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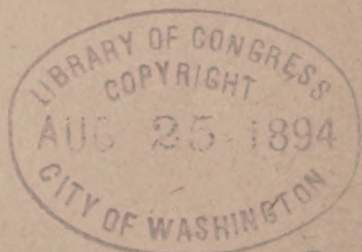
*Home & endeavour*

# A FAMILY DILEMMA

*A STORY FOR GIRLS*

BY  
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"FOR HONOR'S SAKE," ETC., ETC., ETC.



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TO  
ELSIE MAY ESCHBACH,  
WITH "AUNT LUCY'S" DEAREST LOVE.

*New York, 1894.*







# A FAMILY DILEMMA.

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## I.

SARAH opened the door of the Malone dwelling in Dawson's Block and stood a moment gazing up and down the familiar roadway, while she rejoiced over a piece of good luck which had fallen in her way. It was one of those mild days which occur between the last parts of the winter, with a sky of dazzling fairness—sunshine like filtered gold and a crisp look to every twig and tree branch, as though they were warm with the secret of an early spring. All nature seemed alert and joyously expectant and the figure of Mrs. Malone's "dead brother's child," as she called Sarah, framed in the doorway of the old house, looked young and bright enough certainly to take part in the blitheness of the morning.

But quick, good-humored, and independent though she might be, the youngest Miss Malone had not a touch of that sort of poetry in her composition which, responding to the loveliness of nature, would feel vague stirrings of delight. That the day was warm for the season and exhilarating Sarah appreciated, no doubt, as the sparkle of her black eyes and the little swing of her foot gave lively testimony, but affairs of a very different character were occupying her mind at that moment. As I have said, an unexpected piece of good luck had fallen in her way, and



the question Sarah was addressing to the sunshiny silence about her was *how* to take the best advantage of it.

Away up to the left of Dawson's Block, and where the Nautuck Hills began their first wooded enclosures, Sarah could see, in sharp outline against the radiant sky, the roof-tops and chimneys of the Hill House, by which uninteresting name Colonel Dyker's fine old dwelling was known and honored for miles around. The very fact that it was seldom occupied by the family lent it additional importance, since inexhaustible indeed must be the resources of a gentleman who could afford to leave such a place virtually closed for the greater part of twelve years. It had been cared for in the strictest manner by three elderly people, Peter Knapp, his wife, and their widowed daughter, Mrs. Keyes. Now, however, this state of things was all to be changed. Only that very morning an open wagon from the Hill House had drawn up on the corner of Dawson's Block, and Mrs. Knapp, a tall bright-eyed matron of forty-five, had disappeared within Mrs. Tom Bird's doorway adjoining the Malones', coming out in a few moments to rap briskly on the latter's kitchen door and make known her errand.

Could the widow's daughter, Aggie, come up to the Hill House for a day or two and help prepare for the rather unexpected return of the family?

Aggie and her mother were away for the day. It was Sarah who received the visitor—Sarah who was keeping house and guarding the slumbers of the widow's precious infant son, Michael—keeping house very tidily, too, for Sarah was one of those natural born housewives who have the gift of order and cleanliness as a birthright. Mrs. Knapp took it all in at a glance: the bright little kitchen, gleaming stove, and shining array of tins and



crockery within the cupboard whose door Sarah had just opened. The tall darkeyed girl of sixteen or seventeen, perhaps, looked a very cheery and capable housewife *pro tem*.

Sarah listened with polite attention to what Mrs. Knapp had to say.

“Isn’t it too bad!” she exclaimed, putting the teacup and dishcloth in her hand down to draw a chair forward for the visitor. “My cousin’s out, ma’am, you see, but it’s just for the day——”

“Why wouldn’t *you* do?” said Mrs. Knapp. “I shouldn’t think your aunt would mind, and you see I *must* get someone. You look smart. It’s more to help me clean up and then run about for a day or two and wait on the ladies when they come.”

Sarah’s dark eyes snapped and sparkled. She was well aware that it was a chance not to be lost, the Hill House embodying all of remote grandeur and distinction which she knew. There seemed but one drawback—Mikey Malone—at present wrapped in peacefully unconscious slumber. But even here the fates were propitious, for at that very moment the gate clicked and Alice Bird, a neighbor’s lame little daughter, came slowly up the narrow bit of walk. Many a kindly turn had Sarah done for Alice, and very gladly did the young girl come to her friend’s rescue now. Of course, she could and would take charge of the precious heir of the Malones; not only that, but Alice undertook to explain precisely what had happened to his parent and his elder sister.

“Now, then, spring up, my good girl,” called out Mrs. Knapp from the wagon which she had entered while Sarah made her final arrangements, packing a small bundle with feverish haste. Indeed, she only breathed



quite freely when they were well along the road, since at any moment an unexpected detention might have occurred.

“I guess you are smart and spry,” Mrs. Knapp said, with a peculiar one-sided sort of smile, as soon as they had passed the first turning. “You *look* it—and I’ll tell you just what it is you have to do. Old Miss Dyker and Miss Jean are coming home and the Colonel’s adopted daughter, Miss Polly, and the girls ’ll want a deal of waiting on unless they’re made over new since I last saw them. It’s run here and run there, and give me this and pick up that! Dear, *dear!* the place ’ll be all put about,” sighed Mrs. Knapp discontentedly. But to Sarah such a prospect seemed cheerful in the extreme! Surely it could not be anything but pleasant, even amusing, to do the bidding of these young ladies, both of whom were the Colonel’s nieces.

“And, then there’s the *party*—not a very large one, as you might say, but big enough, the dear knows, to be a bother. Colonel, he thinks it’s all easy, because he orders things by the wholesale from Albany, but I tell *you* there’s mor’n eating to one of *their* parties! We won’t get straightened out for a hull month.”

Sarah tried hard, but, as can readily be understood, found it difficult to be properly sympathetic, since the prospect revealed only what was enchanting to her mind, but she turned her bright young face up to the wrinkled one beside her, saying, “Oh, dear *me!*” with a very elderly sort of manner which stimulated her companion, as Sarah wished it might, to explain who the various members of *the* family were.

“You see,” Mrs. Knapp continued, “old Miss Dyker, she’s the Colonel’s aunt. Well, she adopted one niece,



that's Miss *Jean*. Then *he* ups and adopts Miss Polly. She's another niece. There was another—well, that's a story of long ago. Seems as if it just run in the Dyker blood to pick up with other folk's children! The other one—Sarah, she was called—well, she run away and married beneath her, and was lost sight of, I guess. But *I have* heard Miss Dyker was huntin' for a child of hers, not having done enough, I suppose, first and last in the line of adoption—and—why, even Colonel, he's gone to work and sent a strange young man right through and through college."

Mrs. Knapp spoke as though firearms *might* have been used upon this last vicarious charge, and nodded at her attentive if somewhat bewildered listener, with a grim air of "summing up" the family peculiarities, but again Sarah's little "Dear, dear!" was all she could find to say, and by this time they were entering the great gateway of the Hill House, and five moments later had driven up to a small side door. Mrs. Knapp relaxed her hold upon the reins as briskly as she had taken them up, and waited until the sound of their coming brought Mrs. Keyes to the door.

She was a tall, faded-looking young woman, a complete contrast to her mother, who spoke, as Sarah soon learned, always in a peculiarly loud and decided voice when addressing her, as though she felt it necessary to keep her wide awake.

"Now, see here, Maria," exclaimed Mrs. Knapp, "this is Mrs. Bird's daughter. No, that aint just it; it's a friend of hers—a young girl who can fly around spry and help. Now, then, jump out, my dear."

Mrs. Keyes smiled faintly, with her head very much on one side, and shook it slowly—whether in admiration of



her mother's good management or by way of welcome it was difficult to tell.

Ten minutes later, however, while Sarah stood before the great kitchen fire, fairly speechless with admiration of all she saw about her, every thought was sent flying by an exclamation from Mrs. Knapp, who had opened a telegram waiting for her on the table.

“My sakes *alive!* *Gracious!* If that aint just like 'em,” she exclaimed, tugging wildly at her hat strings, “here they go to work, never come nigh the place for *years*, and then plump down on us all in a blessed born minute! Whatever shall I do without so much as a pie to the fore, and the whole kit and crew of 'em to be here, it says, at 5.30. Now, Maria,” she concluded, wheeling around desperately upon her daughter, while Sarah listened with intense interest, “I tell you for once you've got to brace up and get to work. Mooning about is all very well when there's only empty rooms to be gaped at, but it won't do when every chair in the house may be sot upon before to-morrow night.”



## II.

SARAH never will forget the charmed excitement of that morning, when she flew about with a good will, running back and forth and up and down at the bidding of Mrs. Knapp or Mrs. Keyes, while the great house was revealed bit by bit, and the young girl from Dawson's Block got over her first almost dismay at seeing her own thin, brisk little figure so often repeated in the mirrors of the long beautiful drawing room, or those set panel-wise in the folding doors between the dining room and the Colonel's special library, and ceased to feel so spellbound and bewildered over the varied elegancies the faded splendors brought to light, even though they filled her with unspeakable admiration, waking up that love of the wonderful in the young girl, which did duty for a feeling such as might have revealed the poetic side of life and nature with a deeper charm.

It was all like living in a story book Sarah could not help feeling, and she polished the great, shining staircase in the entrance hall, allowing herself, when no one was by, the delight of walking up and down it slowly and "like a lady," smiling and bowing to an imaginary cavalier and feeling as if she was really of great consequence. "Oh, my, *no*, sir," she responded, in answer to an imaginary inquiry on her partner's part if she felt too tired to dance again. "I guess *not*. I'm sure you're awfully kind!" and putting up her hand she twirled around and around and about, humming an air under her quickly drawn breath.



But this, of course, was only momentary. There was too much actual work to be done, and Sarah was really too fond of activity not to lend a willing pair of hands. Moreover, she had caught the fire of Mrs. Knapp's anxiety about this unexpected home-coming, and quite appreciated the fact, as her employer explained it to her, that "Colonel would expect things to be all ready and in waiting, or there'd be a precious how do you do about it!"

Sarah looked on in wonder at the way in which Peter Knapp accepted all his wife's suggestions, doing her bidding as though he had long been waiting for just such a day as this, only insisting upon plenty of time to get out the old-fashioned family carriage and clean it thoroughly for its first journey in many a day.

When Peter was at last ready to start with it to the Junction Station two miles below, Mrs. Knapp calmed down long enough to watch it start away, pride beaming in her expression. She grew almost affectionate in her manner as she and Sarah turned back to the house.

"Time enough that carriage gave its wheels a chance, I should say," she exclaimed. "Now then we'll *swift* a look upstairs, Sarah. Aint you never called Sally? Well, it can't be helped, I suppose, now," as Sarah absently shook her head. "We'll just make sure every room's right, and I'll tell you all about them so you won't be waking the Colonel up, let's say, if it's Miss Jean's bell that rung."

She preceded the happy Sarah up the staircase, and flung open door after door of the rooms opening on to the wide hall.

"Here's Colonel's room all right," a sombre looking but very commodious apartment, with a glimmer of heavy old brass in picture frames and mantel ornaments, mahogany and rich dark colors in the furniture. "Yes,



and here's his dressing room," and at the next, "Here's old Miss Dyker's," a large severely plain but very commodious and well-appointed room; "and here, this is Miss Polly's, you see, Sarah," a square little room at the upper end of the hall; "and here's the room Miss Jean—Lord love her—has *always* had, right next! All those chiney figures on the mantel and the things on the little dressing table are her very own, and this pink and gray chintz, that's her own choice, and," descending two steps to a corridor in a small wing, "here are three company rooms."

One after another was entered and subjected to the process called by Mrs. Knapp "swifting" a look, not inaptly, if the truth were known, her peculiar phraseology having the merit of fitness; for her eyes darted with lightning rapidity from point to point, taking in everything, sending her flying across to straighten a picture or shake out a curtain fold where needed, while Sarah looked on, still appreciative and wondering.

The rooms were all so evidently fashioned for comfort and cheerful occupancy that it seemed pity enough they were so seldom used, and Mrs. Knapp, as she reopened the door of Miss Jean's pink and white bower, remarked upon this, turning suddenly as Sarah, who was just behind her, uttered a cry, an exclamation of bewilderment—or was it fright?

"My *gracious!*" exclaimed Mrs. Knapp; "*speak!* What's the matter with the girl!"

But Sarah's eyes were fixed, riveted on a picture unnoticed before, and which hung in a recess near the western window.

It was the portrait of a man, young in years, yet with a peculiar, grave nobility of expression. The face was thin, clear cut and sensitive in outline, dark in coloring,



lighted by a pair of keen hazel eyes, at once mirthful and yet intense in their glance; not eyes which even in a picture could, once seen, be easily forgotten, and Sarah's heart beat wildly as she thought of another portrait with just those eyes, just that gentle, quiet mouth—the same broad, white brow and loosely waving dark brown hair—the same alert, noble poise of the head! It seemed impossible, but surely it must be the same! And then suddenly the girl's presence of mind came back with a rush, and Sarah's frightened, puzzled eyes were turned upon the old housekeeper.

“Oh, it was because it's so like a picture I've—I've seen,” faltered Sarah, the crimson dyeing her cheeks as she spoke.

“*A picture you've seen,*” demanded Mrs. Knapp curiously, “*like this, you say?*”

Sarah, more and more composed in manner, could only nod her head, but she still continued to gaze at the portrait.

“Well, upon my word,” the housekeeper was beginning, when, fortunately for Sarah's peace of mind, a wild call from Mrs. Keyes below reminded Mrs. Knapp that time was flying and “the family” might even now be on their way up the avenue itself.

“Come, come, my dear,” she exclaimed anxiously, “I declare I believe we're going to pay in a day's hurrying for ten years' dawdling.”

“There they be, mother,” fairly shrieked Mrs. Keyes, and five minutes later the two women had contrived to light the main jets in the great hall, and fling open the seldom-used front door. Sarah hovered in the distance, hidden from view but where she could see all the kaleidoscopic effects which followed.



### III.

IF silence and darkness had reigned in the main rooms of the Hill House for years, they were, it would seem, to be banished now, for in a moment the hallway was full of sound and movement, voices and laughter. There was "Colonel," as Mrs. Knapp called him, a tall, fine-looking elderly man, fairly enveloped in a fur greatcoat, and who came forward promptly to shake hands with his old housekeeper and her daughter. Directly after him was a slim, upright, brisk old lady, the Miss Dyker of whom Sarah had heard, the very gleam of whose spectacles looked shrewd and kindly as she rapidly asked questions, waiting, however, for no answers; and just behind them the very prettiest young lady Sarah thought she had ever seen: not very tall, slender and *dainty* from the crown of her fur toque to the tip of her cloth boot; her fair, soft little face looking out upon everything and everybody with dimpling smiles and that delicious *radiance* of happy youth which is like the music of some joyous melody. Sarah fell in love with this dazzling, sweet young creature on the spot, and was well prepared to hear she was "Colonel's" cherished darling and heiress—the "Miss Polly," talked of so much among the servants and for whose sake he had long been a wanderer in summer climes. But if a trifle delicate, she certainly looked or seemed no *invalid* now, and her voice as she turned, calling out, "Where is Jean? Cousin Dick, what *have* you done with *Jean?*" was fresh and clear as a bell—sweet, too, in spite



of a touch of imperiousness—an outward token of the sovereignty of the Colonel's petted darling, and when, in answer to her demand, a tall good looking young fellow in a fur cap and long ulster bustled forward, saying: "My dear Polly, Jean as usual is taking care of herself," there came from the last of the group a quick gay laugh as Jean Garnier moved forward on this little scene of action so important, bewildering, fascinating to the stranger looking on from the shadow of the staircase. A young lady of twenty, perhaps, was this final figure in the picture forming itself before Sarah's eager eyes—taller than Miss Polly, but with the same slim grace of manner; less regularly pretty, but with something more attractive about her clear dark face, soft hazel eyes, pert little nose and lovely red lips parting on the whitest teeth—and when Miss Dyker said, "Well, Jean; I'm glad you've allowed me to come home," how everyone laughed and how the beautiful old house seemed to wake up to a new life—a new sense of value and the usefulness long denied it!

"Everything looks finely, Mrs. Knapp," the Colonel was saying as he flung his greatcoat on the hall table and looked around with satisfaction. "Jones [the Colonel's own man]—has attended to matters in Albany, but I thought you would see to your own department without my interference. Your own way is generally the best."

A speech which inspired Mrs. Knapp—as "Colonel" well knew it would—to unlimited efforts in the direction of his biddings and made her wrinkled face a network of smiling content on the instant.

"And who is this?" said the still gracious master of the house, his keen glance resting on our friend Sarah, who made a timid step forward and then drew back, blushing crimson. I am afraid her rehearsal of "company



manners" on the staircase was quite forgotten for the moment.

"Oh, it's Mrs. Bird's daughter, sir," said Mrs. Knapp hastily, once more forgetting Sarah's "Malone" ancestry. "A very spry young girl, sir, as I got in to help wait on the young ladies."

"Very thoughtful indeed," said the Colonel, and Miss Polly bustled forward now saying—"Oh, to wait on *us*"; but in reality being very curious about everything and everybody in her uncle's house, the young lady was only anxious to take a good look at Sarah.

"I'm sure I'm very glad, Mrs. Knapp," she observed. "For Cecile has stayed over in Albany to see some tiresome friend who is ill there."

Grand young Princess of the Hill House Polly Dyker might be, but there was the instinct of her "far East" ancestry in her veins and she dearly loved to know all the "ins and outs" of everything, the *details* of all the lives going on about her. Polly would be quite as much interested, when Cecile returned, to hear her "news" as she would be to know what Jean Garnier had been doing if absent; and Sarah being a newcomer, a stranger even to the Hill House, took on a special importance in the young lady's eyes. It would be amusing to draw her out, dazzle her with her own brilliancy, and "hear all about" who and what she was herself, and so Miss Polly was pleased to be very gracious.

"*Sarah*, did you say? Well, Sarah, here is my cloak, and—oh, but you had better see first to Miss Dyker and Miss Jean," added Polly, whose good manners came to her mind suddenly. Moreover, she was anxious to have everyone aware from the very first that it was *she*, "little Polly" no longer, but Miss Dyker (No. 2) who was the "young



lady of the house"—its master's acknowledged heiress—*she* who was in effect welcoming them as guests, doing the honors of the Hill House and seeing to their various comforts—but *as* their hostess. Jean's fine little brows drew together, and she held her head unusually high as she moved forward, not knowing quite what to do; but well aware that dear old Aunt Ellen ought to take precedence at once.

"Very well, Polly," said Jean, nodding her head. "If Sarah likes to take my little bag along with yours I've no objection. Aunt Ellen," she added, "you're rather tired, I'm afraid."

Polly's lovely little face colored. With all her carefully laid plans she had overlooked what was *really* her first duty as the "young lady of the house," but she flew toward Miss Dyker now, anxious to repair her mistake.

"Oh, Aunt Ellen, don't touch a *thing!*" she exclaimed. "Here, Sarah, take Miss Dyker's shawl. Oh, you really must let her—and is her room all ready? Where is Mrs. Knapp?" she continued, glancing about quickly. "Oh, there you are, Mrs. Knapp! Is Miss Dyker's room ready? She is tired——"

And in spite of some faint movements meant as protestations on the part of old Miss Dyker and even Jean herself, Polly carried the day—as she had planned to do—and before they were half an hour in the old homestead had made everyone feel that it was *she*, Polly, or "Miss Dyker," as she tried to be called when her aunt was not by, who was mistress and *hostess* as well, she to whom the guests might look for their comfort, the servants for their authority and commands; and as for the Colonel, he looked on, only half seeing the little byplay: the dramatic *coup* of his youngest niece, the discomfiture and



annoyance visible on some of the faces. But above and beyond all things Colonel Dyker liked to be "amused"; and it was so harmless and so "funny" to see that "child," as he called her, assuming those airs of young ladyhood and hostess-ship—"and doing it so well too, I declare," laughed the Colonel to himself. As for Miss Dyker, she resigned herself without much effort into the place of guest, to which the now energetic Polly relegated her, for she was really tired and anxious to be "looked after" by somebody; and Mrs. Knapp led the way, Polly and the eager Sarah following, the rest loitering—for Polly could not really carry them off to their various rooms against their wills.

"Oh, is *this* Miss Dyker's room?" said Polly with a little quaver of disappointment in her tone as the house-keeper ushered them into the largest, most commodious apartment. She could *hardly* object, but it flashed through Polly's active mind suddenly that before Jean came up she had better be certain where *she* was to be installed.

"And here's *your* dear little room, miss," said Mrs. Knapp blandly, opening the door of the little square "nest" at the end of the hall. Polly's eyes gave a quick flash and then she turned, remembering her *rôle* of gracious, condescending young Princess Royal.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Knapp," she exclaimed. "I don't think that is the room my uncle intended for me. Let me see." And she moved toward the pretty pink-and-gray room beyond, of which the firelight and candle glow made a charming picture.

"Here, I'll take my things off for the present. I think," she added quickly, with another of her pretty smiles, "Miss Jean will like best to be in there, close to



her aunt, you know. Please put that little bag of Miss Jean's, Sarah, down in a safe place."

And when, ten minutes later, Jean disengaged herself from a talk with Dick Appleton, it was all settled. Polly was already moving about *her* old room with as complete an air of proprietorship as though she had reigned over it for years, and Jean could only force back her instinctive remonstrance, remembering, with a sigh, that after all times were changed. It was not by any means "little Polly," their uncle's spoiled "baby" and pet who had come home, but, as she had already made everyone aware, from Peter Knapp at the station to the new lady's maid, Sarah, it was his acknowledged heiress—the young mistress of the Hill House—the hostess of the Colonel's guests, be they members of the family or only friends.



#### IV.

POLLY was not sorry to be alone for a few moments after that swift taking possession of her new abode. She wanted a moment or two of quiet in which to review the situation and collect her forces. For she was by far too astute a young person not to be aware that, as yet, her conquest was not complete. She had struck the first blow and captured the first redoubt, but there remained that important outpost of the enemy—the kitchen department—yet to be reconnoitred. Aunt Ellen would give in, of course. Polly had no fears where that dear old lady was concerned—and Jean—well, Jean would do battle, no doubt. However, Polly rather liked the idea of such warfare. She had long ached to “put Jean Garnier in her place,” and now, assuredly, was her opportunity. With Jean there would be some lively skirmishing, which Polly hoped to conduct with such an excess of politeness as to freeze out the enemy at once, but, as I have said, the main difficulty lay in the servants’ department. Old family retainers, like the Knapps, for instance, were not to be put down in an hour by the mere force of a girl’s will; and, moreover, as our young lady was keenly aware, her only hope of keeping her uncle on her side was in thoroughly attending to his material comforts.

For the Colonel, a bit of recluse, fond of his books, and his rare “before the letter” engravings, his old china, his “specimens” of various kinds, was a very epicure of epicures where the questions of the table, household manage-



ment, home comforts of every kind, were concerned. For years he had indulged himself in so luxurious a mode of life that he had only been preserved from being disagreeably whimsical by his ability to gratify his tastes and an exquisite delicacy of feeling which prevented his wounding people with whom he came in contact. Harmony, order, serenity, repose—these were attributes which had to belong to the Colonel's system of things, and then, as I have said, he dearly liked to be *amused!* The peculiarities, the oddities, even the prejudices of other people, were to the old man a constant source of amusement, and with the instinct of the born humorist, he liked the *incongruous*—the unexpected. The thought of sixteen-year-old Polly, with her mayflower face, her clear, ringing young voice, ruling the old family mansion, putting on such absurd airs all in a moment, condescending to dear old Miss Ellen, settling things for them all, amused him so much that he decided to “give the child her head,” and see what would come of it; but as Polly, taking counsel with herself that first half hour, was very well aware, it would never do to have the kitchen cabinet in rebellion. That would mean a disturbance of her uncle's personal well-being, which was not to be thought of for a moment. It would also interfere with that *rôle* of something between a Princess Royal and a Lady Bountiful, which was Polly's idea of the part, the station in life, she was called upon to fill.

From the lower windows of her room—at least the one she meant henceforth to call hers—the young girl could look down into what seemed to be a yard way off the kitchen, to the left of which were the stables. It did not impress her as particularly favorable to all her little plans that there was in the chilly darkness, only dimly lighted



by the stable lamp, a group of two or three people—the servants, of course—talking together. They were discussing her, she felt sure, and blowing out her dressing-table candles, Polly pushed open her window, and, kneeling down, tried to catch the floating bits of talk from her newly captured subjects. Only a sentence or two, however, reached her. She heard very plainly the words “to-morrow,” and then “Colonel’s no fool.” A laugh of derision followed, all of which I need scarcely say was not at all encouraging to the new sovereign. But it all made her the more determined to hold her own. Sarah’s voice at her back startled her and made her close the window with a bang, conscious that if her new maid suspected her of such eavesdropping she might thoroughly despise her.

“Why, you’re all in the dark,” said Sarah very briskly, “and I just met the Colonel and he sent to hurry up the dinner; it’s going in at once, Mrs. Knapp said.”

Polly made every haste now, with such slight alteration in her toilet as could be effected without opening her trunks. She was wearing a very pretty travelling costume of darkest claret-colored cloth, and a scarf of yellowish lace at her neck softened it becomingly. Sarah was still all admiration.

“That looks just too sweet,” said Mrs. Malone’s niece, beaming approval. “I s’pose,” she ventured to add, “you’ll be putting on something gorgeous to-morrow, Miss Polly.”

But to do her credit, Polly had very little personal vanity. Her arrogance was of quite another kind.

“Oh, well,” she assented carelessly, “my uncle always expects me to dress well. Now, Sarah, go downstairs and tell Mrs. Knapp she may send in dinner—but wait a minute—where is my uncle—do you know?”



“I see him just now at the hall fire,” said Sarah, who, truth to tell, hardly liked carrying such peremptory orders below.

“Oh, very well, then,” said Polly quickly, “go on and do as I tell you—I’ll run down and speak to him myself.”

Sarah’s disagreeable mission was not needed, much to her relief. At this moment the gong, so long silent in the fine old dining room, peeled softly forth. There was the sound of opening doors, and Polly made rather a breathless descent into the hall in order to be there before her “guests.” She was almost ashamed of the way in which her heart was beating quickly. Even while her uncle said something to the effect that he missed Jones already, she wondered how she should place the company, since, of course, the order of precedence must be established at once. This difficult point had, as it happened, already been debated in old Miss Dyker’s mind, and when they were all assembled in the dining-room, and there was a barely perceptible pause, Aunt Ellen spoke with a clear, sweet ring to her voice which Jean thoroughly understood.

“As Polly is keeping house for you, I suppose, James,” she said, addressing the Colonel, “she had better learn all her duties together and take the foot of the table.”

Polly’s cheeks flamed now, and she said quickly, and with her sweetest manner:

“Oh, of course, Aunt Ellen, I know what you mean; still, while you are with us, I’ll resign my rights, for, of course, you are our guest of honor.”

Conscious of scoring another point, even in giving up the place which surely ought to be her own, Polly herself drew out the high-back chair facing the Colonel’s, and scarcely knowing what she was doing—whether accepting a favor or asserting her rights—Miss Dyker



sank into it and it would have been hard to say whether amusement or annoyance was uppermost in the minds of the others at this very odd scene.

There was, however, no question at all in Jean's mind as to it's being high time to say or do something, and as soon as the rather tiresome meal was over she captured Dick Appleton, whirling him away into the splendid drawing room, where, in the midst of so much confusion, the fire had nearly died out from the hearth, and there she demanded of him "*what* was to be done."

The sight of Jean's altogether useless rage, her indignation, her wrath, which had made her for once careless of all the little airs and graces to which she had of late been treating Dick, made the young fellow forget the simple fun he had been taking out of Miss Polly's *coup d'état*, but, as he declared, what *could* be done?

"For you see Jennie, my child," said the young lawyer, trying to possess himself of one of Jean's hands, "brassy as it looks, your Cousin Polly certainly has something of the rights of the case. The Colonel has been proclaiming her as his heiress; consequently, if he chooses to let her be mistress of the house, I really do not see how any one of us can possibly interfere. She is decidedly in her rights when she calls us"—he had to laugh—"her guests."

"*Her* guests!" repeated Jean, her soft hazel eyes flashing fire. "What—Aunt Ellen, for example, the guest, and in the Hill House, of that little *goose*?"

Before Dick could answer, the door was flung open by the very object of their discussion herself. Polly came in beaming, breathless, and excited. A tall, severely clerical-looking gentleman followed the young girl, with an air which was half bewildered, half confused, yet evidently he was well enough pleased.



He held his hat in his hand while he looked from one to another of the little party with an almost apologetic manner. Something in his smile, which, as Dick remarked later, would have made his fortune as an undertaker, chilled our friends on the instant.

“You are here, are you?” exclaimed Polly, with a little laugh. “I declare, you do look like a genuine pair of conspirators! Mr. Rounce,” she continued in a very bland manner, “this is my cousin, Miss Garnier, and our friend, Mr. Richard Appleton, who has come for a day or two.”

“Am I not a cousin, too, Polly,” laughed Dick, wondering who the suave-looking stranger might be, “no matter how many times removed?”

But Polly only tossed her pretty head and shrugged her shoulders. She had no doubt whatever as to the nature of the *tête-à-tête* so fortunately interrupted.

“I will send for my uncle, sir, at once,” she said to the stranger, and in the same moment whirled away again.

The visitor drew near to the smouldering ashes on the hearth, and, like the person in the Bab ballad, “continued to smile,” while Richard, shooting a glance of mingled rage and amusement over his head at the almost statuesque Jean, murmured something about a “call in the village.”

“Ah—ahem,” said Mr. Rounce, “are you much acquainted hereabouts, sir, might I ask?”

“In Thornton, do you mean?” asked the young man politely. “Well, I was born here and my nearest relatives are here; at the same time I have lived out West a good part of my life.”

“Ah—just so; then you may be considered a Thornton Appleton, I suppose.”

“My father was the Rev. Peter Appleton of St. George’s,” said Richard gravely.



“And this young lady,” continued the amiable Rounce, oblivious to Dick’s growing wrath—“is she also an Appleton? I didn’t catch the name.”

Dick’s handsome face flushed, and he looked with a most absurd glance in Jean’s direction.

“Not—as yet, sir,” he murmured, while Jean darted what was meant to be a withering glance upon him.

“I am Jean Garnier,” she said haughtily.

“Oh, yes—yes—yes,” said the stranger, nodding his head; “of course. Let me see! A wonderfully clannish family this! Now, as I understand it, the branches of the family tree blossom as follows”—he held up one large, comfortable-looking hand, extending every finger, while with a very bland smile he proceeded to dock off the various branches of the house of Dyker: “Colonel Dyker”—here he slowly wiggled his thumb—“sole survivor of the old squire’s four children, two sons and two daughters. Right! Thomas Dyker, married—died—leaving a daughter, Miss Polly. Our friend, the Colonel”—otherwise the same vigorously shaken thumb—“never married, but had numerous vicarious family charges. He adopted Miss Polly. Then there was Lois Dyker——”

Jean waved her hand with a peculiar manner, scarcely raising her eyelids.

“My mother, sir. If it is important for you to be so genealogical, she married Captain Frederick Garnier, and I am their only surviving child. My parents died many years ago.”

“Precisely—and then—there was another daughter of the Colonel’s parents.” The stranger glanced half furtively over his shoulder. “*Sarah*, I believe, was her name. She——”



Jean's eyes flashed unmistakably now, while Dick's lips drew together sharply.

"My Aunt Sarah, sir," said the girl, lifting her young head with all the Dyker *hauteur* in the action, "made a—well—perhaps unhappy marriage and died years ago."

"Exactly," said the imperturbable Mr. Rounce; "it happens every day in the week, my dear; nothing surprising at all in it; but what is strange is that in such a clan-nish family Sarah should have been so completely wiped out—forgotten—put out of sight and mind, so to speak! Oh, yes, I know your grandfather vowed vengeance and all that kind of thing, but I was under the impression your uncle here had been really instructed by your grandfather to hunt up Sarah or her possible family."

Dick Appleton turned around sharply from the window, where he had been standing. Whoever or whatever this man might be, his impertinence in cross-examining Jean was intolerable, and should come to a standstill then and there.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said with ill-concealed disgust, "but these are family matters my cousin and I are scarcely called upon to discuss with strangers. Colonel Dyker, I presume, will see you presently. Jean," he added, looking at that young lady, "if you really wish to see Mrs. Mackenzie to-night we ought to start at once to get back before nine o'clock."

"Oh—Mrs. Mackenzie," exclaimed the visitor genially. He was entirely above minding young Appleton's wrath, it would appear. "The clergyman's widow who lives almost at the gate? A nice woman, as I remember her, and a mine of information in regard to county matters and families."

What desperate means Richard might have used to



force his cousin away I dare not conjecture; had not the Colonel's step sounded along the hall, the ever-active Polly flying in his wake.

But for once the "young lady of the house" was not permitted to assert herself. Just at the very door the Colonel turned and said quietly:

"Polly, my dear, I have a little business alone with this gentleman. Run away, my dear—there's a good girl."

And as Jean and her cousin appeared Polly flung herself away, afraid of their discovering she was not wanted, so that her cousins made their own escape a little later unremarked by anyone in the great, now almost silent, house.



## V.

MRS. MACKENZIE occupied a position both in the county and the village of Thornton, to which the Hill House really belonged, which was so peculiar that a few words of explanation are certainly allowable, although I can never hope to make my readers quite understand just why things around and about that lady were precisely as they were. No one, so far as I ever heard, did attempt any definition or even explanation of it. It simply *was*. That was all there could be offered to enquiring strangers who at first wondered and commented upon the fact that she was treated by everyone far and wide as a person of such importance, such social, mental, diplomatic, even literary, consequence, since, judged by externals, there seemed nothing in especial, not even the lady's own inclination, to warrant it. There was not even the *prestige*—the descent of her husband's cloak, so to speak—upon her shoulders, for the Rev. Job Mackenzie had been the most negative of men, living, preaching, even dying, mildly, and like a gentleman. That was all that could be said of him, and indeed it was not until his death that his wife's peculiar power made itself felt, moving people to observe that if she had only asserted herself a little more during his lifetime she might have seen him a bishop. But this was not at all in Mrs. Mackenzie's line. She was the last woman in the world to advocate a failure, such as the Rev. Job would unquestionably have been in any high episcopal office. Perhaps the real secret of her greatness of



mind, her capacity, lay in her never attempting to forward a hopeless cause, although people often came to her in despair, nor seeking a field too large for her special abilities to work in. That her husband filled the not quite obscure position of rector of Thornton admirably was a source of the greatest pride to her, since under no circumstances would she have liked to appear as the better fellow of the two, finding it much more to her liking to have people congratulate her on her husband's excellent qualities than to be compelled to push him forward in a field where his kind of talent and amiability would have been hopelessly astray.

In Thornton Mrs. Mackenzie's own talents were decidedly above the average. Her sympathies were larger than those of the people she met every day. Her keen, shrewd common-sense, her good nature, were most valuable, and then—her *tact!* Even in that place it was far better than a large fortune, since by means of it she understood everything and everybody, became a valued counsellor, a kindly friend, a genial companion, and yet always held herself just a trifle back, a little bit shut off—or was it above the others? It was certainly nothing that anyone could question or be wounded by, but just something which made it agreeable to really bask in the full sunshine of her confidence and favor. When it is understood that Mrs. Mackenzie held a position of such authority and importance in Thornton, Nautuck, and indeed the very county itself, the oldest Albanians recognizing and admiring it, it will be seen that the Rev. Job's widow must have been a remarkable woman, for she had neither wealth nor beauty at her command. But the sources of her income, if not such as to make any increase of money probable, were so well assured that there was never a qualm in



these days, as there once had been, as to the well-being of the morrow, and accordingly Mrs. Mackenzie could afford to be very good-humored, sympathetic, and practical in her *rôle* of general adviser and friend, and yet indulge herself in certain ways which gave her importance of a kind such as I have mentioned. She subscribed for various magazines and periodicals, including foreign quarterlies. The newest books were to be found on her table. She always had tickets for the best lectures and Recitals during her visits to New York or Albany. Various seedsmen sent her specimens of the newest roses, hybrids, etc., on their lists, since her knowledge and skill in the care and life of plants were so thoroughly understood that she was urged to report on the results of every grafting. When a certain rose was brought out, starting its life a rich deep crimson, but gradually growing purplish in tint, Mrs. Mackenzie was one of the first persons consulted as to what could be done, or whether such a rose was worth going on with, and she found herself in receipt of almost too many letters from people anxious in the matter to have time to answer. Last, but not least, her cook was a veritable *cordón bleu*, trained to that perfection by Mrs. Mackenzie herself, who, admitting her table was the simplest, declared herself an epicure as to the way in which even a chop and a potato were cooked and served.

This suggestion of absolute good taste, which impressed even casual acquaintances, was carried out by the little house itself. It was only a cottage, and so close to the Colonel's gates that it might seem to have been overshadowed by the Hill House grandeur and luxuriousness, but that it was too complete, too perfect in its own way, either to borrow lustre from, or have its own light dimmed by, any other. A two-storied frame dwelling, with a fan-



ciful roofing, every window dazingly clean and daintily curtained, it had its bit of garden and box hedge in front and at one side, yet the windows of the little drawing room looked out so close upon the main road that when Mrs. Mackenzie sat in either of them she could see clearly every passer-by if she chose, yet, with her careful balance of things, she was herself sufficiently guarded from intrusive eyes. The ruddy gleam of her firelight streamed out down upon the path and wintry road, making many a passer-by long to penetrate beyond the pretty dark-green doorway and share the warmth and good cheer likely to be found within, and it is safe to say that Mrs. Mackenzie, if not a woman given to promiscuous visiting, thoroughly liked her hospitality to be cheering to every sense—better, perhaps, than could be found even up at the great house of the Dykers itself.

Such, in brief, was the family friend to whom Jean and young Appleton were hurrying that memorable evening, having ostensibly no further motive for the visit than to exchange the affectionate greetings of the hour. Yet both the young people were aware that they expected and hoped for some especial sympathy and counsel from so shrewd, so wise, so kindly an adviser.

“How nice it looks!” exclaimed Jean as they turned from the Hill House gates and crossed the road to Mrs. Mackenzie’s little hedge-girted gateway.

Dick had opened his lips to speak when suddenly the house door swung back—there was a stream of lamplight on the frosty road, a tall, dark figure shot out, and in the dusk Jean was aware of a familiar face, although it was half buried in a high ulster collar. A voice said abruptly:

“Oh, I beg your pardon,” and the stranger held the gate back for the visitors, but with evident impatience.



“I—oh—why, is it you, Sandy?” exclaimed Jean suddenly, and putting out one of her little gloved hands.

The stranger laughed.

“Oh—why, its Miss Garnier, I believe,” he said in a way meant to be very offhand. “I’m not so often called ‘Sandy’ nowadays.”

Jean blushed in the dim light and laughed nervously.

“Oh, I beg your pardon—Mr. Mackenzie,” she said with a barely perceptible touch of scorn. “This is my cousin, Mr. Appleton,” she added, “and we were just going in to see your aunt.”

“I’m sure she’ll be delighted,” said young Mackenzie, turning back at once. “She was just wondering a while ago how soon she could see any of you.”

He opened the little drawing-room door, still with rather awkward politeness, and in the firelight the visitors saw Mrs. Mackenzie slowly, apparently thoughtfully, pacing back and forth. Her start showed how very deep was her preoccupation, but it was gone on the instant as she folded Jean tenderly in her arms, then put out her hand to young Appleton.

“So you came to the old woman at once,” she said with evident pleasure. “Alex, ring for lights or make one yourself. Dear, dear, so you are home again.”

“Oh, never mind the lights,” exclaimed Jean, a trifle anxiously. “Mrs. Mackenzie, I just want a little cosey talk with you yourself. Oh, I can see enough from the fire, Dick,” she continued imperiously. “Do you and San—Mr. Mackenzie, I mean—talk about your old times, and let Mrs. Mackenzie and me have our gossip.”

“For ten minutes, then,” said the young lawyer; “but remember, Jennie, how late it is, my dear girl, and that man up there.”



“Oh, *I know*,” exclaimed Jean.

She had seated herself on a small low sofa by Mrs. Mackenzie, directly in the firelight, and had taken possession of one of the widow's soft white hands, on which gleamed two beautifully set antique rings.

“Oh, Mrs. Mackenzie,” she went on in a low, hurried tone, “I've such heaps to say and to ask you! We only came home to-day, and indeed I don't know whether to be glad or sorry.”

Mrs. Mackenzie's face took on a quick look of alarm.

“My *dear*, why, I am sure you cannot but be glad! I was beginning to give my old friend up in despair.”

“But, you see,” said Jean with nervous eagerness, “nothing is—well, how shall I express it? Nothing, anyway, is what one should expect it to be. I don't know what to make of things at all. Aunt Ellen has been very nearly deposed.”

“Your Aunt Ellen! Jean, my dear,” said Mrs. Mackenzie rather sharply, “what are you talking about?”

“It is this way,” said Jean, lowering her voice; “don't fancy for a moment I have rushed down here to make mischief or trouble; but, *really*, someone must take a stand at once. Is it not a matter quite of course that it should be Aunt Ellen's place to be the head of the house—that is, the mistress—isn't it? But what do you think? It is *Polly*, little Polly Dyker, if you please, who has stepped in between her and everything. Oh, don't laugh! She has as good as told us we are all just *visitors*, and indeed—indeed, dear Mrs. Mackenzie, I would never say one word of this, but I'm afraid it will end in misery all around, and you, perhaps——”

Mrs. Mackenzie's brows had drawn together sharply at



first—now she put up one of her white hands, smoothing the wrinkles out slowly.

“Is it—does she think *she* is the—natural mistress of the house, then?” said Mrs. Mackenzie.

“It must be so.” Jean gave a dismal little laugh and bent her eyes upon the leaping, gleaming fire. “And I suppose she means to try the housekeeping. What I hoped was that you could make a few suggestions to my uncle. Aunt Ellen is too dismayed, I fear, to know quite what to do, and Polly is such a little—whirlwind!” she added, smiling.

“Do I hear your cousin’s name, Miss Garnier?” said young Mackenzie, moving forward. “I met her a year ago, travelling. So she has come home to take up the reins of government! She used to have no end of plans, I remember, for her new duties.”

Jean smiled coldly. So even this young man—the lawyer’s clerk from Albany, she called him—knew of it!

“By the way,” he went on, “didn’t I see a Mr. Rounce going into the Hill House to-day?”

“I presume you may have,” said Jean distantly, and remembering that he also was a reason for her coming down here. “He was there when I left.”

Young Mackenzie laughed. “Is it possible that—shyster—has any of Colonel *Dyker*’s business?” he said, with an evident sneer.

Jean was roused now in a different direction.

“I don’t think he has—or *ought* to have,” she was beginning eagerly, when Richard interposed in his most authoritative tone:

“Do you know him, Mr. Mackenzie? This Rounce, I mean. Where—or who—*what* is he?”

“Oh, he’s a regular practising lawyer, if you come to



that," said Mackenzie, with a shrug of his shoulders. "It depends upon *what* branch of his profession he is exercising in your uncle's interests."

"I fancy he is thinking of his own," said Jean hastily, quite heedless, or perhaps really unaware, of Dick's warning eye as she continued rapidly. "He began by cross-examining us on the genealogy of the Dykers, and then spoke of poor Aunt Sarah and her marriage."

Mrs. Mackenzie made an abrupt movement, bending forward to stir the fire.

"Your uncle—surely he did not discuss Sarah?"

The two young men were exchanging remarks in an undertone, and Jean said hurriedly and with her hand pressed down upon her old friend's arm:

"Mrs. Mackenzie, is there any special reason why any of us should find out more about Aunt Sarah's marriage?"

"Oh, my dear," exclaimed the older woman quickly, "how can I tell—what is there for me to say on such a subject?" She hesitated and then went on: "Your grandfather, I know, was anxious to have all traces of poor Sarah found, and no doubt your uncle attended to his wishes. She married, you know, a very common fellow. I once heard a rumor of her leaving a child."

"Who—where did you say this man came from?" said young Mackenzie in a low, sharp voice to Richard. He began to scent a legal complication in the affairs of their great neighbors which might prove of service to himself if he could "start the hare."

"He said he had lately been in Nautuck; in fact, I believe he came from there," said Dick absently. "I can't imagine for what reason, unless it was to make enquiries among my uncle's friends or acquaintances.



Come, Jean," he added, with the tone of impatience a man can assume to those nearest him when vexed by any matter. "We had better be going back; it is growing late."

"Good-night, dear Mrs. Mackenzie," said Jean, who felt ready to weep. *What* a home-coming it was, to be sure, thought the girl. Oh, if people who were dead and gone had only known in life how cruelly their folly would be visited upon the innocent would they ever have so complicated affairs in yielding to a passing weakness? But Jean, as everyone who knew her was well aware, had rather a high-strung temperament.

On the whole, the young people departed consoled, as was always the case with those who sought the widow's tender sympathy, even though she had been unable to offer direct advice, a thing, by the way, she was very chary of giving in the family matters of others, however dear they might be to her, one of Mrs. Mackenzie's original maxims being: *Sympathize and suggest, but never meddle.*

A spark, however, had been left alight in young Mackenzie's mind which burned into a flame likely to reach more than his own well-being. Even his unqualified admiration for Jean Garnier was merged into this new turn of the wheel, which showed a state of things at the Hill House by no means unworthy his cleverest attention. And it was difficult indeed to keep his aunt from observing how excited the slight discovery made him while he exercised his legal tact and diplomacy trying to draw her out.

Mrs. Mackenzie had begun that soft click of her knitting needles which could be interpreted as an encouragement to conversation, or the reverse, as the case might be. On this occasion Sandy should have been a little keener in



observation. But he continued leaning back against the chimney-piece and smiling with well-affected carelessness upon his hostess.

“What an unfortunate thing having no real head to that house, Aunt Margaret! No one, I mean, who is clearly understood to be its mistress. And what a mixed up family it seems to be. Who, for instance, is this Sarah they have begun to talk about?”

Mrs. Mackenzie looked at the young fellow’s handsome, clever face, with its hint of cunning—or was it only selfishness?—and wondered if Jean Garnier really could be brought to take an interest in him. But the young man was waiting for an answer to this important question.

“Who is, or was, Sarah?” he repeated, with a little laugh.

Mrs. Mackenzie was well aware he would persist in his cross-questioning until he had received some definite answer.

“She was the Colonel’s sister,” said Mrs. Mackenzie shortly. “She ran away when nothing but a mere school-girl with a handsome scamp. He taught music, I believe, in a school. It is a long time ago. They are both dead.”

“Without children?” said young Mackenzie.

“So far as anyone ever knew. Indeed, if there had been any you may be very sure the Colonel would have known of it. Her father was furious, naturally. From all that could be learned, the fellow was a mere adventurer.” She paused and reflected for an instant. “I have heard that the Colonel’s father begged them to try to find traces of her when he was on his death-bed, so that it is more than likely our Colonel spared no effort.”

More than this Mrs. Mackenzie either could not or would not tell her nephew, as she good-naturedly called



the Rev. Job's young relative. But it was quite enough to set him thinking, so that, indeed, the hours of the night were very restlessly passed, and he was glad of a fine, bright morning in which to take a turn in the village, and refresh himself for breakfast and a call at the Hill House. It would not be his fault, he decided, if, sooner or later, he did not attract Jean Garnier's attention, but could anything at present be more exasperating than her way of overlooking him?

The roadway in front of Mrs. Mackenzie's little cottage was absolutely deserted, and lay white and still in the cold, clear morning, with something very attractive in its solitude to the pedestrian. Mackenzie was turning to the left toward the little village to which one street, a cluster of houses, and a small railway station gave the name of Thornton, when suddenly every faculty within him seemed checked. The great gateway of the Hill House was pushed open, and a girl's figure appeared on the outside. She stood still a moment, looking up and down, holding a letter in her hand. And then, by a turn of her head, she, too, beheld the stranger, and clutching the letter in her hand more tightly, uttered a little scream—an exclamation half of fright, half of wonder. Was there not, however, a note of triumph in it as well? And then, making the best of it, young Mackenzie sauntered forward.

“Well, upon my word,” he said with an easy familiarity of tone and manner, but, at the same time, not offering his hand; “where in the name of all that is wonderful did *you* come from?”



## VI.

SARAH—for the apparition which had so startled young Mackenzie was our active heroine—stood still an instant, flushing and paling, with those conflicting emotions by which heroines in real life, as well as in romance, can be tormented. She remembered an “old score” against the young man before her, who had seen fit to amuse himself very pleasantly one summer’s afternoon at the county fair with a party of young people from Nautuck, “flirting outrageous with her,” as Aggie had asserted, and then—as might have been expected—“just passing her by.” All of this rushed through the girl’s mind, but almost in the same breath Sarah realized he might be a useful tool or ally now, for she was perfectly well aware he was, or meant to be, a lawyer. Should she turn on him now—scorn, wither, crush him with a flash of her dark eyes, and what a certain person she knew called her “*cruelest* stare”—or should she let him sufficiently into her secret to show him she was not to be slighted—on the contrary, quite worth making up to in his very best manner?

As a result of these rapid communings Sarah tossed her head, drew back a step or two, and said carelessly:

“Oh, it’s *you*, is it? Well, who’d ever have thought to see *you* again?”

“*I* might say the same thing,” said young Mackenzie, with a laugh. He also had been thinking very rapidly, and was wondering how his acquaintance with this girl—



if, as appeared, she was staying at the Hill House—might be turned to good account. However, it could do no harm to keep her on his side.

“I could add,” he went on, smiling, “that I must say you are looking very well. But there it is, your kind of looks bear *any* lights.”

Sarah blushed crimson all over her face and tried vainly to give her head a disdainful toss, while young Mackenzie followed up his advantage quickly.

“Is that a letter you are going to put in the box?” he enquired. There was a box just below for the convenience of the Hill House. “Well, I suppose if you really are up here visiting you’ve someone in Nautuck to write to.”

He smiled shrewdly and shook his head. Again Sarah blushed.

“Oh, never *you* mind, Mr. Mackenzie,” she returned quickly. “You see I’ve found out your name and everything—and I suppose,” she continued as they turned up the road—Mackenzie judiciously leading their steps away from his aunt’s cottage—“you thought I was just a nobody you could have your fun with and forget all about, did you?”

Unfortunately for the delight of tormenting her former admirer, Sarah was too full of her new sense of importance to keep her bait long hidden, and above and beyond all he was a lawyer, the very one to advise her now!

Sarah stood very still a moment after that, her breath coming and going quickly, her big eyes fastened on the young man’s rather insolently smiling face. Might not the securing of him be worth even the amusement of paying him off, and moreover, when he guessed her importance, would she not have her triumph as well? Sarah’s eyes danced, her cheeks glowed, and she was really a



handsome girl of her type as she stood there. She could not resist the temptation of pushing her advantage.

“I suppose,” she exclaimed, with a light laugh, “you’d be very much taken aback if you was to hear I’m writing this very day to get a lawyer for my own affairs, seeing as I found out I’m not just a nobody after all. Maybe”—and she jerked her head back in the direction of the Hill House—“I’ve a better right to be there than some people might think.”

Mackenzie’s face, with its insolent look of admiration, changed so suddenly that Sarah was startled by the effect of her own words. He made a step back, then forward—the peculiar kind of legal instinct which he did possess coming to his rescue.

“Take care,” he said lightly; “you may be playing with edged tools, my dear girl, or”—watching how the shaft told—“only making a fool of yourself.”

“Fool of myself!” exclaimed Sarah, flashing a look of mingled scorn and triumph upon him, “when I’ve my own grandfather’s picture in my pocket this blessed born minute.”

It was out now—her precious, wonderful secret, and Mackenzie, astute lawyer’s clerk though he might be, was for an instant fairly dazed by all that this revelation seemed to imply. His head spun as he recalled the conversation of the night before in Mrs. Mackenzie’s firelit parlor—Jean’s anxious enquiries, young Appleton’s evidently warning words and look, and the very name itself! Half unconsciously he spoke it aloud, meaning it only as an emphasis to his thought.

“Sarah!” he exclaimed, and then the girl’s light laugh and toss of her head restored him again.



“That’s me,” she said pertly, “and, if you please, sir, what of Sarah?”

“Just this,” said the young man hurriedly, now so clearly in earnest that even Sarah’s gayly independent mood was changed. “I can be your friend in a way you little dream of, or your enemy. If you’ll do just as I tell you it’ll be better for you. Come, let us make a bargain, and I’ll stick to it—and to you,” he added, the smile which had so captured her fancy once before glowing upon her now. “Tell me the whole story—at least all that I don’t know already, and let me see if the picture is worth considering.”

Sarah was carried away now by her mingled desire to astonish and to please him, and as well by her real anxiety to have a genuine “lawyer’s” opinion. She was well aware she could do nothing quite by herself, and if, as he intimated, he knew enough to be her enemy, why not make the compact and keep him as a friend?

“You’ll be fair?” she said reluctantly.

Mackenzie nodded with an impatient gnawing of his mustache.

“Just give me the chance,” he declared, and then slowly, and not taking her eyes from his face, Sarah drew forth her hidden treasure, the portrait in miniature known only to her as that of “her grandfather.”

There was a moment’s absolute, breathless silence as Mackenzie studied the picture, realizing, even more surely than had Sarah, that it was, it must be, a portrait of one of the Dykers, for the family resemblance was positively startling. He needed not to study the initials on the reverse side of smooth gold to be convinced he held in his hand an important clue to the mystery of “Sarah’s” marriage, and what was still more wonderful, beheld in the



flesh, in the glowing, excited, and eager girl before him, a living—dare he say representative—of the would-be-forgotten and despised daughter of the Hill House.

“J. TO E.”

And below someone had traced with a pin or some sharp pointed instrument:

“TO SARAH FROM N.”

“Your grandfather!” said Mackenzie slowly, unaware in his absorption that he was admitting his fears—or were they hopes? “But, Sarah”—he roused himself quickly and looked at the girl with a commanding air—“now that I have the matter in my own hands, let me know everything. To begin with—who are you?”

Sarah gave a little scream, half dismayed at the severe tone her new legal adviser used, half bewildered, for she realized that beyond the fact of her connection with the Malones she could tell nothing of her pedigree or family history.

“That’s every bit I know, Sandy,” she exclaimed; and Sandy, wincing even more than when Jean Garnier had called him by the familiar name, dared not check his new client in the outset of their conferences. “I’ve heard my aunt, Mrs. Malone, tell just how, when my father and mother were dead and gone, she took me—no, I think she said”—the girl blushed—“my father wasn’t good to my mother; he ran away with her—or from her—there was something, but I really don’t know a bit more than I am telling you,” cried Sarah desperately, fearful lest her golden chances might slip away through her ignorance concerning the main facts of her father’s life, yet dreading to send Mackenzie down to Mrs. Malone’s for informa-



tion. "But whatever you do," she exclaimed eagerly, "be on the watch with her, my aunt down in Nautuck, I mean; don't give it away to her."

Mackenzie laughed.

"Never fear," he said quietly. What a piece of luck! He saw through the whole business now. It was of course with Sarah's father that the Colonel's gay young sister had eloped, attracted, no doubt, by the same bold good looks and spice of daring which were this girl's chief attractions. On his and her death the child had been adopted by the simple, hard-working Malones, to whom the picture meant only Sarah's "gentleman grandfather." How curious that they had never taken any trouble to investigate the matter! But fortunately, he reflected, it was not too late.

"I must be going now," said Sarah suddenly; "it won't do for me to be fooling around here, and—oh, Sandy, see here a minute: don't you go and be making any trouble! Only, what do you think it means?"

"What do I think?" said the young man slowly, and facing the girl with an expression on his face which completely silenced her. "That if you leave it to me, Sarah, and above all things if you do just as I tell you, why, it won't be long before you are a greater lady than any of them up there could dream of being; but if you say one word to anybody I'll give the whole thing up, and you'll find yourself left."

And then, having managed to keep possession of the locket for the time being, young Mackenzie was very well pleased to let Sarah make her escape back to the Hill House, promising her the earliest news that he could bring.

Altogether the young man found himself justified in



returning to the cottage with a light-hearted, affable, almost exhilarated manner, which he jocosely ascribed to his walk in the crisp morning air, advising Mrs. Mackenzie to try it for herself instead of the next doctor's tonic.

And as for Sarah, she regained the Hill House in a condition of mind impossible to describe. How everything seemed changed! Oh, what a triumph it would be to bring that Polly down more than a peg or two! Even to lord it over Miss Jean, whom that stuck-up young Appleton seemed so foolish over! And, best of all, wouldn't it be a take-down for Will Rogers! Thought he was so fine, did he, because he had charge now of the peddler's wagon running from Nautuck to Thornton, Ashfield, and two or three adjacent villages! Sarah felt she needed but one more drop to make her cup of happiness full to the brim—that Will Rogers should hear all about it, and should at last see her in her glory! It was Will, too, as she well remembered, who had dared to interfere with her talking to Sandy Mackenzie. Oh, what a take-down for him, for them all! Sarah nearly laughed aloud, and then quickened her steps, running around to the back door not a moment too soon, for Mrs. Knapp's voice was to be heard shrilly ordering her daughter here and there as they made haste with the belated breakfast.



## VII.

MACKENZIE found it hard work to answer his aunt's—to him—meaningless questions upon trivial subjects, so eager was he to engage in his new enterprise, and on leaving the cottage it was an additional annoyance that his steps, when he did escape, were hindered by a lumbering sort of vehicle, half express, half peddler's wagon, which, coming along, compelled him to draw back into the foot-path—the driver meanwhile, with a jerk and smothered exclamation, pulling up sharply.

“Hullo,” said the owner of the nondescript vehicle, peering down at the tall, well-built, well-dressed figure in the roadway, “so *you've* turned up again, have you? Jiminetty Christmas, but I'll have it out with you this time and no mistake. Whoa up!”

And, fastening his reins, the peddler sprung lightly to the ground.

He was a young fellow of twenty-five, perhaps, not above the medium height, but well, even powerfully, built, and his face, ruddy and brown from exposure, showed signs of good health and temperate living which more than made up for regularity of feature. The blue eyes had a snap to them; the mouth was firm, if good-humored; the chin square; and when he bared his head to rub his hand across it he displayed curly hair of a yellowish tint, that became his fresh color and bright blue eyes admirably well; and that he was muscular enough was shown in his every movement, to say nothing of his clinched right hand. “It's you, is it?” he went on



angrily, and peering into Mackenzie's face. "Now, then, are you going to let her alone this time? I see now what all her airishness means. Oh, it's *you*, is it?"

And as the color flamed into the young man's honest face Mackenzie recognized, with a thrill of disgust, his—*rival*—whom he had seen with Sarah at the county fair! All his pride of class—I use the term advisedly—rose up in revolt against any altercation, any dispute, as to the right to Sarah's affections; but Will Rogers misunderstood his rival's expression and supposed him only sneering in triumph.

"Out with it," he said doggedly; "you've turned the girl's head, making her think herself a fine lady! I—I wouldn't wipe my shoes on her," the young fellow went on, still raging over the other's—apparent—calm; "but, by Jove, I'll knock the dust out of any fellow who dares try to fool her! A gentleman, are you? Sticking notions into her head! Look at here! You can call yourself what you like, but if you come any of your little games around that girl I'll call you what you deserve to all the county if I swing for it."

Mackenzie watched him spring into his cart and drive on without attempting an answer. It was fully five minutes before he realized what had happened—what, indeed, Sarah must feel himself pledged to. If he could have drawn back then and there he would gladly have done so, but already the transaction had taken too serious an aspect.



## VIII.

DURING the various small excitements of these days the Colonel, outwardly the most calm, had been in reality the most disturbed. Not only in his quiet way did he see and understand that the elements of the family were far less harmonious than he had expected, but the return to his old home had roused him to consider certain realities of life which in his vagrant wanderings he had felt no inclination to think seriously about. The hunting up of some special "bit" to add to his collection had, during his travels, absorbed him at times, so that he was taken completely out of any groove of discontent. His responsibilities he had certainly felt, but they were all toned down by the ease of his surroundings. The return to actual home had been an effort to the Colonel, more because he had feared to be roused, or perhaps *driven*, out of his accustomed ways; yet it was due to his sense of honor toward all the young people of his family that he had finally decided upon a return. He loved the old place of the Dykers. He had fancied himself there surrounded by family presences which would be cheering, in that his young people would see and learn to love the place which their parents had known as home.

But—as our realized dreams so often do—he was as disappointed as a child over its broken doll, which had seemed a living creature. Polly, whom he had cared for in the fashion of a petted plaything—a luxurious bit of childish loveliness—had completely baffled him. The workings of



the girl's mind he had, of course, never understood before, and now it was as though a sudden flashlight had been flung upon the girl, revealing everything within her character in an exaggerated light. He had always counted upon Jean, who, if a trifle cold or "statuesque"—to use Dick Appleton's expression—was one of those fortunately made women whose inner qualities shine so through their actions that we never think of the unexpected. But now even her attitude toward some members of the family had assumed an entirely different aspect. The fact was that he did not in the least comprehend that a girl with so much high-strung and fine activity about her should have a sensitiveness that was almost painful; that rendered her silent, uncomfortable, and a bit disdainful when she found that her Aunt Ellen's place was so nearly usurped, and that she herself was subjected to constant petty annoyances from Polly, who continued her reign of triumph.

The house which he had really longed to see seemed to have lost its fine quality of home. He would open the door of the great drawing room with a furtive air, not knowing whether he most dreaded to encounter the ghosts of the past or the living presences. Polly's quick step, her ringing voice, would reach him from some remoter part of the house and make him dread what he might hear or have to say. Jean's half-offered, half-withdrawn air of sympathy annoyed him, because he did not like to consider himself pitied by anyone, and yet he well knew it would have afforded him infinite relief to hear all the girl had to say, to find out if she had any little pet projects which their home-coming had roused into feeling. Dick had betaken himself for a day or two to Boston, and Miss Dyker was constantly shutting herself in her room with



the excuse of a cold. A final source of annoyance to the old man was the way in which Sarah would proffer the little attentions which should only have come from one of his family, and even the arrival of his own man—Jones—from Albany, with the special boxes he had been detained to look after, failed to do more than give the Colonel someone to talk querulously to.

He was certainly in a very dismal frame of mind when, a few days after Jean's somewhat excited visit to Mrs. Mackenzie, he made up his mind that a long talk on confidential family matters with his old friend would be the best relief to the fretfulness growing upon him. The first sight of her cheerful abode made him draw a long breath of something like real satisfaction, for he was well aware that whatever might be the outcome, her counsels would be from a clear-headed brain and a very tender heart. He did not even ring the bell, but tapped with his cane on the window of her drawing room, within which he could see her seated, and it pleased him to notice that she rose at once, with a cheery smile, and instead of waiting for the door to be opened, she raised the window, letting him step in with the familiarity of a daily visitor.

“Do you know, my dear friend,” she said brightly, holding out both her hands, and then pushing forward the easiest chair in the room, “if you had not come down to me I certainly would have sent for you or gone up to the House myself, for there is so much I had been wanting to talk over with you about our young people.”

“Ah, Margaret,” he answered quickly, “that is one of the many things I have needed good counsel upon. They are so young, yet I never realized it before.”

Mrs. Mackenzie laughed in her good-humored way.

“And we are getting old, my friend, are we not? So,



although that makes it difficult, no doubt, for us to understand their little tumults and caprices, yet all the more should it make us very wide awake to the fact that it is we who must govern and direct them."

"It has made me irritable, I am afraid," he answered. "They seem to have so little of the feeling I expected."

She looked at him gently.

"Do you mean too little reverence and enthusiasm for the old place? or is it, perhaps, that until they are a little older, or perhaps I should say more settled in life, they might do better for a time apart?"

"Either I have not the key to their characters or to the riddle of life itself. It may be," he went on to say, with a rare look of sweetness which softened the somewhat stern outline of his features, "that I have been too long a dreamer. Margaret, I wandered aimlessly over the old house to-day, and listened for what I could not find."

"What is that?"

"The voice of the present; a cheerful present instead of the echoes of the past."

Mrs. Mackenzie made no answer for a moment. She had picked up a piece of fancy-work from a small table near by and let her knitting needles click gently before she spoke.

"I wonder," she said, raising her kind eyes to her old friend's face, "what it is we elderly people really ought to expect. When you and I were young everything in life seemed like a kaleidoscope, to be turned around at our pleasure, falling into perpetually new effects. And now we know, do we not, that the broken bits of glass are a mere toy, and that the turn of the wheel in the real events of life is in higher hands."



She broke off, smiling half sadly, and resumed with a lighter air.

“Now you and I can enjoy sitting quietly, can’t we, by this simple fireside, for we have, to a certain extent, done with the impetuosity and extravagance of youth. We have lived all that out and come to definite conclusions as to what our little tempers and vagaries and even expectations are worth. But, you see, they are beginning it all, and they jar upon each other, not knowing what is to come.”

He was listening with almost reverent attention, having risen to rest his arm upon the mantel, and so gaze down into her fine, expressive face. His “ghosts” seemed to flit away as he remembered that during almost all of their two lives her counsels, her keen and tender sympathy, had been the anchorage to which his helpless hands would return. And yet her life had been so limited a one, he had thought, in its actual surroundings! He had even smiled at her simple horticultural tastes, her content with this very little drawing room, for instance. And all the time had she not been grasping and holding truths which he had considered too difficult or troublesome to be worth his while?

“Don’t imagine,” said Mrs. Mackenzie with a sudden change of tone and a smiling gleam in her eyes, “that I want to preach to you, for indeed I could not to anyone, only, you see, I can’t bear to let you complicate matters in your daily life so that all the restfulness and pleasure shall be taken out of it.”

“Then, Margaret,” he exclaimed almost fretfully, “tell me what I am to do. You know that I could never bear to see anything discordant, as you would call it, about me, and now, up at the house, not a wheel—well, a social



wheel—seems to be running smoothly. I want to run over to Albany and perhaps to Washington for a few days, but if I do so will I find absolute chaos on my return?”

“Oh, Neil,” she exclaimed, “I hope not; and there is no use of being so abstract or even metaphysical over what are only practical matters in everyday life. You really have, I think, if you wish my advice, a clear duty before you. To be plain, I think your little Polly needs the discipline of school life. Lovely as she is, she will be completely spoiled fancying herself the mistress of the house, and—perhaps end by breaking some good man’s heart. School life won’t hurt her. The everyday jostling in it will show her she is not the only animate object on earth, and give her a reverence for her superiors.”

He stared for an instant in silence, and then laughed.

“Why, she is only a baby!” he exclaimed.

Mrs. Mackenzie made a gesture of disdain. “She is long past that,” she answered, “and why not make of her a lovable, useful woman while there is yet time?” She hesitated a moment and then continued gently: “Is she one day to rule supreme over the Hill House?”

“Ah!” He drew a long breath. “How can I tell?”

There were a few moments of silence between them, and again that dislike to even think of the disagreeable made him hesitate to take Mrs. Mackenzie completely into his confidence. But he did say at last:

“You know, I think, something about the conditions of my father’s will.”

“Oh, I know,” she answered quickly. “Has the search for any child poor Sarah may have left been useless?”

“I think so. At least I never could come upon any definite trace of her, and as for her scoundrelly husband, it must have suited his purpose to disappear, for had he



any idea of gain in presenting himself he would certainly wear our lives out. I advertised enough and tried every clue to her movements. By the way, there was a terribly underbred man up at the house, whom I could see was trying to ferret out a mystery and make something out of it."

"Yes, I know," assented Mrs. Mackenzie.

He went on with an evident effort at calm.

"I made quick work of him, although his visit has disturbed me ever since. However, I must look into some bits of his voluntary information. I don't want to let a thing of the kind worry me, but I don't see my way toward letting it alone."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Mackenzie quickly. "If your father imposed any duty upon you in regard to Sarah it is clearly your only path to take it up. You know," she went on, "that I never like making intrusive enquiries or offering advice; but in this case, as perhaps your oldest friend, I think I may say that you should leave no stone unturned if your father gave you any mission to perform—no matter, Neil," she continued with unusual decision of tone, "how painful it may be for you to take it up. Of course I do not ask you to tell me anything; in fact, I would almost rather not know anyone's actual private affairs. I am merely giving a general opinion as to what is one's duty in regard to a mission—possibly bequeathed one."

"Ah!" he said, with another of those long-drawn breaths. "That is just it! And, as usual, I have taken a long time to say out what might have been expressed in three sentences."

She again waited in silence for him to continue.

"I have decided to make a will a dozen times already,"



he went on; "and now I *shall* make one, which will settle the question."

"But, Neil," she said very anxiously, "don't do anything rash, I beg of you. Remember there is nothing in the world more wretched than the complications over a disputed will. That is so like you! You will only apply a salve to your conscience instead of remedying an evil."

"Good Heavens, Margaret," he exclaimed half angrily, "don't misunderstand me—you of all people! I surely could not be unjust to those nearest and dearest to me. No, depend upon it, I will do nothing either rash or weak-minded in such an important matter. I don't know," he added half sadly, "why I have talked of all this as though it were so settled a grievance. It was that wretched fellow's visit, I suppose, which disturbed me. All the same, you may count on my taking everything very gravely into consideration before I act."

"Do! *Do!*" exclaimed Mrs. Mackenzie very earnestly. "You were talking," she went on, "a few moments ago of all your responsibilities. Let this be among the greatest, I beg of you, and if it is of any comfort to you to come and talk over these matters with me at any time I hope you will do it. To go back to where we started from, why not try a good school for Polly? On this subject I do not hesitate to express my opinion very decidedly. You need not send her far away. Think this over, and in regard to the other matter, if there has been anything left undone, think out how to do it now."

"I will," he said earnestly, and continued, speaking more rapidly: "I don't know, Margaret, whether it has been the sense of disappointment or failure I have had in coming home, but it seems to me that life may be far nearer ending than beginning."



“Oh, no, no,” exclaimed Mrs. Mackenzie; “nothing at all of the kind. It is more like a fresh start, and why not cheer yourself up by giving some sort of house-warming, so to speak? Go off to Albany on this little visit, and, if you like, let Ellen and me prepare a surprise party. If you authorize me,” she continued, “I will talk it all over with her and send out all the invitations in your name. It will cheer you up wonderfully, and you will clasp hands and see faces you have not met in years.”

His face showed that he had caught the inspiration of her idea.

“Will you really undertake this?” he exclaimed. “Then I am sure it will be a success, for I never knew of your making a failure.”

“Certainly I will,” she said brightly; “it will do you worlds of good. If you like, I will go up to the House and talk it over again this very afternoon.”

“Very well, do, I beg of you,” he exclaimed, and added in a moment: “Margaret, you are a wonderful woman. I believe you could have guessed the riddle of the Sphinx.”

But Mrs. Mackenzie only shook her head.

“I can only unravel certain little webs in the lives of those I love,” she answered. “As you know, I have never cared for a boundless horizon. A few things interest me so deeply that I want to probe their very depths, and perhaps in doing that I find bits of other matter on subjects beyond me, which cling, in spite of myself, to be felt unexpectedly just when they are needed.”

“But a statesman would need no more,” he answered. “That means a sagacity which covers everything. I declare, Margaret,” he added, “it is delightfully like old times to talk these things over with you. After all, is



there anything more enjoyable in life than a completely sympathetic friendship?"

"Humanly speaking—no, I suppose not," she said with sudden gravity.

"I know what you mean," the Colonel said in a low voice; "but then, when we reach a fine human altitude, does it not bring us that much nearer the Divine?"

"Neil," she said suddenly, "you know there is not a particle of cant about me, and yet I will take the privilege you have given me of offering you one bit of advice. Draw nearer to the highest authority of all and you will find our small, vexatious needs in daily life resolve themselves. Even though we may not do our very best for others as well as ourselves, nevertheless, if we place our uncertainties in the hands of Him who knows the reason for every doubt and all it entails, the answer will be given us. A bit of priceless china, if it suits your fancy, is well worth seeking for as an amusement, but the other search leads us to a rest and peace even if we make some mistakes."

"Margaret," the Colonel said very gravely, "if you had taught or led me long ago I might have been a braver man to-day."

Mrs. Mackenzie flushed a little, but she quickly resumed the lighter tone in which she had been speaking a moment ago.

"But this is not the long ago," she answered, with a cheerful smile; "it seems to be for you a very perplexing to-day. Therefore let us only consider the question we had first under discussion. Try to do all you can to carry out any wishes your father may have expressed, if not written, in regard to Sarah, and meanwhile cheer yourself and us all by a general house-warming. When I go up this afternoon let us marshal our forces and discuss our plans."



When the Colonel walked away a few moments later in the direction of his old home he kept saying to himself:

“Why on earth did such a woman as Margaret ever marry that poor creature, good as he was, Job Mackenzie? What could she have found in his limited mental capacity?”

But perhaps, wise as he was, the Colonel did not know that the fidelity to small matters, the perfect acceptance of fundamental truths and principles in Job Mackenzie, which had made his life so tranquil and to many others apparently so negative, had been just the influence which had developed the highest and finest traits in the character of a woman who would have been apt, under other guidance, to let enthusiasm almost override principle.



## IX.

THE idea of a real "party" at the Hill House sent an electric thrill throughout the entire county, and it apparently mattered very little to any of the invited guests that so short a time was given for their own preparations, and as Mrs. Mackenzie had predicted, the prospect drew the Hill House family together most agreeably. Miss Dyker "rose to the occasion" with such a complete sense of her importance as mistress of the house that Jean was enchanted, and Dick so gleeful that he nearly drove her back to her "dignity" again, while Polly was so absorbed in what she would wear, say, and do, how "receive the guests," for instance, and whether any nice "girls and boys" were to be among them, that not a sign of a "tantrum" appeared in the small "whirlwind"—and accordingly her uncle's peace of mind was undisturbed.

One member of the household, however, went about her duties with less composure than belonged to her present position therein. Needless to say, this was Sarah, whose spirit rebelled against every "order" given her, yet rose when she thought that very soon—sooner than "they" thought, perhaps—her "day" would come, and *then* she would see *who* could order around! Her "ye-e-s" in answer to Miss Dyker and Jean was excessively aggravating, but, as Miss Dyker observed, very soon they could do without her services. Cécile, the French maid, who had been allowed to remain over with a friend in Albany, arrived, and proved a very glittering specimen of the genus *femme de chambre*, far more formidable to Sarah



than even the Colonel himself, her very broken English and her superior way of opening trunks, shaking out dresses, arranging and rearranging toilet affairs, inspiring Sarah with something so nearly like awe that she unconsciously said "Yes'm" when Cécile, with a look of disdain, told her to "remove herself—no touch mademoiselle's things." Sarah, who had been loitering in Jean's room eager to see all the finery, fairly flew at this command, running down to the kitchen to tell Mrs. Knapp "that Frenchwoman was a regular *terror!*"

Jones was perhaps the most reliable, sedate, and satisfactory member of the kitchen cabinet. He was a grave, dignified, self-contained person of mature years, no superfluous sentiments, and apparently the tolerance of a wide mind and vast experience for the inabilities of other people. Accordingly he was ready to do anything required of him, taking it all for the "credit" of the family, overlooking the shortcomings of others, since, as he reflected, and sometimes observed, Providence couldn't make *everybody's* brains level, the inference being that were such the case the "Joneses" of this world would not have been needed; but he did express himself strongly on the subject of the supper having to be sent from Albany.

"Ah, Miss Jean," he observed gravely, "'t isn't like the *old* Hill House times. When we were young—Colonel and me, miss—do you think *we'd* have let those 'fly' waiters and cooks around? *No, miss!*"

"But, Jones," said Jean, much amused, "you see it *isn't* old times at all. Indeed, I think it's *very* new ones."

Jones shook his head gravely.

"There's all our collection, miss," he went on; "aint touched yet, and I'm glad of it. I wouldn't have one of those Henry Doos cups to be cracked for all you could



give me! nor let a girl like that Sarah to so much as put her little finger on our genuine Farnese bit of tapestry; and when I think of the Breeches Bible, miss, I tell you I feel cold till I see it safe under lock and key."

From all of which it may be seen that Jones, in his capacity of body-servant and attendant on the Colonel, had received his own higher culture.

Jean reported this conversation to Richard a little later, who declared that Jones was a "man of destiny."

"The like of him occurs perhaps once in a century," said Dick. "He is simply invaluable—in his own state of life. Think of having a man who can shave you like an artist, and at the same time understand the very sacredness of a Henri Deux cup and saucer! He deserves embalming after death."

Toward Sarah the conduct of this pattern creature was just what might have been expected. After the first stare of surprise at her familiar way of going about, he simply ignored her, unless she stood directly in his way, when he would, to use her own expression, "*brush her away like a fly!*"

Mrs. Mackenzie's presence, suggestions, and actual help were of the greatest service, so generally felt, yet at no time intrusive; she was, if anything could be, like the so much needed "oil" on those fractious wheels of the Hill House life. But it troubled her greatly to think that the Colonel's visit to Albany had not been entirely successful. They had chance to exchange but a few words on the subject until she was about leaving to make her own toilet for the party. Then she waylaid him in the lower hall, drawing him into the library of the house adjoining his own sanctum.

"Neil," she said, with an imploring look, "if you



couldn't find the older Mr. Tolles in his office why didn't you see some other member of the firm?"

The Colonel looked distressed.

"My dear Margaret," he said with the touch of impatience she understood so well, "I've been waiting for a chance to tell you." (Poor Colonel! "putting it off," would have expressed it so much better.) "I *did* see one of the—well, branches of the firm, so to speak—an old family friend, who lives very quietly on Beattle Street; a most interesting man! wonderfully well read in Sanscrit——"

Mrs. Mackenzie's hands went up for an instant, and the Colonel rather hastily continued:

"He and I talked the matter over confidentially, for *he* had known poor Sarah and her—scamp of a husband. Well, *he* thinks the last traces of her child, if there was one, was about *this* neighborhood, or rather lower down. He mentioned Nautuck."

"*But*," exclaimed Mrs. Mackenzie, "what *made* him think? He must have had some *reason!*" ("Heavens alive!" she ejaculated to herself.)

"Yes, yes, Margaret. I'm coming to that," said the Colonel quickly. "It appears that a fellow looking very like him—I mean Dalton—used to be seen about by some people who had a music store in Albany. On one occasion he bought some music, or rather ordered it "put to his account," saying he had to have it then and there, as his wife had particularly wanted it that day. Now, then!" concluded the Colonel.

Mrs. Mackenzie waited. Then: "How could they remember such a trifle all these years?" she asked.

"For an excellent reason. He already owed a large bill, and this amount was to be added to it."



“And was the music sent?”

“Yes; the old books show that.”

“*Where to?* O Neil, *do* come to the point!” exclaimed poor Mrs. Mackenzie, standing up in despair.

“You need not be worried, Margaret,” said the Colonel, taking out his wallet as leisurely as though he only needed to extract therefrom a one-dollar bill. “I wrote it down carefully. In fact, as you can see, I was cleverer than you think, for I visited the music store itself, and I assure you spent a great deal of time to get at the old books of the firm.”

And he handed her a slip of paper on which was written in his delicate Italian hand:

“Five pieces of music charged to Philip Dalton, Esq., June 10, 187— (presumably for his wife), Dalton residing at the time in or near Nautuck, Schoharie Co., N. Y.”

As Mrs. Mackenzie lifted her eyes from the paper he said, with his delicate smile:

“Well, Margaret, what does *that* look like?”

“Like!” exclaimed his friend eagerly. “Why, Neil, like a gleam of hope!”

The Colonel drew a long breath.

“If not despair!” he said in a low tone.

“But, Neil,” urged Mrs. Mackenzie, more thoroughly roused by this bit of information than she dared to show, “surely you will not *now* let the matter rest here! Oh, if only *I* were a man!”

The Colonel smiled again.

“Thank Heaven you are not, Margaret, my dear,” he observed; “for you would set all the rest of us poor weaklings at naught. As a woman you are simply incomparable.”



She passed his words by with another of those quick gestures of her hands.

“Then you will look into it without delay, dear Neil?” she asked anxiously.

“I promise you,” he answered with real solemnity. “For, Margaret”—he had drawn nearer to her, and as they faced each other laid his hands on her shoulders with a firm pressure—“you may think me only an idle dreamer, but I am something better than that where actual duty is concerned, and lately poor Sarah seems to pursue me. Is it, I ask myself, because I am so soon to see her?”

“Neil, Neil! Do not, my dear, I beg of you!”

“But would that mean unhappiness?” he continued, smiling down into her troubled face. “Not at all! I feel myself more and more of late drawn toward the old days! You remember them as well as—perhaps better than I. But to go back to what we were saying—to prove my earnestness on this subject, let me tell you my will is already made. If, when I am gone even, the child of poor Sarah, if it exists, has not been found, I have provided that the search shall be continued; moreover, I have taken good care that all our dear ones here are provided for. You know how little they have of their own.”

He moved back toward the chimney-piece, leaned his arm upon it, and looked down at her very gravely.

“Under the conditions of my father’s decidedly eccentric will, as you know,” he resumed, “Sarah and I inherited almost everything. In the event of the death of either of us the property was to go to the survivor, and upon the death of the survivor, leaving no will, to the child or children of either, in equal shares. This was his last will, when he regretted his casting the poor child off so coldly on her marriage. That was before poor Gar-



nier's death, or before he knew much about Dick, and Tom and his father never agreed. Jean, though I never let her know it, has next to nothing. Polly"—he smiled tenderly—"I'd be amused to see the little thing living on *her* income, and even my Aunt Ellen—— No, no; it well becomes me *now* to set all this business right, and so I have made what I consider a very just and considerate will."

"O Neil!" exclaimed Mrs. Mackenzie, almost weeping between relief of mind on the one point and dread of the time when such a document should be needed. "I am so *glad* you have done this, for it has always seemed to me nearly criminal that people should for a foolish shrinking from making a will leave matters in a troubled way for those they love. Think of all such negligence has brought to us already! My friend, I *am* glad of this."

His brows drew together slightly.

"One would fancy, Margaret," he said a trifle coldly, "you expected me to die!"

She smiled, and shook her head.

"Only in the Lord's good time," she said very gently, "which I believe and hope to be a very long way off. I never saw you looking better, my dear friend. It must be coming home."

"Is it?" He spoke with a touch of wistfulness and glanced around the beautiful old room. "But, Margaret, my girl, I am not so young as when you and I sang in this very room. Those were happy days!"

"But," said Margaret Mackenzie quickly, "do you know, charming, fascinating, as youth may be, middle life has a deeper attraction for me. Perhaps I had better say I find more real content in its occupations, and even aspirations."



“Ah! There are aspirations yet, then?”

“Why not? Better ones; everything takes on a finer, higher, more useful meaning. We can afford to look back, and looking forward means added peace.”

He waited a moment, then said as though speaking to himself:

“They will not be alone——”

As he broke off their eyes—the eyes of long and tried and trusted friendship—met, and instinctively Mrs. Mackenzie held out her hand.

“If *anything* should take me from my charges here—the unexpected is what always happens, is it not?” her friend said, laying his hand in hers—“Margaret, will you befriend them?”

Nothing could have exceeded the solemnity, the gentleness of his tone, and tears, such an unaccustomed sign of feeling with her, sprang into Mrs. Mackenzie’s eyes and ran unheeded down her cheeks.

“Neil!” she exclaimed. “Why do you talk and look like this? Tell me, dear, dear old friend, my *brother*—you have always seemed like one—*what* is on your mind! There is something—something more!”

He drew back, a slight shiver passed through him, but he bent his head, and for the first time in his life touched her with his lips, pressing them lightly once upon her brow, then her cheek.

“Thank God! *It is a promise!*” she heard him saying as if to himself as he turned and abruptly left the room.



## X.

IF in its ordinary condition the Hill House was fine to look upon, it became a picture worth remembering when candle and firelight, flowers in abundance, the presence of a brilliant, happy, cheery company, all glad to meet there once again, woke it into new life, and even Mrs. Mackenzie's very fastidious taste was satisfied by what met her eyes on returning from the cottage in the evening. It was not eight o'clock, and Sandy, who had been ready half an hour, had been hurrying her that they might be there "on time," and as they hastened along the avenue she called upon the young man once or twice to admire the charming picture the old house made as they approached it. But Sandy disdained the merely picturesque, although he was by no means indifferent to the value of bricks and mortar.

"Oh, yes," he assented in answer to her demand that he should observe the beauty of the scene before them. "I know it's all very well; but I wonder how it will look a little later—in other hands, for instance."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Mackenzie as sharply as she could speak. "What do you mean?" She remembered with a queer pang the talk of the morning. "I declare," she went on, "there are some natures which can only calculate the money value of everything!"

Mackenzie laughed.

"And they are the wise ones, Aunt Margaret," he observed.



They were in good time and more than cordially welcomed. Even the "statuesque" Jean unbent slightly as she shook hands with Sandy, or "Alex," as he preferred to be called, and it seemed to the young fellow, who really fancied himself in love with her, that she had never looked more beautiful than as she stood under the great candlelit chandelier in the drawing-room with old Miss Dyker and Polly at her side. Her dress was some wonderful combination in which pinks and reds were blended with the tones of a pomegranate, and which set off her clear dark beauty—if such it could really be called—in the most effective way, and for ornament Jean, with her usual delicate taste, wore only the bunch of Jacque roses which Dick had at considerable trouble procured for her, and a slender little chain of gold about her throat.

"It's easy to see what *your* bent is, Jean," he remarked. "I believe you are studying art, aren't you? and, by George, you know how to use your talent in dress."

Jean laughed and made him a little courtesy.

"Thank you, sir," she remarked. "Now go and say things that are equally pretty to all the other ladies and you'll be the hero of the evening."

Sandy did go away—not, however, to compliment the rest of the company, but to seek, if possible, an opportunity for speaking with Sarah. He was well aware that to be found conversing with one of the women domestics of the establishment would not look suitable in the least, and yet he felt it of vital importance to secure a few moments alone with her. Accordingly, when the rooms began to fill, the carriages sent to different trains, and those of the "neighbors," as people within ten miles were called, began to roll up to the door, and deposit their cheerful burdens, he roamed about the lower hall, glancing in and



out of doors with a would-be careless air until he espied at last the object of his search.

Sarah, as he might have known, had been equally anxious to see him—her “lawyer,” as she called him to herself—and so it was not at all surprising that she should have been “discovered” in the act of apparently dusting something on the mantelpiece in a small room off the library, a nondescript place which might once have been a lady’s *boudoir*, and was now a sort of general sitting room. Sarah turned upon him with audacious good humor.

“Hello!” was her pleasant greeting.

Sandy came in, glanced about, and then said coolly:

“Doing as I told you?”

Sarah nodded.

“Keepin’ still? Well, yes, for the present. But maybe I might ask what *you* have been doing.”

“Don’t you fret! It’s all coming out first-class,” said her “counsel,” nodding his head. “I’ve been to Albany and I’ve *consulted* in the case.”

Sarah’s heart under the red cashmere waist of her “best” dress beat very high and fast, but she was really too much afraid to speak.

“Yes, sir,” pursued Sandy. “We’re on the right track, I *think*, if you don’t go to work and spoil things.”

“Oh, *bother!*” said the amiable client.

“That’s the word to use,” said Sandy, nodding his head. “All these things involve more *bother*, my good girl, than you can dream of, Horatio.”

“*Horatio!*” demanded Sarah, who began to wonder if her legal adviser was quite himself.

“See your Shakspeare,” returned Sandy, well aware that by confusing her he was impressing her with his own power



and knowledge. "But to business. I have set things going, and now I want you to give me just a little bit of handwriting."

The color flamed into the girl's face—so evidently not with anger, but distress, that Sandy felt really sorry for her.

"Oh, it's nothing much," he remarked in a very off-hand tone and laughing good-naturedly. "You can write your own name, of course."

"Oh, *yes!*" said Sarah, infinitely relieved. "Why, what you talking about?"

"Now we have to hurry up, for it won't do to keep you from—me from the company," said the young man, drawing a slip of paper from his note-book. "So I'll just give—trust you with this, Sarah, my dear, if you'll swear no one shall see it; if anyone does you'll lose everything; and when you get the chance read it over carefully, and if you see fit sign your name there—at the bottom—hand it back to me, and all will go well."

Sarah shared the feeling common to many minds that in a "bit of writing" might lie danger, and as she showed this so plainly on receiving Sandy's memorandum he added quickly, and with a touch of impatience:

"If you've any brains at all you'll see it won't mean *anything* without I get *everything* for you. And if you don't do as I tell you, then I'll walk straight to the Colonel and tell him the whole story."

He placed the paper in her hands, watched her hide it away, and saying: "Mind, for your eyes alone," sauntered leisurely away.

Sarah stood still a moment bewildered, half alarmed, and above all things anxious to read the "writing" on this important paper. She could not wait, and so, regardless of all that she might be called upon to do, slipped away



up the stairs to the little room assigned her, where she nervously struck a light, and holding it above the paper, read as follows:

“I hereby promise to make Alexander Mackenzie of Thornton my sole agent in all business matters relating to the Dyker estate.”

For an instant Sarah felt almost dizzy. Then she laughed aloud.

“Why, an *agent* aint anything!” she reflected. “That doesn’t speak of *money!* *The Dyker estate!* What if it *should* all be true!”

Sarah scarcely knew how she contrived to reach the little *boudoir* again, where she knew pens and ink were to be found. Luckily Mlle. Cécile had not so far sent for her, and feeling entire confidence now in the success of everything, she contrived to scrawl her name to the memorandum, looking it well over to make sure that every letter was clearly formed, and as she did so a queer idea came across her mind. *Where* had she once seen her name written differently? Sarah—something—Malone, or was it just without the Malone? Yet she *knew* her aunt had called the article on which it was written hers. The question, however, involved speculations too deep for the girl’s mind. Again she looked about her, and moving toward the hallway, saw her “lawyer,” who was still waiting, coming toward her.

“All right?” he asked quickly, and half snatching at the paper.

“Why, yes,” said the girl slowly. “But, Sandy, just you wait a bit! Do you know—seems to me that aint my own name, or I’ve got another. Aunt had it written down somewhere, but I remember how she scolded when she found it out.”



“Your aunt, Mrs. Malone?” demanded Sandy.

The girl nodded.

“Why, yes,” she said. “It’s on a little book, seems to me, a sort of hymn-book.”

Sandy stared.

“*Listen* to me,” he whispered quickly. “Would you know the name if you heard it?”

“Guess so,” said Sarah.

“Was it—*Dalton?*” enquired the young man as calmly as he could.

“Why, yes!” exclaimed the girl. “That’s just what it was! And I said we didn’t belong to any Daltons that I’d ever heard of, and she was awfully mad.”

Sandy felt almost alarmed by his success.

“Sarah, my sweet child,” he said quietly, “don’t you fret. I guess *you’re* all right.”

And he sauntered away, thrilled, excited, and yet forcing himself to be calm. *What* a find! Well, Rounce couldn’t call him “only his clerk” after *this*. No, *sir!* And with these sentiments lending an expression of the utmost amiability to his face Sandy re-entered the drawing room, which was already pleasantly filled by a company of the Colonel’s old friends—people as different in type, in birth, in bearing from Mackenzie and Sarah, his “client,” as the sun from its shadow, yet who were all enjoying themselves heartily, laughing, talking, joking with unrestrained good humor, never fearing to go “too far,” indulging even in little witticisms at each other’s expense with no fear of giving a wound. *What* a different world it was from that of Sarah, Sandy could not help thinking. And yet, if his half-formed project was carried out, when *she* should be mistress here *he* would be master. How would it seem to come into this fine old room, with its



dignity of old possession, its air of perfect harmony, the various objects representing the tastes of its owners for generations, to see *her*, for instance, seated at the fireside of the Dykers, mistress of the house, his name the price *he* would have to pay for sharing such a possession? Coarse of grain the young fellow might be compared to many of those with whom he lived in daily contact, and yet, from the very force of his associations, came a fastidiousness, a flavor of fine feeling, at least about externals, which made him shiver as he thought of all that the new order of things might involve, nay, must bring about.

“How I should hate her!” he said to himself as he leaned moodily back against the wall near the lower doorway, “and myself too.”

And in the same instant he was aware that from a group near the piano Dick Appleton was approaching—Dick, careless in his perfect ease and self-possession, handsome, smiling, on perfectly good terms, it would seem, with all the world and himself. It was enough! One of those chance touches of a dark hand in a picture which destroys its finer influence. Not if *he* could help it should *this* fellow have all the say; and accordingly Sandy drew himself up, smiled, held out his hand as Appleton did his, and Sarah was in the ascendant again.



## XI.

POLLY'S happiness was very complete to find herself that evening the centre of a group of girls and boys of her own age, all of whom regarded her with open admiration and interest, for had she not only recently come home from various sojournings? But she was so bright and pretty and amusing, and then, as everyone seemed to know without being told, she was the heiress of this grand old house. It was certainly quite enough to ensure her success as a hostess, and feeling this put Polly at her best. She could afford to be very good-natured and even tolerant when the two Branscombe girls said how nice it must be not to "*have to go to school.*"

"Oh, but dear me," cried Polly, "*I think sometimes it'll be very pokey having to study by myself! No one to care whether you get ahead of them or not,*" said Polly, unconsciously revealing herself. "And no exhibitions or anything."

"We don't have exhibitions at our school," said Charlotte Branscombe, a very thin, grave girl, unwontedly excited by all this chatter. "Our principal doesn't approve of them. She says it encourages jealousy, not real study."

"We have 'em, you bet!" interposed her brother; "and I can tell you, don't the boys just wish we didn't!"

"But, O Polly, *dear,*" said Marian Cayle, one of the girls from near by, "you're just like someone in a book—in this dear old house, and everything you want, and such a



lovely—well, I don't quite mean *lovely*, but darling—uncle!"

The term somehow sent a little thrill through Polly's careless young heart, and involuntarily she turned her head toward the end of the room, where Colonel Dyker stood talking in his pleasant, well-modulated voice to a group of interested people. How noble, how fine, how *courtly* a man he looked, and how *good* he was to her. Yes, he was, he had *always* been, a "darling uncle."

"Indeed, Marian, he is a *perfect* darling," said Polly, with a sigh of content. "Why, he never dreams of refusing me *anything!*"

And as a little murmur of approval passed through the group Colonel Dyker was seen to be moving toward them, and Polly called out in her impetuous way:

"Uncle *Neil!* Come here, *please!*"

"Eh, Polly?" said the Colonel, ever ready to respond to the voice of his little favorite. "Well, what now?"

"Oh, Uncle Neil!" she exclaimed, clasping one of his hands in both her own. "Do you know, they're all envying me; for what, do you suppose?"

The Colonel, who was very fond of young people, glanced around indulgently, and the boys felt proud of his notice on the instant.

"Not your white flummery, is it?" he said, still smiling. "Because I'm sure Ned Branscombe, for instance, has something better to think about. Your father has just been telling me, Ned," continued the Colonel, "that you're going ahead finely."

"*That* so, sir?" said Ned, crimsoning with pleasure.

Dr. Branscombe rarely praised his boys, and a word of the kind was music in the lad's ears, and he loved the Colonel at once for repeating it.



“But, Uncle Neil, Uncle *Neil*,” Polly went on, still clinging to his hand, “it’s *you* they envy me! Do you hear? It’s having *you* for an uncle!”

“O Polly, Polly, how could you?” was chorused in various tones as the Colonel, laughing in his quiet way, moved on. But the chance sentence set him thinking again with renewed satisfaction on the step he had taken. Could his little Polly have said those words had she known how he had idled with his direct duty toward her? And again he rejoiced over having done his best on all sides.

Whether Jones approved or not, certainly the management of the Hill House party resulted in something so successful as to be remembered long afterward by all present. Some of the Colonel’s treasures had been unpacked and were tenderly, proudly displayed. Polly had a heap of trifles to show, and—for she was exceedingly generous where merely giving was concerned—to bestow on her young friends. Miss Dyker forgot every symptom of headache in talking over old times with her former friends. And so it was, as Mrs. Mackenzie had predicted, a thorough success, fusing all discordant elements, and above all, as she had secretly hoped, setting dear Ellen Dyker at once in her proper place as her nephew’s housekeeper, chatelaine, sweet presiding household angel. The young people contrived a song or two by themselves in the long hall, Sandy Mackenzie thereby showing one of his smaller accomplishments as a pianist; and from time to time the quietly happy master of the house would stand a little apart, looking on, better and better pleased to think of what he had done, and of the journey he was to take on the morrow to make a new purchase complete.

“Well, Margaret,” the Colonel said, smiling down upon



Mrs. Mackenzie, when the last guests from a distance had departed, "your suggestion has been all that your ideas usually are."

"Yes; but, Neil"—she glanced up at him a trifle anxiously—"there is just a word or two I had meant to say to you; but you look tired."

"Tired! No, indeed. I never felt more thoroughly rested. Dear, dear! Well, Margaret, must you *really* go?"

And then the little family party clustered about her. Everyone, even the careless Polly, had something, some "last word," to say to this dear, generous, sympathetic family friend. "Oh, Mrs. Mackenzie, be *sure* to come up in the morning!" from Jean, and "Mrs. Mackenzie, why don't you stay here all night?" from Polly, while Dick made fun in his way, declaring her "cloud" was not on right, and persisted in rearranging it, while Jean held her fast by one hand. Mrs. Mackenzie felt herself stirred out of her usual calm by all this, and the Colonel's words of the morning flashed across her mind. But then—how she loved them! She stood there, laughing and talking, the centre of a happy, merry group, such as the fine old hall would not know for many a long day again.

"Margaret," said the Colonel on the doorstep, watching her depart with the rather irritated Sandy, "don't forget you promised to be here early in the morning. That paper—you know I want to show you something in particular."

Mrs. Mackenzie looked back through the darkness at his figure under the great swinging lamp above, and nodded her head.

"Yes, yes, dear," she called out softly—the first time in years the tender appellation toward him had been on her lips. Then he moved back, the doorway was closed, and there were no more parting words to be spoken.



## XII.

MRS. MACKENZIE'S sleep was a troubled one that night, as might have been expected, for the experiences of the past day or two had been of a really exciting nature, and her sense of responsibility in regard to affairs at the Hill House deepened as she recalled various portions of her talk with the Colonel. What, for example, had he quite meant her to understand by asking her to "befriend" them all? Surely no better guardianship than his could ever be needed. And so full were even her half-sleeping moments of thoughts of this kind that when a voice at her door roused her in the gray of the morning she started up, and almost before her maid, Hannah, spoke the words she called out: "The Hill House—what is it?"

Hannah's voice, quavering with excitement, was heard answering:

"Oh, please, ma'am, get up quick, do," and in an instant her mistress had flung open the door.

The woman stood there trembling and tearful.

"It's Mr. Knapp, ma'am, if you please, and he's downstairs, and the master's had a fit, or something. Will you go up right away?"

It seemed to Mrs. Mackenzie as though she could never find her garments or get them quickly enough upon her, and scarcely a word was spoken until she and the faithful Knapp were out in the early dawn. She had asked, "What is it?" and he had answered huskily, "We heard him groan, ma'am, and went in, and there he sat in his dressing-gown by the table."



“And then?”

“We thought we heard him speak your name.”

The man waited a moment for the question she dared not ask, and then said in the same tone of voice:

“He was breathing when I left, and the doctor is sent for.”

It was useless, of course, to question further, and the lights, like fitful spectres of the evening's festivity, could be seen glimmering in some of the windows, or moving about, and when the great door was once more thrown open it was to find a strangely altered condition of things from that which Mrs. Mackenzie had so lately left. Servants were moving about on the lower floor, and Jean's figure came gliding swiftly down the staircase, her face blanched with terror, and the hands she stretched out to her friend's cold as ice.

“Come up at once,” she whispered nervously. “He has been asking, or trying, poor dear, to ask, every instant for you.”

The room in which he lay was that so recently prepared for his happy home-coming, and few signs of disorder were about. The Colonel, best and kindest of men, gentlest of friends, as she could not but think even in that moment, lay upon his bed evidently suffering intensely, yet with eyes which held more yearning than pain in them fixed upon the door. He knew at once, and tried by a feeble gesture of his hand to welcome her, and at the same time motioned the rest away.

It was no time for idle ceremony, and reading in a glance that he wished to say something to her alone, Mrs. Mackenzie, with a few gentle words, dismissed them for a moment from the room, and then, kneeling at his side, she whispered:



“Neil, you know me, do you not?”

His eyes answered her.

“There is something you wish to say to me, is there not, dear?”

Still holding her hand his eyes moved in the direction of his secretary, which she saw in the faint morning light was standing open, with papers scattered loosely upon it.

No intuition is quicker than that of a woman where someone she has loved long and tenderly is concerned. Mrs. Mackenzie scarcely hesitated an instant before going to the open desk, where she glanced over the various papers, recognizing quickly in one long, folded document something which looked newly written, and it flashed across her mind that it might be that most important of all papers—the will they had been discussing. Before she could speak she saw him feebly move his head, then wave his hand as though he intended she should close and lock the desk, and when she followed this mute signal a smile flickered across his face.

He seemed to be making one great effort to speak, and at last she contrived to understand him, for although scarcely an articulate sound came, she answered:

“Do you mean it is my trust? Were you trying to say ‘your trust’?”

He pressed her hand and again his head moved in assent.

“Neil, I promise you,” she answered, trying by what seemed an almost superhuman effort to control her own emotion. “See, dear, I am kneeling down beside you, and I promise you that I will take upon myself any charge which I can, and so long as I live the children may always look to me as to a mother. Now, dear, is that what you wish to have me say?”

He pressed her hand once more in token of assent, a look



of ineffable peace and comfort crossing his features, and but that she knew his physical needs should be attended to, Margaret Mackenzie would fain have knelt thus quietly at his side for a little longer time. Only for one moment dared she linger, and that was to say, still in that tone of infinite tenderness in which all the strength, the gentleness, the comprehension of her long friendship for him seemed blended:

“Neil, you remember what we talked of the other day. Try to think, as I am thinking for you, of the dear Lord who has us all so lovingly in his keeping. It is all, your staying or your going, in his hands, and you believe it, do you not?”

Later, when she tried to recall every look and touch of those moments, Margaret remembered with a thrill of exquisitely deep joy and satisfaction the look—one of perfect triumph—which lit and glorified his dying features. In speaking of it to one very near and dear to them afterward, she said it was as though the Angel of the Lord, standing close at hand, had been suddenly revealed to him, holding out that message of hope sent to cheer the departing soul, and which, since he saw and believed in it, might be his.



### XIII.

THERE is no need to dwell upon all the sadder incidents of the day which followed. Few households but have known all that such a time entails, and what a merciful dispensation it is that in the first hours of such a trial there is too much bewilderment and perplexity for us to be conscious of our personal loss; since death is ever new as life itself. It is always the same shock, met with the same surprise that it could have come to one lately keen and alert among us.

It was well for the Hill House party that they had Mrs. Mackenzie virtually at their head, since among them all only Dick and Jean seemed of the slightest use; but for some reason, unaccountable to his aunt, Sandy Mackenzie suddenly appeared, almost officious in his efforts to be of service; a fact which would have irritated her into peremptorily telling him to leave them alone; but that someone was needed to do just what he was ready to undertake, and accordingly he became indispensable and like a member of the family.

Mrs. Mackenzie was at no time a very talkative woman, never had moods of careless garrulity like so many of her sex; so that it was only to Dick Appleton that she mentioned the fact of her having locked the Colonel's desk.

"The dear old man!" Dick answered, not ashamed of the tears springing into his eyes, "I think I understand it all, for he said a few words to me that night after he came back; and, Mrs. Mackenzie, we must be careful no one touches anything up there. Mr. Tolles telegraphed



he would be over at once. Until he comes of course no one has a right to interfere with anything. Do you know, I hear he called at the doctor's that day, spoke of these seizures, and had his heart examined."

"Then he feared this?"

"Yes; but it is a symptom of the trouble to dread admitting it."

They chanced to be talking in the main hall at the moment, and one of the swing doors below suddenly, opening, revealed Sarah's figure, her face keener than usual, something in the whole manner and expression of the girl intensified, as though she was watching anxiously a critical moment. She was not in the least abashed, but said carelessly:

"Do you know, Mrs. Mackenzie, when those lawyer people are coming?"

For answer Mrs. Mackenzie simply stared an instant at the flushed, excited face and figure, then turned back, still in silence, to Dick Appleton.

Sarah did not move, and Dick, with the gleam in his eyes which Jean well knew as a danger signal, moved forward.

"Sarah," he said, controlling his voice with an effort, "do you know you have been behaving very strangely to-day? What is it? It can scarcely be your grief for the good master of the house, nor is it likely to be that you wish at such a time to hurt other people's feelings. If you really have anything on your mind, why not say so?"

The girl's eyes drooped for an instant, and an abashed, not ashamed, look came into her face; but Dick's next words roused her.

"Is it," he continued, "that you don't like the idea of



being here at such a time? Is it that you wish to go home?"

A look—eager, vexed, just *what* Richard could not define—had changed her expression, and, but for her promise of silence to Sandy, Sarah must in that moment have *hinted* at her secret. But the young lawyer had inspired her with sufficient fear of him to check any such careless boast, and she forced herself to say quietly, yet with the same lack of deference which had marked her conduct all day:

"I can't say just yet; I've someone else to consult in the matter. Maybe," she added with sudden inspiration, "the lawyer gentlemen 'll be able to tell you more what's best to be done."

The door swung back, and with feelings impossible to express even to each other, Dick and Mrs. Mackenzie stared in silence, and indeed dismay. For what possible connection *could* there be between this girl and the Dyker attorneys?

"*Dick*," whispered Mrs. Mackenzie, her hand heavy on his arm, "what *can* she mean?"

"By George!" ejaculated Dick, grinding his teeth, "whatever the little upstart means she shall *have* to tell it when they *do* come! Oh, don't worry, dear Mrs. Mackenzie. What earthly connection can she have with *our* affairs? A girl we never heard of before—from Nautuck——"

Why or how it was Mrs. Mackenzie never could have told, but suddenly an awful gleam of light seemed to fall upon her at sound of the name, and she caught Dick's arm again, uttering a low cry of dismay.

"O Dick! Dick!" she said hurriedly, her whole frame shaken. "*If* it should be—oh, *can* it be possible? *Nau-*



*tuck!* Yes; that is where the people said he was living; and *with his wife!*”

“What—who, Mrs. Mackenzie?” exclaimed poor Dick. “Come”—he drew her into the deserted library. “Tell me, I beg of you, *what* all this can mean.”

As soon as the door was closed upon them Mrs. Mackenzie, forcing herself into composure, said quickly:

“You know, Dick, the story of poor Sarah Dyker’s marriage, and what perhaps you did not know was that the last traces of her seemed to have been at Nautuck. Certain it is that Dalton and his wife were seen there years ago; and then”—she hesitated, pressing her hands firmly together, while she strove to remember every detail of her last conversation with the Colonel—“he told me that while he was in Albany that day he hunted up a faint trace of poor Sarah at a music store, and found that on June 10, 187—, certain pieces of music had been charged to Philip Dalton *for his wife*, and that they were at the time residing in Nautuck.”

The muscles of Dick’s face seemed to harden as he listened.

“And was that all?” he inquired.

Mrs. Mackenzie sighed. “Yes,” she said slowly. “You, Dick, who loved him so well, know what was the one failing in his noble character: that terrible tendency to procrastinate. He could not bear to face the disagreeable in anything, and always, as you know, thought to-morrow soon enough for to-day’s work.”

Dick bowed his head in mute assent. It cut him like a pain to think of anything like wrong-doing in one who had always been his ideal of the chevalier *sans peur et sans reproche*, and yet he could not but admit that this lack of firmness, this overfastidiousness in regard to having the



grooves of his daily life disturbed, constituted in the Colonel's character a weak spot just as hurtful in its results as any openly pronounced trait could have been. He would have preferred to close his eyes to a fact if he dreaded something distasteful to his senses in what their clearer vision would reveal, and now might there not be a terrible irony in the result of his neglected duty? If, as there seemed some slight danger, this girl Sarah from Nautuck had any claim against the Dykers, what would the poor Colonel feel could he know of it? How much better would it have been for him long ago to have accepted the disagreeable fact of Sarah's marriage, and rescued her child from the vulgar surroundings in which she, if indeed it were she—and Dick shivered at the thought—had been reared!

“There is but one thing to do,” said Dick suddenly, rousing himself from all abstraction, determined to avoid an unpleasant scene in the house. “Send the girl to me, Mrs. Mackenzie, and I think, if I am any judge of human nature, it will not be very long before I know something definite on the subject.”

“I trust to you, Dick,” said Mrs. Mackenzie; “but remember, there must not be a hint of this wretched business to anyone until we are sure what is ahead of us. You see, I know all the family history; I have been in all their counsels, and you children here are dear to me as my own, and come what will you must all look upon me as a mother.”

The young man, to whom she had always seemed in the light of a near and dear relative, stooped down, kissing her reverently on her brow.

“Like a mother, Mrs. Mackenzie!” he exclaimed. “Have we not all felt it at every turn in our lives?”



#### XIV.

MRS. MACKENZIE could not bring herself to deliver Dick's message to Sarah in person, but after sending word to her by one of the servants that Mr. Appleton wished to see her at once in the library, went alone into a room near by to await the result of Dick's cross-examination. Strange and varied were her thoughts as she sat there, piecing out bit by bit the puzzle of the past: Sarah Dyker's marriage, death; her father's will, leaving everything to the Colonel and his sister; and then the still more complicated puzzle of the present, since what she dreaded now was that this girl from Nautuck might be proven to be Sarah Dyker's daughter, and next, that if the Colonel had *not* made a new will the children here, so unutterably dear to her, so unfitted to face the world, would be cast upon it! "No, no," said Mrs. Mackenzie almost aloud; "what I have shall be theirs!" and then she stopped short, common sense reminding her that the income which supported her in such comfort, affording her those little luxuries which from long habit had become like necessities, would amount to nothing divided among the Hill House family.

But this was pushing miserable speculation too far. She had begun to hope she was only growing morbid, when Dick's step sounded along the hall, the door opened, and he came in looking as she had never seen him except once, when as a boy at school he had returned from giving the bully of the class a sound thrashing.

"It is a miserable business," he said almost harshly; "and the worst of it is that the girl has already taken



someone into her confidence." He hesitated, and then went on: "However, with a nature like hers, it was easy to get at all she had in view, even while she was trying to keep faith with her"—he laughed queerly—"her *lawyer*. It appears she has long suspected her claim to the estate, and from what I could get out of her the grounds are excellent. She is a mixture of ignorance and shrewdness—the hardest stuff to deal with—and what we have been thinking only a few airs and graces on her part has been in reality the result of her conviction that she is really entitled to the property!"

"What!" Mrs. Mackenzie's hands went up in dismay.

"Oh, yes." Dick spoke with the calmness almost of despair. "So far as I can make out," he continued, "this is her cheerful family history: Her father's name, she declares, was Philip Dalton; she knows nothing about her mother, except that she died when Sarah was a baby, and his relatives in Nautuck took charge of her. She speaks mysteriously of a locket—a painted picture—of her gentleman father, she calls it, and then corrects herself and says it was her grandfather. I have a theory."

"Yes."

"It is this: We know that poor cousin Sarah died and left a child after her marriage to Dalton; that Dalton and his wife, for whom, you see, he bought the music, were in Nautuck, where, as you remember, some of his relations lived. Now, then, the chances are, improvident as he was, and perfectly unscrupulous, Dalton simply left this child as a baby to these common people, who probably didn't know enough to advance any claim upon the Dykers. Chances are they did not even know who his wife really was. You see, he might easily have been afraid of showing himself to any of them, for you know it was well



known that cousin Sarah's father had vowed he would cowhide Dalton if he once showed his face. No one knows how many crimes such a fellow had to conceal. Depend upon it, if he had thought there was the least chance of gain to himself he would not have hesitated to make himself known."

Mrs. Mackenzie listened intensely to every word, and Dick had spoken slowly, building up his theory as he went.

"Horrible!" she ejaculated at last. "Dick, what are we to do?"

"I have terrified the girl into silence for the present," he answered, with a very dreary smile; "and of course we must consult Mr. Tolles at once. How white and worried you look, dear Mrs. Mackenzie," he added suddenly, laying his hand with a caressing touch upon her shoulder. "You must get some rest. What is Jean thinking of to leave everything to you? She ought to have more stamina."

"Nonsense," retorted Mrs. Mackenzie, roused into defence of her favorite. "The poor child has had her hands full keeping Polly from wild hysterics. The best thing for her, Dick, will be a little quiet talk with you, and you see I don't trust that girl Sarah. She is sure to start in gossiping with the servants. Do let us keep everything outwardly tranquil while *he* is with us. I will keep an eye upon Sarah, and let me send Jean down to you."

She left him, and when the door had closed Dick flung himself into a deep easy-chair, clasping his hands behind his head.

"By all that is wonderful," he thought, with a mirthless laugh; "what would that darling woman say if she knew that Sarah's lawyer was her precious nephew, Sandy?"



## XV.

IN the course of her varied experiences with the Dyker family Mrs. Mackenzie had never had a harder task than the self-imposed one of the next two hours, for it was repugnant to every feeling within her to treat Sarah even as an equal, and to keep her occupied near her lest she betray her secret to the other members of the household. She had simply called the girl, and using a dignified tone of command, desired her to accompany her to the cottage. At the first sign of rebellion on the girl's part Mrs. Mackenzie made haste to say:

“At such times, you know, my dear, it is difficult to get all the mourning that is necessary ready at once, and I am going down to look over a few things which may be of service, so you had better come and help me.”

As this offered a suggestion of suitable attire for herself, and moreover, something in Mrs. Mackenzie's manner having the effect of reducing the girl to a wholesome state of submission, Sarah made no further objection, and explaining her errand to the others, Mrs. Mackenzie set out, wondering as they went along down the fine old avenue how soon it would be before the familiar gateway would be closed upon them all, since there was no question of doubt that were this girl to take possession, none of the Dykers would ever think of sharing it with her. And indeed it was not likely, judging from her appearance, that she herself would think of such a thing. Mrs. Mackenzie glanced up at the girl's profile as they walked along in silence, trying to see just where there lurked a faint



resemblance to the winsome Sarah Dyker of old. It was only in coloring, and there was an unmistakable—Mrs. Mackenzie called it to herself *hateful*—look of Philip Dalton about the handsome face. Yet it was by no means a bad or disagreeable face. On the contrary, if pert, it was exceedingly good-humored, and the girl had honest dark-brown eyes and a really pretty mouth, and a certain brave way about her which, toned down by the refinements of association, might be graceful, or at least interesting. She was still very young, her sophistication being less of years than of the habits of early training, which had no doubt left her early independent, free to choose and decide for herself. Of course it would take an immense amount of polish to give her any social grace, but there was a great advantage—so thought Mrs. Mackenzie, who had the happy faculty of making the best of everything—that the girl was only common in look and bearing; and moreover, the face, for all its lack of intellectual quality, was a decidedly pleasing one. It was hard work, of course, to get at the inner workings of so untutored a mind as Sarah's, but Mrs. Mackenzie, realizing the fact that the girl was no doubt to become the mistress of the Hill House, determined at once to see what could be done with her. How strange it seemed, she could not help reflecting, that in the varied events of the Dyker family she had been called upon to play the part of special providence, guide, philosopher, and friend, and it was this knowledge of her personal responsibility which kept her spirits up and gave her the kind of impetus which she needed. She was always in her element when controlling in a kindly way the lives of those whom she loved, and now it seemed to her, as she entered her own little gate, as though the Colonel's legacy to her must have included this half-tamed,



untaught, but decidedly independent daughter of the house, and it was characteristic of this best of women that the greater the difficulty to surmount the higher rose her courage—a fact which those who knew her were often surprised at, since she had chosen to let the outward channels of her life flow in such calm directions.

Meanwhile Sarah, as may be easily imagined, had not been silent from any lack of subjects to talk about, nor from any special deference toward the lady at her side, but simply because, being aware that Mrs. Mackenzie was Sandy's aunt, she was wondering just what to say, how to escape too close a cross-examination, and yet, at the same time, to fling out some little hint that, since Sandy was her lawyer, she—Sarah—must be quite as good as Mrs. Mackenzie herself. It came over her with a little shock that when Sandy appeared, as he doubtless would very soon, he would announce himself as her agent, and Sarah naturally began to wonder just what that would imply. It had sounded to her very fine to hear that she had an agent; it suggested a variety of things to the girl's mind; and if he was like other agents, she reflected, he ought to be able at once to buy her some very handsome clothes.

“Come in, my dear,” said Mrs. Mackenzie, forcing herself to a politeness of tone and manner as she ushered her guest into the dainty, home-like parlor. “Now take your things off, and sit down over there; I want a long talk with you.”

Sarah did as she was bidden, beginning to feel rather more uncomfortable when she found herself in that charmingly appointed room; but her main idea was to hold her head up, and not let any of them think they could put her down.

“I hardly think,” said Mrs. Mackenzie, “that it is



necessary, Sarah, to pretend I don't know all that you have told Mr. Appleton. Now, it may be and it may not be that you have something to do with the Dyker estate. I think myself that you have some sort of a claim."

"Oh, I should say so," exclaimed Sarah, suddenly crimsoning. "You just better wait until you hear what my lawyer has to say," and then her cheeks flushed a deeper red.

"It's very well you have a lawyer, my dear," said Mrs. Mackenzie with admirable composure, and having laid aside her wraps, she seated herself in her own special chair near the fire, half facing her young visitor; "for in these matters we cannot be too careful. You know a mistake just now would mortify you very much."

"There aint no mistake," said Sarah, unabashed. "It's all as plain as a pikestaff," she continued, heedless of Sandy's injunction. "My father was Philip Dalton, as heaps of people know, and he ran away with my mother, and she died and left me, and her name was Sarah. Now aint that clear?" concluded the girl with a triumphant expression in her eyes.

"Possibly. Do you remember your mother, Sarah?"

The girl's face softened just a little. Thoughts of her motherless childhood in the Malone household, when she had so often wished to know something even of the mother never mentioned, came back and subdued her voice as she answered:

"I can't tell you anything more, because, you see, mother died when I was a baby, and father"—her cheeks colored—"I guess he was not good for much, from what I've heard aunt say."

Mrs. Mackenzie started a little.

"So you have an aunt?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," rejoined Sarah, brightening, and



feeling really glad that she had some relatives of her own to put forward against those new ones who seemed so disinclined to receive her. "My aunt's Mrs. Malone, down at Nautuck. You see," continued Sarah, now that the ice was broken quite ready to explain herself, "the way I happened to come up to the Hill House was this: It was when the family were coming home, and Mrs. Knapp came down to get someone to help, and Mrs. Tom Bird sent her in to me. Aunt Jane was out for the day, and I was just minding the baby, so I was only too glad of the chance to come."

"Did you know nothing of the house before then?" enquired her hostess.

"What do you mean? The house up here? Oh, yes, of course I often heard of it; but, you see," added the girl, her shrewdness returning to her rescue, "I guess the way I never knew I belonged to the Dykers was because I always went by aunt's name. My father he was her step-brother, but she never talks of him much. He was a music teacher."

Mrs. Mackenzie bowed her head, and Sarah continued:

"They say he could play lovely on different kinds of things, and I've some music at home he wrote all himself, and a little book besides. He wrote that for my mother," continued Sarah, little knowing the added misery she was inflicting upon her listener. "But, I guess, from what I hear aunt say, he was pretty wild. He was awful good-looking. I used to think," she proceeded, "that the painted picture I had was him, but I found out when I came up to the Hill House that it was my grandfather's. I see one just like it up in Jean's room."

"Where was your father married, Sarah?" asked her inquisitor.



Again Sarah blushed.

“Why, I know he was married somewheres around here; but, you see, he ran away,” she added apologetically.

After this Mrs. Mackenzie remained a few moments absorbed in thought. There was no question but that the girl was telling the truth. The very fact that she knew so little of her family history was proof of this. She had no desire evidently to embroider upon the simple groundwork, and it seemed now to the widow's mind that the chief thing was to find this aunt of whom Sarah spoke. She certainly must be in possession of the absolute facts of the case.

“We had better send for that aunt, I think,” said Mrs. Mackenzie; whereupon Sarah gave a little start, almost a jump, forward, remembering that all this now lay in Sandy's keeping.

“Oh, my lawyer's attending to all that,” she exclaimed hastily; “and he doesn't want it to be mixed up at all. You see, he's my agent; it's all written down. Ought I to wear black at the funeral?” she added, breaking off suddenly, and, indeed, to Mrs. Mackenzie's relief, since it was evident that nothing further was to be done or said until the lawyers took up what appeared to be not a very difficult case in this girl's favor. There were no complications in the matter. Either she was or was not the daughter of Philip Dalton and Sarah Dyker; and if the former it was clear as noonday that at this moment, sitting there in the firelight of her own drawing room, Mrs. Mackenzie beheld the newly found heiress to a large share of the Hill House property, to all the collections, the family accumulations of years; but not—no, not, under any circumstances, unfortunately, of its traditions, of its heritage of high-mindedness, refinement, and nobility of



feeling. Mrs. Mackenzie naturally judged by externals; to her Sarah's whole manner and appearance suggested everything that was vulgar, common, and no doubt sordid; and even though, when the gate clicked next, it was to admit her nephew Sandy, Mrs. Mackenzie felt that any interruption was a relief. The *tête-à-tête* which she desired had certainly accomplished its purpose, and was now becoming wearisome.



## XVI.

SARAH'S start on seeing Sandy, her little frightened exclamation, showed of course that they were not strangers, and poor Mrs. Mackenzie felt her heart sink within her. To find her husband's nephew involved in all this was painful in the extreme, and yet, with her way of looking on the best side of everything, she determined not to show her anxiety. He, too, came to a rapid conclusion. Something very unexpected must have happened to bring Sarah to the cottage, evidently as a guest, and before Mrs. Mackenzie or the girl had spoken he said in his off-hand manner:

“Well, Sarah, so you and my aunt have been making friends, I see?”

Sarah glanced at him with a mute look, half apology, half appeal.

“This young lady and I, Aunt Margaret,” he went on, “have had a certain very important business transaction to attend to, or, rather, she has wisely consulted me in a matter of great importance to herself——”

Mrs. Mackenzie interrupted him. She rose and regarded him with that peculiar smile which the young man thoroughly understood, and beneath which he had to quail.

“Ah! Now, Sandy, I understand it all *thoroughly*, and I can only say,” she added, “that I am very sorry we have tormented them all and subjected the poor child to any cross-examination. I might have suspected it was your doing.”

He laughed.

“Oh, so you know it all, then?” he said carelessly. “I



needn't ask how it came out; did a woman ever hold her tongue yet? Of course I meant her to tell it all in good time, but as I was acting for her——”

Sarah nodded her head eagerly.

“Yes'm,” she said. “That's the truth. I made him my agent.”

“I was obliged as a lawyer to caution her to keep silent, although I must say,” said the agent somewhat loftily, “I am as well pleased the truth should be out and I saved the unpleasant preliminaries.”

“They are by no means over,” said Mrs. Mackenzie coldly. “Moreover, you must remember, even if this girl's claim is proven, we know nothing of the terms of the Colonel's will.”

Sarah's eyes sought Mackenzie's face eagerly. He looked fixedly at his aunt.

“The lawyer, his own man of business, will soon be here,” Mrs. Mackenzie said quietly; “and it appears to me he is the best one to attend to it all. It was but natural Sarah should show *some* interest in her own affairs, if indeed they are in any way concerned with those of the Dykers.”

Sandy waited a moment—a breathless moment it appeared to Sarah, and then he decided, since matters had gone so far, he might as well avail himself of the chance to show how cleverly he had taken his own part.

“My dear Aunt Margaret,” he began in the coolest tone of voice, and standing where he could face both his listeners, “certainly this afternoon will settle it in one way. That is, I have conclusive evidence—you may as well hear it now, in the young lady's presence—that this young lady”—he waved his hand toward his excited client—“is absolutely the daughter, the only child, of the late Sarah



Dyker and Philip Dalton, married in Bonfield, where she attended school and took lessons from him; removed subsequently to New York, whence, after some months, they returned to the neighborhood of Nautuck. Sarah—here present—was born in Nautuck, in the house of her father's sister, Mrs. Malone. The father, I regret to say, was not all that he should have been, and accordingly he left the child on her aunt's hands. Her mother, unfortunately, died when the infant was ten days old, leaving with Mrs. Malone various papers, family trinkets, etc. I give you only the outline; the facts are all proven to my mind and satisfaction, and will soon be to any intelligent jury, should such be called; but I feel certain that no member of the Colonel's family will require more than the *prima facie* evidence I have secured. I am glad to say that she was sensible enough, on suspecting the true state of the case, to place it right in my hands, for I have acted solely in her interest, and in such a way that unless the other members of the family choose to make a protest, all scandal—a thing the poor Colonel would have shrunk from intensely—will be avoided. However, in the event of their insisting upon anything of the kind, we are quite prepared to fight them. I am sorry to pain you, my dear aunt, but remember it is a case of equity, and I am determined to protect my client's interests even—even—even," concluded the young man, "in the face of my own."

To describe the effect of this long, but very carefully uttered speech upon both his listeners would be entirely impossible. But that it was different upon each can be easily imagined. Sarah, to whom her genealogy was of no earthly consequence, so long as she secured the estate, or money, as she called it, felt, in spite of much bewilderment over Sandy's long phrases, her spirits rising at each



sentence and a dozen wild fancies darted through her ever-active little brain. Poor Mrs. Mackenzie seemed to be turning to stone. She thoroughly appreciated the fact that Sandy would never have dared say all this, dared openly admit what he had been doing, were not his grounds excellent; and, as she well knew, he possessed precisely the kind of legal ability needed for such ferret-like work, and among his legal friends he had apparently secured some good advice. No; she could not doubt that he felt his ground solid. The risk was too great. Defeat would have meant the contempt of all his friends in Thornton.

“And if this is proven,” she said at last, letting her one barbed arrow fly, “how do you think Jean Garnier will feel?”

“That’s so!” ejaculated Sarah, but from quite a different standpoint.

If Sandy could have taken the girl up bodily and hurled her from the room it would have afforded him infinite relief. As it was, he could only turn upon her with a look of withering contempt, and say, as quietly as possible:

“I’m very sorry for Jean, but then I believe she has a trifle of her own. As for the others,” he smiled, “hard work will make a man of Dick Appleton, and a little fight with the real side of life take the starch out of Polly.”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Sarah half hysterically, and Sandy, determining inwardly to pay her out when they were alone, continued:

“And above all things, Aunt Margaret, remember that if the Colonel erred in postponing any search for his sister, he would be the first to commend us now in clearing up the mystery of his sister’s marriage. And how would



Jean herself like to feel that she was living on anyone else's money?"

"Like as if she stole it," came from the irrepressible Sarah.

Again Sandy glowered in her direction, and Mrs. Mackenzie, seeing that at present, at least, there could be no advantage in pursuing the conversation, rose, simply inquiring what he intended to do.

"That's just what *I* want to know," insisted Sarah.

Now Sandy did turn upon her the full force of his eyes and wrath.

"I'll tell you, Miss Dalton," he said severely. "You'll do precisely as you are told by your legal adviser, or I'll give the whole case up, wash my hands of it and you, and let you manage for yourself."

Sarah, being well aware that this would send her hopelessly adrift, since she supposed that Sandy alone held the key to all the riddle, was immediately subdued, and Mrs. Mackenzie did not hesitate to draw her nephew aside, where she said to him in a low, earnest voice, not without a tinge of supplication in it:

"Sandy, don't let yourself be deceived or deceive us. If you look me straight in the face, and tell me you are sure this girl is really Sarah Dyker's child, I promise you I will do everything to make the best of it."

The young man did not flinch in his gaze, but he rapidly reviewed the situation, and decided that by all means it was best to keep Mrs. Mackenzie on his side.

"I solemnly assure you that such is the deplorable state of affairs, and you will see," he added hurriedly, "that it was far better for the family that I should take up her case than that she should have carried it off to some scheming fellow who would simply have wanted to make the best



for himself in the bargain. Of course," he continued in the lowest possible tone, "it is scarcely needful for me to remark she is at present anything but a credit to the Dykers; still, that is not the poor girl's fault, and in time something may be made of her. My idea is that when her inheritance is proven some sort of a reliable guardian can be found, and if we stand by her she will do as we say, and no doubt agree to share the property with the others. You see," he continued very earnestly, "I've really done the best by all concerned, and you should thank me instead of complaining of my being very sharp; for what on earth have I to gain?"

"True enough," murmured Mrs. Mackenzie; and yet, although she could not help admitting the justice of all that the young man had said, there still lurked that suspicion of his integrity of which she could never rid herself. Some stronger motive than he had yet avowed was surely at the bottom of all this apparent disinterestedness. However, his counsel for the present was certainly the best and the wisest. And indeed there was nothing else left for them to do.

"I am by no means afraid," continued Sandy as a final argument, "of laying the case before Mr. Tolles this afternoon; and another thing, Mrs. Malone, the woman whom you hear her speak of as her father's sister, is ready at any moment to come forward with her conclusive evidence. It is simply this: The child was brought to her as a baby by the father with all the necessary documents, family trinkets, etc. The case is as clear as noonday."

"And at the funeral," whispered Mrs. Mackenzie, "what can we do with her?"

"Oh, frighten her into staying at home," said Sandy lightly. "I'll manage that for you. In fact, it is not



necessary for me to do more than consult with Mr. Tolles, and I can look after her while the proceedings are taking place. She's rather an untamed specimen, I admit; but I think I can subdue her."

And indeed Mrs. Mackenzie asked herself was there any better way of tiding over the difficulty. Of course everyone must very soon know the whole story, and why could she not suggest keeping Sarah at her own house for the time being? She murmured it to Sandy, who declared it a capital idea, and they turned back to their very difficult charge on the instant.

"I have a certain condition to make with you, Miss Dalton," said Sandy, who had determined among other innovations to accustom her to her rightful name. "My aunt here is kind enough to invite you to remain with her until after the sad ceremonies are over at the Hill House. It will be far better for you not to appear. If you choose to accept the invitation everything will be made agreeable and pleasant for you; if not——"

Sarah's eyes had already begun to roam about the pretty room.

"Here?" she inquired, evidently quite cheered.

"At the cottage," explained Mrs. Mackenzie very sharply. "You shall be my guest, do you understand, for a day or two until all this matter is settled; then you will not be bothered by people who are simply curious, perhaps, and anxious to make you say or do too much."

"Shall I wear black?" demanded Sarah.

"You will wear whatever is suitable as a connection of the Colonel."

"His niece," said the dauntless Sarah.

Cowed from time to time she might be by Sandy and Mrs. Mackenzie, but she had two or three points in view



she was determined to carry. She was "a lady" now, and she was determined to be treated like one. She wished to at once appear in the garments becoming a "member of the family." Later on she would enjoy an interview with Polly, and perhaps with Jean, of whom she stood in just a little awe, that young lady's very calm sort of superiority always having impressed her far more than Polly's whirlwind of arrogance.

"They'll all know it, won't they?" she demanded, determined to make her own terms, which were a speedy acknowledgment of her rightful position among them.

"Of course they will," exclaimed Sandy with another wild impulse to choke her. "Don't you see you're only making a fool of yourself?" he added. "If I were in your place I'd try to show I was a lady by acting a little more like one."

The girl's face really fell, and she looked mortified and troubled.

"You needn't fire up like that," she said in a lower tone; "only, can't you see, Sandy, I want to know right away just what I am to do."

Something in the girl's look and manner touched Mrs. Mackenzie's ever-open heart. She laid her hand gently on Sarah's arm.

"My dear," she said gently, "you need not be afraid that we will not all do the best for you directly the lawyers are satisfied as to your claim, and to prove it to you I will ask you up into my prettiest room now and see that you are made comfortable there, just as though it was your own."

Something like tears came into Sarah's dark eyes.

"I didn't think you'd be as good as all that when I first saw you," she observed; "and I'm sure I'm ever so much obliged. Do you mean right away now?"



“Yes,” assented Mrs. Mackenzie; “but before we go, Sarah, I want you to make me one promise. It will not be well, dignified, for you to talk about your affairs with any of the servants just at present, either here or at the Hill House. I have only one maid here, a very trustworthy, excellent woman, who has been with me for some years. Now it would surprise and shock her very much, and she would never think of you as a lady, if, when I leave you here, you were to chatter about any of the family affairs. I must go back and see the poor children up at the House, and can I trust you to stay here and really show me by what you do while I am gone that you are a lady, or, at least,” added poor Mrs. Mackenzie, “trying to be one?”

“May I look about at the things?” enquired Sarah, who, singular to say, was beginning to lose all her former independence of spirit, or perhaps it was only being softened by Mrs. Mackenzie’s gentle influence, and the fact that no one seemed inclined to “fight her.” Moreover, something within the girl told her that she should be grateful for the personal treatment she was receiving, since, no matter how good her claim, they might have treated her in a very different manner.

Mrs. Mackenzie had to smile, but she said quickly:

“Sarah, my dear, I will show you your room. It’s one I just keep for my special visitors, and you may look about at everything. Sandy,” she continued, “will you wait here for me a moment?”

When the door had closed upon the ill-matched couple Sandy flung himself into the depths of a great easy-chair, and remained a few moments buried in thought. It was, no doubt, as he had often said to himself, a tremendous “find,” but how should he turn it to the best account for



himself, since of course that was the only point he had had in view? He was well aware that Mrs. Malone would very soon obtrude herself upon the scene; in fact, he had had the greatest difficulty in persuading her to remain away until after the funeral, only obtaining her consent to this arrangement by threatening to give the whole business up if she persisted in her first idea, which was to make all haste to the Hill House and her "darling niece." He was very well aware that, once Sarah's claims were established, the bit of paper by which she had made him her agent would be of no value in the eyes of the law, and certainly result in no pecuniary advantage. At best he could only claim a good-sized legal fee. He had been thinking for some hours on the same subject, going around and around it, trying to escape the one way in which he saw substantial benefit for himself, and this was by offering her his hand, and—nominally—his heart. It would only be now, he reflected, that he could be sure even of obtaining her consent, since it was merely while she needed his advice, if not control, that she would consider him a good enough match. A year hence, when she had received a little polish and training, she could do fifty times better in the matrimonial market. No, thought Sandy ruefully, this would be the price he would have to pay for this great achievement. It might have been that Sarah, with her real good humor, her frank, high spirits, and her by no means unpresentable appearance, would have suited him well enough for a life companion had he not been influenced and roused by the delicate refinement and finer spirit of Jean Garnier. Singular to say that to young men of Sandy Mackenzie's calibre finer natures most frequently appeal, since they afford them, as it were, a relief from the distaste of their own environ-



ment. Sandy was not a fool. He knew his own shortcomings, and in trying to rise above them he put on a bravado not always meant, and the times when he disabused himself most were when he failed in attaining the point which fellows, as he said, like Dick Appleton held, as it were, by some instinctive right. It was a vexed question, yet to one of Sandy's calibre presenting scarcely any variation of light and shade. It was simply a choice of evils: Sarah and the money, or his present less than moderate means and—as he was quite certain—no chance of gaining favor with Jean Garnier.

He could hear the footsteps overhead, and realized what a glimpse of delight Mrs. Mackenzie was offering poor untutored Sarah, and it crossed his mind that if only he could persuade his aunt to really take the girl in hand something endurable might be made of her. Supposing that he were to boldly take Mrs. Mackenzie into his confidence? Apparently it was what everybody did, and she never seemed to go wrong.

“By Jove!” thought Mackenzie, springing to his feet; “that’s the talk! That’s the very thing I’ll do before the day is ended. It’s easily seen she thinks Jean a thousand miles beyond me, and I don’t suppose she’d object to my having some of the Dyker’s money. If she’ll stand by me in it I’ll make the girl do the square thing by all the family yet!”

And thoroughly satisfied with the result of his cogitations, Sandy stood eagerly awaiting Mrs. Mackenzie’s return, and quite ready to enter into any plans for the immediate present she had to suggest.



## XVII.

MRS. MACKENZIE had not come to any more definite conclusion, when she rejoined Sandy, than that he was certainly acting fairly in this matter, and that since he *was* so far involved in Sarah's affairs, it was plainly her duty to befriend him and make the best of it at the Hill House. But she was determined there should be no roundabout or circuitous paths toward any desired result. No, Sandy must face Mr. Tolles, consult with him in an entirely straightforward manner, and admit precisely his part in the transaction, or she would most assuredly let the matter drop so far as he was concerned, taking care to explain to her old and dear friends that she had been no traitor in the camp.

Sandy greeted her eagerly; his own resolutions were formed, and he really believed himself capable of carrying them out for the good of all concerned.

"I thought you were never coming," he began, with a long-drawn breath of satisfaction. "Well, what next?"

She smiled sadly.

"But one thing, Sandy, and only one. You must at once tell Mr. Tolles, the Colonel's lawyer, the whole story."

"And then?"

"Why, take counsel with him."

"The case is mine," declared Sandy. "Even if I am only a clerk, still, she has put the matter into my hands, and I shall be admitted to the bar next month. Aunt Margaret," he exclaimed suddenly, and looking at her with the determination about eyes and lips she knew so well, "you



can be friend or foe; but you won't move me, and I mean to marry her!"

Mrs. Mackenzie started, but he gave her no chance to say anything else, continuing hastily:

"Yes; and it will not be a bad thing for me or for her. Considering the girl first. She is a good-hearted, whole-souled sort of creature, but entirely unversed in the ways of the world, and, as you can well imagine, would be an easy prey to some fortune-hunter who would ill-treat her and squander the Dyker estate. Now, then, you may not have a very high idea of me, but, believe me, I would never treat my wife badly; besides, I should always remember she had made my fortune, and"—he smiled sadly—"I fancy it would cure me of an old folly, and perhaps *I* would be a better husband to a woman who would feel me her superior than to one who could say to herself she had *condescended* in marrying me."

It was the first time in all her knowledge of him that Mrs. Mackenzie had seen Sandy betray genuine earnestness and emotion from a really good and true source. His usual "veneer" of manner was gone, and it occurred to her suddenly that he was in part right. A girl of Sarah's calibre *would* suit him well, develop what was best in him, since she would take him at a high valuation, and surely he could then afford to be generous to the other members of the family.

"Sandy," she said hurriedly, "I can't tell what to think just now, but at least I am not *against* it; more than that, I will not oppose you, if only you will show yourself worthy of my trust, as well as this poor girl's, by at once telling frankly to Mr. Tolles, who is sure to be here soon, just what you have been doing. You must in the end; why not do it before you are asked?"



"It was my first intention," exclaimed Sandy. "Remember," he added, "not a word of all this to Sarah. Ah, me! what a queer mess of things the Colonel's father made just by *one* piece of stiff-necked arrogance, for I don't doubt the music teacher wasn't such a bad fellow after all. There is one serious drawback," he laughed; "this aunt of Sarah's, Mrs. Malone, is—well, what I have heard Jean Garnier describe as *impossible*. But she has all the documentary evidence."

"And it is complete?"

"Beyond a question; even Sarah Dyker's letters to her husband, and the old portrait, books, everything. Well, what next?"

"I must leave Sarah cared for and go up to the Hill House, to my poor children there."

"Very well," said Sandy, who felt decidedly encouraged. "Let me go with you."

Mrs. Mackenzie had no objection whatever to this arrangement, knowing she could leave her guest in good hands, since fortunately she possessed in her maid Hannah one of those rare blessings a perfect servant and a trusted friend. There could never be any question of loss of dignity in Mrs. Mackenzie's confiding in her, since Hannah was too entirely well bred and of too delicate a mind to misunderstand it. She was as well aware that she possessed Mrs. Mackenzie's friendship as that she cherished it as something to be proud and worthy of; and for the rest, the maid loved her mistress with a fidelity that repaid the latter for the two years of hard and patient labor she had devoted to her training, when, ten years before, she took her from misery and almost despair to give her a new lease of life and hope of eternity. Hannah had become so used to her mistress' ways and ideas that she always under-



stood her, sympathized with her keenly, and had, by dint of close companionship, if such it may be called, cultivated her mind until its workings were in very close line with Mrs Mackenzie's own—certainly in most direct sympathy with it; and her mistress had now not the least hesitation in telling this faithful servitor just how things stood, and desiring her not to discuss them with Sarah, but to look after her wants, make her take a rest—which the poor girl really needed after so much excitement, and admit no visitors until her return.

If only, thought the good woman as she and Sandy started on their difficult mission, the Colonel had known all that her “stewardship” was to involve!



## XVIII.

SARAH'S first sensation on finding herself alone in the pretty room to which Mrs. Mackenzie had conducted her was one of relief; for the excitements of the past few days had really been very great; now that, in part at least, the tension was removed, she began to feel what it had been, and to be glad of even physical rest. Mrs. Mackenzie's "guest chamber," in which Sarah was installed, had, as might have been expected, its wardrobe, containing such garments as any passing sojourner beneath that hospitable roof would require. Among the articles was a soft swans-down wrapper of pale gray, which Mrs. Mackenzie desired the girl to put on, with a pair of knitted slippers to match. Well did the astute lady of the house know that while such an attention might puzzle her guest, it would at once open her eyes as to the everyday usages of the class into which she had unexpectedly entered; and the girl was in no sense dull: she had a peculiarly keen mind; her very glance showed her observant faculty; and then she had lived long enough in an American village or small town to be free from any feeling of restraint in accepting attentions of the kind. The Hill House had subdued her by the stateliness of its rooms, their rather sombre furnishings, and the evident awe in which "Colonel" and "the family" were held. Mrs. Mackenzie's cottage had nothing to dismay her; it pleased her as though she had found herself suddenly transported into the midst of a pretty fairy-tale, and she decided when Mrs. Mackenzie had closed the door



that so soon as she "had her rights" she would do something very nice to show her appreciation.

It would not have been Sarah, however, if, lying on the wide, comfortable lounge before the glowing wood fire which Hannah had lighted, she did not indulge in some speculative dreams and fancies. She tried to put Mrs. Malone away far out of her mind, tried only to think of what all this new life would mean for her, and then—suddenly a burning blush spread all over her face down to her very throat, and Sarah sat upright, saying, "Oh, *dear!*" out loud. *Will Rogers!* She had *hoped* to overawe him! *Now* she could! Had ever any girl on earth such luck? And then—was it only physical fatigue, nervousness, or what?—but Sarah suddenly flung herself face downward on the cool linen-cased pillow and burst into an agony of hysterical weeping. Oh, *what* would Will think of her? Would his honest, gentle, but very clear blue eyes flash with scorn, soften with pity, or gleam with hate? Sarah did not of course put it into just these words, but the meaning of her thought was the same, and her passionate weeping all because she doubted if Will and she would ever meet again! And he would say it was all Sandy's doing! And Aggie would encourage him! Oh, she had often and often heard that rich people were not happy, and now she felt *sure* of it! Poor little Sarah! If her triumph had been very great her misery was certainly as real and far harder to bear, and I do not know how long or bitterly she would have continued her weeping and sobbing had not the faithful Hannah heard the echoes of it and come hurrying up the stairs. "Poor girl!" thought Hannah. "She has sympathy for the poor, dear Colonel's being took away, after all." And Sarah suddenly lifted her tear-stained face to see the housekeeper standing



beside her. "There now, my dear," said Hannah. "Don't you take on like that; it won't bring him back, and he's better off this minute."

"Why, do you know him?" demanded Sarah, sitting upright from sheer amazement and gazing fixedly at the kind, thin face of the housekeeper, of which she was less afraid than Mrs. Mackenzie's, or even Jean Dyker's. Hannah had once been the prettiest girl of her class in her own township, and now if middle age had brought sallowness instead of bloom, and wrinkles in plenty, with gray hairs thicker than the brown ones under her cap, yet she was pleasanter and sweeter to look upon than many a youthful beauty, having caught something, I think, of her mistress' serenity of expression, as well as followed her example in a wise and gentle manner toward all.

"Know him? Of course, my dear," said Hannah indulgently; "although he's been away so long, his name is always respected, the poor, dear Colonel; and to think of him now lying all alone in the dark room."

Sarah dried her eyes hastily, and was thankful she had seen her mistake in time, but she hoped Hannah would not go away. It was very pleasant to lie there on the soft lounge, with the wood fire crackling and gleaming, throwing up little dancing lights on the various objects in the room.

"If I bring you up a nice cup of tea could you drink it?" said Hannah reassuringly.

"And will you come back?" demanded Sarah anxiously, "and stay a little while?"

"Certain," said Hannah, nodding pleasantly as she went out of the room.

A drowsy sense of comfort and security stole over Sarah as she lay there, watching the shadows and the firelight



chase each other in fantastic patterns across the walls and ceiling, forming a pretty interior, set against the wintry scene outside of the two chintz-draped windows. Something more delicate and appreciative than she had been aware of possessing was stirred by the charm of her surroundings; it was like the feeling which the girl had experienced that morning sitting on Mrs. Malone's doorstep when this wonderful chapter in her history had begun. As I have said, Sarah had a strong element of romance in her composition, but until now it had never had any reality to feed upon, and the girl's life had been happily free from the ruder kind of flirtation, not to be called love-making, which formed so large a part of the amusement of many girls in her own class. Fortunately for her Mrs. Malone had been almost fiercely strict in such matters, and could have set an example to many a mother in the upper ten, and there had no doubt always lurked a dread lest the wildness which had characterized her father's youth should reappear in the girl herself. It had never done so, and rough, untutored though she might be, no dainty lady in the land could have boasted finer instincts of maidenly reserve than this uneducated girl, whose feet, so to speak, were standing on the threshold of the old Dyker inheritance. Some far-away ancestress, no doubt, had bequeathed this portion of instinctive feeling, better than all else, to a girl who had never known gentler training than the Malone household could give. And now Sarah's fancies went on, foolishly, no doubt, but with nothing deeper in them. She pictured herself gorgeously dressed entertaining "heaps" of people, smiling and courtesying, dancing somewhere—on this point she was not clear—with Will Rogers, riding in an open carriage with a coachman and footman, and—oh, yes, no doubt, lording it over Jean and



that "stuck-up Polly." *They* had not yet had their dues, but, she concluded, after a while she would be very generous to them. It was odd, thought Sarah, to be thinking in this half-sleepy, half-comfortable fashion, and yet to feel her head aching all the time. Then she remembered how it had throbbed the night before, and how it tired her to go up and down stairs. She was very glad when the door opened and Hannah's friendly face and figure appeared, carrying a tray upon which was a dainty little repast.

"Isn't that nice?" said Sarah rather languidly, watching while the housekeeper set it forth on a little gypsum tea-table near the fire. "Hannah," she continued, "isn't it funny I like to be here, and I'd like some of that to eat, but when I move about I get cold shivers all through me, and my head aches as if it would burst."

Hannah said nothing for an instant, but with a keen and practised eye regarded the languid young figure on the lounge. There was no mistaking the fact that she was in a high fever, her eyes intensely bright, her lips seeming to be parched, and without a word Hannah laid two of her gentle bony fingers on the girl's pulse. It was bounding. For an instant or more Hannah made no remark, then she said quietly:

"You ever been sick much before?"

"Not since I was little," said Sarah slowly; "then I guess 'twas only measles."

Hannah, with her finger still on the leaping wrist, said in a very soothing voice:

"I tell you what you do. You just take a drink of this tea and lie down a minute. I have to go downstairs about something."

Sarah very quietly did as she was bid. Indeed, there



was a curious inability creeping over her to make any exertion on her own account, and she offered no objection to Hannah's leaving her alone again.

But once outside the room door Hannah's whole expression changed to one of intense anxiety, and for an instant she stood very still, planning what to do. And it was fortunate in this emergency that her mistress left her so much authority, for she decided to act for herself without disturbing the conference she had no doubt was taking place even now at the Hill House.

She went out to the little gate and watched for the first passer-by, who fortunately chanced to be a trustworthy young man from the village, well known to them all.

"See here, Jake," she called out. "I want you should do an errand for me right away and smart. You know Dr. Fraser's house, just down the road there, don't you?"

The young man nodded.

"Well, you hurry right down there for me and tell him, or the young doctor, if he aint in, Hannah Martin wants to see him quick at Mrs. Mackenzie's gate just for a minute."

Messages of various kinds had been so numerous in the Hill House and the cottage for the last few days that Jake Rowe did not hesitate a moment, but Hannah stood still with an anxious heart until she saw him disappear within the doctor's doorway. It was perhaps five minutes, but it seemed to her almost half an hour before the door reopened, and to her relief the doctor was to be seen hurrying out. A few steps brought him to Hannah's side, when she hastily explained that a young girl come on a visit had been taken sick upstairs, and as Mrs. Mackenzie was away at the Hill House, she had taken upon herself to send at once for him.



“And very sensible, Hannah,” said the doctor, following her into the house with the rapid steps of the professional caller in an emergency. “There’s been a great deal of low fever about lately.”

Hannah was at no time a woman of many words, and she had the good sense now to leave the doctor to diagnose the case for himself, only desiring him not to alarm the patient, who had gone through considerable excitement lately.

And so it happened that when Sarah next opened her languid eyelids it was to find Hannah and the doctor bending over her. Very few questions were asked, but all of these Sarah could answer intelligibly, although she was fast drifting into that listless condition which made her more anxious to sleep than to talk to anyone, even though from time to time a certain restlessness betrayed her fever.

Dr. Fraser said a few reassuring words to his new patient, patted her on the head, and then drew Hannah over to the window, while Sarah half dozed off again.

“It’s hard just at first to tell whether the case is a serious one or not, but there is every sign and indication at present of typhoid fever, and you had better send word to Mrs. Mackenzie—I’ll see to that—and get the little girl into bed at once. I’ll send some medicines and be back in an hour or so. It’s too bad you are alone,” he added, “but Mrs. Mackenzie, of course, must have someone else with her. It’s hard to tell in these cases just what will be needed, but I know of old, Hannah,” he concluded, smiling, “what an efficient nurse you are.”

He hurried away, and Hannah was thankful that with Sarah’s weakness had come complete docility. She made no objection whatever to being assisted into the pretty bed standing at one side of the room, whose brasswork



and dainty covering she had been admiring an hour ago; and then Hannah waited anxiously for her mistress' return.

In less than half an hour Mrs. Mackenzie and Mrs. Keyes had been hurried down from the Hill House, to find what was indeed an unexpected turn in the varied fortunes of those connected with the Dyker family; for while the lawyer and Dick were discussing matters connected with those interests she had but a short time ago so valiantly defended with such a determination to see and hear all for herself, poor little Sarah lay upon a bed of sickness from which it was not possible to conjecture how soon, if ever, she would rise again.

*Christy's dear ones*



## XIX.

"I'M afraid it's indisputable! Oh, what a shame I let him leave me without signing then and there."

"But how did it happen?"

Dick Appleton asked the question, half in indignation, half in despair, and Mr. Tolles, the first speaker, coughed nervously. He was a small, compactly built, very carefully dressed man; one of those people whose every sign and outward token suggest their calling and do credit to it. He and Dick Appleton were standing in the library of the Hill House discussing anxiously a question now of so much importance to the entire household.

It was late on the day of the Colonel's funeral, and the family, wearied with grief, anxiety, and the great tension of the past few days, had been glad to seek such repose as quiet could give them, since peace of mind they could scarcely expect after such an overwhelming blow. The house looked cold, drearily deserted, and unlike itself; the library, full of suggestions of the dear presence so lately departed, would have impressed Dick more painfully but that at this moment his mind was too fully occupied with the important matter in hand. As Mr. Tolles frankly admitted, the Colonel had certainly instructed them to draw up the will which he now held in his hand, but which, alas! proved to be unsigned.

"How did it happen?" repeated Mr. Tolles testily. "You know his way of perpetual postponement. He came to the office that day in my absence, nervous and worried and anxious, declared that owing to certain recent events he



must see that all his children, as he called them, were properly cared for, and accordingly Dent drew up the sort of will which the Colonel considered made everything fair and square. Here it is"—and Mr. Tolles gave the useless paper a quick tap. "At the very last moment he decided, as he was always accustomed to my transacting such matters with him, not to sign it until the next day, although he declared himself immensely relieved to have, as he called it, the matter at once satisfactorily settled."

Dick thrust his hands into his pockets, walked to the window, where he stood for an instant in silence, then wheeled about, remarking:

"And of course—poor, dear old man—this final procrastination has made all the trouble."

"Exactly," said the lawyer, "and a nice mess it has made of things, especially if this Sarah Dalton, as I suppose we must call her, makes good her claim. I mean to have a talk with this aunt of hers, Mrs. Malone, but, really, as that young Mackenzie said this morning, it would only prolong trouble and revive a family scandal to take it into court. You see, everything is perfectly clear; Mrs. Malone has sworn to the marriage, which, of course, everyone acknowledged; and, unless he made a will, Sarah Dyker, or her heirs, inherited after the Colonel. There you have it. Of course it's my business," continued Mr. Tolles, with a wintry smile, "to litigate everything, but as an old friend of the family, I say, where would be the gain?"

"Exactly." Dick leaned his arm on the mantel, and for a moment reviewed the miserable situation. He was thinking less of Sarah's inheritance than of the nearly penniless condition to which it would reduce the other members of the family. How would it fare with Jean, for instance,



with Polly, to face the world on an income of perhaps eight hundred a year between them?—if indeed the little property in the girls' own names would yield as much; and Miss Dyker, in her almost old age, accustomed to every comfort and luxury in life—what would become of her? How would she endure what the younger people might be able to make light of? As for himself, though there was naturally a twinge of disappointment in that he had always supposed himself to some extent considered by the Colonel, yet he had his youth and strength, and apart from that an equipment in sound college training. Moreover, the gross injustice of the whole proceeding fairly overwhelmed Dick, making him feel almost angered by Mr. Tolles' cool professional manner. And then, Sarah Dalton, as he knew now they must call her, who was lying ill over at the cottage—that she should step into this place, sacred to every tradition of the family!

There came a light, quick step, which Richard knew, along the passage, and as the handle of the door was turned, Jean's voice said in the piteous sort of accents she had used of late:

“Dick, will you—can you come here for a moment? A lady—a person—is waiting in the sitting room to see some of us.”

“A lady!” exclaimed Dick, and as he stepped out into the hall Jean said, with a troubled look:

“It's an Irishwoman, who declares she has come to see her brother's child get her rights. What can she mean?”

Dick almost groaned aloud, for in an instant he realized who the unbidden guest must be, and indeed there was left but a moment to doubt, since Mrs. Malone's voice was heard in shrill discussion at the lower end of the hall,



where she stood arguing with Jones that she would "find Sarah if she searched every timber of the place."

Something in the quietly dignified manner of Jean Garnier overawed Sarah's excited relative, who calmed down directly Jean approached.

"Did you wish to see Miss Dalton?" inquired Jean.

"Indeed, I do," was the answer; "and I want to see the young man she has for a lawyer. Where is he now?" continued Mrs. Malone, searching the walls and ceiling with a furtive gaze. "I think you've got up a fine conspiracy among you to keep an innocent girl out of her rights."

"You are so far mistaken, madam," said Dick, raging inwardly, but reducing the irate Mrs. Malone to calm by the very force of his manner, "that you are the very person we are most anxious to see, and by coming you have saved us the trouble of sending for you. Jean"—he turned to her, speaking in a gentle tone—"go into the drawing room and let me take this lady to the library for a few moments. You look very tired; do be careful of yourself," he whispered.

Mrs. Malone followed, with an air half mystification, half wonderment, over all she saw about her, to the library, the door of which Dick held open with as much courtliness of manner as though he were ushering in the greatest lady in the land.

Mr. Tolles was still standing deep in thought by the fireplace, but he raised his head suddenly as Dick said:

"Mr. Tolles, something very fortunate has occurred. This lady"—motioning in the direction of the completely subdued Mrs. Malone—"is, as I understand, the aunt of Miss Sarah Dalton, and will probably give you all the information you require. Mr. Tolles," continued Richard, "is the family lawyer, madam."



“Upon my word!” ejaculated Mrs. Malone, looking from one to another; “and what do you mean to say the other little fellow is doing? He came down on an errand from our Sarah to me a while ago.”

Mr. Tolles, entirely ignorant of Sandy’s interest in the affair, and only eager to cross-question so valuable a witness as Mrs. Malone might be, made haste to say that they need not waste time. If she would kindly answer a few questions at once it would save time, and, as he put it judiciously, help on all sides.

Mrs. Malone gladly availed herself of the chair offered to her, and looked ready for any cross-examination.

“The question we are now anxious to settle, madam,” said Mr. Tolles, “is whether your niece, Sarah, was the daughter of Mr. Philip Dalton and Miss Sarah Dyker.”

The woman stared for an instant in silence, and then began:

“Well, I wouldn’t have come all this way when I heard of the Colonel’s death if she wasn’t. It’s like this, you see, gentlemen: My brother Phil was handsome as paint and an elegant player, and he taught in the school where the young lady was learning, and ran away with her. I’ve their marriage lines this minute and lots of little trinkets belonging to the poor dear. I’m not denying he never treated her well, and truth to tell you, gentlemen, the reason I never made it all known was because the old Squire, the Colonel’s father, had threatened to ruin my brother entirely if he’d ever catch hair or hide of him; so when Phil died—and I’d no reason to be proud of him—I just kept the child like my own, and it was none of my doing that she ever came up here, and she can tell you I never made a boast of her belonging to one named Dyker no more than Dalton. I brought her up as a Malone.”



There was a brief silence, during which Mrs. Malone tried to look indifferent and Mr. Tolles remained buried deep in thought.

“Then, as I understand it,” he said presently and with studied deliberation, “your niece, madam, has already engaged the services of a lawyer?”

“She has that!” declared the visitor, “and it’s him as I’ve come to see. Sure, he bid me wait, but whenever I came to look into it I said, now that I heard of the poor old gentleman’s death, I’d come up and see this lawyer for myself. And where is he? for he bid me do no talking without him. Mackenzie’s the name—Alexander.”

Her listeners exchanged a look. Then Mr. Tolles coughed and observed dryly:

“In this case, Mr. Appleton, we can only confer—with the young lady’s counsel. And, indeed, if it will hasten a settlement of the affair, the sooner we do so the better.”

Reassured by the lawyer’s manner Mrs. Malone decided to hold her tongue, while Richard stepped quickly out into the hall. The side door of the house had just opened to admit Mrs. Mackenzie and the very person he was in search of, Sarah’s legal adviser, the confident, but still somewhat anxious, Sandy. He had no fear of establishing Sarah’s claim, but he was desirous of appearing to advantage on both sides, to “keep in” with all parties concerned, and he was yet in a little doubt as to how his news would be received; for it is one thing to say that you like to see justice done on all sides, and another to find it deprives you of the very roof above your head; and well did Sandy know that the Colonel’s family would not ask the bounty of a girl like his “client,” and would certainly remember he had been the instrument used to turn them out into the world.



## XX.

MRS. MACKENZIE'S brave heart failed her just for an instant as she caught sight of Dick's pale, set face, but she made haste to say quickly:

"Richard, I have insisted upon Sandy's coming here at once to explain the very remarkable position he has taken upon himself——"

"I know," interrupted Dick shortly, but he took her hand and pressed it warmly. "It is like you, dear Mrs. Mackenzie, and it has saved me the trouble of hunting him up. His client's aunt, a Mrs. Malone, is in the library with Mr. Tolles this moment. It appears"—Dick could not resist this little fling—"after Mr. Mackenzie and she had laid their plans she felt afraid he was not quite to be trusted, and thought best to investigate for herself."

The speech lashed Sandy into precisely the frame of mind needed for his enterprise. He turned very white for an instant, but said quietly:

"So much the better; for it is a matter which really ought to be settled out of court."

And while Mrs. Mackenzie felt ready to weep between shame of him and dread of what might be in store for her "children," Dick, with another gentle glance in her direction, led the way back to the library, Sarah's "counsel" following with all the bravado at his command in look and bearing.

For an instant Mrs. Mackenzie stood still, wondering what she had better do, or rather just where at that critical moment she would be most needed, and then she slowly



went up the great staircase and to Jean's little room. She was not there; the sound of voices—soft, subdued girlish voices—led her to a little schoolroom of the house, so long unused that in preparing for the Colonel's return no change or thought of it had occurred; and there, in the deep embrasure of a window looking out on the old garden, were the girls, Jean and Polly, drawn together curiously not only by their common loss, but their fear of what might yet be in store for them of misery and change. They had been talking in low tones; Jean was in a deep old chair, behind which she had played hide and seek as a very tiny girl, and Polly on the floor beside her rested her pretty head in an attitude of utter weariness on her cousin's knee.

“Oh, Mrs. Mackenzie!” they exclaimed together, welcoming their friend. “Come in. Do tell us *what* is going on! There's something very queer, and *do* tell us what it is.”

Mrs. Mackenzie tried to smile, but bravery was hard at sight of the girls newly orphaned, and perhaps to be left to the fate of many other young bread-winners, with so little equipment for the fight!

“You see, dear children,” she said gently, “there is always a great deal of business at such a sad time, and perhaps you had better know at once your uncle did not sign his will. He made it, but he died before he signed it.”

“Poor Uncle Neil!” said Jean compassionately. “Will that make any great difference?”

Mrs. Mackenzie gazed down an instant into the sweet uplifted young face, and reading in its soft lines only compassion for the uncle she had loved so dearly, wondered what “parents and guardians” *could* be thinking of



when they left young people so entirely ignorant of the actualities of life. Polly, however, was a trifle more astute. She had raised herself now from the dependent attitude against her cousin's knee, and a shrewd look crossed her lovely face.

"Why, if he didn't leave a will," she said slowly, "then—what's to become of us?"

"Ah, Polly, my dear little girl," exclaimed Mrs. Mackenzie. "Perhaps it is as well for you to be prepared for the worst. If, as seems now the case, your uncle failed to make provision, you must all start life on just—well, what you have been used to spending as pocket-money; for everything here will pass away from the old Dykers forever!"

The girls sprang to their feet.

"Mrs. Mackenzie!" gasped Jean, and Polly, white as the wall, was shaking from head to foot.

"My darlings," said the good woman, taking a hand of each in her own, "I *believe* this is what we must expect, so I thought I ought to prepare you for it; but, after all, think for a moment: *much* worse could have happened to you! It is not loss of good name, nor of each other, nor of health and strength and youth, and it may do you worlds of good! Why, surely, Jean, you are brave enough to stand even a blow like this?"

For Jean had slowly withdrawn her hand, and walking over to the window, stood looking fixedly down into the wintry garden. Polly seemed stunned.

"I—I was not thinking of myself," said Jean in a low voice. In a moment she added: "Must we *all* go away? Aunt Ellen——"

Mrs. Mackenzie uttered a little cry of despair.

"O Jean!" she exclaimed; "you are right! That is



true. It may be only a little harder fight for you girls, but for *her*—— However, remember that nothing need be said to distress her until we know just what we have to expect.”

“And when *shall* we know?” came piteously from Polly, whose hand was still in Mrs. Mackenzie’s clasp.

“Ah, my darling, only too soon! There is a—person—now talking to Mr. Tolles in the library who, perhaps, will decide it.”

And indeed at that very moment Mr. Tolles was saying to himself:

“Of course we can investigate, but I fear our case is a very poor one.”

And Sandy, trying to quiet Mrs. Malone, was finishing a very clear and concise statement of facts, winding up with an expression of sympathy for “the family” and an assurance that “his client” wished them to “take their time.”

“Upon my word,” declared the old lawyer to Dick later, “for a piece of consummate impertinence I never heard its equal!”

And thus night fell upon as strange a scene in the Colonel’s old home—the home of the honored Dykers—as can possibly be imagined. Except in the two rooms occupied by the rival lawyers and their irrepressible client or witness, Mrs. Malone, and the old schoolroom, where the girls sat crouched on the floor each side of Mrs. Mackenzie’s chair, there was scarcely any sound of voices and scarcely an audible movement. Miss Dyker—for once fortunately—had a headache, and, with Cécile in attendance, was in her room. The Knapps and Mrs. Keyes had the kitchen department to themselves, and Jones, in a condition bordering on despair, was “going over” his master’s wardrobe, mentally apostrophizing every garment, and know-



ing something of the truth, addressing many a mute reproach to a portrait of the Colonel on the wall. Suddenly he remembered "the poor orphans," as he called them, and with a feeling of satisfaction in ranging himself against whoever might be "slighting them," he nearly flew downstairs, entering the old schoolroom so unceremoniously that the three friends at the fireside were terrified.

"Oh, it's only me, my dears," said poor Jones, forgetting, in his anxiety, to be deferential. "And to think you're here in the dark, and dinner not ready yet! Whatever are those Knapps thinking of!"

"O Jones!" cried Jean, springing to her feet and running up to the faithful friend and servitor of years. "It can't be any harm to tell *you*, dear Jones; but, perhaps—perhaps we must leave the Hill House forever!"

Jones clutched at the door for support. He had guessed at more than he knew, but this was unexpectedly bad.

"Miss Jean," he faltered. He peered into the pale, sweet face of the young girl he had carried in his arms as a baby and taught to walk. "Then it's well for you, miss," he added solemnly, "*I* wasn't took as well as the Colonel."

Jean smiled and clasped the old man's hand affectionately.

"Indeed, it is," she had just begun to say when a quick knock sounded on the door.

"If you please, Mrs. Mackenzie," said the voice of Mrs. Keyes in a high tone of lament, "Mrs. Martin's sent over to say Sarah, ma'am, is took very ill, and the doctor is waiting to see you."

And so it came about that for the time being, as we have seen, all progress in Sarah's fortunes came to a stand-



still. Even Mrs. Malone was forced to hold her peace on learning that any more excitement might cause Sarah's death. She submitted herself with wonderful docility to Sandy's directions, which were, indeed, more in the form of a threat than anything else, and after giving into his hands for the use of counsel on both sides the various memoranda which her reticule contained, she departed, not, however, without remarking that she expected before long to visit her "darling niece" in the place which was rightfully hers.



## XXI.

SARAH MALONE, or Dalton, as she now must be called, was half seated, half reclining in the most comfortable easy-chair of the cottage parlor. She was quite alone, an unusual thing since the beginning of her illness, just three weeks ago, but she had understood for some days past that on her first "strong enough" day she was to listen to a long story connected with the past, or, at all events, the story of the present, which was a sequel to that past, and accordingly, with all the will power of her nature, she had bent her energies toward as rapid a recovery as possible, being docile under every order, quiet when ordered repose, ready to do whatever her nurses desired of her, and accordingly here she was on a snowy winter's afternoon awaiting what she considered her fate; since, for all her own satisfaction as to her rights, she was by no means sure as to what would be the result of the final meeting held that morning in Mr. Tolles' office.

Natural vigor of constitution, freedom from anything like nervousness, and a strong desire to recover speedily had, with the perfect care bestowed upon her, pulled the young girl through what had at one time threatened to be a fatal illness. And there was this advantage in her enforced seclusion: she had been spared all the worry of business interviews, which would certainly have been her portion had she been in any way equal to bear the strain. But Sarah, in the seclusion even of her sick room, had never lost sight of certain facts, and among them were clearly in her mind two—*i. e.*, that



directly she was at all able she must assert her claim to take up her residence at the Hill House, and either make terms of peace which suited herself with the family or send them all to the right-about. She had no idea, as she told herself, of allowing anyone to get the better of her, and would it not be a fine opportunity of showing Mr. William Rogers, as she now began to call him to herself, what he had thrown away!

It had annoyed her somewhat that Mrs. Mackenzie should spend so much of her time with the Hill House family, and Sarah was now waiting quite as anxiously for that lady's return from a visit to the children and Miss Dyker as for the arrival of "her lawyer" with his special information and instructions.

The door opened at last to admit Sandy, who came in with a becoming air of solicitude for the invalid whose interests he was still watching so carefully, and Sarah roused herself to the usual "give and take" sort of combat which they were apt to indulge in.

"You see I'm a great deal better," she announced, trying to sit up very straight in the chair, and looking at him as though to challenge any opinion to the contrary, "and I'm about tired of waiting for this business to be settled."

Sandy had learned that an off-hand manner was decidedly the best to use toward his client, so he said, with a careless laugh:

"And so am I, and I don't think, my dear girl, you'll have to wait more than another twenty-four hours before you can take possession of your own."

"The Hill House!" exclaimed Sarah, sitting upright, the color flying into her cheeks.

"Exactly," he said; "and now I want to ask you what you mean to do there."



Sarah laughed.

“Do, you goose!” she returned; “what would anybody do in her own house?”

She paused an instant, remembering how lonely the great rooms would seem with no one but herself to occupy them; and yet, what else could be done?

“I am afraid,” continued Sandy, “that we must make *some* concession to your aunt, Mrs. Malone, and her daughter. In fact, they insist upon it, and you don’t want to have them making trouble, as they certainly will do. They want to live with you if you are going to keep the house open.”

Sarah remained silent for a few moments, her brain working more actively than it had done for a long time. As I have said, her cleverness was precisely the kind which takes a common-sense view of any situation, and she realized that since she could not live alone in the large house it would be far better to have some of her own people with her. Moreover, it would afford her immense satisfaction to be the mistress of such a place with Mrs. Malone as her dependent or visitor. Naturally she had not the least idea just what their methods of life would be, but it had occurred to her mind that they might close up several of the rooms, using only what they actually required. She would keep the great drawing-room open, she had decided, chiefly because she intended to invite Will Rogers and his sisters to call upon her there. Poor Sarah! Never was heiress so little qualified for the new state of life to which she was called, and she was keen enough to be well aware of her own shortcomings, yet too proud to wish to appear ignorant enough to need advice. Sandy, however, appealed to her as belonging more directly to her own class, and moreover, she had an idea that, as he was in her



pay, she had a right to his services, no matter in what branch they might be required.

"Well, now, see here," said Sarah, "I mean to go and live in that house, if it's only for six months, just to show it's mine; but of course I can't stay there alone. What do you say to my letting the Malones come up?"

"I say just this," said Sandy: "if you do we may as well shake hands and say good-by"—a threat he had found very effectual before. "You can have them up to spend a day or two now and then, but nothing more. If I could have induced Mrs. Mackenzie to live there with you, that would be all very well, but I have consulted with your guardian."

Sarah interrupted him.

"That's Dr. Fraser, isn't it?" she inquired, for although the good doctor had been chosen as a suitable guardian for the girl, he had not so far said much in his new capacity.

"Exactly," said Sandy; "and he agrees with me in thinking that if you insist on living in the Hill House, even for a time, you should have a suitable companion—a lady just such as other girls, Sarah, in the upper class of life would have as a companion."

Sarah remained puzzled in thought for a moment.

"A companion?" she repeated. "What for? I don't see, if I want company, why I can't have all I choose to ask. I aint blind, nor weak in my head, nor a foreigner, as I can see, so as to need somebody to be always around after me," said Sarah.

Sandy, it may be observed, was entirely deficient in a sense of humor, or his annoyance would have been merged into the ridiculous side of the situation. As it was, the girl simply exasperated him.

"See here, Sarah," he said almost roughly, "you talk about being a lady, and I wonder how long it will take



you to keep your mouth shut on subjects you don't understand. It was all very well when you were just Mrs. Malone's niece to run about the country any kind of way. No one thought anything of it. But," continued Sandy with a very superior manner, "in *our* class of life girls don't do that sort of thing. They wouldn't live alone, for instance, keeping house for themselves. How can I explain it to you?" he concluded desperately. "To do the right thing, you ought to have some elderly lady, a widow or something of that kind, to live with you as your friend, so to speak."

"Boss me," said Sarah, with a curl of her lip; but indeed the girl was beginning dimly to understand what Sandy meant, yet felt driven to torment him a little further before she acknowledged that she understood, even if she could not agree with him.

"No," he almost shouted; "that's a thing I don't believe any created being ever could do; but if you had the right sort of person she would teach you a great many things you would be very glad to know."

"Well," said Sarah finally, "I suppose you must be right, and I shouldn't wonder," she added, with a gay little laugh, "if all this talk doesn't mean that you've got the person right in your mind's eye this minute, Sandy Mackenzie."

The girl rose, laughing, and shook her finger at him.

"I declare," thought Mackenzie to himself as he looked up at the slim young figure, the face refined by illness, really quite charming as she stood there, "as soon as the proper time comes I shall certainly make known my own intentions, for I'm very much mistaken if another year won't make a fine woman of her, and she's smart enough to be a match for anyone."



"I was coming to that," he said aloud. "Dr. Fraser has suggested exactly the proper person, a former patient of his, a widow lady with one little girl."

Sarah interrupted him briskly.

"No, sir, thank you," she announced; "I don't want any young ones around."

"*Will* you keep still a moment?" demanded Sandy. "The child is at school, and this Mrs. Holmes is boarding in Albany, and ready to take any such position. My aunt will tell you precisely what she would do and be when with you."

"Well, if I must, I must," said Sarah. "Only she'd better hurry up, for I mean to get into the house just as soon as I can. By the way," she added suddenly, "what are the others up there going to do? I hear they're pretty well packed up."

Sandy flushed. The one miserable part in all this business had been Jean Garnier's distinct avoidance of him on the few occasions when he might have spoken with her. What she thought he could only conjecture, for of course she had not expressed the slightest opinion, but he could well imagine that she believed him a—cad.

"They are only anxious now," he said quietly, "to be away. I understand that they are going to New York, to some friends of Mr. Appleton's."

"Visiting?" inquired Sarah.

Sandy laughed dismally.

"They are going into lodgings," he said in a harsh, dull voice. "Miss Garnier is quite an artist and expects to do something in that line. Polly will probably go to a public school, and old Miss Dyker will live with them. So you see, Sarah," he added, with a sneer, "you have done a fine piece of work for everyone concerned."



The girl's eyes fell. She was glad of her triumph over those who, she had considered, looked down upon her, and yet it hurt her now to think of them as actually suffering through her good fortune.

"Isn't there any way," she began slowly, "to help them on?"

But this was precisely what Sandy did not wish undertaken. So long as he knew they would not be in actual want he had no intention of permitting his client to mix herself up with the family affairs of those whom she had superseded. There should be a new start on all sides, and he made haste to say:

"You don't know them as I do, Sarah, and they would be greatly insulted if you even suggested such a thing."

"Oh, well, I only mentioned it," flashed the girl. "So they're going, are they?" she continued. "And how soon can this Mrs. What-do-you-call-her be ready to come? Dear me, that'll be another stranger to get mixed up with, won't it? Those days I was sick upstairs I used to feel in a perfect whirl when I thought of all the new acquaintances I've got."

"But *I* was an old friend, Sarah," said Sandy, with his really pleasant smile. Perhaps because he had bestowed it upon her so seldom lately—possibly because it brought back in a flash the remembrance of that day at the county fair, when she had been so happy in receiving his attentions—Sarah felt her heart beat a little quickly, and she answered in a gentle tone:

"Yes, but you're the only one I've got. I feel," she added, a curious wistfulness creeping over her face, "just as, if I wanted friends now, I'd have to go out and buy them." She gave a little half-hysterical laugh. "Wouldn't it be funny," she went on, "to go into a store and say to



the man, 'If you please, I'd like five friends and a half'?"

She laughed gayly at her own conceit, and remembered what good fun she and Will Rogers had had over their jokes together. What a pity it seemed that, young as he was, her lawyer should be so solemn, and he made it worse by saying gravely:

"Sarah, you talk a great deal of nonsense, and you'd better take care how you do it when you set up for being a fine lady."

The girl started from her chair and whirled around, facing him with the expression he had only seen once or twice before upon her face.

"Now see *here*, Sandy Mackenzie!" she exclaimed. "I guess you don't know me yet. Not *much*! You may be my lawyer, and I may have to have a guardian, or whatever you call him, and a companion lady to tag round after me, all because I happen to have a house and a little money, but I don't need you to try and make me all over again. I guess," the girl added, with a laugh, "if it's coming to that I'll have to engage another kind of a somebody. We'd make quite a procession when we walked out, wouldn't we?"

"Well, then," said Sandy, decidedly nettled, but obliged to admit to himself that he had gone too far, "let us keep, then, to the main points of the interview. Your idea, as I understand it, is to move at once into the House and begin for yourself." He paused for a moment, and added: "*Miss Dalton of the Hill House.*"

"That's it," she assented. "I'd like that Jean," she added, "if she wasn't so stuck-up, for she's got the right kind of a look about her, and I wish, some way or other, she'd keep friends with me."



A gleam of hope shot across Sandy's heart.

"Sarah!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet, "will you let me do one thing for you, and that is tell Jean Garnier just what you have said? and you never uttered a wiser saying. If you could make a friend of *that* girl, let me tell you, it would be the making of you."

"Ah," said Sarah, the wistfulness which had been in her face before coming back, "ignorant as you think me, Sandy, I know better than you. Jean Garnier might be very kind to me, but she'd be a hundred miles off from treating me like a *friend*."

Sandy was silenced, perfectly well aware that Sarah's intuitive perceptions on some points were better than all his good management; and having settled the main points of their interview, and made her understand that she was free to take up her residence in the Hill House as soon as the family had vacated it, he was now only waiting Mrs. Mackenzie's return to take his departure, and turned the conversation to a subject which he was sure would interest her without much argument.

"Do you know," he observed with a smile, "that you have the right to a bank account and to draw as much money as you like? Don't you want to buy some of the things girls generally like to wear?"

Sarah's eyes sparkled.

"I guess I do," she answered, and proceeded immediately to inflict upon her lawyer a list of the various things she intended to purchase, not being entirely sure as yet whether attending to them was part of his business, or if the money was to be placed in her own hands. But on this point Sandy felt that he must make matters very clear to her.

"Sarah," he said gravely, "this will really all be in the



hands of your guardian. You will see him to-morrow or the next day, and then it will be his place to talk all this over with you."

Sarah's brows drew together slightly.

"See here," she said suddenly; "he's been attending to me since I was sick. Can he pay his own bill to himself, or shall I say something about it?"

It could scarcely have been from Philip Dalton that Sarah had imbibed the clear and downright sort of honesty which was her most admirable characteristic. Spendthrift she might become, intoxicated by sudden wealth, and moved by natural generosity of spirit; but to defraud a human being of his honest dues in any matter would have been impossible to her. Her sense of justice, having no peculiar sentiment attached to it, had made it in no way difficult for her to claim possession of the old home of the Dykers, but to have outdone them by so much as a picture frame which was theirs by right would have been impossible to her, and it is a question whether, on the whole, her kind of integrity was not more satisfactory than that of many people who would make a sentiment out of refusing what was theirs by right and go in debt because they had not enforced the claim.

"Certainly," said Sandy, and then it occurred to him as a fitting time to mention his own services. "And while we are speaking of these things," he said carelessly, "you must remember there are my expenses."

"Why, good gracious," exclaimed Sarah, "I should think I do! Why, you've attended to most everything. But, of course," she added, "you can settle that all up for yourself, can't you, when it comes to my getting any money?"

"Is she entirely sincere, a miracle of honesty, or a fool?"



thought Sandy, looking at the girl's candid young countenance as she faced him. As for Sarah, she simply wondered that he should have bothered to ask such a question, and it may have been as well that at this point Mrs. Mackenzie's step sounded in the hall, and in another moment she was in the room.

A look sprang into the girl's face on seeing her hostess, which, had Mrs. Mackenzie not felt such a sense of grievance against her, would have gone to the widow's tender heart. But, as a matter of fact, she had just left the desolate little family at the Hill House, all of whose lives seemed to have been jarred upon, broken into, confused, and all but maimed by the discovery of this new claimant to the estate. It was all very well for Mrs. Mackenzie to feel glad that the girls were to learn something of the reality of life, but it had hurt her like a physical pain to see them gathering together all their special treasures, dismantling rooms which they had known from infancy of every little souvenir which they were justified in claiming for their own, while the actual helplessness of Miss Dyker in regard to the impending change had really alarmed her. She had begged the older lady to remain with her, but Miss Dyker would not hear of it. She would not, could not, leave the children, and as she wisely enough said, when they had made their start in New York, as they intended doing next week, they would assuredly need some chaperone.

"But I declare," Mrs. Mackenzie had reflected as she walked down the old familiar avenue to the cottage, "poor Ellen is the greatest child among them all. Still, as Dick says, she will be a protection and comfort to them."

Mrs. Mackenzie had written to a friend in New York giving a brief outline of the state of affairs, and request-



ing her to engage even temporary apartments in some quiet, suitable neighborhood for the party, who, she realized, had better make the break while all their energies were stirred into action than postpone it until the excitement had given way to a chilling consciousness that their loss was one to affect them at every turn. And Jean's womanliness, her wisdom, her quick executive ability, had almost startled Mrs. Mackenzie. It was the young girl Jean in one sense no longer. The clearness, decision, and the bravery of womanhood had come to her, as it were, a very gift of Heaven from this need of work; a power of endurance seemed to be within her which she realized as the poor Colonel's only legacy.



## XXII.

It was a large room, a studio, even though it may not have been originally designed for the purpose; but when George Carrington fell heir to the house he determined at once that it should be his workshop. There were high lights from one side—that fronting on the side street—while two windows overlooked Benton Square, a small, not over well-kept park, yet giving a certain dignity to this east-side locality, and moving Carrington's sister to observe that it "looked well on your cards, if not in reality."

But visiting cards were scarcely in Miss Carrington's line, her occupations being of so peculiarly domestic a character that her calls, generally speaking, were only upon the tradespeople in the neighborhood.

On a certain chilly morning toward the end of February Miss Carrington, having concluded various domestic matters below stairs, was seated before one of the many tables in her brother's studio, with sundry small papers and account-books spread out before her, while the painter, a tall, well-built young man, with a thoughtful but exceedingly pleasant face, was busy putting finishing touches to a good-sized picture on an easel before him.

"If I was only *sure*, George," said Miss Carrington suddenly, and turning a very anxious face in the direction of her brother's broad shoulders and close-cropped blond head, "just how to account for that *liver*."

Mr. Carrington, it may be observed, was accustomed to



his sister's bringing these—to him entirely uninteresting—household details into the studio, and to listening to various remarks of the kind without paying the smallest attention to what they meant. However, as he was well aware, they called for a certain kind of response, so he said in a careless tone:

“Oh, I presume the cat ate it.”

“*George*,” exclaimed Miss Carrington, “what an idea! Of course she didn't, and you know how careful I have to be, and what do you suppose we are going to do when these friends of Mrs. Mackenzie come in case they should ask for a lunch?”

“Do you mean,” suggested George without pausing in his work, “because there won't be some liver for them to eat as soon as they arrive?”

Fortunately for the artist's peace of mind Miss Carrington had plunged into fresh housekeeping details, and was beginning to jot small items on a piece of paper by her note-book to the accompaniment of a German air which Carrington presently began to whistle.

“I wish, George,” she resumed presently, “you would take a little interest in the way I have the rooms arranged for them.”

“Where's the duchess?” inquired George, now really roused.

“Do *you* ask me such a question as that?” demanded his sister, “when you know perfectly well she is making that costume upstairs for you and neglecting everything else?”

Heedless of Miss Carrington's remark, he opened the door of the long room and gave a low, soft, but peculiar whistle, standing back in the shadowy hall with an amused expression, while he awaited a response.



There was the sound presently of an opening door upstairs, then a voice sang in a very clear contralto:

“Du, du liegst mir im Herzen,  
Du, du liegst mir im sinn.”

And at the top of the wide, old-fashioned staircase a girl's figure slowly appeared in view. As she came down, still humming the air half under her breath, a very graceful little figure and a fair young face were revealed. Her gown of dull blue cloth was made artistically, so that it had almost the effect of a fancy costume, with high puffed sleeves, a short round waist, and a quaint little rolling collar. But Carrington's younger sister revelled, as she put it, in contributing to the artistic element of the house by dressing as nearly like one of her brother's favorite ideals as possible, and in fact the style became her so well that she could easily be forgiven any eccentricity it suggested.

“Come along, duchess,” he exclaimed; “I've been waiting half an hour for you.”

And he led the way back into the studio, where the elder sister was still wrestling with her accounts.

“George,” she pleaded, lifting a pair of very mild eyes in anxious supplication, “if you keep Linda posing there for the next hour what do you suppose I am going to do about the rooms upstairs, and where is that Miss Barton, I should like to know, whom you engaged only last week?”

“Where she generally is,” said Carrington, with a laugh — “spending her money on something new in the way of parasols or boots to dazzle the boys with the next time she goes down to the Academy. Linda will answer capitally for this morning; only, my *dear* child,” he said pleadingly, “*don't* look as if you had lost *every* friend.”

Linda, having resumed in the most nonchalant manner



the pose she had started for her brother's picture the day before, had allowed her pretty features to assume the most miserable expression.

"You can't be thinking of liver, too," he went on. "Now cheer up and look festive, and remember, if you please, that this is probably the last day we will have our ancestral halls to ourselves."

"And so much the better," put in Miss Carrington decidedly, while her brother began to make rapid strokes with his charcoal, "for indeed, George, as I have long said, it was a shame not to put the house to some practical use. The only fear I have is that these people will not like what we have to offer them."

And now George did turn around for a practical understanding of the case.

"My dear Kate," he said very quietly, but with unwonted firmness in his tone, "there is no earthly use of worrying yourself or me on the subject for the present, since, as you well know, they are only to be here for a day or two until they find some home or abiding place to suit them better. We are not even called upon to entertain them; and as you have arranged it, so far as I remember, they are to have the floor to themselves entirely independent of us. I really do not see how they will interfere with us any more than if they were in the next block, and if you will take my advice you won't begin by worrying too much about it."

Miss Carrington, who was always immensely pleased and flattered by her brother's really entering into any household question with her, adopted his view of the case at once.

"And, George," she said a little anxiously, "you will *try* to make yourself agreeable to them, will you not?"



"No," said George very decidedly, "I do not think I shall. That is"—as he observed a look of alarm gathering upon Miss Kate's face—"I do not mean, of course, that I shall shout and howl at them to keep out of my way, and so forth, but I shall, except so far as common politeness goes, keep out of *their* way. Imagine my coming into the studio, for instance, and finding it occupied like a family front parlor! Moreover, you must remember that, as they have lived so long in the country, they are likely to be unbearably sociable. You would want, I suppose, to immediately take out your knitting and ask them to do the same, and sit around my fire here while I was trying to work."

He laughed, and Linda gave way to unrestrained merriment.

"George," said his eldest sister gravely, "I don't know whether you are unkind or only ridiculous."

"I think I'm ridiculous," he said quietly; "but, joking aside, Kitty, I don't quite like the idea of having my peace and quietness invaded, and I'll be ever so much obliged to you, old girl, if you'll only see to it that I have very little to do or say in the matter at all. How many of them are there, by the way? Some eighteen or twenty, I gather, from what you were saying last night."

"George," exclaimed Miss Carrington with real severity, "there are two *young* ladies and an *elderly* lady, their aunt, and possibly a man-servant, who is merely coming to see them safely here."

"Well, that's trial enough," said George, going back to his work, and rubbing his hands disconsolately over his head. "Never mind; hand me that pipe, Linda, like a good girl and let's go back to business; it may be the last peaceful hour, my child, your good sister intends we shall ever know."



But Kate, although she said very little, was of quite a different opinion. When Mrs. Mackenzie's letter had arrived the day before, requesting her old friend Kate Carrington to receive the Colonel's little family for a day or two until they should decide where to establish themselves in the great metropolis, Miss Carrington had hailed the idea with delight, in spite of some anxiety as to just how it should be managed, since, unlike her brother and younger sister, the good little woman dearly loved whatever roused and stimulated her housekeeping propensities. There was small satisfaction, as she often averred, in wasting her time upon the other two members of the family, since, as she once declared, her brother only knew whether the dinner table looked picturesque or not, and Linda had an absolute disregard for anything approaching details of domestic life.

“As long as they can get new draperies or *pick up*, as they call it, a piece of uncomfortable furniture, here or there, for the studio, the pair of them would never know,” Miss Kate had remarked, “whether they were eating their dinner on the top of the piano or the parlor sofa.”

Certainly it was what might be called a Bohemian household, and Miss Kate bore the burden of making both ends meet in a spirit which was truly heroic, although it must be confessed that attending to all such matters formed the excitement and pleasure, if the frequent vexation, of her daily life, and her pride in her talented brother and sister was more than she ever dared to let them see. The trio had been left, when young, almost alone in the world, but it had united them by a bond of sympathy strong enough to make their differences in temperament forgotten, or, I might almost better say, the practical common-sense of Miss Kate had been the very best balance for the visionary



point of view so often taken by George and Linda. What, however, few people guessed or knew was the amount of real self-denial of the brother in order that his sisters might have the best that the common purse would allow them. Keen-eyed as Miss Kate was, she did not always discover why her brother's clothes were shabby, or when he took a miserably poor price for some piece of work which, with a trifling delay, might have brought him fame.

Mrs. Mackenzie had been a friend of long standing, although the opportunities for intercourse had not been frequent, and it was with a view to conferring mutual benefit that she had written Miss Carrington, requesting as a personal favor that the Hill House family might go at once to Benton Square on their arrival in New York. She had made it very clear that the means of the family were limited, and that they must look about, not only for some suitable abiding place, but, it might be, for some occupation; and Miss Carrington had decided within her own mind that if, when a day or two had passed by, their visitors should prove congenial associates, she would try to enter into some arrangement whereby they might take up their home permanently with them. There were rooms and to spare in the old-fashioned house, and there had been frequent attempts made to utilize them, but unfortunately the apartments had generally been let to some out-at-elbows friends of Carrington's who were in need of a home without the means of paying for one, and for some months past Miss Kate had not suggested their doing anything of the kind, dreading a recurrence of the same experience, which had usually resulted in Carrington's being his tenants' banker as well as landlord.

It had pleased and stirred all Miss Kate's housewifely



instincts to make even such slight preparations as she had been able to carry out for her expected guests, and as it had been decided they would require only the use of the rooms, she had arranged a front upper chamber as a cheerful parlor, with a suggestion, as she called it, of a means for a little light housekeeping. Shabby and worn as the furniture might be, it, like the fortunes of the family, had been of the best in its day, and the high, old-fashioned chimney-pieces, deep windows, and lofty ceilings gave the rooms a dignity and charm of their own, which, as Miss Kate often remarked, quite made up for the decayed gentility of the neighborhood.

Within an hour after this brief consultation in the studio, the Hill House party, rather a bewildered and dismayed one so far as Jean and Polly were concerned, were on their way to the address Mrs. Mackenzie had given them. Jones had been their escort, since it was absolutely necessary at the last moment for Dick to remain a day or two in Albany and arrange certain matters which would leave him free to take up his abode in New York. To have lingered longer in Thornton would have been unendurable, and confused as the girls felt, they were glad on the whole, of the relief which their departure occasioned, and Jean felt the necessity of keeping up a brave outward appearance, at least before Miss Dyker, who was inclined at every moment to give way to complete despair.



### XXIII.

“Two cabs,” said Miss Kate in an undertone. She was standing in the front parlor window, watching the arrival of their expected guests. No such pleasurable excitement had occurred in the good little lady’s life for some time, and she was undecided as to whether it was exactly her place to run down the steps and welcome them or to occupy a dignified and smiling position in the parlor. Linda had become unaccountably shy, or she certainly would have been out upon the doorstep before the Hill House party had fairly left their carriages, and as for George, he had wandered away saying, in a quiet fashion, that he presumed there would be confusion enough without adding his presence to it.

It was with a quick sense of relief that on entering, Jean, who had the party in charge, observed the quiet and refined air of the old house, and Miss Kate, stepping forward with her little, somewhat antiquated, but very sweet company manners, won their good will at once. Linda made, as usual, what her brother called a “picturesque bit” in the background.

“This is Miss Dyker, I am sure,” said Miss Kate, full of hospitality and pleasure in being hostess to such a party. “Like old times,” she was thinking to herself. “How do you feel, ma’am, after your journey?” She was leading the way back into the parlor. “And these young ladies are Miss Jean and Miss Polly, I presume, and——” She glanced at the dignified Jones, who with his usual tact made haste to explain himself.



"I'm Jones, ma'am, if you please," he said quietly; "and as I've been with them since they were only babies I couldn't let them start on such a journey alone. I've been boy and man with the Colonel, ma'am," he continued, "for five-and-twenty years."

"And he's among our best friends now," said Jean, with her pretty smile, while Miss Kate felt more and more satisfied that her guests, as she chose to call them, would be precisely after her own heart.

"And of course," Jean went on, "though we've had to introduce ourselves, this is Miss Carrington?"

Miss Kate laughed.

"Miss Kate, you must call me," she exclaimed. "I never took the name the other way since our elder sister died;" and she went on quickly, "this is my sister Linda."

Linda moved forward with a sort of reluctant grace, and stood smiling while the greetings were exchanged.

"Linda and I are housekeeping together," said Miss Kate, "and it has given us such pleasure to make ready for you. My dear," she said, turning to her younger sister, "do you take the ladies up to their rooms, and the man and I will attend to the luggage."

Linda, leading the way upstairs, made an apology for having to place them on the third story of the house, but, as she told them, and they at once discovered, it had its great advantages in possessing larger rooms, better air, and an outlook from the windows which Jean thought picturesque in the extreme. Far above the din and bustle of the streets they could see a jumble of roof tops, chimneys, and church steeples against a sky of varying winter brightness; and when they turned back to look at the old-fashioned apartment, Jean's artistic sense was still further gratified, for, as I have said, the house was one of those



built when dwellers in the great city had more leisure to plan a dwelling and more fondness for considering it a permanent home. A low wainscot skirted the walls, above which was dark blue cartridge paper, one of Linda's extravagances, when she and George had considered themselves justified in fitting up that portion of the house. The chimney-piece was high and heavily carved, and the fireplace, if not very large, had a quaint look about it suggestive of a comfortable cup of afternoon tea. The room had been prepared as a sort of sitting room for the party, and beyond were two sleeping apartments plainly but comfortably furnished, while a tiny room at the end of the hall would answer every purpose for a trunk room, and possibly afford a shelter at any time for the obliging Jones, who, to remain with the young ladies, would willingly have slept in an armchair.

Whatever the girls had been dreading and expecting, this was such a relief in every sense that Jean felt almost as though there had been no sacrifice at all in going out to seek their fortunes, and unfortunately made up her mind at once that, with such a beginning, there could be very few trials ahead. She only wished that, as had been suggested, Dick could so arrange matters as to follow them in a day or two. He had on parting expressed a hope that this could be managed.

Linda left them as soon as, to use her own expression, she had "given them their bearings," and at once Jean called upon Miss Dyker to express some satisfaction with their new home. But unfortunately the old lady could not share her niece's satisfaction.

"You see, my dear," she said in her gentle voice, while, having insisted upon her taking the easiest chair, Jean removed the old lady's bonnet and cloak. "I'm afraid I'm



too old for changes of this kind. But of course I would rather be with you girls here or anywhere than in a palace without you."

Jean fully understood and appreciated what her aunt felt, and determined that if there was any way of making up to her for what she had lost in added gentleness, consideration, and, indeed, it might be, forbearance, she would certainly bend every energy to doing it. Polly, fortunately, seemed as well pleased as Jean herself by her inspection of the rooms, which she had made with her most critical air, having examined into details which Jean would have passed unnoticed, and in less than an hour the trunks had been put in their places and Jones was ready for a brief consultation with Jean as to what he was to do next.

It had been understood on their leaving that Jones would merely act as escort and return to the Hill House, to conclude such preparations as were needed to make it ready for its new occupancy. It was a trial to part with him, but Jean was thankful that the man was tolerably well off and would be able to take time to look about him before entering into any new service, a thing he had declared would be dreadful to him after his long years with the Colonel.

"And of course it isn't good-by, Jones," said Jean. "You know you are and always will be one of ourselves, and be sure to let us hear from you directly."

Jones took and clasped his young lady's hand in both of his, while tears rose to his honest eyes.

"Never you fret, Miss Jean," he said solemnly, in farewell, "as I told you before, it's well I wasn't took along with the Colonel, and you'll never want for anything old Jones can do for you as long as he lives."

It would have touched and gratified Jones inexpressibly



had he known that, on retracing her steps to their new apartment, Jean felt that the good-by to him indicated a complete break in all that she had called home life. But there were, there must be, reflected Jean, no sentimental regrets, and Polly's first question roused her to a practical view of their position.

"Jean," said her cousin anxiously, "did we arrange whether we're to board here or not?"

Jean laughed.

"Which means that like myself you are hungry," she said gayly. "But it was distinctly understood that we were not to board here. The one stipulation that Miss Kate made when she wrote to Mrs. Mackenzie was that we would provide our own meals. She said there were restaurants on all sides in the neighborhood."

"Anyway," said Polly confidently, recalling her last visit to New York, "we can always go to Delmonico's, can't we? You remember Uncle Neil took us there for lunch, and we saw ever so many ladies at the tables by themselves."

Jean laughed, but rather sadly.

"My dear Pollikins," she said, laying her hand very gently on the girl's shoulder, "don't you know that we are a great way off in more senses than one from dining at Delmonico's? Very soon we must set up housekeeping for ourselves, for I am afraid restaurants at any price will be beyond us."

"But, Jean!" exclaimed Polly, "do you mean that we shall have to cook for ourselves?"

Her tone was almost tragic.

"Mrs. Mackenzie explained to me all about it," said Jean very confidently. "It's what they call light housekeeping, and I believe I will try to find Miss Kate this



minute and make some enquiry on the subject at once. I don't know how you feel," she added, "but I am rapidly reaching starvation."

Leaving Polly to comfort or minister to Miss Dyker's wants, Jean went slowly out of their room and down the wide, old-fashioned staircase, wondering just where she could find the mistress of the house. Everything in the main hall was absolutely still. Jean opened the parlor door, and finding that room vacant, went on, wondering whether the doorway below led into the dining room of the house, and as she stood there irresolutely an instant, the door was opened suddenly, and a tall, broad-shouldered young man, with short blond hair and a close-trimmed blond beard and mustache, stepped out into the hall.

Jean drew back, with a little exclamation of surprise, whereupon George Carrington colored violently, but said, with his genial manner:

"I beg your pardon, but—I ought to introduce myself. I am George Carrington, and perhaps I have the pleasure of speaking to one of my sister's friends."

Jean extended her hand quickly, and thought, if a trifle careless in his dress and perhaps a little offhand in his manner, Mr. Carrington looked a thorough gentleman.

He turned, leading the way back into his studio, and Jean, recognizing at once that it was an artist's workshop, uttered a little cry of pleasure.

"Oh, Mr. Carrington!" she exclaimed, "*now* I feel better pleased than ever."

She stood still in the centre of the room, her eyes wandering from one point to another, while Carrington made haste to say:

"How is that? Are you accustomed to studio life?"

"Oh, no," said Jean quickly; "but you see I know I



have to earn my living, and the only hope I have of doing it is with such little talent for drawing as I may possess."

"Upon my word," exclaimed Carrington, "so that is your bent, is it?"

He smiled indulgently. He was so used to hearing girls say they could draw, and, pleasant as this girl was to look upon, he groaned inwardly, wondering if she would expect to have him develop her talent.

"Perhaps," she went on, looking at him gently, "in a day or two, Mr. Carrington, you will be able to give me some advice. I am not looking for fame," she added, smiling, "only for whatever will bring me bread and butter."

"Then, indeed, if you have any sort of ability, I may be able to help you very materially Miss Garnier," exclaimed Carrington. He paused, and looked at her with a smile. "Fame," he added, "is an illusive goddess, and I am inclined to think that tempting as her laurels are, the humbler workers in the field have the best of it, for her crown is full of thorns."

Jean listened with kindling eyes.

"I know," she said eagerly, her delicate, expressive face lighting up as she spoke; "yet in anyone with the art instinct, so to speak, must there not be something as a goal which we know to be far, very far beyond our reach? We strive for heaven, don't we—yet have to close our eyes when we think of all that it can mean."

Carrington looked at the girl with a curious expression in his deep-set blue eyes.

"There is no way to define or gauge the feeling," he said presently; "you have given it as much expression as though you had spoken for an hour, but, to understand that *afflatus*, let us call it, you must either have the gift



itself, or perhaps, what is rarer still, a keen sense of feeling, of *appreciation*."

"I have only a little, small vein of ability," said Jean, with a smile; "just, as I have said, something which may add a few comforts to my aunt's life, but I love your art too well ever to travesty it with attempting anything great. I have a certain faculty," she went on, assuming a businesslike tone, "for character sketching—at least, so I am told. When we were travelling, for instance, I could always make a rapid sketch of a scene which people said, however badly done, gave a good idea of its points. Do you see? It is my drawing that is so execrable."

Carrington smiled with pleasure.

"Delightful!" he exclaimed, "if indeed you really have this kind of *savais*—that's a term you will have to learn how to use—then you may keep the pot boiling, as you say, for a good illustrator is always in demand."

"But to illustrate," said Jean anxiously, "one must understand more than merely putting a picture together. I talked it over once with an American in Paris, and he told me a great many useful things."

"Of course. For instance, you must know how to compose your picture, and how to illustrate your text, and how to interest thereby the reader of the same."

"Yes," said Jean slowly; "and I fancy I could do that. Whenever I read a story I find myself almost unconsciously illustrating it in my own mind. I see it in pictures."

"We shall see, we shall see," said Carrington tolerantly. "I must introduce my friend Baldwin to you. He drops in any evening, and can give you the best of advice, and you must show him some of your work."

"Oh," exclaimed Jean; "it is all very crude, but if only it is hopeful I don't care how hard I have to work."



“Never mind, time will tell,” said Carrington. He hesitated, looking at her with newly awakened interest, and Jean said suddenly, and with a laugh and blush together:

“Oh, Mr. Carrington, just fancy, I came here on an errand. A very prosaic one, away off from art gossip. Can you tell me where to find your sister?”

“Linda?” He opened the door, gave their little whistle, and in a few moments the duchess, as from an old time joke he called her, appeared. She raised her eyebrows rather quizzically on seeing Jean and Carrington together, remembering his dread of intrusion, but directly Jean had made known the condition of the party upstairs Linda suggested taking Jean out to the neighboring stores, so that in future she would understand where to go or send in such emergencies.

“I don’t believe you’re used to this kind of thing, Miss Garnier,” said Linda, smiling, as they crossed out into the avenue; “but, perhaps, when you get into the way of it, you’ll find it quite amusing. Really, it’s quite a life by itself, and people say it’s more like the foreign way of living. I’ll take you first to what our little slavey, as George calls our one servant, speaks of as the *delicate man’s*. Please observe his proportions, and see how well the title fits.”



## XXIV.

February —, 189—.

“MY DEAR DICK:

“This has been such an absorbing and really exciting day I couldn't write a line until this moment, when, with all my family sound asleep, I am sitting in our sky parlor alone by the fire for a chat with you and Mrs. Mackenzie, to whom you must show the letter at once. The house is quaint, and to my mind delightful, and our host and hostess and the younger sister promise well; indeed, I am only dreading lest we have to search for another abiding place. First for Mrs. Mackenzie's old friends. Miss Kate is like some quaint little character out of an old-fashioned story book, but I fancy she has more that is practical and modern about her than shows at first sight. Linda, the younger sister, is simply adorable; a perfect picture, although not regularly beautiful. She dresses in purely artistic style, wears her hair in a great loose, soft coil, high on her head, with funny little silver pins stuck in it, which she says her brother found in an old bric-a-brac store and likes to see her wear. She has a lovely voice, and would like to sing in public but for her brother's very definite disapproval. Mr. Carrington puzzles me. He has a sort of brusquerie about him which does not fit in with the expression of his face, and I fancy he has had a hard fight with many things in life. His studio is a large room on the ground floor, full of all sorts of delightful things I'd like to rummage among if I dared, and he has been kind enough to look over my sketches and say they promise well, but I need



technique. A friend of his named Baldwin, who is what he calls a "black-and-white man," is coming up to-morrow to talk things over with me and give me some advice. Poor Aunt Ellen! She is reduced to a state which I try to laugh her out of by calling her *Mrs. Gummidge*, and when I described who and what that personage in "David Copperfield" was, instead of offending it quite amused her. But she really is to be pitied, and Dick, my dear, between ourselves, the spirits of your humble servant are anything but the best. Poor Uncle Neil! Well, of course we know what he intended doing. Do write me how matters stand at the Hill House. Horrible pictures rise to my mind of that girl tearing about and disarranging all the oldtime grace and sweetness of the place. Can Mrs. Mackenzie do nothing, I wonder, to keep her from downright vandalism? I must stop now. I have just been looking out of my window, and I wish you could see the picture the city below makes on this clear starlight night. The tramp of human feet now and then, a shrill cry from someone, the movement of the cars near by, all these sounds seem mere incidents in a picture of perfect godlike calm. I have been recalling some of our old studies from the Hill House cupola and gazing at our old friend the Great Bear, where he rests with every point a lambent silvery light; and perhaps, if you are unwise enough to be awake at this hour, you may be consulting him yourself. Anyway, dear, dear Dick, I know you are thinking anxiously and tenderly of us all, and oh, what a treat it will be to see you! By that time it is to be hoped I may have learned how to make use of the little gas stove in our sky parlor, and can treat you to some "light housekeeping." Polly remarked to-day she feared it *would* be very light indeed if left to her and me. She is to go in a day or two to the



nearest public school, and although the novelty pleases her she shrinks from all that it will bring about. A young friend of Linda Carrington's is to call for us and introduce us to the principal at her school in this neighborhood. Poor little Pollikins! I'm afraid her "glittering generalities" in the way of book learning won't do her much good in the cold light of a public school examination. Still, it won't hurt her to learn where she stands among other girls of her age, as Mrs. Mackenzie said, and she has been wonderfully sweet and gentle of late and taken a great liking to Linda Carrington. There is a little park opposite us which Polly calls *measly*, it has such a forlorn, neglected air, and yet it is by no means lacking in the picturesque, and not far away is a very quiet, comfortable-looking church which I mean to know more about on Sunday. Altogether, if not aristocratic, the neighborhood certainly has its attractions. How I wish I knew what you were doing at this moment. I hope you are plunged in loneliness. Don't dare say so if you are not. Good-by, dear Dick. Think of us all, particularly your homesick

"JEAN."



## XXV.

THE clock in the Hill House drawing room had just pealed forth the hour of noon in its soft silvery note, and one occupant of the room laid her book aside, yawned unreservedly, and stood up rustling her skirts as she did so in a way which caused her companion to look up with a "Well, my dear?" uttered half-inquiringly, half in reproof.

"How many wells make a river?" demanded Sarah of her companion, a small, negative-looking woman of forty-two or three, with an unmistakable air of having long been in servitude to others about her, and yet something delicately refined and very agreeable in her pale, quiet face, hazel eyes, soft brown hair, and costume of dark brown serge.

"I declare," continued Miss Dalton, going over to the window, where she beat a tattoo on the pane, observing as she did so the gleam and sparkle of her new rings; "I'm beginning to get tired of so much elegance. I don't see where the fun comes in, not exactly. It's all very well," she continued, "for you and Mrs. Mackenzie, Mrs. Holmes, to talk about toning me down, and refinement and polish, and all that; but I don't see why I shouldn't have a little fun as well. See here," she added, turning around upon her companion, with a sudden light in her eyes, "I'll *tell* you what we'll do. We'll have out the carriage and drive over to Nautuck. I've meant to do some shopping there some day soon. I'd like to see how they'd all act."

Mrs. Holmes might groan inwardly, but even in her two



months of residence she had learned that Sarah's whims or wishes were not to be disputed if the peace was to be kept, and accordingly rose to give the order for the carriage, while Sarah rushed off to her own room, Jean's pink and gray bower, where she rang her bell violently for Mrs. Keyes.

It was, as I said, two months since the newly found heiress to the Hill House had taken up her abode therein, and keen as was the girl's pride in her position, she had been forced to admit to herself that the life of a fine lady, according to the rules laid down by her guardian, Dr. Fraser, Mrs. Mackenzie, and Mrs. Holmes, to say nothing of "her lawyer," was anything but the triumphal progress she had anticipated. Disappointments, or perhaps I had better say impediments in her way, met her at every step. Innate pride made her anxious to do nothing which the servants, for instance, would criticise. She stood far more in awe of them than of Mrs. Holmes or even Mrs. Mackenzie, and ignorance made her hesitate to ask advice or to accept many suggestions from her companions, in consequence of which the girl had known some very mortifying experiences, while so far there had not even been the satisfaction of having anybody to—according to her phraseology—show off before. No callers had appeared, whether from lack of interest or a feeling that it was a house of mourning, Sarah could not tell; and the routine of her daily life, while it was conducted with every luxury, so far as externals went, had become to the girl insufferably dull. Dr. Fraser had certainly been very liberal, perhaps careless, in his allowing her to spend as freely as she liked, but as the girl frequently reflected, what difference did it make to have a change of costume for every day in the week, with no one to admire or even



envy you, and the first novelty of dressing up simply for herself had begun to wear away. Instinctively Sarah was conscious of her own limitations. She might have good birth, but she had no traditions; and the thousand and one delicate touches which are the natural result of early training, and, above all, of association, and which would enable a well-reared girl or woman to accept and dignify poverty, or use wealth with a generous ease, were wholly wanting in poor Sarah Dalton, leaving her embarrassed at every turn, dreading a mistake, and yet in her ignorance scorn- ing to ask or accept Mrs. Holmes' delicately proffered advice. She was perfectly well aware that the kitchen cabinet regarded her as an upstart, and instead of trying to conciliate them by gentleness of demeanor, she had assumed an air of command which secretly infuriated them all. The only one whom she found subservient had been Mrs. Keyes, complete amiability being that good woman's leading trait; and accordingly Sarah had elected her to the post of confidential maid.

Mrs. Mackenzie forced herself now and again to visit the girl, but she had not found her what she expected after Sarah took up the reins of government for herself. Conscious perhaps that Mrs. Mackenzie's near and dear interests were with the absent members of the family, Sarah had taken refuge in a half-defiant, half-condescending attitude, which Mrs. Mackenzie would not attempt to change, and with Sandy alone was Sarah, to her own way of thinking, a complete success.

He was still in the same law office in Albany, but he paid frequent visits to Thornton, where Sarah delighted in playing the grand lady before him. But as he was always treated as a highly honored guest, he had no objection to this display of her pride and power; rather encouraged it



in view of a day when he intended to make his own wishes known.

For some days past Sarah had been planning a tour of Nantucket, which should include shopping in the various stores, and possibly a condescending visit to the Malones, who, as she well knew, must not be kept too long from some share in her prosperity. She had signed a liberal check by Sandy's advice for her aunt, but she was well aware it was only the beginning of what she might have to do, and it occurred to the girl that just now a friendly call would be the best way to keep the Malones from any open demands.

"What you going to wear?" inquired Mrs. Keyes, while Sarah pulled open and shut various bureau drawers, turning things over with a careless hand.

"The best I've got," returned Sarah, "for I'm going shopping in Nantucket, and they're people I'd like to show my best foot foremost to. There, I guess that black silk and crepe is good enough," she continued loftily, as Mrs. Keyes took down a rich lustreless mourning silk, heavily trimmed with crepe, which was the best gown in the girl's new collection; "and it's cold enough to-day for my seal-skin," she continued, "and I guess I'll put on that jet and diamond set."

There was yet a charm about all her finery, but Sarah, as she regarded herself in the long cheval glass which had so often reflected Jean Garnier's slender form and high-bred face, was not entirely satisfied. Was it that her cheeks looked too red, or the dress too heavy? Her really pretty face was becomingly shaded by a broad-brimmed black felt hat, rich with ostrich plumes, and the costume, but for the jewels, was in perfect taste; yet somehow, as the girl was dimly aware, there was a lack which she could not



tell how to supply. The garments fitted her perfectly, yet they did not look as though they belonged to her, and her keen wit made her uncomfortably conscious of the fact.

"Aint that carriage ready yet?" she said sharply, turning away from the mirror with immense satisfaction in the prospect ahead of her, and beginning to draw on a pair of long black suède gloves. "Here, where's all my new bangles?" she added, searching an upper drawer for them. "You go see if Mrs. Holmes is ready," she rattled on; and as Mrs. Keyes departed, Sarah glanced about to see if by chance she had neglected any means of further adornment. She had her new silver purse by a chain over one wrist, and five crisp twenty-dollar bills within it, and her Russia leather account or memorandum book in her hand, and she intended to buy the most expensive dress in Eastman's store by way of a beginning.

Mrs. Holmes was quite ready and waiting in the hall below when Sarah rustled down the great staircase, and a moment later they were seated in the family carriage and bowling rapidly along the avenue, thence out into the Thornton turnpike.

The intercourse between Sarah and her "lady companion," as she called her, was at no time to be exactly called conversation, since it consisted either in a monologue on Sarah's part or a series of questions and answers on various subjects of general information in which Miss Dalton discovered herself ignorant; but now Sarah had a congenial topic and launched forth with a history of the different people in Nautuck, whom she wanted to see stare.

"They aint got over wondering yet," began Sarah, whereupon Mrs. Holmes, mindful of her chief duty, ventured to repeat the phrase: "*They have not ceased wondering, my dear.*"



“That’s so,” said Sarah good-humoredly. She was well aware such corrections were part of Mrs. Holmes’ engagement, and so, as she expressed it, “she bore no ill will”; but in fact her deficient education troubled Miss Dalton very slightly. So far she had not been compelled to meet strangers who would put her ignorance to shame. Mrs. Holmes she regarded as hired to improve her, consequently she could not expect to find nothing to do. The servants she ignored, so far as possible, unless to issue peremptory orders, and insist upon their prompt fulfillment, and there was little occasion for using her pen except during one penitential hour a day when Mrs. Holmes insisted upon her writing a copy, and Sarah yielded because she was well aware that for business reasons, if for no other, penmanship was necessary.

It was for a restless desire for the adulation which so far she had not received that Sarah determined upon this shopping expedition, and as the carriage rolled along the main street of Nautuck the girl was divided between a desire to see and be seen, and the fear that if she looked out of the window too freely her dignity would suffer. They stopped at last before Eastman’s large store, and Sarah descended from the carriage with a languid air, not so much as looking back at her companion, who followed half amused, half irritated by the girl’s treatment of her. But of course, the little widow reflected, however annoying it is, one can forgive ignorance anything, and it was Sarah’s way of being a fine lady.

Eastman’s was a large store for the place, having various departments, and representing the fashion and richer class of trade in that section of the country, and needless to say, not a clerk in the establishment but knew all of Sarah Dalton’s history, embellishing the tale according to



his or her fancy, so that she was really received as a public personage, and something in the way of a curiosity, while those who had been favored with her acquaintance when she was only Sarah Malone made haste to greet her warmly. It was no part, however, of Miss Dalton's plan to treat these former friends as though she still resided in Dawson's Block, yet of course she could not quite turn the cold shoulder upon them, but when Katie Martin, one of the principal salesladies, began an animated conversation Sarah contrived to say that she must hurry up, as she had a great deal to do and several purchases to make.

"And, if you please," she said, with an admirable imitation of indifference, "whatever you show me I want nothing but the *best*," whereupon Mr. Eastman himself volunteered to wait upon her, and a scene followed which amused Mrs. Holmes intensely even while it aggravated her. Sarah selected everything with the air of one to whom money is a merely necessary commodity and a burden, but her purchases were of the most random character. Now and again she would, when really perplexed, refer to Mrs. Holmes with a "Say, what do you think of that?" or "Aint that about the right thing?" while at last Mrs. Holmes could only resort to monosyllables, her own delicate good taste refusing to enter in any way into the calculations or ideas of her charge.

They were examining a stock of umbrellas, Sarah not exactly knowing whether so fine a lady as she had become ought to need one, since for rainy weather, of course, she had her carriage, when one of the salesladies inquired carelessly:

"Is your aunt any better, Sarah?"

Sarah started.



“Why,” she exclaimed, “that’s first I heard she was sick.”

“Why, yes,” said the girl, the fondness for such detail which afflicts the rural mind making her eager to give the bad news. “She was taken sick last week and is pretty bad.”

Sarah’s cheek paled. She hardly knew whether there was any actual grief in the shock of this news or not; still something like a pang shot across her heart as she thought of her only known relation in suffering or trouble. She concluded her purchases hastily, ordered them sent at once to the Hill House, not forgetting to give her name and address in a very distinct voice, and then swept Mrs. Holmes away to the carriage.

“I guess if aunt’s sick,” she observed hurriedly, “we may as well stop up there and see her. Say, you tell Mr. Knapp, won’t you? It’s 15 Dawson’s Block.”

Not a word passed between them while the carriage went quickly over the streets of the town, turning down the well-remembered roadway which Sarah had never seen since that day—how long ago was it?—that Mrs. Knapp had taken her out of bondage. Even in the short time which had elapsed the girl had absorbed enough of the external influences of her new life to feel a sickening sense of disgust when she found herself once more in the narrow, ill-kept street, and before the well-remembered little doorway. How was it she had not before realized what it was like? A shiver passed through Sarah as she descended from the carriage, leaving Mrs. Holmes sitting within the equipage, an object of admiration for the entire neighborhood.



## XXVI.

MRS. MALONE was seated in the one easy-chair her kitchen could boast, and as Sarah pushed open the door she turned sharply, every line of her face showing suffering, both bodily and mental. The room was untidy, comfortless, and dreary in the extreme, and while Sarah took it all in at a glance, what really dismayed her was the alteration in her aunt's entire look and manner.

"Sarah," she said, with a queer sound in her throat, as though her tongue had long been silent, and putting her hands on the arms of her chair, she endeavored to rise to her feet.

"Sit down, Aunt 'Tilda," Sarah said quickly. This was worse than she had expected. "Why, you've been sick, I hear," she went on, coming nearer to the poor woman, whose sunken eyes were lifted eagerly to her niece's face. "Why didn't you let me know?" said the girl jerkily.

Mrs. Malone's thin hand wandered to Sarah's rich gown, and she stroked it with pleasure.

"Why, *Sarah!*" she said, smiling, "I guess there aint anyone better off'n you now, *be* there? Well, well, to think of poor Phil's girl having it all."

"Never mind me, aunt," said Sarah sharply; "where's Aggie, that she leaves you like this? And who's got Mikey?"

"Miss Birds keeps him," said Mrs. Malone anxiously, "and Aggie's got work over to Cranston's Mill. She's only home nights."



“And you are alone?” cried Sarah indignantly. A thought of the luxury she was revelling in over at the Hill House smote the girl’s heart, and, as usual, she acted on a sudden unconsidered impulse.

“I guess *this* won’t last,” the girl exclaimed, her eyes flashing. She flung off her sealskin paletot and the beautiful felt hat, not heeding that they rolled off the untidy bed upon the floor.

“Sarah,” whispered Mrs. Malone, “what you goin’ to do? Look at your elegant clothes on the floor.”

“Oh, *bother!*” retorted Sarah. Suddenly she remembered Mrs. Holmes sitting in state out in the carriage, and regardless of her out-of-door garments she flung herself from the room, running quickly down the path, all her little airs and graces forgotten.

“Say, Mrs. Holmes,” said that lady’s pupil breathlessly, “my aunt’s feeling miserable, and she’s all alone, and I mean she shall go right straight back with us to the Hill House. The carriage is big enough for four, so I guess three can squeeze in.”

And without waiting for any opinion from her companion, Sarah sped back again, explaining her intention to her bewildered but entirely docile aunt.

“Sarah, honey,” said Mrs. Malone, “if I’m a-going up there with you I want to take my own little box—it’s got the few cents I’ve saved up and some bits of old things in it—I don’t want Aggie to get at it all—there it is,” as Sarah, searching about, had come upon an old rosewood box which she remembered since she was a child; “and my best shawl’s right there in the trunk,” she was going on when Sarah interrupted her with:

“Oh, never you mind, Aunt ’Tilda! I want to get you away, and Mrs. Bird ’ll see everything’s took good care



of. "You shan't need much for a new *shawl*, I guess," said the girl, with a laugh.

If she had come in upon her aunt strong and defiant how different would have been her tone. But the sight of her helpless, stricken, enfeebled, such a change from the last time, had turned everything in Sarah's heart to her aunt's favor, and she was now resolving "all that tribe," as she called them collectively, at the Hill House, should see that no one belonging to her could be ill treated or put down. No—it would be part of her triumph to install her aunt, Mrs. Malone, in the best room the house could afford, and Dr. Fraser should be called in at once.

These thoughts flew through Sarah's mind and brain while she dressed her aunt with eager but nervous hands, and then, bidding her stay where she was for a moment, Sarah put on her sealskin and fine hat, and darted around to Mrs. Bird's doorway.

Little Alice, who was minding Mikey, set up a shrill cry of welcome, and the heir of the Malones laughed and crowed in sympathy, although not in the least recognizing the visitor.

"O *Sarah!*" cried Alice, "aint you just *grand!*"

The child hobbled to her feet and stood looking at her old friend in speechless admiration.

Sarah's spirits rose at once. She almost forgot her anxiety about Mrs. Malone in her pride over so dazzling Alice Bird.

"Guess I am, Alice," she said, with the old toss of her head, "and some of these days I'm a-goin' to have you up to my house for a visit—see if I don't. Now, look here, Alice, you be a good girl and mind Mikey for a while and I'll pay you for it. I'm taking Aunt 'Tilda away till she gets a little better. See? And here"—Sarah extracted



a five-dollar note from her little silver purse and put it down carefully under the clock on the chimney-piece—"when your mother comes in," she went on, "you just tell her Sarah Malone—no, I mean Dalton; don't you forget that's my name now—took her aunt away in a great hurry, 'cause she was so sick. You ask your mother just to look after things and let Aggie know when she comes home. There, now. Don't you be a little gump and cry. I aint dead, am I? and I'm goin' to give you all the good time you want bime by," said the excited Sarah, stooping to kiss her little friend, who was crying plaintively. "Shut up now, Alice," she went on; "s'pose *I* tune up and cry too."

And while Alice tried to laugh at such an idea Sarah made good her escape, returning to find Mrs. Malone standing in the middle of the floor very pale and tremulous, but evidently eager to be away.

Sarah gave Mrs. Holmes no chance for enquiry or remonstrance, if indeed the little lady had thought of offering either, for, on reaching the carriage, she said curtly:

"Here, Mrs. Holmes, this is my Aunt 'Tilda, and she's too sick to leave alone, so I'm takin' her right home with me."

There was a little difficulty in getting Mrs. Malone safely into one corner of the luxurious carriage, as she seemed scarcely to understand what was expected of her, but once it was accomplished Sarah turned to Mr. Knapp, directing him to go back to Eastman's.

"For," reflected the girl, "I aint goin' to have those servants making any fun of my aunt's clothes. I guess they'll see *she's* as much of a lady as *I* am, any day!"

And to place the ineradicable hall-mark of gentility upon Mrs. Malone, Sarah once more dazzled Eastman's



with her presence and custom, explaining to her particular friends there that she was taking Mrs. Malone up in such a hurry to the Hill House that there wasn't time to pack a trunk.

"I don't care what I pay," she went on, "if you'll send all the things right over before night. I aint got room in my carriage."

If she had started out bent on relieving the tedium of her life of solitary grandeur Sarah Dalton's object certainly was attained, for what could have been more unexpected than that she should return with Mrs. Malone as a guest, and so ill that it was necessary to get her at once into bed and send for Dr. Fraser?

Mrs. Holmes proved all that was kind and efficient in the emergency, and Sarah was really thankful for her assistance and quiet clear-headedness. The large quiet room which had been occupied by old Miss Dyker was quickly warmed and made ready for the guest, who seemed only anxious to be in bed and in quiet. It did not seem as though she was suffering much actual pain, yet there was a queer hunted look about her eyes, a drawn, pitiful expression about her whole face, which touched Mrs. Holmes' heart inexpressibly, and roused Sarah to the kind of sharpness of tone and manner which was her way of concealing what she really felt.

"So that's your aunt, is it, Miss Sarah?" said the sympathetic Mrs. Keyes, with an ominous shake of her head, "and how nice it is to think as you've brought the poor dear lady to die comfortable up here."

Sarah wheeled about suddenly, a quick light in her eyes.

"Don't you talk about *dying*," she exclaimed, "just yet. I mean my aunt shall have the very best money can give her, and I guess she won't die if *I* can help it."



But Mrs. Keyes was not silenced. Sarah's tone shocked her.

"You'll find that aint all in your hands, my dear," she said solemnly.

As Mrs. Keyes left the room Sarah went slowly up to her aunt's bedside and gazed for an instant in silence at the worn face and closed eyelids. Something—she knew not quite what—told the girl that Mrs. Malone's sickness had a foundation deeper than a mere physical cause. It could not be any pecuniary trouble, since she had seen that the family in Dawson's Block were well enough cared for. What, then, could it be? Sarah rested one of her young hands on the woman's tired-looking brow, and bending down, said quietly:

"Aunt 'Tilda, the doctor's coming to see you in a few minutes, and I guess if I was you I wouldn't talk to him too much. He aint one of that kind. If you've got anything on your mind," she went on, "that's troubling you, why, you can just tell it to me and I'll fix it all straight. You know," she continued, "the doctor is my guardian."

"Where's that young lawyer man?" inquired Mrs. Malone, looking up at her niece with an anxious frown.

"Who—Sandy Mackenzie?" she inquired. "Oh, he's over in Albany. He comes here every little while. Why, what's that to *you?*" she went on.

"Nothing much," said Mrs. Malone slowly, "only," she added, "if anything *was* a-goin' to happen to me there's a little business matter of my own as I wanted seen to—something to do with my burying," she went on hastily, "and I guess he'd do it about as cheap as anybody."

"Now just see *here!*" said Sarah, speaking with all her usual energy, "if you don't stop that talk about dying and



getting buried I'll just leave you to the servants and won't come near you again."

"O Sarah!" said her aunt plaintively, and catching her dress with one nervous hand, "*don't* you take on like that, I didn't mean anything; only it's so foolish for people not to look things straight in the face, and you know I have a few dollars I want to see someone gets that will take care of my little Mikey."

"You leave Mikey to me," said Sarah, smiling; "I guess he won't want for much while I'm alive."

The sick woman's eyes closed wearily again, and Sarah, as she stood over her, could not rid herself of a feeling that her aunt was holding something back. Something there surely was working on her mind, and how was she to break the silence? An instinctive dread of its being some painful disclosure, perhaps against her own interests, made her dread to let Dr. Fraser share her suspicions, and her principal fear was lest Mrs. Mackenzie should bring the search-light of her presence into the room. No, Sarah decided in that moment, until her aunt was stronger, she would see that only those in whom she had perfect trust were about her. Mrs. Holmes, she reflected, would be of the greatest service, since there could be no danger of her discussing family matters with the sick woman, or of Mrs. Malone's talking unguardedly to her.

It was a relief to hear the doctor's quick step upon the stairs, and Sarah felt much of her nervousness disappear on sight of his pleasant, inspiring countenance.

He asked very few questions, but commended Sarah's action in bringing her aunt back with her.

"She is more run down from nervous exhaustion than anything else," said the doctor. "But you have prescribed just the proper remedy. Perfect rest, good care, and a



nourishing diet—I can hardly add to that prescription, for she doesn't need much medicine."

Sarah, to use her own expression, made "short work" of the servants, who naturally were curious about the unexpected guest, and Mrs. Keyes, who was the bearer of all news from her mistress to the kitchen, satisfied them by saying it was a "very queer old aunt of Miss Dalton's who had heaps and heaps of money and wanted to be with her niece when she was dyin'."

Dr. Fraser, on leaving the Hill House, knocked at Mrs. Mackenzie's door to inform her of what had taken place.

"Then there *is* some hope of the girl," exclaimed Mrs. Mackenzie. "I never liked her keeping quite aloof from her own kith and kin. What, I wonder, will Sandy say to this?" she added. "He had a great horror of Mrs. Malone's being with Sarah."

"My dear friend," said the doctor, "let me tell you one thing: whatever Miss Sarah Dalton makes up her mind to do, that will be done if she can compass it, no matter what forty Sandys or fifty guardians chose to say to the contrary. What a fine creature," he added, "the girl might have been with early training! As it is, we can only make the best of a bad business. By the way, how goes the little family in New York—our exiles?"

Mrs. Mackenzie's look of preoccupation was dispelled.

"Dick sent me on a delightful letter from Jean," she answered. "In a little while I mean to run down and see them. I sent them to the right place when I remembered Kate Carrington and her brother. Polly is to go to a public school, and Jean is beginning to draw in Carrington's studio. Dick means to run over and have a look at them next week."

"Ah, me—too bad, too bad!" sighed the doctor. "Still



the girls are young and healthy—but poor Ellen! Can she ever feel content, I wonder, out of her old moorings?”

“Perhaps not; never mind—things might have been infinitely worse,” said Mrs. Mackenzie cheerfully. “Jean is a—trump!” she added.

“Ah, Jean, of course,” said the old doctor, “is what Lois Dyker’s daughter *ought* to be!”

And as he went away down the sunshiny road to his own little dwelling Dr. Fraser glanced back once at the turrets of the Hill House, piercing the clear, springlike morning, and remembered a day when the very sight of the old place had thrilled his young veins, because he knew it was near the season for Lois to have her Easter holidays at home—Lois with her dainty little ways, her soft dark eyes, and the smile that now and then flashed across her daughter’s sweet young face, and made the old man’s heart beat with mixed pain and pleasure.

“Well, well, well!” the doctor kept on saying to himself as he opened his surgery door. “Queer changes, sure enough. I wonder how many more Margaret Mackenzie and I are destined to see. *We* stand aside like a Greek chorus, but are in the plot all the time.”



## XXVII.

“Now, then, Pollikins, don’t look as if you were going to your own funeral!”

Polly laughed, but not very pleasantly, and Jean went on:

“This girl you are going with seems very nice and bright, and I’m sure she’ll look after you the first day all she can——”

“It isn’t *that*,” said Polly, more inclined to weep than anything else. “But from what she told me last night I’m afraid I’ll be in a *very* low class.”

“Then work with a will,” said Jean, “and you’ll get ahead quickly even over the rudiments just because you are older and wiser than the girls you will be with.”

Polly dried her eyes with a long sigh, half of misery, half resolution to be brave, prepared to face what was really the most trying ordeal of her life; for Mary Davidson, Linda’s friend, was waiting downstairs to take her to the public school which she attended.

Mary was in the highest grade and aiming at a college course to fit herself as a teacher, but well did Polly know, from what Linda had been able to tell her, that the place to which she would be assigned would be among the youngest pupils, since, advanced as she might be in languages, and what one may call general information, she was woefully lacking in a knowledge of the actual rudiments.

Only the day before she and Jean had hidden themselves upstairs, while with a slate and pencil they had



endeavored to go through certain examples in arithmetic, and the result had been hopeless confusion, Jean giving up all effort at assistance when it came to proving the sum. It might have been that this demonstration of their own ignorance spurred Jean on to a feeling that Polly must, as soon as possible, get the groundwork of her future established. It was all very well, reflected Jean, to have your own little personal methods of adding up a column of figures which would bring out the sum total satisfactorily in the end, but it was quite another thing to do that of bookkeeping as a business matter, and under the cold glare, perhaps, of an employer's eye, who would never know why you reduced everything to tens in the first place and then added them together with little marginal notes of the units which might be left over! Polly might, as she knew, have to support herself by teaching, and this exceedingly airy manner of doing sums would not be very useful to her pupils.

"I'll tell you what it is, Polly," had been Jean's ultimatum, "you may consider yourself fortunate in being obliged to go right into a public school. You'll be thankful for it all your life long. You see, when I was studying, I was allowed to learn anything and everything, just whatever took my fancy; and now, you see, no doubt Mary Davidson could make me blush in ten minutes for my own ignorance."

Polly, to whom Jean was the ideal of all that was dignified and gentle in young ladyhood, had been greatly encouraged by this, and the first sight of Mary Davidson's pleasant, good-tempered face cheered her still further, although she still had a feeling that she was about to sacrifice her dignity in some mysterious manner by presenting herself at a public school with only her family name to support her through the examination.



"This way," said Mary as they turned up Third Avenue; "it's not a very long walk, and I'll take you to the playground first. If we are in time you will find most of the girls there amusing themselves until the bell rings."

Polly nodded her head and made her mind up that Jean should find out on her return that she had conducted herself in every way "like a Dyker," which was always Jean's summing up of any argument in regard to good behavior.

After all, there was a dash of novelty in the situation which caught Polly's fancy, and Mary Davidson seemed such a universal favorite that her introduction of the new girl proved quite a card in Polly's favor, and in a few moments youth had asserted itself. By that common bond which unites all young people of every class and condition, Polly speedily found herself one of an eager, talkative group, and when the bell rang and the classes formed for chapel exercises, although Mary Davidson was obliged to leave her, she found herself in very congenial company. At the top of the staircase a bright, cheery-faced young lady, who she learned was Miss Nichols, met her and explained that she would sit at one side until the reading and prayers were ended. Polly had by this time become thoroughly interested in all that was going on, and so, while the principal of the school read aloud and a sweet old-fashioned hymn was sung, she sat quietly in the place assigned her, wondering what would come next, and not quite so ashamed of her ignorance as she had been.

But the blow to her pride fell later, swiftly and surely, in the very brief examination to which she was subjected. It was found, tall sixteen-year-old girl as she was, that her place in the ranks of Uncle Sam's scholars was a very humble one. Every advantage of the highest form of education was open to her, but it mattered nothing that she was



Polly Dyker, with the bluest of blood in her veins, the traditions of a long line at her back, and the feeling of one born in the purple in every action and sentiment. She was only a little American girl among hundreds of others, and when, school over, Polly waited for her new friend to say good-by and retrace her steps, the wisest lesson years could have taught her had been learned.

But the delicacy of her bringing up told in the way in which she took this second defeat in life. She offered not the slightest objection or remonstrance to anything said or done, and was only anxious to get back to the shelter of Jean's loving sympathy and encouragement.

"I hope you'll come to see me, Mary," she said to her new friend. "I'll find my way back easily enough now, thank you, and I'd be ever so much obliged if you will look out for me in the playground to-morrow morning."

Mary readily promised, and Polly started on her first walk alone in the great city, feeling as though she had really begun life on her own account. Brief as her experience had been, it already seemed to have put the luxurious ease of the Hill House far away from her, and in her one day's contact with the crowd of other girls she had begun to learn the best lesson that life could teach her: her own unimportance to the world at large unless she made herself worthy of a place among her fellow-beings.



## XXVIII.

A FEW days sufficed to so regulate matters in the little household in Benton Square that Jean found no difficulty in setting her fire going in the sky parlor, making coffee for her family, and starting Polly away to school. But all the time there was the undercurrent of anxiety as to the future. It would be impossible, as she knew, for them to continue long in this desultory fashion. She was anxious that when Dick came on a visit he should find them, so far as possible, in working order, and accordingly, one afternoon about a week later than the day which chronicled Polly's first school attempt, she ventured down to the studio with some sketches of her own, which she had made the day before.

Carrington was alone, whistling gayly over his work, and he turned a very cheerful countenance to her as she entered.

"Now, let me tell you beforehand," said Jean, holding her sketch-book behind her back, "I shall be satisfied if you'll only tell me there's something worth while in this. Please don't scream out in horror, for I'm well aware they are very bad."

She handed him the book and walked deliberately over to the piano, before which, while he inspected it, she sat down, playing a few idle chords in order to distract her own attention.

Carrington turned leaf after leaf, and then at last he looked at her with a quizzical smile.

"Miss Garnier," he said, leaning up against the wall



near the piano, and looking down upon her with a very gentle, kindly expression, "as I told you, I want Baldwin's opinion, and he will be here to-night. Judging by what I see here, you ought to be able to do something—but not very much—in the line of illustrating. If you take my advice you will never aim at anything beyond producing a pleasing effect, and I think if, as you said the other day, your object is only to make money, you may at least be able to pay for your own bread and butter. But remember this can only be done by hard work and putting any ambitious flights out of your mind."

"Then I am entirely satisfied," said Jean gravely, "and next, I want to know how I can learn something about technique."

"Why, for the matter of that," said Carrington carelessly, "you can do it right here in my studio as well as anywhere else, if you will allow me the pleasure of helping you a little. All you need is to draw from life, not from the flat, as we call it. You will never learn anything by merely copying."

He picked up an empty inkstand from the mantle-piece, and laid it on a surface of white paper, saying as he did so:

"That is as good a study as I could give you. It's no consequence what the object you draw from is so long as you have an actual model and draw the thing precisely as you see it. That gives life and reality to your work. Of course I don't mean it would make a pretty or salable picture, but it would be thoroughly sincere."

"I know," exclaimed Jean; "I remember once in traveling making a study of the buttons on a lady's dress opposite me, and I really learned something worth while in doing so."

"That's it!" exclaimed Carrington, "and for just the



same reason you must draw from casts before you attempt anything good in figures. However," he continued, laughing, "I don't want to overwhelm you in the start. This evening Baldwin can give you excellent advice, and, by the way," he added, "in that very connection I remember my sister had something to say to you."

He left the room, and in the few moments which elapsed before his return with Miss Kate Jean was conscious of a decided elevation in her spirits. He had not wholly discouraged her. Moreover, there was something peculiarly sympathetic in the way in which he expressed his interest in her undertaking. It was like the touch of a friendly hand when we have long been among strangers, and Jean reflected that she ought to do her very best to prove worthy of such unlooked-for kindness. It would please Dick, she was quite certain—Dick, who might arrive here now at any moment, and who would certainly not interfere with her plans for making money, since they did not separate her from the other members of her little family.

Miss Kate very soon appeared, following her brother into the studio with her most cheerful and hopeful expression.

"I'm sure, my dear Miss Garnier," she began at once, "you won't object to a very quiet little evening with just Mr. Baldwin and one other friend. You know," she went on, "that in our kind of life we are quite unconventional, and even if they make a little fun and music it won't distress you, will it?"

Jean could only answer that she was quite sure it would be all suited to her own taste, whereupon Miss Kate turned to her brother, inquiring whether he thought Mr. Baldwin would like to make a Welsh rarebit.

"For if so," she said, "I must get out the chafing-dish."



“You see,” laughed Carrington to Jean, “Baldwin’s chief talent lies in the direction of a rarebit, and whenever he comes in we have one. Our evening,” he added, “will be a mingling of music, art, and gastronomy, and this old girl”—laying his hand affectionately on Miss Kate’s shoulder—“is the best little woman in the world, for she never interferes with our own way of doing things, even though I don’t doubt she often has to groan in spirit. The best wife in the world was spoiled for some man when she sacrificed herself to looking out for Linda and me.”

Miss Kate blushed with pleasure, but when she and Jean left the room, the latter to return to her aunt upstairs, Miss Kate said almost wistfully:

“My dear, if I were to work for a lifetime, I never should feel that I did half enough for George. Some of these days I may tell you just a little of what he has been to me. I am so glad,” she continued, “that he seems to have taken a liking to you, for he is very odd about things of that sort. His friends fairly adore him, but he will never make or choose a friend for any worldly motive. Some day,” she concluded, smiling, “I’ll tell you all about it.”



## XXIX.

“ Lord Bateman *was*—a noble lord—  
A noble lord was *he* of high degree,  
And he deter—min—ed—to go abroad,  
To go—strange coun—un—un—tries—for to see.  
He sail—*ed* east—he sail—*ed* west,  
Until he ca—a—hame—to proud Tur—*kee*—”

“MR. BALDWIN! *will* you—*can* you forget Lord Bateman for one moment?”

Linda was the speaker, and, as may well be imagined, Mr. Baldwin's pathetic ditty came to a sudden stand-still—fortunately, indeed, since he and Linda were supposed to be getting the silver chafing-dish in order for the impromptu supper on that, to Jean at least, eventful evening.

The studio had been so far rearranged for the evening that a space in the centre of the large room was cleared, the easels were turned face wallward, and a small tripod stove occupied a dignified position, above which Linda's face was bent anxiously, while Baldwin manœuvred dexterously, Miss Kate hovered near by to hand out the necessary ingredients, and Jean and Polly looked on keenly amused and interested.

Miss Dyker was in a chair of state, undecided as to whether the proceedings were quite befitting ladies and gentlemen, yet something so entirely free from vulgarity was there in the unconventionality of everything said and done that the old lady instinctively felt it was all harmless amusement. Carrington also looked on, but offering superfluous remarks and advice from time to time in which



he refused to be silenced, and during a moment when the "chefs" were completely absorbed he half whispered to Jean: "You see the honest, downright sort of fellow Baldwin is. You may be sure he will tell you the exact truth about your work."

Jean nodded.

"I like him," she said quietly. "There is a look of decision about his mouth and eyes which pleases me." She glanced at the broad-shouldered, not very tall young fellow, whose dark face was, as she had suggested, manly in its strength and indication of fine feeling. He had the look of one who had made a fight for some of the comforts of life, not its refining influences—these he had evidently known always; and there was perceptiveness strongly developed in brow and eyes. In point of fact, Baldwin's opinions were often considered more valuable than his actual work.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," announced the guest suddenly, "behold, the banquet may proceed. Linda, my angel, hast thou the table laid with covers for the all-hungered?"

"I hast," said Linda, with a wave of the fork in her hand, and drawing aside the folding doors leading into the parlor, she displayed a daintily spread supper-table, decorated with a few choice flowers, and laid out with Miss Kate's best silver and china. Added to the rarebit were a salad, and some cold fowl, and a good-sized home-made pie.

"Act II," exclaimed Baldwin. "Now, ladies and gentleman, will you be seated? since the proof of a rarebit is in eating it the moment it leaves the fire. What! ho! there, warder!"

"You do," said Carrington, "but in moderation, for



remember that we are ruled by a lady who regulates those matters after a fashion of her own, but which results in the greatest good for the greatest number."

Even Miss Dyker was roused by the simple fun which pervaded the little party, and when just before they were sitting down the door-bell pealed, and two friends of Car-rington's were welcomed—brothers in art, who readily took in the situation—the old lady seemed really interested by the fact that, as she whispered to Jean, "it was almost like a party." The "shop" talk which went on at once and with eager interest fixed Jean's attention from the start. Criticisms on this and that piece of work were rapidly and graphically exchanged, and presently Car-rington, with his peculiarly pleasant smile, said, turning to Jean:

"Miss Garnier is entering our ranks, Baldwin, and, by the way, my chief anxiety to have you here this evening was that you might give her some advice about black-and-white work."

They had moved back into the studio; Linda and the little maid of all work were busy transforming the parlor into its original purpose again, and Jean found herself on a low sofa by Baldwin, who had her sketch-book in his hands.

He looked—peered down—held the pages up—nodded his head or shook it occasionally, but for a few moments said nothing. Then he turned to her suddenly, observing:

"You say you've never studied under a master?"

"No—that is, at one time I took drawing lessons, but they amounted to nothing. I merely copied pretty landscapes and flowers. This"—touching the book—"I have done at random—just as the objects struck me as worth putting down."



"So much the better. Bad as some of the drawing is, it at least shows decided ability and what we call *chic*—you just escape being an excellent caricaturist."

"I am glad of that," said Jean, with a curl of her lip. "I despise extravagance of the kind in art."

"It's not so bad if it doesn't go too far," said Baldwin. "But anyway you can at least turn your ability of that kind to good use in portraying character. You would like, I believe, to illustrate?"

Jean, hanging on every word he uttered, nodded her head.

"Well, see here—now suppose you just begin work in a slapdash fashion, here in Carrington's studio. Make a few sketches, compose your little picture, then let me show them to a firm I know down-town. Meanwhile grind away at it. Do it from the real things and people"—he waved his thumb about. "For instance, see that group at the piano? By Jove, that's good! There is Linda sitting there in that brown-and-yellow gown of hers—see how nicely her head comes in—and there is your aunt, a picture in herself, looking up from an easy-chair with a smile; it's as though she was saying she'd like to hear a song of her youth. See? Isn't that a good subject?"

"Delightful!" exclaimed Jean, while Baldwin stood up to rummage on the table for a pencil, with which he presently began to make a few rapid strokes on a leaf of Jean's sketch-book. "Pretty, isn't it?" he went on, drawing rapidly, until suddenly his unconscious model rose and he exclaimed:

"O Linda! you've spoiled a work of art."

But Jean had caught his meaning and quite understood what he meant that she should do, and felt only anxious to discuss it anew with Carrington.



“Mr. Baldwin has given me a wonderful lamp,” she said, smiling, as George, in obedience to a look from her sweet dark eyes, drew near. “And it only rests with you, Mr. Carrington, whether you will let me test its powers in your studio.”

Carrington smiled.

“I am at your service,” he said quietly. “Will you put on a big apron and come down to-morrow morning? I shall be working from a very good model—the airy fairy Burton, Baldwin—and you can sketch away to your heart’s content.”

Jean felt so encouraged that it was an easy matter to accede to the general request that she should sing for them; but her voice nearly failed her as she tried one of the old French ballads the Colonel had called his favorites, and she was better pleased to play an accompaniment for Linda, whose voice, if a trifle too tragic just at present, was really very fine—rich and full of feeling, with the cadence of a perfect contralto. Jean could not help understanding why the girl “aspired” to use such a voice in public, and yet she was equally certain that Carrington’s decisions must be right. He could only have good motives for anything of the kind, and she wondered why Linda did not turn her attention to church music. A voice such as hers could not but be deeply impressive in sacred music, and she decided to discuss the question with him at her earliest opportunity.

Certainly the evening was not only delightfully entertaining, but it spurred Jean on in the direction she longed to take, and little as Carrington had said, she knew he had considered every opinion, and was in earnest about her working the next day in the studio.

“The ‘airy fairy,’ as we call her, will make you laugh,”



said Linda when their guests had departed and she was bidding Jean good-night. "She has been a model all her life, and the boys have the greatest amount of fun out of her. She imagines her criticisms are invaluable, and passes them on everything perfectly seriously. She never sees they are chaffing her. You should hear her tell how, when she was posing for M.'s picture of 'Hamlet and the Queen,' he told her he couldn't imagine why the critics found fault with his subjects, and she goes on to say: "Well, Mr. M.," says I, "I never find nothink wrong with your work," and M. says to me, just a-squeezin' my hand: "That's so, Burton, and it's what keeps me up, girl." "

Jean laughed quite as much at Linda's clever assumption of Miss Burton's cockney accent as anything in the story, and Linda continued:

"You know, these professional models are a class by themselves and wonderfully good-hearted. No one knows how kind little Burton has been to many a struggling one of the boys. She's been nurse and doctor and banker for many a one, I assure you, and the poor girl is dragging out a hopeless engagement with a young fellow, who, I'm afraid, is dying of consumption. Her only extravagance is in a very radiant out-of-door costume which she wears on occasion. 'My Billy,' as she always calls her fiancé, evidently adores her, but, poor fellow, there is little chance but the grave as an ending to their story. Dear me, what a network life is," said Linda, with a deep sigh. "I'm ages older than you, Miss Jean," she went on, "in experience, although I am only nineteen. Well, good-night and good luck to-morrow."



### XXX.

JEAN was awake bright and early the next morning, having various matters on her mind which needed prompt attention. To begin with, there was the helping Polly on her really penitential journey, for only she and Jean understood how she dreaded beginning public-school life in earnest, and then there was the morning's meal to prepare, which, simple as it was, cost the girls real anxiety.

"Now the *fire's* all right!" said Jean, regarding the little stove with a cautious expression, "and now, Polly, with this French coffeepot we only need boiling water. I'm sure it's simple enough. Where's the coffee?" Polly made a dive for the cupboard, in which they had stored a few provisions for breakfast. "And now, while I am making the coffee, will you run down and see if the baker left our rolls with Miss Kate's? I asked him to do so."

Polly, who quite enjoyed this "housekeeping made easy," as Jean had called it, flew off on the errand, and presently a fine aroma of Jean's coffee was perceptible, and she made haste to set out their little table as daintily as possible, having determined that there should be no untidiness to mar good appetite in their little household. It really looked very cosey and inviting when Polly returned with a plate of fresh rolls; and when the eggs were boiled and breakfast announced as ready, the girls sat down with a fine spirit of self-satisfaction to enjoy their little meal together and discuss the plans of the day ahead. Miss Dyker was still sleeping, and Jean meant to take her break-



fast to her on a little tray when she awoke. Now Polly had to be given her undivided attention.

“Keep up bravely, dearest,” was Jean’s parting injunction. “And when you come home we’ll go down to the library near by, which Miss Kate told us about, and draw some nice books to read this evening. Remember I expect you very soon to keep our account-books!”

Polly tried to laugh, but she went away, poor little dethroned princess, with rather a heavy heart if the truth were known. But Mary Davidson was on the watch for her and introduced her to her own particular friends—Annie Graham, Amelia Flicker, and Elsa Braun—every one of whom accorded the stranger a cordial greeting in downright schoolgirl fashion, and, as Polly felt at once, without the slightest regard as to whether she was a Smith or a Dyker. She was a new girl, tall and bright and wonderfully pretty, and the band of friends decided to take her in cordially, at least on trial, even though, as she now knew, her actual place in school was among the younger children. Babies, she called them, almost tearfully, to herself when she was introduced to the primary department.

Meanwhile Jean at home was trying to make Miss Dyker as comfortable as possible, feeling eager to get down to the studio and try her ’prentice hand under Carrington’s kindly guidance. She had determined to make an effort to be patient and not let her anxiety interfere with learning the rudiments of art, which she was well aware she sorely needed, since that faculty for *chic* she was sure had been almost an injury to her work. Certainly it would not advance her much in making practical use of her ability. She had not the desirable big apron, but she presented herself at the studio door, and Carrington’s quick



"Come in" was followed by his opening the door himself and welcoming her cordially.

"The airy fairy one has not come yet," he observed, "but it is just as well, for you will have the fun of seeing her make her entrance."

And indeed he had scarcely finished speaking before the door-bell rang, there was a quick rustle of drapery along the hall, and first a small face under a very large hat appeared around the door, the figure of the wearer coming gradually into view, while Miss Burton exclaimed in a shrill but not really unpleasant voice:

"Wish you the time of day, old man; I hope you feel full of good work to-day."

She drew back on seeing Jean, whom she regarded for an instant as a possible rival, but Carrington made haste to say, looking very gravely in Jean's direction:

"Miss Dyker, allow me to introduce Miss Burton. Miss Burton," he continued, "Miss Dyker, I am happy to say, is going to work for a little while in my studio. She and her aunt are visiting us at present."

Miss Burton nodded her head in a very friendly and approving manner.

"You've struck a good thing, Miss Dyker, then," she observed generously, "for I'll tell you what it is, to be Mr. Carrington's pupil is worth something."

"Good little Burton," said Carrington approvingly, and patting her on the shoulder; "you always stand by us, don't you?"

Miss Burton nodded her head and proceeded to lay aside her hat and jacket, after which she inquired what they were going to do.

Carrington had been occupying himself in placing a new stretcher on his easel and in preparing one for



Jean on a smaller stand near by, and he now requested Miss Burton to take her place in a high-back easy-chair against a screen over which he had flung a piece of pale blue drapery. Jean watched with interest his arrangement of the girl's pose, and her easy adaptation. He adjusted her head at the proper angle, lifted one hand so that it rested idly at the back of her neck, and then placed an open sheet of music in her other hand.

"Now, then," said Carrington in a very businesslike manner, "you are singing from that music, do you see? Open your mouth a little—oh, come on, Burton! I *didn't* say you were yawning."

Miss Burton received the suggestion with perfect equanimity, and at last got her lips into the proper position, while Jean could not but admire the thoroughly businesslike spirit with which she entered into her work, and began to think that, after all, the girl had more to do with the artist's picture than they gave her credit for. It made her think of one of Mrs. Mackenzie's favorite maxims, that the secret of success lies in doing whatever you undertake thoroughly well, no matter how humble the grade of work may be.

"Now, then, Miss Dyker," said Carrington, "just go ahead and don't try to do anything fine, but make the best you can out of just what you see before you. Keep your mind and eye fixed on just reproducing the impression they receive of the girl in the chair. Of course," he continued, "this is only to give you a start, because you'll have to do some hard work, I fancy, from casts before your hand is free enough."

The work began in earnest, and with the exception of an occasional bit of melody softly whistled by Carrington half under his breath, scarcely a sound disturbed the quiet





THE ARTIST'S STUDIO.







of the studio. Miss Burton's eyes after a time wandered to the clock, and Carrington, looking in the same direction, said, "All right, you can take five minutes," and when the girl sprang to her feet he walked over to Jean's side and deliberately inspected her work.

"Well, you see," he observed, "Baldwin was right; this is just what you need, and I'm not a bit afraid but that we'll make something of you yet."

He sat down near her and with his own pencil began to put in touches here and there which astonished Jean in that they suddenly revealed what her sketch had needed and gave it a finished air. He talked on a few moments, indicating her faults, criticising and suggesting, then exclaiming, "Now, my dear, get back to work again," sent Miss Burton to her high-back chair, piece of music, and graceful pose.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when Jean remembered that there were other things to be thought of than the work in which she was now enthusiastically engaged, and she rose, reminding Carrington that she had her aunt to consider, "and," she added, smiling, "you know I am housekeeper upstairs as well."

"All right," said Carrington, "and by and by if you can come down again, Miss Jean; we'll talk this matter over, and I hope you feel," he added, "as encouraged as I do."

"I shall try to," said Jean, "and anyway I shall never forget how much your kindness has done for me."

Once upstairs again, however, there was little chance of a return to the studio, since Miss Dyker was in a most forlorn frame of mind, and was only to be comforted by Jean's taking lunch with her and sitting down for a little hopeful talk. Then Polly came in, breathless and ex-



cited, not wishing to wait even until Jean could do more than put on her out-of-door garments. She had the address of the nearest public library all written down, and had discovered that the only thing necessary to obtain books would be the use of Miss Kate and Carrington's names.

"Do hurry up, Jean dear," she urged, "for it begins to look like rain, and I'm so anxious to get there to-day."

They paused for one moment at the studio door, that Jean might explain her errand, and to ask whether Miss Kate would take the trouble to pay a little friendly visit to Miss Dyker in their absence.

Carrington, who was looking very grave and preoccupied, reassured them on this point, as well as giving them the permission desired to use him as a reference, and a moment later they were out on the busy avenue, and following the directions given, walked quickly down, turning out into lower Second Avenue.



## XXXI.

THE girls had little difficulty either in finding the Ottendorfer or, once within its heavy doorway, making their way to the main reading room, and after a short delay had their slips made out, their references put on file, etc. This formality gone through with, they found themselves free to choose from what appeared to be an inexhaustible store.

Polly, loyal to her first love, insisted upon something of Miss Alcott's, and Jean selected, by Carrington's advice, an enchanting book, the title of which belied its lighter charm. "The Intellectual Life," by Hamerton, was her choice, and when Polly made a wry face over a book with such a name Jean made haste to explain what Mr. Carrington had said about it.

"And we'll read it aloud, Polly," she continued, "so that, if you don't like it, it will be easy enough for you to say so."

Jean was standing with her cousin near one of the tables as she spoke, and in the same instant a very curious thing occurred. She raised her eyes and unexpectedly confronted another pair in a face so strangely like her own that she started in amazement.

The owner of the face was a young girl standing directly opposite her, and who, it was clearly evident, was quite as much astonished as herself. There were the same characteristics of coloring, almost the same outline of feature, and what made the resemblance the more striking was that certain tricks of expression natural to Jean



were mirrored, as it were, in the face of the girl before her.

It was impossible for them not to betray their mutual recognition at least of this fact, and Polly, who was looking on, exclaimed in a low tone of voice as the young stranger, with a peculiar smile, walked away:

“Why, *Jean*, did you know you had a twin sister?”

“Did you ever see anything like it?” answered Jean in an awe-struck tone of voice; “and look, Polly,” she continued, “I believe she is trying to find out who we are.”

The young girl was holding a whispered consultation with the lady at the desk, a half glance over her shoulder evidently indicating the subject of her remarks. She lingered a moment or two and then walked slowly, reluctantly away, turning at the door for one more look back in the direction of her unknown double.

“I never saw anything like it,” declared Polly. “Why, Jean, except that she is younger, and has not exactly your way of walking, she might be your very self. I wonder if we could not find out who she is.”

“I’ve half a mind,” said Jean, “to speak to the lady at the desk about it. Yes, I will,” she went on. “She can’t think it impertinent when it’s such a queer coincidence.”

The lady did not seem at all surprised when Jean made the enquiry, but laughed good-humoredly as she said it was precisely what the other girl had done.

“I must say,” she continued, “I never saw anything more striking in the way of a resemblance before, and to think that you are perfect strangers to each other. She comes here very often,” the lady went on, “and I’m sure there can’t be any harm in giving you her name.”

She lifted up a little card at her side and read it off:

“‘Edith Morris, No. — Fourth Avenue.’ She asked



your name," the lady went on, "because she said it fairly startled her to see anyone so like herself."

"Well, if she comes again, will you please tell her that I did the same thing? and I trust she won't consider it an impertinence," said Jean, with a smile.

"Oh, not at all," said the lady; "she's one of the nicest young girls who come here. She and several of her young friends are very much interested in looking up references, and I've got so used to them now I know just the kind of books they want. Her mother has a fancy store on Fourth Avenue, and I believe this young girl is her only child."

Jean thanked the lady very politely for her information, and as she and Polly left the building they talked eagerly over what had occurred.

"Suppose we walk up past the place, Polly," suggested Jean; "I think the rain will hold off a little longer."

It was decidedly an adventure, both girls felt—something they could amuse Miss Dyker with on their return, and accordingly they made their way into Fourth Avenue and toward the number which the librarian had given them. Then they stood still a moment, looking with interest at the house where Jean's double lived.

It was on a corner, a modest, unpretending three-story brick dwelling, the ground floor of which was occupied by a small store with one large window, in which a variety of articles in fancy-work and the usual implements connected with them were displayed, some samples of lace and fine embroidery having a place among them. The name

"C. MORRIS"

in gilt lettering showed that it was indeed the home of the young girl whom they had seen.



"Can't we make an excuse, Jean?" whispered Polly. "You want worsted needles or something, don't you? Let us just go in, and perhaps we'll see her again."

Jean's curiosity was quite as well aroused as her cousin's, and in a moment more the girls were inside the little shop door, while through an open doorway at the back they saw the object of their interest talking to a tall, dark-haired lady, who turned quickly and came forward to attend to her customers.

She gave the same start on seeing Jean that her daughter had done, but was evidently only in a hurry to get rid of her customers, answering their questions almost sharply, so that Jean found it impossible to speak on any subject but the business in hand. The young girl still hovered in the distance, and Polly fancied that she would have come forward but for a warning gesture from her mother, who was evidently more annoyed than amused by what had taken place. It was clearly impossible to do more than wait for her change and walk out again, but Jean determined that, sooner or later, she would try to find out something more of a girl who might easily pass for herself anywhere. It was hardly comfortable, she reflected, to think of there being another human being on earth so exactly like yourself, and she found herself wondering what Carrington's opinion on the subject would be.

Meanwhile Edith Morris had darted out into the store, exclaiming:

"Mother, I do believe they just came here to have another look at me. I wonder who on earth they can be."

Mrs. Morris' face clouded. "Well, you said you had the name, Edith," she answered.

"Oh, yes, I wrote it down. Here it is."

And she took from her book a slip of paper on which



she had written down the two names: "Jean Dyker, Mary Dyker."

"And see, here are their references: 'Mr. George Carrington, 15 Benton Square; Miss Kate Carrington, 15 Benton Square.' Oh, how I wish I could find out more about them."

"Oh, it's nothing but an accident," said Mrs. Morris carelessly; but she dared not let her daughter see how much the "accident" had troubled her.

"Did you ever know anyone named Dyker, mother?" continued the girl.

Mrs. Morris caught her breath quickly.

"I think I've heard the name," she said in a low tone of voice.

"Now, Edith, dear," she continued, "like a good girl go out and see whether the fire is all right for supper. You know we will have Harry Perry and his uncle here without fail this evening."

Edith departed to attend to the domestic part of the house, which was a charge very dear to her heart, and Mrs. Morris, left alone, sank down into a chair behind her counter, leaning her head on her hands, remaining lost in thought for the next five minutes.

Was all the sweet security, the peaceful, happy companionship of the last few years, to be broken into and hopelessly disturbed? What could she do, she asked herself, if these people were to hunt her up, perhaps even to take her child from her? Her mind went back, with a swiftness born of its deep anxiety, recalling every incident of an experience many years ago—of a promise she had made and faithfully kept—of struggles she had endured with poverty and anxiety; and through all had she not done her duty in every particular by the girl who was at once the pride and comfort of her life?



“No, no,” exclaimed Mrs. Morris, rising suddenly, and speaking almost aloud in her excitement; “I have the right on my side; my claim is the first and a just one.”

Where she stood she could hear Edith humming lightly the air of a popular ballad while she busied herself over preparations for their evening meal. They were expecting company. An old gentleman, who had once been her tenant, and his nephew were expected, as well as an elderly maiden lady, Miss Rose, who lived near by and was pleased and flattered by an occasional invitation to tea, Mrs. Morris doing the honors on such an occasion with genuine hospitality. Edith half expected a friend of hers, a girl of about her own age, so that altogether, as Mrs. Morris well knew, there was no time for her to sit still indulging in reminiscences of the past and exciting dread of the future. With whom, she wondered, could she—dared she take counsel? She had lived so long dependent on herself in almost every way, capable of meeting all the ordinary emergencies of life, that she found herself confused and perplexed by this question, but at last resolved that she would say something on the subject to her old friend Mr. Perry, and consult by letter, if he advised it, her brother-in-law, Charles Morris, who was a Boston lawyer.

In some way the poor woman felt, as she rose to attend to a customer who appeared at the moment, as though she had all along expected just such an hour as this, and yet she felt herself totally unprepared to meet it. More than that, what would Edith say were she to know the whole story of the past? She would not love her less, Mrs. Morris hoped, while she mechanically matched a sample of wool for her customer and answered some casual remark about the weather, for there had been the closest kind of a bond always between the two. Since the days when Mrs.



Morris had brought the child by tenderest care through one infantile sickness after another up to the present moment there had never been lacking one hour of gentlest consideration on her part for everything that could be for Edith's good. And what was best of all, the girl deserved and appreciated it. While she yielded to her mother's advice, and was keeping on for this year at least her school work, she was only anxious to relieve Mrs. Morris of some of the burden of her daily life, and already had assumed charge of the housekeeping matters, which she controlled well, thoroughly enjoying the work.

Humble though it might be, it was as happy a little home as could be found in the great city. The two who shared it had no wide ambitions, though Edith was very fond of planning a future in which there should be more money to spend on the luxuries of life, some chance to travel about and see the world. She was old enough to be anxious to assert that kind of independence which would enable her to be her mother's adviser as well as companion, but so far there had come no breaks between them, either in complete mutual confidence or action. Edith would graduate at the normal school this year, soon after her nineteenth birthday, and then, as Mrs. Morris realized, life would begin in earnest for the girl.



## XXXII.

No cosier home in all New York, Edith was fond of saying, could be found than theirs, and fond as the girl was of study, she enjoyed housekeeping beyond everything else, taking a keen pride in having every detail perfect, yet never wearying others by her over-particularity; and to entertain a few friends in a simple, homelike, and refined way gave the girl as much pleasure as some of her schoolmates derived from the balls which they attended, and against which Edith's mother had resolutely and wisely set her face.

"Ask your young friends here whenever we can entertain them," Mrs. Morris would say; "let them know that if they know you they must know your mother, and if a suitable party is made up for any good amusement outside you can share in it—but no child of mine shall be seen on the floor of a public ballroom."

And Edith willingly gave in to her mother's opinion, especially when their valued friend old Mr. Perry endorsed it in the most emphatic manner; and Harry, young as he was, would declare: "Edith Morris has to be met at home if you want *her* acquaintance," recognizing it as a privilege to be allowed an evening now and then in the young girl's company.

During that rainy, chilly afternoon, while Edith hummed gayly over her work in the rooms upstairs which Mrs. Morris reserved for their own use, her mother found it hard enough to drive all anxiety from her mind, and at



last, when the afternoon had drawn to a close, decided that, whatever Mr. Perry advised, she would at least communicate with her brother-in-law, Charles Morris, whom she had only seen once in her life, but whom she well knew to be a man of sound judgment, good common-sense, and well versed in the intricacies of legal lore. He had not interfered with any of his sister-in-law's affairs, chiefly because she had never asked his advice. His brother's marriage had not entirely pleased him. He was an elderly bachelor of fastidious, reserved tastes and habits, and satisfied that his brother's widow and the child were not in any want, he preferred not keeping up a close correspondence which might create social demands. It would be tiresome, he reflected, to have a "rattling New York girl," as he presumed Edith might be, quartered on him for a visit from time to time; and he felt a trifle ashamed of the fact that such near relations—his very nearest—earned their living in trade. He understood—and approved—of Edith's intention to be a school-teacher; that quite fitted in with his New England ideas of what was a suitable and dignified way of earning her living; and decided that, as soon as she was definitely started upon this honorable career, he would extend some invitation for her holidays, provided she turned out to be creditable in appearance. Mrs. Morris said very little, but she thoroughly understood her brother-in-law's motives in keeping them at a distance, and while she did not exactly resent it, it spurred her on to make of Edith all that the most exacting of Boston uncles could require. What a triumph it would be to her when she could present the sweet, ladylike, well-educated girl to him as his niece, the product of good home training, and Edith's innate refinement and gentle character. No doubt he would ascribe it largely to her inheritance as a Morris;



but, at all events, he would know that her home associations were of her mother's making.

Now, however, Mrs. Morris felt that an emergency had arisen which made it an imperative duty to consult her husband's brother. Just what she would write she could not decide until she had taken counsel on some points with old Mr. Perry. He was wise and kind, loved Edith dearly, and was the only human being in New York who knew anything of Mrs. Morris' early life.

"Now, then, mamma," exclaimed Edith, rushing into the store about half-past five, "won't you go and dress yourself for the evening? We might as well close a little early. No one will come looking for fancy-work such a night as this. The Perrys and little Elsa Braun are sure to be here early."

Edith's own simple toilet was made: a gown of dark blue, with trimming of silk cord and tiny gilt buttons. There was no chance for extravagance in Edith's dress at any time, but it was always in quiet good taste, while her lovely, youthful bloom, perhaps not to be called downright beauty, but infinitely more attractive from her innocence, freshness of color, the sparkle of her soft dark eyes and sweetness of expression, than mere regularity of feature, set off her simple costume in a way which many a jaded society belle could have envied.

Mrs. Morris was glad to accept Edith's suggestion. She went away slowly, glancing in at the kitchen, where Edith had everything in readiness for the simple supper, and then, going upstairs, she surveyed the little front parlor with its attractive look of home, its refined simplicity, much of which was due to Edith's good taste, as well as her mother's objection to merely cheap display.

The floor was stained and polished, covered only by three



rugs of good dark colors, the furniture was solid and old-fashioned, the draperies a pretty well-lined chintz, while Edith's piano and violin case suggested the girl's real talent, as well as the many pleasant evenings which had been spent in the little room. A small bookcase was well filled with good reading, the centre table held a pretty drop-light, some magazines, and Edith's work-basket, while the grate fire leaped and burned cheerily, diffusing a glow over the various objects in the room, as well as suggesting a cosy corner on this rainy, windy night. What should they do, thought Mrs. Morris, if the clouds she began to feel on their horizon were to gather, to darken, and to burst? And then, as with half-tremulous fingers she made her own toilet, Mrs. Morris asked herself had she done right either in shrinking from or perhaps postponing a duty.

"Mother," called Edith's voice from below, "can't I tell Sammy to close up the store?" And Mrs. Morris roused herself to answer "Yes" out of a veil of thought.

Edith was only too eager to bid Sammy, a youth of tender years engaged for errands and chores by the day, to close the store; and having covered everything for the night, she locked the door of communication out into their narrow hallway.

"Now, then," the young girl exclaimed, "if we don't have a pleasant evening, mother, it won't be our fault. What's the matter?" She wheeled around suddenly, and taking hold of her mother's hands, looked her critically in the face.

"I declare, mother," she exclaimed, "I believe you're going to get a chill or something."

Mrs. Morris roused herself quickly.

"Indeed I am not," she answered; "I'm going to enjoy



myself greatly, as I mean you to do. I want a little quiet talk," she added, "with Mr. Perry on a business matter, so you won't mind, my dear, when you and Harry and Elsa are amusing yourselves with the music if we seem a little bit rude in whispering together."

Edith promptly kissed her mother and answered:

"I'll make a bargain with you, then, mamma, dear: if Harry and I get too much interested in our music *you* won't call us to order, and you and Mr. Perry may hobnob to your hearts' content."

Fifteen minutes later a quick, sharp ring at the bell announced their guests' arrival. There was the sound of stamping of feet as old Mr. Perry removed his overshoes in the hall and talked in quite a loud voice to Harry at the same time. Then there was Elsa's shrill, gay little voice calling out, "Edith, are you there?" and in a few moments the invited guests were in the parlor.

Mr. Perry the elder was a tall, thin, dark-complexioned man, with a face at once shrewd and kindly, and something in his look and manner which inspired confidence. His nephew, the Harry of whom Edith had spoken so many times, was a tall, well-built young fellow, with a fair, handsome face, decidedly German in its blending of strength and sweetness, the eyes blue-gray under well-marked full brows, indicating his musical ability, and his blond type suggesting the finer qualities of his Teuton race. The young man had the frank heartiness of manner which no period of absence from the Fatherland can destroy in the German nature. There was a look of good comradeship in his expression, the touch of the same in his hearty grasp of the hand, and it was easy to understand why both he and his uncle were welcome guests.

Harry made himself at home at once, and Edith made



haste to show him her violin, the G string of which she was afraid was slightly out of order. In a moment the young people were busy producing those heartrending sounds which are the necessary prelude to any performance on that sweetest of all instruments, and while this was going on Mrs. Morris took the opportunity to say to Mr. Perry that she wished to consult him on a business matter.

“*Certainly,*” he responded at once; “you know, my dear madam, how happy I am at any time to be of service to you.”

“Well, then,” said Mrs. Morris quickly, “after a little while we will have a chance to talk it over. I need advice—the very best advice—at once, and I know of no one more competent to give it to me than yourself. However, this is just between ourselves for the present.”

There was a knock at the door, and this time Miss Andrews, a music teacher who occupied a room in the house, appeared, well pleased with the impromptu invitation which had been afforded her, and a moment later a cheerful hum of conversation was going on, Miss Andrews and Harry having their music under eager, amiable discussion.

Few pleasanter evenings had been spent than this in Mrs. Morris’ hospitable parlor, so far as all the guests were concerned. Miss Andrews was an admirable accompanist and delighted in playing, while Edith and Elsa and Harry Perry made up a trio with their violins, Harry’s eye sharply upon the young girl, whose musical education he considered incomplete without his occasional advice and supervision, and he had all the inspiration of his nationality in the way he used his bow and fingers.

“What next?” said Edith suddenly after they had concluded quite a dashing tarantelle.



Harry smiled back at her and said quietly:

“Suppose we try the old cavatina—Raff’s.”

Edith nodded—they waited for a moment for the inevitable tuning up. Miss Andrews patiently struck the A on the keyboard before her over and over again, until at last young Perry said “All right,” and having found her accompaniment in the book Edith gave her, that sweetest, simplest, most harmonious of Raff’s compositions was begun. As Edith played all thought beyond or apart from her music was forgotten. The slow, sweet melody, the gradual movement toward the minor, seemed to carry her with it away from every small vexation or hindrance in daily life. Many times had the girl asked herself whence had come this instinct, which she dared not call genius, for musical life and utterance. So far as she knew there was none of it in her mother’s family, but that it was hers by birth-right she felt almost positive. Fond as she was of everything connected with home and household life, yet her moments of positive enthusiasm were when she expressed her feelings in music of some kind, whether listening to it or performing. Now she almost forgot her surroundings in the rendering of this bit of perfect harmony, and laid her violin down with a quick-drawn sigh, as though coming back from the realms of enchantment to an everyday prosaic world.

“Well done, Edith!” exclaimed Harry; “you never played better. What do you think of that, Mrs. Morris?” he added, turning suddenly to their hostess. Mrs. Morris started. She had been confiding, so far as she dared, in Mr. Perry, and his advice had been finally summed up in a few words: she must write at once to her brother-in-law. She had told him that she feared she had kept Edith too long to herself; there were relatives, rich people, whom



she had hesitated to make known to the child, lest it break the perfect bond between them; but now certain events had made it seem imperative to her to make known an important fact. While Edith and Harry, with little Miss Anderson, were absorbed in their music, Elsa occupied with a game Edith had given her, Mrs. Morris summoned up all her courage, and holding out her hand, said:

“Mr. Perry, I am placed in a terrible position. I have heard something which makes me feel that I may have to break the silence of years. I need counsel at once. May I confide in you and ask your advice, relying upon your saying nothing without my permission?”

The old man smiled and gave her his hand.

“For how many years,” he said, “have you not known me as a trustworthy friend? You may be very sure I will betray no confidence and give you the very best of my advice.”

“Then it is this,” said Mrs. Morris hurriedly, her face flushing and paling as she spoke: “Edith is not my own child; when she was a week old her mother died in my arms. Her husband had deserted her. Her one prayer was that I should take the little girl and never let her own people know of its existence. I had lost my own baby six months before. I was alone in the world—I did not need to give an account of myself to anyone. My husband’s brother did not even know that I had lost my child, so you see it was an easy matter for me to adopt the poor young creature’s little girl. And now, from what I hear, I am afraid I have done wrong in keeping knowledge of all this from Edith. Yet,” continued Mrs. Morris eagerly, “I would rather never see a cent of any money from anyone belonging to her and work my fingers to the bone sooner than part with her.”



Mr. Perry listened, fairly overwhelmed by what Mrs. Morris had revealed to him. What could he say or do? The question seemed too important to be decided there in the little homelike parlor, which he had so long considered the hospitable resting-place of Mrs. Morris and her daughter; it confused all his ideas, and Mr. Perry started to his feet and gazed down upon Mrs. Morris with an expression half bewilderment, half dismay.

"This is most extraordinary," he exclaimed in a low tone; "you are sure—but of course you must be—of what you are saying, and"—he reseated himself and bent forward, continuing in a half whisper—"do you know, then, where Edith's relations are?"

"I know only this," said Mrs. Morris hurriedly: "Her parents ran away and were married privately. The husband deserted his wife—the child was born in my house and left absolutely to my care. On her death-bed Edith's mother begged of me to keep the little girl as my own, give her my name, and never let her know anything of her father. You can see for yourself that I have certainly done my duty by my child."

"Ah," said the old man, drawing a deep breath, "that anyone can see. She is a credit in every way to you."

"And so," Mrs. Morris continued hurriedly, "I did everything for her and by her as though she were my own. No one knows how I have struggled and even deprived myself in order to fit her for any position in life which she may be called upon to fill. And what shall I do if they take her from me?"

The old man's brows drew together in anxious thought.

"Have you no one else to consult?" he enquired. "Where is your late husband's brother, who was, I believe, a very clever lawyer?"



“He is in Boston, and I mean to write to him to-night.”

“The wisest thing you could do,” exclaimed the old man. “Now, my friend,” he added, smiling, “do not look so miserable and unhappy. Cheer up; let us see what our young people are about.”

And nodding his head sagely, Mr. Perry turned with his genial smile toward the trio at the piano, exclaiming loudly:

“Come, come; can you not give us something a little less melancholy? Come, Harry and Edith, how long is it since you have sung ‘Madele, ruck, ruck, ruck’—or ‘Sonnenschein’?”

Edith laughed gayly.

“Then, Mr. Perry,” she exclaimed, “if we sing ‘Sonnenschein’ you must join with us. Miss Andrews knows it, too; don’t you?” she continued.

And in a few moments a chorus of Schumann’s exquisite song to the sunshine filled the little parlor with its perfect melody, Mr. Perry’s somewhat defiant bass not overpowering the sweet clear notes of the younger voices, while Mrs. Morris sat listening and wondering, hoping and fearing. Was this to be one of the last of the tranquilly happy evenings of her life? Hardest of all to consider, what would Edith say when she knew the whole story?

The young people thoroughly enjoyed themselves; the little supper was a success, and Edith beamed with pleasure when her good cooking was praised by their guests; yet she could not rid herself of a feeling that her mother was not at her ease—or could it be that she was ill? They had no secrets in their daily intercourse from each other, these two; and directly they were alone Edith put her arms about Mrs. Morris’ neck, and said almost tearfully:



“Mother, *dear*, what is it? Have you any trouble on your mind that you hesitate to tell me? What am I worth if I have lost your confidence?”

Tears sprang into the widow’s eyes.

“My darling,” she said tenderly, “it is only this: Certain events lately have made it seem right—that I should consult Mr. Charles Morris, in Boston, and you can fancy how it makes me feel, knowing that he has always looked down upon us.”

Edith’s eyes flashed.

“I know, mother, dear,” she exclaimed; “and is it necessary now?”

“Yes, Mr. Perry advised it strongly. Edith,” she added suddenly, and gazing down into the face of the young girl, who was kneeling beside her chair, “will you trust me for a few days without questioning me? Then I promise you shall be my first confidant. No matter what Charles says or does I will tell you everything.”

“Trust you, mother,” said the girl slowly, and with a note of irrepressible sadness in her voice; “why, of course you know I will. What else *can* I do.”

“Ah, my darling,” Mrs. Morris exclaimed tenderly, “when I tell you of this business matter you will thoroughly appreciate my reticence. Edith, you will be the first one to do so.”

“There is nothing else for me to do, then,” said Edith, rising to her feet. She stood still for a moment irresolute, then, bending down, tenderly kissed her mother good-night. It was the first hint of anything like concealment from each other, and when the girl had gone into her own room near by she sat down in the dark window trying to piece out what was a perplexing puzzle. So far as she knew there was no trouble in the little business, which



Mrs. Morris carried on without the risk of any high or overleaping ambitions. What, then, could it be which so troubled her? It must be something unusual since it was of sufficient importance to warrant Mrs. Morris addressing her brother-in-law on the subject. It was a long time, as Edith knew, since any letters had passed between them. But while the young girl sat up in her window, thinking anxiously, Mrs. Morris had taken out her writing materials and had nerved herself to the very unpleasant task of addressing a few lines to the Boston lawyer, who must soon know all.

“There has arisen,” she wrote, “in my quiet life a very troublesome matter, which I feel that I must consult you about. To be brief, I think that I ought now to inform you that Edith is not my own child, although she does not know it. I adopted her soon after my little baby’s death, with my poor husband’s full consent. He died a month later. I moved from the neighborhood I had lived in and no one on earth but myself ever knew that I was not Edith’s mother in fact, as I certainly was in affection. Now, I fear, from little things which have come to my knowledge, that I shall be wronging her if I do not make her real parentage known. Her mother’s family, I feel sure, are people of great wealth and high position. If I could see you, dear Mr. Morris, I could lay all the details of the case before you, and you could advise me just what I had better do.”

She dared not trust herself to delay, but having sealed, stamped, and addressed the letter, she slipped out of the house and put it with her own hands into the box on the corner.

Come what might, Mrs. Morris reflected on returning to the house, she had done what was clearly her duty—but at what a cost to herself she alone could ever tell.



### XXXIII.

It was an unusual thing for George Carrington to leave his studio in the morning, but on a certain day, not long after his impromptu supper party, the young man informed Jean, who had prepared for work, that he must positively go down-town and look up two or three articles he needed for his picture, but she, of course, was at liberty to make any and every use of the studio she liked.

Jean moved about listlessly for a few moments, while Linda, taking advantage of her brother's absence, was starting in for some vigorous dusting, a thing Carrington abhorred in his presence.

"There are piles of things here," exclaimed Linda, "that I daren't lay a finger on. I presume George thinks that they will mellow and improve from cobwebs, like old wine. But oh, how I long to get at them. I know I could find ever so many things he considers lost. Nevertheless," she continued, "I must do the best I possibly can with the small amount of liberty he allows me."

She had placed a high step-ladder at one side of the room, and mounting it slowly, sat down on the top, while she continued:

"From this bird's-eye view I can see so much to do in the room, Miss Garnier, that I am almost hopeless. I came up here to get at the ceiling."

The door-bell gave a sudden peal, and Linda, gazing down from her perch, said:

"Oh, *would* you mind going to the door? Maggie"—



the little maid of all work—"is out, and I'm simply black with dust already."

Jean very cheerfully did as she was asked, uttering a cry of surprise and delight on admitting Dick Appleton.

In her excitement, scarcely waiting to hear that he had seized a chance to run on for a day or two, she led the way back into the studio, where, suddenly remembering Linda's elevated position, she stopped short very much confused, but obliged to laugh, for Linda flung a look of mute reproach and dismay upon her, while Dick stood still, not knowing just what he was expected to do or say.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times," exclaimed Jean, laughing. "Miss Carrington," she went on sedately, again, "don't move, if you please, but allow me to introduce my cousin, Richard Appleton."

"Delighted to see you, Mr. Appleton," said Linda demurely, "and if you wait a moment I'll come down and shake hands. I came up here for the purpose of seeing how much dusting the room would require."

"Allow me," said Richard, smiling and going forward. He offered her his hand while she came slowly down the steps and then exclaimed in her gayest manner:

"You must understand it is a wonderful chance to have my brother out for a whole morning, and your cousin and I intended to make things somewhat presentable before he came back."

"I hope he will appreciate it," said Dick gravely, and wondering what there was about this girl to make her so bewitching and attractive, while Jean made haste to say:

"Will you come upstairs at once, Dick, and see Aunt Ellen? It will do her a world of good, for she is miserably down-hearted."

A moment later and the cousins were on the staircase,



Jean rapidly going over a few details of what had occurred since their last meeting. They paused a moment on the upper landing, and Dick said quickly:

“I can only spend a day or two here, Jeanie, and you must manage to come out with me. I have so much to say, and only this little time to spend in New York.”

“Very well. I must wait until Polly comes home from school; then I am at your disposal. I shall enjoy nothing better than a long ramble about with you. I am trying to do something with my pencil,” she continued, “and no one in the world could be kinder than Mr. Carrington; but, O Dick, I’m afraid I’m a long way off from making much money.”

His brows drew together, and he laid his hand affectionately on the girl’s shoulder.

“I wonder if you know or can guess,” he said gravely, “what it costs me, Jean, to see you struggling in this fashion—and that girl up there at the Hill House spending money right and left. She has her aunt with her now—the old Irishwoman—and I dare not think just what she intends to do next. She seems to be only anxious to show her power to fling money away. Dr. Fraser, annoyed as he feels, seems to consider himself helpless in the matter.”

“We must not think of her or the old place,” said Jean hurriedly; “it would paralyze me completely, and there is nothing for us to do now but make the best of things and try to earn money, since it is absurd to think of supporting our family, especially with Aunt Ellen in delicate health, on the small income Polly and I have between us. Come in now, Dick,” she went on; “cheer Aunt Ellen to the best of your ability, while I will put on my things, for Polly will be in any minute.”



Miss Dyker's worn cheek flushed with pleasure at sight of her favorite, and Dick did his part wonderfully well, driving away all of the old lady's "lone lorn" feelings, and assuring her that he was only afraid she would set up for a fine lady of fashion now that she was one of the dwellers in Gotham.

"And what do you suppose, Aunt Ellen," he continued, "I have in mind to do? I've been talking over different things with an old friend whom I met unexpectedly, and he's advised my trying newspaper work; so I intend seeing one or two editors, whom I have a slight acquaintance with, to-day. They say it's as easy as winking your eyes. All you have to do is to get hold of a subject that you know something about and then rattle away as fast as you can, just as long as you can spin out something amusing."

The ladies listened with almost reverential attention.

"Why, that sounds *delightful!*" exclaimed Jean. "Do you mean to say you intend to be an *editor*, Dick?"

"Well, I mean," said Dick, laughing, "to see whether an editor will allow *me* to be a reporter. That's about the size of it. If he doesn't require me to actually black his boots by way of a beginning I shall consider myself fortunate. As I understand it, I must be ready to go anywhere he chooses to send me by way of a trial. It may be to a police court or possibly to a fire. All that I am required to do is to dash off a thrilling report of what I see and come back with it in time for the next edition."

"And will you sign your name?" inquired Jean very anxiously.

"Yes, to any check I may receive," said Richard; "but I hardly think they will require me to have it in colored lettering, so to speak, in the paper. It might hurt the circulation."



"Is the whole of this a joke," demanded Jean suddenly, "or do you mean to say that you really propose to run around with fire-engines?"

"I hope for the latter," said Dick, "and that there will be something very thrilling for me to report. You see, my dear girl," he went on seriously, "they don't care one atom at a newspaper office who you are or what you are or whence you are, so long as you do your work satisfactorily. Now and then it pays them to have someone's name tacked on to an article, but nine times out of ten if John Smith does better work than the Hon. Augustus Montmorenci, for instance, J. S. will get the job, draw his salary, and no one be the wiser."

There was the sudden sound of the door-bell, then a dash up the stairs, and breathless and eager, Polly made her appearance in the little room.

"Richard!" she exclaimed with genuine delight; "where *did* you come from? How *too* lovely for anything!"

"At this rate," said Dick, while Polly nearly shook his hand off, "I shall never want to return to Thornton. I don't deserve such a welcome unless my own delight in seeing you all is worth it. Now, then, Jean," he continued, "since Polly has come back, let us make haste for our walk."

If Polly felt a trifle slighted on seeing her cousins start off together, she made a brave effort not to betray the feeling; moreover, she had lately been delighted to find herself of great importance to her Aunt Ellen, who could not, if she had tried for a year, have found an easier way into Polly's good graces than by approving of every little attention the girl showed her. And now, when Polly went into the old lady's room to explain that "Jean and Dick had gone off philandering," she was rewarded by the



bright look her aunt gave her, and the way in which Miss Dyker said:

“So much the better, Polly. I’ll have you all to myself for a little while.”

In some unaccountable fashion since coming to New York Polly and her aunt had found themselves drawn to each other in a way which, while it delighted the old lady, flattered Polly. She had never understood before how the old depend upon and cling to the young—never understood what her youth and brightness could be to the old aunt fast descending the hill of life; nor had she in the least appreciated how interesting a companion an old lady like Miss Dyker could be.

“How I wish you could go about with us, Aunt Ellen,” said Polly, sitting down on a little footstool near the chimney-piece, and leaning her head back while she gazed up into Miss Dyker’s thin, quiet face. “A girl at the school was telling me that when her grandmother was young this used to be a very fashionable neighborhood.”

“And so it was,” said Miss Dyker, drawing herself up erectly. “I suppose, Polly, you can’t imagine that I was ever young and bright, as you are; but let me tell you when I was your age I spent a season in New York just in this very part of the city. Of course the streets were not built up as they are now, but there were a number of just such houses as this one standing, but for the most part with fine gardens about them. I visited a lady named Tompkins. She was what we may call of the old school, and lived in a large house with a fine garden, and entertained a great deal of company. Everything was conducted on a very formal plan, for Mrs. Tompkins despised anything like unconventionality. I never ventured to speak to her without her addressing me first, nor do I ever



remember anyone else doing so in my presence. Every morning at ten o'clock she sent for me and prepared the routine of the day. You may be sure that I was delighted when it included anything like a little amusement, above all things if there was a party in prospect, for then Mrs. Tompkins always saw that I was dressed beautifully, that I had plenty of partners, and seemed to take a pride in my having a great deal of attention. She had an elderly maid-servant, one of the kind rarely seen nowadays, and with whom I had established a sort of understanding, whereby I managed a little freedom. That is to say, Mrs. Nesbitt, which was the woman's name, obtained permission for me to go out walking occasionally, accompanied by her niece, who kept a small millinery store somewhere in the Bowery, which, by the way, was then a very fashionable resort. Mrs. Crashaw, the milliner's name, would come for me about three o'clock on a fine day, requesting permission to take me out for an hour or two, and you may be sure I made the most of my time, chattering away like a young magpie and asking her all manner of questions. For some little time it had occurred to me that this Mrs. Crashaw had something weighty on her mind, and which she hardly dared to confide to me. At last, while we were strolling through the square one afternoon, she looked at me suddenly and said, in a voice full of feeling and anxiety:

“Miss Ellen, if you could do someone a very kind deed, I believe you would take a little trouble to do it.”

“Indeed I would,” I answered quickly; “is it anything, Mrs. Crashaw, which I can do for you?”

“Well, yes and no,” she answered slowly; “it's for me, because I want it done; but it's to help someone else, and you must make up your mind, if you begin it, you'll carry it through.”



“Polly,” continued the old lady, “I can’t tell you what I felt just in that moment. Perhaps I had been reading too many of the old-fashioned novels to be found on Mrs. Tompkins’ bookshelves, but I was inspired by an idea that nothing would suit me better than to be concerned in some mystery which had a tinge of romance in it; so, although I was somewhat alarmed, I made haste to say that I would help her in any way possible.

“‘All you have to do, then,’ said she, ‘is to come with me this afternoon to my house and witness something which has to take place. It will not detain you very long, and I assure you you will not get into any trouble.’

“Completely mystified, but delighted with the novelty before me, I very willingly went back to her store with her, waited while she made a slight change in her dress, and then followed her to the top of the house. She knocked at a door at the lower end of the hall. A voice said, “Come in,” and as we entered a tall, strikingly handsome, military-looking man rose from the table where he had been writing, and stood looking at us for an instant in silence—or, rather, I should say, at me, for he scanned me from head to foot, and with a searching gaze, as though he was making up his mind whether I was trustworthy or not.

“‘This young lady, sir,’ said Mrs. Crashaw, ‘is a perfect stranger to you, but is willing to oblige me and act as witness, and I assure you she is a trustworthy little lady.’

“‘She knows nothing of the matter?’ the gentleman inquired in a deep, rather melancholy, voice.

Mrs. Crashaw shook her head.

“Nothing at all, sir,” she answered, and the gentleman continued, speaking to me in a very kind, almost fatherly, tone:



“Let me explain to you, then,” he said, laying his hand on my shoulder, “that I am about to be married this afternoon, but there are reasons why I wish the ceremony to be as private a one as possible. I’m starting on a long and somewhat dangerous journey, and before leaving wish to make a very dear young friend of mine secure of my name and fortune in case anything should happen to me, and also leave her in a position to come to me as my wife should she need my protection. Do not fear assisting us in this matter. I prefer having a perfect stranger to one who might know more of my circumstances and history.’

“Polly, I trembled from head to foot, and yet I did not for a moment feel that I could draw back. Mrs. Crashaw left us for a few moments and I dared not even trust myself to speak. The gentleman, whose name even I did not know, stood by the mantle, leaning his head upon his hand, evidently lost in thought and forgetful of my presence, while you may be sure I was wild to know who and what and whence he was, and why on earth this marriage had to take place under such peculiar circumstances.

“It seemed a long time, yet in reality I suppose it was not more than twenty minutes, when Mrs. Crashaw’s knock sounded on the door and she came in followed by a very young but sedate-looking clergyman and a young lady wearing a wide-brimmed hat, which nearly concealed her face. When, however, she did lift her head, I saw one of the sweetest, gentlest of countenances—not pretty, exactly, but exquisitely refined and intelligent. She was simply dressed, according to the then prevailing fashion, with a very short waist and straight skirt, just coming to the tips of her black slippers. A little black silk cape on her shoulders and a pair of long gloves which reached up to



her elbows completed the costume. When she removed her hat, at Mrs. Crashaw's suggestion, it showed a pretty head, covered with short, fair curls. But what a mere child she looked, and how timidly her glance went from one to another.

"The gentleman, whose name I had not yet heard, stepped forward, and taking her hand in his, said very earnestly:

"Agnes, do not feel that you are obliged to marry me unless you wish to do so, but you know that otherwise, if I go away and you needed me at any time, it would be very hard for me to insist upon seeing you or sending for you unless I had some such legal claim and authority. If you are my wife, and you need me at any moment, you yourself could come to me. Moreover, your father cannot insist upon your marrying simply to please him.'

"I understand,' said the young lady, looking up at him in the most trustful fashion, 'and I think, Mr. Lee,' she added, 'you are very good to take so much trouble about me.'

"He smiled, but very sadly.

"It need never be a trouble, my dear,' he said quietly, 'if it only turns out for your happiness.'

"As well as I remember, very little more passed, and you may be sure I was half frantic to understand what it all meant, but before the clock on the mantle had struck the next half hour the strange and binding ceremony had been performed, and I had caught quite distinctly the names, spoken clearly by the clergyman who read the service: Agnes Collins and John Lee.

"The ceremony over, the clergyman seemed in nervous haste to depart. Mr. Lee handed him something in an envelope, there was a certificate made out and signed,



and to my surprise the young lady began to tie on her hat and prepare also to depart.

“I had never heard before of so silent, so dismal a wedding, and for my own part I felt inclined to cry. Mrs. Crashaw helped the little bride to tie on the hat and draw on her gloves again, after which she held out her hand to Mr. Lee, saying very quietly:

“‘Good-by, sir, and I hope to hear good news of you soon, and I thank you very much for your kindness.’

“He took her hand, held it for a moment, and kissing her very gently on the brow, said gravely:

“‘You need not thank me, dear; I have only done my duty, and some day we may try to make a very happy home together.’

“I did not know exactly what to do with myself when Mrs. Crashaw and the young lady left the room, so I said rather timidly that perhaps I had better go as well. I think Mr. Lee had almost forgotten my presence, for he started as I spoke, held out his hand, and with the same grave smile, said politely:

“‘I cannot thank you sufficiently now, my dear young lady, but some day in the future I trust to do so,’ after which he held the door open with the greatest deference, while I passed out, returning to the little store in a most bewildered frame of mind.

“I was sitting feeling half stupefied and half frightened when Mrs. Crashaw suddenly returned, her eyes red, as though she had been crying, and her whole manner showing nervous excitement.

“‘Don’t you fret, Miss Ellen dear,’ she said anxiously; ‘I wouldn’t have asked you to be a witness if any harm could come of it. No; it’s the best day’s work that could have been done; and some day you may hear more of it.’



“As you can imagine, I stood too much in awe of Mrs. Tompkins to reveal one word of what had passed, even had there not been my promise to restrain me; but it was a long time before I could stop thinking of the mysterious occurrence, about which, when I next saw her, I could not get Mrs. Crashaw even to talk. It was, I think, about six weeks later that, as I was sitting all alone in the library at Mrs. Tompkins’ house, there came a violent rat-tat-tat from the knocker on the hall door, and in a few moments a queer-looking old gentleman was ushered into the room by Mrs. Tompkins’ servant, who looked frightened and perplexed. The gentleman was talking very rapidly, and as he came in exclaimed over and over again, ‘Where is she? I say; where is she?’

“‘Here she is, sir,’ said the servant, pointing at me; ‘this young lady is Miss Ellen Dyker.’

“‘Exactly,’ exclaimed the little old man, fixing his very black eyes fully upon me. ‘Then, Miss Dyker, will you have the kindness,’ he went on, ‘to put on your hat and coat and come with me at once? Oh, yes, you must,’ he continued; ‘I don’t intend to take no for an answer; I want you to go with me to a Mrs. Crashaw’s house directly. You are needed there.’

“Mrs. Tompkins was out, and I could only conclude that no harm could befall me if I went to see a person whom I knew as well as Mrs. Crashaw, although, of course, I felt certain that the visit was connected with the curious wedding ceremony I had witnessed. In any case, I dared not hesitate, for it would be much worse to have Mrs. Tompkins come in and discover what had taken place than to go even with a stranger to Mrs. Crashaw’s; and accordingly, only leaving word that I had gone to Mrs. Nesbitt’s niece’s house, I put on my things and followed my strange



companion out in the street, where I found he had a coach in waiting. Once on the pavement he demanded abruptly the number of Mrs. Crashaw's house, and repeating it after me to the coachman, ushered me into the coach politely and followed, not addressing a remark to me until we were close to the house, when he turned, saying, with a sarcastic smile:

“I presume you wonder how I found you out; but you know that a marriage ceremony has to be registered, and perhaps you forgot when you acted as witness that your name and address were noted down.’

“I said nothing—what could I?—indeed I was too terrified to talk, my only anxiety being to feel myself under Mrs. Crashaw's protection. You may well imagine the good woman's surprise—I had better call it consternation—when the coach drew up before her door and my singular companion sprang out, offering me his hand as I alighted. She was in her shop-window at the moment, and at once went around to the side door leading to the dwelling part of the house, admitting us still with a blank look of astonishment on her face.

“‘Now, then, madam,’ said the little old gentleman sharply, ‘I have brought this young lady here to have it all out with you. I don't need to tell you,’ he continued rapidly, ‘how I found out that my disobedient daughter had run away to get married; but clergymen sometimes,’ he said, with a sneer, ‘have a conscience too late in the day. As I understood this lady had been witness to the transaction I brought her here to face you with it. Oh, you needn't be angry with her; I compelled her to come; but I want to hear the whole story from your lips and in her presence.’

“By this time we were in the little back parlor adjoining



the store, and Mrs. Crashaw, who had recovered her self-possession, said gayly: "I presume I am speaking to General Collins?"

"Yes, madam," he snapped out.

"It must have been the clergyman who gave you a hint of this," she went on, "and I can only say that your daughter and Mr. Lee were married in my house and in this young lady's presence as well as my own nearly two months ago. Mr. Lee was obliged to leave town immediately, but he will send for his wife directly I notify him what has happened. He would not have thought of leaving her then but that imperative business called him away."

"And did he know," demanded the old gentleman, "just what he lost, or rather what he had to share, by marrying her?"

"Mrs. Crashaw smiled.

"He knew everything, sir," she said gravely, "and it was to protect her interests that he had the ceremony performed, and I shall at once let him know what has taken place. Allow me, sir," she continued, "to give you one piece of advice: Mr. Lee is not a man to be trifled with, and if you attempt to separate him from his wife you will only bring scandal and disgrace upon yourself."

"I think, Polly, I never saw a human face betray such rage as the old man's did at that moment; but it was evident he saw argument or resistance would be of no use, and after a few moments' silence he said, in a tone of forced politeness:

"I do not propose to interfere further in the matter, but I warn you of one thing: you can take care of Mr. Lee's bride until he claims her, and she shall come to you, madam, with just the clothes that she wears on her back, so be kind enough to prepare to receive her."



“‘Indeed I will,’ exclaimed Mrs. Crashaw; ‘and you can’t send the dear young lady to me,’ she added, ‘a moment too soon. What do you say to my going back with you in the coach and bringing her myself?’

“‘You can do as you like,’ he snarled; ‘but remember, once you take her I wash my hands of the whole affair.’

“They actually did go off in the coach together, Mrs. Crashaw bidding me wait until she returned. Well, Polly, to make a long story short, let me wind up by explaining to you what I heard later, just why all this had taken place. Miss Collins, it appeared, was to come into quite a fortune if she married Mr. Lee before her nineteenth birthday. If not, either by her refusal or the gentleman’s, the money was to be divided between Mr. Lee and her father. The strange conditions of the fortune had only come to Mr. Lee’s knowledge a short time before, and discovering that her father was bent on keeping them apart, he had sought every opportunity of meeting the girl, and at last, with Mrs. Crashaw’s assistance, planned the private marriage ceremony of which I had been a witness. He would, of course, have acknowledged it at once but that urgent business called him away that very day and hour, but fearing trouble during his absence for the girl, or that she should be kept from communication with him until after her birthday, he had insisted upon the ceremony’s taking place, as I have described.\*

“I was too much interested now in the whole affair to care what Mrs. Tompkins thought of my absence, and so was quite content to wait for Mrs. Crashaw’s return, while I was delighted to think of seeing the sweet little bride again. It was nearly two hours before the coach stopped

\* A true story related to the writer by the witness to the marriage in 1825.



at the door, and Mrs. Crashaw, evidently much excited, appeared with Mr. Lee's bride following just behind her. Evidently she had packed up several things in a hurry, from the appearance of the bundles which were next brought into the house, and then Mrs. Crashaw nearly wept for joy, declaring all that they needed now was to let Mr. Lee know at once what had taken place."

Miss Dyker paused, and Polly, roused to the most intense interest in the little story of her youth, exclaimed eagerly:

"Oh, Aunt Ellen, don't stop there; how did it turn out?"

"Well, my dear, far more fortunately, I am glad to say, than such hasty affairs are apt to do. But, you see, the very fact of Mr. Lee's insisting upon the marriage shows what an honorable man he was. There were no telegraphs in those days, and Agnes had to wait for a letter to reach the distant town in which he was stopping, and then for him to come back by stage-coach instead of railway. But she did not return to her father's house, staying on most contentedly with Mrs. Crashaw, who was delighted with the way everything had turned out, and even permitted me to make a clean breast of it to the dread Mrs. Tompkins, who was pleased to find everything satisfactory and the young bride a most eligible acquaintance. So far as I ever heard or saw, they were a very happy couple, and had no reason to regret what had taken place that day in Mrs. Crashaw's humble home, while, of course, the old man was compelled to resign his daughter's inheritance to her husband and herself."

"Oh, Aunt Ellen!" exclaimed Polly delightedly; "I could listen to your stories forever; they are so much nicer than what you read, because they are real, and I shall always think of Mrs. Tompkins and Agnes and all of them



when I walk about the old Square, and you won't mind if I tell the story to some of the girls, will you?"

Miss Dyker was well pleased to have interested Polly so thoroughly, and the young girl sprang up declaring Jean would never forgive her if she overlooked making her aunt a nice cup of afternoon tea.

Miss Carrington was found without difficulty, and seemed much pleased by Polly's anxiety to attend to her aunt's comforts, and instructed her just how and when to remove the cosey which she placed over the teapot, in which, as she explained, the "tea was *brewing*, not *boiling*."

Altogether Polly was beginning to feel that there were some pleasures in life which even the luxury of the Hill House had not afforded her, and Miss Dyker, who had apparently quite forgotten to be "lone and lorn," declared that she and Polly would have to set up old maids' hall together if they could always have such a nice time.



### XXXIV.

DICK was in unaccountably high spirits when he and Jean started out on their ramble together, and he declared that, after all, for freshening a fellow up there was nothing like being in the old metropolis.

“We run it down, complain of it, despise it, and come back to it like a first love,” he said lightly, “and I wonder what would become of us if it ever comes to the complete stand-still which a great many wise people are saying is its fate. Paris is the only place,” he went on, “which ever gave me the same feeling of good-fellowship. I don’t doubt, however, from what I hear, that the life of a reporter will knock some of the sentiment out of me.”

“Then you must often come up to the Carringtons’,” said Jean, quite as ready to be enthusiastic as was her cousin. “You cannot imagine, Dick,” she went on, “how much I have learned since I have been in that house. It is what Mr. Carrington calls taking things at their own value. He is a delightful talker when you can get him interested. He was telling me the other day that it took him a long time to sift the wheat from the chaff in affairs of this life. When he was very young he grasped at everything, he says—felt as though nothing was worthwhile unless he held the world, so to speak, in the hollow of his palm, and so he lost a great deal of good time and did not work at all in the right direction. Now, he says, he has made of life a perfectly simple, straightforward affair, in which he knows exactly what he wants independent of others, and what he wants from them and what he



has to give, and if that is attained it matters nothing to him what the 'madding crowds' are doing or thinking."

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed Dick, looking down at the girl's uplifted face with an odd twinkle in his eyes; "there is just one course open to you, Jean—that is the platform. If you are going on at this rate, imbibing so many excellent ideas, you must take to lecturing, for you do it capitally."

But Jean was not a whit abashed.

"You can talk as you like," she remarked, "but I am growing wiser every day, and you know perfectly well the only lecture-room I ever care for will be my 'ain fireside.' I want a home of some kind where I can make a few people I care for happy."

Dick was silent for a few moments, and then he said, very quietly:

"That sister of Carrington's—the little one, I mean—looks as though she could infuse any amount of brightness into a home if she liked."

"Linda," said Jean quickly; "yes, indeed. There is far more to the girl than you would guess at first. She's a bit visionary, as Miss Kate says, like her brother, but full of talent, and so strong in her sympathies that I do not wonder at Miss Kate's dreading the future before her. She tells me that she is a girl who could never bear much hard usage."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Dick, "she ought never to get it. I don't know," he went on, "when in all my life I have been so taken with anybody. It's rather a dangerous business, however, for me to indulge just now in any feeling of the kind. I have made my mind up," he went on, a fixed and grave expression settling upon his face, "not to allow myself any sentimental thoughts for a long



time to come. It's nice, Jeanie, old girl, to have you to talk to, so I don't mind telling you that I had a few soft-hearted reflections over little Miss Linda; but, as I have said, I am not worth much if I drift into nonsense of that kind before I can earn my own living, and I do not doubt," he went on, with a light laugh, "she would not give me a second thought."

Jean's eyes were bent upon the pavement, so that Dick could not see the strange light which leaped into them. Suddenly she began to laugh.

"May I enquire," said Richard gravely, "what you see in what I have said for such extreme hilarity?"

Jean suddenly tucked her hand into his arm.

"I daren't tell you now, Dick," she exclaimed; "it was just something which flashed across my mind and made me feel like a new being."

She laughed again almost unrestrainedly.

"Is this only hysterical, Jean?" he demanded; "because if we are going into any *bric-à-brac* stores I would prefer to see you calm down in the fresh air first."

"O Dick! Dick!" exclaimed the girl; "some day I will—I must—tell you all about it. I don't think you will despise me; you are too good and kind. Moreover, you will be so grateful, no doubt, that you'll be willing to think more of me than ever in your life before."

"I could not bargain for that," said Dick quietly, "because you know, Jean, how fond I have always been of you. I never can remember the time, it seems to me, when I some way hadn't your interest at heart; and whatever happened to me I felt some way as though it partly affected you."

Yes, Jean was grave enough by this time, and Dick went on:



"I believe it's better than if we had actually been born brother and sister, because then the relationship is enforced and we feel impelled to be true to it or else unnatural in our appreciation of home ties. But the feeling when it comes, as it did to us, by choice is so much deeper and stronger. It is as though we chose the members of our own family just to suit ourselves. I cannot think," he went on, "of a more ideal sister than you could be, and I'd like to be in your eyes the best brother who ever lived."

Jean looked at him, her sweet face full of tenderness.

"And you are, Dick," she said quietly, "so dear a brother to me that anything I can ever do to further your happiness will be an object always in my life. You don't know how intensely interested I am in this new undertaking of yours. I shall want to see and hear every line you write; I don't care whether it's about a fire or a steam-boat landing, or anything else; so long as it's part of your work it would interest me; and, by the way," she added, "Linda Carrington is quite excited over the idea that you are beginning what she calls a career."

"No," said the young fellow, smiling with pleasure; "does she really care about it? I do not doubt she could give a fellow lots of inspiration if she chose to take the trouble."

"Talk it over with her, then," said Jean, "when you come up this evening. I assure you you will find her full of interest and by no means a dull critic."

They had reached the corner by this time on which stood the old *bric-à-brac* store to which Carrington had directed them, and no sooner were they within it than it occurred to Dick in his new profession as too good a subject to lose, and forthwith, while Jean roamed about turning over a variety of objects, all more or less confused and dusty.



Dick talked to the old man in charge—a few trifling purchases were made, and once out upon the street again Dick exclaimed buoyantly:

“Now, see here; I will do this thing up at once. I wonder,” he added, gazing about, “whether you could manage to get home alone, and I will go right off to my friend Berkmann’s room, where he says I can make use of anything I find. I will take it down to the *Echo* to-night and see what they have to say to it.”

Jean was not only very certain that she could get home alone, but glad of an opportunity for a little quiet reflection.

She watched Dick spring into a downward-bound car, and then turned her steps back slowly in the direction of Benton Place.

What a revelation had come to the girl in that brief talk with her cousin! The color deepened on her cheeks as she reflected how foolish she had been to suppose herself in any way tacitly pledged to him. It had weighed of late on her mind heavily and sadly, since she had become well aware that in her feeling for Dick was none of the deeper sentiment which should perfect and govern married life. Something altogether different had been aroused of late, sending to the winds every thought of worldly prosperity, social distinction, of the cheap achievement of a high place in the world to which the Dykers, by right of birth, belonged. Was it, Jean asked herself, that all along she had really had a mind and nature, sympathies and ambitions, which demanded only the simple things of life for their setting, or had she suddenly come unawares, by means of her poverty, upon a great, unalterable truth: that the only thing worth striving or caring for, so far as worldly matters are concerned, is what is intrinsically



worthy—what of itself, divested of all externals, will be worth clinging to, caring for, and living up to. To be high in the esteem—the friendship—the companionship of such a man as Carrington, Jean had begun to feel was worth all the triumphs of endless ballrooms—all the glitter, the admiration, the applause of the world to which she supposed she belonged. To speak her inmost thoughts freely, knowing they would reach his deepest understanding and meet a complete response, was all the girl told herself she could care for in any conversation—to have her little light-hearted jokes appreciated and responded to by him would make a holiday of the dullest experience—last, but, to a girl of Jean's calibre, by no means the least, what a never-ending source of happiness would it be to her to bring into his hard-working, self-denying life such grace and sweetness as she fancied herself capable for his sake to diffuse. She had never guessed at half her own capacity for the simple details of home life until the last few weeks. Even her lofty art ambition had dwindled into insignificance compared to this other feeling; and gravely self-restrained as Carrington unquestionably had been of late, Jane could not rid herself of a feeling that there was something in his eyes, his voice, the touch of his hand which, against his will, betrayed his own feeling.

The one misery in it all had been her dread of hurting Dick, and now how clearly he had shown her that she could do him no harm by “deserting him,” to use the phrase she had employed against herself. No doubt his feeling about Linda was a merely passing fancy, yet it had sufficed to define their own relationship, and Jean found herself already wondering just what would be the result of a love affair between her cousin and Carrington's wilful, charming little sister.



What a complete revolution all this would cause in the family history of the Dykers! Jean almost laughed aloud as she thought of the way in which it would strip the old family idea of its prim conventionality, and then her hand was on the door-bell and a moment later Linda was telling her that a gentleman was waiting in the parlor to see her.

“And I have had to keep him entertained,” declared Linda, “for a half hour, he was so impatient.”

Jean roused herself from her own abstraction of mind and opened the parlor door slowly. As she did so, a figure in the window rose and she found herself confronting a tall, distinguished looking stranger.



### XXXV.

LIFE at the Hill House, exciting and flattering as she still found it, had been for some time to Sarah Dalton charged by the restraint of Mrs. Malone's illness—more than that, the woman's evidently unhappy frame of mind. In Sarah's presence she was ill at ease—yet watchful and anxious to keep the girl near her. In her absence Mrs. Malone drove even the long-suffering Mrs. Keyes to the very limits of her patience by cross-examining her on every point of the family history.

“Whatever she's up to,” Mrs. Keyes grumbled to her aunt in the kitchen, “I declare I can't make out; but it's back and forth and up and down and ask me this, that, and the other about every one of the name of Dyker till I'm that worried I don't know how to speak.”

“Oh, it's because it's such a change for her to find herself in such a grand house,” Mrs. Knapp would answer; “she aint long for this world, anyway, and I wonder then what Sarah will be up to.”

Only a feeling of pride, a lingering desire to hold her own, had kept Sarah during these days from showing how the dullness of her life affected her. The splendor of her surroundings, the fact that she had servants to attend her bidding, a fine carriage to drive out in, and every luxury money could buy palled upon the girl, since she had no audience to approve, applaud, or even envy her. She had given up all idea of much book learning. It merely bothered and perplexed her, and Mrs. Holmes' presence was only endured because she felt that to have a companion in



her train gave her the dignity and importance which she needed.

She had expected to be overwhelmed by attentions by the various people within a few miles of the Hill House, who had certainly never thought of the distance or the time it would take to call there in the old days. But Sarah remained day after day in solitary state. With the exception of a very short and formal call from Mrs. Fraser and her two daughters, the clergyman of the parish and his wife, no one belonging to her new world had shown any desire to so much as pass the gate. Once, indeed, there had occurred an incident the remembrance of which at any time sent the blood furiously into Sarah's cheeks.

It was a bright, soft afternoon, and Sarah, disinclined for a long walk, was rambling about the grounds when she saw a party—two ladies and a gentleman—entering the low gate. They walked in with an air of such perfect assurance that Sarah slowly followed them at a distance, deciding they were callers and that she could manage to get around by the side door almost as quickly as they would reach the main entrance. As she passed a clump of evergreens where the drive curved up to the great door of the house, Sarah's blood seemed to freeze within her for an instant as she heard one of the ladies say, with a light laugh, in answer to a remark of her companions:

“Oh, no, my dear, of course we don't want to see the girl who owns the house now and lives there; they say she is insufferably vulgar and ill-bred. All I shall do is to ask the housekeeper whether she will let me show you and Will some of the Colonel's fine old pictures. We needn't mention her at all.”

And then Sarah had watched them go slowly up the steps of the house.



In an instant she had flown around to the side entrance and despatched Mrs. Keyes to open the door, telling her, no matter what was said by the visitors, to simply usher them into the drawing room and come back to her. Then she waited in the little boudoir, her heart beating almost to suffocation, but a smile of complete satisfaction lighting her face.

“Vulgar, am I?” she was saying to herself, as she shook out the rich folds of her silk and crepe dress, and surveyed her flushed face in the mirror. She had on her solitaire diamond earrings and the showiest of her brooches, and all her bangles, which sparkled and gleamed in the firelight. “All right,” she continued, nodding to the figure in the glass; “we’ll see how much of my house they can poke into.”

Mrs. Keyes, slow of step, was heard coming down the hall, and in a moment she entered, announcing that the ladies didn’t give their names but were waiting to know if they could look at some of the Colonel’s old pictures.

Sarah stood still for an instant, deciding just how she could best answer the request and carry her own point, and then a sound of half-subdued laughter from the drawing room reached her. “I’ll see them myself,” she exclaimed, a deeper flush mounting to her face, and without giving Mrs. Keyes time to answer, she rushed away down the hall, trying to control her feelings while she opened the drawing-room door and confronted her uninvited guests.

The ladies stared at the flushed, excited girl in her rich dress and glittering jewels, but Sarah gave them very little time to think.

“I’m afraid, ladies and gentlemen,” she said quickly, “you’ve made some kind of a mistake. My house aint a museum nor yet a picture gallery, and I’m not so vulgar



and ill-bred that I wouldn't know better than to come into anybody else's place and say I didn't need to mention the lady of the house at all. Oh, I don't care," she went on, gaining courage as she observed the looks which passed between the party, "I aint so hard up for visitors as to care; only you might as well know I was close by when I heard you talking about me out in the grounds. Now, if you've got anything worth looking at in your house, you needn't be afraid that Sarah Dalton 'll ever ring the bell and ask the privilege of looking at it."

To describe the effect of this speech upon her uninvited guests would be impossible—they could scarcely do it later themselves—but needless to say the story went around in the county, and if the incident left poor Sarah more hopelessly alone than before, she was thankful to have spoken her mind once for all, and at the same time it afforded unlimited amusement in the circles where the ladies and gentlemen who had visited the Hill House so unceremoniously moved. Mrs. Holmes had heard of it but dared not remonstrate with her pupil, and indeed, often as the girl irritated her by her overbearing ways and profound ignorance, she could not help a feeling of pity for the peculiarly lonely position in which the girl was placed.

Dr. Fraser's visits, unless to attend upon Mrs. Malone, were limited to merely matters of ceremony. Mrs. Mackenzie seldom entered the house, nor did Sarah trouble the cottage, and so the days dragged their length along until one windy twilight when, sitting alone with her aunt, Sarah observed a peculiar change in the sick woman's face. It must have come very suddenly, the girl thought, since she certainly had not remarked it an hour before, and the strained, anxious expression, habitual now, was deepened in Mrs. Malone's sunken eyes.



“Aint you feeling quite so well, Aunt 'Tilda?” demanded Sarah, coming up to the sofa on which her aunt was lying.

“I've just been thinking,” said Mrs. Malone, “and seems to me, Sarah, on windy nights all the lonesome kind of things come up to a person's mind.”

“Why, what you lonesome about now?” said Sarah quickly. “Haven't you got everything you want, and aint I going to send down for Mikey and Aggie to spend the day to-morrow?”

“I know,” fretted her aunt, “but 'taint that so much.” She glanced over to the dressing table on which her precious rosewood box, the key of which she always kept under the pillow, was standing. “I think,” she went on querulously, “if you'll leave that little box of mine over here when you go down to supper, there's a few things in it I'll just look over.”

It was not the first time that her aunt, when left alone, had occupied herself in the same fashion; but whatever the box might contain Sarah had never seen its contents, nor, indeed, had she cared particularly to examine into it, supposing it to be the receptacle of some merely useless mementos of her aunt's youth. But now, for some reason, it flashed across the girl's mind that the box might contain something more actually important than she had supposed. Diplomacy and indeed deceit were entirely out of Sarah's line, and not for an instant did it occur to her to obtain access to the box by anything but perfectly fair means. However, needless to say that, having made up her mind to know what the box held, it was not likely Sarah would allow her plan to be defeated.

“I'll give you the box of course,” the girl said, standing up, “but I'll tell you now, right now and here, Aunt



"Tilda, I mean to know what there is in it. You've got something hidden there you're awfully afraid I'll find out, and if you don't tell me of yourself I warn you I'll open it and there 'll be trouble."

It had begun to rain and Sarah deliberately, when she had finished speaking, walked over to the windows, where she drew the heavy curtains closer together, then stirred the fire into a brighter blaze, lighted the candles on the chimney-piece, giving her aunt time for reflection.

"What's it all to you, Sarah?" Mrs. Malone said, with a little whimper. "Haven't I always acted for your good? What's the use of your wanting to know everything?"

"I aint talking about everything," said Sarah resolutely, and taking the little box in her hands; "I'm just speaking of what's in here, and I've given you fair warning. I don't want to be cross with you," she added, softening a little at sight of her aunt's wasted face and tearful eyes; "only you know me when I've made up my mind. How do we any of us know," the girl added with sudden fervor, "whether we mightn't be took right all on a sudden, and then if we'd left anything behind we'd wanted to say, how would we feel when we was dumb?"

It was a rude form of theology, but no minister of the Gospel could have put forth the same argument with better effect, and Mrs. Malone's spirit quailed.

"There you go, talking about dying again," she began; but Sarah only shook her head.

"You can do as you see fit," she answered, "but I tell you, Aunt 'Tilda, so will I."

She stood leaning up against the chimney-piece, a tall, resolute young figure, in her rich dress and shining jewels, waiting for the full effect of her words upon her aunt, but with a full determination that she would carry her point



no matter what it cost her. And to do the girl credit, a fear like a cold knife had darted across her heart lest the little box contained bad news for her and her enviable position.

“If I show it all to you,” said Mrs. Malone slowly, and speaking in an awe-struck kind of whisper, “will you swear to me, Sarah Dalton, you’ll never tell?”

“No, I won’t,” declared Sarah promptly; “do you take me for a perfect fool? I’ll say this much, though: I won’t do anything that’ll make any trouble for you, I promise you that.”

“Then I’ll tell you what you’ll do,” said Mrs. Malone, feeling apparently entirely relieved by this; “you may put the box away—there’s the key, and by and by you can just make it all out for yourself.

Sarah only half realized that her aunt considered her bound by a more definite promise than she had made, replaced the box, and fearing to have Mrs. Malone change her mind, rang the bell quickly, desiring Mrs. Keyes to bring up the invalid’s supper as soon as possible. She contrived quickly to take the box in her hands, and following Mrs. Keyes into the hall, told her to remain with Mrs. Malone as soon as she had ordered the supper until she sent for her.

The girl had no idea just what was her governing impulse of anxiety, curiosity, and fear, as she sped along the hall and into her own room, where, with nervous fingers, she lighted the candles and then seated herself on the great rug in the glow of the fire, one of the candles at her side, while she opened the all-important and secret treasure.





THE SECRET OUT AT LAST.







## XXXVI.

How long Sarah remained crouched in the firelight of her room, the contents of the box in disorder on the rug beside her, she could never tell. She was conscious in a vague, dull fashion of the way in which the rain lashed the window-panes, of how the fir trees outside seemed to bend and moan, but of little more besides her own nearly desperate thoughts the girl was not in the least aware. She heard Mrs. Holmes' voice at the door asking her if she was not coming down to supper, and she answered No, not to wait for her, in a dull, constrained tone, entirely different from her own, and then mechanically she gathered up the papers and the pictures which she had found, and began slowly putting them back in their former receptacle. It seemed to the girl as though a year might have passed since she had come into the room, and she stood up holding her hands to her head wondering if she was indeed in her right senses, or if the testimony of her own eyes and understanding could have been at fault. But no, there was no danger, or rather no hope, of that. Ignorant the girl might be in many ways, and yet no lawyer could have been keener witted or shrewder on some points than was Sarah Dalton, and she did not deceive herself in the slightest as to what the result of her discovery might be. It had crushed and stunned her for an instant. She felt as though someone had dealt her a physical blow, and yet it had not so far occurred to her that there was any loophole of escape from the story the little box would have to tell. She must go back to her aunt of course, and



talk about it—there was some point which even the papers and pictures did not make clear, and Mrs. Malone only could enlighten her. The girl moved slowly toward the door, not in the least intimidated by the thought of discussing this question with the aunt, but only fearing to excite her, and no sooner was she in the hall than Mrs. Keyes appeared holding her finger up to her lip.

“She’s asleep, poor dear,” said the woman, “and she seems almost flighty in her head, Miss Sarah, so I do hope she’ll get a little quiet rest. Lor’, how white you do look—just as if you’d seen a ghost,” the woman continued.

Sarah gave a queer laugh. “Well, perhaps I have,” she said shortly; “there’s more’n one kind of a ghost, aint there?”

What should she do? Inaction to Sarah, when there was something to be accomplished, was unendurable. She dared not disturb her aunt, and of course it would not do to gossip on such a question with Mrs. Keyes. And then suddenly it flashed across Sarah’s mind how Sandy would feel when he heard of this, and if she chose he might hear of it at once, since she knew that he was expected that evening at the cottage, and would probably make an early call upon her in the morning. The girl was tolerably certain as to what he would advise. She could quite imagine him taking the box from her hands and flinging it, contents and all, into the fire, but against that, of course, she could be on her guard, and the sooner he knew of her discovery the better. Had he thought Sarah by any chance suspected the real state of affairs? Could it be that her aunt’s anxiety to see him was the result of having given him, even in part, her confidence? To deliberate long over anything was impossible to the girl, and she



decided suddenly to send over to the cottage, find out if he was there, and summon him at once. The answer came back quickly enough even to satisfy Sarah, who was impatiently walking up and down the main hall of the house, thinking as she had never thought before. Sandy had gone to Albany, but would return the next day, when Mrs. Mackenzie was sure he would call at the Hill House. What, then, did there seem left for her to do? Suddenly one person, whom she thoroughly believed in, in spite of all petty jealousies and heart-burnings, rose to Sarah's mind: Jean Garnier; if she could see her, talk it all over with her, Sarah felt very certain that she would at least receive good advice and gentle treatment. She would tell Mrs. Mackenzie something of it at least, and leave her to explain matters to her guardian, who was absent from Thornton at the time, but of one thing Sarah was determined not to be balked. She would act honestly and squarely in the matter, simply because it was not in her nature to do otherwise, but she would not give any other human being a bit of the credit or glory which might attach to the performance of so heroic an act as she contemplated. Sarah's spirits rose with a bound as this thought occurred to her—as she saw herself the heroine of an important thrilling occasion. Who would despise or look down upon her then? What was there to prevent her throwing the poor little old box and all it contained into the flames of the hall fire, before which she had paused to conclude her important reflections? She could leave her aunt well cared for, take Mrs. Holmes with her if necessary as a guide in what would be a wilderness to her, and go on to New York herself by the first morning train. She then would be the one in whose hands everything would rest, to whom everyone would look as their good genius,



and who would dare to scorn her after that? And yet as the girl glanced about the grand old entrance hall, with its beautiful curving staircase, its suggestion of all that meant means and wealth and luxury in life, her heart fell, remembering that this journey might mean a farewell to it all for her. Could it be that she was standing there really for the last time as mistress of the Hill House? She was conscious of the elegance of her own attire, her sparkling jewels, the soft laces at her neck and wrists. How would it be to give them all up and go back to calico and homespun once more? An angry, rebellious look sprang into the girl's face at the thought, but she confronted it only as a misery, not—thank Heaven—as a temptation. Whatever of downright honesty, fearlessness, and ingrain love of justice there had been in her mother's far back New England ancestry certainly warmed the veins of her daughter and made it impossible for her to blink matters in a question of actual right and wrong. Selfish, grasping and overbearing she might be, or, in the new life she had been leading, have become; but dishonest by word or look or act—never.

Having come to certain rapid conclusions, Sarah's mind went further ahead, and she decided to start by as early a train as possible to New York, taking Mrs. Holmes with her, and leaving her aunt safely enough in the care of Mrs. Keyes and the doctor.

Still holding the little box securely under her arm, Sarah ran upstairs to her own room, whose dainty look of elegance and comfort impressed her suddenly anew. But she gave herself no time for reflection. Opening the drawer of her desk, she locked the box securely in it, and then went away in search of Mrs. Holmes. It was still raining furiously, but Sarah's mind was definitely made up,



so that even if it stormed on the morrow she was determined not to be hindered in her enterprise.

One thing, however, she would give herself the satisfaction of doing before she went to sleep, and accordingly she seated herself before her desk and after two or three efforts contrived to write tolerably well the following note to her lawyer:

“MR. SANDY MACKENZIE:

“I am going to New York to attend to my own business there, and you had better stay here and look after things while I am gone. I don't know how much you know of what I have found out, but if you did know about it and kept it back, then the sooner you and me are parted the better it will be for you. I guess that's all I need say, except that I shall go to see Jean Garnier when I get there.”

And this effusion, without further formula, she signed, “Sarah Dalton.”

Putting it into an envelope, which she addressed, to be given on the morrow into Mrs. Mackenzie's safest keeping, Sarah felt as if she had decided this difficult matter in a masterly way, and spent the next hour in packing a small bag with such necessaries as she would need for the trip, it not having as yet occurred to her that Mrs. Holmes would think of offering any opposition to her plan, but when her own bag was packed she remembered that she ought to give her companion time to make similar preparations for herself.



## XXXVII.

WHEN Jean Garnier found herself in the presence of her strange visitor she very quickly recovered her self-possession as he handed her his card and said, in an agreeable voice:

“Although a stranger to you, Miss Garnier, yet I believe we have some interest sufficiently in common to warrant my calling upon you.”

As Jean, smiling politely, but entirely mystified, took the nearest chair, Mr. Morris, her visitor, seated himself, and in his leisurely, well-modulated voice went on:

“I called owing to a visit I paid yesterday to Thornton where I went to make certain enquiries of the utmost importance to members of my own family. I could find no one at the Hill House who could give me any information; the”—he paused, with a slight smile—“young lady of the house, they informed me, had started with her governess or duenna, some person of the kind, for New York, and I was directed to the house of a Mrs. Mackenzie.”

As he paused Jean smiled and said quietly:

“Our dearest friend. Did you see her, sir?”

“Yes, indeed,” said the visitor, “and a most delightful woman I found her; but of course I had to cut my visit short. She directed me where to find you and gave me a little insight into certain matters, but insisted that it was not her place to talk over her friends’ affairs without their permission. You may think I am a long time,” he went on, “in coming to the point, but—I do not want to appear abrupt in what is a somewhat painful duty to perform, although so



far as I can see it cannot hurt your interests, and will, I hope, only please you. It appears there has been some mistake in the identity of the young person who has taken possession of the Dyker estate. I have not the proofs at hand which I need, nor do I know at all where to put my hand upon them; but of one thing I am certain. Your Aunt, Sarah Dyker, died in the house of my brother, Andrew Morris, in Seventh Street, in this city, and his wife, who had just lost her own child, adopted the week-old baby young Mrs. Dalton left. It appears from what my sister-in-law at this late date has confided to me that the poor young woman had run away from her husband, who neglected her shamefully, and who had even then deserted her. Her one fear in dying seemed to be that the father of her child would ever get possession of it, and so in giving the baby to Mrs. Morris for her own she begged of her never to let anyone belonging to her know of its existence. Mrs. Morris is under the impression, however, that old Colonel Dyker, Sarah's father, did know of it, but dreaded to have Dalton or anyone belonging to him on his hands. However that may be, when, a month later, my brother Andrew died Mrs. Morris determined to keep the child, giving out that it was her own. I had seen nothing of them for two or three years, and was confined to my bed with a severe illness for several weeks after my brother's death, so that when I next heard from the widow she had moved into an entirely different neighborhood, where the child passed, as she has done ever since, as her own; and I may say," continued Mr. Morris, "that no mother in my circle of acquaintances could have done better by any of her offspring than my sister-in-law has by this child of her adoption."

Jean listened almost stupefied by the importance of what



she had heard, and yet in some way there was a thrill of relief as she thought of Sarah Dalton and her usurpation of the old family home.

“Do you mean to say, sir,” she asked in a low, anxious tone of voice, “that your—niece is really the child of my Aunt Sarah and her husband Philip Dalton?”

“Exactly,” said the gentleman, smiling. “You may be very certain that I sifted every proof carefully before coming up here. The only missing part of the evidence is in certain letters, trinkets, etc., which Mrs. Morris is sure Dalton took away with him, but she is ready at any time to swear to the identity of the girl, which she has only concealed so far from fear of losing her. Lately it had occurred to her, from little things she had heard, that she had no right to defraud her of her just inheritance, and so she very wisely consulted me. As you may imagine, I was completely stunned by the news, but of course I came on at once. I only arrived on the boat yesterday morning, and directly I had heard my sister’s story and obtained from her the address, which she had long kept hidden away, of the Hill House in Thornton, I took the next train there, found, as I tell you, that Miss Dalton had started for New York, whereupon I consulted Mrs. Mackenzie.”

“This is most extraordinary,” exclaimed Jean, profoundly moved. “Have you any objection, sir,” she said quickly, “to my asking our friend, Mr. Carrington, to consult with us? My cousin, Dick Appleton, is—I can scarcely say where at present, probably reporting some fire, if there is one, as he tells me that will be his kind of work for a while on the *Echo*, and I feel as if I wanted someone to take counsel with.”

“By all means,” said Mr. Morris, rising, as did Jean;



“you are quite right. In these matters it is always well to consult a trustworthy friend.”

Jean felt as if everything was in a whirl about her as she went down the hall and knocked lightly upon the door of Carrington's studio. He was alone when she entered, and with his arm on the chimney-piece, but apparently lost in thought. He smiled, however, directly Jean made her appearance.

“I have just heard the most extraordinary piece of news,” said the girl quickly, “and I fear to do or say anything in the matter without advice. Will you, Mr. Carrington, come with me to the parlor and hear all that this gentleman from Boston has to say. No,” she added suddenly, with a quick change of expression, “better still, leave me here and go and talk to him yourself. You and he can come all the more quickly to an understanding, and—I would like to be alone for a few moments and think it over.”

“As you like,” said Carrington slowly; but he paused and looked down upon the girl with infinite tenderness in his expression. “Before I go I must—I will say one little word to you. He held out his hand, and involuntarily Jean placed her own trembling little fingers within it. “Jean,” he went on quickly, not conscious of the way in which he pressed the hand in his keeping, “if this means any trouble for you ahead I want to tell you that my life—anything that I have or can do for you, is at your service. Don't answer, my child, and don't look so frightened,” he went on, with a half-sad smile, as he saw the bewildered expression which flitted across Jean's face, and the color which dyed it scarlet. “I am not asking you to even answer me, but before I hear any of the perhaps bad news this man has to bring I want you to understand how and



when and where you can command me. I have no thought in life," he added in a low voice, tense with feeling, and which thrilled Jean to the depths of her heart, "apart from you and your interests in anything."

A moment later and she was alone, conscious in the midst of all her bewilderment of a wild, unreasoning, bewildering joy. She could not, did not, for an instant doubt what Carrington had meant by what he said, and one look, the last, into his fine, strong face had been enough for her to see, to know, that he loved her. What had she done or been, the girl asked herself, to deserve it? Not a thought of any of the sterner facts of life, its externals or conventionalities, robbed her of the exquisite joy of that moment. She had known what it was to be rich, admired, and indulged, and she had known of late what it was to be poor, anxious, and depressed over the actual need of earning money for those dear to her; but of actual heaven-given content Jean felt she had known nothing until that moment. Presently she rose and moved about the room with a strange, delightful sense of ownership in its humblest appointments. Was it indeed to be her privilege to share this simple but ennobling life of toil and high purpose with such a man as Carrington? And then a great wave of recollection and gratitude rushed across her heart. How could she ever be thankful enough for what had once seemed the hardest stroke of fate? How much she would have missed had she simply glided from one period of luxurious inactivity at the Hill House into another, marked, perhaps, by some responsibility, but strengthened by none of those elements which had developed her own character, she hoped, and certainly brought her to the gates of an earthly paradise.



### XXXVIII.

JEAN could not tell how long she sat waiting for Carrington's return, so engrossing were her new thoughts, but presently his step sounded and she sprang up to meet him as he entered, the color rushing into her cheeks, while he said quickly:

"Jean, this gentleman has certainly brought a most astonishing piece of news, and if what he says is true, then the destinies of the Hill House are once more changed. He has come directly from his sister-in-law's house, and now suggests that you either accompany him there, or perhaps I can go for you, and see the lady who can unravel the last of the tangle."

"Will you—can you go?" said Jean eagerly. "It will be so much better, and then I can be here to console Aunt Ellen, or explain it all to her, if need be."

"It is for you to decide," said Carrington quickly; "in any case I will come back as soon as possible, and——" He stood still a moment, gazing down at the slender young figure before him, and then said impulsively, holding out both his hands:

"Jean, of what use is there for me to hesitate now that I have read the message of your eyes and face? Perhaps if I had not seen perplexity so near you I would not have dared to speak; but will you then give me the right that I have asked for?"

The girl held her hand out, laying it quietly in his.

"You have every right," she said in a low voice, "over all my future, if you care to take it."



And then Jean was in a strange way conscious that for an instant Carrington had held her in his arms, that his lips had touched hers, and then once more she found herself alone.

It was, Jean knew, a betrothal, yet how suddenly, how strangely, it had seemed to have come about. Well she knew that hours of discussion would have brought them to no clearer an understanding of the simple, wonderful fact of their feeling for each other, yet she was as well aware that but for this emergency Carrington would have hesitated to speak—to have asked her to share the simple, hard-working life which of necessity was his. And how could she be sufficiently grateful, thought Jean, for what had forced them into an understanding of their mutual need of each other? It was, as she knew, the discovery of her own feeling which had made her so overjoyed on finding herself free from any duty toward Dick Appleton, and now if only he could see his way and Linda hers toward a happiness anything like her own, what a fairy-tale their lives might turn into! She longed to run upstairs to Miss Dyker with her precious, wonderful piece of intelligence, and yet feared to do so until Carrington's return. Still it would be hard to go about the usual preparations for their supper as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred, and it was a relief when Polly's quick step and gay voice sounded, a knock at the studio door followed, and her cousin came into the room. There could certainly be no harm whatever in telling the girl of the strange gentleman's visit, and binding her over to keep all news of it from Miss Dyker, at least until Carrington's return.

If Jean had expected a sensation she was certainly not disappointed in the way Polly received her astonishing piece of news.



"Then that girl we saw at the library," she exclaimed, "is somebody after all, and O Jean, although it won't make us any better off, I suppose, *what* a difference it will make at the Hill House. What, then, will become of that Sarah Dalton?"

"It's all too deep for me as yet," said Jean, with a light laugh; "anyway, Polly, we've served a valuable apprenticeship and have begun to learn how to take care of ourselves."

Polly sighed.

"I guess you wouldn't say that, Jean," she remarked, "if you had to struggle over compound fractions the way I do. I'd like to know what kind of a living I could earn just yet awhile. Miss Nichols told me only to-day that she shouldn't wonder if I could graduate in about eight years. Hopeful, isn't it?"

"Never mind," exclaimed Jean, with her gayest laugh. "I'm so happy, Polly, that I feel ready to be good to all the world. I never thought that life could be so beautiful, *beautiful!*"

Polly stared an instant in silence.

"May I enquire," she said gravely, "whether you are getting the brain fever? I declare, it looks like it."

"Perhaps I am," laughed Jean, "but if so I hope it will last all my life long."

"Well I believe you *are* daft, and no mistake," said Polly, now becoming serious. "You can't have gone crazy suddenly just on account of that gentleman's news. Jean," she exclaimed, coming up to her cousin and catching her hand while she looked down severely into Jean's sweet, flushed face, "look up at me this instant and tell me what's the matter, for if you don't I shall guess, and then I'll never forgive you."



The color had quite faded away now from the face Jean lifted to her younger cousin, but in her expression was something which made it lovelier than Polly had ever seen it before.

“I will not let you guess,” she said gently, “for, my dear little cousin, I would rather tell you my wonderful piece of fortune myself. Mr. Carrington has asked me to marry him and some day I am going to be his wife.”

For an instant Polly stood still, a feeling of being shut out once more coming over her; but the finer, more generous part of the girl’s nature quickly asserted itself, and as usual her practical side of a question was uppermost.

“O Jean!” she exclaimed, kissing her cousin affectionately, “of course he’s perfectly grand, and I hope everything will go well; but you know, my dear, you’ll have to wait as long before you’re married as I will to graduate, I expect.”

“Never mind,” retorted Jean; “then we can just keep on being engaged; and oh, Polly dear, you must promise me one thing: you are the first person who has heard of it, and remember not a word to anyone until—Mr. Carrington and I have really decided it.”

“Are you always going to keep on calling him Mr. Carrington,” said Polly, with a sniff.

Jean laughed.

“Well, I’ve only had the right to do anything else for about two hours,” she answered.

And then suddenly the interesting conference between the cousins was interrupted, and once more on this wonderful day of events Jean was summoned to the parlor,



Polly following her, feeling that she had now the right to hear and see all that might be going on.

The gas had been lighted and it shone full down upon two anxious, eager-looking figures, in whom Jean and her cousin recognized at once Sarah Dalton and her companion, Mrs. Holmes.



### XXXIX.

IF for an instant Sarah's former assumption of independence in the presence of her rival was resumed, Jean's very sweet and gentle way of greeting her softened the girl at once. Moreover, she had come with a story to tell and was anxious to plunge into it.

"Can we sit right here and talk?" demanded Sarah, glancing round the little parlor; "because it's on business, and I don't want anybody else coming in."

"No one will disturb us," said Jean quickly; "I hope," she added, "that you are not in any trouble, Miss Dalton."

"Well, I am and I amn't," said Sarah, who in obedience to a suggestion from Jean had laid aside her wraps. "But I guess when you hear all I have to say, Miss Garnier, you'll think I'm a pretty good sort after all. I brought Mrs. Holmes right along with me, you see," she went on, "because I didn't want to make any mistake hunting you up, and I felt there wasn't an hour to lose."

Sarah did not add that she hardly dared trust herself to let go the high pressure of morality in the matter which she had reached, but she felt now that she was certainly doing a very creditable thing.

"You see," she went on, "I found out just by an accident that aunt must have made a kind of a mistake." She blushed hotly for an instant, and then continued: "Aunt's been very sick, and perhaps she got things rather mixed up. Anyhow that Sandy Mackenzie was a good deal to blame. You see, I came into the possession of the Hill House because my father was Philip Dalton, and aunt and every-









SARAH "RIGHTS HERSELF" AT LAST.



body else said as how my mother was his wife, Sarah Dyker. That was it, wasn't it? Well, now it turns out that my father and mother were married after his first wife died, see? Oh, I've got it all straight as a string; good as any lawyer could tell it to you. And, you see, father didn't die, from all I've heard, worth his salt, so—there it is.”

The girl was evidently in a highly nervous state, and when she had finished this blunt but absolutely truthful statement she walked over to the window, pressed her hands against the pane of glass, trying vainly to repress a burst of weeping.

Jean sprang to her feet. Suddenly she realized all that it meant, and more than that, the intense integrity of the girl who had voluntarily come forward to resign her claim.

She sprang to her feet, and going over to the tremulous, weeping figure, put her arm about Sarah's waist.

“Sarah,” she exclaimed eagerly, “I wonder if you know what a fine girl you are. Don't cry, my dear; you have acted just splendidly.”

“That's what I say,” exclaimed Mrs. Holmes, for once in her experience thoroughly proud of her pupil. “I've been telling her that ever since we started.”

Sarah still wept, but Jean's words were music in her ears. No one among those Dykers would ever look down upon her again, and how she intended to make Sandy Mackenzie *crawl!*

“I don't see what else there was to do,” said Sarah, wiping her eyes on her very elegant pocket-handkerchief, and allowing Jean to draw her over toward a little sofa, where she seated herself beside her. “As soon as I found out for sure I could hardly get here quick enough. It'll be



awfully hard on aunt," she continued sorrowfully; "she's so weak and suffering."

"But Sarah, my dear," said Jean quickly, "I hardly think this young girl who we hear is to come into the property——"

Sarah interrupted her, giving her a little push.

"Why, what young girl?" she enquired. "Who you talking about now?"

Jean made haste to relate what had passed, and mentioned the fact that Mr. Morris had called at the Hill House, only to find her gone.

"Well, if that doesn't beat everything," exclaimed Sarah, beguiled into a little laugh; "and isn't that just my luck? For, you see, if I hadn't come of myself I'd have *had* to, anyhow."

"Exactly," returned Jean; "and now you have the credit, you see, of having done the right thing all of your own accord. Of course I don't know," she went on, "how it will all end; but we will hear very soon, for our friend here, Mr. Carrington, has gone over to see the girl who will step into your shoes."

"Well, all I can say," said Sarah with a touch of her old spirit of fun, "is that I hope they'll fit her better than they did me, for I had all the bother of being a fine lady and *none* of the fun."

Polly had been so silent during this really exciting conference that Jean began to feel anxious as to what might be passing through her brain, when suddenly that young person said in her most dignified and autocratic manner:

"Do you know, Jean, that I think we are doing very wrong to talk so much business without Dick or Mr. Carrington, or even that Mr. Morris."

"Oh, bother them all!" exclaimed Sarah, tossing her



head; "I don't see as the men in the business have shown themselves so powerfully smart we need to be afraid of them. If I'd known how things stood from the start I wouldn't have needed any man to tell me what to do or how to do it either. Yes," she added suddenly, "there's just one I mean shall have any say in the matter so far as I'm concerned, and that's Will Rogers, who said he wouldn't wipe his old shoes on me while I let Sandy Mackenzie fool around."

It was impossible for the girls not to laugh heartily at this candid speech.

"Oh, yes," continued Sarah; "he advised me for the best straight along, only now I'd be ashamed to let him know how I've been fooled. Do you know," added the girl, passing her hand across her head, "I don't believe I've ever got real good and strong since that time I was sick over at the cottage. My head spins around now just the way it did that other time."

Mrs. Holmes stood up at once.

"Sarah is really not at all well," she said anxiously; "she has been under a dreadful strain for twenty-four hours, and indeed the past few weeks have been trying in a great many ways to her. We had better go back, I think, to the hotel near the depot, where I have been before."

"No, no, indeed," exclaimed Jean; "you must not think of such a thing; if you'll put up with such accommodation as we can offer you; and, Sarah, you must lie down at once in my room upstairs and try to get a little sleep. Polly," she added, "won't you try to find Linda or Miss Carrington?"

Polly darted away, just as well pleased to be by herself for a few moments, since she had not reached the point of sympathy which made Jean so sweet and tender in her



manner with their unexpected guest. She stood still an instant in the hall, realizing that the change in the fortunes of the Hill House could not affect them materially, except in placing someone better qualified than Sarah for the position as mistress of the place, and she was surprised to find that all her scorn of and animosity toward poor Sarah had completely died away. Polly hardly liked to admit it to herself, but she could not help wondering whether, under similar circumstances, she, a daughter of the Dykers, would have acted quite so promptly and well. No one better than Polly herself knew how much good the experience of the past few months had done her, and now this voluntary submission on Sarah's part had made her feel all the more keenly her own insignificance. How merely theatrical her own little airs and graces, her assumption of young ladyhood, appeared. But then these were reflections for Polly's own mind alone, she not having reached a point where she felt herself justified in acknowledging herself in some ways defeated or converted.

Miss Carrington and Linda were both busily engaged downstairs, but on hearing from Polly that a friend from home had arrived who was feeling ill and needed a little rest Miss Carrington at once suggested the use of a little hall room upstairs until something better could be provided, and Sarah was really glad of the chance to lie down in the quiet and stillness of the little chamber, Jean having assisted her to disrobe and put on the dressing-gown she had brought with her, and then leaving Polly to sit near by, Jean drew Mrs. Holmes into their own little sky parlor for a few words of clearer explanation of this most astonishing business.

"I only know," said Mrs. Holmes, "just what she has told me, for she insisted upon hurrying away. But she



has an important box of papers with her, so she says, which she insisted upon her aunt's giving up. I have no doubt they will unravel whatever mystery there is left in it. The girl has really done wonderfully well," she continued, "but I'm only afraid the excitement will prove too much for her."

Jean found it difficult to conceal her impatience for Carrington's return, and could not but feel in the midst of all these new disclosures a thrill of delight over the thought that come what would she belonged to him, to be guided and directed and controlled by his gentle wisdom and love. Just what he would advise or what Mr. Morris would say it would be difficult, of course, to conjecture, and meanwhile it would be necessary to give Miss Dyker some explanation of what was going on. Miss Carrington suggested Jean's taking Mrs. Holmes up to the old lady's room and letting them simply talk it over after their own fashion, and this accomplished, Jean stole back downstairs to wait in the front window for Carrington's return. He would not, she felt sure, be delayed much longer, and almost in the same instant she saw him turn the corner of the street, and the next moment heard his key in the door and he was with her.

"What is it?" he asked the instant he came into the room, for Jean's face had betrayed her anxiety.

He listened with earnest attention while she related what had happened.

"Why, that girl must be a trump!" he exclaimed; "and we have been wondering, Mr. Morris and I, how we could induce her to resign her claim."

"You won't have a bit of trouble," said Jean; "she simply regards it as a matter of honesty to put the whole affair into proper hands; but she is worn out with all the



excitement, and I have had to make her go to bed and rest."

"And you yourself," said Carrington with grave tenderness in his voice and expression; "do you think, now that I have just got possession of you, my little sweetheart, I am going to let you wear yourself out about anybody or anything? No, indeed, my child; your cheeks look too white as it is, and you will please to remember that your young man has a pair of very broad shoulders quite able to carry any of your burdens for the next hundred years or so."

Jean drew nearer to him, looking up earnestly into his face.

"And yet," she said in a low tone of voice, "I was wicked enough to think when poor Uncle Neil died life was going to be nothing but a weary grind for me. Oh, my dear," she went on wistfully, "you must be very careful and not let me be too selfishly happy, for I am afraid now there is grave danger of it."

"What shall I do?" he answered quickly. "Shall I concoct a string of hard names to call you on occasion in order to bring you down from the pedestal I have set you upon? Or shall we agree that twice a week, say Tuesdays and Saturdays from nine to ten, I shall treat you to a lecture on my own good qualities and your shortcomings? Ah, no, my child," he added, dropping the tone of banter; "don't let us be afraid that we can ever treat each other with too much tenderness or love. There will be rubs enough of all kinds in the world, and we won't escape our own share without voluntarily adding anything just of our own making."

"Then I must resign myself to bliss, must I?" said Jean quizzically. "But beware—you see, if I start out



on that principle it will be terrible ever to disappoint me.”

“I am not afraid,” he said quickly; “and now, then, little woman, let me tell you that Mr. Morris is anxious for you and Miss Dyker and Polly to make his niece’s acquaintance as soon as possible. You will like her thoroughly. She is a bright, charming-looking young creature, thoroughly refined and ladylike, and her mother, as she calls her, seems to be a remarkable woman in her way. Mr. Morris assured me that he had only just discovered what a fine woman his brother’s widow was, and I fancy he has all along been treating her rather too distantly, for fear she was not up to the Beacon Street standard.”

The handle of the door was turned a little timidly and Miss Kate’s slender figure and quiet face appeared.

A look passed between Carrington and Jean, and then the former said in his gravest tone of voice:

“Kate, my dear, there is an end to all my miserable hours of loneliness. Will you not welcome Jean as a sister?”

This was a most hopeful beginning, and in less than half an hour every member of the little household knew of Jean and Carrington’s betrothal, and in spite of the deeper anxieties of the moment there was such general rejoicing that even poor Sarah could not be left out of it, and Jean herself went softly into the little room, where, kneeling by the girl’s side, she told her the wonderful piece of news, and was pleased by Sarah’s open sympathy.

“But what have you done with that Dick Appleton?” said Sarah, whose weakness had not deprived her of all her shrewdness and sagacity.

Jean had to laugh.

“Oh, Dick Appleton is quite capable of taking care of



himself, Sarah," she answered, "and he will be greatly interested in hearing what your visit has brought about."

"Well, after all," said Sarah, "I aint just a nobody, am I?"

"I should say not," said Jean; "you are a Somebody with a capital S, and I can only hope that in future your own happiness in life will repay you for what you have been brave enough to do."

Jean rose as if to leave her patient, but Sarah put out a detaining hand.

"See here, Miss Jean," said Sarah; "if you don't mind will you wait just a minute? There's ever so many things I'd like to talk to you about. It seems funny now, doesn't it, that I ever wanted to spite you; but, you see, I thought you were dead set against me. Could you write a letter for me if I was to tell you just what to say, and never let on to anyone else?"

"Indeed I could, Sarah," answered Jean; "if you will let me go and get my portfolio I will come up and write it and address it here and put it in the box myself, and no one will ever know anything about it."

Sarah's anxious eyes closed wearily, while Jean left her for a few moments. When she returned between them they made out the letter poor Sarah had been so anxious to write.

It ran as follows:

"DEAR WILL:

"I suppose you think me a very mean kind of a girl, and maybe I have acted like that, but when you hear the whole story I think, maybe, you'll say Sarah has something good in her, after all. I thought I owned all



that Hill House, but I find out now I didn't. You see, it's just this way: My father, Philip Dalton, never told me that he had been married before; but it seems he had. He was married somewhere and took his wife down to New York, where they boarded with a Mrs. Morris on Seventh Street. My father's wife died and left a little girl that Mrs. Morris adopted and brought her up as her own. Then, after that, he came back to the country and met my mother, and never let on a word that he'd been married before. I don't want to talk against him, only I guess he was a regular scamp. You see, he was Mrs. Malone's half brother, and she had always kind of shielded him and been proud of him because he looked so like a gentleman, and could play the piano so well. Now you understand, I hope, how I came to make the mistake. When my aunt came to the Hill House and got very sick she brought a box of papers with her, and from what she said to me I made up my mind that there was something wrong I'd have to find out about, she was so terribly afraid of anyone seeing what was in the box. So when she was sound asleep I just looked it through for myself, and then I found out pretty well what had been going on. You know me, and when my mind's made up there aint any use of trying to change me, but O Will, I tell you for a little while I felt as if I was just like a common thief, and yet I did hate to give up being such a grand lady. I sat right down in front of the fire, and I knew if I threw all them papers into it no one would ever be the wiser, and I just had to wrestle with myself for quite a while, for, you see, I was so afraid everyone would laugh at me; and then I thought like this: If ever I put my hand into Will's I want him to know it's an honest one, and even if we're poor we haven't got anything to be ashamed of. I was all



dressed up in my elegant silk, all trimmed with lace, and, do you know, I kind of hated myself, because I felt it didn't belong to me. I didn't dare trust myself to wait long, and that lawyer, Sandy Mackenzie, was in Albany, and Dr. Fraser wasn't at his office, so I just wrote Sandy Mackenzie a letter and told him I was coming to New York to attend to my own business, and he'd better look out for himself, as I was going straight to see Jean Garnier. I knew she'd do the straight thing every time. I brought Mrs. Holmes with me, but I see now I was too sick to stand the journey. It's just all I can do to write these lines; or I oughtn't to say I'm writing them, I'm just telling Jean Garnier what to put down, because I want the truth to be known right now and here, and I want you to know just what I've done. I aint anybody but just Sarah Dalton, and I don't even own the clothes on my back. It kind of worries me to think how I'll ever pay back the money I spent up at the Hill House, but perhaps they'll let me do it a little at a time. There shan't no one be able to say that Sarah wasn't honest. And now, dear Will, you know just who and what I am, and I'd like nothing better to have than a good talk with you, when you could tell me just what I'd better do."

When Sarah, with much difficulty, had dictated this important letter, she turned with a wistful look to Jean and asked:

"How shall I end it up?"

"Why," said Jean, "you could say, 'Your loving friend.'"

"Sure enough," said Sarah; "and if I aint that I'm just nothing at all."



So the letter, which had cost Sarah more than anyone could ever know, was signed:

“Your loving friend.”

And Jean held the girl’s hand while she traced her own name at the bottom of the page, adding to it, “Dalton,” addressing it to the young man, care of his employer.



## XL.

I NEED hardly say that the little family in Fourth Avenue had felt themselves in a most disjointed frame of mind. Edith was perfectly well aware that there was something important about to happen, yet felt too proud to question her mother until permitted to do so, and Mrs. Morris had a most uncomfortable sensation of being doubted by the one being on earth dearest to her heart. She realized how wrong she had been to have practised any deception in the matter of Edith's birth, even though she had considered it for the child's good, and felt miserable with every thought of what Edith would say on learning the whole story. She had put the matter completely into her brother-in-law's hands, and during the morning she found it hard to wait for his return.

A hasty lunch had been prepared and eaten by Mrs. Morris and Edith almost in silence, when the door-bell rang and a moment later Mr. Morris was in the room.

His whole manner and expression had undergone a remarkable change since he was last there, and he was in such evident good humor that Mrs. Morris tried to feel encouraged.

"Where is the little girl?" he exclaimed. "Edith, Edith," he called out; "let me have a good look at you."

And as Edith stepped forward from the recess of the room he continued:

"Upon my word, you really are a credit to the family. What have you meant, Christina, by keeping her hidden all these years?"



"I've not been hidden, Uncle Charles," said Edith proudly, "and I am very glad to give the credit where it belongs. If mother and you have any secrets which I ought to know I would like to hear them at once, because I can't go on seeing mother so unlike herself. Do you know, Uncle Charles, how she has acted the last day or two? She will look at me and say nothing, but her eyes will fill with tears, and then, after a minute, she will say something like this: 'Edith, what will you do without your mother? Suppose you have to lose me.' Now you can imagine what that makes me feel like; and then all these mysterious talks. If mother is in any trouble," concluded the girl, "I want to share it and know all about it."

Charles Morris looked at his niece with profound admiration.

"What would you do, Edith," he said at last, "if you found out that you were heiress to an immense amount of property—if you owned a fine country place and had a bank account away up into the thousands?"

Edith said nothing, but she turned very pale, and instinctively put her hand out toward her mother.

"I don't think, Uncle Charles," she said gravely, "that you are the kind of person to make a wild joke; so would you please tell us exactly what you mean."

Mrs. Morris felt completely reassured by Edith's manner and the touch of the strong young hand in her own.

"You are your mother's own daughter!" exclaimed Mr. Morris. "It's a queer thing, I declare," he went on, "how blood *will* tell. Now, then, we have not much time to lose. I have sifted this matter pretty thoroughly and I see just how things stand. There is no use in beating about the bush any longer. If Edith will put her things on I



want to introduce her to some of her new relations. After that, Edith, you can do just what you like, and I hardly think," he went on in great good humor, "you will find that your mother here, as you like to call her, will need to keep a little store. You will probably be able to make her more than comfortable."

Edith still held her mother's hand and looked at her now for advice or suggestion.

"Do as your uncle tells you, Edith," said Mrs. Morris gravely. "I'm glad to say I can trust you anywhere. I am not ashamed of anything I have done for you."

In a few moments Edith, still feeling bewildered, and yet full of a girlish pleasure in the novelty of her position, had prepared herself to accompany her uncle on their mysterious expedition. She took five minutes to debate as to which of her two hats she had better wear, and at last decided in favor of a wide-brimmed red felt with small black ostrich tips. This, with the addition of a white silk handkerchief at her neck, and her long paletot, gave her quite the young-ladylike appearance she most desired, and Mr. Morris could find no fault with her appearance.

Mr. Morris had a great deal on his mind to say, but he found himself in such a novel position that he wisely refrained from saying anything beyond the interchange of a few common-places. Within himself he was wondering why he had so long been fearful lest his brother's child, as he had always thought her, would not turn out a credit to the race. Now he was more than worried lest his own part in the whole affair should not redound to his credit. Edith's alert kind of cheerfulness of manner was a great comfort to him. Whatever she was thinking or feeling she was sensible enough not to worry him with, and the



only thing he found it necessary to say was, as he rang the bell at Benton Place:

“Edith, whatever you do or say, please don’t let us have any kind of an excitement. We will just talk things over quietly and settle the whole business with a few words. Are you the kind of girl,” he added, looking at her critically, “who ever has hysterics, or anything of that kind?”

Edith was compelled to laugh.

“Uncle Charles,” she exclaimed, “you don’t begin to know how funny you are. I never had hysterics in my life and I don’t think I’ll begin now. I’m worried, of course, thinking all that mother has to go through, and it’s rather surprising, isn’t it, to find yourself very rich when you thought you were very poor; but I guess I can bear the shock if you can.”

It was Jean herself who opened the door, and her eyes spoke a welcome before she had said a word.

She led the way into the little parlor, Mr. Morris introducing Edith with as much courtliness of manner as though he were opening a ball.

“I’m so glad,” said Jean, “that things are going to be at last settled, and I can only hope, Mr. Morris, that your niece will keep the dear old family place as well as we tried to do. It’s been in our family for generations, and everything belonging to it is dear to me.”

Edith had been revolving one or two points in her own mind, and now she spoke out of her own solemn convictions.

“Miss Garnier,” she said slowly, “so far as I can understand it, the Hill House property belongs to me. But I would never enter it nor touch one penny belonging to it if I thought there was any kind of a wrong done to any-



one else. Please don't interrupt me, Uncle Charles," she went on, "for I have made up my mind just what to say. I don't understand all the business as yet, and therefore I want to find out everything connected with it. So far as I can see, this young lady and her family were brought up supposing they would inherit all the property. There's something," added the young girl, "higher and better than just what the law allows. I'm not as smart as you are, Uncle Charles, in regard to all kinds of law matters, but I think I know right from wrong."

Mr. Morris simply stared in amazement, first at his niece and then at Jean Garnier. He was trying to find out where Edith had obtained all her high-minded sense of honor which alone had prompted her to act as she was now doing; moreover, he realized that there was something in his brother's child impossible for him to combat.

"I suppose, Miss Garnier," he said at last, "we must let this wilful girl have her own way, and I am sure," he added, "I am only too anxious to have her on good social terms with relatives like yourself."

"But what *is* her way?" asked Jean. "Don't you think, Mr. Morris, that she should not decide everything in a hurry like this? My uncle made his will, but delayed to sign it."

Edith gave a little cry of delight.

"There now," she exclaimed, "that just settles the whole thing. Don't you see, Uncle Charles, whether Colonel Dyker signed the will or not, that is the way he intended the property to go? Can't we find that will anywhere and act accordingly?"

"Well, upon my word, Edith," exclaimed Mr. Morris, "I don't know what to make of you. Do you mean to say



as Colonel Dyker's heiress you want to share the money with half a dozen other people?"

"I want *this*," said Edith: "to know exactly what Colonel Dyker really intended to do. It isn't likely, is it, that he would have brought up his relations letting them think that they were well off and then leave them without a cent. You know," she went on, "mother calls me very headstrong, and I suppose I am; but if you can't advise me the right way, Uncle Charles, I can consult old Mr. Perry. There is no danger of *his* not giving me the best kind of advice."

After that what could Mr. Morris do but own himself defeated, and in point of fact he was too well pleased with Edith to care to combat her in any of her decisions. He flattered himself that she was doing credit to her New England ancestry in the very downright view she took of things, and in deciding to let her have her own way saw that he was establishing himself thoroughly in her good graces.

"There is just one thing," said Jean, "which I think I ought to tell you, Mr. Morris; Sarah is here—the young girl whom Mrs. Malone brought up. Her father, I think, was Mr. Dalton; he married her mother after your sister-in-law died."

Quiet as Jean's voice had been, a bombshell thrown into the room could not have startled Mr. Morris more than her words.

"Are we never going to see the end of this?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to tell me that girl is here and in the house?"

"Yes," said Jean anxiously, "and very ill. I don't dare to allow her to have any excitement. It seems that during Mrs. Malone's illness she had frequently called for



a little rosewood box which she kept near at hand, and Sarah, suspecting that it might contain some information which her aunt was desirous of withholding from her, determined to see what the box really contained. Finding her aunt asleep, she took the box from the room and very carefully examined everything which it contained, and it was the information gained in this way that gave Sarah the clue to the true state of affairs."

"And this girl," exclaimed Mr. Morris, "is here, you say, now?"

"Certainly," said Jean; "she and the lady whom Dr. Fraser engaged as her companion came directly on from Thornton as soon as Sarah made this discovery. The poor girl was really too ill for the journey, but it seems that she was only anxious to have everything settled in the right way, and her first thought was to reach me."

Mr. Morris remained lost in thought for a few moments. Then he said very quietly:

"She has the papers with her, you tell me?"

Jean nodded.

"Can I see her?" he inquired. "I will not worry her, but in a case of this kind I think a few words of explanation will no doubt make her feel more at rest. Please remember, Miss Garnier, that I am an old lawyer, and as such have to be as good as a doctor. I will not worry nor excite your patient. On the contrary, I think I can set her mind completely at rest."

Jean was thoroughly convinced that Mr. Morris was working in the right direction, and now only asked that she might be allowed to prepare Sarah for the meeting.

It seemed to her as she flew up the stairs as though some great load had been taken off her heart.

Sarah was sleeping, but at the first sound of Jean's



voice, speaking in a low tone to Mrs. Holmes, roused and sat upright in the bed.

“Sarah dear,” said Jean quietly, “there is a gentleman downstairs who would like very much to see you and talk over this business matter with you. You need not feel worried, for you are with your best friends, and I don’t intend to have anything make you sick and bothered. Will you trust to me, Sarah, and let this gentleman see you for a few moments?”

“Go ahead,” said Sarah; “I guess you know what you’re doing.”

With this permission Jean went down, and only waiting to urge Mr. Morris not to worry Sarah by too much legal preamble, conducted him upstairs to the little room.

Sarah, true to herself, was slightly defiant as he entered; but the sight of the girl’s really feverish and worn looks made him compassionate, and he seated himself beside the bed with as gentle an air of solicitude as a physician could have used.

“I think, Sarah,” he said quietly, “you are going to turn out our good angel in all this matter. Now will you let me understand your history thoroughly and have all the papers you brought with you from Thornton? Too much depends upon it to delay any longer.”

“There they are,” said Sarah jerkily, waving her hand toward the little bureau in the room; “you can just take them and do what you like; and I only hope,” she went on, “Will Rogers will be satisfied now; I guess I aint quite beneath his notice if I am poor, and look a’ here,” she continued, grasping Jean by the arm, “you won’t forget all the money I spent when I didn’t mean to.”

“Dear Sarah,” exclaimed Jean, “we will forget everything but that you are a miracle of honesty, and I am very



certain Mr. Will Rogers will have a treasure if he gets you for a wife.”

Sarah closed her eyes, a slight expression of disdain crossing her face.

“Don’t you fret,” was all she answered.

Mr. Morris, with a motion to Jean, quietly left the room, and having seen that Sarah was comfortable, Jean followed him.

“This is a most extraordinary case,” said Mr. Morris in a subdued tone. “I think now the best thing I can do is to look these papers over carefully, and when Sarah is a little stronger discuss matters further with her. We may possibly need some evidence from Mrs. Malone, but I think we have a clear case.”

He paused, a smile crossing his face.

“The only difficulty is, Miss Garnier,” he continued, “that should my niece inherit the property it leaves you rather out in the cold.”

“But the *right* will have been done,” said Jean proudly. “I am young and able to take care of myself; I am only worrying thinking of Aunt Ellen in her old age.”

“Edith will have to say something on all this,” he answered, “and I think you will find she has her own mind made up, and a more determined little piece of humanity I never came across.”

Meanwhile Edith had been trying to content herself as best she might in the parlor. Her own mind was definitely made up, and her only fear was that her uncle would decide things for her. Provided nothing was done which should separate her from Mrs. Morris, that her adopted mother could have an income which would relieve her of every daily care, she felt that her own girlish needs would be satisfied. Moreover, there was a touch of romance in



the whole affair which appealed strongly to Edith's nature. It lifted her out of the ordinary common-place routine of life and brought her into contact with people and things which she felt herself akin to. With a young girl's quick enthusiasm she felt how fine it would be to have for relations, and possibly companions, people like Mr. Morris and Jean. Her life so far had been delicately cared for in one way, but there had been few social surroundings which the girl had really liked.

"However you settle it," said Edith suddenly, "if my name amounts to anything I won't sign it to any paper that leaves everyone else out in the cold. What I think ought to be done is to let Colonel Dyker's will stand just as he meant it should. I don't see," added the girl, "when everybody knows what he meant and wanted to do, why, just because he didn't live long enough to sign his name, other people should suffer."

She looked at her uncle, who returned the glance, not quite prepared at the moment to answer this remarkable statement of facts. Whether it was that he caught the infection of Edith's spirit of equity, or that he thought to himself it was no use to argue with a girl of her calibre, no one could ever tell; but, at all events, he said very decidedly:

"Miss Garnier, my niece is perfectly right. We will settle this matter out of court. It is very easy to find out what Colonel Dyker's original intention was, as his lawyer certainly has the unsigned will, and if my niece here insists that that shall stand there will only be the delay of the necessary formalities. I don't see," continued Mr. Morris, resigning himself completely to the situation, "that there is anything else to be done."

Jean felt for one moment as though everything in her



brain was in a whirl. Was this to be the end of all her anxiety and care—had she any right to allow this young girl to act the part of fairy godmother in a fashion? But Mr. Morris' keen, critical face and well-poised manner reassured her. He certainly was doing nothing upon mere impulse. Sarah also had to be considered, and thinking of her, Jean said quickly:

“But, Mr. Morris, even if we accept the very generous offer Edith has made, what shall we do about Sarah Dalton?”

“Do!” exclaimed Mr. Morris, “why, she will be thoroughly happy on a small income we might allow her in consideration of what she has done for us. If I'm any judge of human nature I think this girl, from all I hear, will be prouder of having been the *deus ex machina* than anything else, and I am more than thankful that my little niece here has found such congenial relations.”

Edith had not spoken, but her face showed that there was something on her mind to say, and Jean understood it in a moment.

“What is it, Edith?” she said, smiling.

“I'm just thinking of mother,” said Edith. “I don't want to do or say anything she wouldn't like.”

Mr. Morris sprang to his feet.

“Miss Garnier,” he exclaimed, “Edith is one girl in ten thousand. She is loyal to the heart's core. She knows what Mrs. Morris has done for her and been to her, and I am proud of her for keeping it all in her mind.”

Jean smiled.

“There is where she shows the instinct of her race,” said Jean. “We Dykers are nothing if we are not loyal. There is more in tradition of that kind than people can suspect till they find themselves face to



face with some emergency. Then it is that the real grit shows.”

“Well, what shall I do now?” said Mr. Morris. “Shall I leave Edith with you for a little while?”

“I wish you would,” exclaimed Jean; “we need a little time to get acquainted.”

Mr. Morris was only too pleased to arrange matters in this way, and promising to call back in an hour or two, he left Edith to make friends with her newly found relations.

Jean waited a moment for deliberation, her heart all the time full of what Carrington would say to this new turn in the wheel of her life. Then she decided to send Polly to the parlor to make friends with their cousin, and for herself explain matters to the master of the house.

Whatever had happened to Polly, all her little airs and graces seemed to have been forgotten in view of so much that was really important, and when Jean explained to her that Edith Morris was waiting in the parlor to be entertained during her uncle’s absence Polly arose with the very gentlest kind of manner, saying:

“Certainly, Jeanie dear; shall I just talk to her? Perhaps she can tell me what to do up at the school, for I feel myself in a perfect wilderness there.”

“That’s just what you had better talk to her about,” said Jean. “Tell her just exactly how you feel, all about the teachers and the girls and everything. Sarah is sleeping quietly and Mrs. Holmes will take good care of her, so just for a little while we need not worry.”

The girls went down the stairs together, and when Polly entered the parlor Jean very timidly knocked at the studio door.

Carrington’s “Come in” was in a very depressed tone of



voice, but as Jean entered his face brightened as though a ray of sunshine came with her.

“What is it?” said Carrington suddenly.

“I am so worried,” said Jean; “but I am sure you will tell me just what I had better do. Mr. Morris has gone away for a short time after making things very clear to me.”

She explained the situation thoroughly to Carrington, who listened with grave intentness.

“Whatever is the ending,” Jean concluded, “I am thankful the whole affair is in such good hands. It seems now only a case of too much generosity on the part of Edith Morris. But, Mr. Carrington, when you see and talk with her uncle you will feel convinced that whatever he says is based on sound good judgment. His niece, Edith, is upstairs now. I was only too anxious to see you and discuss it all with you.”

“Is there any discussion needed?” exclaimed Carrington. “It seems to me, Jean, you have done the only thing that you could or ought to have done under the circumstances. Whatever comes of it you need not feel ashamed of your part in the matter. Morris, you say, will return?”

“Yes, indeed,” exclaimed Jean, “and then you must see him and settle the whole affair.”

Carrington smiled.

“Then you give me power of attorney, do you?” he enquired.

“Absolutely,” said Jean; “and now let me run away and see to my invalid. Poor Sarah, after all but for her what would we have known of all this business?”

Jean gave him her hand for one moment and then hastened from the studio, running upstairs quickly, anxious to let Sarah know something of what had happened.



The girl was lying in a very tranquil sleep, and as Jean entered the room Mrs. Holmes lifted a warning finger.

“She has been so worried,” Mrs. Holmes whispered, “for fear everything would not turn out all right, and I only coaxed her into quietness by assuring her that it would worry you to find her ill. Can you tell me what Mr. Morris had to say?”

Jean knelt down by Mrs. Holmes and said in a very composed tone of voice:

“He had just this to say: So far as the Dyker estate goes, we have no rights in it at all; but his little niece, Edith Morris, has shown a spirit that would make dear Uncle Neil proud if he were alive. She declares that she will accept nothing unless the Colonel’s will, which he never signed, is allowed to stand. And then—well, when that is all settled, we must look after Sarah’s best interests, for without her what should we have done?”



## XLI.

YOUTH is a wonderful power in itself. The principle persons in our little drama were young enough to be buoyant and light-hearted enough to enjoy novelty, new friendships, and the excitement of this sudden turn in the wheel of their fortunes. Edith and Polly made friends within half an hour, and when Jean went in search of them she found the two girls comparing notes as to their various studies. Not a trace of hauteur was there in Polly's manner. She was intensely interested in everything Edith had to tell her of school life, and apparently the graver affairs of the moment were forgotten.

"Your uncle will be back soon, Edith," said Jean, "and then he will arrange all this business matter with you. Some day when you are in the Hill House you will realize why we have loved it so dearly, and I am sure," said Jean gravely, "you will make a very nice little mistress of the place."

Edith gave her head a decisive little nod.

"Never mind," she said quietly; "you know what I told my uncle; I have made my own conditions, and I never shall take the Hill House on any other terms. Why, isn't it enough," exclaimed the girl, "to have found all my mother's relations without wanting anything else?"

And from this point of view it was impossible to move Colonel Dyker's heiress. Astute, clever lawyer as he was, Mr. Morris found that his niece was determined on certain points. She would accept nothing except on the terms of the Colonel's unsigned will, and she had her



adopted mother to sustain her in this argument. Moreover, she insisted that Sarah's interests should be considered, and when Will Rogers appeared on the scene Edith had another strong supporter in her view of the case. In the midst of an argument she would simply sit down and, folding her hands, would declare that unless her point of view was accepted she would leave everything in *statu quo* until she came of age, and thereby complicate affairs more than ever.

Two days of discussion and indecision of this kind went by, driving Jean almost to despair, while Mr. Morris exercised all his legal ability to reduce his niece to the terms he at first proposed; but Edith was immovable, and so what Mr. Morris called a compromise was at last effected.

The Hill House intact was to be returned to Miss Dyker, Jean, and Polly, an income sufficient for their needs to be settled upon them, and then Sarah's interests were considered. It was while she lay still hovering between life and death that certain papers were made out, by which a little income was settled upon her for life, and Mr. William Rogers was at once notified of the proceedings.



## XLII.

ONE fine morning early in the month of June Mrs. William Rogers, from the doorstep of her new cottage on a street in Thornton, gazed up and down with the air of satisfaction which had become habitual to her of late. She was thoroughly satisfied with her own position, socially and otherwise, in the village of Thornton, and the county generally, and was wont to remark that there was nothing like feeling you had had the very best of a good bargain. If she would have owned to herself any secret annoyance, it was that in her brand-new little house she found so little for her active fingers to do, but there was always pleasure to be derived from airing and dusting her rooms, looking around from one point to another deciding where a new picture could be hung, possibly some latest fashion in fancy-work be introduced, or some of the many patent novelties Will was fond of bringing home be displayed to their best advantage. Whatever was the very latest and newest, according to the weekly journals for which Sarah subscribed, it was her dear delight to invest in, and as a consequence the rooms of her little cottage were decorated with so many pieces of fancy work, sofa pillows, draperies, etc., that they looked almost as though ready for contribution to a church fair. Rogers would laughingly call the "spare room" upstairs Sarah's dime museum, since it was a wilderness of every kind and description of fancy-work, decoration, pillow shams, and portières, which made one almost feel afraid to touch



anything for fear there might be some patent arrangement connected with it which would be put out of place.

“What would you do,” Will remarked one day, “if someone came to visit you with two or three trunks? It would just be a question as to whether you or your friend would have to give way. There might be room for her to sit down and stand up again, but if she took her hat off I declare she'd have to hang it to the ceiling for want of a place to put it down in.”

To which Sarah responded, with the old toss of her head:

“You can wait till that person comes along, I guess.”

One guest, or I had better say member of their household, was gently and quietly and most tenderly cared for by both Sarah and her husband, although for obvious reasons she occupied a little room in the small wing of the cottage. This was Mrs. Malone, whose condition of helplessness of mind and body would have been pitiable in the extreme but that it had mercifully brought with it a complete surrender of all her old antagonism of spirit. She was perfectly happy, tranquil, and at ease, understanding in a vague kind of way that Sarah had righted the old wrongs which had for many years laid heavy on her conscience, and fulfilling the strange law of compensation which so many times goes to prove that virtue is its own reward. Her mind was at all times somewhat clouded, but she understood enough of what was going on about her to be very glad when Aggie and the little boy paid a visit to Sarah and spent a nice quiet day in her room, talking over all of the old times she could remember. Singularly enough, all memory of her step-brother's strange career had faded from her mind, so that Sarah had more



reason than ever to be thankful for the night on which she had found all those decisive papers.

Only a girl of Sarah Rogers' peculiar type and calibre could have enjoyed her relationship with the Hill House, such as it was, just in the way in which she did, and it was characteristic of her that while she listened to some advice on the subject from Mrs. Mackenzie and Dr. Fraser, she made up her own mind definitely just what stand and position to take. She wished by all their mutual world to be known and accepted as a relation, a neighbor, and a friend. This being accomplished, she had not the slightest idea of making herself in any way disagreeable or intrusive. But she thoroughly enjoyed her actual friendship with Jean Garnier, and one of her greatest delights was in the kind of confidential terms upon which she found herself with that young lady. There was a bond of sympathy, unexpressed, but keenly felt, between them, and it might be in long days to come that Jean would find in Sarah a helpful, tender, and protecting presence. At all events, Jean openly made much of young Mrs. Rogers, and would have had her constantly at the Hill House but that Sarah's peculiarly keen tact was her own defence against any slights she might have had to encounter from people she would meet there. It was possibly owing to Jean's warm espousal of Sarah that Mrs. Rogers in her very showy little cottage had received so many visits from the county people, and another evidence of Sarah's good sense was in her seldom availing herself of invitations sent her. Her husband had, through their new influences and in virtue of his own sagacity, obtained a good position as agent for a life insurance company not far from his own little home, so that Sarah was not denied the comfort and enjoyment of knowing that he was



working his way well up the ladder, and at the same time free to spend a great deal of his time with her, while no prouder man existed in the entire northern part of the State. Everything seemed turning out to the warm-hearted young fellow's entire satisfaction.

While Sarah on this June morning was observing the aspect of things generally from her doorstep, Jean in the Hill House was going through more excitement than she had supposed could come into her life.

An unexpected offer to start at once for a six months' tour in California had been sent to Carrington, and he absolutely refused to accept it unless Jean would accompany him as his wife. Mrs. Mackenzie was paying one of her almost daily visits to the Hill House when the letter arrived, and upon Jean's lifting a pair of very anxious eyes to her friend's face, Mrs. Mackenzie answered in her most matter-of-fact tone:

"Well, Jean, we mustn't even discuss it. Of course you will do as Mr. Carrington says. And after all, it's only a question, one might say, as to whether you would marry him to-day or to-morrow, and to tell you the truth," said Mrs. Mackenzie earnestly, "I don't like these to-morrows. They are more apt to bring pain than pleasure."

Once Jean had given way she was quite willing to let the household enthusiasm over the new event rise to highest pitch, and Mrs. Mackenzie was in her element. Such an occasion she and Miss Dyker had decided justified them in once more opening the old Hill House with its former spirit of hospitality and good cheer, and perhaps it was just as well, Jean argued to herself, that things had to be done in somewhat of a hurry, since there would be less time for regrets in the temporary leave-takings all around.



She had hardly liked to own to herself how constantly she had missed and longed for Carrington's daily companionship. Simpler methods of life appealed to her imagination constantly while she was trying to attend to the various duties of her old home, and her letters to Carrington were full of suggestions of a future in which the Hill House should be their occasional fitting place when their dearly loved Bohemian existence was growing into something too nomadic to make them good every-day kind of people.

"See how things are evenly balanced," she had once written to him; "here we have the dear old place as a constant check and helpful influence against the vagabond spirit you and I certainly possess in common. My idea of happiness is to 'go on a wander' together when we feel disposed, always conscious of the happy and at the same time conventional background to which we may transport ourselves in Thornton. If we don't turn out a well-poised pair of human beings it will be our own fault. I never look around at the sedate elegances of the dear old drawing-room here but I think how harmonious they will make our lives. When we come back from time to time they will teach us the lesson we need and keep away all tendency to overdoing even our spirit of fun and frivolity."

As I have said, once Jean had made up her mind and accepted Carrington's rather dictatorial terms, she allowed herself to be drawn into the spirit of happiness which pervaded the household very creditably, and she insisted upon writing herself to Edith Morris, to tell her the latest piece of news and beg that she and Mrs. Morris and the Perrys would come at once in order to see the old place and be among her special guests at the wedding. It had



been decided that Mrs. Morris, whose health was by no means of the best, should give up all idea of business in New York and take a trip to Colorado, but this nearer journey could be easily accomplished first, and be the means of uniting the branches of the Dyker family in a happier way than had for years been hoped for. Delicate as Edith had been about all evidences of her new position, she was young and happy-hearted enough to be delighted at the prospect of such a visit, and above all things for such a romantic occasion; and on the strength of it she and Polly had exchanged two or three letters, Polly making characteristic suggestions of what Edith should bring with her from New York, especially of what Harry Perry should produce in the way of violin and piano music. Sarah meanwhile had decided to claim one privilege—*i.e.*, that little Alice Bird should be her special guest, while a few of the young ladies from Eastman's store were to come up on a special train as wedding guests for the day.

Until this morning Jean had not felt how promptly everything had to be arranged, and leaving Polly to attend to certain matters in the house, she hastened down to the village to consult with Sarah on certain preliminaries attending their guests' arrival, and encountered her sworn ally standing in her gateway looking at things in general, as I have said, with an air of perfect good-fellowship and contentment.

It was Sarah's turn to be conventional, and with a little frown she drew Jean inside the gate.

“Oh, my dear,” she exclaimed, “it won't do for you to be running round like this if what I hear is true, that Mr. Carrington has sent on to say you are to be married at once.”

Jean laughed, but admitted that Sarah had etiquette on



her side, and directly they were in Mrs. Rogers' little parlor she explained her errand.

"Now you know, Sarah," she said, "how things are all around, and I want you to go down to the station, if you will, two or three times to-day, with the very best of the carriages to meet the friends we have telegraphed for, and I will trust you to bring them up to the house in the proper style. You will have little Alice Bird and your friends here, I suppose; and anyone you want to invite in a hurry this way, just use your own judgment about, and consider the Hill House like"—Jean laughed—"well a Hotel Annex to your own. But I particularly want to have you up there with me as much as possible."

"Well, you know where to find me every time, I guess," was Sarah's answer, but the thought of parting with Jean even for a time made her lips quiver, and a moment later she was kneeling down at Jean's side.

"I wonder if you know," she said, trying to control these mortifying signs of depression, "how I am going to miss you, even if you go away for a little while. I'm not afraid of your forgetting me, but well, I'll tell you what it is; you've been to me, Jean, like some of the pictures people look at and wish they could be like. You know what I mean. When you go away I won't feel as if I had anything better to look at, that kind of way, than when I see my own face in the looking-glass."

"There's no going away about it," answered Jean, "we are only going to make as short a trip as possible, and then come back just to form a new home centre, as George says, for all the family."

Sarah rose to her feet, and remembering the practical side of the question, said gravely:

"Well, if all those people are coming and we've got to



get ready for a wedding, I think we'd better make up our minds at once just what is to be done. You tell me what I'm to do first."

And a half an hour later Sarah was in the Hill House prepared to make herself generally useful in every sense of the word, thoroughly elated by the prospect of all the company about to be assembled in the fine old house.

Jean had confided to her that, by an arrangement between herself and Carrington, she was going off quietly to a junction station to meet him at a certain train. It was her special tribute to the calm and complete mutual understanding which had marked their knowledge of each other from first to last. Polly also knew of it and thoroughly approved, so that, while the House was full of a cheerful and unusual activity which marks such occasions, Jean dressed herself quietly, slipped out of the little side door to the upper gate, where Peter Knapp had a small pony carriage in waiting for her.

As she drove herself over the quiet country road, she wondered newly what there had been in her own life and that of those around her to bring about so fair an ending of all which had once seemed to mean darkness and storm. Everything had turned out, she could not but reflect, in a way which would have thoroughly gratified the higher, finer side of the old Colonel's nature. The House had resumed its original intention of gentle, well-bred, diffusive hospitality; and added to the old form was a spirit of generosity and sweetness which made it worthy of its best traditions; and now, as Jean reflected, here was she, driving along the country roads in such a quiet, happy fashion, with one dearest thought in her mind: that owing to what she had to give of love and faith and confidence—of worldly goods as well—the highest part of Carrington's



ambition was realized, and he would have the means to carry out his best plans for work.

How lovingly and tenderly she recalled the old house in Benton Place; how the happiness she had found therein had idealized even the privations they had suffered; and then, fortunately for the practical side of all that was before her, Jean saw the little railway station close at hand and came back to every-day realities.

There were scarcely ten minutes to wait, and no one at the junction recognized the young lady in the pony carriage; so that when the train drew up and a tall, well-known figure sprang out upon the platform, Jean and Carrington could meet with no uncomfortable feeling that they were criticised and observed.

“So then,” he said, directly he found himself at her side and they were speeding along the country road, “you were determined, like myself, to begin this important visit unconventionally. Jean, you have a genius for understanding me. The only thing I dreaded was a very demonstrative arrival.”

“And now,” said Jean gayly, “I can drive you about for half an hour, and then just turn in the Hill House gates and leave you at the door to make your own entry. Of course,” she added, “Miss Kate and the others, if they take the next train, will be here very soon.”

It was one of the happiest half hours in both their lives, and although not much was said, yet so much was tacitly understood, there was such a wonderful future of companionship ahead of them that neither Jean nor Carrington felt the need of much conversation, and when they turned in the Hill House gates it was after a few moments of perfect quiet, so that Carrington had full leisure to observe the dignity and beauty of the fine old place,



—and as well to realize the exquisite simplicity and depth of Jean's character, since leaving all this, she had accepted the life in Benton Place without a murmur—and had given him her love, and pledged herself to become his wife, knowing him to be poor, hardworking, and hampered by various tiresome considerations.

“Never mind,” he reflected, as Jean drew in her ponies while he alighted, “I have a lifetime ahead of me in which to show her what I am worth.”



### XLIII.

It would be impossible to describe the satisfaction and delight with which Sarah found herself at the Hill House on such an important occasion as Jean's confidential friend. It roused all the best faculties within the girl, softened everything aggressive in her, and made her feel that she had an ideal worth living up to. But it would not have been our Sarah of old if she had not taken some pride in directing the Knapps, Cecile, who was there again, and some improvised servants engaged for the occasion, just what to do and how to do it. Sarah sailed around in one of her best black silks, suggesting various arrangements of the rooms; and her real genius as a house-keeper made her valuable. It took her a very short time to understand just what the occasion required, and it pleased her immensely to feel that she was not only trusted but put into a position of authority.

Jean and Carrington, as may well be imagined, were too idle in their thoughts to be of much practical service to anybody, but there was a delightful hour during which Jean took Carrington from one room to another explaining their various uses and intentions, and making him learn the secret of her devotion to the old place.

Polly meanwhile was in a fine state of hilarity. Her part in the whole affair was to prepare for and receive her young guests, and the spring twilight had not gathered before the various vehicles sent to the station began to return with the merry, happy company invited to Jean's wedding.



Old Mr. Perry, who had undertaken the care of Edith and Mrs. Morris, had delegated Harry to take charge of two of Polly's schoolmates and Miss Nichols from New York, and when the old gentleman was ushered into the fine hall of the Hill House he found the language of his adopted country inadequate to express his feelings, and could only relieve his mind by gazing at Jean, who welcomed him, shaking her by both hands and repeating over and over again:

“So—so—so. This then is the house of your respected family. The little one has done well, and for myself I feel proud to be here.”

Very soon the hall was animated by as happy and lively a group as it had ever known. Polly had conducted Edith and the young people into the little boudoir of bygone days at the lower end of the hall, whence came merry peals of laughter and the sound of gay young voices, while Jean felt proud and happy to conduct Mr. Perry herself into the library, where Mrs. Mackenzie was waiting to be introduced, and, as can easily be imagined, very speedily made the old gentleman feel thoroughly at home.

Jean had but one real anxiety upon her mind during that last day of her girl's life at the Hill House. A letter had been delivered to her by the morning's post which she had half dreaded to open, and so kept for two hours in her pocket untouched. Then, having nerved herself to open it, found it from Sandy Mackenzie—a few lines begging of her to think the best of him and thereby help to keep him straight. He had had an offer to go to North Carolina, but wanted to make everything clear and at rest before he started. Jean had felt both touched and troubled by the letter. She hardly knew whether to trust to Sandy's sudden good intentions and resolves or not; yet certainly,



as she thought, there could be no harm done by giving him a few words of encouragement and good cheer, and so it crossed Jean's mind that, as a final act of her girl's life in the old house at home, she would write Sandy a "free pardon" for his old offences, and a few words of encouragement to help him on in the new life he was beginning. Later on she could tell dear Mrs. Mackenzie all about it. Jean went into her own room for a quiet half hour in which to accomplish her generous design, and she tried to put herself in the place of the arrogant, weak-minded young fellow, who had really meant to do no one any special injury, and yet, by his cowardice and sinful deceit, had wrought so much harm and useless pain. She had thought of enclosing money in her letter to him, but instead of that she wrote:

"I want to tell you one thing, Sandy, which you can abide by. Wherever you go, if you can prove to us that you are doing well, and always striving even to do better, write here and consider me your banker for any amount you may really need. Mr. Carrington says that absolute poverty often creates temptation, and it will be a help to me to think that such an emergency need not come into your life. I am to be married to-morrow, and all our old friends are coming to the wedding. I shall think of you and so will your aunt, and hope to hear good news of you in the future. Remember me always as one who wishes to help you to the best and honorable side of life.

"JEAN GARNIER."



#### XLIV.

ONE bright crisp morning about a year after the events chronicled in the last chapter, Dr. Fraser tapped in his usual fashion on Mrs. Mackenzie's parlor window, within which the genial lady of the house was sitting enjoying her favorite magazine, the leaves of which she had just finished cutting. In another moment the good Doctor was inside rubbing his hands together briskly after his fashion when he had anything of importance to relate or some special confidence to bestow, and looked eager, for the widow's curiosity to seem aroused.

Mrs. Mackenzie was one of those delightful companions never above gratifying small whims of the kind, and accordingly her "Well, 'what now, Doctor?" was alert enough to satisfy the good man and make him doubly anxious to be talkative.

"I've just come from the school committee," announced the Doctor, taking his favorite easy chair. "And I declare, my dear woman, Jean Carrington's plan is working like a charm! Like a *charm!* I can't think how she ever thought it all out so skilfully! upon my word, it is going to make an era in our lives, I assure you. I made a little, well, so to speak—*report* for the county paper, and I thought—ahem—if you have time, I'd just run it over with you before submitting it for publication."

"Of course I've time," said Mrs. Mackenzie, reaching out her hand for her never failing knitting; "and I'm glad you thought of me in it; only remember, I can criticize, but I can't write."



“Nonsense,” declared the Doctor. “You could do—anything, I believe, Margaret, if you set about it.”

Mrs. Mackenzie smiled indulgently, by no means averse to the good doctor’s sweeping commendation, but she shook her head slightly in deprecation of such wholesale praise.

“I can sympathize,” she said quietly. “That is all the genius I have to offer.”

“Well, well,” declared the Doctor, producing a roll of manuscript and clearing his throat. “This is better than the creative faculty half the time. *Ahem.*”

There was a brief pause and then in his most oratorical manner, and with quite as much *verve* as though he were actually before the committee, Dr. Fraser began :

“In accepting the munificent bequest of Mr. and Mrs. Carrington of the Hill House, the township of Thornton has shown itself both appreciative and public-spirited. Mr. Carrington has long planned an endowment of some kind which should serve as a memorial to the late Colonel Dyker, and nothing more fitting than the school proposed could have been devised. Careful consideration of every point was gone over and the very best authorities consulted, before it was at last decided that a school in which fifteen pupils can be boarded and educated, with a view to developing individual talent, making them self-supporting, but in no degree hampered by a sense of obligation, would be the most fitting tribute to Colonel Dyker’s memory. A sum large enough to make the building complete in every respect was first set aside; the site chosen is in every way worthy, both from a picturesque and salutary point of view; it is near enough to the station, yet overlooks the most charming part of our fine country; not an item but has been considered so that the students lives will be in



every respect healthful, refined, and stimulated by the very best surroundings. Mrs. Carrington has for months given the school her personal care and attention, corresponding with various people of distinction in philanthropical and educational circles, and the result is something which we feel sure will be a precedent and a stimulus for other capitalists of like zeal and good will.

“The building is divided into two sections, so that the actual school and class-rooms are on one side, and the dwelling on the other, thus making the *home* sense more complete for scholars and teachers. The pupils occupy separate rooms in every instance. These are small but perfect in their appointments, each being furnished in light woods, tasteful chintz draperies, and with certain touches calculated to inspire the occupant with a desire to keep it all in good order as well as to feel cheered by her own little dwelling-place. The dining room is perhaps the brightest part of the house, and although all its appointments are of the simplest, yet they carry out the same idea of good taste and refinement. There are five small tables instead of one large one, each being provided with the best of linen, china, glass, etc., and as a means of education the pupils are to take charge of the room in turn : three ‘serving’ a week at a time. Although there are four excellent servants, the kitchen department is to be managed in the same way—three of the young ladies serving their time of a week therein, and being regularly instructed in every branch of plain cooking. Gardening and dressmaking are among the practical branches taught, and special prizes awarded for proficiency in these departments. A percentage is allowed each girl who can cut, fit, and make her own garments, she receiving the amount which would be paid any seamstress, thereby not only encourag-



ing good work, but enabling the student to have a little bank account of her own with which to start out on leaving the school for the more regular battle of life. Few rules are made, and the *espionage* is merely nominal, but the least infringement—the least evidence of anything dishonorable on the part of a student is punished by suspension if not actual dismissal. A literary and musical society are included, and Mr. Carrington himself will superintend the drawing department. The ‘lady of the house,’ so to speak, since there is a regular housekeeper, is Mr. Carrington’s sister, and she will reside in the central building and be regarded as the ‘mother’ or presiding genius of the establishment. As there are absolutely no fees or dues of any kind, appointments are made by special request, on carefully verified references and creditable examination, and it is expected that in every sense of the word the Dyker Academy will prove a success and worthy of its name.”

“Now, then,” said the Doctor, leaning back in his chair and letting his eye-glasses drop off while he regarded Mrs. Mackenzie critically, “anything more there? Jean can’t object to that—Mr. Carrington either? They’re so afraid, you know, of being praised; but as I told Jean, everyone knows it’s a memorial to our dear old friend.”

“Certainly! Well, I don’t see how you can improve it. By the way, I’ve had Sarah Rogers in here in one of her most elated moods. It seems Jean has asked her to superintend getting the house ready for the committee dinner, etc. Jean knows just what delights Sarah. She sent word to me as well, in a little private note, to consult with Sarah. How many people are we to expect?”

“Oh, fifteen or twenty; but there”—the Doctor sprang to his feet and made a little rush toward the window as



the sound of quickly rolling wheels in the roadway was heard—"there goes Jean herself up from the station. Well, I'll be off—up there—and I suppose you'll be around presently."

Mrs. Mackenzie nodded.

"Yes; and then he shall know first what our programme is to be."

Left alone Mrs. Mackenzie indulged in one of her happy moods of meditation, reflection, and indeed, *thanksgiving*. Well did the good woman know that higher hands than hers had guided the leading strings of her beloved "children's" lives, yet it afforded her infinite satisfaction to have been able to help the course of affairs on in its successful direction, and her pride in the family itself had now no drawback. All had been done honorably, bravely, and well. Carrington, the one "stranger" in the group, had proved himself the very element most needed, since his disregard for what was merely conventional had toned down what might have proven affectation in some members of the family. Polly was fast losing her little frivolities in a desire to be as like Jean as possible, the latter being at present her ideal of everything that was fine, charming, and fascinating; and to be praised or commended by Carrington was reward enough for Polly's finest efforts! He managed her admirably, knowing just when to be encouraging, and when a trifle severe, and Jean looked on, delighted and proud, if a trifle secretly amused by Polly's abject humility where Carrington was concerned.

As for Jean herself, if her outer seeming was more composed and undemonstrative than formerly, it was simply because with her new life had come a tranquillity—a peace—an *assurance* born of happiness and content such as needed no eager "watch and ward." In her marriage she



had realized what perfect *comradeship* can be between two people who, acting first for the higher good, the nobler and truer side of all things in a Christian life, understand equally each other's smaller needs, cravings, hopes, and impulses. It was often commented upon as somewhat peculiar that, while Mr. and Mrs. Carrington seemed so ideally happy in their married life, they never obtruded it upon others, never for an hour forgot their friends or withheld their keenest sympathies from others as do so many absorbed in some one affection.

But the explanation of this was very simple. Out of their abundance they both longed to give the "measure running over," and as Jean once said to Mrs. Mackenzie, she felt as though "the peace of her own life was a stewardship." Once in a while the "Bohemian," as Carrington would say, was uppermost, and, like a pair of school children, they would steal away together on some "wander," usually choosing the most remote and primitive of country places where no hint of the "madding crowd" could reach them. With their art and books, and the means of driving about, these brief holidays were all white letter ones, and kept them going and healthy in heart, mind, and body, better far, Jean always thought, than the occasional—very rare—excursions into the life of the gay social world. Gradually they both intended to drift away from what was merely "society" life, although an existence full of widest social charm and most generous hospitality was part of the Hill House creed and philosophy. There were no distinctions among their guests in one sense. The little village school-mistress was made as cordially welcome of an afternoon, entertained with as much respect and attention, as the richest of the county ladies. Few guests were more welcome than the Morrises and the Perrys, and yet Jean



and her little family contrived always to keep the quiet of their own *home life*, from time to time, entirely uninvaded. There were happy weeks of the winter when the little circle knew no interruption to their busy but quiet daily routine; when the evenings would be full of domestic charm; Jean and Miss Dyker and Polly engaged over some fancy work or sewing, while Carrington read aloud, or Linda “made music”—an element she was always ready to contribute, especially as a course of study in a Boston conservatory had been decided upon as the best outlet for her really pronounced genius.

And while all things moved along in the old house with so much of calm prosperity, few of the family friends equalled Sarah Rogers in enjoyment of it all. Her husband’s “position” as an insurance agent removed from her the painful idea that she had “married a pedler” to quote a phrase once flung at her by Peter Knapp in a brief moment of malice—or was it envy? And on this particular occasion Mrs. Rogers was to take as prominent a part as her heart could desire in the opening of the academy. She and Miss Kate were staunch friends, their sympathies in household matters drawing them together, enthusiasm reaching its highest when there came the question of filling the store-room with a “supply”—Sarah and the little lady made an expedition into Albany by Jean’s request to “put in” whatever they considered necessary. No prouder woman walked or shopped or “ordered” that day than Mrs. William Rogers, and it would have been worthy Carrington’s pencil to see her criticising the labels on certain jams and potted meats, disdainingly in her most superior manner whatever was not of the very best!

“It is for the Dyker Academy, please remember,” she observed once, with a withering glance at a young clerk



who was showing her a "novelty" in marmalade. "I cannot order anything but what I know *all* about," and it would have been an immense satisfaction to Sarah had she known of the awe she inspired, and the way in which the clerk later referred to "*Mrs. Rogers of the Hill House!*" Crescent Cottage—the name of Sarah's dwelling being unknown—or overlooked by his dazzled mind.

Sarah's heart and womanly ambition, as may well be imagined, would not have been satisfied had not Crescent Cottage boasted a nursery in which her infant son, a remarkably fat, and truth to tell rather *heavy*, infant of two months reigned supreme, "minded" by a young girl from the village, to whom Mrs. Rogers was a pattern of elegance and fashion. True, mistress and maid were on rather free terms of social intercourse when alone, Maggie's society being by no means despised on the long winter afternoons or evenings when Mr. Rogers was away, and as Sarah kept no other "help," there was the more excuse for it. As we know, our heroine needed an "audience." In honest, simple-hearted, talkative little Maggie she found one quite to her satisfaction, the girl being really deeply attached to her showy, kind-hearted mistress.

It is not, I am sure, always in real life that things turn out so satisfactorily, yet after all, it was not in any way undeserved happiness. Sarah had gone through an ordeal, more fiery than anyone could ever know. Even now a recollection of it would flash across her mind with the half sickened feeling we experience in recalling some wonderful *escape*—and it was at such times that the young wife would clasp her child closely in her arms and in her own heart, if not actually with her very lips, thank the Divine Master who, seeing her temptation, had freed her from her danger.



Jean came flitting down the main hall of the Hill House, opening the door of her husband's study with a bright happy look on her face—a sparkle in her soft eyes which gave token of her pleasure in the work on hand.

Carrington was busy at his writing table, but turned the instant Jean's step sounded, putting up his hand to meet hers as it rested on his shoulder.

“Well, young woman, what now? Remember our guests will arrive in about half an hour.”

“I know. That is just why I'm bothering you,” said Jean. “There is so much I must ask you about.”

“Go ahead.” He laid aside his pen and rose, looking down now upon her with affectionate amusement. “I wonder how many women have to consult their husbands as often as my wife does.”

She smiled, but with the little wistful look which was like the Jean of old.

“Do you mind?” she demanded.

Carrington nodded.

“Yes; I certainly *do* mind,” he retorted; “so much, my child, that if the day comes when you leave me *out* of your counsels I will—well, take the matter into court to enquire into my own sanity.”

“Then behave yourself and listen. I've just been arranging *something* I'm not quite sure about—but come and look at it—and you will know if it is all right.”

He followed, wondering what new idea she had developed, as she led the way down the hall and into the quaint old room so long sacred to the late master of the house. There on a pedestal she had hung and wreathed the Colonel's portrait in the fairest blossoms and deepest green the conservatory or late gardens could furnish forth. The Colonel's fine, clear-cut, melancholy face looked out upon



them as though he fain would speak and commend what his "children," were doing, but what touched Carrington more even than the way in which Jean had wreathed her cousin's portrait for this happy day, was a little banner of silk on which, with her own hand, she had painted in gold and scarlet that sweetest of texts :

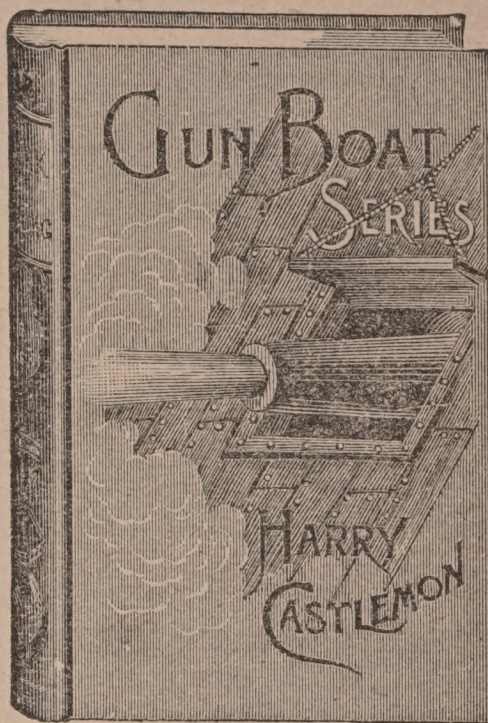
"Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

The sunshine of the morning creeping in filled the old room with a soft clear radiance, enclosing in its warmth the master's picture, the glowing blossoms, and rich ferns, and as well the figures of the two standing before it, who had certainly fulfilled the Colonel's unsigned will.

THE END.



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