’s come!”

Then the carriage stopped before their own gate, Amy sprang out, and, turning, saw her mother’s face.

CHAPTER II

THE CAT AND THE ROSES

THE street lamp opposite the gate revealed that face with clear distinctness and its expression astonished Amy. For it was an expression of bewilderment and anxiety, whereas the daughter felt it should have shown but pride and happiness.

“Why, mother! What——”

But the perplexity had already vanished and Mrs. Barnard's smile was radiant as she exclaimed:

“Take care, Nugent! This precious diploma is worth more than all these flowers, lovely as they are.”

Then she held the white-ribboned parchment high above her head, out of reach of any crushing blossoms, as her son clumsily gathered the bouquets from her lap and started for the house.

A moment later they were all in the little

parlor, realizing that the great event was over, and mentally "getting their breath," as Amy observed. Realizing, too, the fatigue of emotional excitement, they heaped their flowers upon the table and each dropped into a convenient chair to rest and talk it over. Mrs. Barnard still retained the rolled diploma and sat with it held caressingly against her cheek, though her eyes had an absent look and her thoughts were not upon the scene about her.

Mr. Barnard broke the brief silence: "Well, well, daughter, I'm proud of you. To think that my own little girl carried off first honors! Well, well."

"Your valedictory was real good, Sis, but you mumbled a good deal. Anybody who's going to speak in public ought to do it so folks could understand."

Amy smiled. "Thank you, Nugent. Before I pose as an orator I'll take lessons in elocution. This time caught me unaware, you see."

"Did you have any idea what Professor Gray was going to spring on you at the end?"

"Not the slightest. Nobody did, I fancy. Even yet it seems like a dream."

"How'd you feel when he called you up front, eh?"

"Didn't feel at all. Just was numb and stupid. Seemed as if I were walking on some other girl's feet when Edna pushed me forward."

"Likely you were. Jeannette Herburn's, no doubt."

"Poor Jeannette! She's never liked me, and this will make things worse. I'm sorry. I don't see why whoever gave one scholarship couldn't have given two, so she could go."

Mrs. Barnard rose rather hastily.

"Come, come, my dears. It's late and there are all these flowers to take care of. Nugent, please bring two or three large pitchers and pans to the pantry and fill them with water. Amy, I'll help you off with that dress before we attempt to fix the bouquets. Ah! my daughter, I'm proud of you, too. Proud that you should have won the love of all these givers. There must be a dozen, at least, and the air is heavy with so much sweetness."

"Better close only the outside shutters and leave the windows open," suggested Mr. Barnard, as he went about locking up.

When, at a much later hour than common, the house was finally still, Amy yet lay long awake, restless and excited.

“ Must be ‘ rose leaves ’ in this bed ! Else I should have been asleep the moment I touched it, for I’m very tired. Rose leaves of too great success and too much flattery. I can’t help thinking, though, how odd it was. Every one of my family said : ‘ I’m proud,’ but not one said : ‘ I’m glad.’ Maybe they didn’t think it necessary and that I’d take it for granted. Anyway, *I’m* glad—glad—glad ! That higher education—mine, mine, mine. After school the college ; after college—who can guess how wise and great I may grow to be ? ”

Once started on this theme the dreams of the ambitious girl wandered far afield, and these waking dreams merged into those of sleep ; where she seemed herself to be the central figure of an endless succession of Commencements, each more brilliant than the other ; till in a jumble of ribbons and gossamer gowns, of cheers and jubilant music, of blooming plants and flaming lights, she passed into the sounder slumber that was natural to her.

“ Well, dear, I must wake you at last. The breakfast positively will not keep fresh any longer and your flowers need attention.”

Amy sat up and rubbed her eyes.

“ What time is it? ”

“ Nine o'clock.”

“ Why, mother! Then I shall be late! Oh! I forgot. I shall never be late again. I declare, I thought I should be so glad about that and I'm not. I'm sorry. Dear old Latin School! I believe I love its very walls.”

“ I can understand that. They've been four happy, care-free years you've spent among them. They ended in a little burst of glory, too, and that will be something good to remember. Now—vacation and—home.”

“ I shall love that, as well, for a time. Then more school, more study, more—oh, mother! Isn't it splendid to be alive and all that richness stretching out before one? I am so happy, so happy!”

“ Yes, dear. I understand,” again responded the mother.

But to the daughter there seemed something missing in the tone, a lessening of the sympathy which had always met her own

moods. Yet how could that be since they were all in all to each other and the joy of one had meant the joy of the other? Then she smiled, whimsically:

“I wonder, motherkin, if a body can get a bit too much philosophy into one’s head, at sixteen? or if being an ‘honor girl’ sets one prying into—into her insides too much? All sorts of notions were in my mind last night and they’re popping up again this morning. A why—why—why about everything. Why you, nor father, nor even Nugent, said you were glad about the scholarship, for instance.”

“Foolish child. A sensible breakfast will regulate both your mental and material ‘insides,’ as you so inelegantly express yourself. A fragment of ‘higher education,’ I suppose.”

“Mother! You, of all people, to turn sarcastic!”

“Come. Don’t dawdle. There’s no sarcasm in that. It’s a busy morning and Rebecca has a ‘misery’ again.”

Mrs. Barnard went smilingly away and Amy dawdled no more. Rebecca was the one servant of their household; a faithful and capable colored woman, but arbitrary as many

capable persons are. For the past year she and her "miserics" had led Mrs. Barnard an uncertain life, the mistress never knowing just when an attack of some sort would keep Rebecca at her own cottage, whither she went of nights, or if she did appear in the morning whether she would be of much assistance.

"Oh! dear! How provoking! I know mother had ordered strawberries for canning to-day, and needs Becky more than usual. It won't make things any pleasanter to have me keep breakfast behind, either, even though it's but one to serve. Well, I'll try to lend a hand. A girl who can win first honor ought to be capable of hulling strawberries."

Hurrying to the dining room she made short work of her belated meal and set herself to clearing the table. At which Becky smiled, entering to do that task herself, yet also grumbled:

"Well, honey, 'low steppin' round's good for young legs. Won't hurt you none to know how victuals is handled."

"Oh, Rebecca! Victuals! What an unpleasant word. So suggestive of 'cold' and mendicancy. How can you? Don't you

know I'm a 'sweet girl graduate' and should be treated delicately?"

"Hey? What's that? Them was good victuals and they wasn't cold. I kept 'em hot myself in the warm oven. And I don't know nothing 'bout mendicatin', 'less that's what your poor ma's doing most the 'during time. And I 'low now you've got done studying all them books you'll be taking the needle outen her hands into your own. It cert'nly is fine for all we Barnards you finished all them outgoin's, day after day. Now I hope you'll get sense into you and grow up a woman."

They were both steadily clearing away and setting the pleasant room to rights, Amy singing in a low tone and Becky talking in a loud one, when Mrs. Barnard looked in and remarked:

"Why, my darling! I didn't intend you should begin to work this very first morning. Except, of course, to arrange your flowers and not to hinder us."

"But I want to work, motherkin. I want to do every single thing I can to rest you while—while I am at home. For four years I've done nothing but study, and a change of programme

will be good for us both. Three months goes so quickly, and Wellesley—why, mother!”

Again that strange expression was on the mother's face and, as if to hide it, she turned toward the kitchen.

“I'm hulling the berries out on the back porch. You'll find me there if you care to come.”

“Of course I'm coming, to help you. I'll be quick with the flowers.”

But the girl sang no more. Indeed, she became so preoccupied that she forgot to “brush the crumbs,” as she had promised Rebecca, and went away leaving the dustpan in the middle of the floor. Where, coming into the darkened room from the sunshine without, Nugent promptly stumbled over it and bruised his shin against a misplaced chair.

“Hang it! What does that old Becky mean, setting man-traps about, like this!”

From the adjoining pantry Amy called:

“Boy-trap, not man-trap, laddie dear, and I wish you would hang it, for I forgot to. 'Cause 'twas young Amy, not old Becky, who left it there. Come in and help me, will you?”

“Can't. I'm going fishing. Have you seen

my rod anywhere?" Yet he did enter the pantry and stood for a moment regarding his roses, whose stems she was clipping and placing in a great glass vase. "Kept pretty fresh, didn't they?"

"Indeed, they did. And I didn't have half a chance to tell you last night how much I love you for giving them. Only, Nugent, I felt just a trifle sorry you should have spent so much money for me. 'American Beauties' cost lots, don't they?"

"Never look a gift horse in the mouth, Amy. But say, have you seen my tackle?"

"No. I wish I had. Hark! Who's that?"

"All creation, I should say. A crowd of your girls. Don't let them come in here. Amy! I say don't you let them come in here! *Amy!*"

But he was too late. His sister had sped across the dining room and opened the long blinds which gave upon the piazza, and through this window a half-dozen or more of Amy's classmates had entered, laughing, explaining, questioning, all in one breath. To escape them was impossible unless he were

willing to be seen running away or shut himself within the pantry.

He chose the latter alternative and closed the door with such energy that the china rattled on the shelves; and with such careless haste that his coat caught on the thorns of his own roses. Turning back to cast one anxious glance upon the narrow, fast-barred window, his own movement precipitated a catastrophe.

Crash! Splash! The rattle of breaking glass, a growl of impatience.

Every girl in the outer room was stricken silent, then Amy sped pantry-ward, crying:

“My flowers! My vases! It’s that dreadful cat of Rebecca’s!” For she had supposed, so far as she thought at all about it, that her brother had disappeared at first sound of her friends’ voices. He “hated girls” and avoided them consistently.

Then she swung the door wide and there he stood, furious, scarlet of face, and with the awkward angles of his figure accentuated by the predicament in which he found himself. As Rebecca frequently remarked: “Our Nugent has the makings of a man in him, if he ever quits growin’,” but at the present stage of

his existence these "makings" did not fit each other very gracefully.

"Oh! what a pretty cat!" cried Edna, following close on Amy's heels.

"My! See the cat! Can the cat run? Yes, the cat can run," echoed Molly Sargent; both girls speaking with more fun than malice.

"Does the cat bite and scratch? The cat will bite and scratch—if it gets a chance," tossed Edna back again.

"Girls, stop! You shall not be so horrid!" pleaded Amy, as sorry for her brother's mishap as for her broken vase. But they held the door ajar and her single strength was unequal to theirs.

By this time Nugent was able to see the absurd side of the affair and to retaliate in some sort. Seizing a monster "Beauty" he threw it straight at Edna, his chief tormentor, who caught it, pricked her fingers, screamed, and returned the charge.

Then and there was fought a "War of the Roses," with such spirit of devastation that when it was ended and the conquered "Cat" forced to beat a retreat through the very ranks

of his enemies, there remained of poor Amy's lovely graduation flowers but broken stems and scattered petals.

"Oh! oh!" was all she could say, and the tears were very near her eyes as she gazed upon the ruins about her.

The fun was all over and Edna full of self-reproach. "Amy, Amy, what shall I do to make amends? It's all my fault—I am such a simpleton! Forever acting first and thinking second. And what a looking room we've made. Come, girls. At least we can carry away the débris. But did ever anybody see such a silly boy as Nugent Barnard? Afraid of just plain girls. Come on, Molly. You carry the rest of these 'Beauty' stems. They're the thorniest and you and I deserve the worst."

They went at the task with a will, even Amy assisting, if somewhat sadly, and when even the last petal had been gathered into the lifted skirts, she marshaled her forces:

"This way, to the garbage-box."

"Yet they were so beautiful, only last night, and we so envious of you, pet," sympathized Harriet Lord.

Even now, though most sincerely sorry for her behavior, Edna could not restrain her nonsense and burst into the melody "See the Conquering Hero Comes," and, instantly, every fragment-laden maid in the procession piped an accompaniment.

As they came round the corner of the house Mrs. Barnard looked up from her seat on the back porch, under its drapery of vines, and nearly dropped her dish of berries.

"Why, Amy—Edna, what is this?"

"It's——" began her daughter.

"It's," interrupted the penitent Edna, "an ashamed set of girls, who came to propose a picnic, but were attacked by a Cat. The Cat is on your porch roof this minute, and if it doesn't come down at once, and help us help you hull your strawberries, it will get its name and its picture in the *Warden Chronicle*. The Cat knows this is true."

CHAPTER III

THE UNINVITED

THE "Cat" did know it was true. The *Warden Chronicle* was a lively little newspaper published and edited by a "picked" staff from the rolls of the Latin and Polytechnic schools. Originally intended for the students only, it was now quite liberally patronized by older friends of these young people, and Edna was editor-in-chief. Her office was by election and held over for another year, and the next issue would appear on the following Tuesday.

There was one thing which Nugent feared more than girls, and that was ridicule. Despite his assertion that he didn't care, and his rather ostentatious display of indifference, he did care very greatly for the good opinion of others and was painfully conscious of his own shortcomings. He was but two years older than Amy, yet his height was already six feet,

and, Rebecca was saying, "he ain't done got his full growth yet."

Peeping over the edge of the porch roof, whither he had retreated for safety, he asked:

"If I come down and help will you promise me to keep the thing out of that horrid sheet?"

Edna glanced about the clothes-yard. "I see no sheets, handsome or horrid. Mrs. Barnard is too good a housekeeper to have her 'wash' out on a Friday."

"Will you promise?"

"You'd better come down by intention than slip down off that inclined plane and break your neck."

"Promise?"

"If you will."

"What?"

"That you put yourself under our orders until all these berries are hulled."

"Honor?"

"Honor. Girls, you witness."

Whereupon Nugent hastily descended from his slippery perch, bringing a goodly portion of grape-vine with him, and landing so unexpectedly amid the group that it hastily scattered to give him room.

“Here,” said Edna, and deposited her own armful of rubbish within his. “Now, Harriet. Hurl your green indignity upon our vanquished foe.”

They loaded him mercilessly, till not even his tall head was visible behind the heaped-up branches, he standing like a wooden image to receive his unwelcome burden. When the last rose-branch was piled upon him, he was ordered:

“Right about, face.”

To his own surprise he was entering into the spirit of the moment and wheeled around with soldierly precision.

“Behind my chariot, prisoner! To the garbage-box; forward—march!”

Five minutes later the great fellow was docilely seated in a child’s rocking-chair, a gingham apron tied under his chin, and a big dish of berries in his lap.

“Hull.”

He obeyed with the silence and movement of an automaton, while his conquerors talked around him, or at and about him, as their mood chanced. Sometimes one or other held a decayed berry to his lips, which opened and re-



Seated in a child's rocking-chair, a gingham apron tied under his chin. — Page 38.

ceived it like a trap, but all the while his great fingers toiled with a swiftness they found themselves emulating, and long before Mrs. Barnard could have accomplished it alone the task was done.

When the last basket was emptied and the great dishes of glowing fruit stood ranged upon the table Edna took pity on the captive.

“Rise, Sir Cat, and receive your parole. Till two o’clock your time is your own. At two o’clock of this afternoon you will report at the domicile of one Miss Jeannette Herburn, Six-sixty-six Sixth Street, from which alliterative mansion you will escort our honored salutatorian, bag and basket, bundle and budget, part and parcel, racket and wrap, to the appointed picnic-grounds of Grover Growden’s Green Grove, foot of Grove Street, abutting on the river. There to conduct and disport yourself as seemeth our good pleasure.”

She waved her hand and Nugent stood up, the picture of dismay.

“Oh! I say, Edna, that’s too much. I’ve kept my word. Let up on a fellow, can’t you?”

“ Couldn’t.”

“ But a picnic, of all things. Any other penance. I’ll give you every fish I catch to-day.”

“ Wouldst see me starve?”

“ Amy, speak for me. Yet, no matter. I shan’t go.”

He would have run from them, but they surrounded him on every side, a circle of clasped hands, and he hated to use force.

“ Allow me to differ, and to inform you that you are not the only beast in the menagerie, though we need you to complete the collection. All our cousins and our brothers, and our friends——”

“ That’s all right. I’m not going. Will you please stand aside or must——”

Edna dropped her arm and the circle parted to give him egress. “ To the victors belong——magnanimity. At two of the clock. Remember the *Chronicle!* ”

There could not have been two more astonished young people in that pretty town of Warden than Jeannette Herburn and Nugent Barnard when, promptly at two, he presented himself in Sixth Street and asked

that young lady if she were ready for the picnic.

“Picnic? I’ve heard of none.”

Nugent explained as far as he knew and with his customary awkwardness; but, as she listened, Jeannette’s anger rose and her cheek flushed.

“It appears to me, Mr. Barnard,”—the lad unconsciously straightened himself at the unaccustomed title—“that our friends are playing a practical joke upon us. They did not believe that you would invite me or that I would accept. Let us disappoint them by doing what they did not expect. I’ll be ready in five minutes.”

Jeannette was both right and wrong. She had never felt herself a favorite and had held herself disdainfully aloof from the social gatherings of her mates, though she was scrupulously asked to them all. Nugent’s behavior had been so similar to hers and so different from the other brothers’ that it was Amy herself who had laid this pretty plan to capture the recalcitrant pair. She had whispered to Edna under cover of their berry-capping:

“I do so want to have him at our last class

picnic. He'd enjoy it, I know, if he'd let himself. So would poor Jeannette, who'll probably decline if I ask her. Send him! He can but fail, and if he should succeed—hurrah!”

So, in her character of “victor,” Edna had imposed a duty which she honestly hoped would prove less irksome than it promised, and it was with real delight and the warmest of welcomes that Jeannette and Nugent were greeted by their mates already assembled in the grove by the river. The tables were thus turned so neatly that almost before she knew it the girl was drawn into a game of tennis while the lad was left to lounge unmolested under a tree on the bluff. From this point of vantage he meant soon to make his escape to a little cove he knew lower down the stream, where he kept hidden under a protecting boulder his second-best rod and line.

Meanwhile, in a shed at the edge of the grove, a few “Poly boys” were gathered. Being neither brothers nor cousins of the picnickers they had not been asked to join the merrymaking, and were intent upon revenge.

“If there's anything a girl's afraid of it's a

'tramp,'” said Louis Cassell; “I vote for 'tramps.’”

“Go down under the bluff and smoke 'em out,” suggested Philip Byington.

“Wind's the wrong way. How's a 'Wild West' performance?” asked Robert Morris.

“Pooh! Latin Girls aren't as silly as you.”

“Thanks. The same to yourself. Growden's colts, then. They're over in that field beyond the lane. Cows would be better, but colts will do, if we get them frisky enough.”

“Colts have it.”

“'Tramps.’”

“Colts and 'tramps.’”

“Good enough. The irresistible combinations of this show are evinced by the shrieks and terrors of the gentler sex! Edna Merton isn't the only girl has a vocabulary of her own. I'm the other girl.”

“Never mind the vocabulary. Hurry up is the word. Growden's scarecrows in his cornfield are just as many as ourselves. Time and the hour wait on the action!”

“If Grover Growden catches us he'll make scarecrows enough to last all summer. I don't

like rifling that corn-field. It's been a lot of work to rig up all those things."

"Pshaw! Phil! It was you yourself spoke of colts."

"That's different. We can drive the colts back. I couldn't make a scarecrow to save me."

"Needn't try. All you'd have to do would be to stand upon that wall and every crow in sight would die of fits."

Philip laughed, as did his comrades, and offered no further objections, though he remarked with emphasis:

"I know Mr. Grover Growden. He's our neighbor, and goes around with a 'chip on his shoulder' most of the time. You'll have to put all back as you find it or look out."

"All right. You stay here and look out yourself while we get the rags. If you see anybody coming whistle three times. We'll drive the colts back with us when we come, and you hold them at the end of the lane while we fix. Then we'll fix you!"

Philip meant to keep watch, but forgot it. As usual he had an interesting book in his pocket and knew nothing beyond its pages

until the clatter of horse-hoofs startled him to his post of keeping the end of the lane. With wildly waving arms and many shouts he prevented the frightened animals from passing beyond him into the grove, while the others guarded the rear and at the same time rapidly slipped over their own clothes the ragged ones of the scarecrows. To streak their faces with mud and pull their football locks over their foreheads was the finishing stroke of genius, and they might readily have passed muster in that "under world" they counterfeited.

"Ready?"

"All but Phil. Here, somebody. Hand him along these things," ordered Louis, trying to make a crownless hat stay on his head.

But there wasn't time. The excitement they had aroused in the herd of colts was already beyond their control. An injudicious slap on the haunches of the nearest one, dealt by Craig Washington, sent it forward among its companions, and instantly they were all in a mad rush through the wood.

Then, for the first time, the seriousness of the affair chilled the mirth of the "tramps."

“Stop them! stop them! Quick! Phil! Bob! Whoa! WH-O-A-A!”

As well have tried to stop the wind.

Grouped around the roots of a mighty oak tree, on the extreme verge of the high bank, the picnickers were having their feast. Jeanette was nearest the water, her beautiful face aglow with the new knowledge which had come to her—that, in spite of her own repellent ways, her classmates really loved and were proud of her. Not so proud and fond as of Amy, indeed, but who could tell what might not happen in time?

Delighted by the success of her venture Amy kept close to her school rival, and was now sitting next her, but gently remonstrating that she should keep so dangerous a place.

“That root looks old and treacherous, Jeanette. The earth has all been washed away beneath, and the least slip would send you down the bank. It’s so straight and steep here, too. Let’s move a bit inshore. I really feel giddy, yet I’m not so far out as you.”

Then came a loud, clattering rush from behind, accompanied by shouts of warning, and

cries of "Stop, there!" "Look out!"
"Whoa-a!"

Amy sprang up and faced about, her timid heart halting in terror and her eyes dilating as she gazed into a seeming chaos of heads and hoofs hounded by fierce, wild men. Then she flung out her hand to clutch her classmate's skirts and found only the empty air.

"Jeannette! Jeannette!"

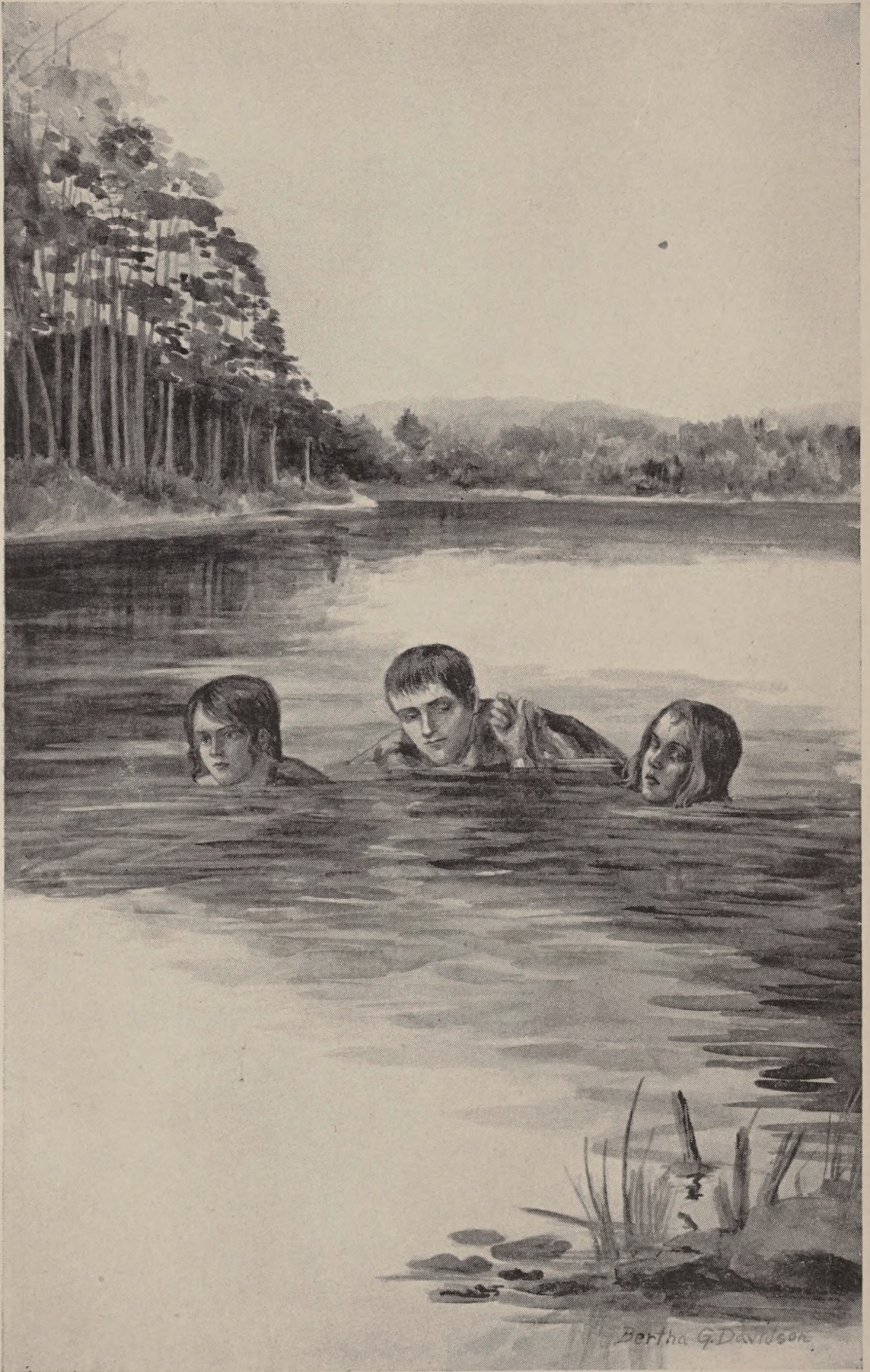
One glance downward into the widening, circling ripples told whither the girl had gone, and with another terrified cry of "*Jeannette!*" Amy had followed.

CHAPTER IV

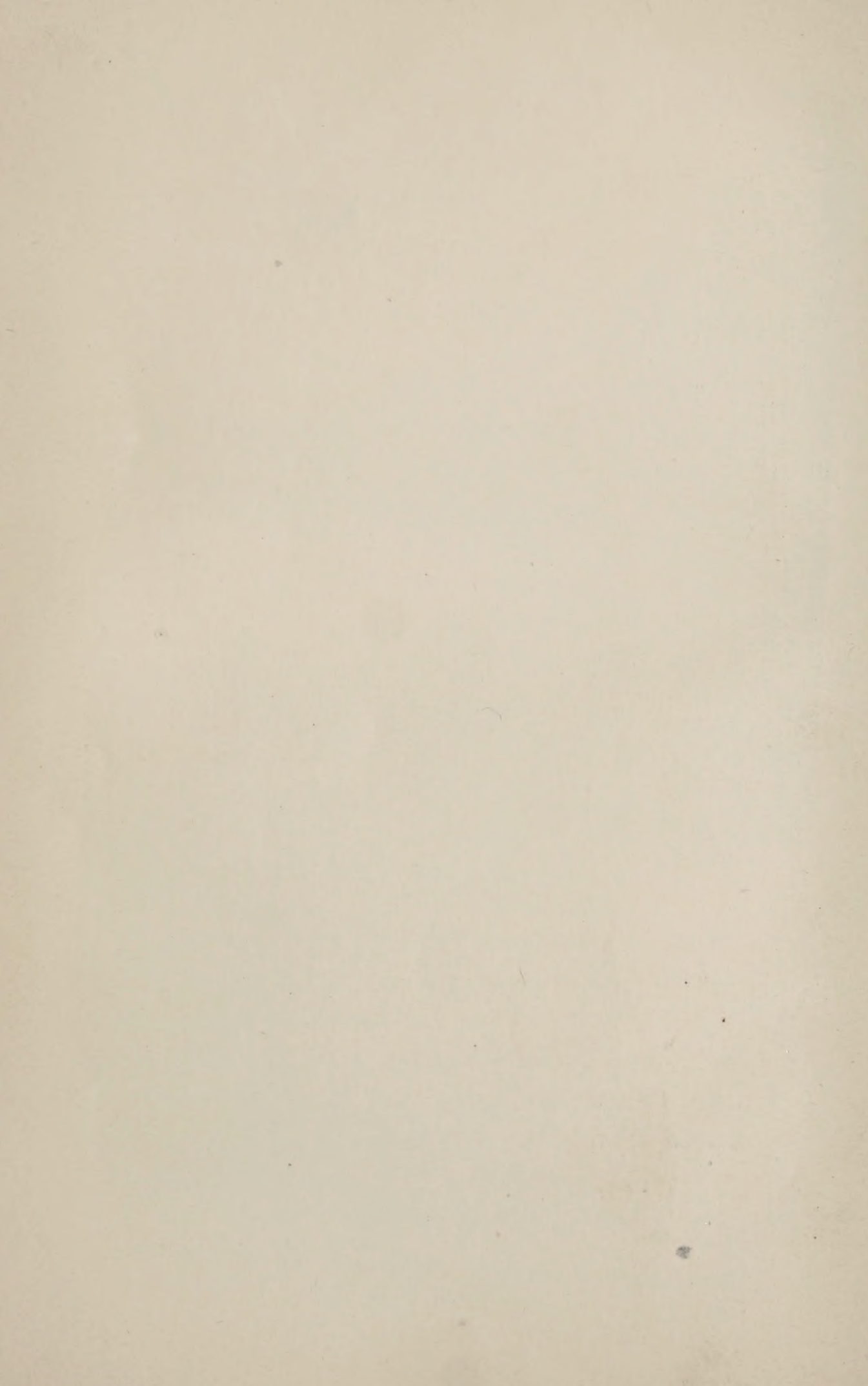
AN AVERTED TRAGEDY

As soon as he could do so unobserved Nugent slipped away from his friends and settled himself in the quiet cove to fish and dream. The spot was but a short distance from the bluff whereon the others were enjoying themselves, though out of sight from it, and he lazily stretched himself on the grass, letting his line take care of itself. The result was that he fell asleep and no fish came to his bait. Indeed, there rarely did on such a sunny day as this; else, possibly, he might have kept his eyes open.

As it was they remained shut until the rattle of dishes and a sense of hunger roused him to the fact that if he did not rejoin his mates he would miss the feast they were spreading. So he sauntered back along the stream and at the foot of the cliff which for some distance rose so straight and steep above it.



Her brother was beside her, seizing Jeannette's struggling arms. — Page 49.



“I’ll wait till I get right under them, then climb suddenly into sight and yell. The head and the yell will seem to rise out of the very river, and how those girls will shriek. I wish I could pay that Edna Merton off! and I’ll do it yet some time. Now——”

But the fright and the surprise were to be his, not theirs. As he started to clamber up the cliff he heard the mad rush of the frenzied colts and the cries of the boys who chased them. Then something fell past him and struck the water heavily, sinking at once out of sight. Almost at the same instant another figure shot past him, and he recognized his sister’s dress. She was a good swimmer, he knew, and had evidently dived from the bluff while the first person had as evidently fallen.

“An accident!”

Action followed swift upon this thought, and as Amy rose to the surface of the water, which just there was very deep, her brother was beside her, seizing Jeannette’s struggling arms and drawing both girls with him to the shore. Fortunately, this was but a few feet away, and almost before anybody on the bluff had realized what had happened below the

dripping trio were making their slow way along the lower bank to a point of easier ascent and Amy, at least, calling in shrill tones:

“She’s safe! She’s safe!”

Jeannette said nothing. She was still sputtering and half gasping, while her feet dragged like lead, and she shook as if in an ague. Indeed, but for the sustaining arms of her rescuers she would have been unable to walk at all. The shock had terrified and unnerved her, and her one desire was to sink down on the solid earth and hold fast to it. Only in this way could she reassure herself that she was not still in danger of drowning.

“Why, Jeannette, brace up! It’s nothing. You weren’t hurt, and in the water only a minute. You’ll be all right directly. Are you so cold? We’re just as wet as you, but I don’t mind it this warm day.”

“I—I can’t. I must stop. I must sit down. I feel so queer.”

Nugent looked sharply at the white face of the girl, and remarked with more force than gallantry:

“You needn’t try the fainting act. You’re

no fairy for weight, and I couldn't drag you up this rock single-handed. The rest of the fellows must be having their own fun up yonder, judging by the noise, and wouldn't bother. Come along. You can do it if you've a mind to."

Jeannette flashed round upon him:

"Let me go! You great, big, homely, horrid boy! How dare you?"

"Oh! I dare easy enough. I've often made Amy mad when I couldn't make her do things otherwise. Good! We'll be at the top in a jiffy."

Jeannette tossed off the helping arms of both assistants and leaped upward as if her former weakness had been all a sham. Her nervousness ended in an unreasonable anger against everything and everybody. Why had she ever come to that detestable picnic? What did that grinning simpleton, Nugent, mean by treating her so? Did she look such an object as he and Amy did in their quickly drenched summer clothing?

Amy, however, was not to be so easily gotten rid of. She saw that Jeannette's lips were blue and her teeth chattering, and again clasp-

ing her classmate's waist with a firmness too strong for its owner's resistance she begged:

"Don't be angry, girlie; be thankful. It might have been a tragedy, but it's only funny now. If you feel as absurd as I do——"

"Please, Amy, let me go. I'm obliged to you—of course I mean it's much stronger than that, but—don't, don't. I never cry—I don't want to now, but if I—should now in a minute——"

"You'll laugh instead. Here is everybody! You can't escape, even if you would." Then to the crowd which met them at the top of the bank and quickly surrounded them: "Yes, we're safe. It's all right. Nobody is the worse for it."

"Oh! Amy! What a brave girl you are!"

"Jeannette, what made you do it?"

"Hasn't anybody anything hot anywhere?" demanded Edna; "I've read that after drowning everybody drinks hot stuff."

"If they have it. This is a cold-water picnic, you know."

"It's just as I told you," said Harriet Lord; "we ought to have made either coffee or tea."

"Out of what? The hottest things I can

think of are those sandwiches of Grace Winslow's. There's mustard enough in them."

A boy ran back to the disordered cloth on which the food had been set out, and Edna seized the plate he brought and began to feed her victims with more zeal than discretion.

"Ugh—I—my mouth's full. It's Jeanette needs——" spluttered Amy, resisting the enforced nourishment as best she could. "I'm hungry enough, but I like to take it my own way."

"Try me," suggested Nugent, opening his capacious mouth and closing it with much satisfaction upon the dainty sandwich thrust into it.

"Walk 'em around. They mustn't stand still. They'll get their death if they do," suggested Robert Morris, whose father was a doctor. "Feed 'em and walk 'em and they'll be all right. Come on, Phil. We must try for those colts again."

"As well try for the man in the moon. They're scattered all over Warden by this time. The worse for us," he added dolefully.

This was true. The frightened animals had

promptly disappeared from the grove and had run up Grove Street out of sight.

"Yes, we must walk. We must get home as soon as we can," said Amy, leading the way.

"You can eat as you walk, can't you?" asked Robert, tendering a particularly soft piece of cream cake.

"Oh, Rob! my waist! The stuff is drizzling all over it!"

"It's got to be washed, anyway, hasn't it? Nothing but a little cream. Here. Another bite—quick! before it slips out of my fingers."

"It's one good thing: you'll all get done dripping before you do get home. I'd hate to have your mothers' carpets spoiled by nasty river water," said Edna consolingly. Then she turned to the uninvited lads and ordered: "You who made the mischief must stay and pack up the things and bring them home. Bring them all to my house, and there Molly Sargent and I will sort them out and return them to their owners. If you break a dish, eat a cake, mislay a sandwich——"

"I'm mislaying them as fast as I can," cried Craig defiantly.

"I've no objections, so long as you pay for

them. Five cents each and the proceeds to go toward the sinking fund of the *Chronicle*."

At the mention of the *Chronicle* the "tramps" looked at one another in dismay. Not all of them had as yet discarded their borrowed tatters, and Grace Winslow's camera had been quietly busy.

Immediately they surrounded her and began to plead:

"You didn't 'catch' *me*, did you, Gracie?"

"You wouldn't 'snap' an old and tried friend like *me*, Grace! You couldn't have the hard heart. If my father saw me thus—oh! Grace!"

They were all walking townward now at a rapid pace, leaving the wood and their own belongings deserted; but Jeannette suddenly broke her obstinate silence with the question:

"Would you boys, who pretend to be gentlemen, do so little for your sisters? The least amends you can make is to protect their property. It's beyond words to tell how deeply I regret my own share in this afternoon's entertainment, but as for *you!*"

With one impulse every "tramp" raised his hand to where his hat should have been and

gravely saluted. Then they wheeled about and returned to the picnic-ground. There Philip assumed charge of affairs and decreed:

“This hasn’t come out just according to programme, but we’ve got to swallow it. No, not one morsel of that shortcake, Craig Washington! This has become an affair of honor. We will pack the dishes in the baskets the best we can, and every old sandwich in ’em to the last crumb. Then we’ll carry the baskets to the corn-field and fix the scarecrows again.”

“Humph! ’Twould be easier to stand up ourselves on the stone walls.”

“If you prefer. After that’s finished, as well as we can, we’ll carry the baskets to Edna’s, and then——”

“Then?”

“Four trembling youths will beard the lion in his den, or farmer Growden in his barn.”

“Worse than that. He’s laid up with the rheumatism now, and my father’s attending him,” said Robert. “I’m not as pleased with myself as I was an hour ago. I rather pity Robert, I do.”

“Well, we’re in for it. I hope somebody will catch a colt or two before anybody gets

killed. Amy Barnard's a plucky girl. Lucky for her she learned to swim from that old fisherman she tackles to so much. Now, not another word. Work's the thing."

They were already very hungry, and they grew hungrier each instant, but not a particle of the provided feast did they allow themselves. True, the packing was not done in a manner to make this feast more palatable for anybody afterward, but that feature was not mentioned in their contract. They simply obeyed Philip, and when the last napkin had been tucked into place, even the last scrap of wrapping paper after it, they sadly left the wood and marched down the lane to the field where a company of crows were diligently damaging the hoped-for crop.

"Well, I'm beat! I didn't know I was such a simpleton I couldn't tie a mess of rags round a stick and make them stay there!" exclaimed Louis Cassell, after a half-hour's fruitless labor to replace the tramp's outfit whence he had borrowed it.

"It's a case of try, try again—try a good many times more; but we'll succeed after a while. We must," said Philip consolingly.

Indeed, it was fast gathering twilight before the last of the scarecrows was finished and stood in its old place of warning; and it was a half-starved set of lads who hurried townwards, heroically carrying untouched the delicacies it made their mouths water just to think about. They asked of all whom they met: "Have you seen the colts?"

"What colts? No! I've seen no colts. Why?"

"Nothing."

After a half-dozen such questions and replies Philip exclaimed:

"This thing grows worse every minute. If those colts are lost, or are hurt, old Growden's going to make it lively for our fathers. They're thoroughbreds, most of them, and some he's raising will be racers. Oh! why did I ever think of colts or act like such a fool!"

"Nature. Nature and destiny," assured Craig promptly. But on his own face was a look of anxiety.

Long before this the other young folks had reached their homes, and Jeannette had parted with Amy more affectionately than one would have expected from so reserved a girl. Yet she

would not permit any of the party to accompany her within doors, nor did they press the matter. Beyond the fact that she was one of many daughters in a careless, worldly household, herself an exception to her sisters in intellect and appearance, they knew little about her. A few formal calls had been exchanged between her and her classmates, for she was rigidly exact in the performance of every duty, but there, until this day of the class picnic, all social intercourse had ended.

“Good-night, Amy. I—I thank you,” she had said, then hurried in and closed the door behind her. What the others did not see was that as soon as this was done she turned and scowled, angrily muttering:

“Why must that girl always be doing me such favors! And I hate her. But for her I should have carried off first honors and won that scholarship. I had to carry her flowers at my own humiliation and now—I wish she’d let me alone. I could have saved myself. I wish—I wish—I had never been born!”

Amy and Nugent entered their own home with far different feelings. To them the incident had been less shocking than to any of

their mates. As very little children they had been taught to swim and manage a rowboat by "Uncle John Gay," an old fisherman and Jack-of-all-trades, whose shed-like house was as near the river's edge as he could build it, and who was as much at home upon the water as upon the land. Grandfather Barnard and John had been school-fellows in the early days when Warden was but a hamlet and its only institution of learning a wooden schoolhouse. The fortunes of the Barnards had grown with the growth of the town, but those of the Gays had remained unchanged.

"Like all my folks before me I've fished my living out of the Otterkill, and I expect to die a-fishing. I've never coveted my neighbors' dollars and I've had all the happiness was good for me," was the genial old fellow's statement of the case. At one time in old John's life his little house had been crowded full of young folks, who, one by one, had followed their mother out of it to the graveyard on the hill; so that now he was quite alone save for the children of his friends.

"But I've never lost them, Amy, you know," he had said once: "they've just gone

visiting up yonder, and the invitation 'll be coming for me bime-by."

"Oh! not yet, not yet, Uncle John! I couldn't spare you yet, 'cause I love you."

"And I love you, little girl, and I'm glad to stay and fish just as long as the Lord wills. Life is good to everybody, even to them that say they're tired of it, and in my darkest days I've never said that."

Though this talk had been long ago the girl's affection for old John had never wavered, and as they passed the sitting room window, she was glad to hear his voice in conversation with Mrs. Barnard.

"I was just thinking, Nugent, that if it hadn't been for that blessed old fellow in there we couldn't have done what we did to-day, the river is so deep just there. It was really Uncle John who saved Jeannette. Let's hurry and change our clothes so we can tell him before he goes. Hark! What's that he's saying?"

"No, ma'am. I've had nothing make me feel so bad, not in twenty years. I don't like these new-fangled ideas. Time was when there were daughters and sons. Now there's

nobody left but career-ers. Don't know as that's a dictionary word, but it tells what I mean. I was dumfounded when I read that in the paper about our Amy. I thought better of her. I confess I'm more disappointed in her than I ever dreamed I could be."

"Her higher education demands it, Uncle John."

"Higher fiddlesticks! Beg pardon, ma'am. But I'm r'iled. I'm sorry. An only daughter, you not strong, her father—well, things going—you know business isn't what it was. I came on purpose to see that child and talk sense into her if I could. Sorry she's out, but just ask her to come see me, will you? Four years away from her home! The notion's wrong from the beginning."

Poor Amy. She was more chilled by her old friend's words than by her dip in the river. The worst of it was that he but voiced a fear that had troubled her all that day.

CHAPTER V

IN THE SILENCE OF THE NIGHT

WHEN Amy went down, at last, to the sitting room old John had gone. She had not hurried in her dressing as she had urged Nugent to do, and he had already told the story of the afternoon to their mother.

“Oh! my darling! how thankful I am for you!” cried the little woman, running to meet her daughter and to clasp her fondly, as if still not wholly assured that she had suffered no injury. “Are you all right? Warm enough? Did you change everything—everything?”

“Everything, motherkin. Don’t worry. There’s nothing amiss with your wonderful children except a terrible hunger. They fed us just enough sandwiches to whet our appetites. Has Rebecca gone? Is supper over?”

“Yes, to both. Your father has also gone back downtown. I’m afraid there’s little beside bread and butter for you. You see I didn’t

look for you to need anything, and in your hurry to fill your basket when you started you took nearly everything nice from the pantry. I've been busy with the berries——”

“Mother, mother! Don't reproach yourself because I was selfish and left you all alone with that work. I ought to have stayed——”

“Why, Amy, child! You look as sober as a judge. When did you ever help me with my preserving or when did I expect it? Nonsense. Besides that, I am thankful beyond expression that you were just where you were when Jeanette fell into the river; and that you had the presence of mind to pull her out. Come. We'll find something.”

“Will you eat red herring?” asked Nugent.

“Will I not? I'll eat anything I can get. Where are any?”

“In my trunk. I'll get them. I bought them to go fishing with. Herring and crackers are tip-top.”

“But you shouldn't keep them in your trunk, Nugent.”

“If I didn't I'd not keep them at all. Becky'd throw them in the ash-barrel—or eat them herself. They're prime.”

As he leaped up the stairs, three steps at a time, Mrs. Barnard looked after him and laughed, then sighed.

“ I wish he had as great a liking for other things as he has for fishing. He’ll be another Uncle John if he keeps on. By the way, you just missed him. He was here a little while ago.”

“ Yes, mother. I heard him.”

“ Heard him? Yet didn’t come to see him? ”

“ I didn’t want to see him.”

“ Why, Amy! ”

The girl put her hands upon her mother’s shoulders and turned the surprised face to the full light.

“ Motherkin, do you agree with him? ”

“ In what, my child? ”

“ Do you think it’s wrong I should take this chance—this one chance of my life? Do you wish me to give up that scholarship? ”

There was the slightest hesitation, then Mrs. Barnard answered gravely and gently:

“ I wish nothing but your own greatest good and happiness. It is a matter for you, and you alone, to decide.”

“But, mother! I don’t want to decide. I want you to do that for me. It’s so big a question—mother, it means my whole life and what I will make of it—I’ve so longed for a college course, I know I can do well in it if I work my hardest—but to have you and father and even Nugent displeased—oh! please tell me what is right, and I’ll obey you; or I’ll try to.”

“Amy, I can but repeat, it is a question for your own self, and none other. But you are too tired and overwrought to consider it justly to-night. Come. Nugent is in the dining room trying to find things. It will save us labor to find them for him. Put everything save the events of the moment out of your mind for the present. The dear boy is more disposed to be helpful to-day than I’ve ever known him. Don’t let us discourage him in his good efforts.”

Amy acted upon her mother’s advice. She hated care and was unaccustomed to it. Tomorrow would be time enough to worry, and she tossed her grave mood aside as lightly as she had her drenched garments.

“’Tisn’t so bad a supper after all. Your

berries are fine and it's good of you, little mother, to open a jar of them so soon, just for us. The bread is nice and, Nugent, red herring are 'tasty'—even of perfumery."

"It was only a little bottle. I broke it getting the box out. It didn't wet through the cover."

"Perfumery and cigarettes mixed——" continued Amy.

"Nugent!" cried the mother, aghast. "You don't smoke?"

"I don't know that it would be a crime if I did," returned the lad, casting ugly glances toward his sister. "All the other fellows do it."

"Indeed? I had supposed you were something a little better than a 'fellow.' You know I disapprove of the habit."

"That's why I keep my trunk locked. Since you've found it out I'll tell you all there is. I'm doing my best to *learn* to smoke, but I'm not succeeding very well. It makes me sick all over, but a fel—I mean I must do something. I'm green enough and awkward enough without being a muff besides."

"Thank you, my son, for your frankness. I

leave the matter in your hands. You are quite old enough to decide for yourself."

Both Amy and her brother looked surprised. Their mother was a woman of quick and firm convictions. They had been used to accepting her opinions and obeying them. Now she was suddenly releasing them from this restraint which they had sometimes felt irksome, and putting them upon their own responsibility, and they found the change not half so pleasant as they had fancied.

"You mean that, mother?"

"Surely."

The lad made a funny grimace and helped himself to another herring. To be put upon his honor in a case like this meant—well, of course, it meant he would give it up.

"Mother, you're a wise woman. You always conquer when you yield."

"Thank you. Shall I cut you another slice of bread?"

"No, thank you. I believe I've really had enough. Amy, I thought you were 'starving.'"

"Past tense. Present tense—satisfied. Now, boy, go put mother in the rocker on the

porch and keep her company while I set these things aside."

"My dear, you would better go yourself. You must be tired and I do not mind——"

"I'd rather, mother, please."

Mrs. Barnard did not contest the point. In ordinary, certainly up till that day, she had willingly and continually put her own comfort behind that of her daughter. Now she felt that it would be well for Amy to experience some of the irksome details of house-keeping. These might help her to that decision regarding the scholarship which was so important and so difficult. Besides, her husband was coming up the street, and she coveted a quiet hour with him and her son. Commonly, as soon as supper was over, Nugent left the house and spent his evenings with some crony or other, in any place except his home. To-night he showed no such inclination and the mother's heart rejoiced.

As Mr. Barnard entered the yard the lad stooped over his mother's chair and said:

"Because you're not a nagger. One whack and done. That's why."

She smiled up at him and answered:

“Thank you. Will you draw up that other rocker for your father?”

The evening was warm and the weary merchant was glad to rest. He accepted the chair with a silent nod and did not speak for some moments. Then he asked sternly:

“Do you know what damage you boys did at that picnic to-day?”

“I don’t understand you, sir.”

“You don’t! You don’t? Is that true, Nugent?”

“Certainly, father;” but the lad’s cheek flamed at the imputation.

“Of course, if you say so. But your name is in the paper as leader of the lot. Here.” Mr. Barnard unfolded a last edition of the *News* and pointed to a garbled account of the accident to Jeannette and the setting loose of Mr. Growden’s colts.

Nugent handed the sheet back to his father with this comment:

“That reporter was in too big a hurry.”

“Did you not let those colts out?”

“I certainly did not. I was fishing——”

“Of course! But, go on. Tell the whole story, as it was, then, not as it is here.”

Nugent told it, omitting his own share in the rescue of Jeannette and imputing it all to Amy; who happening to come out just then insisted that he take his full part of the credit.

“If credit there is in doing what comes perfectly natural and was not dangerous. Jeannette said afterward she could have gotten out by herself, and I dare say she could. Anyway we were none of us in the water more than a minute.”

“Hum. But this colt business is serious. They’ve scattered in all directions and they’re so valuable that unscrupulous persons finding them might run them off, out of the county, for their own profit. Somebody told Mr. Growden about it and he’s called out the Horse Thief Detective Society. Four riders started in as many directions as I came by the office. So much for a little thoughtless fun. Who began it?”

“I don’t know;” and very glad was Nugent that he could say this.

“You don’t know?”

“Only that it was some of the boys.”

Again the son’s heart filled with anger. The repeated questions after he had once stated a

fact seemed an insinuation against his truthfulness, and to escape further cross-examination he picked up his hat and walked away.

“Where now, Nugent?”

“I don’t know.”

“Humph!”

Mrs. Barnard’s face saddened. There was trouble of months’ standing between father and son. The former felt that it was quite time that the lad should settle in some legitimate business and be earning his own livelihood. He had himself been self-sustaining long before he was of Nugent’s age, and the latter’s temporary position as clerk in a second-rate lawyer’s office appeared to the elder man as worse than waste of time. The small wages Nugent received about matched the knowledge he acquired and went mostly for trifles which he could easily have dispensed with. Besides that, the lawyer was often out of town for days at a time, as at present, and this left the young clerk with many idle hours to fill as best he could.

Mr. Barnard watched his son walk away and felt that no more unfortunate father existed. He needed a young, active helper in the

big store, where the control seemed fast slipping away from him, and considered that Nugent should have been this helper. It was with much bitterness that his thoughts vented themselves in grumbling:

“Look at that, will you, for a dutiful boy? He ought to be glad, glad and proud, to be at my right hand, looking after our mutual interests, keeping a keen eye upon that foolish partner of mine. Instead, he says: ‘I hate dry goods. I couldn’t wrap a decent bundle to save me. I’ll never be a mere counter-jumper,’ and so on and so on. Faugh! He makes me sick.”

“Oh! father!”

“Well, Amy? Have I said anything unjust?”

The girl slipped her arm about his neck and stroked his scant hair. He had always petted and indulged her, but she knew in her heart that despite all this her brother was dearer to him than she was. It was her great grief that the two should so misunderstand each other, and she was always, sometimes unwisely, seeking to alter this state of things.

“Father, dear, Nugent isn’t so bad. He’s a

dear brother to me, and I know if he *could* make himself like the things you want him to he would. I know that."

"Anybody can like his duty. His duty."

"Can he? It seems to me that a body's 'duty' is the hatefullest thing in life. The next hatefullest is deciding what that 'duty' is."

"Why, Kitten! Where did you get such a crooked notion into your pretty head?"

"I didn't 'get' it of my own accord. It just came of itself. I wish it had stayed away. But, father, about Nugent. I've found out something Nugent would like to do, or be."

"What's that?"

"A farmer."

"A farmer! Trash. It takes a clever man to be a farmer, these days, and make money at it. I shall never consent to that. The Barnards have been merchants in Warden ever since the place existed. I do not mean that the old name and firm shall lapse just because an eighteen-year-old boy turns rebellious to discipline. I shall send word to-morrow to that pettifogger to look out for another errand boy. Monday, Nugent goes into the store as a clerk

and stays there,—if there's any store left to stay in!"

Neither his wife nor daughter were as shocked by this exclamation as he had expected them to be. He did not realize how often similar expressions had escaped him during the past months, and they attributed this particular outburst to some minor annoyance of the day. One year before Mr. Barnard had taken a stranger into his business, and, from that time, both the business and Mr. Barnard himself had been also changed. His own old, safe, conservative methods found no favor with the stranger, who was headstrong, ambitious, and unscrupulous. The former small stock of reliable goods was displaced by a large one of meretricious articles which, sold at low figures, brought a temporary prosperity, but eventually injured the firm's reputation.

All this had worked upon Mr. Barnard's mind till he became unable to sleep, grew irritable, and despondent, and like many another sorely tried person vented upon those dearest to him the vexation that was caused by others to whom he dared not so express himself.

"Oh! father, dear! There's always been

'Barnard's' in Warden, and always the best house of the town. I reckon there always will be, too."

"I'd like to know how, since Nugent is the only son and refuses to do his duty. But that's over. He's a minor. He shall obey me. Good-night, Amy. You'd better go to your room. Your old father's cross to-night, and you must forget that in thinking over your triumphs of last night. There, child, kiss me and go."

It was the dismissal she desired, for, indeed, she wanted to do a lot of "thinking," though not quite of that sort her father had suggested. Kneeling down by her open window she rested her arms upon the sill and looked out on the lovely, peaceful scene. Even the unnatural light and shade of the electric lamp seemed, for once, to blend harmoniously with the moonlight, and the few street sounds which rose to her were pleasant ones. The distant tinkle of a mandolin, the nearer music of a male quartette passing homeward from some practice, and the chime of the cathedral bells soothed and strengthened her.

How long she knelt there she did not know;

but she roused after a time as the gate clanged noisily shut and she heard her brother come slouching up the path.

“Nugent! And it must be very late! I’ve been asleep, for I’m stiff and cold and things look queer, as when one just awakes. Surely that is Nugent, but what ails him? How odd he acts! As if he couldn’t see, or—he must be ill! Poor Nugent!”

She sped down the stairs in her soft bedroom slippers, cautiously opened the street door, and hurried to her brother’s side; to slip her arm around him and peer into his face anxiously:

“Oh! Nugent, are you ill? What is it, dear?”

“Ill? No. Nobody’s ill—I know of. ’Less you. Dizzy. Head’s awful dizzy. That’s all.”

Poor Amy! She dropped his hand that she had clasped so tenderly as if it struck her. In all her sheltered life she had had no experience like this, but she comprehended instantly. His breath, his manner, these did not belong to Nugent as she knew him. They must never be his again. Never, never, never!

“Come with me, dear, softly. Mother is

tired. I hope she's asleep. Come softly, softly."

"Good girl, Amy. Honor girl, Amy. Life-saver, Amy. Amy—Amy—Am——"

She stopped his lips with her trembling fingers, whispering: "Hush! dear. You must not, must not wake my mother. Hush—hush!"

CHAPTER VI

THE ISLAND

EVERYBODY was late the next morning, even Rebecca, who came limping into the kitchen fully an hour behind her usual hour. Mrs. Barnard was trying to get the breakfast forward, but one glance into her mistress' face told the old servant that this was a "sick-headache day," and that working over a hot range was not going to help matters.

"There, honey, you go 'long lie down again. My skyattic's worse 'an common, but never mind. I'll get the master's coffee ready in a jerk. Miss Amy's not up yet, I reckon. Well, let her sleep. She deserves, being she's the smartest girl in Warden town and the bravest. All our alley is talking how she took the prizes and saved the other girl from drownding. You go, honey. Sure you're not fit for anything here."

Mrs. Barnard went, for Rebecca's words

were true enough. At that moment she had but one desire—a darkened room and a cool pillow. A passing regret that Amy should not have been down to make the father's meal less lonely, was banished by the memory of how hard the girl had been studying and how tired she really was.

Mr. Barnard swallowed his half-cooked food in haste and in a moody silence, answering not at all, save by an inarticulate grunt or a curt nod, when the privileged Becky began a recital of the morning's gossip as she had heard it, coming along the way. Sometimes the old woman's garrulousness had amused him, but nothing did so on that unfortunate occasion, and she soon ceased her efforts. But she watched him down the path, thinking:

“There he goes withouten a good-by from nobody. Looks 's if he hadn't had a mite of sleep, neither, and him the bread-earner for the whole family. Hm-m. But I reckon things 'll be brighter by dinner-time. Now I'll call them two childern.”

Amy roused with that sense of guilt that sometimes follows oversleeping and exclaimed with keen regret:

“ Oh! I meant to be up so early this morning. Is breakfast ready? Is Nugent down yet? ”

“ That Nugent won't be down this hour, I reckon, the way he growled when I called him. Your father's eat and gone and your mother's back in bed with a headache. My skyattic's so bad this morning I 'lowed I didn't know I'd ever get here. Hurry, honey, that's a good girl. I wouldn't woke you, but seems like there ought to be somebody 'round lookin' after things less 'an old Becky. It's going to be dreadful hot. Your mother overdone, yesterday, that's why she's laid up now. She ain't as strong as a lion, your mother ain't.”

With this remark Becky made her painful way back to the kitchen and Amy hurried through the cold dip with which she began each day, dressing afterward with unusual haste, yet dreading the moment when she should meet her brother.

“ How can we look each other in the eyes, after last night? And why do I feel as if it were I, not he, who did that dreadful thing? Why do I feel as if the blame of what happened were mine? ”

But she need not have feared the meeting, at least for the present. Nugent did not appear and Amy ate her warmed-over food with scant relish and a deep sense of the dreariness of things in general.

“Doesn’t seem as if this were the same bright room we had our jolly supper in. Oh! why can’t everybody do right and be happy! By all odds I should be the happiest graduate of all our class, but I doubt if there’s another girl as sad as I am this morning. Well, thinking of trouble doesn’t mend it. I’ll go see mother, for a minute, then help poor old Becky if I can. After that, I must go somewhere quite by myself and think.”

There was little to be done for Mrs. Barnard save to persuade her to take a cup of tea and to insure her a few hours of quiet; and her consent that Amy might go for a long walk was readily given. Afterward, the girl saw that the parlor was in order, attended to her own room, and carefully avoided the dining room where the table still waited—and was destined to wait—for the delinquent Nugent. Then she sought the kitchen and placed her mother in Rebecca’s faithful care.

“I’m going out, Becky. I feel restless and I can’t stay still here. It’s so lonesome and dismal; but I’ll be all right again when I come home. If any of the girls call don’t tell them where I am, though, of course, you wouldn’t know. Good-bye. I hope your rheumatism will be better quick.”

Rebecca sat down in the sunshine of the kitchen door and watched her favorite walk away.

“Sure she’s the prettiest and the stylistest girl in the place. Wears them plain white dresses of hers like they was the satins and laces of a queen. She certainly does. See her hold her head that way, now? I tell you, old Becky, your young miss is the nicest, smartest girl, and obligingest young lady ever you saw. Yes, sir, that’s so.”

But if Amy’s head was held high it was from habit, not her present mood. Her heart was heavy and perplexed and her feeling was one of desire to get free from the unwelcome trouble.

“If I could only run away from myself! Just two days ago and everything was so lovely. That beautiful Commencement, my

‘honors,’ my flowers—it did not seem as if there could be a care in this world. Only two days and I feel a regular Methuselah. What shall I do? Either way I look there’s nothing but perplexity.”

Almost unconsciously, Amy had turned into the path across the fields which formed a short-cut toward that part of the river where John Gay lived. She had not meant to go there just yet, but finding herself on the way, kept on with the determination to win him over to her side of the question that worried her; her side being the conviction that her duty lay college-ward.

“Next to my own family ‘Uncle John’ loves me better than anybody. He would miss me if I went and that’s one reason why. Besides, he never had an education, and I suppose sees little use for such in a girl’s life. Oh! I think he’ll change his mind after he’s listened to me. Queer, anyway, that I should care so much whether he does or not. Yet, maybe, not so queer after all. I don’t suppose there’s anybody, man, woman, or child, in Warden, who knows and doesn’t love that sunshiny old man. I’ve often watched the faces brighten

along the way when we've been walking together and met people. I love him, too, and he must approve. He must!"

The very thought of the fisherman seemed to lift a weight from Amy's spirits and she tripped over the rest of the road with a light step and eager haste. When she came in sight of the gray cottage she whistled a gay little salute which her old friend promptly recognized and answered, by appearing in his doorway.

"Good-morning, child. You're late."

"Late? Did you expect me?"

"Surely."

"Nobody told me."

"Maybe not. I knew you'd come, though. Now you're here let's be off?"

"Where?"

"To the Island."

"Oh! are you going there? How charming!"

"For a spell. I'm in an Island fit and 'lowed you'd be, too."

"I am. It's the very place to think in, or on. Which boat?"

Old John pointed toward a snowy rowboat, that rocked gently beside his little wharf,

and smiled. The boat was new and was daintily lettered in blue and gold: "The Amy."

"Why, what?"

"Step in and try it, child. It's yours. I thought you'd have time to use it now you've done school."

"Mine? From whom? My father?"

"No, indeed. Somebody a deal older than your father."

"You? Is it you, Uncle John?"

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"Oh! you darling man!"

Away around the fisherman's neck went the girl's arms and a hearty kiss touched either grizzled cheek. "Thank you, thank you, thank you! What a splendid, generous present! It's too much. I can't——"

"Tut, tut, Amy! Leave that part to me. Your part is to accept it, step into it, row me over to the Island, and then do as you please. I've got a loaf of bread in my basket and a few potatoes to roast in the ashes. You can make a fire while I catch a fish or two. We'll have dinner together and *I* shall like that, I can tell you. 'Tisn't every day in the week an old

fisher body can dine with a graduated heroine. No, indeedy."

"Oh! You funny Uncle John!"

"Step in, missy."

"Only too gladly, and wish it might be for a dinner, too, as you say. But mother is ill with one of her headaches——"

"And won't expect you back. A little shaver was just going up the hill as I saw you coming down and I sent a bit of a scrawl to the good lady. Told her not to look for you home till you got there. I'd have you in care. 'Tisn't the first time you've had a picnic with me and I mean mine shall turn out better than the one you managed yesterday."

"Or mismanaged—in part. Do you suppose those colts will ever be found?"

"Surely. Like Bo-Peep's sheep they'll all come home and bring their tails behind them."

"Father was worried. He blamed Nugent, though, truly, Nugent had not the slightest thing to do with that business. Nugent was just splendid yesterday——"

The sister paused so suddenly that John looked at her keenly. Then he said, with a curious accent:

“I’m very glad to hear it. Now step in, please, and try your oars. I’m anxious to know if they’re right weight and see how you handle them. You haven’t had much practice since last summer.”

But she had not forgotten the art. She loved the water almost as dearly as old John did, and the very fact of being upon its placid surface seemed to reflect a placidity upon her own troubled mind. The little craft had been fashioned with a loving hand and adapted to its prospective owner’s strength according to the builder’s best judgment and skill. The result was that Amy was able to propel it toward the Island in the middle of the wide river by so slight an exertion that, after a few strokes, she exclaimed:

“Why, this isn’t rowing at all! It’s just floating. It tires me so little I could sing.”

“So do, child, and give the old man pleasure.”

Amy’s voice was sweet and clear, but neither trained nor powerful. To the fisherman, who loved it, its music was like that of the birds, and sitting motionless with chin resting on his hands and his eyes closed he listened to it now



“ Why, this isn't rowing at all ! ” — Page 88.

in keenest delight. He continued thus until the first gay melody altered somewhat and a minor tone crept into the tender voice.

Then he opened his eyes and said crisply:

“Time to stop, now. You’re running too far north of the landing, and not minding the first duty on hand—to make a good finish of a fair beginning.”

“Why, I didn’t see we were so near the Island. I was thinking of other things.”

Gay’s Island, as it was called, was a half-rocky, half-wooded bit of land in mid-stream, and the private property of Uncle John. It had been the home of his forbears, fishermen all, and the house where they had lived still remained. But it was big and empty now, and fast falling into a sort of decay. John’s pride was too great to allow its utter ruin, even though he could not see what use the building would ever be to anybody; so he would put an occasional day’s labor on the ancient structure, and his present errand was to repair the roof, whence a few shingles had been blown in a recent gale. The nearest he ever felt to sadness was when he entered the deserted building which had been a home in his boyhood; and

sadness he considered a fault in a world so full of love and happiness.

“There! Didn’t I do that pretty well, for one who’s out of practice as you admit?” demanded Amy, as, having safely moored the other “Amy” she sprang to the beach and fastened the painter to its stake.

“Fairly. Fairly. You’ll do better by autumn. Now we’ll carry the traps up to the kitchen and then I’ll get to work.”

There was a big, old-fashioned fireplace in the kitchen and a few ancient utensils to use in it. A rather rusty iron tea-kettle hung on the crane and a Dutch oven leaned against the bricks. There, also, hung a heavy iron grid-iron, with a long handle, and standing upon four legs when in use, which it bothered Amy to lift; but which over a bed of wood coals would broil a fish to perfection.

“Oh! this is delightful! What a day we shall have. Thank you, Uncle John, almost as much for bringing me here as for your beautiful gift.”

“Enough said, missy. The thanks are on my side. Let’s see. Here’s kindling a-plenty, and I’ll just step out and bring in an armful of

wood. Most obliging wood-cutter in the world, the wind is. Never come over but I find enough branches broken down to keep all the fires I need. Economical, too, for wood-cutter wind takes none but the dead and worthless stuff. Same's them wore-out shingles. They'll make a terrible hot fire to start with and that's the best use for them. Like some folks: terrible rush and bluster, but no substance. Now you, Amy, child, what's this I hear about you? Are you going to turn rusher, too, after book-learning, and forget that slow and steady burning does the most good?"

"Uncle John, you've heard all about it, of course. You were at my Commencement. Isn't it an honor that's offered me? Isn't it a splendid chance to get the education I want?"

"Yes. Surely."

"Then why don't you like it?"

"In your case, *in—your—case*, little Amy, too much like dried shingles."

"You don't believe in the higher culture of women. Why don't you?"

"I do. I do, child, with all my heart."

"But you don't like colleges."

“ Mistaken again, missy. I do like colleges—for some people. I wish I was rich enough, no, I mean if I was rich enough I’d build one right here in Warden for poor and ambitious youngsters to use free of cost. But it isn’t needed or I’d have been given the cash to build it.”

“ Why not for me? ”

“ There are homes first, child. If ever God set a girl in a home where ’twas her plain duty to stay, you’re that girl. Staying there needn’t end that ‘ higher culture ’ business as I see. Indeed, it will but make it more certain. Think well, little girl, think well before you let ambition run away from duty.”

“ That horrid word again. I—hate it! I’d like to banish it out of the dictionary and out of the world! ”

“ Hm-m. Well, it would be a dismal old world, indeed, if gentle ‘ duty ’ left it. She’s the very sunshine of life, missy, and don’t you berate the sunshine. Now, I’ve preached my little sermon—as I expected to. I’m going aloft to patch up that old roof. That’s my immediate duty and I like it. Run along off into the woods and be happy. I saw a few late

swamp-pinks on that burnt-over piece, and you know what this Island's strawberries are. I'll be about an hour shingling, then I'll catch a fish and we'll have dinner. Pity there wasn't somebody else to enjoy it with us. Nugent, now, for instance."

"Nugent!" thought Amy. "The very last one I want to see. How can I meet him? He'll know I know, and yet I don't want to show I know and—oh, dear! That sounds exactly like Edna. I wish I were more like her. She never worries about anything."

Amy resolved to do no more worrying, herself, for the present, and, taking a basket she found in the cupboard, set off for her berries. They were plentiful and delicious, with that piquant flavor which only the wild fruit keeps, and she grew enthusiastic over them. The belated pinks, too, seemed to have a depth of color and perfume that the earlier ones had not known. The sky was cloudless, and though outside the wood the heat was intense, beneath the big trees there was coolness and comfort.

Such coolness and comfort, in fact, that the girl soon yielded to its influence and curled herself under a dense pine for "forty winks."

“It’s absurd to be sleepy in the morning,” was her last waking thought; forgetting how broken had been her last night’s rest. She woke with a start and the sense of intrusion. At the foot of the wooded bank somebody had beached a boat; and a tall, rough-looking person was coming straight toward her, though his eyes were cast down, and he stumbled along like one too absorbed in his own thoughts to note where his feet are set.

CHAPTER VII

A DAY AND ITS ENDING

“WHY—Nugent!”

“Amy!”

There was dismay in both voices, but the lad's shamefaced manner roused his sister's pitying tenderness. She could not bear it that he should drop his eyes before her, and one glance took in all the suggestive details of his appearance. His hair was unbrushed, his shoes unlaced, his necktie missing. He seemed to have gotten into the first clothing convenient and in great haste; for this was wholly a different Nugent from that she was accustomed to. The other Nugent had been awkward, indeed, but never unclean nor unkempt. There was dirt on the pretty madras shirt of which he had been so proud, and the buckle of his belt was broken. He looked like one who had fallen or been

rolled in the street, and an instant indignation against some unknown tempters made her fierce in her brother's defense. She became as glad as she had been afraid to meet him.

“How did you know we were wishing for you? Uncle John and I?”

The boy raised his eyes but glanced anywhere save at his sister's face. “What do you mean?”

“Oh! you don't know, of course. That's one of Uncle John's boats, I see, but you've come round the north side of the Island, while we came straight from his house, south. He's given me a splendid 'graduation gift.' The dearest, prettiest little rowboat, all white and clean like snow, and with my name on it in blue and gold. Of course, he built it himself and with the greatest care. It's a beauty. Come and see it. I've not really looked it over myself, yet. We're going to have dinner here, in the old house or on the grass before it. He's brought bread and potatoes, and there's always a jar of butter in the cellar here. He's going to take a fish and I'm to broil it on the old gridiron. It'll be a deal jollier picnic than yesterday, he claims. Come on. Aren't these

lovely berries? Do eat some. There's more than we can use at dinner."

Something rose in Nugent's throat and choked him. There is no suffering keener than that of a well-trained boy when he wakes to the fact of his own first downfall. It was the old story of idleness, wild companions, and a passing anger against the legitimate restraints of life; but it was a story bitterly new to Nugent Barnard, and one which he believed to have left an ineffaceable stain upon him. He had slunk breakfastless from his home, thankful to escape for the time being the accusing eyes of mother and sister. He had gone by a remote by-way to John Gay's wharf, and appropriated one of the several boats always found tied there, and which John kept for the convenience of his many patrons. He had pulled himself over the most unused course to the Island, expecting to find it in solitude, and had plunged into the deepest part of the wood, to recover there, if he could, some part of his lost self-respect. And he had come directly upon the very person he most wished to avoid!

Nugent had all of his sister's directness with little of her tact. His hesitation lasted but an

instant; then he advanced and laid his hands on Amy's shoulders, demanding fiercely:

"Did you tell mother?"

"No. Nor never will."

His eyes were not averted now and his grip on her flesh hurt her.

"Somebody will."

"Then let it be yourself."

"I can't. It would break her heart."

"No. It would not even bend it," smiling a trifle sadly; "it would only strengthen it."

"What do you mean? How dare you say that?"

"I judge her by myself. I never loved you half so well as I love you this minute. What is my love compared to hers?"

The lump in his throat forced the moisture to his eyes, and he passed his hand across them impatiently. His gaze dropped from the girl's moved face to the ground at her feet, and his clutch upon her shoulders relaxed.

"Amy, you're a trump."

"Thanks. Do eat some berries."

"In a minute. I'm half-starved. I had no breakfast. But first, I want to say something. Will you believe it?"

“Aren't you a Barnard?”

“Yes. They don't lie, even though my father——”

“He didn't mean it, Nugent. I fear poor father has more anxieties than are good for him. He is tired and worn. I can't remember when he has taken a vacation, even a short one. We must make him go away this summer.”

“The Barnards are no more easily made to do things than they are to lie. These berries are perfectly delicious.”

He had seated himself on the ground beside her now, and was fast emptying her basket. He often declared that he was always hungry, but the thirst and craving of that morning were something horribly new to his experience.

“Amy, it shall never happen again.”

“No, Nugent, I hope not.”

“You needn't say ‘hope.’ I tell you it *shall not*. I'm a Barnard.”

“And will keep your word.”

“I'll make a clean breast of it to father and mother. I'll accept what they impose. I've disgraced them and I shan't complain.”

Amy smiled angelically, but said nothing.

Only picked out the plumpest berry she could find and thrust it between his lips.

“You see, girlie, it’s been awful dismal. You’re always at your books or with those chattering girls. Mother is always busy and father glum. He doesn’t approve of me in any single respect; and it’s not so encouraging a thing as you might fancy to feel one’s self continually in disfavor. I don’t see any light ahead, either. If you go away it will be worse than ever, for you were home at supper time, at least. Oh! I’m sick of life!”

“At eighteen! and down yonder’s that blessed old John in love with life at seventy! There’s something wrong somewhere in such a state of things. The case should be reversed.”

“He read me a lecture on duty once. He thinks I should go into the store. I’d rather die, I believe.”

“You don’t mean that.”

“Maybe not. I don’t know. I do know that the thought of being shut up between those cloth-laden counters, day in and day out, is enough to drive me crazy. I hate it. I couldn’t do it. But he, old John, pays no at-

tention to my notions. Says we 'aren't flung down in life like bags out of a wagon, hap-hazard.' That 'there's a Hand arranging everything, and that to believe it, and accept it quietly, is to be perfectly happy.' I suppose it is for him. That's his nature. Mine isn't so tame. It doesn't seem to me that there's much show of any wise Hand in the arrangement of my affairs. I could manage them better for myself, I fancy."

"It does seem so, sometimes; but, Nugent, *could* you? If you could do just what you wished, what would it be?"

"I'd be handsome and popular and clever. I'd fill my pockets with money. I'd take father out of that old store and mother out of her stupid house and send them a-travel. I'd give you—hello! John's whistling for you. I guess I won't go down. Don't tell him I was here. I can slip away as I came and he'll never know."

"But *I* shall know. Do you suppose I'll enjoy my picnic dinner without you? Nonsense. Here. Take my comb. Never mind it if it is a girl's, made to hold up a few stray hairs. You've plenty of stray hairs yourself,

and it will answer at a pinch. You can wash in the pool below the spring. Here's a pin to fasten your collar. Tie up your shoes. Be a good Nugent and you shall have the best part of the fish when it's cooked."

"I can't. I have a dim remembrance that old John Gay passed me on the street last night. Somebody did. Somebody took hold of me and shook me and set me on the road home. Somebody went with me as far as the corner of our yard. I'm afraid it was John. If it was——"

"He'll be the more glad to see you here and thus. Oh! I hope it was he. He's a true, true friend. He blames nobody for any wrong-doing."

"He blamed me all right! I remember somebody saying things that cut like a whip. I'd rather not go down."

"Nugent Barnard? Where's your manhood? Now you stop this nonsense! You made my heart ache last night. Did you enjoy the performance? Do you want to make it keep on aching? Then come down and eat my dinner. See if a 'sweet girl graduate' and an 'honor girl' can't cook good food."

She stood up and her brother also rose.

“Amy, you’re—you’re AI! I’ll come.”

The fisherman had the fish ready for her and was just burying the well-washed potatoes in the ashes. He had made a fire that had now burned itself down to coals, and Amy set about the cooking with a will. She made her old friend seat himself in a “Boston rocker,” one of the few ancient bits of furniture left in the house; and, for want of a better, spread the deal table with a newspaper “cloth.” The knives and two-tined forks belonged, like the rocker, to the days of John Gay’s childhood, though articles of the same pattern served him daily still, and he saw nothing amiss in them if these younger folk did find them a trifle awkward. There were a few cups and plates, and as soon as Nugent appeared he was handed a big blue pitcher and bidden:

“Go back, boy, and fill that at the ‘fairies’ well.’ ”

John’s welcome had been equally commonplace; merely the greeting:

“Hello, Nugent. Just in time. I was expecting you. That’s why I hooked so big a fish.”

When the lad had gone away with the pitcher Amy asked:

“How came you to be expecting him, Uncle John?”

“I knew he was in trouble. Same as you were. Ever since you were knee-high you’ve brought your troubles over here, haven’t you? Ought to be called the ‘Refuge,’ ’stead of Gay’s Island. Now, go on with your broiling. Don’t let that creature scorch. If there’s anything I find hard to swallow it’s a burned fish. By the way, missy, you look a deal more like Amy Barnard than you did when you went sighing up the hill.”

“Do I?”

“Yes, indeed. I reckon you did a lot of wise thinking up there.”

“Uncle John, I did not one bit. I meant to, but I put it off. I picked the berries and I went to sleep. Then Nugent came——”

“And you forgot your own worries in comforting his. Little woman, let me tell you, you’ve found the secret of a happy life!”

Such a day as they made of it! When the dinner was over and done the old man grew talkative, and told them stories of his early

days that set them laughing continually. They had heard the same tales many times, but were not now in a mood to be critical. Sitting under the shade of the great oaks before the house door, with a cool breeze blowing from the river, and the only sounds the whistle of a passing steamer or the rumble of a railway train along the distant bank, it seemed to all three as if care and perplexity were dreams and this sweet serenity the real and only life.

But the day waned. The wooded Island threw its shadows across to the eastern shore, the night calls of the birds sounded in the tree-tops, and the fisherman rose.

“That unwelcome Miss Duty is after us again, Amy. Time to go home, look after the mother’s headache and the father’s comfort. Time for my chickens to be fed, and those fish you’ve caught, Nugent, to be put on ice if you’d have them nice for breakfast. Well, that’s all right. If our good times never ended we’d not care for them at all. Besides, you have now the *Amy*, and, though you’ve never waited for it yet, I’ll do what I read in the papers sometimes, give you ‘the freedom of’ the Island. Come. Let’s be going.”

Nugent was made to get into the boat with Amy, and the old man took that which Nugent had brought and rowed alongside back to his own wharf. There they parted with good-nights, and promises of frequent visits, and their old friend watched the brother and sister climb the field-path over the hill with loving eyes and earnest wishes.

“ May she choose right, that little maid. It’s a hard spot she’s come to, and a sharp turn in her young life. Two roads lead from it, and both seem straight. But, standing on the top of my seventy years, one of them looks terrible crooked to my old eyes. Well, the Hand is leading. I can trust her to It.”

Mrs. Barnard was on the porch to greet them when they reached home. The long, quiet day had cured her headache, and Becky had been relieved of any midday meal, since Mr. Barnard lunched downtown. The windows were open, the table neatly laid, and all in readiness for the father’s return.

“ Come, Nugent. Let’s hurry and dress. I feel untidy after lounging on the rocks all day, and I’m sure you look so!” cried Amy, thus diverting her mother’s surprise at her brother’s

careless appearance. For even the loan of a side-comb and a pin for the buttonless, tieless collar, had not quite made good the delinquencies of the lad's attire.

But they were both fresh and dainty when at last Mr. Barnard came slowly up the street, and, clustered about their mother's chair, were rehearsing the happenings of the day. Or Amy was so rehearsing, for Nugent was now again oppressed by the knowledge of last night's shame, and the necessity he felt of telling his mother at the first opportunity. He kept silence, therefore, and left the talk to Amy, though his manner toward Mrs. Barnard was full of an unusual tenderness. Had the daughter guessed aright? Would that gentle face turn toward him with harshness or forgiveness, when his confession was made?

As her father passed through the gate Amy ran to meet him, and, slipping her arm within his, walked with him toward the house. But the warmth of her greeting was chilled by his indifference, he seeming hardly conscious of what he heard or spoke.

Mrs. Barnard hastily rose and stood waiting, her face paling and flushing, and the pain re-

turning to her temples with redoubled force. She was one who could toil ceaselessly, almost tirelessly, for those she loved, but was stricken into helplessness by anxiety or suspense.

“Why, Charles! What is it? What’s happened? Quick—please tell me!”

Apparently he did not hear her; yet at the top of the steps he paused, and with uplifted finger fixedly regarded Nugent as he said in a tone unlike his own:

“For all these generations, in love and honor, father and son, shoulder to shoulder, and at the end—*disgrace!*”

CHAPTER VIII

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

“COME, Charles,” said Mrs. Barnard quietly, and led the way indoors, he following with that absent manner which showed how troubled he was. But when she rang for dinner to be served he begged:

“Excuse me, Gertrude, please. I couldn’t eat to-night. No, wife, I’m not ill; I’m merely—busy. There, don’t look so anxious. If it will satisfy you better let Becky bring a cup of tea and a roll to the library. I’ve some writing to do and I’d rather be alone.”

“Very well, dear. If you wish; though a good, wholesome meal would help you more than you think.”

He shook his head, kissed her, and she felt herself dismissed. She knew that in good time he would explain everything, and tried to be patient till that time should come. But when she entered the dining room she tried to throw

off her own depression and to be bright for her children's sake. Only Amy met her, however, and the girl's eyes were full of trouble as she raised them appealingly to her mother's.

"Where's Nugent, Amy?"

"I—I don't know, mother."

"He should not keep us waiting. Call him, please."

"I don't think it will do any good. I don't think he will come."

"Why not? Of course he'll come and take his father's place to carve for us. Just speak to him, won't you?"

"I heard him run upstairs and down again. Then the gate shut hard and—I guess he's gone—somewhere."

Mrs. Barnard lost patience. Rebecca had reported Nugent's neglect of his breakfast, and now he was absenting himself from dinner.

"He should not be so thoughtless and keep us waiting. Doubtless he saw some of his mates passing and went out to them. I'll go myself and call him back."

Amy did not follow nor say more. She knew that her brother had received his father's reproof as relating to his escapade of the night

before, guessing that Mr. Barnard had heard the story discussed in the town. Nugent was no coward. He had meant to tell his parents himself, but he had already suffered much from his own remorse, and he resented being judged without a hearing. At first she had agreed with this notion; but she now saw that her father's bitterness was only the familiar one, pertaining to that "business" which was "going to ruin" because the last of the Barnards would not assist in saving it. Everything was in a muddle and life looked dreary enough.

Presently Mrs. Barnard returned.

"He is nowhere in sight. It is very strange that he should behave so. Please take your father's place, Amy, and do the best you can with the joint."

It was new work for the schoolgirl, but her awkwardness proved fortunate in one sense, for she could make fun of her own efforts and in some measure lessen the discomfort of the moment. Both she and her mother were glad when the meal was over and they could leave the table, which had been made so inviting, and escape Rebecca's grumbling.

“Huh! Don’t know what use there is trying to fix victuals tasty if nobody’s going to eat ’em. Them rolls so light they nigh flew out the window ’fore I could clap ’em in the oven, and only two touched, and them not half eat. Well, well; I hope something ’ll take a turn ’fore sun-up, ’less there ain’t much use of old Becky hobbling down here, cookin’ for folks won’t eat. Don’t eat, can’t live. No, sir.”

“I hate to leave you alone, Amy, but I’m going to sit with your father if he’ll have me. Rebecca, put some dinner on the hot-water plate for Nugent, please, and leave it on the range. I hope you’ll be on time to-morrow morning, for Mr. Barnard likes to get an early start. Good-night.”

This was mutual dismissal, and both daughter and servant so understood it. They exchanged surprised glances, then Amy laughed:

“It’s so doleful it seems absurd, doesn’t it, Becky? I feel as if I were a naughty little girl being punished. Don’t you fret about the dinner. There’s so much the less to cook to-morrow. The roast was barely touched, and father always likes it cold, anyway. I’m going

up to my room and watch by my window. If Nugent comes in I'll come down and serve him myself. Good-night. I guess mother means there's nothing more for you to do, after the dish-washing. I hope your 'skyattic' will keep away from you to-night."

"Bless you, honey! and I hope every sort of trouble stay away from your good heart, so I do. Good-night, and dream of angels all the dark time."

But as Amy passed the outer door she saw her mother sitting there alone, and paused.

"Do you want me, mother?"

"Surely. I always want you."

"Father——"

"Was busy writing. I felt my presence only disturbed him."

The girl drew a cushion to her mother's feet and dropped upon it. Resting her head on the arm of the chair she asked:

"May I talk to you, motherkin?"

"Yes, indeed."

"About that scholarship?"

"Certainly."

"It's such a hard, hard question. I can see that you will miss me and maybe Nugent, too.

Father doesn't seem to notice either way, whether I'm around or not."

"That's a mistake. He is preoccupied and anxious. All the same you are very dear to him. He is well aware of your presence and its cheer."

"It's the one chance of my life for an education. If I don't take it I shall lose it forever."

"I understand your thought."

"Don't you agree with it?"

"Education does not lie along one line. There is a culture of life and love as well as of intellect."

"But I love study! Learning—to know things—I love it, I love it! And there is so much to learn. If I did the best I could I should only be beginning."

"That's the beautiful side of it. It is limitless."

"If I don't take the scholarship, and, indeed, I have accepted it, I couldn't go in any other way. I didn't think whether we were poor or rich till this last year, but I see now there's not much money. You could not afford to send me."

"No, dear, it would be impossible."

"Don't you think higher education is right?"

"I think it is what God means for every one of us."

"Then why do you oppose it for me?"

Mrs. Barnard laughed. "Suppose I answer you in Yankee fashion, by another question: Why do you accuse me of opposing it?"

"You say nothing. Or what you do say makes me think you do not approve. You look so queer and sad when it is mentioned."

"I wish to be as absolutely impartial as I can. But, Amy, put yourself in my place for a moment. Up till now you have been so absorbed in study that you have been like a boarder in your home. I have approved of this fully, because I wanted you to have all the book-training which was needful—*needful* for you. But I look with misgiving toward a further absence of four years. You will become a stranger to us and will find the narrow life of home irksome. You have never felt that you could teach; and while I do most cordially approve the fullest course of study suit-

able—suitable—for any and every woman, I do not see that a college course is essential in all cases. There. I have said more than I intended. I have shown you one side and you can look upon the other. I do not wish to influence you. Each individual soul knows its own necessities. Whatever your decision I will uphold it faithfully and do my best for you. Now, dear, my head is bothering me again. Early as it is, I think I will go to my room. Give Nugent his dinner when he comes in, and good-night.”

Amy did not go to her room. It now seemed to her that to be shut within four walls would suffocate her. The perplexity had all come back, and she felt again that either course she chose would be the wrong one.

“I cannot give it up. I cannot. It would be my bitter regret all my life if I did. Always, when I felt my ignorance of any subject, it would come to me that this was all my own fault. I do suppose that mother hates to have me leave her; yet, after a time she would get used to it and not mind. At the end of the course I could teach, even if I did not like it, and so earn money to help them if this ‘busi-

ness' keeps on failing. Yet—if I stay at home——”

But there opened an endless vista of argument through which Amy threaded her way as best she could. The dull routine of domestic life as opposed to the fun and competition of a college class; the not too inspiring society of three people whom she knew, or fancied she did, through and through, in place of the stimulus of a brilliant multitude; and, at the end, on the one hand the same economy and dependence instead of self-support and independence.

Poor Amy! She had come to the darkest, most difficult hour of her life. If her mother had realized quite how hard and difficult decision seemed to her beloved child it is probable that she would have cast the weight of her opinion to settle the vexed question. As it was, the daughter fought her battle all alone, save for that Leader of whom, just then, she thought only that He was far away and careless of her need.

The evening passed. Nugent did not come, and Amy grew very tired. After a while she slept, and when she woke she was as refreshed

as if she had rested a whole night in her own cosy bed.

“Why, what is this. The worriment is completely gone. How could it ever have existed? There is but one way, and that so simple!”

The relief and happiness were so great she would have liked to sing, only for waking her mother, whom she trusted to be sound asleep by then. She did not think that Nugent had come home, yet even that did not disturb her.

“He’ll come after a while. It will be all right. Everything will come right now. My father shall forget his worries; my mother—ah! what a wise body she is, to go away and leave me to myself. I am so glad, so glad. Now I’ll lock up. If my boy doesn’t appear before I’ve finished he’ll try his old trick of throwing pebbles against my window. Then I’ll come down and let him in.”

There were no pebbles thrown and Amy’s sleep was deep and unbroken even by the dreams of angels which Becky had wished for her. She woke early, put her room in order as soon as she had finished dressing, then crossed to Nugent’s “den.” He had two small

chambers for his own use, the outer one, which he called his "den," being a receptacle for all sorts of treasures dear to a boy's heart, from fish-hooks to books, and a place wherein to welcome his mates without fear of damage to the finer furnishings below stairs. His bedroom opened off the "den," and the windows of both stood open.

"Nugent!"

There was no answer.

"That's queer. Either he must have got up very early or he hasn't been in. Nugent! Nugent!"

When to her repeated summons there was still no response, she crossed the "den" and peeped into the bedroom. The bed was as smooth as if it had just been made up, and she then knew that her brother had stayed out all night.

"Well, maybe that's all right, though I don't remember his ever having done so before. The boys sleep here sometimes, but Nugent likes his own home at night. He is so shy in strange houses. Oh! I know! He's gone to Uncle John's! Or so I think. Now for my new 'career.'"

Lingering for a few moments to put away some scattered belongings of the absent lad, she surveyed the "den" with a critical eye.

"He needs another rocker. I've two in my room, a big one and a little one. 'Tisn't good form to rock, anyway, so the little one will be sufficient to practice bad manners in. I wonder if that Boston woman was right who tested her friends' good breeding by offering them a rocker, and then deciding for or against them as they used it. For my part, I think she was horrid mean to set such a temptation before them. I notice that my mother rarely rocks, yet she finds the shape of our old 'Plymouths' mighty comfortable to her tired back. Yes, Nugent shall have my pretty rattan. I'll put fresh ribbons in it, if I've money in my purse to buy them, and I'll choose them a deep rose-pink, just the color of his 'Beauties,' if I can match them. I'll do—well, I'll do a lot of things, Nugent, my boy, before this summer's over! See if I don't. Now for below stairs."

Mr. Barnard was in the library as she went along the hall, reading the morning paper. It was his habit to go down and unlock the doors before the rest of the family appeared or

Rebecca came from her own cottage. He looked up at the sound of his daughter's footsteps and greeted her with a pleased surprise.

"Why, Amy! So early and so bright?"

"Yes, father. But you're always the earliest, let me try as I will. I hope you're rested this morning."

"Some. Rested some, child. There is a rest that comes with the acceptance of the inevitable. One can but do one's best, after all. There, little girl, I think I hear Rebecca at the kitchen door."

It was great relief to find her father's mood calmer if not much brighter than on the previous evening; and she augured from it that he had found a way out of his own perplexities even as she had.

"Dear father! I'd have liked to stay and talk with him a bit, but he seemed to prefer his paper. Well, I suppose the worries of a girl do, or would, seem small to those of a grown man. Yes, Becky, I'm coming!"

As the old servant entered she stared with surprise.

"To goodness knows, honey, what's happened? Who's sick?"

“Nobody, Rebecca. And all that’s happened is a revolution.”

“Pshaw! What’s that?”

“You’ll see if you watch out. Where do you keep your dusters?”

“In their places. There’s where I mostly keeps all my things. I ain’t like some folks, leavin’ their traps all over Christendom, I ain’t.”

“Temper a little crisp this morning, Becky? ‘Skyattic’ still on hand? Sorry. But never mind. I’m not ‘some folks’ any more. I’m Amy, a home girl, who demands dusters at once before her ambition flags. I’ll save the motherkin and you some labor if you’ll be good-natured.”

“Meaning you’d dust that parlor withouten being set?”

“Meaning exactly that.”

“Here, then. And see you put ’em back right square in that cornder of this table drawer. Shake the dust outen ’em first, too. Fold ’em even. What I can’t abide is slovenness in nothing.”

“Rebecca! Whenever was I a sloven?”

“No, honey. You’re not. Huh! Ain’t I

raised you myself, me and Mis' Barnard? And ain't she the neatest woman in the whole town of Warden? You go 'long, don't tease old Becky. I've got my breakfast to get."

"Make it a good one, then, Becky. Such early risers need a good many worms."

Rebecca disdained to answer. She was not in the habit of feeding her household upon "worms," nor of serving anything save a most excellent breakfast; save and excepting such rare occasions as the morning of yesterday, when rheumatism and oversleeping got the better of her. Certainly it was a delicious meal she prepared that morning, and the family did the better justice to it because of their scant appetites of the last evening.

Amy sang at her unaccustomed task in the parlor and Becky broke into one of her melodious hymns in the kitchen. Mr. Barnard in the library found himself listening to the sounds, which might have been discordant had they been less heartfelt, since the singers chose altogether different tunes, and smiling to himself at the conflicting but still inspiring strains.

Even Mrs. Barnard, above, murmured a

soft accompaniment to Amy's voice, and the girl, hearing her, thought with a smile of the ups and downs of the past few days.

“ ‘Shadow and shine is life, little Annie, flower and thorn.’ Considerable many thorns lately, but I'm pulling them out now. There's a mighty big one to extract after breakfast, though, and—well, I wish the deed were done! ”

Small comment was made upon Nugent's non-appearance at the early meal, and Amy kept her own counsel. Her father and mother were blissfully ignorant for the moment, and it would be time enough for her when she had to answer inquiries.

Indeed, she was wholly spared such. Mrs. Barnard had an errand in the town and proposed to walk thither with her husband.

“ Do, mother. I'll fetch your hat and parasol. I want to go out myself by and by, if I may, and to wear my ‘best bib and tucker.’ ”

“ Certainly; though which is best when all are so simple, it would be difficult to tell. Well, good-morning. Be sure to come home to lunch. We mustn't repeat yesterday's experience too often.”

An hour later Amy left the house arrayed in her freshest gown and newest hat. Her face had lost something of its earlier brightness and her feet lagged somewhat as she turned from her own street into the broader avenue whereon dwelt the richer citizens of Warden. Her steps grew even slower as she came to a fine mansion sitting well back among stately trees and blooming shrubbery, and for a moment she felt as if she should turn and run away again. As if never, never, could she ascend that terrace and inquire at that distant door for the great personage she had come to see.

Then she whispered to herself: "Father! mother! brother!" and as if the words were talismanic, sprang up the steps and rang the bell.

CHAPTER IX

THE PROFESSOR

A TIDY maid answered the summons and replied to Amy's inquiry:

"Yes, the Professor is in. But he's just ready for a drive. I'll ask if he can receive you."

"Oh! he must!" cried the girl more to herself than to the other, who smiled and disappeared. "If he doesn't I don't know that I could bring my courage up to it again. No. That's not so. If I don't see him now I shall come until I do. But I want it settled—quick!"

Then she heard a familiar step along the polished floor of the wide hall, and, turning, was face to face with her late instructor.

"Why, Miss Amy! Good-morning. Very pleased to see you. I'm not often favored by visits of pupils during holidays. Very, very pleased, I'm sure."

Professor Gray was reputed to be the most absent-minded of men, and the girl had anticipated some difficulty in recalling her own personality to his remembrance. So many students were in his classes that it seemed unlikely he should identify any in particular, but she began to think this opinion a mistaken one. Certainly, he knew her well and met her halfway in her errand.

“Have you come about the scholarship?”

“Yes, Professor, if you have a few moments to spare me.”

“An hour, if need be. Well, my child, I congratulate you in private as I did in public upon your well-deserved honor. I foresee four very happy years for you.”

A hateful lump came into Amy's throat and kept her silent for an instant. In the presence of this dignified, cultured scholar all her old intense longing for greater learning revived and made her waver in her purpose.

But he was waiting for her to speak, and she had to swallow the lump and do so.

“Yes; it is about the scholarship I've troubled you. I want to give it up.”

“You want—to give it up?”

“ Yes, Professor, if you please.”

The gentleman's expression changed to one of real disappointment, and this did not make matters any easier for Amy, whose lip was trembling suspiciously. He took off his glasses, wiped and replaced them; then looked at her critically above their rims. It was a little mannerism so characteristic of the classroom, and his half-ironical amazement at an incorrect answer, that she felt as if she were again blundering, and flushed guiltily.

“ Why, Miss Amy? Why? ”

“ I think I am needed at home.”

“ Hm-m. Hm-m. It is a serious question; one of a lifetime. Have you reflected well? ”

“ Oh! I have—I have! ”

Again the girl's lips trembled and there came such a pathetic look upon her fair face that a burst of tears seemed imminent. Like most men the Professor hated tears, and he saw that hers was a real regret and not the idle whim he had feared. He went and seated himself beside her on the sofa where she had perched as lightly as possible, and meaning to make good her escape as soon as the unpleasant interview was ended. Laying his hand

upon hers, which were nervously clasping and unclasping themselves, he spoke in a tone of fatherly interest:

“Tell me all about it, little girl.”

She could hardly believe her own ears. Was this the stern Professor of the Latin School? She gave him one quick, keen glance, then broke into a torrent of words which left nothing hidden of all she had thought and suffered since Commencement night. When she had finished she waited a moment, during which he kept silence, then cried out again:

“I beg your pardon. I should not have said so much; but it was such a relief to talk to somebody—somebody outside who was unprejudiced. I’ll go now, Professor, and thank you for treating me so kindly.”

“Not yet, Amy. Let us talk together. In the first place, you are quite right. Your duty as an only daughter and sister, with the attendant circumstances, is in your home, not in a college. That doesn’t matter so greatly as you think. Your education will still go on—in every sense. Let me consider myself still your instructor—among books—and I

will give you a course of reading to follow and any help you need."

"You? Why, Professor Gray, with your busy life I could not think of taxing you so."

"My dear, my keenest happiness in life is to share with others what little I have learned. Bring me a receptive mind, as glad to take as I to bestow, and I shall be very thankful you are to stay in Warden."

What should impulsive Amy do but throw her arms about his neck and kiss him heartily? then blush and drop her head, wondering how she had dared.

The Professor laughed and patted the hand which now covered her scarlet face.

"That's all right, little girl. Spontaneous and honest, therefore—thank you. I realize what your decision has cost you, but I consider it a wise one. Wisdom is so much greater than knowledge."

"Aren't they one and the same?"

"Tennyson thought not. He said:

" 'Who loves not Knowledge? Who shall rail
Against her beauty?
But she is earthly, of the mind,
And Wisdom heavenly, of the soul,' "

Amy listened, earnestly regarding the speaker with a glance which led him to change his manner rather suddenly and to demand:

“Your thought, my child, for the traditional penny?” and laughingly drawing a coin from his pocket he tossed it into her lap.

She smiled, too, as she folded it between her palms and answered:

“Thank you for payment in advance. I mean to keep this always as a souvenir of this blessed morning. My thought was: Until to-day I had seen only the husk of your real character. Now I know you and—and love you.”

“Thank you, Amy.”

Amy's charm lay in her unconsciousness of self and in her perfect frankness. The Professor rose and walked to a distant window and looked out from it for a moment. He was more deeply moved than he cared to show, but at the end of that time turned with his ordinary brisk movement and came back to his place.

“One thing remains to be settled. Who shall be offered the scholarship?”

“That is for you to decide, of course.”

“Not at all ‘of course.’ Suggest some one, please.”

“Jeannette. That’s just, I think. Her marks were next to mine in nearly everything, and it was a question of ‘marks’ only, I suppose.”

“Not wholly. Yet that is just, though some others ranked nearly as high.”

“Please offer it to Jeannette.”

“Come with me and do that yourself. I leave town on Monday for the summer vacation, and would like to have the matter arranged before then. My carriage is waiting, I believe.”

It had been waiting, Amy knew, ever since she had been there, but good breeding prevented any further apology than:

“I’m sorry I timed my call just as I did.”

“I’m not sorry, since it gives me the pleasure of a little drive with you.”

Again Amy’s wonder rose. The stern Professor of the school and this delightful gentleman seemed two different persons.

He added as the footman closed the door and stepped into his place behind them:

“We’re out of school now and I feel like

a child. Let's take the long way round. I've to pick up Mrs. Gray at a friend's in the suburbs and would like to present you to her."

As they whirled along behind the pair of fine bays, which were what the Professor called his "one extravagance," the spirits of both were in unison with the glorious June morning, and the charming "bits" they passed by the way. Added to this was the pride the girl felt in thus being accounted worthy to share this wise man's society in so new a fashion, and it seemed but a few moments before they had reached the house where Mrs. Gray was visiting and she joined them. She proved to be as delightful and simple as her husband, and Amy was reminded of what her mother often said, that simplicity was always found among those of highest culture, or breeding.

On the way back they passed Edna Merton, swinging along with her racket in her hand, and whistling like a merry boy *en route* for a "lark." She glanced up, saw who they were, politely bowed to the Grays, made an absurd grimace toward Amy, and promptly sank down on the sidewalk as if overcome by as-

tonishment. Whereupon, her friend knew that the news of this drive would be spread broadcast among her mates and that she would be called upon for explanations galore.

“Well; they’ll all know it after a while, anyway,” she reflected and returned a defiant smile to Edna.

They put her down at Jeannette’s gate, Mrs. Gray expressing her pleasure at their meeting and extending an invitation to visit them upon their return in the autumn. “If we are back before you go to college,” she added, “for I remember that you are ‘the honor girl’ who has achieved the scholarship.”

“She’s better than that. She’s a faithful daughter,” said the Professor, lifting his hat and smiling as they drove away.

Jeannette was on the porch reading when the carriage stopped at the Herburn entrance. She had seen it coming and realized, with a sudden angry jealousy, who it was that had been now “taken up” by these people who were so well “worth while.”

“Humph!” she thought; “‘nothing succeeds like success.’ Amy Barnard has become a fad in Warden just now. Honor girl,

scholarship-winner, life-saver—yet not one bit better nor cleverer than I am! I hate her. I wish she had left me alone when I was in the river. I wish—pshaw! she's coming in and I'll have to play the polite hypocrite. Why, I wonder! Do life-savers think it incumbent upon them to visit their—their victims?"

But Amy had reached the steps and Jeannette could no longer pretend not to see her. Yet, being by nature honest and hating to affect a welcome she did not feel, she came forward slowly.

The visitor had been quick to note the hesitation, and saved her classmate further awkwardness by exclaiming:

"Good-morning, Jeannette! Aren't you surprised to see me in the Professor's carriage? If anybody had told me a few hours ago what would befall me to-day I wouldn't have believed him. But, Jeannette, he's just a dear!"

"Indeed? I shouldn't have used that adjective in describing him. Will you sit down?"

"Of course. Thank you. You certainly

have a pretty view from this point of the old river and Gay's Island. But it fits—the adjective, I mean. And you're wondering why I came, uninvited. Well, just to tell you that I've given up that scholarship and it is yours, if you will take it."

Jeannette's eyes opened to their widest and for an instant filled with amazed delight. Then as instantly clouded with resentment.

"Thank you—for nothing. If I wasn't worthy of it in the beginning I've no mind to accept a second-hand honor."

"Oh, Jeannette! There was but the slightest difference in our rating, and if the trifling balance was on my side, what matter? The scholarship is yours, if you'll have it."

"And I tell you again I will not."

"It will go to Grace Winslow, then."

"That simpleton!"

"She stood third. She's a good student."

"And a rattle-brained gossip. Thinks more of those stupid 'Poly boys' and her clothes than of her school standing."

"That proves how clever she is. She could always count on her quickness in learning to put off study hour."

“Why do you give up this college chance yourself? What’s wrong with it?”

“Jeannette, do you suppose I *like* to give it up? Don’t you know I want to go—with the selfish side of me? Oh! how I have wanted and how hard it has been to make up my mind. Yet, it’s made now and shan’t be ripped open, if I can help it. There’s nothing wrong with it. It includes the fullest advantages. You must take it. You must! with your fine mind and your ambition it’s a chance not to be lost.”

“Amy, why did you give it up?”

“Because I’m the only daughter and am needed. That’s all, that’s the only ‘why,’ and, if you please, I’d rather not discuss it. But you——”

Jeannette interrupted. “Why did you think of me first? I’ve never liked you nor treated you right. You know that. In your place I would have kept such a chance from such a girl as I forever, if it had been in my power.”

“You do yourself injustice. You’re a bit angry now, but that will pass. You’ve always wanted a higher education, and you have a lot of sisters who do not care for one and will

stay in your home. I don't know them, hardly, but it seems—of course, it's for you to decide."

There was no resisting Amy's determined sweetness and patience. Jeannette's proud jealousy suddenly gave way, and, clasping her hands rigidly, as if to repress herself, she cried out:

"Oh! I want it, I want it! Yes, there are a lot of us, a silly, worldly lot. Only the little ones are unspoiled still. My stepmother is all for society and dress. She has brought us up to make a show of ourselves and is not pleased because I care for books. I should never have had even the Latin School if it hadn't been for a greataunt. She's paid my tuition there, but can do no more. Amy, forgive me! I've been so hateful—but I'll show you! This means a new life to me. It means so much. Oh, I can't talk. I'm too full."

"I'm so glad, Jeannette. As glad as if I were going myself, almost. I must get home now and tell mother. She doesn't know, and she'll be as happy to keep me as you are to go. Put on your hat, won't you? we'll walk as far as Professor Gray's together, and the

next time you see me tell me if you haven't found him the 'dear' I said."

At his gate they parted, and once more Jeanette's proud spirit stooped itself, as she begged in a half-audible voice:

"Forgive me, Amy! I wish I could undo the past!"

But the girl who smiled and walked homeward? It came over her now with startling force that she had forever put it out of her power to acquire that "higher culture" she craved, and again the tormenting question arose: Is it wise for any individual soul to sacrifice its best for a doubtful good to others?

CHAPTER X

THE PLAIN SPEECH OF A FRIEND

ONE morning, a few weeks later than Amy's visit to the Professor, Edna Merton, attended by a groom, was riding along the shaded river road, taking that exercise her anxious invalid grandmother declared the girl needed, and which she would have enjoyed well enough had she any other companion save the solemn, gray-headed Peter. As it was, she was feeling the loneliness and isolation of being the richest girl in her set, and was regarding the ripples breaking on the shore with a countenance as nearly downcast as Edna ever wore. Raising her eyes at a turn in the way, she saw something ahead which banished the depression and sent her clattering forward at Johnny's swiftest pace. The sight was that of a lad on a limping farm horse, which had been proceeding at a snail's gait, and which was now turned aside out of the path without its rider raising his own downbent head.

“ I bid you good-morrow, Sir Cat! ”

As the chestnut reined up alongside, Nugent raised his eyes and muttered:

“ Edna Merton, of all people! ”

“ Exactly. At your service, Cavalier. How goes it? ”

“ Well enough. ”

“ Thank you. You retain your old urbanity, I perceive. ”

“ Humph! ”

“ Beg pardon? ”

“ I say your groom looks impatient. His horse is fretting. ”

“ So are you, though your horse isn't. Besides, a groom's preferences aren't to be compared to your own. Confess, you're delighted to see me. ”

“ I'm too truthful. ”

“ I saw Amy a half-hour ago. She grows prettier and lovelier every day. Prettiness applying to the outside and loveliness to the inside of her. You're an awful goose—or gander. ”

“ Thanks. Please ride on. Your horse needs exercise. ”

“ Yours doesn't, and I don't care to ride

on. I'd rather talk to you. I was lonesome."

Nugent said nothing. A stolid expression settled on his face, now tanned and sunburned almost beyond recognition. He flicked a fly from his horse and studied the road again.

"I said I was lonesome."

Again no response.

"*I said I was lonesome!* Don't you hear? Or have you caught Mr. Growden's deafness?"

"I heard. I didn't know that deafness was infectious. Is it?"

"Apparently. Talk to me."

"Old Peter 'll talk to you, directly."

Edna faced about and suggested:

"You go forward, Peter, as fast as you please. Mr. Barnard will look after me."

"I didn't say——" protested Nugent.

"No. But you're a gentleman and you know my grandmother doesn't like me to ride unattended."

Nugent smiled, but still kept silence.

Edna demanded: "Why don't you behave? You know you like me, and I know you like me, and Amy knows you like me.

That's how I know you know you do. She told me."

"People change their opinions."

"You're not that sort?"

"How do you know?"

"Because, if you were you'd have gone home long ago."

"And lived in idleness?"

"Not a minute. Put your shoulder to the wheel and helped your father."

Nugent's face flushed. "What——" he began, then checked himself.

"What—is that to me? A good deal. I'm a friend of the family. I love to see my friends happy. At present none of the Barnards are, save my 'honor girl,' whose virtue is its own reward. She's just blooming. She'd be more blooming if her unworthy brother would come to his senses."

"He has. He has, at last, found his place in the world."

"Riding farmer Growden's old Doll? Well, I don't envy you your 'place.' Her back's a regular valley between two hills. Her action—upon my word, I'd rather go afoot."

“So would I. I mean I would if I weren’t too plaguy tired.”

“Tired? How can that be possible, since farming is a life of constant hilarious fun? And when one can ride instead of walk?”

“Come, Ned, I’m in no mood for nonsense.”

The old boyish nickname which suited her so well touched her heart. She had been Amy’s closest intimate and had known the shy, self-conscious lad better than any other of the girls had done. She was so full of gayety, so free from airs, so wholly unspoiled by her position of heiress, that he could not help but like her almost as well as if she had been a boy. She now dropped her bantering manner and became wholly serious.

“Neither am I, Nugent. I was as blue—as blue as that forget-me-not yonder in that low field. I was dreading going away.”

“Are you going?”

“Of course. When did my dear old lady ever stay in one place more than three months at a time? As long as I was in school she allowed me to be a permanent, but now—heigh-ho! I’m a ‘bud’; an exceedingly small, I mean undeveloped, ‘bud,’ sicklied o’er with green

moss and school books. The developing process is to begin immediately. Grandmother has been to every resort on this continent, and some on another, and has decided that for my greenness and her liver trouble, Saratoga's the spot. I hate it. I've begged hard for another year of quiet, just to get my courage up, but she declines. She says I look—well, I don't look well and she must brace me up after all my hard study! Me! Brace me! I and study! I wish the Professor could have heard her! As for Amy, she laughed till she cried when I told her how delicate I was."

Nugent looked round and also laughed. There was never a more radiant picture of health than the large, well-developed girl beside him, who sat her horse as easily as if it had been his own mother's comfortable "Plymouth" rocker. She was not nearly as handsome as Jeannette nor as daintily winning as Amy; but the candor and friendliness of her big blue eyes challenged the friendliness of others, and the firm grasp of her big, white hand was but suggestive of her own integrity.

"You'll have a good time."

“Yes. I should have to have a good time wherever I was. I’m not a moper. But I’d rather choose the sort of a good time I want.”

“I don’t see how you can grumble. With more money than you know what to do with——”

“You blessed goo—gander—Cat! I never have a cent in my pocket. Never.”

“Your own fault, then.”

“Does that make it any easier? If I can’t keep hold of my dollars, if they will go spend themselves without asking my leave, that’s my misfortune. Do you know that all through our school time together, I’ve had to borrow, about every month, from your sister Amy? And she had little enough, in all conscience.”

“You needn’t twit me about that!”

“Who’s a twitting, Mumblegump? Now isn’t your mother’s son ashamed of himself?”

“Yes, Ned, I am. There’s nothing petty about you.”

“Thank you, Nugent,” answered the girl gently. “You know, you do know, that I hate this money business. I should like to have everybody equal, one girl to have no more than



“Let’s rest a few minutes and let the horses drink.”

Page 147.

another. If I had forty sisters to share it with me——”

“There wouldn’t be watering places enough to go around. Fancy poor Madam Merton with forty Ednas on her hands.”

“I couldn’t fancy it. There wouldn’t be any darling old Grandma left. Ah, there’s the watering trough. Let’s rest a few minutes and let the horses drink. Mine’s not too warm and yours——”

“Nothing will hurt old Doll. She’d rather stand and drink all day than travel a rod.”

At this Edna’s conscience woke. “Would Mr. Growden rather have her?”

“No. You’re right. I must hurry back—as fast as hurry is possible. This is the third time I’ve ridden into town to-day. All on that colt business, too. Three of them have never been found, and he’s sued all the boys’ fathers. I don’t know about the law, but he doesn’t mean to be cheated of his money, or his colts.”

“I heard that they told, themselves.”

“Yes. The boys were straight enough. It’s horrid, though, that if a fellow does the least little thing out of the way he has to suffer so much for it. There’s no justice in the world.”

Edna was inclined to give a flippant answer, but, on looking toward Nugent, saw that he was in a mood to need sympathy rather than ridicule.

“There, Johnny! You’ve had enough. So has old Doll. Let’s jog on again, and, while we jog, Nugent, tell me all about it. From the time you ran away——”

“I didn’t run. I went, simply without saying a word. I hate a fuss and I knew there’d be one.”

“And the next day you wrote Amy that you’d got a place on a farm and wouldn’t come home again until your father asked you.”

“She told you? Girls can’t keep anything to themselves.”

“Amy couldn’t keep that, though she didn’t tell, Mr. Accuser! She just went down to the arbor at the foot of the garden and cried herself blind and told nobody. And your poor mother sent me there to comfort her—or to know the reason why I couldn’t—and there she was, the splendid, noble unselfish girl—and there was your wretched old letter on the grass and I picked it up and read it. So then, as the children say. I warned her that I was going to

read it, and she just mumbled: 'I don't care. I don't care. I don't care about anything. I've done it all for nothing.' Even my precious Amy isn't a beauty when she's weeping, and to have it come right on the top of her grand deed! You—you ought to be—to be licked by kittens, Sir Cat! Oh, I just hated you then. Didn't your ears burn?"

"I presume so. They burn most of the time, for the sun's very hot, and that was my first morning working in it."

"You're not clear in your remarks. The Professor would correct you. You don't work in the sun but in the sunshine. I do wish you'd be particular. I hate to rub the gloss off my own learning by associating with ignoramuses."

"She didn't answer the letter. She didn't care."

"I—I'd like to make a horrid face at you, you mean boy! She wasn't allowed to answer it. You might have guessed that, being as well acquainted with the Barnard family as you are. For, of course, Amy said I could show it to your mother; and she showed it to your father; and your father is an honorable,

self-respecting gentleman, who said: 'Let the silly boy come to his senses and come home. Don't answer it, daughter, I'll see Mr. Growden myself and arrange matters with him. If Nugent prefers to rise at four o'clock instead of seven, and eat fried pork and hominy instead of Becky's good food, allow him his preference. It's sometimes wise to give an unruly lad his own head.' Oh! you made a lot of happiness for the Barnard household, Mister Farmer! And after all Amy did for you, too."

"Humph! That's one side of it. Mine is the other side."

"Let's hear it. I knew there was something misunderstood. Tell me, boy, and I'll never call you 'Cat' again—if I can remember not."

"'Tisn't very pleasant to be misjudged."

"It's horrid."

"Am I the only person in the world who ever made a slip? or did something of which he was heartily ashamed and will never, never repeat?"

Edna thought her friend's indignation redeemed his face from its ordinary plainness. Her unconquerable love of fun made her long

to set his crooked sentence straight for him, but his sincerity prevented, and again her gentler, better mood prevailed:

“Can't you tell me about it, Nugent?”

“I'd like to tell somebody. I never had a chance to explain even to Amy. I was going to tell them both, my father and mother I mean, but he came home so angry and taunted me with it without giving me the shadow of a chance.”

Edna felt no inclination toward mirth now. The lad was in bitter trouble. She saw that and longed, intensely, to help him. As she had said, she was lonely. An only, orphaned grandchild in the stately, silent home of an invalid grandmother; almost unrestricted in the use of money, but cut off by her very abundance of it from the intimate friendship of most of her mates. The girls of Warden were few of them able, when not in the equality of the classroom, to keep from their thoughts or manner their consciousness of this difference in station—as they were pleased to call it. Only Amy and Nugent, being themselves simple and valuing wealth lightly, had entered into Edna's home life and taken her into theirs. To her,

the young Barnards typified what a brother and sister might be like, and she loved them so dearly that their troubles became her own. It was to her as if her own brother had lived and were needing her sympathy now.

“Nugent, you can trust me, can't you? I am as true as Amy to your interests. Tell me.”

“Very well. I shall be glad to. But though I may some time give you leave, don't you repeat what I say to anybody until then. Will you promise that?”

Edna hesitated. “I'd rather give away anything I possess than a promise. The moment I promise things—everything seems to say: ‘Tell.’ I guess I won't promise. I'd rather you left it to my judgment. No, you needn't frown. I've a little bit, even if I do laugh at folks. Besides, I'm not laughing at you, Nugent Barnard. I'm sorry for you, or rather, I sympathize with you. I'm forever doing bad things myself. Sometimes I may ask you to reciprocate.”

“You odd girl. But I trust you. Well, then, here goes. Edna, I—I——”

He paused so long that the corners of the

girl's lips curled, but she pulled them down and, fortunately, Nugent was not looking at her. He was looking anywhere else in preference.

“Yes, Nugent.”

“Some of the fellows met me and we went fishing that evening. One of them fell in and somebody else proposed a drink of liquor. I'd never tasted any and they guyed me. I hate ridicule. I took a little and—it went to my head. I guess I didn't know what I was about. Well, Amy behaved like a queen. She never let on nor told mother. Then father came home next night and accused me, openly, before them all. I couldn't stand that, you know, so I came here and hired out to old Growden for all summer, and maybe all the year. Now, call me Cat or anything else contemptible you please. I deserve it.”

“No. I shan't call you anything worse than—simpleton.”

“Edna Merton! Oh, I was a simpleton, indeed, to trust you!”

“Thank you. Well, you are one, all right. Do you suppose, can you for one moment possibly imagine, a gentleman as courteous, a

husband as kind, a father as tender, as Mr. Barnard, humiliating his only son like that? I can't. There's some mistake. It was only the old, old grievance that you wouldn't be a merchant and help him save the business. Oh! you ninny! After all Amy was doing for you, most of all for just *you*, mean *you*! It's too bad. It's too unjust."

"What do you mean? What has Amy done?"

"Goodness! If I had such an ungrateful brother as you I'd put him in a sanitarium for idiots, if there is such a place."

"Thank you. We both seem to be getting to the root of things, airing our real opinions of each other most thoroughly."

"It's not a case for sarcasm. It's a case for getting down in this dusty road and covering your head with the dirt, ashes not being convenient. What has she done? Why, nothing. Nothing—only to give up the college course she coveted beyond anything to stay at home and be good—to make a little earthly paradise—for *you*! Oh, I'm glad I've no brother after all!" And with a cut of the whip on Johnny's flank she galloped away.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE STOCK FARM

“WHEW!” ejaculated Nugent, and looked after the retreating figure in amazement. “Would Amy do such a thing as that—for me? I can’t believe it.”

But whether he would believe it or not the statement set him thinking more profoundly than was his habit.

“I must go home and see her even if I do nobody else. Hello! Here comes that mad-cap back again.”

Edna had ridden but a short distance ahead before she remembered just why she happened to be going in that direction, and that Nugent could help her in the errand upon which she had been sent. So she wheeled Johnny about and again took up her place beside the sober old Doll.

“You had no right to put things out of my head like that, Nugent Barnard.”

“I thought I was rid of you.”

"You're not. I'm going straight to the stock farm with you."

"Edna! I protest. Mr. Growden will think I have been loafing with a girl."

"Haven't you? Never mind. He'll not fret over you. Look at me. Besides being a 'bud' I'm a young woman of business. Fact. Grandma says she'll let me begin to do things. Look after her affairs and my own. I'm on her affairs now; to see about boarding the horses this season. Peter usually attends to this and isn't pleasant because I'm set to do it. I shall like business much better than study or society, I think. But I wish I could pack Johnny in my trunk so that when I get too tired of being a grown-up young lady I could mount him and ride away. Grandma is going to send the carriage horses to the Growdens' this year as well as the saddlers. I'm to make a bargain. Tell me, please, how much ought she pay apiece?"

"Doesn't Peter know?"

"Of course. But I'm not Peter and I don't."

"Ten dollars for pasture, and oats occasionally. Twelve for stable board. You

should have their shoes taken off when they run on grass. It's good for their feet."

"All but Johnny's. I want him kept in shape for riding every day, and you to ride him."

"Why, Ned! I wouldn't like to do that. Besides, I'd have no time. I get up at four, then milk—or try to milk; clean the stables, harness and unharness, ride the mowing machine or hay-rake, pitch hay, show off stock to purchasers. Oh, I'm a busy Nugent these days. I'm not eating any bread of idleness at present. Not much."

"Do you like it?"

"If it were all right at home I think I should. It's awful hard work, and I get so tired I can't even think, sometimes. The sun scorches me till I smart and my head gets buzzing frightfully. But there's no hanging back where old Growden is."

"Say Mr. Growden, please."

"Why? You're not over-particular yourself. You said 'Growdens' just now."

"All the same don't you do it. You've got to prove to Mr. Barnard that a farmer can be as well bred as a merchant."

“Does he doubt it?”

“I don't know. I wish you wouldn't ask questions. Just mind and be happy. Mind about Johnny, too. Poor Johnny! with nobody to ride him. Listen to me. I've a notion.”

“Humph!”

“Your employer has offered a reward for those stray colts. I saw the placard in the post office this morning. You try for it.”

“It won't do him any good. The Horse Thief Detective Society has been at work ever since they disappeared, and nothing came of it. They have abandoned the search for the time being. If they failed it's not likely I should succeed.”

“Nugent, isn't it queer and sort of awful, really awful, how fast little things grow into big ones?”

“What especially?”

“That colt business, for one. It seemed the veriest trifle of nonsense when those boys let the creatures loose to scare us girls, and nobody dreamed that there would be any trouble in driving them back again. See what's come

of it. Then your acting so badly. When you rushed away from your home, so angry, it was only a few steps between your room and the gate, yet now it seems impossible for you to go back over those few steps. Nugent, I wish you would, though. It's going to get harder all the time."

"I mean to see Amy. I mean to try to persuade her to go to college after all. What good will she gain by staying at home? Even if she did it, in part for me, how will it help? I shan't go home to live until I'm treated right. I'm just as much of a Barnard as my father is, and he'll find that out some time."

"Fiddlesticks! That college business is another of the little things which grow so big all in a minute. Amy can't go now, even if she would. She's put it out of her power. She's handed over the scholarship to Jeannette Herburn and has offered to help get the girl ready to take her place. In some things, some studies, she was behind Amy at school, and Amy's going to help her review and pick up. She's even offered to help with the sewing, if necessary, but I reckon the Herburns will have too much pride to allow that. Jeannette is so

happy over her prospects and now loves Amy as dearly as she—as she didn't before. Professor Gray was lovely to your sister, too, and commended her for being a daughter first and a scholar afterward. Amy didn't tell that part, but Mrs. Gray told grandmother at her parting call. Heigh-ho! there's the farm and I'm not half through talking yet."

"Should you ever be?"

"That sounds rude and—Cat-tish."

"I feel both. I'm dreadfully cut up that Amy should miss Wellesley."

"Then do what you can to make her happy here."

"I can't go home. I've——"

"'Nobody asked you, sir, she said.' Going home in your present spirit would only make bad matters worse. But you'll go and be good after a while, when milking and haying and rising at four A. M. have had time to pall on your appetite. About Johnny: I'm in earnest. I do wish you'd take him and use him for yourself. I'll tell Mr. Growden I request it. If you could I would love to have you teach Amy to ride. I'll send my saddle to your house, and if you could get a horse here, sometimes, you

could meet and be happy. You owe it to that darling girl to treat her square."

"And I owe you a good deal, too, Ned. There's 'the makings of a splendid boy' spoiled in you, as Becky would say."

"There's spoiled boy enough in you, sir, but I don't see the splendid part. I should, though, if you'd go home in the right way; say you're sorry, explain to the father, or let Amy for you, kiss the wrinkles off your mother's sweet face—then come back here and work out your penance to the bitter end. Oh, Nugent, if you'd do that I should feel as if my morning's missionary work were not in vain. In dead earnest, lad, won't you?"

Nugent's only answer was to slip off from Doll and open the gate. Peter could be seen walking his own horse up and down in front of the farmhouse porch where Mr. Growden sat nearly all of every day when his rheumatism allowed. This porch commanded a view of a great part of the farm and a sharp-toned whistle lay at the master's hand. A blast upon this reached the most distant field, reminding the toilers that a keen eye was upon them and that any loitering would be scored against

them. For Grover Growden was a hard, if just man, paying and exacting the last cent that was his due.

Edna could not but contrast his harsh, weather-beaten face with the urbane countenance of Nugent's own father and wonder afresh how any boy, in his senses, could exchange the one master for the other.

"I fancy it's 'go do it!' with this man, and 'will you, please?' with the other. Poor, silly Nugent!" thought the girl; then addressed herself courteously to the farmer, who replied rather brusquely, and with an inquiring glance in the direction of the impatient Peter.

"Come about boarding the horses, have you? Hm-m. Your folks have generally sent a man to deal with me."

"They've sent me this time, Mr. Growden. There are the carriage span, the bay that Peter's riding, and my Johnny, here. The last to be kept on full feed and well-shod, and is to be for the use of either Nugent or Amy Barnard, but for that of nobody else. Please state your terms."

"You take Doll round to the south hay-field and hitch her to the rake. You'd ought

to have been back an hour ago," ordered the old man as Nugent still waited on the drive, listening to Edna's first business talk.

"Very well, sir," he replied, lifting his coarse hat and waking Doll from the nap into which she had fallen.

"And since you've dawdled so long you can make up the time at the dinner hour. I know to a minute how long it takes to go and come from my lawyer's office. Men that hire to me have to keep up to their contracts. You'll find that out after another fortnight, I guess."

The blood rushed to Nugent's blond face—or that had once been blond—till it seemed it would ooze through the skin, but he shut his lips grimly, and obeyed.

"Well, miss, my price for boarding three of your horses will be fifteen dollars a month each. For this chestnut, treated as you want, eighteen."

"Is that your price to everybody, Mr. Growden?" asked Edna, when she had recovered from her astonishment.

The farmer glanced toward Peter, who seemed uneasy, and asked:

“Isn't that what you've always paid, groom?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then I think grandmother will look elsewhere.”

A change came over the farmer's face. He did not like losing any chance of money making, and knew that the keep of the horses would rather enrich than injure his land. As Edna turned Johnny about to ride away, he temporized:

“What did you expect to pay, Miss Merton?”

The girl noticed a distinct increase of respect in his manner, and answered promptly:

“Ten dollars each for three and twelve for Johnny.”

“Hm-m. Well, as your grandmother is an old patron, I'll split the difference, and call it twelve-fifty for the three and fifteen for this one.”

“No, Mr. Growden, I've been informed that what I offer is fair and the average price. I'm taking hold of my grandmother's business for her, now that I am out of school, and mean to do it as well as I can. Good-morning.”

“ Hold on. Don't be so testy. I'll take 'em at what you say. Peter will have to look out for himself, I can't bother. When will you send them? ”

Edna named the time, bowed, and rode out of the yard. Peter followed at a respectful distance, seeming not half as impatient as he had been before; but Edna soon reined in and waited for him to come alongside.

“ I'm rather puzzled, Peter. What does all this mean? ”

“ Sure, Miss Edna, it's no more than all the coachmen do. It's a part of our 'perg,' you know. When we work for folks as rich as you we always plan with the traders that way. I—I——”

“ Yes, you, Peter. What is your habit? ”

“ Well, miss, you see, ten dollars is right; but because I do all the business part of it I—well, I charge according. That's all. It's the usual way.”

“ It will be the 'usual way' no longer at my grandmother's home, good Peter. We like you and I'm not going to blame you very much this time. Still, you're a man, aren't you? ”

“ Yes, Miss Edna; even if only a coachman.”

“Very well. See that you conduct yourself like one!”

At home the girl burst into her grandmother's room, indignant and yet exultant, and out came the whole story, without preface.

“Peter cheated me? You tell me that Peter, whom I thought the soul of honesty, has been using me like this? 'Tisn't the money so much, it's that he should have the conscience to do it.”

“Don't you worry, grandma dear. Time for that is past. It's all due to my precious 'honor girl' that there's going to be a reformation. If I hadn't complained to her about being such a useless creature I should never have thought of this business notion. She said, you know, that it was common talk how every tradesman imposed on you, and that if she was going to be useful in her home and a faithful daughter, I had just as great a chance here. That's why I asked you to let me try. You sick in your room and everything trusted to servants, of course you were cheated. Oh! I'm so proud of myself. And see here, grandmother! Suppose we start a little box, you and I, and call it our poor box. Every time we save something, as I did this morning, we'll

put the savings into it and then there'll always be a fund on hand, no matter if I do come short in other ways. What do you say?"

"Yes, of course. You are pleasing me greatly; at the same time, let me do a little of the 'supposing.' Suppose that so good a business person turns a new leaf and from now on lives within her allowance? What a 'reformation' that would be, just—supposing!"

"Grandma, sweet, let's change the subject. Look out the window, please. There comes Amy, this minute. Isn't she the daintiest creature in the world?"

Madam Merton was rather a worldly old lady. At least she was exceedingly fond of dress and, in her days of health, had been a leader in society; and what struck her most forcibly about the approaching girl was less her delicate prettiness than a certain air of style which made her simple attire seem the perfection of the tailor's art.

"She is a wonderfully stylish girl. She is *distingué*. She carries herself admirably. She—Edna, dear! She has given me an idea. Quick! go bring her in!"

CHAPTER XII

THE USE OF A TALENT

MADAM MERTON went straight to the point. As soon as the ordinary salutations were over she demanded:

“Amy Barnard, where did you get your style?”

Amy blushed and stammered: “Why, Madam, I—I don’t know; that is, if I really have any.”

“You must know that you have. I should know it in your place and be proud enough of it. Come closer, please. That frock is nothing but cheap piqué, just as I thought. But, by the cut and wearing of it, might have come from the best establishment in the country. Who made it?”

“My mother,” answered the girl proudly; though she well knew that the fashionable old lady before her would have disdained herself to handle a needle.

“Your mother! Oh! Well, all I can say is that she’s a genius. But I hoped for a different answer. I hoped you could tell me the name of a decent dressmaker. Of course, there are plenty of the trade in Warden, but nobody can wear their things outside this town. I want to go right through to the Springs without stopping in New York, and Edna must have some clothes. She’s a sight now. She hasn’t an atom of style, anyway.”

“Grandma, sweet, what is—‘style’?”

“It’s—a difficult thing to explain. You and Amy place yourselves before that mirror and observe the contrast. Your clothes must have cost ten times as much as hers, yet—oh, dear! I am disappointed.”

“Come along, Amy. I’m not afraid. I’d rather anyhow that you were the most admired of the two. Yes, there is a difference. Grandmother, do try to explain it. Please. It’s just possible I may acquire it.”

“I doubt that. It’s a thing born in one, not acquired. But, at least, one may aim towards it. Let me see; upright bearing, shoulders well set, self-respect in every line, simplicity, and a perfect fitness of things. For

instance, Amy's simple costume is just suited to a morning call; while you, as soon as you threw off your riding habit, crawled into a half-worn silk."

"Grandmother, you must be able to see through the ceiling. How did you know I 'threw' and 'crawled'?"

"Because I know *you*, dear. But, Amy, I'm in trouble. I wish you could help me out."

"I should be very glad, though I don't see how I could."

"Edna tells me you are a clever artist."

"Why, Ned! What an exaggeration. All your friends are paragons, of course, but I'm no 'artist.'"

Edna went to a cabinet in the corner and brought back some well executed pen-and-ink sketches, likenesses, and caricatures, but all evidently the work of one hand.

"Here's a sample, grandma; but what are you driving at?"

"At a fitting wardrobe for you, child. The fashion books give little aid, for their patterns are too ornate, yet a dressmaker will follow them implicitly. They can sew well enough,

it isn't that; but they are themselves provincial. They know nothing outside of Warden and they made Edna look a dowdy."

Amy laughed. "I'm provincial, then, for I know nothing outside of Warden."

Madam shrugged her shoulders.

"You have intelligence."

"She has intelligence enough to apply her intelligence to an intelligent style of dress. There you are, grandma, sweet. Any time you need an explanation call on me."

"You disrespectful child!" said the old lady, with so loving a glance that her reproof was void. "Yet you've hit it exactly in—quite an intelligent way!"

Again Amy laughed and felt herself drawn to this odd madam, who was wise enough to enjoy "a little nonsense now and then."

"Dear Madam Merton, I wish I could help you. I'd love to help fix Edna out, as you want to see her, but how can I?"

"On a purely business basis. Draw me some sketches. Study Edna's face and figure. Design a couple of morning costumes, a few dinner frocks or gowns, and as many evening ones. I wouldn't trust a Warden seamstress

to make a street suit, and, fortunately, I can order that from the city. But the others; if you'll design them and instruct the seamstress how to put them together, or rather, what you mean in the pictures, I'll gladly pay you for them, and any price you ask."

Unconsciously Amy's shoulders stiffened. It was the first time she had ever realized the difference between her own and Edna's station and the truth did not come home to her with any satisfaction. She had been listening to the lady's talk with keen interest, and was already, in imagination, sketching a costume which should suit her friend's fine figure perfectly.

There was an awkward silence for a brief time. The madam was so accustomed to paying highly for every service rendered her, and to receive no service not remunerated, that she had had no thought of offending Amy. Edna felt more hurt than her friend and wondered at her grandmother's "indelicacy." Amy was herself ashamed of her own feeling and was the first to recover her ordinary manner.

"Beg pardon, dear madam, but you took

me quite by surprise. I'll be proud enough to make some designs for Ned, and if they are practical you will be welcome to them. But I couldn't take payment for them; indeed, I could not."

The independent old lady was about to say, "Then I can't accept them," but caught a shake of her grandchild's head and merely replied:

"Very well. Let it rest that way, then, but I'll be thankful for any hints. Now, you girls, go and chatter elsewhere. I must take my nap."

They acted upon this suggestion promptly, and spent a happy hour together; as Edna would have expressed it: "unmarred by any talk of clothes." But there was full and ample talk of Edna's morning experiences, and of Nugent's promise to see Amy soon. Then Edna begged her friend to make use of Johnny, "for Johnny's own good," and planned the happiness they would enjoy when she returned in the fall.

"By that time your brother will have gotten back his common sense and be at home again. I will ride one of the carriage horses

and he can use Peter's bay, and with you on Johnny—my! what good times we'll have!"

"There's always a good time where you are, Ned. You ought to be happy, you're so generous."

"Nonsense. I ought to be happy because I've nothing in the world to make me unhappy, except—well, I do wish dear grandma was well, and I had a few more folks belonging to me. Otherwise—heigh-ho! What! Must you go?"

"Yes, dear. It's twelve. Father has taken to coming home to a midday dinner, and I like to be there. He says little to me, but I know he misses me if I am away. Come around as often as you can and I'll make a drawing or two this very afternoon. Good-bye."

"Dear Amy! I wish grandma hadn't said that," thought Edna, watching her friend walk away. "But it's quite true about her stylishness; and I do believe, if she weren't too proud to do it, that lots of people would be glad to have her design their clothes. And I'm afraid there's not too much money in that household. Well-a-day! How uneven things are!"

When Madam Merton's flattering remarks concerning her dressmaking were reported to Mrs. Barnard she was, naturally, much pleased, and entered into her daughter's plans for the designs with keen interest.

"Why not as fitting to prepare beautiful clothes for our bodies as appropriate covers for our books? It's not so long since I heard you remark that you could design book covers, if you'd give your mind to it. I am very much obliged to Madam Merton for her suggestion; and I'd like to have the dressing of her own self for once. I'd take off all that 'flummery' she wears and put on simple, dignified garments, appropriate to her age and position. Well, you can work for Edna, anyway. Bring your drawing things into the sewing room, dear. We will have a happy afternoon."

It proved such, indeed; yet after a time both mother and daughter fell into a silence that was broken, at last, by Amy's asking:

"Mother, just how poor are we?"

"I wish I could tell you. But I can't. I only know that your father gives me very little

for the housekeeping lately, and spends less than he used upon himself. When I told him the other day that our magazine subscriptions had nearly run out and asked about renewing, he said: 'I think we can do without them this year.' Now, his current literature has been his chief recreation, and if he economizes in that, it is of necessity."

"It's horrid to be proud as well as poor. I wonder if it's silly, too?"

"What's set you thinking that?"

"Madam's offer to pay for the sketches. The money would have given father his magazines. I should hate to be silly. I detest silliness."

Mrs. Barnard laughed.

"My dear, I think it has not come to that—yet. When it does, I have faith to believe you will be wholly sensible. How soon will Edna go away?"

"They want to get off within the next fortnight."

"Then, dear, after supper you had better take your sketches and submit them to the old lady. If you start early you will be safe to come home alone, though it's so long a walk.

The evenings are light; but I wish Nugent were here."

"He'd be as likely elsewhere as at home. But, mother, mayn't I go and see him soon?"

"Your father has said not."

"I wish he would change his mind. I know, or I think I'm right, that father and he are acting from different notions. I mean the thing Nugent is blamed for isn't that which he thinks it is. That's not very clear, but if I could see him just a few minutes, I do believe everything would be all right."

"I wish I could say 'yes.' Once I would have urged the matter, but I can't now. Charles has outside troubles enough without home worries. There's nothing tragic in the situation, as your tone suggests. The case is simple. Nugent got angry and hired out to a hard master for the whole summer. The experience will do him good. Hm-m. Here's Becky. Probably to say she's unfit to work."

The servant tapped at the door and entered with her hand on her brow, already bound with a voluminous white cloth.

"Please, Mis' Barnard, I've got the misery again."

“Have you, Rebecca?”

“Yes’m, I have right smart. I’d like to go see the eye-dentist ’fore he leaves the dispensary and get somethin’ done.”

“Indeed, I, too, would like to have something done, to change affairs. You’re ill with remarkable frequency since Amy left school. Oh, yes, you may go, of course. But do get something to really help you this time. Will you come back to wash the dishes?”

“Maybe. I mean, yes’m, I will.”

“Please set the table first. I want to finish this waist to-day, so that it may be ironed to-morrow.”

“That ’ll make me dreadful late, Mis’ Barnard.”

The lady did not answer, but Amy did for her, with a short laugh.

“Hurry along, then, Becky, I’ll do that for you.”

“Will you, honey? That’s a good girl. Some folks can’t help being sick if some other folks is cross,” she finished with a mutter.

Amy flashed a glance toward her mother, who was now smiling, and the retort died on her tongue. Then she gathered her sketches

into a small portfolio and left the room. But she was perplexed and her mood had changed; and as she went about her self-imposed task she wondered:

“How is it possible that the behavior of an ignorant serving woman can affect our happiness? But it does. My mother used to be the gentlest of women, yet the tone in which she answered Becky just now was decidedly sharp. Will I get to be like that? Dear mother, with her own frail health, sparing herself never at all when she can add to our comfort. She'd not have minded about the table, either, except that it was for me she was sewing and thought I needed the waist. I don't wonder her nerves are unstrung, what with father's gloominess, and Rebecca's tantrums. She affects not to feel badly about Nugent, but I know she does miss him dreadfully. And was it for such humdrum work as this that I gave up college?”

For a few minutes the pretty dining room seemed a sort of prison and an intense longing to escape all the sordid duties of a restricted domestic life assailed her. Then the singing of a wren outside in the honeysuckle attracted

her and she threw the blind wide, the better to hear her little favorite. Instantly the sun flooded the apartment and seemed to sweep the darkness from her own mind. There came into her thoughts, as if the wren had sung it, "Who sweeps a room as in God's sight." Was she doing as she would "in God's sight"? Might not this commonplace task of table-setting be part of that "higher culture" at which Professor Gray had hinted when he bade her good-bye that Monday at the station?

It certainly helped her to think so, and, once more fully happy, she gave the additional touches to her work which would never have entered Rebecca's head, save on some holiday occasion.

"Why not make holiday every day? I'll do it. Mother loves to take her tea from dainty china, and she shall, always, after this. Of course, that means washing the cups myself, for Becky's too heavy-handed to be trusted. But what is the washing of a couple of cups and saucers compared to the satisfaction their use will give my parents?"

Then she pulled a spray of the honeysuckle and folded a bit in each napkin. Afterward

glanced at the clock and saw that if she hurried she could bring from the cellar and ice-box the food already prepared and which her mother expected to set in place herself. When all was done it was an attractive little spread, and she was only just in time.

“Why, there’s father now!”

Mrs. Barnard, also, had heard the footsteps on the path and laid aside her sewing, coming into the dining room with the troubled expression one wears who finds herself behind time. One glance, though, and a smile which seemed disproportionately radiant, lighted her face.

“Amy, darling! How good of you, and how pretty you have made it! I’m thankful, dear, for I hate to keep your father waiting. How good it is to have a daughter!”

It seemed good to the merchant, also, when he had made himself ready for the evening meal, to find so sunshiny and dainty a place. He had come without appetite, to eat that he might live, but a real hunger fell on him as he observed the parsley-decked salad and the delicately sliced ham. The largest berries were in a dish by his plate, and as he unfolded his nap-

kin he gayly stuck his sprig of honeysuckle through his buttonhole and demanded:

“Whose birthday, Amy?”

“Everybody’s, father. I’m a home girl, now, you know.”

“Ah! Thank God!”

Then his eye fell on the empty place opposite the girl’s own, and he smiled, though somewhat sternly, at sight of Nugent’s napkin adorned like all the others.

“Has he come to his senses? Yet he mustn’t break his word to Mr. Growden.”

“Oh, he hasn’t done that, and he’s not coming to this supper. But I mean to keep the place ready for him till he does come. How does your tea taste? I’m not used to making it yet, but I want criticism, so I shall know if it is right.”

“Excellent; only—a trifle cold.”

“It shall be hotter next time. Thank you.”

It was the most cheerful meal they had enjoyed since Nugent’s departure, and, indeed, his waiting plate and napkin seemed to bring him nearer. It was as if he might rush in at any moment, in his old, tardy fashion, full

of excuses and awkwardly stooping to kiss his mother before he slouched sidewise into his chair. They sat longer than usual, Mr. Barnard retailing the news of the day in the town and his wife unwilling to hasten him, though she glanced uneasily at the clock from time to time.

Amy understood her anxiety and nodded, as if to say:

“I shall not be afraid. Let the dear man talk who has been so silent, for it’s good to hear him.”

But at last he pushed back and she was free; nor would her mother hear of longer delay, even though Rebecca had not yet returned from her interview with that unknown practitioner, the “eye-dentist.”

“Why, Amy! Have you come so late? And how happy you look!” cried Edna when her friend arrived at Merton House.

“Yes, dear. Mother thought you would better have these designs to-night so that Madam Merton could look them over and not have to waste to-morrow waiting for them. I’ll leave them with you and hope they’ll be of some use. No. I mustn’t come in.”

“But you *must*. Hark! That’s grandma calling now. She’s in the library and will want to have you talk these over with her. Do, please. She doesn’t like to be denied things, she’s so old and frail.”

“Very well, but help me to get away soon, Edna. Mother would be worried if I were very late.”

“What a pity that Peter’s gone; and it’s the servants’, the women-servants’, night out. I’ve nobody to send with you, but we will not be long. *If* we can help it!”

Yet who could hurry the old society woman when once upon the subject of dress? Amy was made to go over every drawing and explain her ideas of materials suitable; and though it was delightful to find her work so readily appreciated and accepted, she felt “on pins and needles” to be on her homeward way. Finally Edna begged:

“Grandma, sweet, don’t keep this poor thing any longer. She’s alone and we’ve nobody to send with her. Can’t you come again by daylight, Amy, and talk these over?”

“Alone, child? And didn’t tell me? Be off, be off at once. You go part way with



A heavy hand clutched her shoulder fiercely. — Page 185.

her, Edna, but hurry back. I'm alone too, you know."

Amy would not permit this. The invalid must not be left. She was not afraid. Indeed she was not; and very speedily was on the road toward the town, too happy in knowing that she had spent a useful day and given others pleasure to think of any danger worse than her mother's tender anxiety.

But just when she had reached the loneliest stretch of the highway, between Merton House and the town, the sound of hurrying footsteps behind her at first startled, then made her move hastily aside out of the way.

"Oh, oh! it sounds like a tramp, and he's coming straight for me!"

With this sudden terror waking in her heart a heavy hand clutched her shoulder fiercely.

CHAPTER XIII

ANXIETIES

“AMY!”

It seemed an age before she could answer.

“Nugent!”

“Why, girlie! Did I frighten you?”

“Terribly. I—I feel ill yet. I thought you were a tramp. You know there’s nobody I dread like them.”

“Sit down a minute on this stone wall. You’re trembling.”

“No. I’m all right, or shall be in a minute. Mother will worry, as it is. I must make haste. Where did you come from? Will you walk on with me? Though I don’t know as I ought to ask you. Oh, Nugent, my father wouldn’t let me answer your note.”

“I know.”

“How?”

“Edna told me. She was at the farm this morning.”

“How queer that I should forget that, but you scared it out of my head. She told me, too, all about your talk together. She’s a splendid girl.”

“She didn’t call me a splendid boy,” laughed Nugent, remembering their friend’s unflattering frankness. Then he added gravely: “I want you to tell father and mother all about that night. I’ve said to myself that I’d never go home till I was invited there by him, and the invitation seems slow in coming. I feel like a sneak, keeping it back from them, and I want them to know; even though that may stop my coming home altogether.”

“Can’t you trust the love of your own parents? But you’ve never told even me the whole story. You must, if I’m to repeat it straight. Do it now, quickly. I don’t want mother to worry about anything. She’s not well; at least, she’s nervous, and, if you’ll believe it, really sharp-tongued sometimes. I begin to realize all the petty details of life she has borne to give us a chance. They’re enough to fret the courage out of anybody. I don’t think a man could stand them, and

they're not helpful even to the sweetest of women."

"Yet Edna says you have chosen to stay at home and bear them. How could you?"

"Because I love you better than I love learning. Now, don't let's waste time on that. Tell me about yourself."

She slipped her hand into his, and it may be that the lad would have been too shamefaced to retain it had the light not been dim beneath the overhanging trees, and the avenue deserted. As it was, he held it with a friendly pressure, and told in few words the same tale he had repeated to Edna earlier in the day.

"So that's the whole business. Don't try to hide anything or persuade forgiveness. If that isn't mine of itself it 'll be worth nothing."

"And if it is, Nugent? What then? Will you come back into the store and help father?"

"I can't. I've put it out of my power, like you the college course."

"It seems too bad. Father wouldn't have given you that training at the commercial school if he hadn't expected you to do his bookkeeping and typewriting for him. If

you did that you'd know exactly how everything was going on. Now it's all in the hands of William Hardesty, and those others who think father old-fogyish."

"Hardesty is a better bookkeeper than I am."

"Is he a better friend to father?"

"Amy, I fancy he could hardly be a worse. If it were to do all over again, and I knew as much as I know now, I wouldn't have refused. I thought father was only fussy, but I guess it was a more serious matter than just keeping 'Barnard's' in the old way. I'm afraid it was a question of keeping it at all; and, girlie, don't imagine I sleep better of nights for thinking I failed in my duty."

"Oh, you darling boy! You make me so happy to hear you say that. I'm going to put that part with the rest of the story when I tell it to the folks; and here we are at the corner of our own street. How much further can you go?"

"To the latch of our own gate."

"Then to the door! To my mother, Nugent!"

"Don't ask it, Amy. When they want me

I'll come. Indeed, I ought not to be here, anyway. I have to get up so early, and I am so tired. I've four miles back to tramp, and a last look at the stock in the stables before I can turn in. Whew! Wouldn't I like to just run upstairs to my own den for this one night? But, good-bye. Tell them the story in its worst. Don't excuse it. I don't myself, and—none of you need fear that I shall ever degrade myself in just that way again. Good-bye."

Mr. and Mrs. Barnard were on the porch when Amy ran up the path to them. They were growing anxious over her delay, and her father was about to start to meet her when they heard her voice outside the entrance.

"Who was with you, daughter?"

"Nugent, father."

"Humph!"

"And, oh, he did long to come in!"

"Trash! What was to prevent?"

"I've so much to tell. May I begin?"

"Of course. Sit here on the settee by me. On the side of my good ear. I'm growing more deaf every day."

Amy snuggled to him and patted his hand

caressingly. Then told her brother's story, using but few words, and palliating nothing, as she had promised Nugent. A long silence succeeded her explanation; then Mrs. Barnard said gently, and her voice was tremulous:

“You would better go to your room now, dear. You have had a busy day.”

“Good-night, father. Good-night, mother.”

Mr. Barnard put his arm about her and kissed her tenderly. This child, at least, had given him no pain. The sin of intemperance was the hardest for the proud, upright gentleman to forgive. From the beginning, the lives of all the Barnards had been models of correctness, and it was a bitter grief that now, when the fortunes of the house were at their lowest ebb, this degradation should come upon him. He had erred on the side of sternness, it might be, but was not Nugent, also, a Barnard? Ought not his own nature to have shrunk from this disgrace?

Amy had kept her promise to her brother, and had hidden nothing; but now she was free to plead for him.

“Please, father, forgive him. He is so sorry and so homesick. I know it. Please say

that I may go to see him to-morrow, or, at least, to write to him. On Sunday, I suppose, the farmer does not make his men work. May he come home on Sunday?"

It rose to Mr. Barnard's lips to say: "No. He has not been sufficiently punished." But he could not resist the clinging arms of his daughter, nor her kisses on his cheek. So he answered instead: "Yes, Amy. If you wish. Now, go. I'm so tired."

Mrs. Barnard leaned forward, startled. There had come to her husband's face that expression of suffering which seemed half physical, half mental, and that brought with it a confusion of thought and memory new to this accurate, clear-headed man.

"Yes, go, Amy. Let father rest."

The daughter obeyed, nor, in her delight, had she noticed that which so disturbed her mother. She lighted her room, and wrote a hasty note to Nugent, which she meant to rise early and post; then went to bed and to sleep.

She awakened suddenly to find her mother standing beside her, with the gas again burning, and to hear the trembling words:

"Dear, wake up. You must dress and go

for the doctor. Your father is ill. He talks strangely about Nugent, the prodigal son, husks, and that nice salad. He has mixed them all in his dreams—if it is dreaming—and implores me to give our boy his supper. Oh, if he were only here!”

“Don’t fear, mother. I’ll be ready at once. Probably father is just over-tired, or, maybe, the salad was not so fine as we thought. It may be indigestion. You know he suffers that sometimes.”

“We’ll hope so, child. We’ll hope so. Shall you be afraid? Oh! how I hate to send you, in the middle of the night, alone. But there’s no one else. Unless you’ll stay with him, and I’ll go.”

But of two evils the mother knew that the lesser was to take the short walk through the silent streets.

“No, mother, I’ll go. I’m not at all afraid. The idea! Afraid to do anything for my precious father! Go back to him, mother, I’ll be off in a jiffy.”

As she passed by her bureau on her way from the room, Amy caught sight of the note she had written her brother, and an impulse

made her snatch it up and take it with her.

“I have to pass the post office on the road and I’ll drop it into the outside box. I hope it ’ll reach my boy before the news of father’s illness does, if this means anything serious.” Afterward she was very glad that she had done so, for that night proved the last, for many weeks, on which her father could have spoken forgiveness to any one.

“Typhoid fever.”

That was the doctor’s almost instant verdict.

“The disease has been in his system for a long time, and a man less determined to keep at his post would have succumbed before this. I almost wish he had; his chances would have been better.”

From the first it was a fight against great odds; and to Amy it seemed as if she had already lost both father and mother. Within twenty-four hours there were two trained nurses in the house, and the anxious wife hovered about the sick-room and hung upon their words as if she had forgotten everything else.

Nugent came, for a few moments only, on

the second day, and was permitted to stand at his father's bedside just long enough to take the fevered hand in his and press it tenderly. Then he was banished, and left the room to receive his mother's half-conscious kiss, and to hear her anxious question:

"How does he look to you? Oh! son, do you think he will get well?"

"She hadn't a thought for me or my affairs," he reflected bitterly, remembering the very different welcome his fancy had pictured in his own mind. "There was no 'fatted calf' in my business, so far as she was concerned. She has but one idea now, and that is—father."

But Amy met him in the hall below, and was so loving and so glad to talk that he was comforted. Together they discussed the situation, and the girl hopefully declared:

"That 'business' can't be as bad as we fancied, Nugent. Mother stops at nothing, and I've been reckoning up. The doctor comes two or three times a day, and the nurses will cost us fifty dollars a week. Fifty dollars a week! That's a lot of money, and there must be plenty where it comes from, for

mother is all the time suggesting things even they don't ask for."

"Yes, I guess the money part's all right. If it wasn't human life is worth more than money. We must save father, Amy. We must."

"Oh! Nugent, I can't think there's real danger."

"If he gets well I'll try to be a more dutiful son to him."

"Of course he will get well. God wouldn't take him from us who love and need him so."

"I have to go now. If he gets worse you'll send for me?"

"Surely. Instantly."

"Old Growden's acting rough about my coming at all. He's the most afraid to die of anybody I know. Talked about infection and all that stuff. When he isn't watching the men he's reading medical books, and fancies he has everything they treat of. He'll be on the verge of typhoid when I get back, see if he isn't. Good-bye. Don't worry. Father is sure to get well. He *must*. I've *got* to have a chance to prove I'm a good son, even if I do hate the store. Good-bye."

The days dragged into weeks, and the weeks into a month, and still the fever was not broken. There were now two doctors, as well as nurses, in regular attendance upon Mr. Barnard, who knew little of what went on about him, with the occasional visit of a retired physician for consultation.

It was this last old practitioner who gave the anxious household the most hope:

“I’ve known Charles Barnard, boy and man, from his birth on, till I gave up practice a year ago. He has the family constitution, tough as steel. I have faith in God that our efforts will be blessed, and that he will win through. Ill as he is, there are no fatal symptoms—yet. We will not invite them in our own minds by forebodings.”

Nevertheless, there came a day at the month’s end when even the sanguine old doctor lost something of his cheerfulness, and settled himself for a lengthened watch in the sick chamber, through whose open windows blew so fresh and sweet a breeze it seemed that health must surely come upon it.

Mrs. Barnard also watched, sitting wide-eyed and silent at the foot of her husband’s

bed, as rigid in her anxiety as if the power of motion had wholly left her, and with her gaze riveted upon the worn face on the pillow.

The day nurse moved softly about, anticipating every unspoken suggestion of the doctor's eyes, and wearing still that professional smile of cheerfulness, which, in these later days, Amy had come to distrust, almost to hate.

In the hall without, brother and sister clung together, sometimes moving restlessly, yet noiselessly, from door to window-seat; saying nothing, listening intently, and Amy, at least, praying with an agony of supplication that would not despair.

Maybe, too, in the sight of the All-wise, Nugent's sorrow for a negligent past was, also, prayer. For the lad was profoundly moved, feeling that if only his father might be spared there was no sacrifice of personal preferences he would not make to prove his gratitude.

After a time, Amy's eyes fixed themselves upon a kitten gamboling on the trellis below, and she whispered the impotent wonder which

has stirred so many mourning hearts in the supreme hour of their grief:

“What is it, this ‘life,’ this unknown ‘principle,’ of which that useless creature is so full? If we could only take it from her and give it to our father!”

Nugent’s gaze followed her own, but he answered nothing. His ears had just caught the sound of a hurried movement within the chamber beyond, and he lifted his hand warningly, while his face turned white beneath its tan.

CHAPTER XIV

A PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS

IT was a May morning, almost a year after that Commencement which had witnessed Amy's triumph, and which now seemed to her like a beautiful dream of the past. The sunshine fell through the open window upon the kitchen floor, and upon the girl herself, standing before the big deal table, vigorously pounding a mass of dough, that puffed and rolled itself about the kneading-board, as if protesting against the treatment it received. Presently, across this sunshine fell a shadow, and with the songs of the birds outside mingled the tones of a voice that had long been unheard in that place.

"Laws, Miss Amy! Why you so whackin' that there bread? Don't you know dough has feelin's, same as folks?"

"Rebecca! You—you—here?"

"Sure enough, honey. There! you leave

go! I can't stand see no such beatings as that. Raised bread should ought to be handled fin-ickin-hard and steady; this-a-way."

Without waiting for interference from the astonished young housekeeper, the old cook rolled up her sleeves, pushed the girl aside, thrust her own hands into the flour, and began to work the dough with a deft firmness that soon reduced it to submission. Then she lifted the pans, waiting beside the board, critically scanned their surfaces, and remarked:

"Them ain't so bad, honey, but no use wasting good butter greasin' 'em. When I was home my pans needn't no greasin', for my bread was just right."

By this time Amy had recovered from her astonishment, and laid her floury hand on the other's arm.

"That will do, Rebecca. I can attend to my own affairs, please."

"Go 'long, honey. I've come back."

"Without invitation. You may take yourself off again at once."

Rebecca paid no more attention to this than to the song of the robin on the lilac bush.

Amy could not contend, physically, with the

woman, but her face flushed indignantly, and she repeated with all the sternness possible:

“Rebecca, I wish to finish this work myself.”

For answer the intruder raised a bit of the dough toward her nose, smelled it, and exclaimed reproachfully:

“Honey, you left that bread sour!”

“Well, if I did, is that anything to you now?”

“It’s allays something to me see good vittuals spoiled. How’s all?”

“Well enough. Will you go, or shall I call mother?”

“Why, no need, little missy, for disturbin’ her. Me an’ you can ’range our circumstances suitable. Ain’t you school-learned?”

Despite her anger Amy had to smile. The perfect composure on Rebecca’s face showed that she felt no compunction for what she had done, or, indeed, that her behavior had been anything save commendable.

“I am certainly wise enough to know that so ungrateful a person as you has no place in this house.”

Old Becky regarded Amy with amazement.

“To goodness knows, honey, what ails you?”

“Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? To leave us on that dreadful day when my father’s life was despaired of, and without so much as a word? If anybody had told me beforehand that you could treat my mother so I wouldn’t have believed it. But having proved so unfaithful you are of no further use here.”

Rebecca knitted her brows, caught up a fork, and pricked her shapely loaves, then carried them to the shelf above the range, remarking:

“Them done be light by dinner-time. What’s for dinner, honey?”

“That is nothing to you, as I see.”

“Why, Miss Amy, you’re dreadful tired. ’Less you’d never be so sharp like with old Becky.”

She was now moving about the kitchen, opening drawers, inspecting the general condition of things, and shaking her head vigorously at times. Her greatest dissatisfaction was, evidently, with the floor, for she immediately procured a pail and scrubbing brush, and went down upon her knees to clean it.

At a loss what to say next, and, it must be confessed, with some relief that a hateful task was being taken from her own hands, Amy sat down by the window, and watched the servant's strong and skillful movements. After a moment she said, more to herself than to the other:

"There's a right and a wrong way about every single thing, isn't there?"

"Honey, there certainly is."

"And you took the wrong one when you deserted us, Rebecca. Supposing my father had died that day? Wouldn't you have felt it dreadfully, remembering how you had treated us?"

Rebecca gathered her skirts around her plump person, and sat down on an oasis of dry boards in the midst of a desert of soapy water. From this lowly position she regarded Amy with troubled eyes.

"Honey, me and you 'pears to be talkin' contrary. How come I be ashamed, as you say? Wasn't the death-angel flying right around and around this house? Wasn't he just as like catch Becky as your father? Ain't the first one his scrawny fingers lights

on the one has to go? Wasn't Becky *right down on the ground-floor, where that angel done come in?* Huh! Suppose I going to wait an' let him catch me? I didn't dast. I did hate to leave you-all, that-a-way, but nobody that's got sense stay in a house where death's a-flyin'. No, indeedy. So, course, I *had* to go."

"Rebecca! Is it possible that you can be so ignorant as that?"

Becky knew enough to appreciate the indignity of that word, and resumed her task with a gesture of resentment. But Amy went on:

"When you found father didn't die, but began slowly to get well, why didn't you come back?"

"I forget. I guess 'twas 'cause I got married."

"To whom, pray? If you should by any chance remember his name!"

"His name Peter. Him that is old lady Merton's coachman."

"Is that possible! Would he marry you?"

"Why not? Can't I cook tasty?"

"Humph! Do folks marry to please their appetites?"

“ A heap of 'em do. Good victuals ain't no hindrance to getting along smooth, as I ever heard. Look at your own folks now. Ain't your pa better natured when he has his roast done to suit him? ”

Amy smiled, then grew sober.

“ Alas, Becky! I'm afraid it's not often that way now. I try and try, but everything comes easier to me than the cooking.”

“ That's why I come back. After my husband he left for New York where his missis is I worked a spell for them Herburns. They ain't your kind, they ain't. All on their backs and nothing in their cupboard. Me and them didn't hitch; and one day, that was yesterday, when Miss Sophy come in the kitchen and got saucy I done left.”

Amy laughed at the picture which rose before her. Well she knew that the spoiled Rebecca would resent any interference by “strangers,” and could fancy the face of the fashionable young lady when “taught her place” by the old colored woman.

“ Yes, honey, she come boastin' her sister beaten you at that college where she went at. Said if you'd have went you'd had to come

packin' home again straight. Said was all a mistake, anyhow, your gettin' that chance. And didn't I know what your ma tole me? I reckon I set her down where she'll stay without sassin' me, one spell."

Amy's cheek had flushed. She had heard from other sources that Jeannette's family had made the same statement; that but for favoritism Amy would never have had the scholarship. The falsehood had been hard to endure in silence, yet that was the only way in which she could meet it; leaving it to her friends, if they chose, to set the matter right. Then the flush subsided, and she replied:

"Untruths hurt those who utter them worse than anybody else. I expect, Becky, I was what you call 'too much sot up.' I've been going to school to a lot of new teachers since I graduated last summer. It needed Professor Slander to teach me humility."

"You going to school, honey? Why, I thought you done got through all that foolishness."

"No, indeed. I've been matriculated in the College of Life, and I find it difficult to comprehend all my lessons."

Old Rebecca looked in alarm at the sweet face by the window. It was an old trick of her favorite's to puzzle her with the longest words that occurred, but there had never before been such a tone of seriousness beneath the outward fun.

"Laws, Miss Amy, quit foolin'. How could you be going to school yet be doing all your folkses' housework, I'd like to know."

"Bless your heart, I haven't done it all. We put the washing out."

"Why for? Why didn't you get a good woman to work in my place?"

"We couldn't afford it. I reckon we're pretty poor, nowadays, my Rebecca. You shouldn't have come back. Even the rats forsake a sinking ship, you know."

"Well, I ain't no rat, honey. I've come back. You best go tell Mis' Barnard so."

"She won't be able to pay you."

"You go 'long and tell her. When I get this floor done and that bread in the oven, I'll conversation a spell with your ma."

"It's kind of you to clean my floor for me."

"Huh! Supposin' I could step 'round on a mess of grease spots?"

“But they’re my grease spots, not yours, and I manage by stepping *around* them not *on* them.”

“Oh! Miss Amy. But I know better.”

“No, indeed, Becky, it is true. I get so tired sometimes, I can’t clean the floor. But I’m learning. After a time it will scarcely need scrubbing, for I shall do my cooking so daintily that no crumbs will fall. ‘Practice makes perfect.’”

“No, indeedy. Some folks is born cooks, and some——”

“Have cooking ‘thrust upon them,’ eh?”

Rebecca did not answer; she was washing the bread-raiser at the cold-water spigot, and regarding the latter’s tarnished state with stern disapproval. She reflected that it would take her many days to get the kitchen into the condition she liked, and was considering which was the most necessary task to begin with. There wasn’t room in Rebecca’s mind for many ideas at a time, and the spigot drove the thought of wages away, till Amy recalled it.

“Rebecca, you must believe me. My mother cannot afford to pay you what she

used, or what you can earn elsewhere. We shall have to go on in the best way we can."

Becky came over to the window, and looked down on the weary girl, who, despite the fact that she had grown much thinner, and that her feet were aching sharply, still wore a cheerful smile and held her head erect.

"Honey, I saw you going by one day, and I 'lowed to Miss Sophy there wasn't one in Warden town could hold a candle to you."

"Why should anybody hold candles by daylight? And I never go out alone after dark."

"You needn't fool me, Miss Amy. How much you pay your wash-woman?"

Amy named the price, one much smaller than Rebecca's old wage.

"That's all right. I take it, and stay. You needn't bother, Mis' Barnard 'bout no such trifle."

"It is not a trifle, Rebecca. I can't let you cheat yourself."

"Huh! I never cheated nobody in all my born days, Amy Barnard, and you believe I ain't going to begin on Becky. I'll stay. I've been studying it out this long spell. Peter, he gets his victuals to old Madam's, don't he? I

done bought and paid for my own little house, ain't I? I get my victuals here, don't I?"

"You'll get something to eat, Rebecca, but please don't say 'victuals.' That always takes away my appetite."

"Laws, honey, you're dreadful finickin'. Never mind. What your ma pays for the wash will keep me in clothes; and if Peter, that's my man, can't pay for the firin', what's the sense of having a man? Eh?"

"Very little, I should say," laughed Amy, already feeling like another girl, or like the care-free girl she used to be.

"Then, that's all settled. Don't tell Mis' Barnard I'm back. Yo' go right off outdoors, somewheres; and when dinner-time's here I'll fetch in the vict—potatoes, and such. I 'low I'll like to see my old missis' eyes when they light on Becky fetching in the vict—stuff."

"Madam Peter-Rebecca What's-your-name. What is your name now, anyway, Becky?"

"Mis' Peter Wabbles, honey."

"Wabbles? It can't be. Nobody ever had such an absurd name as that."

"That's what it sounds like, sure."

"How do you spell it?"

“Spell it? How come I need spell anything? If I know my name, and answer to it, and Peter knows it and answers to it, and both of us pays our owin’s, ain’t that enough? School learnin’ won’t make nor mar old Becky, but a spoiled batch of bread make her ashamed all the days of her life.”

“Is there anything you cannot cook well, Rebecca? I don’t believe so; nor any part of housekeeping you don’t thoroughly understand. I wish I was as wise as you, and I mean to be. I hereby appoint you to a position in my College of Life, Professor Superstition, to the chair of Economics. Will you accept me in your class-room?”

“You surely done get queer-headed since I left you to look out for myself, Miss Amy.”

“But will you? I want to know everything. I want to make my life a many-sided one. I want to do each thing I undertake in the very best way it can be done. And it makes me half-ashamed that you, who can’t even spell, are wiser in household matters than I am. Well, Professor, I’ll act upon your suggestion. Mother is in the library with father, where she is mostly nowadays, and won’t

miss me till dinner-time. We always have it at midday, since the failure, or since father was ill. I'll go for a long walk, give myself a holiday, and be fresh for my studies under you, Professor, to-morrow morning. Good-bye."

Rebecca watched her depart, feeling puzzled and anxious. She was glad to be back in the old familiar home, but even she could realize that all was not as it used to be. She had heard of the failure at "Barnard's," but knew that the store was still kept open and saw no changes there, except in the absence of the old proprietor. He had never regained his strength sufficiently to resume business, so rumor said, but that real poverty had come upon the household was something she had not dreamed. Yet she began to understand this now as she poked about in the pantries and cellar, and saw the scarcity where had formerly been plenty.

"I reckon it high time I come, 'less my folks starve to death. What that child know 'bout good providin'? Huh!"

Meanwhile the "child" had taken the path to the river, growing more light-hearted with

each step of the way, and picturing to herself old John's face when she should tell him of Rebecca's unexpected return. He had been most indignant at the trusted servant's desertion of the family in its sorest need, and would, Amy felt, be opposed to her reception now as a member of it.

The fisherman was not at his cottage, but her own little *Amy* lay rocking in the sunlight beside the wharf, and she could not resist the temptation to again try her skill at the oars.

"How few times I have used it since Uncle John gave it me? But things seem a little brighter now. That is, I will have more time if Rebecca stays. Oh! what relief it is not to worry about dinner for even this one day," she thought. Then, as she neared the Island, she caught the sound of some one hammering, and knew that she had taken the direct way to her old friend.

She moored her boat, and ran lightly up the slope, and there, indeed, was the fisherman-carpenter working so busily that he did not notice her arrival, till, unwilling to remain longer silent, she cried out:

“Heigh-ho, Uncle! I’ve come to make a visit!”

Whereupon he wheeled around, and, in a tone of disappointment, answered:

“Oh, Amy!”

CHAPTER XV

SOME OF THE FACULTY

“OH! Don't you want me, Uncle John?”

“I didn't, missy. Now you're here, I'm powerful glad to see you. I was an old simpleton, anyway, to think I could get along without you. Yet——”

Amy's expression had changed from pain to amusement, and back again, while the old man stood looking at her in that perplexed manner.

“Yet what, Mr. Gay?”

“‘Mr. Gay,’ indeed! Well, I deserve that for being so inhospitable. You're welcome, my dear. Really welcome. I was merely preparing a surprise for you; but, after all, surprises are apt to be mistakes. Sit down, and rest a minute. Then I'll ask you to step over the house with me.”

Amy glanced at the piles of new lumber and the bundles of shingles lying on the grass, and exclaimed:

“Why, I thought you fixed the roof here last summer. Is it worn again so soon?”

“That was only patchwork. This is to be a new garment. I’m going to put in a few cupboards and such-like conveniences, too. In the old days they built their rooms four-square, without many tucking-away cubby-holes.”

“What did folks do with their clothes?”

“Hung what few they had on the pegs that are still in the walls. Well, why don’t you ask me who I’m fixing up for?”

“Because if you wish me to know, you will tell me without.”

“Humph! I do wish you to know now, so here it is: This is hoping to be a home for one Miss Amy Barnard, of Warden.”

“What can you mean?”

“Exactly what I say.”

“But why should I need any other home than that I have?”

“Because that will be taken from you before many days, I fear.”

“Uncle—John!” cried the girl in consternation, and springing up as if she must return immediately whence she had come.

“ Ah! lassie; I wish I needn't have been the one to tell you; yet who could do so with fuller sympathy? After all, too, what is it but a house? If in this old one you can be as comfortable as in that other, what does it matter? We're pilgrims, at the best.”

“ I've no desire to be a pilgrim. Tell me all you know and mean.”

“ Look back over the past months. Since the day he was stricken your father has never been able to provide any support for his family. Even though his physical strength has, apparently, returned, and he looks as well as ever, he has lost the power to exert himself. He seems to have accepted the situation without hope of anything better; and, though I have suggested it several times, your mother will not discuss business with him.”

“ Uncle John, I've longed to know just how we were fixed, but I hate to worry poor mother, and she says nothing. Do you know? Will you tell, if it is right in duty to my parents? ”

“ You will have to know very soon. I'm sure my old friends would rather you heard it from me than from idlers. When your father

was taken ill last year, 'Barnard's' was on the point of failure. I think that a different partner from him who was with your father might have averted the trouble. I don't know this, of course, and I don't like to judge unjustly. Anyway, the failure occurred while Mr. Barnard was too ill to know anything about it. Your mother was too anxious about him to care for lesser matters, and left all to the lawyers. They worked for the other side, the other man, I mean. The partners' interests ought to have been equal, but they were not made so."

"But how, then, could we spend so much money for doctors and nurses, if we hadn't it to spend? Are we in debt all that?"

Amy had been reared in a wholesome distrust of debt, and was infinitely relieved by the prompt answer:

"Not one cent. Thank God for that. Not one cent. Your mother had a few hundred dollars in the bank, I believe; a little legacy from a relative, and she used that—till it is about gone. To save the business the house had been mortgaged to its full value, and the mortgagee lives at a distance. He wishes to

reclaim his money, and the house is advertised for sale. It has always been an attractive piece of property, and is sure to go. Then—well, little Amy, I see nothing better for the present than that you should all come over here and stay; for the summer, at least.”

Amy rose and walked a bit away, wishing not to show the grief she felt at what she had heard. To lose her home, the home of the Barnards for generations past; the unpretentious, time-enriched old place, with its memories and traditions; this, indeed, was to realize what was meant by that little word, “poor.”

Then the hammering began again, and her heart reproved her.

“I must go back to him—dear old John-fisherman! Whistling and toiling for others at an age when most men would sit in the chimney-corner and grumble. Stripped of all his own kin, losing all whom he loved, yet making of us his kindred in word and deed. Well, he shall see I can show a spark of his bright spirit, even if only a spark. I can't whistle, but I can sing—over the lump in my throat! and if I sing I can't cry; and here's for his accompaniment!”

So then she picked up the tune he had started, and, though her voice was rather tremulous, kept to it bravely, till the lump, which choked her, melted, and the tears, which had threatened, retreated from her eyes. Hearing her, the carpenter redoubled his efforts; and nobody else would ever have guessed that this merry duet was meant to hide two heavy hearts.

“Good enough, missy. Good enough! That’s facing the music in fact and the right spirit. Come, let’s talk things over. They might be worse. They might be far worse. Yes, indeed. Even if it wasn’t a case of no choice, I do believe that a summer on this quiet island will put new snap into Charles Barnard. Snap in him means snap for your mother, too. Isn’t any needed for you youngsters. You and Nugent have made me so proud I’ve had to bow my head every time I stepped through my doorway—growing so tall thinking about you! Which room do you think would be best for your mother’s?”

“That big one facing the east.”

“So I think. ’Twas my own mother’s, and

her mother's before her. Good women all. A blessing rests on it."

"Mother loves the sunrise; and the view is lovely. How odd it will seem to live on an island! and how lovely to be able to watch the shadows of the mountains in the river at any time I want."

The old man rubbed his hands in glee.

"That's right, Amy, girl! That's right. Take things that way; look at the bright side of life, and behold! every side is a bright side!"

"Even being poor?"

"Even being far poorer than you will be."

"How the Faculty grows!"

"Eh? What? I guess I don't understand."

"Maybe I haven't told you. Don't you know that I'm a student at the College of Life? I won a scholarship there, last year. There's no end of the Professors of the Faculty to instruct me. There's Professor Slander, for one; his classes are in Patience and Long-suffering when one's good is evil spoken of. There's Professor Arrogance; instructs in Humility and Modesty. Points his lessons

by examples: as when those who used to flatter and court pass one by unseen, because one wears a last year's frock or can no longer entertain with any sort of 'style.' This morning, Professor Superstition was added to the corps. A woman professor, to train me in domestic science; a dabbler in hoodoo and folk-lore; can prove, infallibly, that the 'crow-in' of a girl-chicken means a death in the family,' and that to put a garment on wrong side out brings either good or bad 'luck.' I forget which."

"That Rebecca!"

"None other. Though she has become a 'Mis' Wabbles' since she left us."

"And you took her back, after her heartless behavior?"

"She took herself back. I had no option. I didn't even ask mother what to do. I left her to get the dinner when the time comes, and meanwhile to clean the kitchen, as it has not been cleaned in—ages. Of course, when mother does find her there—Becky's planning a surprise, too, so you're not the only one—if she wishes not to keep her, 'Mis' Wabbles' will have to march."

“I think she’s sent on purpose.”

“For what? I was doing the best I could.”

“And a very fair best it was, darling. But to help with the moving. That would be a task beyond your strength, even if not beyond your ambition. I, too, plan to have a finger in that pie.”

“Oh! you dear old Uncle John! What do you not plan to help in for us? I—I don’t see why God makes you so good to us! It ought to be the other way. It is we who should be good to you and care for you.”

“Aren’t you good to me? Isn’t it something for an old man like me to have a likely pair of youngsters to plan for and to keep his heart warm? Why, child, it’s my pleasure, my pleasure, to know I can still be of use to you. I shall feel it an honor to have your mother and father on this Island, and shall serve them to the best of my ability. Of course, you know I shall look upon you as my guests while you stay.”

“Oh, that would be impossible. You’re too generous for your own good, and I know father and mother will never accept such a sacrifice on your part. Why, think of it. Four

people, maybe five—if one reckons that burr-like Rebecca—and two of them with prodigious appetites. If you give us house-room you mustn't find us in what Becky terms 'victuals.' ”

The fisherman's face saddened; but only for a moment. When he looked up again the smile had returned to his lips and the whimsical twinkle to his eyes, which had never as yet been hidden behind glasses.

“Come, Amy, ‘let us reason together.’ You nibble away at this puppy-nose apple, that I've kept all winter wrapped in paper for you. There are more where it came from, so don't ‘save it for father.’ ‘Father’ has had his share of good things. That's yours to enjoy.”

Amy's white teeth were already set in the crimson skin of the fruit, and she nodded her head, meaning: “I'm ready to hear the ‘reason,’ if not to be convinced by it.”

Old John went on:

“I have just two thousand dollars in the bank. Money I saved years ago—one-half of it—for my own family. I have never touched it, and it has doubled itself. Now, I propose to let it draw another kind of compound inter-

est—the interest of love and gratitude, if you will. It may be, though, that we will not have to use any of it. What with my good trade and Nugent's earnings there should be enough to feed us all. There'll be some expense in moving, but we'll make it as light as may be. I'll hire the sloop of a man I know and fetch what stuff you need across the water, and I think your father's old porter will be glad to give his good master a lift by carting the goods from house to river-shore. Yet it will make us all comfortable to know there's the bank money waiting should we want it. If there is any surplus after I'm done with it, I've always intended it for you. I simply left it to keep me in the days when my usefulness was past. If I'm useful to the end, the more for my bonny girl, who must put those tears out of her eyes this minute! Why, missy, what are you crying about now, anyway?"

"Your nobleness, Uncle John."

"Consternation! For an invisible thing like that! Suppose I cry about yours? 'Tisn't fair to have all the salt water on one side."

"Mine! You dear old silly!"

"Thanks. Don't I know? I'm 'Uncle

John' to half Warden; yet who, of all its young folks, comes to me and makes me the close, real friend that you and Nugent do? I'm a 'nice old fellow' to the rest of them, but, child, don't I appreciate being more than that to you? Indeed, it is the marrow, the sweetness of my fading life. There, there, don't let's get sentimental—two such common-sense folks as we are. 'Giff-gaff makes good friends.' Come, now, we'll go over the whole house and look at it critically again. Plan a place for everything, then when 'everything' comes its place will be ready."

Amy followed promptly. She was amazed, herself, to find how easily she accepted this change of residence, and how full of delight the Island would really be. Her spirits rose, she met the fisherman's suggestions with practical comments of her own concerning her parents' comfort, and found the morning gone before she realized it. When he had to remind her that it was twelve o'clock she was surprised, and exclaimed:

"Professor Poverty is almost the best of the Faculty. Instead of being stern and disagreeable, like Drs. Slander and Arrogance, he's

simple and delightful. He's almost as charming as Professor Gray, and that man's name stands to me for the highest. Good-bye, Professor Gay; I appoint you—nay, God himself appointed you—to the Chair of Cheerfulness in my Life College. You're better than Professor Poverty, you're the dearest of the group. No; don't bother to go to the wharf with me. I can manage well enough; but when will you tell mother about this moving?"

"Amy, you'd better do that yourself."

"Oh! Uncle John!"

"So Professor Cheerfulness directs! Whose words can be as wise as a tender daughter's? and there's everything in the way a case is put."

"I see, I see! If I speak of the benefit to father that a summer over here will be, she will mind the rest far less. That, I suppose, is being 'as wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove.' Well, I'll try it. Good-bye."

But it was with far less delight that the girl rowed homewards than she had felt on her outward trip; yet as she neared the shore she caught sight of somebody waiting there who brought the smiles again to her face.

CHAPTER XVI

REUNIONS

“EDNA! Oh, Edna!”

“Amy—my sweet!”

They could scarcely wait to meet, and stretched arms toward one another with the impatient enthusiasm of girlhood, the world over. Then Amy caught up the oars she had dropped and sent her little craft leaping to the wharf, where she sprang out and left it to its fate while she clasped her friend in a warm embrace.

“Oh! are you really, really here?”

“Really—and how good it is! Stand back. Let me look at you! Why, child you’re thinner than you used to be, but—darling, you’re even lovelier!” cried Edna, holding the other at a distance.

“And you! Why, Ned, you’re quite the young woman of fashion! How you’ve grown! or is it that long skirt that makes the

difference? When did you come? How is the dear Madam? Are you going to stay? Talk, talk!"

"Oh! I'll talk fast enough—you know I can do it—after you've tied your boat. No need to lose that even if you have gained me. I mean to have ever so many rows in it this summer."

A few moments later they were walking, arm in arm, up the shaded hill road toward Amy's home, but finding, after all, that speech was more difficult than they had dreamed.

"It's almost a year since we parted, dearie."

"Almost a year, and so many things happen in a year," answered Amy, somewhat gravely.

Edna clasped her closer and responded with a similar gravity:

"I know some of the things which have happened to you, though your letters have been few and short. You usually left out the real inside matters that I wanted most to hear about."

"There was so little to write that was bright. Father's long illness and mother's anxiety; Nugent's hard times as a farmer's

apprentice; my own learning to do housework—the real work part of the house, Edna; none of that would have been interesting to you, in your altogether different life.”

“When did you learn to misjudge me? Haven’t you always been my one dearest friend? Why should I change?”

“I’m glad you haven’t, though my life must seem dull to you, after all your variety. Tell me, has Madam, your grandmother, come home to stay?”

“‘Forever and a day,’ she declares. Oh! what a year we’ve had! I’ve learned to live in a trunk—or trunks. I’ve become a lightning packer. We’ve gone from ‘Pontius to Pilate,’ according to Peter. By the way, since our man has married your woman, the families have become ‘connections,’ haven’t they? Grandma has tried every spa and spring—hot, cold, or tepid—to be heard of anywhere. I’ve learned more about our ‘Sweet Land of Liberty’ during ten months of travel than in all my geography lessons put together. Ah! I shall appreciate keeping still for a while. Now, your turn.”

“I’ve summed all our affairs in what I said

before, or nearly all. Though this very morning I've had an unpleasant-pleasant surprise. We must soon leave our home; it is to be sold. That's the unpleasant part; the pleasant and comforting is that another is being made ready for us, by one who can ill afford such generosity."

"Your pretty home to be sold! Oh, Amy!"

"Dear Uncle John has offered his house on the Island for the summer. It will be charming over there. You must be often with us."

Edna understood that it was a case where to express no sympathy, or, rather, no pity, was the surest proof of friendship. That Amy had suffered a great shock was as evident as that she was trying to endure it courageously.

"What a delightful excuse for me to learn to row! Grandma has always been afraid of my going on the water, but she'll surely consent now, since that's the only road by which I can pass to you. If I only had a gondola and a dark-eyed gondolier! We could imagine ourselves in Venice. I think it will be lovely over there. I'll come to picnic with you any day you ask me."

“Don't wait for the asking.”

“How has Sir Cat been conducting himself?”

“Well. Well, indeed. That boy has worked like a hero. He is a sort of hero, too. Did you hear about the colts and the reward?”

“I knew that a reward had been offered by Mr. Growden, but nothing had come of it before I went away.”

They had now turned from the field path into the main road and Amy was about to answer when they saw a farm wagon rolling toward them at a good pace, and both exclaimed, at once:

“There's Nugent, now!”

Edna added:

“That will save us a long tramp, for I was going to ask you to walk to the farm with me, to see about the horses. Grandma wants them sent home, and Peter's sick with rheumatism, so can't be called on for any errands.”

“Mr. Growden is so queer. You'd better go out and see him yourself. Nugent has given offense, already, by transacting some of the farmer's business for him.”

With that Amy waved to her brother who rather reluctantly stopped his team alongside the spot where they had halted. He was in his working rig of blouse and overalls, a big straw hat crowning his sun-browned face and chestnut curls, and was consciously awkward in a costume which perfectly suited his business and that Edna thought most becoming. He was honestly glad to see her, yet succeeded only in lifting his hat and making a sidelong bow.

She had already extended her hand, but withdrew it, turning toward Amy with a twinkle in her eyes and the request:

“Introduce us, please.”

Whereupon the lad laughed, held out his own hand, and remarked:

“Didn’t know that so fashionable a young lady would remember a working boy.”

“Didn’t know I had common sense? Thank you.”

Again Nugent laughed, and in that laugh became natural; a straightforward, honest-hearted fellow who really felt himself the equal of anybody, despite his surface shyness. For a brief time he and his old friend and tor-

mentor regarded each other with kindly curiosity, taking note of the changes a year had made; then said the girl:

“Well, I’m waiting.”

“So I see. For what?”

“To be invited to take a drive.”

“With me? In these clothes? In this old wagon? These work-horses?”

“How else?”

“You’d not be ashamed? You, too, Amy? How are mother and father?”

“As usual. Becky has returned. That’s why I’m loafing this morning. But I must get home now. It’s nearly dinner-time.”

“There’s one accomplishment you haven’t lost, Mr. Farmer: that of asking questions. Only, you do not ask the one question I long to hear.”

“Miss Merton, may I have the pleasure?”

“Assuredly. The pleasure will be mine.”

“I must drive in but one direction. I’m not my own master.”

“Nor I my own mistress. And your road is mine—to end at the Growden farm.”

As Nugent sprang down from one side of

the wagon, to assist her in, Edna as lightly leaped upward on the other side and smilingly seated herself to await his pleasure.

“Oh, Ned! you haven’t changed a bit!” cried Amy joyfully.

“If you’ll both kindly rid yourselves of the notion that I could change you’ll oblige me. Now, boy, I’m in a hurry. I wasted a lot of time running about town looking for Amy and found her but a few minutes ago. I try to be around when grandma takes her luncheon, for, of late, she fancies I can fix her various messes better than Parsons can. Unfortunately, Parsons doesn’t agree with her, and, if I’m not on hand, tyrannizes my poor dear into eating anything offered. Oh, Nugent! I’m so sorry. You’ll let me say that to you, won’t you? Though I dared not to Amy. There was a proud, don’t-you-pity-me look in her eyes that dashed my sympathy before it was expressed.”

The lad flushed and answered:

“Maybe it runs in the family, that spirit. And you haven’t forgotten how to talk, have you?”

“To say so mean a thing when I’ve just

come home! Really, boy, isn't there any way to avert it?"

"What do you mean?" he asked quickly.

"The selling of your home."

"Oh, Ned! Has Amy heard that already?"

"Yes. John Gay has just told her and, at the same time, offered his Island house for your use. He's at work repairing and altering it, Amy says, and it will be an ideal spot for the summer. But to lose the home, I can't bear that. I've always thought it the prettiest place in Warden, and I can't imagine anybody save your family living there."

Nugent's head drooped and his face lost all its brightness.

"It's all my fault, Edna."

"Your fault? How can it be?"

"If I'd gone into the store when father wished me to, and needed me so badly, things might have been different. The two of us might have kept closer watch over the business and he could have prevented some, at least, of the unwarranted expenses his partner undertook. Poor father! He worked single-handed, against great odds; half-ill for months, under fretting anxiety; and I, his only

son, the last of the Barnards, refusing to help him."

"You didn't realize it, I suppose. Anyway, could you have stopped it?"

"To the extent, maybe, that we could have sacrificed everything else yet kept the place. It will nearly kill my father to leave it. As for mother—I dare not think about her. I tell you what, Edna Merton, the hardest thing in the world is to know that your own foolishness has ruined others! But,"—he added, after a pause,—“if I did ruin them I will make them rich again!”

"Good. That's the talk. If I were a boy there isn't anything in the world I couldn't accomplish."

"Now you're ridiculing me."

"I'm not. I feel that way. It's an easy way to feel, because I'm a girl and don't have to be so very ambitious. How will you begin?"

"I've already begun. Or Johnny has begun for me. I couldn't have done anything without that horse."

"I hate riddles."

"This isn't a riddle, it's a fact. Amy had

no time to ride him, even if she'd learned how. But evenings, after even old Growden——”

“Mr. Growden, please.”

“Was satisfied that I had done a full day's work, I'd ride off up the mountain on Johnny and forget everything that was disagreeable. Your right ear should have burned, lots of times, I used to think so gratefully about you. As I said before, if it hadn't been for Johnny I should never have dreamed of it. Do I look like a dreamer?”

“Hm-m. I—I wouldn't like to say. I've no use for dreamers. I like practical folks.”

“I'll be practical enough, when the time comes. Did you know that I was a landed proprietor?”

“I did not.”

“I am. My grandfather, for whom I'm named, made a speculation once. It was said to be the only time in his conservative life. He bought a strip of land on Gray Mountain because somebody had convinced him that the hill was full of iron ore. He lost his cool head, and wasted money on the scheme. There certainly is iron in Gray Mountain, though not enough to pay for mining. Nevertheless, it's

out of that very peak, out of my own bit of 'mother earth' which grandfather willed me, that the fortunes of the family are to be restored. More than restored. In the past we've never been anything better than just well-to-do; in the future we're to be rich; and that will be due to you and your Johnny, Ned."

Edna's curiosity was greater than her faith in his declarations, still she had caught something of his enthusiasm.

"Quick, lad. Tell me all about it."

"It began with the reward Mr. Growden offered. The H. T. D. Society got no trace of the two colts, and it came into my head that maybe they'd strayed into some ravine on old Gray. When I was a little chap I used to about live up there; I felt so rich 'owning a mountain,' and I'd been over every rod of it, nearly. I knew there were places where an animal might easily get trapped and where no one could follow on horseback."

"Why didn't they go on foot? Two hundred dollars is quite a sum."

"Yes, if anybody else than old—beg pardon—Mr. Growden had offered it. People haven't much faith in his promises, despite his

boast that he is a perfectly just man. He is just—according to his ‘lights,’ which don’t happen always to be the ‘lights’ of others. The impression was that he’d try some chicanery to get out of paying the money even if the colts were found. The impression was correct!”

“He wouldn’t be so mean!”

“Wouldn’t he? Meanness comes as easy to him as falling off a log.”

“Go on. Tell the rest.”

“Well, I did find them; in a gully where there was plenty of feed for a few weeks, at least, and a stream of fresh water. Remember the Babcocks? The half-witted old couple of mountaineers, ‘squatters’?”

“The pair that used to bring baskets around to sell?”

“The identical. They live in a shanty in that hollow where the colts were, and had kept the creatures from leaving it. Though they can’t read, and had never heard of the reward, not happening to come to town after it was offered, their witlessness was still shrewdness enough to know a good thing when they saw it. They knew that horses brought money,

and meant 'some time' to drive their find into Warden and sell them. But they were so shiftless they 'didn't never get 'round to it yit,' till I appeared on the scene and explained matters. Then, do you believe they refused to let the animals go until they—*they*—had been paid the full reward!"

"They're not so foolish as they seem, are they?"

"Ned, isn't it amazing how keen everybody is after money?"

"Even Nugent Barnard!"

"Even he! The outcome of it all was that I rode home, hot foot, and told my boss. Then what do you think he did and said?"

"I haven't a notion. Only I imagine from what you hinted that it was something petty."

"Refuses to pay the reward to anybody. Not to me, 'because I'm in his employ and all my services belong to him.' Even my time 'after hours,' since I hired by the month and not the day! And not to the Babcocks, 'because they didn't find the colts—the colts found them—and did not report the fact.' Somebody suggested that the mountaineers should go to law, and Growden says: 'Let

'em!' He knows well enough that they're no match for him, and that none but a pettifogger, such as I used to clerk for, would undertake the case."

"And Grover Growden considers himself a just man!"

"So he says. But——"

"Nugent, how could you stay with him afterward?"

"Do you suppose I enjoyed it? But I was determined not to be idle. I like farming. I like it immensely. Some day, maybe, I'll be a scientific farmer, the only kind that can be successful these days. I made up my mind to learn the business, all the practical part of it, and I couldn't do so under any better teacher. Old—I mean, Mr.—Growden can get more and better crops out of his land than any other man in the county. He's made a study of the soil, and what affects it, and I've been watching him mighty close. He doesn't half like it, yet rather does, too. Amy and I have gone into chemistry this past year."

"Together? How delightful. I liked chemistry, the bit I dabbled in it at school."

"You know Professor Gray offered to help

her in any way he could, with her studies, after she gave up college. She had mighty little time for any study, poor girl! and I reckon would have preferred a course in literature. But she gave that up to learn what she could of chemistry, to help me."

"She's always giving up for somebody, the dear, unselfish girl!"

"Don't fancy I'm not appreciative, this time. Indeed, I wouldn't have asked it only I know, in the end, it will be to her own advantage. Oh, there's nobody can tell me anything about my sister's goodness that I don't know. She's an 'honor girl' clear through."

Edna gave him a commending smile, and felt that she had never liked him so well. He seemed quite another Nugent from the old, indolent, thoughtlessly selfish boy she had known, and she exclaimed with rather unflattering frankness:

"If to 'study farming' improves everybody as much as it has you, it would be a fine thing for Warden to have an agricultural school opened here."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome. Well, go on about

the chemistry and your plan for money-making.”

But he would not. He fancied that underneath her outward sympathy lay a distrust of his powers and ridicule of his enthusiasm. His lips closed firmly, and not another word escaped them till they reached the farm, when he remarked:

“You’ll find *old* Growden in his office.”

CHAPTER XVII

A BUSINESS CALL

“MISS EDNA, there’s a young gentleman in the parlor asking for Madam, and she’s just gone to her room. What shall I do?”

“Didn’t he send up his name?”

“Yes. I guess it was Barnum or something. He isn’t a real gentleman, you know. Hadn’t any card, or such, and looks like a working man. Seems to be in a hurry, and wouldn’t take ‘no’ for an answer. Says it’s very important he should see the mistress, and I told him if it was a tradesman with a bill I’d take it, and, goodness! you’d thought I’d insulted him, the way he turned on me, and asked: ‘Will you, or will you not, carry my message to your mistress?’ Of all the airs!”

“Oh! poor Parsons! when will you learn that there are ‘gentlemen,’ real gentlemen, who do not wear evening clothes after six

o'clock? Living in hotels half your life has spoiled you, my good Parsons, and I myself will see the visitor. It's my old friend, Nugent Barnard, of course; but what can he want with grandma?"

A moment later the girl entered the room, where Nugent was impatiently striding about, looking at the pictures on the walls, or turning the pages of the magazines upon the table, and doing nothing for more than a few seconds at a time. Shyness and determination mingled are not a comfortable compound, and the paying of an evening call was a trial he always avoided, if possible. At the sound of a footstep, too light and brisk to belong to Madam Merton, he faced about and, at once forgot his shyness in his indignation.

"I called to see your grandmother."

"Yes, Nugent, so I understood. But she has gone up to her own sitting room for the evening, and will not likely come down again, unless for something 'very important,'" mischievously quoting his own words to the maid, and glancing curiously toward a case of bottles standing upon the floor.

"Wouldn't she see me upstairs?"

“Come, Nugent, don’t act stiff and cranky. If I offended you yesterday, on our ride to the farm, I’m sorry for it, and can’t guess how. Tell me your errand, please, and I’ll interview grandma myself.”

If he had been less in earnest he would have gone away in a huff. But he had had what he believed was an “inspiration,” and his dominant idea was to act upon it. He saw that the shortest way to his end lay in explaining matters to Edna and winning her co-operation, if possible. So he brought a chair and placed it for her, having, despite Parsons’ hasty judgment, the instincts and training of a gentleman; then lifted a paper-wrapped bottle and seated himself near her. With this object in his hand, to serve as a text, he felt he could talk convincingly.

“Well, I fancy I was disagreeable myself, Edna, and apologize. It shan’t happen again—till next time! We’ve always ‘squabbled’ and always shall, I reckon; but if I didn’t like you I surely wouldn’t now be putting myself in your power, so to speak.”

“Heigh-ho! This grows interesting.”

“I’ll go back to our Johnny talk,” said Nu-

gent; and, having proceeded thus far, lost himself in his own thoughts.

“Go on, please. So suggestive of johnny-cake.”

“Excuse me. I got thinking.”

“An excellent thing for a ‘dreamer.’”

“One of my pet rides on your Johnny was to the Yellow Spring. Do you remember it?”

“Do I not? See that scar on my wrist: a souvenir of your dirty Yellow Spring, and the jagged rocks which guard it.”

“The right word exactly: ‘Guard.’ That spring is on my land, and is my fortune.”

“Indeed? Are you talking sense or nonsense?”

Nugent airily waved the bottle he held, forgetting that its cork was not tight-fitting, and Edna’s dainty gown received an ugly stain. Her calm self-possession under the annoying circumstance revealed her high breeding, and she lightly motioned him back to his chair when he sprang up, confused and sorry.

“It’s the truth. That knowledge is the result of our chemistry studies. Amy and I have analyzed the water, and found it superior to almost all the famous springs in the country.

I've brought this lot for—to ask—do you suppose Madam Merton will try it?"

"Why she, especially?"

"She's so splendidly rheumatic, or gouty, or whatever it is. Ned,—do you suppose that she'd try it? Just to—to make my fortune?"

"Nugent, I do suppose she'd try anything—anything—just for whimsy, if it had the word 'medical' tacked to it. The thing to suppose in the beginning, is whether I'll let her try it."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say."

"You wouldn't stand between Amy and wealth!"

"I'd stand between my precious old dear and any young crank in the universe, even my beloved Amy's brother. There."

"But I'm not a crank. The thing is fine. Genuine. I've tested it. This water contains——"

"Spare me. I'd rather not be informed."

"I believe it will surely cure her."

"I'm sorry I can't share your belief."

"Ned, how can you be so hard? It's such

a trifle I ask. If I could see her herself for one minute——”

“Wheedling won't move me. Grandma sweet isn't to be poisoned by any nasty stale water from Yellow Spring.”

“'Tisn't stale. Beg pardon for so flat a contradiction. I walked up there this very evening and brought a demijohn of it down to the house. Bought all these fresh bottles from the drug store, and then came here with them. It's as fresh as can be. It's always bubbling over the little basin in the rocks, and has been going to waste these ages, instead of curing the suffering anywhere.”

“Why has nobody discovered its marvelous virtue before?”

“Been waiting for a leader, probably. There is an Indian tradition concerning it: that if a redskin was ill his tribe would either carry him to the Spring and bathe him in its waters, or carry the water to him. The taste is against its common use.”

“Ugh! I should think so, indeed. Sort of an Indian flavor left after the bath. Ugh! you horrid boy.”

“You hateful girl. Taking a fellow up that

short. You know there hasn't been an Indian in these parts for generations. Likely their last 'bath' has flowed away. But, come. Please don't be silly nor prejudiced. Prejudice is always a sign of ignorance. Won't you take me to Madam, and let me plead my cause with her?"

"Exactly what do you want or expect of her, boy?"

"To drink the water. To drink it for several successive days, and see if it doesn't help her."

Edna's color rose. She could scarcely believe her own ears. When she could speak, she inquired, with frigid coolness:

"Do you expect that my grandmother, my grandmother—Madam Merton—will make a freak exhibit of her aristocratic self, to advertise the merits of your insufferable Spring? Faugh! The fumes of that bottle you hold in your hand are enough to settle the question why nobody has ever utilized it before." And a very dainty handkerchief was held to an up-turned nose.

"I admitted it was nasty, but I maintain that it is good. Pooh, Ned. I didn't think—"



“ Why, it's Nugent, isn't it ? ” — Page 253.

I hoped—— Well, good-evening. I know now just how great a value to put upon your friendship.”

Both had risen, and both were more seriously angry than they had ever before been with each other. With a fierce air Nugent swung his case of bottles to his shoulder, bowed, and strode into the hall, and—into Madam Merton.

“ Ah, beg pardon, Madam. I did not know——”

“ So I perceive. Why, it's Nugent, isn't it? I heard the ring, and asked Parsons who had called. She thought an 'agent' of some sort, yet somebody whom Edna knew. I judged I'd best come down. How are your parents? I'm hoping to call upon them the first time I drive out. It will take some time to get the horses into fit condition for use, though; that farmer of yours has kept them so short. He sent me word I wouldn't find them too fat or overfed and—I haven't.”

Nugent had flashed a triumphant glance toward Edna, who sat frowning while he set down his case again and rolled an easy-chair forward for the old lady. She was fond of

the young people, and was regarding his growth and improvement with much pleasure. Then her keen nostrils detected the odor of the water, and she sniffed it eagerly.

“Hhuf! Hhuf! What’s that? Smells like that Sulphur Spring in Kentucky. Iron, too! I smell iron.”

With a comical gesture of despair the granddaughter threw up her hands and strolled to the rear of the room. Nugent sent a second glance of triumph after her, which she did not see, then addressed himself to the Madam, and with an eloquence he did not himself know he possessed. Edna, listening, knew that her opposition was in vain, and returned to stand guard behind her grandmother, meaning to interject as many disparaging remarks as possible, even if they would do no good.

“You’ve tested it, have you? Know its chemical properties exactly?”

“Yes, Madam. I’ve brought our analysis. Let me show you, please.”

Edna groaned, and the old gentlewoman turned her head. “Don’t you feel well, Neddy?”

"Not very, grandma."

"Ring for glasses, dear, and take a sip of this mineral water. I don't doubt it will help you, if Nugent can spare it."

"Delighted, Madam. I brought the whole case for you, if you'll kindly accept it."

"Grandma! Grandma! I protest. You must not taste the filthy stuff. It will kill you. Don't."

"Stuff and nonsense, child. As if there was any water, in our mountains roundabout, that could hurt anybody. I've always wished we might discover another spring of healing qualities. With so few——"

"Beg pardon, grandma, but few! Why, you yourself have visited hundreds, seems to me."

"Hm-m. The trouble with this generation, it will exaggerate. The glasses, Neddy. Have you rung?"

"Must I?"

"Certainly. At once. If Nugent has taken all this trouble for me, I surely must try his gift."

Edna rang, as commanded, but turned upon her opponent with a final demand:

“Nugent Barnard, will you drink your own stuff? You yourself?”

“Of course I will;” but the girl noticed that there was a brief hesitation before his answer rang out so firmly.

“Of course,” agreed the courtly Madam; “Mr. Barnard is not the gentleman to offer that to others which he will not take himself.”

Nugent winced and recognized the veiled mischief of the lady’s words. But he felt himself “in for it,” and determined to carry the matter off to the letter. His faith in the Spring was inviolable, but the immediate effect of a draught from it upon himself had invariably been nauseating.

The maid arrived with a tray of tumblers, and Nugent poured out some of the yellowish water for Madam, who quietly set the glass upon her knee, and remarked:

“One, half-full, for Edna, please, and another for yourself. When I’m ever at a spa I like to take the water in company with my friends. It’s so much more agreeable. Nobody dares make a wry face before the others. Now, let’s hope this will prove my cure—and your fortune!”

As she raised the tumbler toward her lips the girl stayed the invalid's hand.

"Why, grandma! Did you hear what we said before you came in?"

"I did. You didn't modulate your voices; and I'm not averse to making 'the fortune' of any worthy young fellow who is willing to practice what he preaches. In other words—to take his own medicine. Drink, children, and may success attend us."

They obeyed her heroically; for, in their cases, it required heroism, but not in hers. The fumes which disturbed Edna were ambrosial in her spa-seasoned nostrils, and she emptied her tumbler with the keenest relish.

"Ah! that was fine, fine."

Poor Edna! Worse than the flavor of the enforced dose was the reflection:

"Grandma will now allow herself to become an advertisement. Fancy! The picture of her sweet, refined old face appearing in every magazine and newspaper in the land. For I know my grandmother Merton. If she's set out to help this boy's 'fortune,' she'll stick at nothing, nothing."

Then, suddenly, she realized that she needed

the air, and hastily retreated to the back porch. But she was not too quick to hear a low chuckle of amusement from Madam, echoed rather feebly by Nugent. A moment later she heard the front door close, and returned to the parlor in an indignant frame of mind.

CHAPTER XVIII

FACING THE SITUATION

FROM the time of his business failure and his recovery from the long illness which had prostrated his strength of mind and body, Mr. Barnard had lived in his library, evincing scant interest in anything outside of the books he had always loved, but, hitherto, had had so little leisure to enjoy.

Into this quiet retreat came Amy, troubled of face and sick at heart, dreading what she must tell, yet eagerly restless till the telling was over. Her mother had borne the news of the prospective sale with the calmness of one who had anticipated it, but she had felt herself unequal to the task of rousing her husband to a similar acceptance of their fresh misfortune.

“If you are able, darling, I wish you would explain it to your father. I am weak, maybe, but I shrink from the sight of his pain when he hears it.”

“ I trust I shall always be ‘ able ’ to shield you, mother, dearest, from all that I can. I’ll go at once. The sooner the better.”

So she had come, praying inwardly for that courage each would need, and laid her hand upon her father’s shoulder.

“ Can you spare me a few minutes, dear? ”

“ Minutes or hours, nowadays, daughter? My time has long ceased to be of any account. But, what’s the matter, child? Has anything unpleasant happened? ”

“ It hasn’t happened yet, father, but it’s on the road toward us. It will arrive within the fortnight. It is this,” and she laid a poster, announcing the foreclosure sale, on the desk before him.

For a while he looked at it as if it had no meaning for him; then he nodded his head silently, and as silently folded the placard and placed it in his pocket. He remained so long without speaking that Amy became impatient, and asked:

“ Did you expect this, father? ”

“ I should have expected it. I should have realized that it would come. But I knew, that is, I fancied, your mother’s fortune, or rather,

her little legacy, might be applied—Amy, does she know?”

“Yes, father; and you may be sure that the ‘legacy’ is all spent, or she would prevent this sale.”

“All spent? For what? Why? Explain, explain.”

It was a difficult task, but the girl faced it bravely. All along, she had felt that her father had not realized how their living expenses were met, and that it was due to her mother that he should know. He listened to her words intently, asking but few questions, yet these such leading ones that in a very few sentences he had learned the whole history of their past year.

Again a silence fell between them, while the daughter sat trembling for the result of her exposures, yet heartily glad that there was no more concealment from him. After a time she put her arm about his shoulders and brought her face around before his own. To her surprise she saw him again wearing his old expression of determined energy. His eyes had lost their dreamy look, his head was resolutely lifted, and with a little snap he closed the

book he had been reading, as if he had done with all that. Then he laid his hand upon her head, smiling tenderly, and saying:

“Time, then, for me to wake up. I have done wrong. I lost heart. The struggle seemed useless. Yet how could it! With you, my child, to work for. There, kiss me, and ask your mother if she will come here. But no, stay. I will go to her. I’ve fallen into bad habits, and you’ve spoiled me between you with so much kindness and attention. It’s time I should give over all this coddling and be a man again. Will you put away these books? Lately I’ve been making a few researches, delving into the probable causes of all the great failures of the world. An idle pastime and, doubtless, it’s just as well I can’t go on with it.”

Amy restored the volumes to their shelves, in a far happier mood than she had dared anticipate.

“Professor Poverty again! Even father feels his uplifting influence. How wonderful it will be if, after all, the loss of our home means our returning happiness. For to have my father his old active self would be greater

happiness than keeping any home, however fine."

Before she had completed the task assigned her she saw Mr. Barnard pass the window and turn into the street toward the town; and directly after that her mother came to the library, her gentle face far brighter than when she had last seen it.

"Oh, Amy, daughter, how bravely he bore it! I was afraid it would crush him."

The girl laughed.

"Mother, I begin to think we've all been too much 'afraid' for, and of, each other. I was 'afraid' for you, you for father, old John-fisherman for me; yet we prove not to be such a limp sort of family after all. Father started off downtown just as he used when he went to business. It did me good to see him. Why has he gone?"

"He did not say. Merely kissed me good-bye and asked the dinner hour, but I haven't felt so comfortable about him since he was first stricken. The very shock of losing his home may result in his complete cure."

"'Sweet are the uses of adversity,' mother-kin. I used to think that a piece of cant, but

I guess it's real fact. Without saying I'm happier than I was before our troubles came, which would be untrue, I do feel myself considerable more of a young woman. Sufficient, if you'll direct me, to begin our packing this very day. Then we can take it quietly and get used to it before we 'flit.' In any case it will be a deal easier to leave a torn-up, disordered house, than it would be to walk out of this just as it stands now."

Mrs. Barnard's cheerfulness was somewhat damped by the suggestion, yet she admitted its common sense. Besides, she had still a bitter piece of news for Amy's ears.

"The packing will not be the great matter you expect, dear. The best furniture, the books and their cases, most of the pictures, and all the floor coverings are included in a 'chattel mortgage' and must remain untouched by us, to await their owner's pleasure. I shall have to see our lawyer and find out exactly what is and is not left free for us. Just as well that we couldn't take much of our 'stuff' across to the Island. Of course, our stay there will be but temporary; and I hope we can get away before the day of sale. It seems to me I could not

quite endure that, nor to see our treasures handled roughly by those who look only at their intrinsic value."

"Yes, mother, we must go before that," answered Amy, all the brightness leaving her own face for the moment.

The entrance of Rebecca gave a timely change to their darkening thoughts, and the card the servant handed her brought an exclamation of surprise to the girl's lips.

"Mrs. Gray! The Professor's wife. Are you sure she asked for me, Becky?"

"Certain sure, missy. S'posin' I don't know what I hear? Course she asked for you. Said not to interrupt you if you was busy, she'd call again."

Much puzzled, Amy hastened to the parlor and greeted the lady, whom she had often met during the past winter and had learned to like almost as well as her husband, the Professor.

After the usual exchange of health, and weather, remarks, the visitor promptly introduced the object of her visit.

"Miss Amy, I've just learned from Madam Merton that it was you who designed all Edna's pretty costumes last summer, and I've

come to ask you if you can help me out, along the same lines. You know, the Mertons and we were together a long time at Saratoga, where my old friend was taking the waters, and I had ample time to notice the difference in Edna's appearance and that of most other girls at the big hotels. I would be greatly obliged if you would suggest a few things to my dressmaker; and, of course, will pay you whatever you ask for the service."

"But, Mrs. Gray, I could not take money from you, though I'd be only too thankful for a chance to serve you. The Professor——"

"Beg pardon, dear, but the Professor knows no more about clothes than I do about—logarithms. Yes, I know what you're going to say; some appropriate, but needless, thing about gratitude and so on. Between you and me, Miss Amy, that matter is all the other way. If he was able to help you in your studies, last winter, he was more than repaid by the chance to do it. Lecturing and teaching are meat and drink to that man, and I used often to pity you, sitting so meekly under his dry dissertations."

"But, Mrs. Gray, they weren't dry to me.

I owe him, maybe I owe him more than any of us dream yet."

"Very well, dear, let it stand so. That's a debt between you and him. Between you and me it's a simple question of clothes. Look at me. Isn't this gown a sight? A dumpy woman like me to be so beruffled! But it was 'the pattern' and I couldn't talk the seamstress out of it."

Amy laughed. Exhibited in this wise the costume she wore did accentuate the fullness of the little lady's plump figure, which was shapely enough and with good points that might easily have been brought out.

"Too many cross lines. It should be thus—and thus," cried the girl, interested at once. "Tell me, please, what materials you have chosen."

"A silk, of what my learned husband calls an eruptive pattern. You know, one of those plain grounds with spotty figures over it. Professor makes few comments on my apparel, but I generally remember those he does make. He calls these ruffles 'shelves,' and said he'd like them better in his cabinets. Declares they break the 'continuity of the idea' and such

trash. Meaning, in short, that my appearance doesn't please him."

"Is it trash? Upon you, long and simple lines would be much prettier. That is, according to my country notions."

"Don't disparage yourself, Miss Amy. The world is swift enough to do that for you. And don't despise your gift of creating beauty, even in a woman's gown. It is a gift. Else how came it to you who, if not really country-reared, as you suggest, have never lived or traveled outside of Warden? You could make a fine income for yourself by it, if you chose."

"Here, in this very town, Mrs. Gray?"

"Here, in this very town, my dear. If you're not too proud to do so."

Amy felt her momentary enthusiasm failing and something rose in her throat to choke her, but she answered bravely, facing the cost:

"Then I will. I must. And I have to thank you, dear Mrs. Gray, as well as your husband for great favors."

A half-frown darkened the visitor's brow, for she was herself so simple and direct that she disliked anything like too great effusion, but a keen glance into the girl's clear eyes

showed that she had not expressed all even of her own deep feeling.

“ I am glad if my suggestion will be of use to you, and I’ll try to make it wholly practical. Be sure you will be of infinite use to others. Suppose you come to our house to-morrow morning and bring your sketching things with you? You can study the stuffs I’ve bought and me, your rotund model. Between your willingness to dress me and my own to be dressed by you, we should be able to please our dear Professor, don’t you think? ”

“ I’ll surely come. Won’t you stop to see my mother? ”

The lady hesitated, remembering an already overdue engagement, but regarding, also, the changed social condition of Mrs. Barnard and her possible suspicion of any fancied slight.

“ Certainly, for a few moments, if she is at leisure. I’m due at our last Shakespeare meeting in five minutes and meant to stop elsewhere on the road. She’ll pardon a seeming haste, I suppose? ”

“ Indeed, yes, though I’m sure she’d like a glimpse of you, of whom I’ve talked so much. ”

Mrs. Barnard came at once, as much at ease

and wholly a gentlewoman in her plain house gown as the other in her too-beruffled silk; and the brief visit was a mutual pleasure. Afterward, when the visitor had gone and her errand disclosed, the mother's cheek did, indeed, flush and she drew her daughter to her with a convulsive gesture.

“Ah! motherkin! *Your* child, *your* girl, is just a bit too fine for common uses, eh? Confess, now, that's in your mind! You'd far rather go out into the world and earn money than see me do it?”

“Of course. That's natural.”

“But the other way's right. I'm thankful, thankful. Just think! My pictures of other women's gowns shall buy yours, dear. And it's such easy, charming work. Simply to sit and look at nice people and make paper dolls of them. I shall like it. I really shall.”

“But, Amy, don't delude yourself. All people are not nice and there's a seamy side to everything. If you work for one person you can hardly refuse to do so for another. The Warden women of fashion are rarely such as Madam Merton, Edna, or Mrs. Gray.”

“Hush a-discouraging of me, motherkin!” answered Amy playfully. “Who’s afraid? Nobody now. We’ve buried that word, you know; and each of us, from the father down to me, is going to take trouble a-smiling. If I’d gone to college I’d have had to wait years yet before I could have added to the family exchequer. Now—well, this is only one more of the times I’m glad I didn’t go. There comes father, up the street. I’ll see if dinner is nearly ready.”

Mr. Barnard’s step was not as firm and confident as it had been when he set out on his walk, and his wife knew that he had learned from his lawyer all the trying details which she had so carefully kept from him. Still, he too, smiled bravely in answer to her questioning glance, and said:

“It’s all right, Gertrude, I’ve just been getting down to bottom facts. I see nothing for it but that we should accept John Gay’s cottage for the time being, though I hope to obtain a situation by which I can pay him a fair rent. Well, well. It’s ‘all in the day’s work,’ and when a man is on the ground he can’t well fall farther. Yet we mustn’t complain.

We're still together; four loving people can make a world for themselves if the outside one turns against them. Even Nugent—— Whew! Look out the window, please! Look out the window, quick!"

CHAPTER XIX

CONCERNING MADAM

“NEDDY!”

“Yes, grandma. What can I do for you?”

“Fetch me your riding habit.”

Surprised, but obedient, Edna left the room, yet paused outside the door to ask:

“The old, or the new, one, grandmother?”

“The new one, of course. Do you suppose I’m going to wear your hand-me-downs?”

“You—wear?” But the idea being so absurd, the girl gave it no thought save that it was a bit of the old lady’s “nonsense.”

Presently, she re-entered the sitting room, with a handsome habit and equipments over her arm, and laid them on the table before the Madam’s chair.

“What’s to be done to it, grandma? I thought it was in perfect order.”

“I hope it is, but if so ’twill be an uncommon thing for your belongings, Neddy.”

“Don’t be hard on a poor girl who’s a-re-forming, dear. I’m not half as careless as I used to be.”

“Indeed, you’re not, child. You’re on the right road; but just keep traveling, please. At the end of it you may attain to perfect neatness.”

“I’ll try. But, grandmother sweet, you don’t over-flatter a body, do you?”

“I’d be sorry to begin to be untruthful at my age. Stand up here, a minute, please. Straight, like a soldier. Let me look at you.”

Edna smiled and assumed a military rigidity.

Madam Merton half closed her eyes, peered through, over, and beneath her spectacles, with a keenly critical air; then remarked, as if to herself:

“The same height, the same build, almost the same carriage, though my back was always straighter. I was brought up with a board on my spine. Girls strapped to spine-boards never grow up lollers.”

“I don’t see how you endured it, grandma.”

“It wasn’t pleasant. It was the fashion. That made it easy. Parsons!”

“Yes, Madam.”

“What does the clock say?”

“Twelve, Madam.”

“He’ll be here in a half-hour. Come and dress me, please. And, Edna, you look out the window toward the stables. See if Peter has saddled Johnny.”

“Johnny? Am I to ride, at this hour, grandma?”

“No, dear. *I’m* to ride. If you’ll lend me your habit.”

Both Edna and Parsons were rendered almost speechless by this statement, though the former exclaimed:

“Grandmother! What do you mean?”

The old lady laughed. She was enjoying the situation intensely and had anticipated the scene with many smothered chuckles, during the morning just passed.

“My child, your tone asks plainer than your words, if I’ve gone out of my senses. No, dear, I think I’ve just found them. Come, Parsons, cease gaping and help me into that habit.”

The maid's hands trembled so as almost to refuse their service, but Edna laid a firm hand on Madam's shoulder, and asked:

"Grandma, are you really going out on horseback?"

"Edna, I expect to ride your Johnny to the Yellow Spring," answered the other, with equally solemn voice, but twinkling eyes.

"Oh, that boy! That awful, dreadful, detestable boy!"

"Has he come?" asked the old lady demurely.

"No, grandma, and I hope he never will, if he's to aid and abet you in this—this dangerous foolishness."

Real tears sprang to the granddaughter's eyes, and her voice trembled more with anxiety than indignation. This was sufficient to touch the old gentlewoman's tender heart and she dropped her teasing manner for one of quiet earnestness.

"There, Neddy, don't look so grave; and don't, please don't, look upon your grandmother as a simpleton. You can see for yourself what the waters of that wonderful Yellow Spring have done for me since I began to use

them. Can you not? Am I not vastly improved in health—if not in behavior!—since two weeks ago, when Nugent first persuaded me to try it?”

“You’re certainly livelier,” admitted Edna reluctantly.

“I eat better, sleep better, enjoy life better. I’m devoutly thankful for all these blessings. I’m going now to see that famous Spring for myself and the only way in which I can do so yet, until I grow strong and nimble enough to walk there—unless somebody kindly blasts a carriage road thither—is to ride. Johnny is the safest beast we have, so I chose him.”

“Why, grandmother! You haven’t been in a saddle since I can remember.”

“Sorry I’ve wasted so much time. I must change all that.”

“But——” Edna’s anxiety now showed in an outburst of sobs.

Madam’s arm went round the shaking shoulders and drew them gently to her breast.

“There, there, little girl. Stop worrying. I’m a Kentuckian. I was bred in the saddle; almost born in one, so to speak. We’ve all been horsemen and horsewomen for genera-

tions. I shall try the level road first and quietly. If all goes as I expect I shall climb Gray Mountain with Nugent Barnard as escort. Be sure he'll make a careful and most watchful one. It means as much, or more, to him that my trip turns out successful than even to me. I've hired him from his employer for the rest of the day and he should be here now. Look again, please. Come, Parsons, don't dawdle. In my day young women didn't keep their escorts waiting, and I see no reason why an old one should begin so rude a habit."

Watching at the window, indignant and anxious, Edna saw Nugent ride over the driveway to the horseblock and reported:

"Your cavalier has arrived, grandmother. He's beautifully mounted on Doll, a sorrel mare, who's lost one eye, part of an ear, and has a peculiar limp. He's attired in a riding-suit of mixed colors, but wears his Sunday hat and, I'll admit, spotless linen. If he had a decent horse he'd not be bad-looking, and I shouldn't object to joining the cavalcade. I don't see why I wasn't asked."

"Do you not, Neddy? I do. Because

Peter's mount has gone lame and the carriage horses are too fresh for you. If I'd thought more about it I'd have ridden one of them myself and left you Johnny—and the old habit! Glad to see you're not so cross as you were, dearie. After a time you'll learn that grandma can still be trusted in some matters. There. How do I look? Is the jacket very loose in the back? Is my hat on straight? Please, take off the veil. That will catch in my spectacles and blind me."

Always erect, though so frail, the gentlewoman stood up before the mirror and surveyed herself with the critical enjoyment of a girl. Almost girlish she seemed, if one forgot the wrinkles and gray hair, and the very donning of the costume once so familiar and so dear, appeared to have taken many years from her age. Though she would not have admitted it, she was greatly excited and somewhat doubtful concerning the issue of her adventure. Indeed, just at that last moment, she was almost minded to give it up; but a deeper motive than her own health or amusement was in her attempt and she would not easily forget that.

“Now, Edna, kiss me good-bye. Or will you go down with me to the start?”

“Grandma, how pretty you look! Your cheeks are pink, your eyes brighter than the spectacles before them, and you are certainly straighter than I am. Grandma sweet, I’m proud of you and if you’re bent on breaking your neck I admire you for doing it in so becoming a fashion. But, dear, seriously, have you thought how the townsfolk will stare and gossip?”

If anything had been needed to clinch Madam Merton’s decision it was this argument, and Edna had unwittingly stumbled on the one thing she would, maybe, have better left unsaid. The lady’s head went up still higher and the color deepened in her face. With a flash of her eyes, she retorted:

“Since when have I—I, gauged my actions by Warden gossip? Hm-m. Are you coming down?” Then she gathered her skirt over her arm and departed.

Edna followed and stood by while the venerable horsewoman was swung up into her saddle and could but marvel at the ease with which she bore herself.

“Ah! this is good. Good. I like it. How silly I have been to debar myself so much enjoyment all these years, simply because I was a grandmother and felt it undignified. Child, after this you shall have my society on your rides. How will you like that? There. Good-bye. Don't worry. Nugent will have luncheon with us when we come back. Tell cook to make it a little heartier than ordinary, please, for we should bring back good appetites.”

They rode away, Madam in gay spirits, Nugent feeling a grave responsibility, yet still delighted, and the girl watched them with mingled anxiety and amusement. When they were out of sight she went back into the house and ordered a meal as substantial as the boy's usual midday one which she suspected he had gone without to suit her grandmother's convenience.

Also, it was the sight of this odd pair of equestrians which caused Mr. Barnard's ejaculation: “Look out the window, quick!”

The same sight made many Wardenites stare and smile, and the cheeks of both Madam and her escort glowed, as they rode

slowly through the streets—Doll's pace admitting of no greater speed—and witnessed the astonishment they created. But they kept steadily upon their way and two hours later rode slowly back again, calm and wholly satisfied. After that, on many pleasant mornings, they repeated the ride and their satisfaction deepened. The Spring proved to be all and more than Madam Merton anticipated, and the motive which had prompted her to the undertaking was confirmed. Each day, as they returned, there swung from Nugent's saddle-bow a little cask of the precious water, and people wondered what it contained. Wondering set them to prying, and prying to trespassing; and before long not only Madam Merton, but many other Wardenites were drinking water from the Yellow Spring, carrying it away in casks and demijohns, and doing their utmost to make public what Nugent had hoped, for the present, to keep secret.

“Sheep! All they wanted was a leader to jump over the wall, then all the rest would follow!” said Madam Merton, when the matter was reported to her. But she was disturbed

and meant to take steps for protecting her young escort's interests as she understood them. Like many another, however, she postponed the matter and, unfortunately, it seemed, for all concerned.

One evening, the last the Barnards were to pass in the old home, Nugent returned to it, furiously angry, and began making frantic requests of Amy.

"Come upstairs with me, or out of doors, or anywhere that we can talk," he went on. "I—I'm so mad I can scarcely speak! Hurry, please."

The sister hurried, indeed, for rarely had she seen even her quick-tempered brother in such a state; and when they had gained the privacy of the now dismantled "den," he burst forth:

"Amy, we're ruined! Ruined!"

"Why—I thought everybody knew that."

"Oh! you needn't take it so calm. 'Tisn't the old failure or any of that business. It's the Spring. My own Yellow Spring."

"What has happened to that? Is it dried up?"

"Dried up! nobody could dry it up, though

somebody is doing his utmost to do so. They're selling it, Amy! Selling the water from my own property, without leave or license; and laugh in my face when I threaten to punish them."

Though the girl had never been as sanguine as he about the "fortune" to be evolved from the patch of mountain land she had still grown to share more in his faith concerning it than she had herself fully realized. The "fortune" had seemed possible but extremely distant, save whenever she was listening to her brother's arguments. Now, it seemed to have been an accomplished fact which was taken from them at their most urgent need. She grew cold and downhearted, but finally roused herself to ask of the boy, who was striding about the little room in a distracted manner and uttering all sorts of dire and useless threats against an unknown enemy.

"Who is selling it, Nugent?"

"Druggist Kemp. The first thing I saw when I came into town to-night was his window full of advertisements of the Spring, and a row of bottles of the water disposed for sale. I rushed in and demanded what he meant by

such actions, and he sneered and laughed. Said lawyer Drayton had told him he was 'perfectly right in getting and selling the stuff if he wanted to. One man had as much right to it as another.' Oh, Amy! what shall I do? What shall I do! I saw in that the way to care for us all."

Amy was greatly distressed by her brother's disappointment. She had herself come to feel that misfortunes were the present lot of the family, and to seek in each fresh one its peculiar and helpful lesson. She was swift now to catch a ray of comfort and suggested:

"Go to Madam Merton, laddie. She's been your stanch friend all the way through and must be wise. She's been all over the world and seen how such things are managed. She'll know how to stop this stealing, if it is stealing. I confess I don't know but others do have the same right to the Spring as you claim, though I hope not. I hope not, and I hope, too, that you'll soon be able to convince them of their mistake."

"Oh, for a little money! For even that which farmer Growden honestly owes me for finding the colts."

“Go to dear old Madam, Nugent. Ask her.”

“I meant to have stayed here, this last evening. Will you explain to my mother that it's not mere foolishness which sends me out again?”

“Yes, indeed. I'll make all that right.”

So Nugent went, losing something of his anger and excitement by the way; but, on arriving at Merton House, to find his old friend inaccessible. Two doctors' phaetons stood before the entrance, and the answer to his inquiry was:

“Nobody can see her now. She is very ill. She is like to die.”

CHAPTER XX

FARMER GROWDEN'S OFFER

THERE began then the hardest year which the Barnards had ever known. A year which taxed Amy's courage to the utmost, yet resulted in strengthening and deepening it, and in confirming her reliance upon a higher than mortal Power. A year saw Nugent still toiling as a farmer's apprentice and winning his way into the confidence of his employer, and even into what was more difficult still his liberality.

When another spring had come round the old man sent for his young assistant to come into his office, and made him an offer.

“You've been here about two years now, Barnard, and have developed from a foolish boy into a sensible sort of fellow. I don't take any stock in that chemistry business of yours, and advise you to give up dabbling in dangerous stuff. I don't like it up there in your shed-

room. You're liable to an explosion any time."

"I'm careful, Mr. Growden. There's no danger. My apparatus is so limited I can't do much. If I had the money—sir, don't you think you can pay me that reward yet?"

"Don't trot out that old subject. We've worn it out. I didn't send for you to be annoyed, young man."

"No, of course not. Maybe you'd kindly explain why you did send. I was getting ready to plow that south field for fodder corn. Thought I would go over it twice and break the ground up deep. Shall I?"

"Yes, yes. When I've done with you. You'll make a first-class farmer if you don't get too foolish over outside matters. I—well, you know, I'm laid up pretty close."

"Yes, Mr. Growden, but I hope you'll soon get better."

"Hope it, do you? Mean it?"

"Surely. I'm not a heathen. I don't like to see anybody suffer."

"Humph! Flattering. Don't pretend to any over-affection for me, eh?"

"N—no, sir," stammered the other.

“Glad of it. Hate liars, and you’d be one if you said you cared a stack of corn for me. That’s all right. I like your honesty. You come of good stock, if unfortunate just now. Well, the long and short of it is, I’ve made up my mind to offer you a share in my business. Instead of wages to pay you a due proportion of the profits. You’ve kept a close eye to affairs even as a ‘hand,’ and I don’t believe ever cheated me a stiver. I’ve paid you thirty dollars a month and ‘found’ for this last year. I’ll give you five hundred for the next, with same board and accommodations. You to look out sharp for our mutual interests, and I to give you one-quarter of what you make, over and above the amount I’ve cleared from the place in the past. What say?”

Nugent hesitated. The offer was, of course, a pretty fair one, but he had other plans in his head, and did not like to commit himself so hastily.

“May I take a week to consider it, Mr. Growden?”

“Take the rest of your natural life, for all I care,” answered the old gentleman testily. “But you’re a fool if you don’t snap me up.

I may withdraw my offer, if I happen to get over this attack of rheumatism; or make it to somebody else. Hm-m. Hm-m."

"I wish you would try my Spring water. I know it would help you."

"Helped Madam Merton, didn't it!"

"Yes, Mr. Growden, it did. It wasn't the fault of the Spring nor her horseback exercise that she contracted pneumonia. That came from too much house-cleaning. She felt so well and energetic she attempted to examine some old trunks of stuff, in a hot attic. Then when she was over-heated, sat by an open window to cool off, and it was natural she should be ill. At her age it went hard with her, but she's all right again. I hope to call upon her soon."

"Was sick all last summer, wasn't she? Got sent off down to Florida, didn't she?"

"Yes. Has been there until now, but my sister had a visit from Edna yesterday, and they've come home again for the season."

"That woman is a sharp one for business; though I never did understand why she bought up your old place and the mortgages. She's

more real estate in Warden now than any other person here. A woman, too."

"She has been successful with it, I presume, and that may be the only form of business she understands. I'm glad our old home fell into her hands, though, for she's left it untouched, and won't even rent it, I hear. Indeed, she had Edna tell my mother that everything in the house was to be left, and would be safe till she needed it. Then she would notify us to remove the goods."

"You didn't take much to old John's Island, then?"

"Not much. Merely enough to meet actual needs."

"Shall you go back there again this summer?"

Nugent wondered at this cross-examination, but replied respectfully:

"That I cannot say, Mr. Growden. Uncle John wants us to, but it is rather inconvenient for my father and sister. He has to be in town so early in the morning, and her customers can't well cross to the Island. I rather think we'll stay in the little cottage where we've been all winter. Shall I go, sir?"

“What’s your confounded hurry? If you’re going to be a partner, you can take things a trifle easier. I worked hard enough myself when I was able, but I’m not going to see another man kill himself if I can help it. You’re young. You mustn’t overdo.”

Nugent’s amazement was plain to see, and the old farmer resented it.

“Pshaw, boy! I’m not half as hard as I’m painted. Sit down. Sit down. And say, I’ll try that Spring water if you’ll haul me a keg.”

“Will you? I’m glad of that. I know it will help you.”

“That’s a strong statement.”

“It’s an honest one.”

“Listen to me. You thought I was pesky mean about that reward, didn’t you?”

The color which rushed to Nugent’s tanned face was sufficient reply, and the questioner laughed heartily at the lad’s confusion.

“That’s all right. I knew you did. I meant you should. You’d have been a sawney if you hadn’t. But young man, that was my test of you. One of ’em. If you’d taken fool’s advice and gone to law with me, or if you hadn’t been fair and willing to divide with

those worthless Babcocks, I'd have wormed out of paying it in some way. There are plenty of loopholes any pettifogging lawyer can show a man who wants to crawl through them to escape his debts. As it was—here's a check for the whole amount, with interest at six per cent. I made it out a week ago, and you'd best get it cashed this morning. It's never a good plan to keep a check on hand. The giver might fail, you know," and the farmer allowed himself a contented chuckle at Nugent's surprise and the trick he had played him.

As for the lad himself he was too astonished to believe his own eyes. His ears had already amazed him by the messages they had conveyed to his mind, but he had long ago given up expecting this money. He sat on the stoop settee, turning the paper over in his fingers, and regarding it as if it might be a hoax.

"Oh! it's all right. Anybody in Warden will cash it for you the moment you present it. I'm good for a few hundreds yet, I fancy."

"Thank you, Mr. Growden; and I beg your pardon for the hard thoughts I've had about you. I am ashamed of myself now. I am, in-

deed. And thank you for that other part—about the partnership.”

“No cause for shame. Your notion was natural. I’d have had the same. But one more word about the partnership. I’m a lonely old man, you know.”

“Sometimes I’ve fancied so.”

“This is a big, nice house.”

“Very nice, Mr. Growden.”

“I’d like to have it used now by somebody else than a gouty, grudging old man. I wish your folks would come out here and live here this summer. It would be handy for you, and if they’d let me board with them, maybe I’d gain strength. It’s hard work to get a decent meal of victuals where there’s only a hired woman at the head, and—maybe, too, I’ve not been over-liberal. But I hate waste. It’s wicked. Yet, if they’d come, I’d do my full part. They shouldn’t find me as ‘near’ as I’m reckoned. What do you think?”

“I think it would be very pleasant, on some accounts. On others——”

“Name ’em.”

“Father’s being only a clerk now, and in a strange new store, he would have to live

nearer his business. As for Amy, the same reason holds good as does about the Island."

"I've heard about her. Doesn't dress-make, but draws patterns for other women to dress-make after. Right?"

"Yes, Mr. Growden."

"Does she earn her salt at it?"

"Much more than her salt, sir. She is doing well."

"Humph. All the Warden 'four hundred' patronize her, I'm told. They ought to pay her well."

"They do, and their own selfishness, or pride, is a good thing for her. They want to keep her designs exclusively for themselves, so have set a price on her drawings that keeps them beyond the reach of what they are pleased to call 'common folks.'"

"Shucks! The world's full of fools, isn't it?"

"Moderately full, I fancy."

"It's a pity. I mean it's a pity she should have to do such things when she was so smart at her books. Hope it won't spoil her and make her sour or bitter."

Nugent threw back his head and laughed.

“Amy sour or bitter? Why, sir, that’s impossible. She’s the sunniest, happiest girl in the world. Every trouble that comes to her, or any of us, she takes and turns about so that she can see its every side; and, somehow or other, she manages to find a bright and strengthening one to everything. I don’t know what education, higher education, might have made of her, but I do know that the voluntary giving it up, and her unselfish devotion to others, is making her a splendid girl. Will make her the noblest of women.”

The farmer leaned back in his chair, and studied the lad’s face curiously. At last he remarked:

“Boy, you do me proud. A fellow that can think and speak so about his sister can’t be anything but all right.”

“’Tisn’t every brother has a sister like mine. All last winter, despite the little time she had to spare, and the less money, she managed to have a room ready for me and my few friends, once a fortnight, with a nice little spread to finish off the evening. She didn’t invite company for herself, though, I noticed. Oh! I tell you, our Amy is a girl worth working for,

and I'll see her at the top yet, before I've done."

There Nugent paused rather suddenly, and remarked:

"Beg pardon, sir. I didn't mean to get talking so free about my own affairs. Shall I start plowing that field now?"

"Yes. And as you plow, keep thinking over what I proposed."

Nugent rose, lifted his hat—a little courtesy he never failed to show his employer, but one so trivial that most of the other employees on the farm neglected—and walked away. The lonely old man watched him with keen interest and considerable anxiety. He had supposed that his partnership offer would have been greedily accepted by the lad, young to be so trusted; yet, since it was not, the eagerness and desire were now all on his own part.

"What if he should leave me? He's a likely lad, all the other men take to him, and this big farm would seem rather empty without him. Well, I hope he'll stay; and I'll try that Spring water of his if that will please him. Hello! Yonder's that Merton girl coming.

What for, I wonder? No good, I doubt. If that old grandmother of hers is going to interfere with my plans about Nugent I'll teach her a lesson. I'm going to keep that fellow on this farm if—if it takes another hundred dollars! Well, good-morning, miss."

Edna brought her runabout to a stop before the familiar porch, with the equally familiar figure in the arm-chair, bowed pleasantly, and inquired:

"Can I see Nugent Barnard?"

"I suppose you can, if you want to. What for?" said Mr. Growden rather testily.

"A little matter of business between my grandmother and himself."

"How is the old lady?"

"Very well, indeed, thank you. Remarkably well, in fact," answered the girl, growing resentful on her own part. She hated to hear the Madam spoken of as "old," and was proud of an activity so strongly in contrast with the invalidism of the past.

"I hope she isn't going to interfere with that boy's work as she did last year."

"I thought she repaid you, at a premium, for his time?"

“What if she did? Money isn't everything.”

“Oh! isn't it? Well, please, when may I see him?”

Mr. Growden blew his whistle and a man came from the stable to attend him.

“Send the young boss around here, Martin.”

The man grinned and departed. “Boss” was a nickname the “hands” had themselves bestowed upon young Barnard, because of his masterful ways and decided opinions; but he did not yet know how near to being a fact the sobriquet had now become.

Edna pricked up her ears. Something dashed her overflowing spirits, which had set her feet to tapping the floor of the runabout, and her lips to smiling. She, too, was the bearer of good news and impatient to impart it.

“What did you call Nugent, Mr. Growden?”

“The ‘young boss.’ He's become a partner in my business.”

“He—has!” cried Edna, in dismay, as Nugent returned to the spot.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WAY IT ENDED

“NUGENT, grandmother wishes to see you. Please get in and ride home with me.”

“I—I’ve started three times to plow a field that needs it. Is it important that I should go this morning, Edna? Of course, you understand, I should be only too happy if I were a free agent.”

“Mr. Growden knows you’re coming; don’t you, Mr. Growden?”

“I suppose he’s his own master, in part, now, Miss Merton. But a field——”

“Beg pardon, but the case is urgent. A deal more urgent than all the plowed or unplowed fields on your whole farm. Get in, boy.”

Nugent glanced toward his employer, who nodded curtly. He was too wise on his own personal account to quarrel with so good a customer as Madam Merton, and he also meant

that the youth should feel something of the freedom that would be his if he accepted the partnership offer.

So the lad took his seat, and Johnny whisked the little vehicle out of the grounds. Neither spoke till they were on the highroad and Johnny had been touched to his smartest pace. Then demanded Edna:

“Why don’t you ask what’s wanted?”

“I’ve no need. You’re sure to tell without asking.”

“Oh, you disagreeable Cat!”

“Thank you.”

“Don’t you see I’m just quivering to tell you?”

“Oh, yes. That’s plain enough.”

“Amy’s at our house. She’s waiting with grandma sweet. She *is* the sweetest, blindest, dearest, nicest grandmother in the world.”

“I agree with you. I’m so glad she is at home again, and so well.”

“That’s decent of you. Don’t you wonder why Amy is idling?”

“I hope that Amy will be able to idle quite often after this.”

Edna flashed a penetrating, disappointed glance into her companion's face.

"What do you mean? What do you know? Who's been telling?"

"What do you mean, yourself? What *I* mean is that I've just been offered a partnership in the farming business, at considerable of a rise from my former wages. Also,—see this?" And he held out for her inspection the check Mr. Growden had given him.

"At last!"

"At last."

"A case of the unexpected. But, pshaw! only half of that is yours, if you're as quixotic as you once were. Half of it will go to those miserable Babcocks."

"Since they are miserable all the greater reason that it should."

"Never mind. You can afford to be generous."

"I fear I can't agree with you, though I hope I can always afford to be just."

"You never do agree with me. You'd be horribly tame if you began. I wish you'd ask me my secret."

"What is your secret, Edna?"

“ I couldn't tell. It isn't mine. It's grand-ma's and Amy's. I fancy they'll think I'm a long time on the road. One thing I know: you'll never be a farmer. Not just plain farmer.”

“ That's just what I'm making up my mind to be.”

“ You may unmake it, then. You are bound to be a merchant. A great, new, progressive sort of merchant. There's to be a new 'Barnard's' in Warden, and—— But I *can't* tell my secret!”

“ You can talk a lot of nonsense.”

“ *You* haven't improved in politeness. I'm offended.”

But the merry smile upon her eager, earnest face belied her words. The real truth was that she feared she should, indeed, reveal a secret which her grandmother had in store for the bewildered listener. So she lapsed into silence, and thus continued until they reached Merton House and the presence of its mistress, who awaited her visitor with a beaming smile, that was reflected in Amy's own fair face, as she sprang up to greet her brother with a more than usually affectionate kiss.

“What’s the matter with you all this morning, dear Madam? You look brimful of mystery, and Edna has been so all along the way. Amy is excited and radiant. What’s up?”

“Nugent,” began the old gentlewoman, as quietly as she could. “That Yellow Spring water cured my rheumatism.”

“So I believe.”

“It’s cured ever so many more, right here in Warden.”

The lad’s face darkened. He was not sorry, of course, that people should be helped by the water in which he had such implicit faith; but he had never forgiven druggist Kemp for his unwarranted sale of it.

“Don’t look so black, laddie. That thief was advertising your wares for you, gratuitously, and in the widest possible manner. He saved you a good many hundreds of dollars in printer’s ink, and he—well, he saved Neddy from seeing her old lady’s picture in the backs of magazines.”

“Now, grandma, how did you know I dreaded that?”

“Have you forgotten that you told me? I haven’t. See here, my boy.”



“Oh, Madam, you have done all this for me!” cried the lad.

She held a paper towards Nugent, and bade him read it attentively. It was of legal form, and rather confusing to him who would have understood a chemical formula far easier. So she took pity on his perplexity, and her own impatience, and explained:

“This document completely protects your interests in the Spring which, unknown to you, is already becoming famous. During the winter an agent of mine has been quietly preparing the market for its reception. I have paid out a good sum in advertising and so on, all of which I expect to receive from you out of the proceeds of your healing waters. That water will make you rich, more than rich.”

“Oh, Madam, you have done all this for me!” cried the lad, overcome by his gratitude.

“Not a bit of it. That is, not wholly. I’ve done it because I’ve felt its benefits myself, and wished to extend them to all sufferers. So much for you. Now for Amy, and the rest. You know that I bought your home?”

“Yes, Madam.”

“Did you know that I also bought the store when it was closed to the public?”

“I heard so.”

“I did. I like to dabble in real estate. I should have done something with the property but for my year of unexpected illness and absence. Now, I’m going to reopen it. It is to be ‘spruced’ up with fresh paint, new fixtures, and new goods. A complete stock of perfectly reliable stuff, such as ‘Barnard’s,’ only ‘Barnard’s,’ kept, here in Warden. Amy, there, has a letter from me to your father asking him if he will resign the clerkship he was brave enough to take, small though it was, and become my manager in the concern, at a liberal salary, until such time as you shall be able to buy back the whole business.”

She paused for breath, and Amy hugged her brother till he nearly choked.

“Oh! did you ever know such a friend as Madam is, laddie? How came we to possess such an one!”

The old lady drew the girl toward her, and kissed her tearful face.

“How could you help having such, my little Amy? One and all, but most of all, my ‘honor girl,’ have you taught the world which knows you, a brave and noble lesson. The

way you have met and fought your troubles, your undaunted faith in God, the sweetness of temper and nature which you have kept through all; but, higher still, the filial love you have shown, are worth more than they have won. It was you, my Amy, that changed Neddy, here, from a thoughtless, careless girl of fashion, into a granddaughter one may be proud of."

They were a deeply moved and rather tearful group when the old lady ceased speaking; and to avert what she called a "downpour," Edna took up the theme.

"Now, grandma sweet, you've had your say, and left out one of the biggest things. I'm glad you did, because I may be able to do a little talking myself. An unusual circumstance, you all know. Well, folks, listen to me. There is no question of *where* you Barnards are to live hereafter. You are to move straight back into your old, old home, which grandma has purposely left empty till you could do so. Everything is to be as it used to be, without any of the old worries. There's to be a Spring House built on the mountain, and Nugent is to superintend the packing and shipping of his.

wonderful waters. When not doing that he is to be his father's first aid in the business of selling good goods to unworthy Wardenites. Amy and I are to continue our respective mothers' housekeepers, yet to have the best of masters and go on with our higher education—out of books—along with that out of life. Oh! isn't it fine? *Isn't* it fine! And isn't it all the doings of my precious 'honor girl'? For without her, master farmer, *you'd* never have had the chemistry lessons that helped you to—Fame and Fortune! Hurrah!"

"Neddy! Neddy! you're a darling child, but you're a wild one, and always will be."

"Grandmother dear, it—it runs in the family!"

"Irreverent! But I forgive you. People as happy as we are this morning are scarcely responsible for all their words."

"And, grandma sweet, lest I should say some further disrespectful thing, just command me, will you, to take my two friends home in the runabout with their load of good news? It's so big and bouncing it will surely take at least three to carry it."

"Maybe, child, they'd rather carry it be-

tween them. Remember, 'the stranger intermeddleth not.' ”

“ Oh! Madam Merton! As if there were any strangers here! Strangers? I think there are none even in all the world; it is so full, so full, of generous and beautiful souls. From old John-fisherman up to you, through a gamut of richness and sweetness, we've been led along the sunniest, brightest way. God bless you, Madam. God bless everybody! ”

“ Amen, ” said the old gentlewoman reverently. Then she nodded to her grandchild, and watched the radiant trio set forth upon their happy mission.

THE END

JUL 30 1904

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00020735855

