KATHERINE DAY

BY ANNA FULLER

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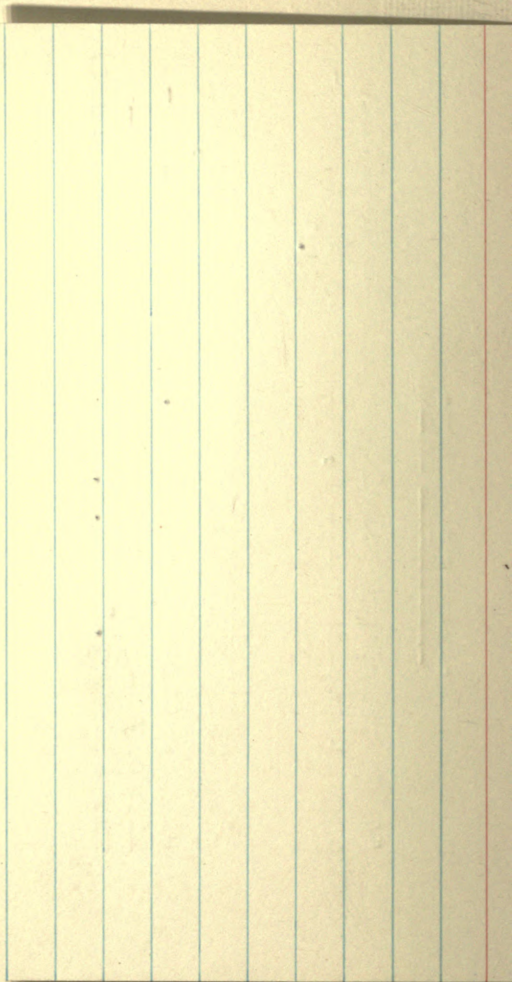

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By ANNA FULLER

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TO

MY LADY

OF

CASTLE SUNSHINE

2228362

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PART I

" Shall not God stoop the kindlier to His work

. . . .

Now that the hand He trusted to receive
And hold it, lets the treasure fall perforce ? "

CHAPTER I

THE LITTLE ORATOR

" The year 's at the spring,
And day 's at the morn;
Morning 's at seven."

"FRIENDS, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!"

The shrill, childish voice was thin as the sunbeam which had slipped through a crack in the wide roof, touching, with its long, bright finger, the tiny creature, perched upon the great central cross-timber of the barn. Far below, on the broad, hay-strewn floor, stood a bevy of children, their upturned faces showing white against a dusky background as they gazed, in pleasurable trepidation, at the bit of humanity haranguing them from that dizzy height.

There had been a thunder-storm, and the whole Sunday-school picnic had been driven into the barn for shelter, the teachers taking refuge in the farmhouse hard by. This, indeed, they could do with an easy conscience, assured that no safer playground could have been devised for the little ones than the great country barn, its shadowy spaces sweet with hay and dim with cobwebs.

The children were playing "*Follow-your-leader*," and while they played, unheeding, the thud of the

rain had ceased upon the broad roof, the birds outside had set up their little chirp of thanksgiving, and the sunshine was lying, warm and bright, across the threshold of the wide doorway.

A few minutes ago one of the big boys had "stumped" the other children by crawling cautiously, on hands and knees, across the topmost beam. He had climbed down again over the hay, acknowledged "leader" in the game. Scarcely was he on the floor, however, prepared to lord it over the other children after the manner of big boys, when, lo! a tiny figure had appeared, following on his adventurous path. Little Katherine Day had slipped from among them while all eyes were turned upon the leader. With catlike agility she had gone hand over hand up the perpendicular ladder fastened firmly to one of the upright supporting timbers. From the first loft she had partly clambered, partly tumbled, up the sides of the great mountains of hay that reared their crests on a level with the central beam. While all eyes were watching the descent of the conquering hero she had crawled out upon that perilous way, and crouched there, with fiercely beating heart, conscious, in all her little quaking body, of the yawning depths below.

Suddenly a face looked up, another, and another, and an awestruck murmur reached her ears. It was elixir to the child's spirit. She no longer trembled; she was conscious only of a great joy and exultation. Slowly and steadily she drew herself erect and stood firmly upon her feet. The round-comb which held her hair in place loosed itself and fell, breaking in a dozen fragments on the floor twenty feet below. The child tossed her hair back with as free

a movement as if her feet had been planted upon the nursery floor ; and, lifting up her thin young voice, she spoke the words which the great poet has put into the mouth of one who was not more soaringly ambitious than the little Yankee girl who had them from the reading-book.

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears!"

The high, piping challenge was a grateful outlet to her exultation. But, alas! as she opened her lips to repeat the words, a sharp, incisive voice cut across them like a knife.

"Come, children, the rain is over. Come out-of-doors!"

Cousin Elmira, the arbiter of little Katherine's childish destinies, stood, a tall, spare figure, right in the track of the sunshine.

The children glanced furtively at one another, and then, as by one accord, every face was turned again upward. Miss Faxon followed the direction of their eyes, and her countenance changed,—but not with the mortal terror that would have clutched at a mother's heart. Outraged authority flushed the pale cheek, and the voice was stern and steady in which she commanded: "Katherine, come down directly—directly! Do you hear?"

The child turned and walked across the beam. She, too, was oblivious of peril, conscious only of coming disgrace and retribution, yet facing it pluckily enough when, a few minutes later, she stood, a sorry little figure, more defiant than afraid, before her indignant guardian. And indeed one need hardly have been a Cousin Elmira to experience indignation at the wreck of all the dainty order which

had been the work of her careful hands. The rather ugly pattern of the *mousseline-de-laine* frock was half hidden under a gray network of cobwebs and dust; the dishevelled hair bristled with long wisps of hay; face and hands were soiled and scratched.

Miss Faxon never wasted words, but her judgments were swift and irresistible Seizing one of the grimy little hands with no gentle grasp, and looking back to bid the other children play out-of-doors, she led the culprit across the grassy space to the rear of the farmhouse.

"Mrs. Stevens," she asked, as they stepped into the kitchen, where that worthy woman was engaged in throwing soft-soap upon her hearth,—"Mrs. Stevens, have you got a room where a very naughty girl would not be likely to get into mischief?"

"Sakes alive! What a looking child!" cried the impromptu hostess. "What under the canopy has happened to her?"

"Nothing but her tomboy tricks. I found her performing on the highest beam in your barn."

"On the big, middle beam?" cried the woman, horror-struck. Then, dropping her voice to a reverent pitch: "The Lord must have preserved her Himself!—to some good end, let us hope," she added, piously.

Little Katherine lifted her stormy eyes to the motherly face. She longed, with all her eager childish heart, to run and hide her head in the woman's ample skirts and sob out all her misery. But life, in the presence of her elders, was a discipline and repression, and little Katherine only stood, silent and constrained, while the two women brushed her off, and washed her hands at the sink; after which

they proceeded to complete her discomfiture by tying the rebellious hair back with an ignominious piece of black tape.

"Let her stay right here along o' me," kind Mrs. Stevens urged. "I 'm used to children, and she won't be a mite of trouble."

But no! Solitary confinement was Cousin Elmira's sovereign penalty for childish misdemeanors, and accordingly little Katherine was led up-stairs to the best bedroom. Here Mrs. Stevens generously opened all four of the windows and flung back the green blinds, letting the sun stream in upon her sacred ingrain carpet and the cherished lamp-mat on the table. When Cousin Elmira's back was turned, she gave the little girl a surreptitious pat upon the shoulder; and then the two women withdrew and passed down the stairs into the front entry.

"You are very good to take all this trouble, I 'm sure," Miss Faxon declared, with a well-bred ceremony which was no more than the farmer's wife was entitled to; for they were all strangers to her, the children having been taken out into the country for their picnic.

But Mrs. Stevens had not lived for forty years close by a favorite picnic grove without learning to take such invasions philosophically. She was an elderly woman whose own sons and daughters were already scattered on their several paths in life, and it was hardly to be expected that she would entertain any sentimental ideas about children. She flattered herself, however, that she could tell an old maid from the mother of a family at sight. Accordingly, as she preceded Elmira down the stairs, she

threw over her shoulder the casual remark: "That's not your child, I calc'late."

"No; she 's not," Miss Faxon returned, with emphasis; "but she 's my cousin's child, and I have all the care of her."

There was in her tone an implication, which could hardly escape the most cursory observer, that the tall, severe woman did not regard her task as a privilege; and Mrs. Stevens, much pleased with her own perspicacity, nodded her head as her guest passed out at the front door, and determined, on the spot, that she would cut a piece of mince pie for the little prisoner upstairs.

The object of her kindness, meanwhile, all unconscious of the solace in store, lay sobbing upon the ingrain carpet in a passion of grief and anger. She had been so happy, oh, so happy, in the big barn! She had so loved the smell of the hay, and it had felt so soft and elastic under her feet! She could have buried herself in it and lain there all the livelong day, listening to the clucking hens as they foraged in the stalls below, watching the darting swallows and the wandering sunbeams. She was just going to climb up there and hide herself away when Sammie Lovell stumped them all, and she was n't going to pretend to be stumped when she was not. How the children had wondered at her, and how brave she had been! Yes, she knew that she had been brave and had risked her life, just as much as the soldiers were doing down South.

Now little Katherine had a very clear head for a child of seven, and she knew perfectly well that she ought to have been ashamed of herself to compare her foolhardiness to the courage of the soldiers, whom

in her better moments she thought of with adoring gratitude. But, as she lay there, palpitating with the sense of disgrace and chagrin, she did not want to be just, she did not want to be reasonable; she passionately revelled in her own naughtiness.

"Oh, I wish I had fallen off, I wish I had fallen off!" she sobbed aloud, as she lay face downward on the hard floor. She had been in danger, and Cousin Elmira had not cared. Perhaps she would have cared if she had fallen at her feet, crushed and dead. What would have happened? Would they have picked her up tenderly, gently, more gently and tenderly than any one had ever touched her? Would they have said how plucky she had been? Would Cousin Elmira have cried? Would her father have cried at the funeral, as he had done at her Uncle George's funeral? She was quite sure she had seen tears in his eyes on that occasion. She had not known until that day that people's fathers ever cried; she did not believe that such a thing happened very often. But if they cried when their brothers-in-law died, of course they would have to cry for their own children. It would be only proper,—and propriety was the fetish to which all grown people appeared to defer.

The funeral would be in the long parlor, and the people would all sit around with their handkerchiefs at their eyes, and it would be so still that you could hear the ticking of the clock on the stairs, and the fragrance of the white flowers would be so heavy that you could almost feel it. And all this solemnity would be on account of a small person who had never in her life enjoyed the importance that she craved.

So enamored was the child of the dramatic situation she had conjured up, that she almost forgot her woes; and, as the sense of them abated, she lifted her head, and, sitting upright on the floor, began looking about her with bright, observant eyes. Her attention was first attracted by a huge four-poster rejoicing in a portentous feather bed and a calico flounce. This interested her particularly because Grandmother Day had very much the same kind of bedstead in the great west chamber, and one which had formerly boasted an even prettier flounce than this. Indeed, if grandmother's flounce had not been a very remarkable one, with peacocks and summer-houses on it, Katherine could hardly have remembered it; for ages and ages ago, when she was only five years old, the feather bed had given place to a hair mattress, which lent a sunken, hollow-chested look to the whole structure, and the gay flounce had been superseded by one of dotted muslin.

Presently Katherine jumped up and walked over to the mantelpiece. It was a narrow shelf quite peopled with little china images, among which was a sheep covered with small shiny knobs,—to represent quite unmistakably the wool,—and a lion of very fierce aspect, laboring, however, under the disadvantage of being somewhat smaller than his natural prey, the sheep. But best of all, to Katherine's thinking,—better even than the cradle with the baby in it, all tucked up with china coverlets,—better than Red Riding-Hood herself, deep in converse with the wolf,—was a little china gentleman in a broad-rimmed black hat, with a very stiff frock-coat and blue breeches. He looked exceedingly dignified and genteel, and he held in his right hand the handle

of something in the nature of a cane, which had broken short off. This would seem to indicate that he had not altogether escaped the vicissitudes of life, — yet how smiling he was! Little Katherine longed to take him in her hands; but that would have been meddling,—one of the worst sins in her childish decalogue,—and the thought of the kind face of her hostess stayed her hand. She felt upon her honor, as the boys and girls used to say.

To escape temptation, she repaired to one of the open windows and leaned out into the warm, sweet air. The picnic grove was only a few rods away, and she could hear the voices of the children and the clatter of dishes. It must be luncheon time. She wondered whether they would think to send her anything to eat. She was not conscious of being hungry; she was still too excited for that. Underlying all her idle thoughts was the sense of ignominy and defeat, of the cruel reaction from the moment's exaltation.

She knelt down on a wooden footstool and rested her elbows on the window-sill. There was a beautiful elm tree in the dooryard, and, as the child gazed into its glinting green depths, a sense of peace and well-being came over her. A bird hopped in and out among the gently rustling branches, eying her with friendly inquisitiveness; a light breeze swayed the tassel of the window-shade, so that it touched her cheek. It felt like a caress. She was glad she had not fallen from the beam; she would rather be alive. What had Mrs. Stevens said? " To some good end." Had she been preserved to some good end? She dreamily wondered what good end could be wrought by a naughty little girl whom nobody seemed

to think very much of. Perhaps when the good end was accomplished people would be kind and sweet to her. Winny Gerald, her best friend, was always petted and made much of; but then Winny had curly hair. Katherine felt very sure that it would be easier to be good if you had curly hair.

The air was very warm, and the buzz of insects had a drowsy sound; and presently Katherine slipped down from the footstool and curled herself up on the floor as naturally as a kitten might have done. Lying there, with her head on her arm, she still thought of Winny. Yes, everybody loved Winny, and Winny had curly hair. She wished she had curly hair,—to some good end, to some good end. If only she had curly hair,—to some good end. The words repeated and confused themselves in her mind until she was fast asleep.

And Mrs. Stevens found her still asleep when she came up, an hour later. The breeze that had stirred the tassel found little to play with in the small *mousseline-de-laine* figure under the west window, for the dress clung fast to the carpet and the hair was pulled straight back from the forehead in Cousin Elmira's severest manner. And even the sun, that came stealing across the little brown face, found nothing to reveal but round, indefinite childish features and a line of long, dark lashes where the eyes had been angry, pathetic, inquiring, by turns. There was really very little to see or to surmise in that childish face; yet, as Mrs. Stevens stood looking down upon it, her motherly eyes discovered something which caused her to say to herself with deep inward satisfaction: "I'm glad I thought of that mince pie, anyhow. I guess she 'll relish a piece!"

CHAPTER II

A THANKLESS TASK

"Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true."

COUSIN ELMIRA, meanwhile, having thus satisfactorily disposed of the culprit, was turning her admirable energies to good account in the picnic grove. The shower, though sharp, had been of short duration, and the big pine trees had appropriated most of the rainfall to their own use. The carpet of needles was dry and elastic underfoot, while the sun, shining upon the moist branches overhead, drew forth odors fit for Araby the Blest. Truly the New England pine grove in its more genial moods may hint of an ecstasy no tropical forest ever dreamed.

We may be sure, however, that no such far-fetched comparison was suggesting itself to the minds of the three women engaged in spreading goodly viands, amid much clatter of tongues and crockery, upon the long deal table. There was Miss Susan Littlefield, the buxom, good-natured captain of the infant class, with cheeks as sound as a Baldwin apple, and sharp little black eyes that twinkled pleasantly. She had charge of the cake department, and was inclined to cut the slices rather large; talking

volubly the while, and with much good sense and good cheer.

Miss Susan, in fact, was sometimes criticised for her unfailing spirits, certain cavillers holding that, in view of her betrothal to William Henderson,—then risking his life in the war,—a paler cheek and quieter manner would have been more becoming. Among her critics none was more severe than her coadjutor at the deal table, Miss Georgiana Tufts. She was the youngest of the trio, fair and flaxen-curled, with a slight stoop in the shoulders, a very prim mouth, and sentimental blue eyes. She was dressed with exquisite neatness and explicitness, a moment's glance sufficing to convince the observer that everything had been selected to match. The prevailing color of the toilet was blue, while the wide, flowing sleeves and the drapery of the skirt over the spreading crinoline partook of the drooping character of the pale ringlets. Upon these last rested one of the flappy, broad-rimmed leghorn hats then in vogue among the well-to-do, and which were provided with a long, narrow ribbon depending from the crown, by means of which the wearer could regulate the flap according to the direction of wind or sun; the ribbon, in Miss Tufts' case, was of precisely the same blue as her eyes. As she stood by the table, laying the well-filled sandwiches in neat piles upon squares of white paper, there was that in her manner which would lead one to infer that if she had had a lover in the war her general aspect would have done justice to the situation.

Cousin Elmira, on the other hand, valued Miss Littlefield's strength of character at its true worth. Indeed, it was only since the stress and strain of life

—like the sun and rain on the pine trees—had brought out Miss Susan's qualities that Elmira had begun to take an interest in her. The two women were neighbors in Camwood, a pleasant suburb of Boston, and Susan had always cherished an admiration for Charles Day's cousin and housekeeper. The latter was several years her senior, and still further removed from her by virtue of a certain impression of superiority to which the modest Susan was keenly susceptible.

Elmira was tall and particularly graceful, but without other beauty. Her complexion was pale almost to sallowness, and there were severe lines in her countenance,—lines with which Life had supplemented Nature's intention. No one ever thought of noticing the color of Elmira's eyes, which was negative, like that of her hair. It was the mouth that made its impression; a thin mouth that could smile, at need, but rarely laughed. The smile being performed, the lips closed in a thin, straight line that seemed to deprecate the indiscretion.

There had been a good deal of speculation, first and last, as to what the capabilities of Elmira Faxon's nature were,—for your genuine New Englander loves to speculate. But there was one point upon which the inquiring mind was speedily set at rest; she did not possess a grain of humor. This was a pity, for not only might a sense of humor have improved her general appearance, substituting other and more genial lines for those of which mention has been made, but it might also have done her the practical service of modifying the state of chronic displeasure in which she lived toward her troublesome charge, little Katherine. That very morning,

for instance, if she could but have appreciated what a comical figure the child had cut, her eyes would not have been holden from the pathetic side of the picture, and she would perhaps have dealt more gently with the ambitious little speechifier. That, however, was not to be. It had been written in the Book of Fate that little Katherine Day was not to be spoiled by indulgence.

"There!" Susan Littlefield exclaimed, as she placed her last thick slice of cake on top of the pile,—"that 's done! We are ahead of time, as usual when you 're manager, Elmira! What a good time those children are having!"

Susan threw her plump shoulders back and contemplated affectionately a swarm of boys and girls whirling in a mad circle about the weeping *Sallie Water*, the morality of whose conduct in affliction had not, at that stage of the world's history, been called in question.

As the Sallie of the moment proceeded to act upon the injunction:

> "Turn to the East,
> Turn to the West,
> Turn to the one that you love best,"

and discreetly selected her own small brother for matrimonial preferment, Miss Susan's benignant smile deepened. Then, while the children danced wildly about the united couple, shrieking, in high childish treble:

> "Now you are married
> We wish you great joy;
> Your father and mother
> You must obey,
> And now kneel down and kiss each other!"

the indulgent friend of the noisiest and most obstreperous child turned her kindly, humorous face upon Miss Faxon with persuasive intent, saying: "And now don't you think we might go and call Katherine?"

Now since Miss Faxon had not for a moment dismissed from her mind little Katherine and her misdoings, the suggestion induced no change of countenance whatever. But then, her countenance was never a mobile one, and therefore Miss Susan had not foreseen the severity of the reply.

"There is no occasion for calling her at present," Miss Faxon declared. "When the children have eaten their dinner I may let her have some bread and butter,—though it 's more than she deserves!"—and the thin lips closed in a manner which forbade remonstrance.

"I think it 's a very strange thing," Miss Georgiana Tufts remarked, adjusting the rim of her hat in the interest of her complexion,—"that Mr. Charles Day's child should be so unladylike."

"It would be if a child had but one parent!" was Miss Faxon's dry rejoinder.

"But surely, Elmira, there was nothing unladylike about Katherine's mother!"

It was Miss Susan who thus valiantly took up the cudgels for the defenceless. She had never had any intimate acquaintance with Mrs. Charles Day, whose sojourn among them had indeed been pitifully short, but she had stood with those who looked upon the face of the young mother when the seal of eternal silence rested upon it, and she could not allow the dead woman to suffer detraction.

If Miss Faxon had seemed inclined to enter into

a discussion, her good-humored adversary might perhaps have considered that she had fulfilled her obligation. But there was something far more disparaging in the cold silence with which Susan's protest was met than any spoken stricture could have expressed, and, when the immediate cravings of the horde of children were satisfied, the generous dispenser of spongecake remarked cheerfully: "I always thought, myself, that Mrs. Day was more than ladylike."

"I don't know what could be more than ladylike," Georgiana exclaimed, with a curious explosiveness of accent that sometimes led one to question whether her excessive gentility were after all more than skin-deep.

"Nothing," was Miss Susan's tranquil rejoinder, as she stooped to tie the errant red braids of the quondam Sallie Waters. "Nothing,—unless being a lady is better than being like one."

"Of course!" Elmira agreed, with frigid impartiality; "the expression ladylike as we use it is always a misnomer."

It was difficult for Elmira not to take sides against Georgiana Tufts even when, as in this case, that most "ladylike" of all their circle had openly espoused her cause. In fact, if the truth were but known, there was something about Miss Tufts and her peculiar graces which was apt to get on Elmira's nerves. The former, however, was quite unconscious of the antagonism she excited; for, quick though she would have been to resent any depreciation of her own qualities, she was not equally quick to perceive it. One must have some delicacy of perception to recognize the attitude of another's mind even toward one's self.

Without wasting further words on the niceties of the English tongue, therefore, she remarked, with a gratifying consciousness of contributing something of importance to the conversation: "Mrs. Day's manners were certainly not what we were brought up to in Camwood."

"I should like to know how they fell short," Susan inquired rather sharply.

"Well, for one thing, she was always speaking to people she had n't been introduced to."

"And what of that?" Susan retorted. "It only showed that she was too sure of her position to be afraid of risking it."

Miss Tufts bridled at this.

"Perhaps you think it was ladylike of her to strike a drunken teamster with her riding-whip the week after she came home a bride."

"That was because the man was cruel to his horses. At the same time," Susan admitted, "it might have been better if she had entered a complaint against him. And yet,—I 'm not so sure! They do say that the first stroke sobered him."

"It makes me think of Katherine's last performance," Miss Faxon remarked, diligently wielding a checked dish-towel. "She stayed out until long after sundown Tuesday evening, as she is strictly forbidden to do, and we found she had been standing guard over a miserable cur that had been run over, because she was afraid he would get hurt. It was on Elm Street, where there is very little passing, and nobody had come along."

"And what happened?" asked Georgiana.

"Oh, I found her there after eight o'clock, and brought her home."

"And the dog?" Miss Susan inquired. "Did they carry him off to a safe place?"

"I 'm sure I don't know," was the indifferent reply, "but I had almost to drag Katherine away from him. I think I have never seen her in such a passion as she was!"

"She seems to have an ugly temper," Miss Tufts remarked, carefully dislodging an adherent crumb from her flowing sleeve.

"If she has," Miss Susan interposed, "she certainly did n't get that from her mother. Everybody says that Mrs. Charles Day had the sweetest disposition. I suppose Archie takes more after his mother in that respect," she added tentatively.

"Archie is certainly not a difficult child to manage," Miss Faxon admitted. "But bringing up other people's children is a thankless task at the best."

"Miss Littlefield, may I have another piece of cake?"

The speaker was a boy of nine, clad in the old-mannish costume that little boys of his day were liable to. A pretty boy, as any one must admit, with fair hair and wheedling brown eyes which were likely to win his battles without a fight,—thus furnishing a pleasing instance of the economy of nature. For the lower part of the still somewhat rudimentary face did not promise well for a fight.

"How many pieces have you had, Archie?" Miss Susan asked.

The other children were playing at a distance, so that Archie was safe from competition in his designs upon the small remainder of the cake. He dug one toe into the pine needles, after the immemorial boyish habit, and answered, "I don't remember."

"Don't remember!" Cousin Elmira exclaimed. "What nonsense, Archie!"

"Well!" Archie declared, addressing himself once more to Miss Susan, as the auditor most likely to see his point: "I don't *feel* as if I had had more than one!"

Then the three women laughed, frowned, and simpered, each after her kind, and a generous piece of cake was administered to the little beggar, who promptly departed with it, lest a belated calculation should betray the fact that this was his fourth piece.

An impartial observer, acquainted with Miss Faxon's methods where the discipline of little Katherine was concerned, might have discovered in the indulgence with which the small affair of the cake had been suffered to come to a successful issue, a clue to Archie's greater manageableness. Perhaps some such impression, hovering in Miss Susan's mind, may have induced the stroke of diplomacy which she now proceeded to execute.

"I am going to carry the rest of the cake in to Mrs. Stevens," she remarked casually. "She might relish it with her supper. And—might n't I just as well take Katherine's dinner along at the same time?"

"As you please," Miss Faxon assented, glad to be spared the little walk in the sun that brooded hot outside the picnic grove.

And so it happened that it was Miss Susan who came in upon little Katherine, sitting in the big farm kitchen, tightly clasping a large triangle of mince pie in a warm little hand, and talking very fast the while to her hostess, whose rocker had fairly creaked with sympathetic interest as the child

described her sensations when first she ventured upon the big beam. Katherine was a born conversationalist, and she held her listener enthralled.

"You see," she explained, gesticulating vigorously, pie in hand; "it was n't dangerous, really, unless you got scared. It was as wide as that,"—and the pie-laden hand marked off a foot measure from the empty one,—"and any one could walk on a place as wide as that. Why, I can walk on a rail fence just as easy,—only Cousin Elmira does n't allow it. I never fell off but once, and then it was because the rail was loose; and it would n't have done any harm if my hoopskirt cover had n't caught on a nail and torn itself. So I had to own up where I had been."

"And what did your cousin do about it?"

"She sent me right to bed. She always does,—and it was quite early in the afternoon too."

"And is that a very bad punishment?"

"It 's the worst there is," Katherine replied with conviction.

"What made you tell her what you had been doing? She might have thought you had caught your skirt on a bramble."

"Why, she asked me; so I had to tell her."

"Then you are a truthful little girl," and Mrs. Stevens' twinkling knitting-needles paused for the reply.

"Oh, yes! I s'pose I am truthful," Katherine returned in rather an indifferent, depreciatory tone. "I don't like to tell lies."

"You mean you know it 's wicked."

"I don't know. Some children that are n't at all naughty tell lies."

"But you know it 's a wicked thing to do," Mrs. Stevens insisted.

"Yes, but—I do a great many wicked things."

"Then what 's the reason you don't tell lies?"

"Well, I guess it 's 'cause it makes you feel so funny inside. I tried the other day to tell one for Archie, but I did n't stick it out, and he was very mad with me."

"And who is Archie?"

"He 's my big brother. He's the tallest boy in his class, and—" the child was eagerly ready to launch upon a new subject.

"And he tells lies?" Mrs. Stevens persisted.

"I did n't say any such thing!" Katherine declared.

"But he wanted you to tell one."

This was a poser, and the little sister cast hastily about for some mode of evasion, — an art in which she was not skilled. For once, however, she was in luck, for, looking out of the window, she discovered a diversion in the shape of Miss Susan Littlefield trudging cheerfully across from the picnic grove. She had left her sunbonnet behind her, and her face was flushed from the heat and the exercise.

"There comes Miss Susan," Katherine hastened to remark. "Perhaps she 's got my dinner in that basket. She 'll be surprised when she finds I 've had some!"

"Well, Katherine!" Miss Susan exclaimed as she paused in the doorway. "You seem to be doing pretty well!"

"Yes," Katherine cried eagerly. "This is my second piece, and the lady cut the pie on purpose!"

"Well, you had better eat it up quick before Cousin Elmira comes in. She might not think it was much punishment if she found you feasting on goodies."

"I 'm not going to eat this piece," Katherine declared.

"Not going to eat it? Why, what be you going to do with it?" inquired her hostess.

"I was saving it for Archie. I thought perhaps he would come over when he had finished his dinner," — and she glanced again rather wistfully toward the picnic grove.

Miss Susan, recalling the sight of the little gourmand devouring his fourth piece of cake,—as she was very well aware,—quite untroubled by the thought of the little prisoner within, felt her heart harden against him.

"I would n't trouble my head about Archie," she exclaimed, with a brusqueness that could hurt only the innocent. "He 's had more sweets already than are good for him, and he does n't seem to have any idea of coming over."

Katherine's face fell.

"I s'pose he forgot," she said slowly; and then, rising, and walking over to the table, she laid the piece of pie back on the plate.

"Ain't you going to eat it?" Mrs. Stevens asked, in kind concern.

"No, thank you," Katherine returned, with a curious small womanly dignity; "it was very good, but I 've eaten enough. And now, may I go up-stairs again?"

"Why, yes, child! Of course. Your cousin might be better pleased to find you there."

"I was n't thinking of that," said Katherine, turning on the threshold and looking back. "I wanted to see the little images again!"

"All right, little girl," the kind hostess agreed. "Run along, and—you may take them down and look at them one at a time if you 'll be very careful."

"Oh! may I?" and the swiftness with which the small feet scampered up the stairs would have seemed to indicate that even wounded affections are susceptible of healing. Katherine might not bring herself to eat the pie she had saved for an ungrateful Archie, but she could still find solace in a more intimate acquaintance with the little china gentleman she had so longed to know better.

"Bless your soul!" Mrs. Stevens exclaimed, as Miss Susan displayed the generous half-loaf of sponge-cake which she had brought her. "You need n't put yourself out about me! But I will say that I relish a piece of sponge-cake with my supper more 'n most anything else,—and so does Mr. Stevens, too!"

"That 's good," Miss Susan replied, vigorously fanning herself with her black silk apron. "And—I don't know how Miss Faxon might feel about it,—but I am really obliged to you for being so kind to little Katherine."

"I like her!" said Mrs. Stevens with decision. "She 's smart and she 's truthful and she 's generous. I don't see what more you want."

"Yes," Miss Susan admitted doubtfully; "but her cousin says she 's a very difficult child to manage."

"That 's because she don't know how! And I guess she exaggerates things. There are worse crimes than climbing 'round a clean barn,—now I tell you!"

"But the child risked her life!"

The farmer's wife gave her companion a shrewd look.

"Do you suppose that 's why she was punished?" she inquired.

"Well, I don't know; but it was reason enough!"

"Yes! I guess that 's so. But, Lord! she ain't one to tumble off a high place. She 'd be a sight more likely to stub her toe running right along the road!" In which casual observation Mrs. Stevens had said a more significant thing than she was aware of.

"Well," Miss Susan admitted, making as if to return to her duties, "there does seem to be a special Providence watching over that child. There is n't a boy in Camwood that does such things. Why, Mrs. Stevens," and she paused, door-handle in hand, "we had the Sunday-school picnic out at the old fort a year ago, when Katherine was only six years old. You know there 's a switch rail of the Albany Railroad runs close by there on the other side of the fence. Well, if you 'll believe it, Katherine Day crawled through under a moving freight car!"

"Goodness sakes! What put such a thing into her head?"

"One of the big boys dared her to do it!"

"Well, well!" Mrs. Stevens cried. "That Miss Faxon has got her hands full, I declare. And she ain't fit for it, now I tell you,—she ain't fit for it!" and Miss Susan, with all her loyalty to Elmira Faxon, could but silently acquiesce in the good woman's verdict.

CHAPTER III

TO SOME GOOD END

" Respect all such as sing when all alone."

ALTHOUGH little Katherine did not again visit that particular picnic grove, nor behold the kind woman who had so generously befriended her in adversity, she never forgot her nor the incidents of that checkered day.

It was not that her own misdemeanor was of an unprecedented character, nor that its consequences were unusually severe. The little girl's ambition to scale heights, her love of peril, or rather her passion for the exercise of courage, was inbred in her; and, since Cousin Elmira's idea of management involved a summary remodelling of character, it is perhaps no wonder that that strict disciplinarian found her task beset with difficulties.

No, it was not the first time, nor yet the last, that the child's spirit had soared indecorously high; nor was it the first or last time that it had been ignominiously brought low. The unique feature of this otherwise every-day experience consisted in the atmosphere of sympathetic indulgence and understanding in which she had found herself,—a very unusual thing in the child's short and troublous career. Thanks to this novel state of affairs that piece of mince pie had had

a flavor all its own; the little china gentleman, when she took him with fearsome joy into her hands, seemed to meet her advances with a peculiar courtesy and consideration; the birds, chirping and hopping about among the elm branches, were her good friends; the very tassel in the window had caressed her cheek. And through all these varied sensations and experiences had sounded like a refrain the echo of those hopeful words, "to some good end; to some good end!" Cousin Elmira had punished her; Archie had forgotten her, but the Lord Himself had preserved her, "to some good end."

She wondered very much what that good end might be, and since she was a child of active mind, her speculations on that head took many interesting forms. She would sometimes lie awake for as much as five or ten minutes enacting an inward drama in which it was permitted her to save Archie's life and earn his respectful gratitude! Or again, as she stood at the garden gate watching the passing of a little company of dusty and ragged soldiers returned from the South, she would be filled with an ardent desire to grow up and become an army nurse and die of a fever,—her death-bed rendered interesting and agreeable by fervent blessings. To the child of the middle sixties, who could not remember a time when the soldiers had not been marching to and fro, when women had not been making little comfort-bags for them, when the news of great battles had not stirred the grown people with an emotion unexplained to the childish mind, the war and its varying phases presented itself as a permanent dispensation, like the rotation of the seasons or the prevalence of influenza.

But perhaps the best vantage-ground of all for

dreams and fancies was the narrow, red-cushioned pew with its high walls over which Katherine could just see the bald head of the Rev. Mr. Wilder. She would have been an attentive listener of this talented divine if she had but had the advantage of an acquaintance with the words and phrases which he made use of. But to her the greater part of his discourse was as unintelligible as much of the conversation of her elders when not addressed to herself. Could the good man have guessed the satisfaction with which she recognized certain familiar words, such as moon, star, summer, happiness,—above all, the prompt arresting of her hopeful attention when the term "children" fell from his lips, he would certainly have been touched. Her favorite among his *dramatis personæ*, so to speak, was Peter. Not because she possessed a very clear or engaging impression of that fine old saint, but because Peter was the name of Grandmother Day's coachman and gardener, her own very good if rather patronizing friend, who sometimes condescended to dance a jig in the stable to the tune of an errant hand-organ. It was in church that the little girl, pondering upon Mrs. Stevens' cheerful prophecy, —her ear caught at the same time by an allusion from the pulpit to the Children of Israel,—conceived the inspiring if not strictly original plan of founding an orphan asylum "to some good end." This proved a most fruitful subject of thought, for the orphan asylum was to be of a very superior character. It was to be in the country, a kind of big farmhouse provided with a barn full of sweet hay,and offering beams and haycarts and ladders and live stock without limit. There was to be a fragrant wood near by, with lots of violets and anemones, and, if possible, a rockery grown with

columbines. Every child was to have a private and particular dog, and some money to give away, and the little girls should walk on fences and even beams to their hearts' content. And they should climb trees and play hop-scotch and go in swimming—at which point a river had to be improvised in the immediate vicinity of the asylum—and do every single thing the boys did without ever being reprimanded or dubbed tomboys. Katherine wondered, in passing, why it was naughty for children to call names, when grown people never thought anything of applying to her that of tomboy or kindred terms of opprobrium. Indeed, if Katherine had had the power and liberty of expression, it might have transpired that she too had her abstruse moral problems.

But there were moments when Katherine knelt down to say her prayers, or when she stood at her window of a starlit evening, that she conceived that "good end" as something beyond her present powers of imagination. That she was a truly imaginative child was in nothing more clearly demonstrated than in the fact that even at this early age she was able to conceive the possibility of conditions vastly transcending anything she could herself "think out." Especially was she moved to such vague but alluring speculations when looking at the stars. There had never been a time when they had not played a part in her consciousness. There were certain episodes connected with them which she never forgot.

One evening in particular she was to remember as long as she lived. It was when she had stood, a very small child, beside her big brother—then aged six—on the back veranda of her grandmother's house, looking across the lawn and garden toward the eastern

sky to see the stars come out. It was early May and the woodbine that festooned the white pillars of the veranda was just coming into delicate leaf. Archie's somewhat ostentatious repetitions of a verse new to him and wonderful to her, beginning:

"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,"

had filled both children with an ardent desire to witness the phenomenon. Suddenly a light shone dim and far away close to the horizon, and Katherine, seizing Archie's hand, cried: "See, Artie, see! a star! a star!"

"Pooh! that is n't a star," was Archie's scornful rejoinder. "It 's only a light in a house."

A chill of disappointment seized the little girl. She could not doubt her oracle, yet—"How can you tell?" she ventured to ask.

"Why, it doesn 't twinkle! What would be the good of a star that didn 't twinkle?" And, indeed, what would be the good of such an unnatural manifestation, regarded as a subject for nursery rhymes?

Yet, as the children stood and watched the sky where soft, imperceptible folds of shadow were deepening about the slowly brightening point of light, little Katherine became breathlessly aware that it was rising, rising! See! it had passed the level of an elm branch, thrown sharp against the breadth of sky. Yes! it was mounting, and ah! how it shone!

"It *is* a star!" the child murmured, under her breath, and with a curious uplifting of the little spirit, checked only by the knowledge that Archie had been mistaken. For, indeed, if Archie could be mistaken, where was she to turn for guidance?

But Archie, quite unabashed, cried: "I don't care! I would n't look at an old star that did n't twinkle!"

"That 's not a star," said an authoritative voice behind them. "It 's a planet." Grandmother Day had stepped softly out on the veranda and was looking down upon the children. "The planets don't twinkle," she added; "they always shine with a steady light."

Then little Katherine looked up gratefully into the handsome, clean-cut face of the tall woman and said: "I think that 's better than twinkling."

"It ain't, though!" Archie persisted stoutly. "I think it 's stupid of the old thing not to twinkle!"

But Katherine in her own heart was very sure that she liked to have her stars shine with a steady light.

Three years had gone by since that May evening,—and a year is a long, long period in the calendar of a child,—yet little Katherine Day at seven had not lost her preference for the steadily shining lights. She had not found many. The twinkling stars are more numerous in every sky than the glowing planets, and her chief star, whose name was Archie, was preeminently a twinkler. Sometimes he seemed fond of his little sister; again he was haughtily indifferent,—at another time he appeared quite to dislike her; while Katherine was sure that she always loved him with all her heart, even when he had driven her into a passion of indignation and despair,—a not infrequent occurrence at the time our story opens.

Indeed, so great was her love for Archie that she never thought of resenting the fact that he was the universal and unquestioned favorite. There was hardly a single one of the "grown-ups" who presided in a solemn circle, much like the ancient gods, over

their childish destinies who did not openly give Archie the preference over Katherine.

A clever Englishman has dubbed the elders of his childhood "the Olympians," and I think that no one whose memory goes back to the time when all grown people loomed like giants on the edges of his youthful horizon, rarely drawing near except for purposes of admonition or chastisement, can fail to recognize the fitness of the term. To little Katherine, at least, her elders appeared much in the light of more or less implacable divinities. And if these exalted beings preferred Archie to Katherine, it was doubtless owing to some innate superiority which their wisdom recognized.

It would appear that logic is strictly an acquired faculty, and certainly little Katherine was rarely put out of countenance by its dictates. She knew, for example, of many particular instances in which Archie had played the part of tempter,—in so much that a casual allusion in her hearing to Satan himself as "the arch-tempter" had established in her mind an unconscious association of ideas between that highly disreputable personage and the fair, always captivating face of her own "Archie." Yet she did not from these instances reason that Archie's moral status was lower than her own. Archie was just Archie,—that was all there was to it,—and if she loved him better than he deserved, and if grandmother and Cousin Elmira and Aunt Anne were deceived in their estimate of his character, we may be sure that his loyal little sister would be the last to recognize the fact.

One of her very earliest recollections might well have served to enlighten her mind had it been sus-

ceptible to enlightenment. She still remembered,—she always remembered,—sitting long, long ago with Archie on the floor of Grandmother Day's parlor, listening to the dulcet strains of a music-box which Aunt Anne, recently returned with this treasure from foreign shores, had wound up for their delectation. Archie, with that propensity to mischief which never seemed seriously to prejudice his cause in the eyes of his elders, had on more than one previous occasion been betrayed into making such digital investigations of the machinery as to stop the pretty tune short off, and Aunt Anne had declared, with gentle decision, that the next time this occurred should be the last.

On that day, so long ago, the children, tiny tots, both of them, had sat there in front of the long pier-glass, unconscious of the pretty picture they made, with their two contrasting little heads bent close together above the magic box, and Archie had once more been seized with a consuming desire to poke his fingers in and arrest the mysterious movement of the prickly cylinder. When the child is yet too small to make, he seems to reverse the impulse of creation and find his account with marring. And so when little Archie lifted his small face and glanced furtively about in search of some possible marplot of larger growth, his pretty eyes were alight with mischief, and his high, childish treble was reduced to a peculiarly sibilant whisper, as he declared: "I 'm goin' to stop it."

The brown companion head was lifted, and the big, serious dark eyes behind their long lashes met his with a look of fearsome admiration.

"Is you, Artie?" little Katherine queried.

"Yes. An' you must never tell. Promise!"

"Not aless she asts," was little Katherine's cheerful response.

"If she asks, all you 've got to do is to say no. That won't hurt you!"

The scornful superiority with which this dictum was enunciated carried the day; and thus it came to pass that little Katherine told her first lie. For, as the pretty tinkling stopped, nipping the *Carnival of Venice* in the bud, so to speak, Aunt Anne, one of the tallest and by far the most beautiful of all the goddesses, came gliding in with the ship-like motion induced by the apparent absence of feet which characterized the ladies of that day, and, towering high above the children, put the crucial question: Had Archie stopped the music-box?

No; Archie had done nothing of the kind, if Archie's own statement was to be accepted. But Grandmother Day, rustling stiffly in the wake of the ship-like Aunt Anne, suggested that Katherine be examined.

"Katherine is a truthful child," she declared, with that careful but quite unenthusiastic justice for which she was noted.

And then and there it was that little Katherine learned by a cruel pang and a sense of degradation quite beyond her years, that, in spite of the experienced Archie's assurance to the contrary, telling lies did hurt. For she told her lie pluckily, one might almost say honestly, as her nature was, and the music-box was duly started up again. But neither the *Carnival of Venice* nor yet the *Maiden's Lament* which followed sadly upon the tripping measure of its predecessor had consolation for the fallen spirit.

The little girl had lifted her head defiantly, scorning to succumb outwardly to a bad conscience, and there

in the long mirror she had beheld the small family group reflected in pictorial distinctness within the gilt frame: the beautiful Aunt Anne, in her flowing draperies of immaculate dove color; Grandmother Day all in black, with her black hair and her keen black eyes; Archie's pretty uplifted face, beaming with exaggerated innocence; and among them all a little brown blot in a high-necked, long-sleeved gingham apron, above which the little brown visage with its brown eyes and mop of shingled brown hair struck its owner as the very personification of evil.

Strangely enough, little Katherine did not then or afterward give much thought to the moral aspect of Archie's attitude in this shocking affair. It was with her own conscience that she had to deal, and so troublesome did that very active monitor make itself that she had scant leisure for resentment toward the sole instigator of her crime. The lie had certainly hurt, and it was she it had hurt; and it was the consciousness of her own hurt that she carried about with her for days, that was never, indeed, wholly effaced from her memory.

If little Katherine had lived on terms of easy confidence with her elders, she would doubtless have made a clean breast of the matter, and before she slept her sin might have been forgiven and forgotten. But that was not so much the way of her day and generation as of ours, even between mother and child; and there was little in the personality of Grandmother Day or Cousin Elmira or even of Aunt Anne to invite a childish confidence.

Yet Aunt Anne was the favorite divinity of Katherine's childhood. She was tall and fair and the possessor of a very winning smile,—to say nothing of a

ravishing wardrobe. There was one richly embroidered blue velvet circular in particular, known in the family as "Anne's Lyons velvet cape," which seemed to Katherine a fit garment for fairy queen or mortal princess. Its rich folds of heavenly color and delicious texture had a way of falling about the slender, shapely form in a manner to captivate any heart,—so that it was very little wonder, though matter for extreme regret, when a bearded, masterful person, expressing a quite unexplained wish to be addressed as "Uncle Theodore," came presently and carried Aunt Anne away for good and all, before ever Katherine had had a chance to become really intimate with her; not, however, before the name of Aunt Anne had got itself enrolled in the list of beneficiaries to be presented each evening in her little niece's prayers.

At an unusually early age the child had been left to carry on her own religious exercises, which she did punctiliously every night, following, with a docility hardly to be expected, in the lines laid down for her by her original instructor. First came "Now I lay me," then "Our Father," and then "God bless." It was only in this third division that she allowed herself some liberty of expression, and when she arrived at Aunt Anne's name, the fifth on the list, she always indicated with unmistakable explicitness that it was "beautiful Aunt Anne" that she meant, in careful contradistinction to a very ugly and unprepossessing Great-Aunt Anne whom she had seen but twice, and the identity of whose Christian name with that of her favorite might, she feared, confuse the heavenly counsels. Katherine bore no ill-will toward the ugly Aunt Anne, but she did not consider herself called upon to include her in her benediction.

Little Katherine's religious life had always been a very real and vital one, and, curiously enough, it comprised many depressing, not to say terrifying ideas. Curiously, because the child had been brought up under that form of religion which takes a hopeful view of human nature and consequently of human destiny.

Perhaps it was because of its novelty that the doctrine of eternal punishment, first inculcated in her mind by a nursery maid, took such strong hold upon her imagination. She did not for a moment question its truth, and from the very beginning it had a gruesome fascination for her. It was perhaps the dramatic suggestiveness of the doctrine which appealed to her,—certainly not any expectation of being herself counted among the elect. So persuaded was she, indeed, of the tragic destiny in store for her that in the occasional moments of pusillanimity to which she was subject she used quite to envy animals and flowers and even articles of furniture because they at least were exempt in the future, whatever might be their disadvantages in the present. There was a certain chair in her grandmother's parlor, a spindle-legged chair with a covering of yellow damask, with which she frequently desired to exchange places in the scheme of things. It was a pretty chair, to begin with, and uneventful as its career might be, it was at least treated with consideration in this world,—owing doubtless to its manifest fragility,—and it might look forward with entire confidence to a future, be it long or short, untormented by hell-fires. Yes, Katherine sometimes felt that she should like to have been created a spindle-legged, yellow-covered chair.

And yet, for all that, and for all that, little Katherine was by no means a pitiable child. Rather, she

was a child of rich and varied experience, an experience fed largely from within, and therefore not subject to ordinary limitations; and being blessed with a sound constitution and much elasticity of temperament, she bade fair to weather the storms of life, the redoubtable Cousin Elmira included, with no serious jeopardizing of that "good end" so cheerfully predicted by the kindly dispenser of carnal and spiritual consolation.

And it was characteristic of our small heroine that, while the sense of mortification and disgrace attendant upon her daring venture on the high beam became less poignant from day to day, the exhilarating recollection of her bold achievement and of the flattering interpretation put upon her preservation lost none of its inspiring character. So that we may take to heart the consoling thought that little Katherine's motherless fate was not without its ameliorations; that perhaps, after all, she had really been preserved "to some good end."

CHAPTER IV

THE PRIZE FISH

> "Still
> I mind how love repaired all ill,
> Cured wrong, soothed grief, made earth amends,
> With parents, brothers, children, friends."

HAPPILY for little Katherine the somewhat distant and perfunctory intercourse vouchsafed her with her elders was neither her sole nor her chief resource, socially speaking. For not only was Archie a stimulating if not always a sympathetic companion, but she possessed in Winny Gerald the inseparable playmate and crony which every child should have.

This pretty and amiable little person, the value of whose fair curls and blue eyes as affecting her social status could scarcely be overestimated even by the admiring Katherine, lived in a rather new and pretentious house of the ginger-bread variety, not far from the plainer dwelling which Mr. Charles Day had the good taste to prefer. He, by the way, like all the Days of Camwood, was well to do, and quite at liberty to build him as new and ugly a mansion as any in that charming suburb. To little Katherine, however, her father's financial ease would have been a matter of complete indifference even if she had been aware of it; for the wealth of a Crœsus would not have altered

Cousin Elmira's fixed preference for magenta in the selection of the little girl's wardrobe,—a color which the child abhorred,—nor would that exercise of hospitality toward her own contemporaries have been permitted her for which her soul vainly longed. Cousin Elmira considered that two children in the house were a sufficient tax upon her patience, and it was well understood that no further invasion of the grown-up decorum would be tolerated.

Katherine, meanwhile, if she gave a thought to the matter, supposed that the Geralds must be very rich and great people to live in so magnificent a house; but this awoke no envy in her breast. Neither did she envy Winny her fabulous allowance of twenty-five cents a week, although that sum represented a quite incalculable amount of chocolate drops, to say nothing of numberless sheets of bright colored paper for the arraying of home-made paper dolls. No, the object of little Katherine's envy was neither wealth nor the luxuries wealth could purchase, but rather those personal advantages which command the homage of one's fellow creatures; and even these Katherine would not have wished wrested from her little friend. If she could have had her choice she would have been so exactly like Winny Gerald in every particular that their best friends could scarcely have told them apart. She would not only have had Winny's sunny curls, but she would also have emulated Winny's captivating manner of tossing them out of her eyes; she would not only have chosen eyes to match Winny's, but she would have had them "squinny up" and almost disappear, exactly as Winny's did when she laughed,—a phenomenon which Katherine never tired of observing. In a word, she

would not only have possessed Winny's charms, she would have worn them with Winny's grace. Yes, it must indeed be easy to be good when everybody loved you.

"I tell you what let's play, Winny! you be a queen and I 'll be a gypsy woman that 's come to tell your fortune!"

The little girls had been jumping rope together until Winny had called a halt, and now they were established on the piazza, where Katherine was allowed to receive one guest at a time on the condition that they should not run up and down or make themselves otherwise audible to Cousin Elmira. Katherine had left off jumping rope with the greatest reluctance, for not only was she a very strong child, but she was liable to an absorbing enthusiasm in whatever she was doing, which made it nearly always an affliction to stop. If she was skating all by herself on a frozen gutter in the chill of a winter sundown, she was apt to be so ardently desirous of one more turn that she was more than likely to come home late and be sent to bed without her supper; if picking currants in her grandmother's garden chanced to be the absorbing interest of the moment, she could not bear to stop when her pail was full; or let her occupation be nothing more inherently delectable than adding long columns of figures at sight on a card provided the school children for that exercise, she was never content with one column, but longed for another. It was not merely that she was endowed with unusual endurance; it was chiefly that her zest for work or play was practically inexhaustible; a surfeit was something the child had never experienced. And so she had found it hard to be

reconciled when Winny had said she was tired and could n't jump any more.

They were quite big girls by this time, "going on eleven," as the saying is, and Katherine's imagination had been recently fired by a history book in which kings and queens figured largely and brilliantly.

"You be a queen," she said; "and I 'll be a gypsy woman come to tell your fortune."

"I don't see how I can be a queen without a crown," Winny objected, taking off her hat and throwing it down, as if to prepare her head for that pleasing decoration, should a discriminating chance see fit to provide it.

The long summer vacation had come, and the children, in the luxury of idleness, were sitting on the edge of the piazza with their feet hanging over. The sun shone full in their faces, and, as Katherine turned a sympathetic eye upon the uncrowned head, she found that the sunbeams were getting caught in the stray locks of hair which the soft breeze lifted lightly.

"If I had some hairpins," she remarked, "I could make a crown out of your curls. They look exactly like gold."

"Pooh! that would n't be any good," said Winny contemptuously. "Nobody would take any notice of a kind of crown that anybody could have."

"Anybody could n't, though," Katherine declared. "I could n't!"—and she put her hand up regretfully to her own round head, whose dark, straight growth was still kept at that ugly length which requires a round-comb for its subjection.

Winny, who had a cheerful way of taking other

people's disabilities for granted, was still concerned for the regal insignia which were so manifestly her right.

"I wish," she said, "that I had n't used up all my gilt paper on a ball dress for Arabella. We could have cut it in points and pinned it round."

"Oh! I tell you," Katherine cried, with renewed animation. "We 'll make one of dandelions!" and she jumped down from her perch and began gathering the yellow weed with which the lawn was strewn.

"Oh, no; dandelions are horrid. They wilt right down, and they smell queer."

"And the stems don't stay tied," Katherine admitted regretfully.

"I guess you had better come back and we 'll play I 've just taken my crown off 'cause it hurt my head."

"And of course a gypsy would know you were a queen by the gift of second sight!"

Then Katherine looked doubtfully at the handful of blossoms she had gathered. She did not like to throw them away.

"I think I 'll stick them in my hair. Gypsies wear flowers in their hair, don't they?" and lifting the round-comb she tucked the questionably ornamental blossoms underneath. "There," she added, "I guess they like that better than not being any good at all. Do I look like a gypsy?"

"Yes; exactly," was Winny's hasty rejoinder. "Now come and tell my fortune."

She rather objected to the gypsy part being made too prominent, aside from its manifest purpose, the glorification of her own future; and Katherine, who

was quite of her way of thinking, ran up the steps of the piazza and, dropping like a bird upon her perch, abandoned herself to the spirit of prophecy.

"You 'll be very rich and powerful," she began, gazing admiringly at Winny's uncrowned head.

"Why, of course! I 'm that already, if I 'm a queen!" Winny interposed.

"Well, you 'll stay rich and powerful; some queens lose their crowns, you know,—and even their heads," —with that sudden reminiscence which ensures the unhappy Anne Boleyn's immortality in every childish mind. "And you 'll grow richer and powerfuller all the time!"

"Don't you think you ought to say 'your Majesty'?" the small queen demurred.

"I suppose so; but how funny it sounds! 'Your Majesty'! Somehow it seems sort of ridiculous, as if you were just Winny after all."

"I don't see why! Anyhow, you 've got to say 'your Majesty' when you are talking to a queen."

"Well then, your Majesty will be the greatest queen in the world; and you 'll make all your subjects happy, and whenever you walk abroad the poor will gather round you and bless you."

"That is n't a bit my idea of a queen," Winny objected. "Tell about the clothes I shall wear and the jewels and—who 's going to be king?"

"Oh! of course!" cried Katherine, with enthusiasm. "You will marry—I mean your Majesty will deign to bestow your hand—on the most magnificent prince that ever trod the earth. He will come with a great retinue to pay you court, and he will be as good and as beautiful as he is great, and he will have a wonderful mind, and a generous soul,

and the courage of a lion, and when you look at him you will forget everybody else and long to go away with him to the ends of the earth with—nobody to interrupt!"

In spite of this rather lame anti-climax, Katherine's eyes were flashing with excitement and her cheeks were flushed. The dandelions were already hanging their heads, the life quite squeezed out of them between the teeth of the round-comb; and Winny felt a sudden magnanimous impulse to repay the generous soothsayer in kind.

"Now I'll tell your fortune," she cried, seizing Katherine's small brown paw and spreading it open with a fine appearance of understanding palmistry.

The gypsy, who, in the enthusiasm of prophetic fervor, had quite forgotten to examine the royal hand, glanced down at her own grimy palm, streaked with green stains from the dandelion stems, and shook her head doubtfully.

"There does n't seem to be anything left for me," she objected.

"Oh, yes, there is," was the queen's patronizing rejoinder. "But of course a gypsy would n't expect to marry a prince!"

"No—I s'pose not; and I should n't care so much about his being a prince. But then your prince was not only a prince, but the best and the kindest and the bravest person that ever lived."

"Well, you might have the next best!"

"No, I don't believe I should want him. I don't like second-best things."

"But Katherine!" Winny cried impatiently. "If only one person in the world can have the best, how could you expect that you would be the one?"

"I never expected any such thing," Katherine protested. "I only said I 'd rather go without. And I expect to go without."

"Well, I think you are very unreasonable!" Winny declared, with quite a contemptuous, hostile look at the poor gypsy.

Then Katherine laughed.

"Is n't it funny?" she said. "We were getting quite mad about something that is n't anything anyhow!—Oh, there 's Archie coming home! Now we shall have some fun!"—and the little girl again dropped off the piazza and ran down the walk to meet her brother.

Master Archie, who happened to be in condescending humor, said, "Hullo, Puss," and laid his arm across her shoulder as they walked up the path together. Little did she care about princes and dominations any more; indeed, she felt quite sorry for Winny, who, for all her brilliant prospects, had n't any big brother to call her Puss. And, indeed, Archie, just entering upon his teens, had grown into a tall, handsome boy, whom a sister less prejudiced than Katherine might have been proud of.

"I know something nice," he declared, with an important air, as they came up the piazza steps.

Winny had stood up and was eagerly ready for the fun which Katherine had so confidently predicted.

"Oh! what is it?" the little girls cried in one breath.

"It 's very nice indeed."

"Please tell us," they cried again, as promptly and simultaneously as a Greek chorus.

"Well, in the first place, it 's most dinner-time!"

"Oh!" and the Greek chorus assumed an indignant droop.

"And after dinner I 'm going fishing with father!"

"Oh!" and there was an almost painful suspense in the inflection of Katherine's "Oh."

"And I am going to ask him to take you girls with us!"

"Oh, Archie! how good you are! Do you suppose he will?"

"Oh, yes! He will if I ask him!" was the reply, given with a touch of self-consciousness which escaped criticism. For the girls were naturally not aware that he had overheard his father ordering the carryall, a vehicle manifestly larger than two passengers could possibly require. There was consequently nothing to shake their faith in Archie's beneficent influence when, a couple of hours later, the two little girls found themselves established in the roomy back seat of the carryall, as it bowled along toward the open country at the willing heels of old Chief.

If the manly contingent of the company somewhat impeded their view of Chief's tail and ears,—the most delectable sight in the world, to Katherine's thinking, —she did not cavil at the circumstance. On the contrary, she was far too grateful to the wearers of coat and jacket to give a thought to unsatisfied longings.

It was a glorious summer's day, the ardor of the sun tempered by a touch of that east wind whose harshness, like the Puritan tang in the New England character, is apt to repel the uncomprehending outsider. To the children there was exhilaration in it, shared apparently by old Chief himself, who, with his long, reaching stride, got over the ground at a rate

which would have been creditable to a younger than he.

The great black beast, whose record for speed was only exceeded by his well-earned reputation for docility, was somewhat the senior of all the party excepting his master; but not one of the children was more susceptible to the holiday spirit than this faithful friend. He had long been intermittently engaged in teaching the two children to drive, and a better teacher they could hardly have had, as Charles Day had more than once declared. For Chief was so lightly biddable that even their childish voices could stay his fastest stride; while not the feeblest pressure of the bit was lost upon him.

As long ago as Katherine could remember she had stood between her father's knees, with tiny hands clinging to the heavy leathers just below his own strong grasp, and giving little futile pulls to right or left as he directed. And, now that she was sometimes allowed to take independent charge of the reins, the noble old horse had developed quite remarkable judgment in the cause of her education. For when Katherine, lost in admiration for some gay passing garden, or her gaze perhaps arrested by a flight of wild duck, would pull the wrong rein, the gentle giant would connive with her father in bringing her face to face with the consequences of her carelessness,—as represented in a ditch, perhaps, or a pile of stones, —but never without a warning turn of the head and a slackening of his pace.

Charles Day, a lover of horses himself, had always encouraged the taste in his children, and he had long talked of buying a pony for them to ride. At first they had lived in momently expectation of this en-

chanting possession; but little by little it had receded to those regions of the future where cigars and moustaches, long-tailed gowns, and gold watches were laid up in glittering but rather unsubstantial promise.

And even Archie submitted uncomplainingly to the hope deferred, for he well knew that if his father was somewhat lax in his treatment of others, he was none the less strict in exacting absolute submission from his children. He was ready enough to give them a pleasure when it came in his way, and he indulged in many an air-castle for them as well as for himself; but at any given moment they must not tease. And so the children learned, very much as their elders do, to take the goods the gods bestow without insisting upon the fulfilment of lapsed pledges.

On this particular afternoon Archie was driving, and Archie's father appeared much occupied with his cigar, which did not seem to relish the east wind. As he relighted it for the third time, he remarked: "I think we shall have to have a prize for the biggest fish. I wonder who will get it?"

"Archie!" cried Katherine, without a moment's hesitation.

"What makes you think so?"

"'Cause he knows how, and we don't!"

"But supposing the fish don't know that he knows how? Perhaps they 'll take your bait by mistake. Fish are not so very intelligent."

Now Katherine had never before thought of fish as having any intelligence whatever, and consequently she had taken it for granted that they were also devoid of sensibility. The suggestion, though negatively put, was very disturbing to her; for she

was philosopher enough to have observed that feeling and intelligence go hand in hand.

"I did n't suppose fishes knew anything at all," she declared in some anxiety.

"No? Then you never saw one of them wink at you when he had been smelling of the bait and decided not to take it!"

"Oh! you are making fun!" she cried, somewhat relieved.

"What do you think about it, Winny?" Mr. Day asked.

"Oh, I don't know," was Winny's discreet rejoinder. "I never caught but one, and he shut his eyes up tight and never opened them again."

"Did n't he wriggle?" Archie inquired, turning sharp about, and thereby sending Chief diagonally across the wide country road.

"Mind your reins, Archie," his father admonished; "or I 'll put you in the back seat!"

"No, he did n't wriggle. He just gasped and stiffened right out!" and at this point in the conversation, Katherine resolved that no prize, however dazzling, should tempt her to catch a fish. And since they had but two fishing-rods her resolution fell in very conveniently with the preference of the others, and roused no remonstrance.

It was a blissful two hours that the children spent floating on the broad, shining pond, unmindful of the broiling sun. Katherine sat perched in the high bow of the boat, to be well out of the way. She was perhaps the happiest of them all, for she could hardly be expected to share the chagrin of the would-be fishermen when the fish gently but firmly refused to bite. She rather wondered that they should

not treat her father's overtures more respectfully, but even that enthusiastic fisherman failed to lure a single victim to his hook.

As the sun got lower, it began doing enchanting things to the quiet sheet of water, and to the tree-tops and the grassy spaces on the shore. Even the ugly ice-houses, huddled together at one end, got wrapped in a kind of sun-shot shimmer that was highly becoming. Katherine did not know how beautiful it was, nor did she understand anything about the subtle chords in her own nature whose sensitive response to the beauty she looked upon was deepening the sense of joy within her. She only knew that she was happy, happy, happy, and that she loved everybody and everything, and that she was never, never going to be a naughty girl again. These feelings were not articulate enough to be called thoughts, but that was the meaning they had to her.

Presently Archie put down his rod in disgust and came to join her at her post. Her father was sitting with his back to them, the oars crossed on his knees, while he helped Winny with her rod and line.

Suddenly,—"See that water-lily!" Archie whispered: "There, there! don't you see it?"

Now they were over the deep middle of the pond, where the longest-stemmed water-lily that ever grew could not have reached the surface, and, moreover, not a water-lily had ever been seen in Fisher's Pond. But Katherine could not know that.

"Oh! let 's get it!" she cried under her breath. "See, we are floating toward it!"

Archie meanwhile had perceived his mistake. The water-lily was but a figment of his imagination;—only a floating leaf in fact, gleaming in the

sunshine. But he did not want to own that he had been wrong, and he did not think Katherine would discover his blunder. She was kneeling on the seat, reaching toward the point of light as they approached, so much absorbed in the effort of keeping her balance that she scarcely took in the contour of the deceptive leaf.

"You 'd better be careful," Archie whispered; but before the words were fairly spoken, she had made a sudden movement that cost her her balance, and, as the boy clutched wildly at her dress, he felt it slip through his fingers, and saw her vanish with a great splash beneath the water.

One cry of horror from Archie, an answering scream from Winny, and Charles Day had turned and was on his feet with his coat beside him, ready to spring.

Perhaps the shock had momentarily paralyzed Katherine, for although she did not for an instant lose consciousness, she did not struggle; and consequently she came up to the surface almost at once and within easy reach of the boat. Another moment and she was sitting, dazed and drenched and choking, on the middle seat, and she heard her father saying that this was the last time they should any of them ever again be taken out on the pond.

"It was the water-lily!" she gasped. "I was trying to reach the water-lily!"

"That is not true," Charles answered severely. "There are no water-lilies in the pond."

Archie glanced at his little victim in some trepidation. Would she betray him? But no, there had been nothing in Katherine's impromptu bath to change her nature.

"I thought I saw one," she faltered, shivering a bit, -- whereupon she found herself quite extinguished and obliterated in the folds of her father's coat.

The necessity of driving home in his shirt-sleeves did not have a softening effect upon Mr. Day's temper. He kept the reins himself, in order to make as good time as possible ; but to the children it was a sign of deep displeasure; and Archie, with the inconsequence of our fallen nature, felt as much aggrieved as if he had been entirely innocent of the disaster which had so changed the aspect of things.

Winny, sitting beside Katherine in the back seat, observed that modest decorum which always characterized her; for she was one of those happy little girls who never make trouble. She looked askance from time to time at the small bundle of misery beside her, and wondered why Katherine could not have been content to sit still and let them finish out their holiday in peace. I am afraid she was not as sorry for Katherine as she ought to have been. She only felt that everybody was cross and disagreeable, and she longed to get home.

Poor Katherine! If she had but had the good judgment to stay under water a little longer, or to lose consciousness at least,—if she could but have prolonged the suspense of her companions by a few seconds, she might have been rejoiced over and made much of. But, with the fatality which seemed to attend her most promising efforts and adventures, even this narrow escape from drowning bade fair to be recorded against her.

As she sat, a damp, miserable little heap, painfully conscious that she was spoiling the lining of her

father's coat, she was wondering what that floating point of light was, which had lured her to her undoing. Had Archie been deceived too, or was he only teasing? She wished he would not tease. Her eyes were fixed upon her father's shoulders, showing strong and broad where the waistcoat stopped and the damp white sleeves began. She thought how good he had been to take them out rowing, and how sorry she was to displease him. Oh, if she were only like Winny, if she only never made any trouble!

Chief meanwhile was trotting over the ground at such a rate that they were passing everything on the road, and Mr. Day, who loved to speed a good horse when there was any occasion for it, was rapidly recovering his equanimity. He presently became aware that none of his passengers had spoken a syllable since they left the pond fifteen minutes ago, and the situation began to seem oppressive. He glanced over his shoulder at Katherine, and his eyes met such a tragic little pair that his heart, a soft if not very substantial one, was moved with pity.

"Cheer up, Katherine," he commanded in his most genial manner. "It 's all over."

There was a sudden little sob and—"I 'm so sorry!" a small, broken voice murmured.

"Well! we are all sorry! But it strikes me you got the worst of it! I don't suppose you meant to drown yourself, eh?"

But Katherine could not speak any more. She just got her little face down among the folds of the coat, and held her breath, for fear of spoiling that beatific situation by a tear or a sob.

Ten minutes later, as Chief stood in the driveway before the door, smoking and breathing deep,

Charles Day, tossing the reins over the broad black back, jumped from his seat, and taking little Katherine in his arms, whispered: "We won't spoil Cousin Elmira's carpets, will we?" upon which he ran lightly up the stairs and deposited the child in her own chamber. "There," he said, kindly, "I 'll send Nora to rub you down, and you 'll be good as new by supper-time!"

He stooped to look into the little face, where the lip was quivering pitifully.

"Oh, Father!" the child sobbed, and two damp little arms were flung around his neck, and a damp little head was buried in his breast. This completed the destruction of Mr. Day's toilet, and it also disturbed his composure.

"There, little girl! never mind about it any more!" he whispered. "We 'll go and get some real pond-lilies one of these days, and you shall pick as many as you like."

A moment later, as he was closing the door behind him, he looked back to say, with that flashing smile which atoned for many shortcomings: "Seems to me it was I that caught the big fish, after all!"

"But you did n't get any prize," Katherine returned, trying hard to catch his light tone.

"I 'm not so sure of that!" cried Charles Day, with a sudden conviction that Katherine was a capital little person after all.

And from that hour Katherine adored her father with a grateful, passionate adoration. It was cheaply won, and for a long time it was not much profited by; so that it played but a small part in Charles Day's consciousness. But for his little daughter it made life a different thing.

CHAPTER V

A TRIAL OF STRENGTH

"Be sure that God
Ne'er dooms to waste the strength He deigns impart!"

NOBODY ever thought of calling Charles Day selfish, and it is certain that nothing could have surprised him more than such a stricture upon his character. He was one of those happily constituted mortals who create about them so genial an atmosphere that their neighbors no less than themselves are content rather to bask in it than critically to analyze its source. He knew himself to be warm-hearted and generous;—indeed that was a patent fact which could hardly have escaped a person of his intelligence,—and he was not sufficiently self-critical to consider that in obeying his kindly impulses, as in the general conduct of his life, he was simply following the line of least resistance. Nor would justice be done to his character by one who limited his encomiums to a consideration of his personal attractiveness, his quick wit, and his easy generosity. This lineal descendant of many Puritans was as pure-minded as he was open-handed, as incapable of deliberate meanness as of blundering heartlessness. Yet few men of mental and moral training in any community, and fewer still of New England blood,

have grown up more utterly children of nature than he, or less burdened by those trammels of conscience and responsibility which society puts upon us. If a witticism of his own was true, namely, that he could resist anything but temptation,—and true it certainly was,—he had every reason to be thankful that temptation in its graver forms did not assail him.

Neither did misfortune concern itself very much with Charles Day,—perhaps because its occasional attacks had been so successfully parried. The death of his wife, to be sure, which had occurred when Katherine was little more than a baby, had been a severe strain upon his equanimity, but he soon found means of easing it. Having promptly enlisted the services of his cousin, Miss Faxon, in behalf of his children, thus securing to himself an indispensable freedom of action, he had, within a fortnight of Lucy's death, departed for a two years' sojourn in Europe.

Charles and Elmira had been familiar kinsfolk all their lives, and the arrangement thus entered upon met with general approval. Elmira was but just past thirty at that time, but others beside herself had forgotten that she had ever been young. Contrary to the custom of the day, she had continued living in her own house when her father's death left her its sole mistress, and even as long ago as that she had been counted among those who are known, not as unmarried girls, but as single women. Capacity and judgment were hers to an unusual degree, and if these went hand in hand with a somewhat peculiar and unfortunate prejudice, it was so well concealed that even Grandmother Day's shrewd perceptions had failed to discover it.

That Elmira Faxon was a reticent woman was well

understood, and, since she was a New Englander of the New Englanders, there was nothing particularly noteworthy in that circumstance. The unique feature of the case consisted in the fact that she was no less reticent with herself than with other people, that she often had as little understanding of her own sentiments and motives as the most indifferent outsider. Thus she would have been at a loss to account for the dislike she had always cherished toward Mrs. Charles Day, the more so, perhaps, because she was well aware that it was strictly an idiosyncracy of her own. Others, indeed, might criticize the vivid, sensitive young creature whose ways had been so obviously at variance with the somewhat hard-and-fast rules of Camwood etiquette, but few there were whose hearts had not warmed to her, and few were those who would not to-day have welcomed in little Katherine an elusive sort of resemblance to her mother which Elmira alone believed herself to have discovered. But if that discovery, imagined or otherwise, involved a transference to the child of the prejudice which the mother had so unconsciously excited, if it counted for something in the harshness with which the little girl was often treated, one would suppose that it might have rendered less agreeable Elmira's task of guardianship; while, as a matter of fact, and for some reason understood perhaps by herself least of all, Miss Faxon clung with a peculiar insistence to the duties which were apparently so irksome to her. Indeed there was probably nothing which she so much dreaded as the approach of the time when little Katherine, grown in years and stature and in that subtle likeness, should take her rightful place at the head of her father's house.

Charles, meanwhile, although he rented an office in the city and employed a clerk, had never yet engaged in any active business. It had been supposed that, as only son, he would follow the calling of his father, a lawyer of distinction, whose influence would have ensured to him every professional advantage. But the study of the law had proved too strenuous for the young man's taste, and, having inherited a fortune from a bachelor uncle whose name he bore, he had hitherto taken life very easily. He intended, however, now that the war was over, and when the country should have shaken itself down into some degree of stability, to put his capital into more active use than at present. He had an impression that he should go into manufacturing interests, which were sure to take a start as soon as the mischief wrought by those troublesome rebels should have had time to subside.

That he had not taken a hand in fighting those same rebels was owing, as he believed, to a certain physical disability inherited from his father, and which had caused his rejection at the hands of the recruiting officers. It is true that he had been aware of this organic defect when he offered himself for enlistment; yet it would be unfair to say that his promptness was due to the knowledge that he would be exempt. He was not called upon to decide what his action would have been under other circumstances, and it is at least certain that he would not have been deterred from a *bonafide* enlistment by any lack of physical courage. If he had shrunk from service, it would have been from the inconveniences and hardships of camp life rather than from the perils of battle. Be that as it may, however, he was well content with the

verdict of the examining physician. It was not a pleasant thing to be reminded that he was subject to a threat of mortality,—that the same attack of the heart which had shortened his father's life might cut off his own very agreeable career; but, as has already been stated, Charles Day was no coward, and he did not fear death even in its more insidious approaches. But neither did he dwell unnecessarily upon the thought of it. When the news from the South became too painful, and the mortality among his friends and classmates weighed too oppressively on his spirits,—even as, now that the war was over, when he felt the need of relaxation from his special form of idleness,—he would disappear for an indefinite period into the wilds of Maine with gun and rod, sending back from time to time a reassuring box of game, the beauty and variety of whose "foliage" was a source of endless wonder to little Katherine.

"It 's not foliage," Archie declared, the day after he had himself acquired this item of information. "It 's plumage."

"I like foliage better," Katherine replied, as she gently stroked the soft breast of a wild duck. "It sounds so nice and woodsy."

"But what 's the good of saying what is n't right?" insisted Archie, in whom a very recent acquisition in the realm of knowledge was pretty sure to induce a didactic spirit.

"I don't see how we can tell what the right name of it is," the little girl demurred, in a tone of sincerest speculation. "How do we know what the ducks call it?"

There was something so pathetic about the dead duck and the way its head tumbled about when it

was lifted up that Katherine felt impelled to take this rather futile stand for its rights.

"Don't be so stubborn and stupid, Katherine," said Cousin Elmira sharply; upon which the children, knowing that they were there only on sufferance, promptly desisted from further argument.

Indeed, until they had begun disputing together, Elmira had scarcely noticed their presence. She was preoccupied with the hope of finding a line in Charles's hand, such as the head of his house was unquestionably entitled to. The last time he was away on a shooting trip a little note to her had come tucked under the wing of the largest and finest specimen. But to-day there was no such pleasant surprise awaiting her, and the thought that the only letter which had come from Charles had been addressed to Katherine gathered bitterness in her mind.

"Go and get ready for supper, Katherine," she commanded curtly. "Archie, you may help carry the ducks into the kitchen."

"But I want to help, too," Katherine cried.

They were all three crouching on the floor of the big china closet where the box had been unpacked; it seemed as if discipline might relax a bit in this unaccustomed environment. But no,—Cousin Elmira was firm.

"Do as I tell you, Katherine," she insisted, in her cold, autocratic voice against which there was no more appeal than against the laws of nature; and Katherine, reluctantly laying down the pretty, lop-headed duck, withdrew with slow step and smouldering indignation, to the performance of an uncongenial task.

As she pulled off her school dress, brushed her

heavy short hair straight back, and pushed in the round-comb,—and later as she donned the Scotch-plaid woollen frock for which she had so ardently longed and which had been spoiled by a strong predominance of the detested magenta, she was wondering vaguely what she was punished for. The general sense of misdemeanor which rarely left her did not seem quite sufficient to account for this egregious exhibition of partiality on Cousin Elmira's part, and she very naturally did not trace it to that blissful event of yesterday, the arrival of her precious letter.

It was a sharp autumn day about two months after that misadventure in the pond which had had such an unexpectedly favorable outcome for herself, and as she buttoned the last almost inaccessible button at the back of her dress, her thoughts, always ready for cheerful diversion, turned with a pleasant rebound to her father's letter. It lay on the bureau before her, on its way from the pocket of one dress to that of the other. Picking it up, she laid her cheek against it, in the happy liberty of loving it and being grateful for it, and then, in the gathering twilight, which her young eyes took no note of, she read again the few lines written in the large free hand which seemed to her infinitely more beautiful than that of the copy-books. When she came to the postscript it was with the same thrill of incredulous delight with which she had read it so many times.

Charles Day had added, as a careless, good-natured after-thought: "I was proud of my plucky little girl the other evening,"—and the plucky little girl as she read it would scarcely have changed places with Archie himself, carrying one of the ducks by its

pretty neck, and swinging it surreptitiously around his head, in the rear of the small procession.

The evening to which her father alluded had been one of mingled triumph and compunction in Katherine's experience. The two children had got into a lively discussion after supper on a small matter of school discipline, Katherine having declared that her conduct mark would have been "perfect" the previous week,—an unprecedented occurrence in her history,—had she not spoken to Miss Dole, without permission,—the very last hour, too, which made it particularly trying. Cousin Elmira was not there to check the talk, and Mr. Day had chanced to be in a mood to find amusement in it.

"What made you do it?" Archie queried, with the superior tone of an elder brother who has been promoted to a boys' school.

"Because she would n't notice when I held up my hand."

"You did n't hold it up long enough!"

"Indeed I did! I held it up as much as half an hour!"

"You could n't hold it up half an hour," Archie declared, warming to the dispute.

But before Katherine could answer, their father's voice had cut across the discussion.

"I 'll make you an offer," he said. "If either one of you will hold your arm out straight for fifteen minutes I will give you a dollar!"

The children sprang eagerly to their feet.

"And if we both do?" Katherine inquired, hardly able to credit so generous a proposal.

"If you both do it, you shall each have a dollar!"

And so it came about that when, a few minutes later, Cousin Elmira joined the family, she beheld the two children standing side by side, their right arms outstretched, and a look of determination, graven upon each youthful countenance. At first she imagined it to be a new form of punishment, which would have implied such a poaching upon her own preserves as she could scarcely have approved. But a glance at her cousin's face, as he sat, watch in hand, regarding the children with an expression of benevolent amusement across the curling spirals of cigar smoke, convinced her that the mysterious function was not of a punitive nature.

At the end of the first five minutes, Archie's arm wavered slightly. "Is the time 'most up, Father?" he asked.

"Five minutes and a half," was the reply, and Mr Day's eyes returned to the contemplation of Katherine's face.

She stood like a rock, her lips pressed firmly together, her eyes fixed straight before her. The moment had been apparent when a realization had come upon her of the seriousness of her undertaking, and she had visibly braced herself in mind and body. She wasted no strength in idle inquiries about the time; it was clear that all her forces were concentrated upon the effort to come.

The seconds dragged their slow length.

Presently: "Is n't the time 'most up?" Archie inquired, in an uncertain, querulous voice.

"Seven minutes," was the disheartening reply.

The boy's arm swayed more and more, and suddenly dropped to his side.

"Nobody could do it," he declared, rather sulkily;

"and I don't see the good of hurting yourself like everything!"

His small sister meanwhile had not moved a muscle.

Now Charles Day had made the offer somewhat thoughtlessly, scarcely realizing to what an ordeal he might be subjecting the children, should it transpire that their moral stamina was equal to it. He watched Katherine with increasing interest. An unmistakable look of pain was gathering about her mouth, and her eyes seemed growing larger and more intense.

"Ten minutes," called the timekeeper with a view to encouraging her.

The small face blanched; she had thought the time more nearly spent.

The child was really suffering severely, more severely than her father was aware. But over against the suffering was set a well-nigh indomitable will. It was not the dollar she was covetous of; a dollar was an enormous sum, but no dollar that ever was coined would have repaid her for that agony. It was not even her father's approval that she was striving for. It was the integrity of her own will which she would not yield; a will which had had but rare opportunities of exercise, a will which was frequently checked by insurmountable obstacles. Here was something that was entirely within her own control; her success rested with her, and with no one else, and she must conquer. She did not come to any understanding with herself; she was conscious only of a hard, unalterable determination that was stronger than the agony—for agony it was—which it involved.

At the end of twelve minutes she asked, in a

curiously constrained voice: "May I walk up and down?"

"Yes"; and she began slowly to move away from her place. But walking brought no alleviation, and she came suddenly to a standstill with her back to the others.

It was a relief to Charles Day; the little face had become distressing, and he never courted distress.

And now the small form had begun to sway slightly and the arm to waver as Archie's had done; and it seemed as if after all the child might lose.

Could he have done so unobserved, Charles would have set his watch forward. But Archie was standing beside him, counting the seconds, and Archie knew the exact minute at which they had begun.

The swaying of the little body had ceased, obedient to one last supreme effort, and even Elmira paused in her tatting, while the two timekeepers held their breath. Only twenty seconds now,—only ten,—only——

"Time!" and the little arm dropped like a billet of lead, while the little figure, as if yielding to that weight, sank to a sitting posture on the floor.

"I am so glad," Katherine sighed, rather tremulously.

Then her father came and picked her up and led her to his own big chair, and, taking her on his knee, he rubbed the ice-cold arm; while Archie said, in a half-hearted way: "I s'pose I could have done it too if I 'd thought it would pay,"—and Cousin Elmira said nothing.

And gradually the color came back into Katherine's face, and her eyes grew natural again, and she became aware that her father's arm was around

her waist,—a state of things which was so highly satisfactory that she did not move until presently the arm was withdrawn, and she found herself released.

"There 's your dollar," Charles Day had said; "and I swear you 've earned it!"

"Must I put it in the savings-bank?" Katherine asked, with an anxious look toward Elmira.

"Not until the bank has held out its arm for fifteen minutes," was the reassuring answer.

She had taken the two fifty-cent pieces of scrip,—the nearest approach to money which the great war had left them,—and had put them away, for mature consideration. It was not the sort of sum to be lightly spent. It must be dedicated to important ends, and Katherine became quite solemn when she thought of it.

Yet underlying all her meditations was a gnawing compunction about Archie and his failure to achieve a like sum; and the word of commendation in that delightful postscript had renewed her uneasiness.

As she stood in her completed toilet reading once again those delectable words, a wave of magnanimity went over her, and her spirit rose to the inspiring thought that she could share her riches with Archie. The money was not the important thing to be sure; it was not that "best" for which she had expressed so warm a preference in the matter of princes; but something whispered to her that Archie might not be of her way of thinking on this point.

She opened her bureau drawer and the little shell box in which she kept her valuables, and possessing herself of one of the two pieces of currency,—a crisp, miniature greenback,—and laying it inside the letter, she slipped down the brightly lighted stairway.

The gas was not burning in the sitting-room, where she found Archie, gravely standing on his head in the dark, with a view to passing the time agreeably until the supper bell should ring. As the sight of his small sister, appearing in the bright doorway, presented itself to his inverted vision, he waved his legs in greeting and then gracefully resumed his normal relation with the universe.

A rush of blood to the head is said to clarify the brain; in this case it would seem to have had a salutary effect upon Archie's judgment at least, for he remarked with great friendliness, and without preamble: "I say, Kitkat, I think Cousin Elmira is pretty nasty to you!"

"Oh, I don't mind," Katherine replied, buoyed up by a general sense of friendly sympathy; feeling, besides, too rich and generous in view of her meditated action to "bother about Cousin Elmira." And she added, with a quaint old-womanish manner which concealed a very deep feeling: "So long as you and father are my friends, Cousin Elmira is n't much matter."

"I should think she was more matter than anybody as long as you have to mind her," Archie declared.

"No," said Katherine, wrestling with a weighty thought. "It 's only my body that she orders 'round; 't is n't really me."

The children had curled themselves up at the two ends of the big sofa which stood in a shadowy corner of the room where the light from the stairway did not reach them.

Presently: "I 've got something for you," Katherine remarked, under cover of the darkness.

"Let 's see what it is," Archie demanded;—upon

which Katherine reached across the intervening space and tucked the piece of scrip into his hand.

"Hullo!" cried the boy. "What 's this?"

"It 's half of that dollar."

"Oh, I say!" Archie protested.

"You 've got to take it," Katherine declared, speaking very rapidly, "'cause I don't know what to do with such a lot, and you ought to have half, anyway, and I never should do anything with a whole dollar, but we can have lots of fun with fifty cents, Winny and me, and you gave me half of your apple one day, and——"

"Any more reasons?" Archie inquired, trying to summon resolution to reject this munificent gift.

"Lots of reasons,—and besides, it makes me feel better inside. 'Cause you know, Archie, it is n't any fun to have things when someone you care about has n't got 'em too; now, is it?"

And Archie, not seeing his way clear to a declaration of indifference towards such creditable considerations, stuffed the bit of currency into his pocket just as Cousin Elmira's form appeared in the doorway.

Unconscious of the children's presence, she came forward and lighted the gas in the drop-light, in the porcelain shade of which were depicted various scenes of a sentimental and romantic nature;—shepherds and bandits, flower-girls and courtiers, willingly lending themselves to the passage of the light. As Elmira raised her eyes, she glanced toward the sofa and discovered the two children, suspiciously quiet in their respective corners.

"What are you doing there in the dark?" she asked sharply.

"Waiting for supper," was Archie's prompt rejoinder.

His little sister said nothing; but there was a look in her face as if she knew a happy secret, and somehow Cousin Elmira, whose perceptions were very keen, was conscious of an uneasy feeling that Katherine was developing resources which were beyond the control of her own vigilance.

CHAPTER VI

HIGH TEA

> "She liked whate'er
> She looked on, and her looks went everywhere."

ONE snowy December evening, when Katherine was eleven years old, there was high tea at Charles Day's, and great was the rejoicing of the children. The guests, six in number, had arrived quite powdered with snow, and there had been the preliminary and unlooked-for fun of brushing them off as they stood, stamping and blowing, on the front piazza.

It was a strictly family party, but Katherine was not sophisticated enough to cavil at that circumstance. She was still of the opinion that no experience in life could be more delightful than that of seeing Grandmother Day and Aunt Fanny, Uncle Theodore and Aunt Anne, gathered about her father's board,—unless, indeed, the honors of this particular occasion might be disputed by Aunt Sarah McLean and her stepson Tom, who had come all the way from New York State to spend the Christmas holidays. The mere expression, "Christmas holidays," had in itself an exotic flavor most pleasing to the ear, for the school vacation at Camwood fell at the Thanksgiving season, and so strong was the Puritan tradition

still, that it was much as ever that Christmas itself had been rescued as a holiday.

Nor were there lacking other highly interesting features in the McLean equipment for the rôle of distinguished strangers. For Tom's father, who was a minister, had recently been alluded to in Katherine's hearing as "a pioneer of the liberal religion in central New York," and upon consulting the dictionary she had learned that a pioneer is "a person whose business it is to clear a road before an army, to sink mines, and throw up works and fortifications." This idea of a militant parson, so totally different from the Rev. Mr. Wilder,—to whom, by the way, she owed her picturesque impression of his gifted colleague,—had appealed strongly to the little girl's imagination, and if her mind harbored a regret tonight, it was that the occasion was not graced by the presence of so interesting a member of the family. She would have been glad to make a study of his heroic mould, the significance of which had on previous occasions escaped her. She reflected, however, that a man engaged in such important work was hardly likely to indulge in holiday outings, and, in his absence, she contented herself with a critical examination of his son's physiognomy.

Tom was a homely, wide-awake boy of fifteen, whose rather rough manners were tempered only by a very outspoken devotion to his stepmother. It seemed to Katherine, as she studied his energetic and combative countenance across the table, that he must be a great help to his father in the arduous labors of pioneer work, and she proposed, at some more favorable opportunity, to draw her cousin out on the subject.

Meanwhile here they all were, in the full delights of a tea-party, and Katherine soon desisted from speculations touching the strenuous theologian, who would perhaps have failed to recognize himself as he stood revealed to the active imagination of his little niece. He might even have felt more in his element had it been permitted him to crack a joke with one or another of the goodly company partaking of delicious viands off the beautiful decorated china which had been a wedding gift to the children's mother.

Katherine was of a pre-eminently hospitable disposition. Indeed, if she could have had her way, she would gladly have arranged one or another agreeable social function for every day of the week; and the infrequency of such indulgences did but render them the more delectable. As she sat, to-night, in her very prettiest dress,—a brown, softly shimmering Irish poplin,—listening to the talk of the seniors, and restraining with the greatest difficulty her own eager little tongue, her small mind was stimulated to the liveliest participation in each phase of this truly brilliant occasion. There was no lack of cheerful converse, for the Days were all good talkers,—Charles, especially, being almost as responsive as his little daughter to anything in the way of a social stimulus. He regaled the company with many wonderful tales which Uncle Theodore, to the undisguised pride of his pretty wife, promptly capped; while Grandmother Day and Aunt Sarah, if less conspicuously gifted in anecdote, were not behind the others in the pith and point of their comment.

The special wonder of the children, however, was Tom, who, in the full consciousness of advancing years, contributed certain items with regard to the

great Erie Canal, its locks and sluices, which proved almost as novel and interesting to his elders as to his small cousins. It was, to be sure, not precisely Tom's conversational ability which impressed our little girl—that, indeed, was a gift which she herself was conscious of possessing in no mean degree,—but rather his temerity in thus monopolizing the attention of the grown people; which, on the part of a boy who still wore jackets and was subject to schoolmasters, showed a phenomenal degree of self-confidence. Yet, despite the triumph which the big cousin had scored at the tea table, he nevertheless condescended to rank himself with the children; and, after supper, he expressed a flattering readiness for a game of dominoes.

"The Delphi boys call it 'bid'," Tom remarked, as the innocent bits of black and white ivory were taken from their box and spread out on the table. "They play it just like poker."

"Like a poker!" Katherine repeated, while her mind wandered to the fire-irons. "How can dominoes be like a poker?"

"Oh, poker is a gambling game," Archie hastened to explain, lest he should be thought as uninstructed in manly things as his small sister.

"But is n't it wicked to gamble?" the little girl inquired, anxiously, while she wondered whether it was possible that a boy whose father was pioneer of the liberal religion could be guilty of secret crimes.

"Rather, I believe," Tom admitted. "And besides, it is n't any fun! You see, you either lose your own money or else you get what belongs to some other fellow, and one is about as bad as the other!"

"You never did such a thing; did you, Tom?"

Katherine protested eagerly,—while Archie secretly hoped that his cousin might be betrayed into the confession of dark and nefarious practices.

"I did, once," Tom answered, carelessly,—"and I felt like a thief!"

"Then you won!" Archie exclaimed, much and agreeably wrought upon by the admission.

"Yes,—and quite a lot, too!"

"I should n't think you would have known what to do with the money," said Katherine, much concerned.

"Oh, I just sneaked it into the contribution box! Draw, Archie!"

But Katherine was so preoccupied that she let herself be badly beaten.

What a dreadful thing, she was saying to herself, to play a game which made you feel like a thief!—for, of course, it would be worse to win than to lose. Yet, how heartrending the latter alternative might be, she could the better imagine, because she was herself acquainted with the delights and dignities attaching to an independent competence.

For the last two months Katherine had been in the enjoyment of a regular income of no less than ten cents a week, and if this incredible piece of good fortune was in the nature of a bribe, contingent in fact upon her going promptly and voluntarily to bed at eight o'clock every evening, it was none the less welcome for that.

Katherine, indeed, had long been in urgent need of some more regular source of supply than the five- and ten-cent bits of scrip which her father bestowed upon her when he happened to think of it,—which is to say, at intervals so extremely uncertain, and

often so painfully prolonged, that she was reminded of the fat kine and the lean kine in the history of Joseph. For a child of liberal ideas, in daily intercourse, moreover, with a young person so sumptuously provided as Winny Gerald, her recurrent periods of absolute pauperism had been peculiarly trying; and she had eagerly grasped at the promise of a fixed income, however modest. To be always in a position to contribute something, if only an ounce of chocolate creams, toward their Saturday afternoon orgies; to look forward with some degree of confidence to the periodical visits of the organ-man and the poignantly human solicitations of one particular monkey in a red cap which it almost broke her heart to send away empty-handed, was certainly worth a sacrifice; and the sacrifice had been cheerfully and persistently made. Yes, she reflected, it must be a grievous thing to lose one's good money, but oh, how much worse to be the means of another person's losing his!

The game was over. Tom was "domino," and Katherine was just rousing to the fact that a disgracefully broad spread of unrelated and undesirable pieces had collected under her hands. Looking across the little inlaid card table at Tom, serenely conscious of victory, she imagined how shocking it would have been if this victory had involved the impoverishment of herself and Archie and:—

"Oh, Tom!" she cried, anxiously; "you never gambled but once; did you?"

"You bet I never did!" was the reassuring answer. "And now what do you say to 'dumb crambo'?"

What did they say, indeed? What would any well-conditioned child say to so ecstatic a suggestion! For "dumb crambo" was another and most rapturous

exotic, the description of which had already fired the imagination of the children.

Accordingly, Archie and Katherine were soon dashing about the house in search of stage properties, for the effective employment of which both were conscious of peculiar aptitudes; and highly elated they were because the grown people had condescendingly agreed to play the indispensable part of spectators. A word was given out, Tom, as stage-manager, had assigned the rôles, and in an incredibly short time the game was in full swing.

It opened with the word "rake," in illustration of which it was permitted Katherine to enact the part of the immortal Maud Muller raking her traditional meadows, while Tom, mounted upon a fiery saw-horse, came prancing up in his character of Judge; poor Archie being relegated to the unimportant rôle of a casual haymaker not mentioned in the text,—a rôle, however, which he entered into with a spirit and grace that made the Judge seem appropriately ponderous in comparison.

Suddenly the deep voice of the hall clock striking eight boomed its warning, and Katherine's heart sank. She paused, tin dipper in hand. Could she stop short off at this happy moment, when the Judge pranced expectant, and the aunts said how well she acted? Yet—could she break the record she was so proud of? Could she come empty-handed to the next banquet with Winny?

The struggle lasted through the first six strokes of the clock; with the seventh our little girl resumed her natural character.

"It 's eight o'clock, and I s'pose I 've got to go to bed," she declared, with a quite abnormal stoicism.

Then, to their credit be it said, the whole audience rose as one man in protest against such an enormity; and when Grandmother Day, herself as strict a disciplinarian as any, made special interest with Cousin Elmira in Katherine's behalf, the former could but give her consent.

And so it came about that the Judge got his drink, after all, and the immortal Maud had the joy of becoming Martha Washington, Lady Macbeth, Jenny Lind and our first Mother Eve in delightful succession.

It was an evening never to be forgotten. Grandmother Day declared herself surprised that those two children could act so well,—for Archie, too, in spite of Tom's propensity to monopolize the leading male parts, had achieved a marked success in such rôles as were vouchsafed him,—the aunts expressed themselves not less enthusiastically about the entertainment provided, while Uncle Theodore remarked in Katherine's hearing:—"That 's a bright girl of yours, Charles!"

Best of all, Tom McLean, the big, self-confident cousin, had declared: "You act lots better than the girls at home, Katherine! I wish you lived in Delphi!" at which Katherine felt almost ready to turn her back upon her own little world and go and prove her superiority to the Delphi girls.

This, however, was but a temporary aberration, and when Saturday came she found herself eager as ever for the weekly tea-party in Winny's attic to which Rosemarygold, Katherine's favorite doll, had been particularly invited, and in connection with which the probability of a large appetite on the part of the doll had decided Katherine on the unusual

extravagance of adding several sticks of taffy to her ounce of chocolate creams.

What, then, was her consternation, when, on Saturday, her well-earned stipend was not forthcoming,—when she found herself rudely condemned to unmerited insolvency!

Yet it is doubtful whether Katherine was more taken at unawares than Elmira herself by the curt refusal which met her legitimate demand, and which had its rise in one of those unpremeditated movements of tyranny into which an unloving autocrat may on occasion be betrayed.

It chanced that on that blissful evening of the tea-party little Katherine had made complete conquest of her Uncle Theodore, a kindly man, of quick perceptions and an enthusiastic temperament,—thanks to which happy combination he was, by the way, winning early distinction as a jury lawyer. On this occasion his interest had been warmly enlisted by the little girl's vivacious and usually felicitous rendering of many and variously taxing rôles; in so much that, not content with the word of commendation which had reached Katherine's ears, he returned to the subject later in the evening when the ladies, with Elmira in attendance, had gone up-stairs to don their heavy wraps.

The two men were standing in the hall waiting for the others to come down, and Katherine could be heard in the parlor, laughing delightedly over some prank of the boys.

"I 've quite lost my heart to your little Katherine," Theodore had said, as Charles helped him on with his overcoat. "I don't know when I 've seen so bright a child."

"Yes," his brother-in-law returned,—"she 's a bright little thing, and,"—with a reversion to the past such as he rarely confessed to—"I believe she 's growing like her mother. She 's built on a larger scale of course, and she 's more Day than Stafford; but,—she certainly did have a look of her mother this evening. However, you would hardly remember Lucy;—that was pretty well before your time."

"I remember her perfectly," Theodore declared, "although I never saw her but once. She was not a woman to forget," he added, feelingly, while a vision of the slight, ardent young creature with the wild bird eyes and the spirit face crossed his mind.

And Elmira, pausing on the upper landing to adjust Grandmother Day's bonnet, heard the little colloquy; whereupon her soul grew bitter within her.

Very bitter it was still when on Saturday morning Lucy's child appeared before her, and, with the ardent eyes and impetuous demeanor wherein that fleeting likeness was chiefly apparent, claimed her just dues.

And because she would never have believed herself capable of a vengeful act, Elmira, taken off her guard, was shocked at the sound of her own voice, declaring: "You will have no ten cents this week, Katherine! You did not go to bed at eight o'clock on Thursday evening."

The occasion was trivial enough in itself, but to Elmira's mind no less than Katherine's it loomed large.

"But, Cousin Elmira, you said I might sit up!" the little girl gasped, hardly able to credit her senses.

And Elmira, though already she would have given much to retract, only answered, coldly: "That does not alter the case."

Then Katherine fell into a passion of rage and resentment that broke all bounds. It was not the loss of the money—little did she care for that! It was the flagrant, and quite unprecedented injustice that was driving the child to extremity. Her cheeks flamed and her eyes blazed, while her heart beat so hard that she felt half suffocated, and her voice was high and strident as she cried,—with an opportune, if hardly justifiable application of the text of a recent sermon:—

"You 're as mean, as mean as a *whited sepulchre!*—and I hate you!"

Elmira Faxon turned a shade paler than usual. There was something really appalling in this sudden outburst of hatred from the little victim whose fate had been as clay in her hands. She had often deplored Katherine's temper, but she had little guessed its force. Yet to own herself in the wrong, she reasoned, would be an abdication of authority as injurious to the child as to herself; and it was not without a certain sense, as of dignity creditably maintained, that she said:

"You will go to your room, Katherine, and stay there until you have changed your opinion!"

Katherine needed no second bidding. For the first time in her life that place of punishment presented itself as a refuge. She craved solitude; she felt that she never, never wanted to see another human creature as long as she lived.

Yet a human creature, and a highly appreciative one, confronted her on the threshold as she turned to leave the room, for there stood no less a personage than Tom McLean, transfixed in an attitude of delighted attention.

The boy had come with a note from his grand-

mother, and had arrived just in time to hear his little cousin's reprehensible opinion touching the mortuary character of Elmira's moral complexion. He did not in the least understand the situation;—indeed, he thought it more than likely that Katherine was in the wrong. But he liked her spirit; and as the child passed him, with crimson face and flaming eyes, he seized her hand, declaring in a stage aside, "Bully for you, Katherine! You 're good as a boy!"

He had lowered his voice for form's sake only, and he knew that his words were quite audible to Cousin Elmira; and when she gave no sign he also knew that she had been in the wrong.

"Wait a minute, Katherine," he called, boldly, as his little cousin reached the foot of the stairs: "Here 's a note from grandmother to ask you and Archie to come to dinner and go with us to see Tom Thumb. Archie 's up at the house already. Cousin Elmira will let you come, of course, and I 'll wait for you."

He was looking, with cool defiance, at Katherine's redoubtable adversary; yet when Elmira, glancing up from the perusal of the note, quietly directed the child to wear her Irish poplin, he perceived that she was yielding, not to his boyish impertinence, but to her own conscience.

And Katherine, unperplexed by the moral subtleties of the situation, flew to her room joyfully aware that the face of the world had changed, and that somehow Tom had done it.

Nevertheless, when half an hour later they were walking briskly up the street together, having first called at Winny's door to make Rosemarygold's excuses, the little girl had not the heart to betray the enormity of the provocation under which she had

spoken those terrific words. She was already ashamed of her own temper, and she had no wish to blight her enemy's reputation forever.

So that when Tom remarked, with a certain big boy patronage : "I know she 'd been horrid to you, Katherine, but — what had she done?" the child answered, with a degree of reticence that was hardly to have been looked for in so impetuous a little spitfire:

"Oh, don't let 's talk about it, Tom! It 's over and done with now!"

Upon which Tom made mental note of Katherine as a girl who was "game" every time.

CHAPTER VII

ALMOST A QUARREL

"Wall upon wall are between us."

IF one has been tempted to linger unduly over Katherine Day's childish experiences, it is less because of any exceptional importance attaching to them than because the memory of them always formed so essential a part of her consciousness. She never lost her sense of identity with that little girl of long ago whose adorations and dislikes, whose misdemeanors and aspirations, were of such dramatic vigor. Insomuch that when, in after-years, she chanced upon some old daguerreotype of herself in round-comb and high-necked, short-sleeved frock, it all seemed so natural that a subsequent reminder of the changes time had wrought in her outer aspect came quite as a surprise to her.

Happily for her, it was the gentler influences which left the more lasting impression, perhaps because they were more rare. And if she always cherished a grateful memory of the farmer's wife who had befriended her in disgrace, how much more vivid and enduring was her recollection of her father's casual kindnesses! She was but ten years old on that memorable day when he had carried her damp little form up-stairs and called her his prize fish, but

there never came a time when she could not see the half-humorous, half-pitiful expression of his face, nor hear the delightful tone of his voice as he spoke the words. By the time Katherine's hair hung in braids down her back, and her dresses came to her ankles, this father and daughter, the one so carelessly affectionate, the other so passionately devoted, had become fast friends.

Katherine was now close upon fourteen years of age, a healthy, growing girl, with something of the awkwardness but not quite the degree of self-consciousness which so often embarrasses and distracts the early teens. She was, of course, intensely interested in herself,—who is not?—but she was also deeply interested in a large number of her fellow creatures; to say nothing of the imperative claims upon her attention of the books she read, the conversations she heard, the sights she saw.

In spite of certain deprivations and limitations to which she had always been subject, in spite, too, of an impetuosity of temperament, a carelessness of consequences, which often got her into trouble, she was at bottom a singularly happy girl. And the very pith and kernel of her happiness consisted in that same good comradeship of which mention has been made. Let Cousin Elmira be as sarcastic as she would, let all Katherine's horizon be clouded with her own misdoings, the voice of her father, returning from town, and his almost invariable inquiry: "Where 's Katherine?" set all her jangling sensibilities in tune as promptly as it brought her feet flying down the stairs.

That she did not watch for his return as the traditional wife or daughter does, was due to the fact that

the hour of Charles Day's homecoming was as incalculable as the vagaries of an April sky. Morning, afternoon, or evening might bring him to his door, or neither noon nor night might know his face for days at a time. If those old rivals, the wild ducks, had long since taken their wedge-shaped way to southern shores, a New York opera season would make terrible ravages in Katherine's content; or in midsummer, when the voice of neither duck nor *prima donna* is heard in the land, a sudden yachting cruise might at any moment carry Charles Day off beyond recall. Again, however, there were periods, blissful periods, when for weeks at a time he would take her to drive day after day, and few were the country roads in the vicinity of Camwood which did not know old Chief's long, swift stride, as he drew carryall or buggy—little did he care which—with easy nonchalance on a twenty-mile reach.

As time went on the buggy came more and more into use, for Archie soon exhausted the joys of driving, while Cousin Elmira rarely found it worth her while to play "third fiddle," as she would have put it, with that surprising ignorance in matters musical which was always a source of wonder to Charles Day, who, by the way, had a pretty gift of his own in music and could improvise by the hour to the extreme delectation of his little daughter.

Charles had long recognized the fact that Elmira was, socially speaking, unremunerative, and although he was obliged to admit that she was useful to himself and doubtless indispensable to the welfare of the children, he sometimes had a lurking feeling that she was not a particularly motherly person. It was not so much his own choice of a guardian, however, that

he felt impelled to criticise, as the mistaken judgment of Providence in depriving his children of that one absolutely congenial spirit who, if he could have had his way, would always have ministered to them and him.

"If only Lucy might have been spared," he would say to himself, using the pious form of speech common to his day and generation, but hardly with the piety of feeling it implied,—"If only Lucy had been spared, we should have been a happy family,—a happy family."

One afternoon in the late spring Elmira, plying her needle in the sitting-room, heard the closing of the front door, and Charles's voice, prompt as an echo, calling: "Where 's Katherine?"

A shadow crossed the needlewoman's face, as, laying her work aside, she rose to her feet and passed out into the hall. She found Charles, just returned from a pleasure trip, standing at the bottom of the stairs looking, she thought, a little flushed. She fancied she detected in his tone rather more than usual of affectionate impatience as he repeated, and without further greeting: "Where 's Katherine?"

He had been absent from home for several days, and Elmira replied coldly and with a just perceptible stiffening of her person: "Katherine is at her French lesson." Upon which Charles suddenly became aware that he had been remiss.

"And how is Elmira?" he asked, with that instantaneous recovery of his good humor which made its occasional eclipse only an added charm.

He came and took one of her hands in both his, stroking it with conciliatory intent. Years ago, when she first came to live with him, he had occasionally

kissed Elmira with the affectionate brotherliness he thought her due, but the habit was soon discontinued; for, as he confided to his mother, it was too much like kissing an iceberg. And Elmira, who had bitterly resented that indifferent, perfunctory salute, had yet never ceased to resent its discontinuance.

To-day she coldly withdrew her hand and asked her cousin if he proposed being at home to supper.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "And you 'd better have it rather late, as I want Katherine to take a drive with me. When is that bothersome French lesson over?"

"The lesson is over at five o'clock, but there 's never any telling when Katherine will come home. As like as not she will be playing croquet with Winny Gerald until tea-time."

"Well, supposing she is! Where 's the harm?" Charles retorted, answering Elmira's tone rather than her words.

"I said nothing about there being any harm in it," was the frigid reply.

"At any rate," her cousin declared, nettled by an indefinable air of misprision which struck him as disagreeably familiar,—"At any rate I shall head her off from any immoral proceedings by picking her up at five o'clock!" and stepping to the rear of the hall he pulled the bell-rope which communicated with the stable.

Five minutes later Charles had followed Elmira into the sitting-room, where she was again at her work. As his eye fell upon her, bending over some white garment which was manifestly meant for Katherine, his heart softened.

"I don't suppose you would care to go with us,

Elmira," he remarked. "But I should think it might be better for you than sitting at home this fine day. Sha'n't we have Chief put into the carry-all?"

"Thank you, but I have my work to do." The tone in which she spoke the words made them seem like a retort. Elmira had perhaps never come so near quarrelling with her cousin.

Drawing up a chair, Charles seated himself near this colorless, inarticulate antagonist, and watched her for some minutes in silence, as she plied her needle with the accuracy and persistence which characterized all she did. He was for the first time struck with the change which the last few years had wrought in her. Perhaps the curve of the back, sharply silhouetted against the window, emphasized the impression, for Elmira's back was a straight one, and the unchanged rectitude of her figure might well deceive the casual observer into the belief that the years had not yet got a real hold upon her. To-day the bending back, strong and supple as its outline was, had its full share in the new impression he was receiving. Was that a streak of gray in the dun-colored hair? Was the outline of the chin getting a bit sharp? Was there a slight sinking in the bony structure of the temples? Elmira must be well past forty. He wondered if she felt old—and cross—and tired. For the first time in all these years something in the nature of a feeling seemed to be disturbing her equanimity. There! she had broken her needle! He did not know whether she was in the habit of doing so,—he had never before watched her so closely at her work,—but, as the thin steel snapped, the incident struck him as out of character.

"Could n't you hire somebody to do that sewing?" he asked, suddenly. "You know I have always wanted you to have more workpeople in."

Elmira was carefully wrapping up the two fragments of the needle, pending their consignment to the kitchen fire.

"There 's only one way of having your work properly done," she answered, curtly. Yes, there was no doubt that something had gone wrong with Elmira.

"I 'm afraid you 're a perfectionist," he sighed, with a humorous grimace that was lost upon her. "So few of us can afford to be that," he added after waiting a moment for the reply that was not forthcoming.

Elmira was threading a fresh needle, and he noticed that she held it far from her eyes. "Yes, she 's growing old, poor thing," he thought to himself. "My eyes are better than that, and I am older than she."

It is gratifying in full middle life to feel as young as ever you did, and, with the magnanimity of good fortune, Charles longed to give Elmira a pleasure. His face, as she glanced toward it, was beaming with good will; but his words were ill chosen.

"Supposing you come with me in the buggy," he said; "I don't believe Katherine would mind if we were to leave her out this time."

So it had come to this;—that Charles could not even take her to drive without deferring to Katherine! He could not have spoken differently if it had been Lucy herself. And she, Elmira Faxon, was to take her privileges conditionally upon Katherine's good pleasure. A lifelong habit of repression

restrained her rising anger, and she merely repeated her refusal. But as she spoke the perfunctory words, she became aware that a purpose which had long lain dormant within her was coming to life.

"Charles," she said, without stopping in her work,—"Charles, have you never thought of sending Katherine to boarding-school?"

It would be relaxing her own control, as she had repeatedly told herself, but also it would cause a break in this increasing intimacy between Charles and the girl which was so often an offence to herself. For the time being, at least, she would be spared the mortification of seeing herself relegated to a secondary place in the household of which she was the nominal head. That would be a great point gained,—one which was well worth the effort the proposition was costing her. A dark flush slowly crept over the inexpressive face as Elmira bent above her needlework, waiting for her cousin to speak.

It seemed ages before Charles answered. He got up and walked across the room and drummed on the window-pane; and then he came and stood beside her.

"Are you getting tired of your bargain, Elmira?" he asked. "Do you want your independence? Would you like to go back to your own house?"

It was a cruel shock to Elmira; her face went pale again, and the stitching wavered a little in its regularity.

"Not unless you want me to," she said in a low, hesitating tone.

"Then what could have put such an idea into your head?"

"There is nothing very startling in the suggestion," she declared, recovering herself. "The Littlefield girls have been at boarding-school in Connecticut this year, and their mother thinks it has been an excellent thing for them."

"I have no doubt of it," Charles replied with sudden asperity. "There was room for improvement in those little meaching Littlefields and it must have done them good to be waked up. But that does n't seem any special reason why my girl should go."

By this time Elmira's blood was up. It had cost her a great effort to make the proposition, but having made it she was determined to stand by it.

"I suppose, Charles," she remarked quietly, "that you would hardly have entrusted your children to my care if you had not had some confidence in my judgment."

"Why of course, of course," he said; "I have every confidence in your judgment. But this is a pretty important step you are suggesting, and one that I am particularly opposed to. Of course, if you have any special reasons—"

"I have a number of reasons," Elmira answered, carefully weighing her words. "Katherine is very much in need of the stricter discipline of a boarding-school."

"Stricter discipline!" Charles repeated. "She has always had discipline enough. Why, the child would no more think of deliberately disobeying you or me than—old Chief would."

"Perhaps I know her better than you do," Elmira retorted, driven to saying more than she had intended.

"Have you any complaints to make of her?" asked Charles, sharply.

"I never make complaints," was the cold reply. "But if you do not know that Katherine has always been a very difficult child to manage you are quite alone in your ignorance."

"Elmira, I believe you *are* tired of us," he declared, stepping close to her. She had stopped sewing, but she did not look up as he stood tall above her looking down. "I don't much wonder," he added; "it has been a long pull, and if you find us troublesome, why —you are an independent woman."

There was no answer.

"I have no doubt we should manage very well," he went on, seriously considering the situation. "Katherine will be fourteen next month; she will soon be old enough, in any case, to take the reins. She is an unusually capable girl and, although I should hate to give her the care so soon, she could probably keep things going very well."

Elmira rose to her feet, which brought her standing close to her cousin and looking straight into his eyes.

"I shall think of what you have said, Charles."

The words came hard and grudging from her half-closed lips, almost as if her teeth were shut together, and in her eyes was a look of mortal offence.

As she glided past him toward the door he could not but think how well she walked and how becoming any expression, even that of fierce resentment, was to her usually inexpressive face. He had never supposed her so touchy, and — he did n't want to hurt her feelings.

"Elmira," he called; "don't go off like that!"

He overtook her at the foot of the stairs. She

turned, with one foot on the lower step, her hand resting on the curve of the polished mahogany balustrade which was supported by thin white posts. The carpet of the stairs was a dark red, and her severe face was defined sharp against it. She had probably never looked so well in her life.

Charles put his hand on her shoulder.

"You would n't desert us, though; would you, Elmira? We could n't let you go,—not for a long time yet!"

She winced inwardly. It seemed to her that he was naming the date of her departure. He felt that he was hurting her, and with a sudden impulse of affectionate compunction, he drew her to him and kissed her. She did not return the caress. On the contrary, her form became rigid, and drawing instantly away from him she mounted another of the dark red steps and stood, her lips parted for speech.

"Oh, there 's Chief coming 'round!" called a clear young voice from without. "Good-by, Winny; good-by, Sally! Father 's got home!" and there was the sound of quick feet running around the gravel walk to the side door.

The two at the foot of the stairs had heard the voice and the footsteps, and Elmira's lips had closed again.

"I 'm sorry not to agree with you about this," Charles Day said, detaining his cousin as she turned away; "and perhaps it 's very selfish of me, but,—the fact is, I can't spare Katherine!"

He stood watching the tall, slender figure as it passed slowly up the red stairway. Elmira did not look back, and he was on the point of calling after her some conciliatory word. The interview had been an uncomfortable one and he would have liked to see a more

friendly expression on her face at parting. He would have liked that she should pause at the foot of the tall clock on the landing, just at the curve of the stairway, —that she should pause and turn that thin, proud neck of hers and give him a kind look. Charles Day was rarely at a loss for the right word, and he surely would have found it. But—"O Father!" came the young girl's voice at the other end of the passageway; "O Father! I 'm so glad you 've come back! And are you going to stay? And did you get some ducks? And are we going to drive?"

"Yes, Chatterbox! Chief seems to think we had better; so put your hat straight and come along!"

And thus it came about that Charles did not capture the friendly word and glance he thought he wanted; and—what was sadder still for poor Elmira—he never missed it.

CHAPTER VIII

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

"On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round."

ONE of old Chief's most engaging qualities was his discrimination in regard to persons. His social nature was highly developed, and the distinctions he made, though very marked, were not based upon such carnal motives as are supposed to actuate the equine mind. Although the apparent source of all his blessings was Fred, the hostler, and although he was on perfectly friendly terms with that functionary, he made no secret of his preference for Mr. Day to all other persons of his acquaintance. He might neigh for his dinner, when that meal was too long delayed, but it was in a tone of remonstrance,—something totally different from the gentle whinny with which he greeted the sound of the master's step. And if, of late, Katherine had come in for her share of this pleasant attention, she was quite justified in regarding it as a peculiar compliment.

"You are getting to be quite a whip," Charles Day remarked, after observing for some minutes the firm, steady action of Katherine's small hands upon the reins. "That 's as good a gait as he gives me."

Chief was always a capital roadster,—indeed he was

far too self-respecting to shuffle or lag under any circumstances; yet it was perfectly well understood that he did not squander his best efforts upon his inferiors.

Katherine blushed with pleasure at this encomium, casting the while a furtive glance at her father's rapidly vanishing cigar. When that was consumed he would take the reins. But then, that too was pleasant,—to sit beside him, with eyes and thoughts free to wander where they would, while the small tongue wagged accordingly. And presently, as he flung the cigar stump into a passing ditch, the master quietly and as a matter of course possessed himself of the reins.

Old Chief gave a slight forward tilt of his left ear with a view to indicating an intelligent participation in events; but there was not that prompt bracing of himself for better work which used to mark the transfer. And indeed it must have been an exacting driver who could ask for anything better than he had been giving them from the start.

They were driving along a pretty road fringed with homely beauties,—the white star of the blackberry gleaming slight and fragile among the ruder manifestations of barberry bush and arbor-vitæ. Blossoming fruit trees leaned lazily over stone walls, the young green of the willows drooped above every water-course, while here and there a straight-backed maple lifted its crown of crimson tips against the bright blue of the sky.

To Katherine's mind, well as she liked the buds and blossoms, these leafy bowers were mainly interesting as home or hiding-place for the wild creatures she so dearly loved. It was bird and squirrel, frog and butterfly, that caught her attention and tempted her eye to roam; it was for their sake that she could relinquish

the reins without a pang. As Chief went clattering across a bridge of planks there was a hasty splash in the stream below, and a sudden shower of drops spattered the blue faces of the forget-me-nots clustering on the water's edge.

"Do you suppose that was a musk-rat?" Katherine cried excitedly.

"More likely to be a bull-frog," was the unimaginative rejoinder; and Charles flicked a fly off Chief's back. Many a horse would have misunderstood the action, and felt obliged to start and make a pretence of increasing his speed. But Chief only wrinkled his coat a bit in acknowledgment, and kept his even gait.

"Don't you like bull-frogs?" Katherine inquired. It struck her that her companion had spoken rather slightingly of that highly respectable member of the animal creation.

Charles Day's countenance took on the quizzical look which sometimes puzzled but always pleased this crony of his, and she felt delightedly sure that he was going to make a joke.

"I don't know that I ever got really acquainted with a bull-frog," he jested; "but, if I were to pass a hasty criticism, I should say they were inclined to talk too much."

Katherine smiled in great content.

"It 's lucky for me that you don't dislike all talkative persons," she remarked demurely. "Cousin Elmira says she gets tired of the sound of my voice."

A long pause ensued, during which Katherine's attention was first monopolized by a regiment of crows strutting about a ploughed field, where a limp rag man appeared to exercise a peculiar fascination over those whom he was intended to terrify. Then, as they left

the noisy caucus behind them, the young girl's eye was caught by a great bird of prey mounting falcon-like skyward. Her thoughts were far, far away, following him in his splendid flight, when her father's voice recalled her from the skies.

"So; Cousin Elmira gets tired of the sound of your voice, does she?" he asked, with a trace of displeasure in his tone.

"Yes!" Katherine admitted, adding in self-defence: "but really she does n't hear me talk so very much. I 'm at school, or playing out-of-doors, most of the time, and she never lets me sit with her when it rains and I have to be in the house."

"And you would like to sit with her?"

"Oh, I 'm not so particular about that!"—and Katherine gave a little resentful toss of her head which was not calculated to deceive her interlocutor.

His face clouded. Another quarter-mile had been left behind them before he asked: "Katherine, are you fond of Cousin Elmira?"

"Oh, I suppose so!" was the reply, given in a preoccupied tone. A half-grown colt, scampering across the great Lincoln pasture, had already driven Elmira from her thoughts.

Under ordinary circumstances Charles Day would not have pressed the subject; he had no taste for embarrassing discussions. But to-day he found himself the prey to an unaccustomed anxiety. Something compounded of irritation and solicitude impelled him to say: "That 's no answer. Is she good to you? Does she make you happy?"

The colt had disappeared in a dip of the field, and Katherine was free to consider the subject in hand.

"Oh, I don't need her to make me happy," she

answered cheerfully; "I 've got lots of better things than that."

There was no intentional evasion in the reply; it was simply the natural working of the child's mind. What was it in the little speech that made him think of Lucy? He did not often catch the likeness to his wife which he had once so unluckily commented on in Elmira's hearing, but to-day he felt it strongly. The tone, too, the spirit, of the child's words was startlingly like her mother. Indeed, now that he came to think of it, the phrase itself was Lucy's own. How often had she said, when he grew restless and craved one or another indulgence that circumstances forbade —to have a yacht of their own, or to take her to Europe in spite of the babies—how often had she said: "Never mind, Charles, we have better things than that,—you and I."

And Elmira Faxon would not let Lucy's girl sit in the room with her of a rainy day. Whose house was it, he should like to know, and who was Elmira Faxon, that she should turn Lucy's child away? A sudden access of anger seized him, and swept him out of his easy indolence.

"Come, Katherine," he commanded, rather sharply, "let 's make a clean breast of it. Is Elmira hateful to you?"

There was no answer. Katherine had never heard an Olympian so roughly spoken of and she was shocked into silence.

They had come to a steep incline and Chief had fallen into the prompt, business-like walk which was one of his shining virtues.

Charles Day, who was a born wheedler, slipped his arm about the little girl, and drawing her close to him,

said: "Tell me, darling; tell me all about it"; and Katherine, carried away by such an irresistible appeal, wrapped, too, in a sense of all-encompassing love and protection, as new to her experience as it was delightful, opened her lips and opened her heart for the first time in her life.

There was no direct arraignment of Cousin Elmira; Katherine was yet too subject to that stern deity to judge her on an equal plane. But the habitual reticence which was strictly an acquired trait gave way before her father's questions, and ere they had reached the end of the two-mile hill, Charles Day had formed a pretty clear idea of the situation. He was deeply moved,—more deeply moved than he had been since Lucy died. His face grew flushed and his questions came fast and urgent; and all the while he held his arm protectingly about his little daughter.

At last: "How about Archie?" he asked. "Does he get on better?"

"Oh, yes; Cousin Elmira likes Archie. Everybody likes Archie," she added, with sisterly loyalty. "They could n't help it."

"And they can help liking Katherine?"

"Oh, yes! I don't think anybody likes me particularly unless—" and the child looked up, half shyly, half defiantly, into the kind, tender face above her,—for Charles Day's face could be wonderfully tender.

"Unless?" he repeated.

"Unless it 's you," she whispered, hiding her face in her father's coat and wondering whether the sky would fall.

"By George, Katherine! You *are* like your mother," he exclaimed, as he lifted her face and kissed it with a sudden passionate tenderness.

Just then they got to the top of the hill where the country opened out into dreamy distances in the warm, late light; and as Chief started of his own accord into a swift trot, and they sped lightly along the road that wound about the brow of the hill, Charles Day fell to talking to the child of her mother, and of the time when Katherine should take her mother's place and keep his house for him, and they could let Cousin Elmira go to her own house where there would be no troublesome little girls to be disagreeable to,—this with a twinkle of good understanding that filled the measure of the child's happiness.

"And mind, Katherine," he said, half an hour later, as they found themselves driving down their own street where the shadows were growing thick under the budding elms; "mind you don't let things get too bad without telling me."

"Oh, they 'll never get bad again," Katherine returned, with a cheerful assurance, under which a little tremor of a deeper feeling was not to be concealed; "they 'll never get bad as long as I have you."

"And supposing you don't have me?" he asked. "You know I am often away for a long time."

He had been thinking of a few months abroad, and although he had been stirred to an unusual degree by the events of the day, he was by no means prepared to relinquish the pleasure.

"Oh," Katherine answered, "I shall always have you—now—wherever you are."

"Even if I were to go abroad for the summer?" he asked, with a sudden impulse to test her spirit.

She winced a bit, and caught her breath; but only to say very pluckily: "Oh, I should never feel really deserted,—even if you were to go on a trip to the

moon," she added, as they drew up before the door. It was the sight of the young moon, showing thin and white against the sunset sky, that prompted her to give this light turn to her eager statement. She knew her father too well to keep the serious tone to the end.

"That 's right," he replied, with hearty approval. "Now hop out and get ready for supper, while I drive Chief into the barn. Fred will hardly have got back yet from Belmont. He was to take old Fan over for a load of hay this afternoon."

The glow of a wonderful experience was still at Katherine's heart when she came down-stairs ten minutes later. She found Cousin Elmira moving about with a quite unaccustomed restlessness. It was nothing unusual to wait supper for Charles, but to-night Elmira was impatient, not for her supper, but for his return. The time had seemed long since she left him there at the foot of the stairs,—time to go over the interview in her thoughts again and again. She had been betrayed into friction with him, she had lost command of the situation, she could not feel sure until she saw his face that the affair had made as little impression upon him as she must needs hope,—though the hope hurt her.

Katherine stepped to the window and watched the brightening crescent of the moon as it dipped toward the horizon. No, she should not feel deserted, even if he were to take that little trip to the moon. That was a fancy which she could smile at; it was easy to be brave where there was nothing to fear. Nice moon, to make her say the right thing! Hark! how Chief was whinnying! Her father must be unharnessing him, that he stayed so long. And there was the click of wooden mallet and ball where Archie was practising

long shots on the croquet ground at the other side of the house.

"What 's detaining your father?" Elmira asked suddenly. "He was not going to unharness, was he?"

"I did n't know he was, but I think that must be what keeps him," Katherine answered, longing to go out to him. "Don't you hear Chief whinnying?"

"Run and see," Elmira commanded. "But don't tell him I sent to ask," she added, hastily;—"and don't go into the barn in your good frock."

Katherine was at the door in an instant. But again Elmira's voice arrested her.

"Wait," she called; "wait! I think I 'll come too."

Was it that she had grown nervously apprehensive about the unhappy discussion of the afternoon,—about that parting on the stairs when she had not looked back? Or was there in that reticent, unimaginative nature an unsuspected chord that could vibrate to a premonition?

As their steps sounded on the gravel driveway, Chief whinnied again. It was not a sound he had ever made before; it was neither hunger nor affection. It was — yes, it was the purely human sentiment of anxiety,— or so it always sounded in Katherine's memory.

Whatever it might be, it struck terror to the hearts of both, and woman and girl hurried forward, urged at last by a common impulse.

The door of the carriage-house stood wide open, and there, in the deepening twilight, they could see the rear of the buggy drawn well over the threshold. At their approach Chief whinnied again, but there was no other sound,—nothing in fact to indicate the master's presence.

"Father!"—the child's voice was sharp with a strange, unreasoning fear—"Father!"

And Chief whinnied again.

And now, unmindful of good frocks and long skirts, they had come close beside the great beast, standing, still in the shafts, his bridle off, his collar turned point outward, as if it had given trouble, his noble head bent anxiously above a dark mass at his feet.

How many minutes was it since Charles Day had loosed his hold on that heavy collar?—"A bit tight it was and bothersome-like to turn," Fred told them, later; "an' a man might strain hisself at it,"—how many minutes since he had slid to the feet of his faithful servant, and lain there, his body in a heap, his head stayed against the great, motionless forefeet?

It was Katherine who lifted the head and pushed the great feet gently back. And Chief recognized her authority, and, treading softly, carefully, he backed against the buggy, causing the shafts to drop noisily from the straps, while the rear wheels slid down the broad incline of the threshold and grated on the gravel below.

And again Chief whinnied anxiously, but more softly now.

Elmira was on her knees there in the shadow, touching the cold forehead, the limp, cold hands; pressing thin, searching, sensitive fingers against the still breast.

"We saw the doctor's chaise in front of the Wilsons' gate as we drove by," Katherine whispered huskily.

Elmira drew back and rose slowly to her feet. In the deepening twilight of that shadowy interior she could still see the white, upturned face, showing dis-

tinct against the child's breast, and the outline of the small, dark head bent above it.

Yes, the doctor must be called; all those futile measures must be taken, and she,—she who knew their uselessness must go.

"Can you hold him so until I come?" she asked, while every word hurt her, with a piercing, rending hurt.

Katherine lifted a face as white as the one on her breast.

"I could hold him forever," she said, with an awe-struck restraint in her voice; and Elmira knew that the child's instinct had divined the truth as surely as her own homely science had done.

As she passed swiftly along the driveway again, Elmira could hear the sound of Archie's mallet knocking the croquet-balls about in the gathering dusk; but she did not call to him, nor did she give the alarm at the house. She did not yet trust herself to admit in words the fear, the certainty, that had entered into her as the one overwhelming reality of her consciousness.

And Katherine?—the child, sitting there with that lifeless head against her breast,—knowing the truth? It was not with pity, not with solicitude, that Elmira thought of her. Yet there was no intentional cruelty in the woman's heart,—only a literal acceptance of the child's solemn avowal that she could hold him forever, and a fierce envy that interpreted her own strange action in terms of magnanimity.

The doctor's chaise was no longer at the Wilsons' gate, and, with a sense almost of relief, the messenger bent her steps in the direction of his house, a half-mile distant. And in that swift, silent walk, through the deepening twilight, Elmira Faxon came face to face with herself.

CHAPTER IX

A VISION OF THE NIGHT

" How can man love but what he yearns to help ? "

ELMIRA was right; at that moment, Katherine was not to be pitied. And in her recognition of the fact, Elmira, for the first time in her life, did justice to the character of the child. That fierce throb of envy, with which she thought of her, was an unconscious tribute to her strength of feeling,—to the real spiritual force of the young nature, that she had so long and so wilfully misjudged.

I do not think Katherine took any note of Elmira's prolonged absence; certainly she experienced no impatience for her return. From the moment that she felt the dead weight of her father's head against her breast, she had known that there was no help that Elmira could give, no aid to be looked for through medical skill. Her mention of the doctor was a half-mechanical concession to the habit which generations have bred in old and young.

She was presently obliged to shift her constrained position and to let the heavy head rest upon her lap, and as she did so the old horse took a step forward, and, bending his head above her, whinnied softly. The child remembered it afterward, as she remembered the sleepy chirp of a swallow under the eaves,

and the pungent aroma of good barn smells that filled her nostrils; but at the time it did not arrest her attention. Her young consciousness centred in a dim amaze upon the lifeless form before her, until gradually that sense of utter bewilderment resolved itself,—not into consternation, not into grief, but into a great, all-excluding love. The feeling was too profound for expression. She was not moved to touch her father's face, to press her lips to the white brow, to give her emotion outlet through any caress or outward token. Her hands lay clasped upon his breast, her head bent motionless above him, and she knew only that she loved him; and because she loved him and because he had loved her so dearly, and had that very day declared himself her champion, she should hold him forever, and no one could ever rob her of him.

Although this first exaltation could not endure, and although cruelly trying days followed,—days in which the child felt herself the more alone in her sorrow because of the general mourning,—yet always she could take refuge in the memory of the hour when he was all hers, before they took him from her and taught her that her great love was one with an equal sorrow.

She found much comfort, too, in Archie, who was truly touched by his father's death, and who cried with her heartily, that first evening on the big sofa, which had known so many of their childish confidences and not a few of their childish frolics. Nor was she altogether unsusceptible to the dignity of her own and Archie's position in the family. Our grandmothers may have been staunch in their republican principles; there is one degree of rank which they have never failed to recognize,—that

of chief mourner. And, accordingly, for the first time in their lives, the children of the dead man found themselves treated with something very like deference.

It had been of a Tuesday evening that Charles Day loosed his hold upon old Chief's collar, together with his hold on many things which had made life desirable to him and its end a matter for regret; and on Wednesday Winny came in to call.

This dear and adored friend, who was always self-possessed, had expressed herself so prettily, that Katherine, touched to the heart, had whispered in her ear a great and wonderful confidence.

"Winny," she had said, as they stood, at parting, in the closely shaded parlor with their arms about each other, girl fashion,—"I want to tell you something."

"What is it, Katherine?" Winny asked, seized with a sudden awesome presentiment that her friend had had a nocturnal visit from the new-made ghost. "Tell me what it is."

And Katherine's voice grew deep and solemn as she said: "Winny, my father loved me,—dearly, dearly."

"Why, of course!" the little girl replied, with ill-concealed disappointment. "Why, of course!"

"Yes, of course, in the way fathers have to love their children; but Winny, I know from what he said,—and did,—yesterday afternoon, when we were driving together,—I know that he loved me very, very dearly; more dearly than I had ever dreamed of."

Winny murmured again,—"Of course,"—and Katherine felt a little chill of disappointment.

"I only thought I would tell you, Winny," she

said, "because you are my best friend, and I thought, —well, I thought I would tell you."

"I 'm so glad you did," said Winny, with the gentle rustle of finespun fabrics which was like a special emanation from her dainty little mind and person. "I 'm ever so glad, and I am sure he must have loved you, because you were so fond of him. I always thought your father was such a handsome man," she added, imagining that the same encomiums which had delighted her friend in happier days might be acceptable in the hour of her tribulation. Nor was she wrong in her surmise. The word of praise for her father was sweet to Katherine, and she bade her friend good-by with only the faintest sense of disappointment in her visit.

Yes, her father was a handsome man, and noble and generous as well; and, yes,—she should always have him, though he had gone on a longer journey than the fanciful one she had jested about. And even while the child summoned all her fortitude to meet the returning pain, she experienced the inevitable surrender to a power stronger than her young will and spirit, and hurrying to her chamber, she abandoned herself to her desolation.

On the following night the little girl had gone to an early bed so utterly exhausted that she had fallen immediately asleep. After several hours of profound slumber she awoke with that shock of returning consciousness which strikes the heart when a grief is yet new and the mind unadjusted to it. She did not sleep again; for a long time she lay there, with eyes wide open in the dark, thinking,—thinking; her young soul entering all too early into the precious poignant heritage of love and sorrow which is

reserved for each of us according to the measure of his strength.

And gradually her thoughts resolved themselves into a strong desire to see her father's face, that was so soon to be hidden from her sight. Why should she not go to him now, when there was none to molest her? Why should he not be all her own for one last hour? It was but a step to his door,—just a step, through the silent house. And presently she was stealing, with fast-beating heart, along the deserted passageway, past Elmira's closed door, and Archie's which stood open, to the great south chamber which had been her father's and where he lay sleeping to-night as on so many nights before.

As the child passed the head of the stairs, two deep, vibrating strokes from the old clock followed one another with slow deliberation, startling the echoes of the empty halls. Would not that deep tone wake every sleeper in the house, and send all feet in the direction whither her own steps were bent? She listened, breathless; but the silence closed in about her like a protecting mantle, and again she moved forward. She could see a faint light through the empty keyhole of her father's room; there had been no key to that chamber door since Katherine could remember. With a thrill of mingled awe and longing she turned the handle, very gently, and, as the door yielded noiselessly to her hand, she passed across the threshold. At the sight that met her eyes her heart stood still.

The light was burning dimly, showing the shrouded form upon the broad, low bed; the face lay exposed on the pillow, its mere physical beauty touched with that ultimate seal of nobility which it is often reserved

for kindly death to bestow. This it was that the child had longed to see, that had drawn the little white feet along the dark, deserted, echoing halls. But that other figure? What was that?

Some one was kneeling beside the couch, a tall, slender form in a light wrapper, the hands clasped across the shrouded feet, the face pressed upon them, absolutely motionless.

As Katherine stood there, bound hand and foot in an incredulous wonder, one deep, silent sob shook the kneeling figure, but there was no further movement.

And the child's brain, that had been arrested for a moment, began to work,—swiftly, surely, as the brain will work when the blood has paused but for a stronger start. She was all interest, all intelligence. What did it mean? Was Cousin Elmira so tender hearted, that she could suffer like that? There was no mistaking the suffering; it was in every line of the body flung down there in the abandonment of grief; it was in the bent head from which the long, thin, dishevelled braids hung in unaccustomed negligence.

Another deep, silent sob shook the tall form. Had she been so fond of her cousin, though she had never betrayed it? Was she fond of them all?—perhaps even a little fond of Katherine, only that it was not in her nature to admit it? Poor Cousin Elmira! Who would have thought it of her?

The child, standing there barefooted in her white night-dress, her own hair tossed and tangled, her own eyes weary with weeping, gazed long upon the prostrate figure. And gradually a strange sense of something deeper, more desolating than her own sorrow was borne in upon her. Surely there was a bitterness in the woman's grief that the child knew nothing of.

That bowed head had not found rest; those terrible, silent sobs brought no comfort. Ah! how they had all misunderstood her! How she must have loved him that she should suffer so! How—

A swift instinct, scarcely defined enough to be called a thought, caught the child's breath, and slowly the color deepened over cheek and brow and neck.

The figure there by the bed had not stirred again; yet so commanding was its hold upon the attention, and yet so imperative was the need of turning away from it, that the child did so without once glancing at the beautiful dead face she had come to see. Softly, softly, she stepped across the threshold, softly she pulled the chamber door to. Oppressed with a strange hush of feeling, in which all the surging emotions of the last few days were stilled, she stole back, past the door of Elmira's empty room, to her own bed. And there she buried her face in her pillow in sudden shame of the unwitting intrusion.

When morning came, Katherine tried to banish the memory of that vision of the night beyond the reach of her own thoughts; but she only succeeded in enshrining it as a sacred thing in the deepest recesses of her consciousness. And if, for her cousin's sake, she shrank from dwelling upon the revelation she had experienced, yet in the mystic and tragic light of it, her own sorrow came to seem a bearable thing, because of the precious assurances it comprehended. She longed, out of the plenitude of her own consolations, to pour balm upon those more cruel wounds from which another suffered; and when, before many hours had passed, an opportunity of kindly service offered, the young girl was quick to seize upon it.

It happened that Grandmother Day and her wid-

owed daughter, Mrs. Bliss, drove over that morning to discuss with Elmira the details of the funeral solemnities. They were sitting together, the three women, in the shaded parlor, when Katherine slipped in and took a seat in the window. Grandmother Day looked up in momentary surprise, but, whatever her attitude might have been on a different occasion, it would scarcely have comported with her sense of propriety actually to exclude a chief mourner from any one of the melancholy functions attaching to the situation.

"Yes," she was saying, in the measured tones befitting the occasion,—and through which no hint of a heart-breaking sorrow was permitted to penetrate,—"Charles had a great many friends, and we must be prepared for a large attendance to-morrow. Indeed, considering how many of his classmates and club friends will wish to pay respect to his memory, it seems almost a pity that the service could not have been held in the church. But of course that would be out of the question, in view of his expressed preference."

"Of course," Aunt Fanny agreed, as she furtively dried her eyes on a black-bordered handkerchief, "I remember he would not hear to having father's funeral at church, though he knew that we should not be able to seat all the people."

"Charles had the reserve of a fine nature," Mrs. Day rejoined, with a melancholy maternal pride; "and in sorrow, especially, he was retiring. He used to say that there was not much privacy left us nowadays, but he did think a man might be allowed to shed his tears in his own house.—However," the old lady went on, with a certain self-defensive briskness—for that bit of reminiscence had proved an unexpected strain upon

her composure—"we really must begin to think of our list for the carriages. I have arranged for the family connections, but after that it 's not quite so simple, and I shall want your help."

As the reader glanced over the top of her spectacles from one to the other of her three listeners, Katherine's intent little face turned toward her. Up to this time the child had been closely watching her cousin's profile, as she sat, with hands folded upon her knees, gazing straight before her. Elmira did not look up, at the reading of the list, nor did her face betray any special interest; yet at the first words, Katherine's heart gave an indignant leap.

"First carriage," Mrs. Day was saying; "Archibald Day, Katherine Day, Mrs. John Day, and Mrs. Bliss. Second carriage, Mr. and Mrs. David Hollis, Mr. and Mrs. Theodore Glynn. Third carriage, Mrs. John Hayden, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Faxon, Miss Elmira Faxon. Fourth carriage, Mr. and Mrs.—"

"Grandmother!"

A small figure had come noiselessly to her side, and a small hand was laid upon her arm.

"What is it, Katherine?"

"Grandmother,—I think Archie and I would rather go in the carriage with Cousin Elmira."

"With Cousin Elmira?" Mrs. Day repeated in great surprise. "But you and Archie must go in the first carriage."

Elmira had not stirred, but something in her face gave the little girl courage to persist.

"I don't think that is so important," she said, in her clear, decided treble, "as that father's own family should be together."

The mistress of ceremonies hesitated an instant.

She could not well discuss Elmira's claims then and there, nor could she, in that presence, ignore the child's suggestion. She glanced questioningly at her kinswoman,—perhaps she herself would express a reassuring indifference on the subject. But no; those thin lips were as unspeaking as the countenance they refused to interpret, and Mrs. Day found herself obliged to take the initiative.

"What is your view, Elmira?" she asked, fixing that inexpressive face with a questioning glance that was not to be evaded.

"It is not for me to say," Miss Faxon replied, with a somewhat distant manner. "But"— yielding to a consuming desire for the dignity she knew to be implied,—touched also, even in that first moment, to a feeling of gratitude toward her little champion,—"I should like to have the children with me,—after all these years."

The conflict in Grandmother Day's mind was sharp but short. She was not accustomed to having her decisions reversed, and she had a strong sense of the superior claims of "own sister" when compared to a mere cousin. Yet—perhaps Katherine was right. At least the child outranked her grandmother on this occasion; there was no doubt of that. And if Elmira wanted it,—after all these years?

"Very well," she said, not unkindly, "then you shall take Fanny's place with me and the children, and — I don't know but what you 're entitled to it, Elmira."

That evening, when Katherine had been in bed only a few minutes, she beheld a tall figure standing at her door. It was years since Cousin Elmira had come to tuck her up for the night, and she was quite

awestruck at the sight. The tall figure moved across the room and stood beside the bed.

"I 'm awake," the child whispered. "Did you want anything, Cousin Elmira?"

"No," was the answer, spoken with evident embarrassment. "Oh, no! I only came to see that all was well with you."

"I wish you would sit down on the side of the bed," Katherine begged, with a great attempt at self-control. "It would seem so good to have you there!"— and as Cousin Elmira took the seat, it seemed to her, also, good to be there.

"I mustn't stay," she protested, "because you ought to be asleep."

"Oh, the night 's long enough," the child answered, lifting a small hand, and shyly touching the sleeve of Elmira's black dress.

"Yes, the nights are long enough," Elmira echoed sadly. "But you are young, and you need all the hours to sleep in; so, good-night!" and, bending her head, the unaccustomed visitor touched cold lips to the child's forehead.

At that slight caress all Katherine's shyness vanished. Flinging her arms about the bended neck—"O Cousin Elmira!" she cried, "we must love each other dearly—for his sake!" and big sobs shook the little form while warm, quick tears wet the young cheek.

Then Cousin Elmira essayed, awkwardly enough, to comfort the child, and, while slow, painful tears made their way at last to her own tired eyes, she it was who found consolation.

CHAPTER X

A CAPITULATION

"Art thou the tree that props the plant,
Or the climbing plant that seeks the tree—
Canst thou help us, must we help thee?"

AND so it came about that out of her bitter sorrow a strange, unlooked-for solace was vouchsafed our little girl; that out of a loss which seemed to her immeasurable grew a gain which meant nothing less than a readjustment of her daily life to happier issues. For that visit of mutual consolation, matter of course as it would have been to most fellow mourners, was understood by both of these to have a very solemn and enduring significance. If neither Elmira nor Katherine was ever to allude to it, it is also true that neither of them was of a nature to forget it, or to be faithless to a pact thus deliberately entered upon.

And indeed had there been no such moment, pregnant of conciliation, some change must surely have been wrought in their relation by the accident of Katherine's midnight discovery. No imaginative young girl could have witnessed unmoved the silent, overwhelming grief of a self-contained woman for the being dearest to herself, nor could any generous soul have outlived the impression born of that experience, have failed to be touched by it to a new comprehen-

sion, a lasting tenderness, toward her who knelt there in unconscious self-betrayal.

And this influence would have been potent with Katherine, even if the tyrant of her childhood had persisted in the harsh treatment of her which she had so long maintained. But a curious change had been wrought in Elmira's attitude of mind,— curious not so much in its character as in its cause. For hers was not a disposition to be softened by adversity, and indeed her heart had been heretofore so little engaged in her relation with Katherine that the child would not have been like to profit by any chastening it might undergo. Yet if Charles Day alone of all her little world could have gained a hold upon his cousin through a direct appeal to her affections, there remained one vulnerable quarter in her carefully guarded defences, and here a happy chance had permitted Katherine to approach.

Elmira, narrow and concentrated to the last degree, was intensely jealous of her personal dignity, and in the moment of its jeopardy Katherine it was who had come to the rescue. But for Katherine, she, whose superficial claim was so clear, whose unavowed rights were little short of paramount,—she, Elmira Faxon, would have been relegated to a third carriage in that funeral procession which had, for her, the significance of a great, rank-establishing function. And if she came to the little girl's bedside that evening to give and receive consolation, the simple act was a tacit, but well-considered, admission that henceforth these two were to be friends and allies.

Yet it is doubtful whether Elmira herself realized all she had conceded, until a chance utterance of her own revealed to her how complete was her surrender.

It was only a few weeks after the funeral that Mrs. William Henderson, whom we have known as Susan Littlefield, the dispenser of unlimited sponge-cake to youthful cormorants, came to see her old friend and to urge upon her a plan which would once have coincided with Elmira's own preferences.

Susan, as happy wife and mother, was, at this period of her life, joyfully exercising toward husband and children the same cheerful indulgence which had once been squandered upon the miscellaneous beneficiaries of a Sunday-school picnic. To-day she had been commissioned by her sister-in-law, Mrs. John Littlefield, to execute a stroke of recruiting work for the flourishing boarding-school which was rapidly transforming the two "little Fields,"—as Archie had flippantly dubbed his old playmates—into small women of the world. Mrs. Henderson, now the devoted mother of twin daughters, was perhaps the less averse to her mission because these incomparable young persons, having but just attained their third year, did not yet present themselves to their mother's mind as possible candidates for like educational advantages.

She found Miss Faxon at her accustomed needle work, looking a thought paler, in her scrupulously correct mourning, but otherwise unchanged by the harrowing events of the past weeks. The two women had met before since that mourning had been assumed, and Susan was consequently free to enter upon her subject untrammelled by the formalities of condolence.

"How tall Katherine is getting to be," she remarked as the young girl, passing out of the gate and up the street, opportunely crossed her line of vision. "Is it

only because she is wearing her dresses longer, or is she really shooting up?"

"I should say she had grown nearly two inches this last year," Elmira replied, giving a casual glance at the departing figure, that showed slim and black against the white roadway.

"I should think she was almost as tall as John's Hattie, and she must be a year younger."

"Hattie was always small for her years," was the non-committal reply.

"Yes, I don't know but that she is, although she has developed very fast in everything but height since she went to Peachgrove Priory. We did n't have such schools as that in our day; did we, Elmira?"

"Perhaps not; but as I never went to boarding-school myself, I 'm not much of a judge." Elmira's conversation was always open to the imputation of dryness.

"My sister says she never saw two girls improve so in her life as Susie and Hattie," continued Susan, bravely pursuing her theme in the face of discouragement. "She means to keep them both there till they are eighteen."

"I should think it was a very good plan," Elmira answered, with the ready acquiescence of indifference.

Clearly the subject regarded in the abstract failed to interest her, and Susan, considering that she had given the rather irksome exercise of diplomacy a fair chance, felt herself at liberty to speak out,—always the most natural course with her.

"Harriet has been thinking," she said, "how pleasant it would be if one or two others of our nice Camwood girls could go to the Priory next year. She has

been talking with Mrs. Gerald about it, and I should n't wonder if they sent Winny."

"Really?"

"What should you say to letting Katherine go?"

"Katherine?" Elmira repeated, looking as much estranged as if no such plan had ever occurred to her. "Katherine? I should n't think of such a thing!"

"Why not? Should n't you consider it an advantage for her?"

"No, I should not. She is doing extremely well at Miss Hancock's,—she has always been a good scholar, and I don't want her to be pushed too hard in her studies."

"I don't think they force the girls at the Priory. It is more their general development that Harriet thinks of."

"I don't consider that there is any hurry about that," Elmira declared. "The child is only fourteen, and she has been through so much that she is already beginning to seem old for her years. She took me driving yesterday, and I was quite shocked at her seriousness. It was like talking with a woman of my own age."

"Do you let that child drive you with old Chief?" cried Susan, startled into a change of subject. "I thought he was the fastest horse in town."

"And so he is; but Katherine is one of the best whips in town, and Chief is just like a person with her." Elmira knew she was quoting Charles, a thing she took a poignant satisfaction in doing, though it would have cost her dear to speak his name. "No, no," she repeated, emphatically,—"I could n't send her away from home. She is far better off here."

"Well," Susan remarked, half an hour later, as she

rose to take her departure; "Harriet will be disappointed, and Mrs. Gerald too. But I suppose it would be hardly fair for them to try and get Mrs. Day on their side."

"I don't know how fair it would be, but it would n't do any harm," Elmira replied, with quiet assurance. "Mrs. Day never could abide a boarding-school."

Now, if Susan had been vaguely surprised at the warmth of her friend's refusal, aware as she was of the strained relations which had so long existed between Elmira and her young charge, it was the former's parting words which gave concrete shape to her amazement. For, just as the visitor crossed the threshold of the sitting-room door, and, turning, extended her hand in final leave-taking, Elmira, moved by a sudden, unaccountable impulse, exclaimed: "The truth is, Susan, I can't spare Katherine."

Her own words struck upon her heart with the mysterious significance of an echo, and, as the door closed behind her departing guest, Elmira turned and passed slowly up the broad staircase.

"I can't spare Katherine," she repeated, under her breath;—"I can't spare Katherine!" and as she paused at the foot of the tall clock, with her hand on the mahogany balustrade, her lips mutely forming the last words she had ever heard her cousin speak, she became aware that she had accepted and assumed the spirit of those words as a sacred legacy.

And yet, such was the eccentricity of Elmira's moral build, so obscure was the relation of cause and effect in her mind, that it may be questioned whether she would have responded to the mystic prompting of that echo, if her better nature had not first been touched into sensitiveness by Katherine's recognition

of her rights. Because Katherine had perceived and maintained her ancient enemy's claim to be counted among the chief mourners, she might now tear her clothes and come late to her meals with comparative impunity; because Elmira had ridden in the first carriage at her cousin's funeral, Katherine's friends were occasionally invited to tea; the purchase of a saddle horse for the use of the two children was advocated and accomplished, and, stranger still, Elmira, as long as she lived, never failed to kiss Katherine good-night. It was not the most enthusiastic of kisses, but neither could it be called perfunctory, and the child accepted it only too gratefully as a sign of affection and good will.

But as if to the end that our stern disciplinarian should not unlearn an art in which she had so long excelled, her relations with her old favorite, Archie, were undergoing a change,—as indeed was inevitable. For already, as his father would have put it, the boy was beginning to "feel his oats."

Charles Day's rule, though an apparently lax and intermittent one, had been singularly efficacious, and the children had early learned the lesson of obedience. If Archie, beguiled by the indulgence which he enjoyed at the hands of most persons in authority, had occasionally ventured to defy his father's commands, the severity of his punishment had been such as to create in him that wholesome awe of consequences which was as near an approach to conscience as had yet been developed in his somewhat unstable character. He had been fond of his father,—indeed, who was not fond of Charles Day?—and he had heartily grieved for the loss of him. Yet scarcely were the first ceremonies of mourning performed than he

began to perceive the change which had been wrought in his own position. In short, to pursue the line of metaphor which Charles himself would have chosen, —the boy had, within a very few months after his father's death, fairly taken the bit between his teeth.

His misdeeds were not of a serious nature; they consisted chiefly in cutting a recitation, attending a horse-race, or learning to smoke. But none the less were they very disturbing and vexatious to Cousin Elmira, to say nothing of the occasional misgivings they roused in the mind of his small sister. The worst of it was, that the discovery of these three misdemeanors was simultaneous; so that it is perhaps not to be wondered at that the female contingent of the family was momentarily unnerved.

One day in late September Elmira and Katherine were sitting at their noon dinner, both painfully conscious of the empty dinner-plate and unoccupied chair opposite Katherine's, when Cousin Elmira asked suddenly: "Do you know what has become of Archie?"

"No," said Katherine; "not unless he got kept after school. He said the Latin lesson was a corker this time."

"Nonsense, for him to talk like that!" Miss Faxon declared, with that oblivion to the atrocious slang of Katherine's statement which the most wary parent or guardian may be betrayed into; "Archie is bright enough to learn any lesson they could set him, if he would only apply himself."

"Yes, Archie is bright enough," Katherine felt constrained to admit, in spite of the unfavorable corollary involved. "We had a very hard lesson ourselves this morning," she hastened to add; "I did n't know

mine,—but they are not so strict in a girls' school";—all this with a view to diverting criticism to a safer channel.

But the little *ruse* was not successful, as Elmira's next observation made clear.

"Katherine," she asked, suddenly, when Nora, having deposited one of Bridget's savory squash pies before Miss Faxon, had closed the door behind her;—"Katherine, did you know of Archie's playing truant last Monday and going with the Halsey boys to the Passall races?"

"Why, no!" Katherine protested, "and I don't believe he ever did such a thing!"

Miss Faxon turned a searching look upon the girl.

"Perhaps you did n't know that he smoked," she said.

"I did n't know he did," was the answer, given with somewhat less assurance.

"But you guessed it."

"Not exactly. That is,—there was smoke in his clothes one day, but anybody can get that from other people's cigars. Mine used to be full of it,—sometimes."

Katherine did not make this little speech thoughtlessly, nor without sharing the quick pang of reminiscence that crossed her cousin's mind. Yet her prompt association of Archie's peccadillo with her father's redolent Havanas was more instinctive than calculating.

"Well!" Elmira declared, ignoring Katherine's point, "Mrs. Gerald says that Mr. Gerald saw him at the races with those two public-school boys during school hours on Monday, and that he was smoking and swaggering."

"I don't believe Archie ever swaggered!" Katherine cried hotly. "It is n't in him, and—I should like to know what Mr. Gerald was doing at the races himself!"

"Why, Katherine! what a way to speak!"

"Well, they need n't say Archie swaggered;—now, need they, Cousin Elmira?" the girl persisted, instinctively clinging to the one weak point in the accusation. "It 's Mr. Gerald that swaggers; I 've heard father say so!"

"That 's a very different thing from your saying so, Katherine!" and Elmira, hardly at home in the practice of this new forbearance, wondered perplexedly whether she was not spoiling the child after all the pains she had taken with her.

At this critical moment the side door closed sharply, and Archie was heard whistling as he strode, two steps at a time, up the stairs. There was a sound of splashing water and of much tramping about in the upper regions, and, after a suspiciously short interval, the culprit appeared, with that damp and shining aspect which is sometimes the result of too hasty ablutions. Also, be it said, with an air of eager readiness for his dinner which should have betokened a clear conscience.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed, as he came in. "Is pie passed, already?"

"You had to stay over for your Latin, did n't you?" Katherine cried, anxious to prove that this time at least there was no secret crime to conceal.

"Yes, worse luck to it! half the boys got stuck."

"It must have been rather mortifying to belong to the stuck half," Cousin Elmira remarked, with the cold sarcasm which had so often made Katherine wince. But Archie was less sensitive.

"Oh, any grind can cram a dose, if that 's all he does!" the boy declared, with lofty scorn. "You would n't want me to be like Jim Marcy, I hope. Why, he does n't know a foot-ball from a pumpkin, and there is n't a tailor going that could make his clothes fit!" and with that the young philosopher fell upon a heaping plate of roast beef which had providentially appeared before him, and which he clearly regarded less as a welcome diversion than as an absolute necessity to his continued existence!

"I can't say that I ever thought it very important that a school-boy's clothes should fit," Elmira contended. "But I don't see that their fitting need interfere with the action of the brain."

"That is because you never went to a boys' school," her antagonist pointed out, with imperturbable good humor.

All this time Katherine had been sitting speechless before her second piece of pie, which had utterly lost its savor in the tension of her feelings. And the sympathetic reader will hardly note unmoved that this was not the first occasion in the course of our homely narrative that a piece of pie had been sacrificed on the altar of sisterly solicitude.

Presently they all three left the table and passed out into the family sitting-room, Archie the only apparently unconcerned member of the party. There was something about this evident unconcern that was peculiarly exasperating to Elmira, and, as the boy picked up the morning paper, turning, with the unerring instinct of his kind, to the sporting column, he found the pursuit of information rudely checked.

"I suppose, Archie," Cousin Elmira remarked, in her chillest tone, and seating herself at some distance

from him,—"I suppose you did not get much Latin at the Passall races last week."

Archie was startled, but he stood his ground; and Katherine, on her way to the parlor for her practicing, stayed her foot in fearful suspense, as he answered: "No, I did not; but I flatter myself that I taught those Halsey boys the meaning of '*non est cum-atibus de swampo*'!"

"Then you were really there, as I was told?" Elmira persisted, ignoring the flippant rejoinder.

"Yes; and Bill Delay's Blue Gentian got licked. That was how those boys learned their Latin!"

"I don't think their widowed mother would thank you for your instructions."

"People don't usually get much thanks for teaching Latin," the self-constituted professor retorted.

How could they be so calm? Katherine asked herself.

"Come now, Cousin Elmira," Archie was saying, in his most wheedling manner,—and how like his father it was! "Don't you worry about a little thing like that."

"It 's not a little thing," she began, "it 's—"

"Anyhow it can't be a state's prison offence, for my father did it when he was a year younger than I am."

"Who told you such a thing as that?"

"Not father, you may be sure; but Dr. Littlefield. He told me how father won a bet off him their last year at the high school. It was on Belle Q. when she broke the record. I like to get the doctor talking about father," he added, with an accession of filial piety that was not all assumed, though it must be admitted that it was opportune.

"I should think Dr. Littlefield would know better than to tell you such things!" Elmira protested.

"He would, if he had any boys; he 'd be as close-mouthed as father was. But you see his kids are all girls, so he has nothing to be afraid of. But, really, Cousin Elmira,—and you, Katherine,—I wish you 'd get the old man to tell you about it. He says father was the best judge of a horse and the straightest man on a bet he ever had dealings with. He says he would n't have hedged if he had staked his bloomin' fortune on it!"

This somewhat wordy diversion had given time for Elmira to make a new rally.

"Well, Archie," she said, "I suppose we must take Dr. Littlefield's word for this; but it only shows what an exceptional character your father's was, that he should not have been led into evil courses by such early temptations. And one thing you know as well as I; he would never have approved of your doing such a thing."

"No; men never understand boys very well,—when they have any," Archie replied, in a tone of thoughtful assent. "Why, father would n't even let me smoke, though he had to own that he did it himself at fifteen."

"And have you no regard for your father's wishes in these things?" Elmira asked, feeling that she had come to her last resource.

"Of course I have! I never smoked nor went to races while he was alive. But I 'm older now, and like as not he would think it all right. Is n't that so, Kitkat?"

Katherine, who had stood rooted to the floor during this bewildering colloquy, trying to adjust her

ideas to its changing phases, was fairly nonplussed at the unexpected appeal. The more so, as Cousin Elmira, to her dismay, repeated the question.

"Tell us what you think, Katherine," she commanded, in a quiet, colorless voice.

"Oh, I don't know," the girl stammered, with unaccustomed indecision.

"Yes, you do know, Katherine," Cousin Elmira insisted.

"Yes, out with it, Kitkat, and don't go back on all the family you 've got!"

At that thoughtless word of Archie's his two companions glanced involuntarily at one another, and each was stirred with the same compunction in the other's behalf. Oh, it was cruel, Katherine thought, and Elmira was getting the worst of it! With an imploring glance at Archie, the young girl deliberately ranged herself on the enemy's side.

"I think," she said, moving involuntarily a step nearer her cousin,—"I think we ought to mind Cousin Elmira!"

"Pooh!" Archie cried, springing to his feet and casting the paper from him, sporting column and all. "That 's all the good a fellow gets out of a sister!" and he was about to make a haughty exit, when, obedient to a sudden caprice, he allowed himself to think better of it.

Turning on his heel and facing his antagonist and her discomfited little ally, he said: "Look here, Cousin Elmira! I 'll make a bargain with you! If you 'll give me leave to smoke in the house, and no bones broken between us, I 'll give the races a rest,—for a while."

Elmira had risen to her feet and set her neck in its

proudest curve, tinglingly aware that she was worsted. Should she compromise?—or should she yield only to the brute force of circumstance, which this tall, self-willed boy had on his side? Her mind worked swiftly; the delay was scarcely perceptible which preceded her capitulation, definitively, if grudgingly given.

"Since you persist in smoking," she said, "I much prefer to have you do it openly!" Upon which, with head erect and countenance unbending, the vanquished made good her retreat from the field.

Then Archie, taking prompt advantage of his victory, drew a match across the heel of his boot,—with the skill of a practised hand, be it observed,—and proceeded to light a surprisingly good cigar. As he did so, he remarked, with a comical grimace for Katherine's benefit: "Ain't I glad, though, that I 've got too big to be licked!"

And Katherine, fascinated by the familiar process, and full of a small sister's admiration for a big brother's prowess, stood watching him, regardless of the claims of Czerny and the practice hour.

"Well, Kitkat?" Archie queried, with a half-patronizing, half-conciliatory smile. He rarely bore malice; resentment was only an awkward way of keeping alive unpleasant sensations,—a thing which he, like his father before him, instinctively avoided.

How tall and grown-up he was, and how like his father! Katherine came close up to him and, drawing in a deep breath of the fragrant aroma: "O Archie!" she cried; "how good it smells!"

CHAPTER XI

THE CLOSED DOOR

> "My own hope is, a sun will pierce
> The thickest cloud earth ever stretched."

LET it not be imagined that Miss Faxon deceived herself as to the value of the contract proposed by Archie; she was perfectly conscious that it was by no means binding upon him. But the empty form of a concession is sometimes better than no concession whatever, and she had been fain to acquiesce in the best terms she could get.

Elmira could measure indeed better than another the wilfulness of a character modelled on Charles Day's own, and she knew by bitter experience her own powerlessness to cope with it. Yet it was the very likeness of the boy to his father which threw her somewhat off her guard. For, aware as she was that Charles had been a bit wild in his youth,—that, in fact, he had always followed the impulse of the moment,—she knew also the essential rectitude of those impulses, and she was only too ready to credit Archie with an equally fortunate disposition. After that first serious encounter, she shrank from open interference, and, if she chafed inwardly at her own lack of authority, her graver apprehensions could usually be allayed by parallels drawn from her cousin's career.

She did not live to verify her hopes or her fears. It was but a few years after Charles Day's death,—when, however, Elmira might fairly look upon her task as accomplished,—that that much-tried, little-comprehended soul followed, very willingly, although with many wearisome delays, across the threshold of the Great Mystery which her cousin's happier spirit had traversed at a bound.

The doctor gave a long scientific name to the slow, but physically painless disease to which she at last succumbed; and his diagnosis was probably correct. Yet Katherine, in her heart of hearts, refused to accept it. To her mind there was never the least doubt that Cousin Elmira had died of a broken heart.

Katherine was much with her cousin during the last years of her life, and although Elmira never became an acknowledged invalid, nor demanded much personal service, the young girl soon acquired the art of ministering to her unacknowledged needs. During the last year, especially, the two were almost inseparable companions.

Before Katherine was eighteen, the discovery was made that she had accomplished as much as was expected of Miss Hancock's pupils, and that she might with profit devote her time to music, the modern languages, and such educational "small deer" as were supposed to complete the equipment of a young lady of the period. These could be pursued at home, and soon Katherine formed the habit of doing her studying in the sitting-room where Elmira sat at work, her needle often flagging, her face growing grayer and sharper day by day.

It transpired that Miss Faxon was strong in her French verbs, and that she liked to be consulted

about them. She also began to take an interest in the music, and sometimes came into the parlor and listened, glad, perhaps, of an excuse for idleness. Often they sat together, sewing, of a rainy afternoon; or, when the weather was fair, old Chief, grown venerable since his master's death, would give them a leisurely turn along the dear country roads that Charles Day had loved so well.

It was the easier for Katherine to become absorbed in this companionship, because her two best cronies, Archie and Winny, were absent from home, the one at college and the other at the Priory. But even had they been at hand, matters would not have been very different. Elmira, in her growing weakness and dependence, would still have been her chief interest.

For the first time in her life Katherine's nature found free play. She could be useful, she could be important; she could spend herself in ministrations, and to one whose tragic fate she and she alone understood. In the light of the romance which had been revealed to her, the young girl could interpret many a commonplace word and act of her cousin's in terms of dramatic meaning; and if Elmira never suspected that her secret was shared, she nevertheless greatly profited by the sharing.

Occasionally Archie brought home a friend to pass the Sunday with him, and the quiet house was suddenly enlivened; or Winny, at home on a vacation, started a little whirl of new interest and pleasure. Katherine, who had gradually taken over the care of the household, found her hands full, and she played her part with a will in all these pleasant happenings. But when they were over and she fell back into the old routine, the passing gaieties came soon to seem

unreal, as if she had dreamed them; and Cousin Elmira,—her faltering step on the wide stairway, her hesitating needle, her thinning features,—seemed the one vital interest in life.

"Katherine," Elmira said to her one day, as the girl closed her German dictionary with a bang, and gave a cheerful sigh of relief over a task accomplished, —"Katherine, you seem happy."

"Happy?" Katherine repeated. "Why, of course I 'm happy!"

"I wonder why"; and Elmira, whose stitches had been stayed some minutes since, laid her work on the table.

"Why, I suppose it 's natural to be happy, is n't it? —that is, when nothing interferes."

"Natural to you, perhaps," Elmira answered reflectively, while her eyes searched the confident young face.

Katherine rose and came toward her,—but not too close. There had been nothing in this intimacy of theirs to encourage the natural expansiveness of young girlhood, nor had Katherine ever attempted to draw near, in small personal ways, to her cousin in her constitutional aloofness.

Elmira, looking up at the girl as she stood before her, found herself making mental note of her attractiveness. Katherine was not fair, with her mother's delicate radiance, nor had she that willowy grace of movement which was Elmira's solitary charm. But in her open, intelligent countenance was much beauty of expression, and she possessed already a force and distinction of bearing which would tell in the years to come.

She had taken a seat on the other side of the work-

table, and, lifting the cambric ruffle which her cousin had been hemming, she asked: "May I go on with it for a while?"

Katherine had not dared continue the subject; it seemed to her doubtful ground for Cousin Elmira to tread. But Miss Faxon was bent on her own train of thought.

"You 've not told me why you are happy," she persisted.

"Why I am happy?" the young girl repeated. "Why, there are so many reasons. You see, in the first place, I do so enjoy doing all the things I do." Then, with a glance toward Elmira, whose attitude in her unaccustomed relinquishment of industry was subtly appealing,—"Don't you suppose that must be owing to my bringing up?" she asked.

"I wish I might think so," Elmira returned, quite missing the audacity of the suggestion. "But —I don't know,"—and she shook her head sadly; adding, with a curious reminiscence, as much of mood as of thought: "You were always a difficult child to manage, Katherine."

"I have n't a doubt of it," Katherine laughed. "And if you had spoiled me I should probably have been even worse than I was!"

Elmira did not reply at once. She sat leaning her head against the high back of her chair, idly regarding the busy young fingers. It was always a pleasure to watch Katherine's finely modelled hands. They were full of nervous strength, and the play of the fingers was delicate and true. With all their beauty, too, they were singularly free from those small affectations which mar the action of so many a pretty hand. Presently;

"It 's getting dark, Katherine," she said; "put your sewing by. No, don't light the gas; it 's pleasanter so. I suppose you are too young, though, to like the twilight," she added, half apologetically.

"I like it sometimes," said Katherine, obediently laying her work aside. "It 's always nice to talk in."

For a good many seconds it seemed as if the twilight as a conversational opportunity were to be wasted; but, after a little, Elmira spoke again.

"Yes, Katherine," she said thoughtfully. "I did try to do my duty by you, and as I look back over the past I don't see very much to regret. But there was one time that I was in the wrong, and I have always meant to tell you so. I wonder if you would remember about it."

"Try me and see."

"It was when I refused you—" she hesitated, while the thin cheek flushed painfully under cover of the darkness. Katherine could not see the deepening color, but she could hear her cousin's slightly quickened breath as the latter leaned forward a bit in her chair.

"When you refused me my ten cents?" Katherine asked.

The unconscious use of the possessive pronoun struck Elmira at once.

"Yes, you are right. It was your ten cents," she declared firmly. "I was entirely in the wrong, and I knew it. I have always meant to ask your pardon."

"We shall have to forgive one another, then, Cousin Elmira," the girl answered gently, "for I remember that I was perfectly satanic that day. Besides," she added, bent on consolation, "you let me go to see Tom Thumb!" and Katherine only wondered in her

own mind that the delights of that afternoon had not completely effaced the memory of her injury.

Again there was silence. The house was very still; the occasional sound of passing wheels seemed to come from a long, long distance.

At last: "I have that ten cents yet," Elmira said. "It was all ready for you, that morning,—a little bit of paper money. I never felt like spending it. You 'll find it in my purse,—some day."

"Dear Cousin Elmira!" the young girl murmured. She had rarely ventured on so demonstrative an expression as that. Somehow it seemed as if the barriers were lowering a bit, and Elmira's next words, too, made nothing of them.

"I wonder, Katherine," she queried, musingly, "whether you have any idea how I love to hear you say my name!"

"Your name, Cousin Elmira? Why, now, that 's very nice,—for I love to say it!"

"You 're the first person who ever made it sound pretty," Elmira went on; "I 've disliked it all my life."

It was almost dark, now, and some one was lighting the gas in the hall. The artificial light, falling in a broad path through the open doorway across the middle of the room, seemed to obliterate the last lingering twilight, leaving the two companions in deeper shadow than before.

Then Katherine ventured on a very daring speech.

"I think perhaps I like your name," she said, "for the same reason that father did."

"That your father did?" Elmira asked, her tone hardening, rather than softening, as it always did when she was adjusting her defensive armor.

"Yes, for I am sure he liked it, from something he once said,"—and Katherine hurried on, without pause, that Elmira need not be forced to speak again. "It was ever so long ago, and I was wondering what to name my new doll that Aunt Sarah had brought home from Europe. I said the name must be appropriate, and father said names became appropriate from persons being called by them."

"Well?" Elmira interjected, in low staccato.

"He said Anne meant to him a pretty woman with blue eyes and fair hair, and that Katherine meant rather a roley-poley, excitable little tomboy, and—"

"Well?"

"Then Archie asked,—what did Elmira mean? And father said that Elmira meant a tall and very graceful person with a good accent. Don't you think that showed that he liked the name?"

"Perhaps so," came the answer, in a voice grown so suddenly matter-of-fact, that Katherine felt sure that the speaker had been touched. The young girl knew that she had never before drawn so near to Cousin Elmira and she was gratefully aware that there had been healing in her words.

For many days after that strange, intimate talk in the twilight, Katherine felt that her cousin must be near her end. She used sometimes to get up in the middle of the night and go and listen at Elmira's door, apprehensive of a sudden seizure. Once her presentiment was so strong that she pushed the door open and looked in, only to be reassured by the quiet breathing in the darkest corner of the room where the bed stood. But months went by, during which the invalid did not lose ground perceptibly.

At last, one gray autumn morning, Elmira did not

come down to breakfast, and Katherine, going to her door, found it, contrary to custom, locked.

Had the reticent, solitary soul known that her summons was at hand, and had she deliberately chosen to meet it alone? Or was it only an accident that the key had been turned? None was ever to know. The quiet form lying there in the great square bed kept its own counsel, in small matters as in great, and, in face of the eternal mystery into which the familiar companion of all her life had entered, Katherine grew to feel how imperfectly she could interpret even that which had been revealed to her.

She truly loved Cousin Elmira, and she felt her loss, as we feel the loss of those whom we have served and tended. And when, a few days later, a funeral procession again moved from Charles Day's house,—a funeral procession in which there was none to dispute Elmira's right to the very first place of all,—the one among all the mourners whose heart was stricken with a genuine, personal sorrow was the one among them all who had once suffered grievous things at her hands.

To those troublous times long past we may be sure that Katherine gave no thought that day; indeed there was no room for any other feeling in her heart beside the deep, reverent tenderness in which was henceforth wrapped about the very name of her old enemy.

PART II

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
  And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
  Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this!"

CHAPTER I

A YOUNG IDEALIST

> "I will pass by, and see their happiness,
> And envy none — being just as great, no doubt,
> Useful to men, and dear to God, as they!"

WHEN Katherine Day returned from Europe, whither she and Winny had gone under the pilotage of the younger Miss Hancock shortly after Cousin Elmira's death, she found her small old world curiously bewildering. It was late October, and she, with Archie, who had been of their party that summer, went immediately to their grandmother's house, where it would be difficult to say whether the familiarity of the old environment or the unfamiliarity of her own position in it struck Katherine more forcibly. Here was the old family house, throning on terraced ground well back from the road, with the reddening woodbine on the rear veranda and the yellowing rose-vines in front. Within, not a carpet in the spacious rooms had been changed, not a piece of upholstery renewed, during the two years' absence which had seemed so long and important a period. The same tall pier-glasses above their low marble slabs faced one another in the long parlor with their endless reiteration of identical images; the same portraits and landscapes hung on the walls, the very same plants flourished in the dining-room windows.

Nor had the *dramatis personæ* of the pleasantly homely stage undergone more change than the scene itself. Grandmother Day in her black silk dress and delicate white muslin "bosom" looked not a minute older; Aunt Fanny, the widow, was still indulging in a persistent mourning alleviated only by the perusal of very much the same dull volumes which had occupied her attention from time immemorial, and which she was fond of reading aloud as often as she could entrap a listener. Even the old servants were still in charge of kitchen and chambers, while the great Apostle's humble namesake, Peter, gave the impression of being as ready for a sober-minded jig on the floor of the stable as ever he was.

But amid these familiar surroundings, so well calculated to make her feel like a child again, Katherine found herself suddenly promoted to an almost equal footing with the redoubtable Olympians of a few years ago; and this state of things it was which sometimes confused her mind.

Grandmother Day had never been abroad herself. She had been on the point of going, with her husband, when his untimely death intervened; and although she would not have owned to so romantic a sense of loyalty, yet the truth was that she had never had the heart for this supreme indulgence since it had been denied him. She entertained a vast respect, however, for those who had enjoyed that privilege, and in the travelled Katherine, slender as was her equipment in point of years, her grandmother recognized an advantage which she herself did not possess.

"I suppose the French cooking is really a good deal better than ours," Mrs. Day opined, speaking from behind the big silver breakfast urn, the first Sunday

after the home-coming of her grandchildren; and it is doubtful whether the old lady was as much gratified as she ought to have been by Katherine's assurance that no French *chef* ever conceived a dish equal to old Hannah's fishballs.

"Did you visit the *Conciergerie* when you were in Paris?" inquired Aunt Fanny, who, under the stimulus of her marriage to a bookish invalid, had achieved Carlyle's *French Revolution*, thereby rendering herself forever thrall to the memory of the unhappy Marie Antoinette.

Indeed they did, Katherine assured her, eagerly ready to give a minute description of those chill vaults.

"It must have seemed peopled with ghosts,"—and Aunt Fanny shuddered at the mere thought of the scenes that had so wrought themselves into her shrinking imagination. Whereupon Archie, perceiving that the conversation was about to broaden out into general topics, beat an apologetic retreat.

"Not with ghosts, perhaps," the young girl replied, mischievously. "It was something worse than ghosts that we encountered there."

"Rats, perhaps," Grandmother Day suggested, with an answering twinkle.

"Worse than rats," was the laughing reply. "It was nothing short of a preposterous Herr von Wappenkoppenstein, who fell in love with Winny and me on the steamer going over."

"Not in love with you both," Mrs. Day interposed; indeed so trifling a tone on a serious subject would hardly have escaped censure two years ago,—but then it would hardly have been ventured upon.

"Yes,—desperately in love with us both," Katherine

repeated, quick to avail herself of a latitude of speech as new as it was agreeable. "He found it so difficult to choose between us, that he was driven to consulting Miss Hancock,—as to our respective fortunes!"

"I hope Amelia Hancock had the good sense to send him about his business!"

"But you see she did not understand his drift! He was really very clever about it, and when he had elicited the information he wanted,—namely, that Winny had nothing in her own right,—he at once concluded that he preferred straight brown hair to a golden fluff, and plain features to pretty ones!"

"Katherine!" Aunt Fanny remonstrated, letting her buttered toast drop into her plate. But Grandmother Day was inclined to condone the amazing flippancy of the tale, if only for the sake of its unmistakably foreign flavor.

"And did he really make you an offer?" she asked.

"Oh, yes; and I was so flattered at being preferred to Winny that I was near accepting him on the spot,—him and his dreadful little *Schloss* in Baden, that he showed us a picture of, and his inordinate taste for travel, and his wheezy flute that he played at the concert for the sailors' box."

"It must have been dreadfully embarrassing to meet him again in Paris," Aunt Fanny surmised. Fortunately for this tender-hearted bookworm she, having accepted her very first offer, had herself been spared the nightmare of rejected suitors.

"Oh, no; not a bit! He introduced us to his new wife and told me in a stage aside that she was the ideal he had so long sought in vain. And before the *concierge* arrived, with his keys and his clatter, Herr von Wap-

penkoppenstein had got it out of Miss Hancock that Winny was already *Braut*, while I was not,—which caused him to treat me with such pitying consideration that I was half inclined to believe that I had made the mistake of a lifetime. Fancy how amiable he must have been!"

"That was, of course, on your second visit to Paris, since it was after the engagement," Mrs. Day observed. She was thinking to herself that this granddaughter of hers, with her fine, spirited face and her ready tongue, was a girl after her own heart.

"Yes; you know it was in Paris that it all came about,"—and, at the memory of this great happiness Katherine fell suddenly serious. The engagement of Winny and Archie meant almost as much to her as to the lovers themselves, and she could not yet think of it without emotion.

That her grandmother, however, took no such exalted view of this sudden infatuation on the part of two immature young persons, was clear from the promptness with which she struck the practical key.

"I only hope," she remarked, drily, as she replenished her own coffee cup, "that Mr. and Mrs. Gerald will have the good judgment to let those children wait until Archie has made up his mind how he proposes to support a family."

"Oh, I am sure Archie will soon settle down into some regular occupation," was Katherine's confident reply; "though of course it 's not as if he had n't an independent income to begin with."

"Independent fiddlesticks!" Mrs. Day retorted, with unusual tartness. "And how long do you suppose his famous income will last if he has nothing to do but spend it?"

"Oh, Grandmother! I don't believe Archie would live beyond his income. He may be a little extravagant now, but I don't think he 's quite accountable. It's only that he can think of nothing but pleasing Winny."

"And can't he please Winny without spending hundreds of dollars on an engagement-ring?"

Katherine's face fell; she too had had her misgivings about that ring, the more disquieting because of the pride and explicitness with which Winny herself had named the exact sum expended.

"I 'm afraid," she admitted reluctantly, "that they neither of them quite realize the value of money. They have always had what they wanted without any effort."

"Well, the sooner they learn to realize it the better for all concerned," Grandmother Day declared, with an asperity which betokened a curious lack of sympathy in this apparently unexceptionable love-affair. "They are certainly unfitted, both of them, for the serious responsibilities of life";—with which final dictum the speaker left her seat, thus putting an end to the discussion.

And Katherine went to the piano,—her father's piano, which had been brought over from the old house,—and played herself into tune again before church-time. She was not much of a musician, at least according to the strenuous standard of to-day, but she loved her Beethoven and her Chopin, and she thought more of what they had to say to her than of her own performance. And, as she played, she let her thoughts wander in the happy paths of this delightful romance, unhindered by any misgivings such as her grandmother's tone would surely have awakened, had

she been more familiar with the workings of that clear and well-balanced mind.

Archie, after his graduation the previous June, had joined the travellers in Switzerland. He had come over, in fact, with a view to spending a year or two at the *Beaux Arts*, having recently adopted the theory that he was to become an architect. This was the third profession the young man had fixed his choice upon in as many years, and it would be vain to deny that the prospect of seeing life in Paris had played a decisive part in his light-minded deliberations. But scarcely had he spent a week in the society of his old playmate,—there among the mighty Alps, where each flower blooms with a more vivid hue, each brooklet rushes with a more impetuous dash and sparkle, than in the lowland,—when he discovered that he had mistaken his vocation; that he had, in short, been created, not for law, not for journalism, nor yet for architecture, but simply and solely to the end that he should acquire the bewitching, exasperating young beauty whose name was Winny Gerald, as his own inalienable possession.

To Katherine the romance that unfolded itself in face of the shining Jungfrau was pure poetry; in the sudden passion of Archie as in the maidenly coyness of Winny she found no flaw, and, from the first, she watched its budding and its blossoming with a happy faith that the ideal fitness of it must ensure a prosperous outcome.

For Katherine was an idealist, as one need but to listen to her playing to discover. She never struck a false note, to be sure, but how then did she get over the difficult passages? One meant to listen critically,—now was the chance with all those double thirds of

Chopin's, which were manifestly beyond her grasp. But,—what a touching, moving melody that was, and how she made it sing! And the harmony! What a lovely change of key! And now, how all the complications resolved themselves back into,— why! they were past, the difficulties were past, and how had those imperfectly trained fingers avoided all offence?

Yes, Katherine was an idealist; she had the gift of seizing the higher significance, the gift of oblivion to the lower.

There had been much in the circumstances of her life to encourage this tendency. In nearly all of those with whom she had hitherto been brought into close contact there had existed something to stimulate the imagination, to beguile the judgment. Her father, her brother, and her nearest friend, had one and all been possessed of unusual personal charm, a thing to which she was constitutionally susceptible. And whatever of disillusionment the future might hold in store for her, one, at least, of the three had passed beyond its reach. Her filial piety was never to suffer a chill; her father's memory was as safe from earthly blemish as her dreams of the unremembered young mother whom she still unconsciously classed with the spotless angels of a far-away heaven. And even Cousin Elmira, whose seamy side the child had such bitter knowledge of, stood glorified and interpreted to her later understanding in the light of a great love and a great denial. Yes, Katherine was an idealist, and her idealism had always found much to sustain it.

Both children,—for children they both were,—had taken her into their confidence during those weeks of courtship, quite as if she had been their elder; whereas, as a matter of fact, even Winny had lived a few

months longer than Katherine. Miss Hancock, deeply interested in her guide-books, had been amusingly oblivious to that which was going on directly under her powerful eye-glasses. If, indeed, any feature of the situation caught her attention, it was the eagerness with which both Archie and Winny seemed to cultivate Katherine's society. At last, however, there came a time when confidences ceased, when Katherine was unceremoniously relegated to the companionship of the chaperone, with whom she found herself constrained to improve her mind at a quite astonishing rate. This was during the first week in Paris, and by the time the enthusiastic Miss Hancock had exhausted her resources in an effort to persuade her quondam pupil that the Henris and the Philippes, the Marguerites and the Dianes of other days superseded all contemporary interests, there came a confession before which bygone battles and intrigues promptly vanished into the limbo reserved for them.

"Well, Katherine," Winny remarked, one memorable rainy morning, as the two girls sat together at their weekly mending, Archie having been dispatched to the *Théâtre Français* in search of tickets,—"Well, Katherine!"

Winny spoke the words in her smallest voice, which was a very small voice indeed, and which at once threw Katherine into a disproportionate tumult of joyful suspense. Regardless of the critical point at which her darning had arrived, she hastily extricated her hand from Archie's sock and waited for more.

"Why don't you ask any questions?" Winny demanded, taking refuge in the pretty petulance which was so becoming to her.

"I think I don't need to," Katherine answered,

coming over to Winny's window and dropping on her knees beside the girl. "You know how glad I am," she whispered; "you know that; don't you, Winny?" —and that was the manner in which the great news was broken.

"Oh, you funny old Katherine!" Winny exclaimed, looking down into her new sister's face, which was quite transfigured with feeling; "I should think it was you that were engaged!"

"Oh, that could n't possibly be so wonderful and beautiful," Katherine declared with conviction.

"Why not?"

"Well, because I am only I, and you,—why you are Winny and Archie both; don't you see? So everything is doubled!"

Winny continued her study of Katherine's countenance, and a singular expression came into her own.

"Do you know, Katherine," she said, giving a speculative tilt to her pretty head, "if Archie had been like you, I don't believe I should ever have accepted him."

"Of course you would n't!—because then he would n't have been Archie."

"No; that 's not what I mean. I was only thinking,"—and the child actually blushed a little,—"I was only thinking that I should have been afraid of him,—he would have expected so much."

"And Archie? does n't he expect—so much?"

"No; Archie is ready to take things just as they are."

"And don't you suppose I should take things as they are?"

"Not in the same way; you would always be expecting more of me than I could live up to."

Katherine shook her head, unconvinced.

"Archie is dreadfully in love with me, of course," Winny continued, with a little self-conscious smile; "but he would n't be if I,—well, if I squinted. It 's my eyes and my nose and my chin he 's in love with;—he as much as told me so."

"And you, Winny;—what are you in love with?"

"Oh, that would be telling," the child retorted, with an irresistible little grimace; and Katherine loved her the better for keeping her own counsel.

Presently, in deference perhaps to that reserve which seemed to her so charming, Katherine got up from her knees and went to the window, where she stood watching for Archie. Whereupon Winny, who had followed the movement with a certain amused interest,—for Katherine's enthusiasms always seemed to her exaggerated,—asked suddenly: "Katherine, do you remember the day we played on the piazza that I was a queen and you were a gypsy?"

"Indeed I do," Katherine laughed; "I remember you were dreadfully grasping and took the best of everything."

"And how fierce you were when I told you you could have second best!"

"Of course I was! And there comes Archie! Wave to him, Winny, wave to him!"

To-day, only two months later, as Katherine sat at her father's piano sending her fingers over the swelling arpeggios of the great *Sonata Pathétique*, the picture of Archie's handsome, ardent face looking up through the rain was vividly before her eyes. She remembered how Winny had stood up and waved, and then, turning abruptly away from the window, had said, in a matter-of-fact voice: "There 's one good thing

about it, Katherine; we sha' n't have to quarrel over princes! There 's nothing now to prevent your having one of your own!"

Suddenly the solemn admonitory tone of church-bells struck across the flying arpeggios, and simultaneously came Grandmother Day's voice at the parlor door asking: "Are you nearly ready for church, Katherine?"

"Nearly ready, Grandmother," and Katherine sprang to her feet and ran up to her room, laughing softly over the guilty start she had given at the sudden interruption of her meditations.

"As if princes were so plenty as all that!" she scoffed, under her breath, as she put on her hat before the mirror.

It was a charming hat, and extremely becoming, and there was really very little fault to be found with the appearance of the young person whose eyes met hers in the glass. But Katherine was still under the spell of curly hair and blue eyes, and it was with anything but self-satisfaction that she turned away from the glass and passed sedately down the stairs, singing, with much conviction, a little German song, the burden of which was a request that the mother of the songstress should not waste her time in sewing upon a red Sarafan. Katherine had not the remotest idea what a red Sarafan might be, although she assumed that it was something extremely decorative; and Mrs. Day, at the foot of the stairs, listening to the pretty lyric,—the words of which were quite unintelligible to her,—was not inspired to reply with the classic *Mütterlein* in the song that youth would come but once and the child had better make the most of it.

What she did say was: "That 's a very becoming

hat you have on, Katherine!"—perhaps as satisfactory a form of encouragement as the more sentimental admonition of the song. And it would be unfair to assume that any thought of princes lent warmth to the grateful enthusiasm with which the young girl cried:

"Oh, Grandmother! what a lovely compliment! It 's the very first one you ever made me!"

CHAPTER II

OBSTACLES

> "Greed and strife,
> Hatred and cark and care, what place have they
> In yon blue liberality of heaven?"

THAT Mrs. Day's concern regarding a hasty marriage on the part of her grandson was gratuitous, she herself would have been the first to recognize, had she been in possession of certain facts which had recently come to the knowledge of the young lady's father. For that same acquaintance with Mr. Gerald's character which had led her to fear that he might be hasty in marrying his daughter to Archie's very respectable fortune would then have reassured her, in that particular at least, although at the price of a more serious cause of anxiety. Grandmother Day was very well aware that this neighbor of hers, whom she had known, boy and man, all his life, had an inordinate respect for money; she was even discriminating enough to perceive that he esteemed it not for its own sake, but for that which it would buy.

Horace Gerald was, in fact, anything but miserly in his disposition; not hoarding, but love of display, was his foible, and he had been rather ostentatiously gratified by the prospect of a rich son-in-law. The chill to his pride had been the more severe, when, by

the merest chance, he had learned that the young man had already, while at college, begun to live beyond his income. The information had come to him,—by accident, as has been stated, but from an entirely trustworthy source,—only a few days before the arrival of the travellers. He did not confide his unpleasant discovery even to his wife,— an amiable, inexacting woman, with a positive genius for meek acquiescence. He merely informed her that, for reasons best known to himself, he had decided to postpone his daughter's marriage, and Mrs. Gerald, though loath to give up the June wedding, did her best to believe that the young people would be none the worse for waiting a year.

"It is no more than we had to do ourselves, Horace," she remarked, pulling a slightly withered blossom off the rose-geranium in the sunny sitting-room window. She was sorry to see her flowers fade, but she had no lingering tenderness for them when the process had once begun.

Mr. Gerald, less grateful than he should have been for a docility with which custom had made him unappreciatively familiar, answered somewhat testily: "I fail to see that the two cases are at all parallel, my dear"; upon which his wife, finding no more candidates for rejection among the geranium-blossoms, proceeded to tend and water with much care that portion of her small horticultural exhibit which had had the good judgment to resist decay.

It was a pleasant picture that she made among her flowers, for this mother of a family had herself preserved much of the flower-like beauty which her daughter Winny had inherited. Here was the same order of hair and eyes and complexion whose orthodox

prettiness held Katherine's imagination captive; here, somewhat modified by the hand of time, but still recognizable, was the same delicacy of contour and piquancy of line which had been the despair of Archie during the few weeks of uncertainty that had seemed an eternity to the unchastened ardor of the boy. If, indeed, Winny had resembled her mother as closely in moral as in physical characteristics; in other words, if,—to borrow Elmira Faxon's audacious thought,—a child might have had but one parent, it would have been safe to predict a smooth and superficially beneficent career for the young beauty on whom both Charles Day's children had so firmly set their affections.

Now Mrs. Gerald had probably never, in the whole course of her life, opposed her husband; but neither had she coerced her children. So that when, on the morning following the demise of the rose-geranium flower, Winny demanded at her hands a reason for the postponement of the wedding, this docile wife had not the slightest hesitation in placing the responsibility for the change where it belonged.

"I 'm sure I don't know, Winny," she declared, "why your father has thought best to put off the wedding; but we must suppose that he has good reasons for doing so."

They had been unpacking the Paris trunks, and it was not without a pang that Mrs. Gerald had reflected that a certain exquisite organdy muslin, peculiarly adapted for a bridal *trousseau*, would perhaps be out of fashion by another summer.

"It 's not that I have any great objection to waiting," Winny said, coolly; "I don't believe I shall like being married half as well as I like being engaged.

But I do think people might give their reasons if they have any."

"We waited two years,—your father and I," Mrs. Gerald observed, with a wistful look at the pretty organdy, as she laid it to one side.

"I don't see any resemblance between the two cases!"

The tone of this rejoinder, no less than the words, would have convinced the discriminating listener that Miss Winny's inheritances, like those of the rest of us, were dual in their source.

"Why not?" her mother asked, really curious to know what had led the girl to make her father's retort.

"Simply that in your case the money was yours, and in our case it happens to be Archie's!"

Now, strange as it may seem, this patent fact had quite escaped Mrs. Gerald's attention,—if, indeed, it had not slipped her memory. Its enunciation gave her something of a shock. Was it possible that Winny,—her little Winny, hardly out of pinafores as it seemed to her,—could entertain considerations of a monetary nature? Yes, the money had been hers, and her father had perhaps been wise in testing the character and business ability of his daughter's suitor before entrusting her and her little fortune to his keeping. But it is only fair to state that these were facts to which Mrs. Gerald never gave a thought. The money had passed into her husband's hands, and she had all but forgotten that it had ever belonged to her. That her own daughter should have been the one to remind her of it made her quite uncomfortable. Was this one of the effects of foreign life? She almost wished she had kept the girl at home, though—how beautifully her dresses were made and how well she did her hair!

"Any one would know you had been in Paris," she contented herself with observing; "I have always understood that the French paid great attention to money considerations."

"You mean when they are going to be married?" the girl asked brusquely. "Well, I should say they had better! I don't think parents have any right to let their children marry poor."

"That 's because you happen to be in love with a rich man," Mrs. Gerald answered easily.

"But I should n't happen to be in love with him if he were poor."

"Not with Archie?"

"No!"

"But Winny! how could you help yourself?" her mother cried, incredulous. Mrs. Gerald was beginning to feel quite crude and unsophisticated in face of this advanced young person.

"Now, Mamma, there 's no use in arguing, for I can meet you at every point. I have been practising on Katherine for two years."

"And what should you say to Katherine if she were to ask you how you could help being in love with Archie?"

"I should say what is quite true, that I could have helped it perfectly while it was,—well, while it was coming on! Of course now," she admitted, hiding her face behind the lid of her trunk, but not before her mother had caught a charming little blush and smile, "it would n't be so easy. Nobody could ever suit me as Archie does."

"And do you discuss all this with Katherine?"

"Not now, not since we are engaged; she takes everything for granted now.—Katherine is so unpractical."

"Unpractical? Why, Winny, what do you mean? She kept house beautifully for nearly two years before Miss Faxon died!"

"Yes, and she can darn Archie's socks a great deal better than I could if I would,—which I never mean to do,—but for all that she is unpractical."

"Well, Winny!" Mrs. Gerald sighed, unfolding a new and elaborate *fichu*, the use of which in the scheme of things did not at once suggest itself to her mind; "I can't say that I always understand you since you came home!"

"It's that *fichu* that you don't understand," Winny laughed, springing to her feet. "Here! let me have it; I 'll show you how it goes"; and as she deftly tossed and turned the dainty film of lace for her mother's enlightenment, she continued, in the same good cause: "All I mean about Katherine is, that she never seems to pay attention to practical things. Now, if she were to marry a poor man, she would quite forget that her money had ever been hers. You may not believe it, Mamma, but such things do happen!" and with that Miss Winny flung the lace about her own pretty throat and stepped to the mirror, wherein her reflected image gave her mother such a playful, child-like smile, that Mrs. Gerald rose to her feet much consoled, remarking comfortably:

"There, Winny! I had no idea you were so fond of hearing yourself talk!"

Winny, like the true artist she was, never lost an opportunity of practising her art, even on the most unlikely subjects. Mother, or great-aunt, or kitchen-maid might serve her turn well enough in the absence of those abnormally impressionable beings of the masculine variety whom she had every reason to

regard as her natural prey. Hence, if she had made no attempt to wheedle her father into more reasonable views with regard to the postponed wedding, we may suppose that she was quite sincere in telling her mother that she had no objection to waiting.

Winny was very much in love with Archie Day,—with his attractive personality, his ready wit, and, above all, his charming love-making. She knew, as she had declared, that no one could have suited her so well. Other men seemed to her clumsy and obtuse compared with Archie; her experience had been that the more they cared for her the less she cared for them,—and she had never entertained scruples about testing their sentiments and her own to the bitter end. But, if Archie was the ideal lover, she was well content with him in that capacity. Indeed, it was an oft-recurring misgiving that she had expressed when she told her mother that she might not like being married half as well as she liked being engaged. She had almost said as much to Archie the previous evening, thus throwing him into what his grandmother would have characterized as "a state of mind."

It was on that same first Sunday after their return from Europe,—the day when Katherine had made of her Beethoven a melodious commentary upon the little idyll of their love affair,—that Mr. Gerald, strong in a parental authority upon which he obviously plumed himself, had informed Archie that he was not to marry Winny until he had proved himself capable of earning a living. The interview was short but decisive; for Archie was quick to see the uselessness of opposition,—on his part at least. It was the first time since his father's death that he had come face to face with an impregnable authority; but his

boyhood's experience stood him in good stead. Here was what he was used to of old,—a curt prohibition, no reason stated, no remonstrance admitted.

"You seem to leave my personal fortune quite out of account," he had remarked, holding himself well in hand, as he had done so many times when far less was at stake.

"Personal fortunes are not to be relied upon," Mr. Gerald condescended to explain. "If a man has n't business capacity a fortune 's about the worst handicap there is; and if a man has business capacity, he 'll earn a living, fortune or no fortune."

As he enunciated this high-sounding axiom, Horace Gerald was filled with admiration for his own sagacity, while Archie, who, with all his faults, was of finer fibre than his antagonist, felt that he was being bullied; and he straightway revenged himself by remembering that his father had accused this self-important marplot of swaggering.

But although Archie had shown plenty of tact in his interview with Mr. Gerald, he was by no means as submissive as he appeared; and it was upon Winny's intervention that he relied for the reversal of an iniquitous judgment.

The young man had sternly refused Mrs. Gerald's invitation to tea, urging his grandmother's claims upon his society on that first Sunday, but it was well understood that this spasm of filial devotion would hardly embrace the evening in its reach; and Winny had no hesitancy in opening the door herself at the first footfall that sounded on the steps. She was not always so indulgent as that, but she realized that this was an occasion when she could not be too kind.

"I thought it would be you," she said, lifting the

sweetest face to be kissed; and Archie could hardly credit his good fortune in being thus privileged on the very threshold. Had his perceptions been as keen here as where Winny's father was concerned, he might have been somewhat less elated; for then he would have known how to interpret such affability.

"Oh, Winny!" he exclaimed, under his breath,—prolonging the embrace for an unconscionable number of seconds,—"Oh, Winny! they sha'n't bully us; shall they?"

"Bully us? Why, what do you mean?" she asked, extricating herself from the insatiable Archie with an ease and grace acquired through long practice. "Come into the parlor,—there 's nobody there,—and don't use bad language."

"Bad language, indeed!" cried the injured lover, following the girl into the softly lighted room, where he promptly selected a friendly shadow as a desirable adjunct to the situation; "if the language is bad, what do you call the thing?"

"It 's a thing I don't know anything about," Miss Winny replied, demurely, ignoring the shadowy and hospitable sofa toward which Archie seemed disposed to lead her. "Come! Let us sit by the table. There 's a better light here, and—I want to see how you look when you are cross!"

"Oh, Winny, how can you?" Archie protested, standing helpless beside the table, since there was no room for a chair in Winny's immediate neighborhood.

"Please go and sit down," she begged, "or you will oblige me to stand up. It 's like talking to an obelisk,—only we don't seem to be in the Place de la Concorde, do we, dear?" Wereupon Archie adroitly begged the question by dropping upon one knee before her.

"You know, Winny," he urged, "that it was there under the old Tuileries trees, in sight of the obelisk, that you promised!"

"Promised what?" she queried, letting him have one of her hands, since he seemed in need of some support.

"Promised for June."

"Oh, but I did n't promise—really. I could n't promise anything without permission."

"But you as good as got permission by letter."

"I know, but I think I must have misunderstood that letter; for papa seems very decided."

"But, Winny! you could persuade him; you know you could!"

"And supposing he should be in the right after all? He 's a great deal older and—"

"Nonsense, Winny! you know better than that!"—and now he had both her hands. "You know that we are neither of us children to be bullied,—I mean dictated to like that! If you would only beg him to be reasonable and if you would be sweet to him,—the way you are to me, sometimes,—he never could deny you anything. Say you will, Winny; say you will make him do as we like!"

Then Winny frowned perplexedly and very prettily, and, drawing her right hand from the grasp of Archie's left, placed it thoughtfully on top of the other.

"Archie," she asked, with the sweetest little cadence,—and, of a truth, it was only Archie who knew all the possibilities of sweetness in that voice and face,—"Archie, don't you like being engaged to me?"

"Like it?" he cried thoughtlessly; "I could n't live another day without it."

"But, Archie, we shall never be engaged again; did you ever think of that?"

"Never be engaged again? Why, what are you driving at?"

"Only that when it comes to an end—it 's over; when once we are married—"

Then began the state of mind.

"You mean to say that you would rather be engaged than married?" he cried, ruthlessly pulling his left hand away from its comfortable berth between two soft detaining ones and springing angrily to his feet.

"Oh, you are cross to-night, Archie," the girl lamented; and then, with a half-petulant, half-conciliatory smile: "I did n't suppose people were ever like that,—when they were only engaged."

"Only engaged! And is that why you don't want to be married? Is it because you won't trust me? Perhaps you think I 'm one of those brutes that don't know how to treat a wife! If that 's your opinion of me—" and the poor boy looked so aggrieved and distracted that Winny was seized with compunction. —From which it will be seen that she was, indeed, very much in love,—too much in love to care to make him suffer.

She stood up, and, going over to him, where he had turned away to hide his face, that was quite distorted with painful emotion, she put her hand on his shoulder very gently, and said: "Please, Archie, don't let us have a lovers' quarrel; they sometimes end badly."

"And you will persuade your father?" he asked, when, after all, they were safely established on that shadowy sofa.

"I will ask him at any rate," she consented, with a mental reservation which was happily unguessed by him; "but you must n't expect very much. He 's not easy to influence, and he 's not likely to find his own

daughter irresistible. Why, even you get unmanageable if I differ with you."

"Only about that one thing."

"Yes, but that 's the very thing,—and it seems to be a dreadfully dangerous subject. Do you think, Archie,"—and she gently touched his sleeve,—"do you think you can forgive me if I fail?"

"I can forgive you anything, Winny, if you will only say that you do really and truly want to marry me,—not just to be engaged, but to be married forever and ever."

And looking up into his ardent, beseeching face, that was still quite sad and drawn with anxiety, she said solemnly: "If I looked forward to anything but that, Archie, I should be perfectly miserable."

She meant it too with all her heart, and Archie knew she meant it, and he was supremely happy; for it was the greatest admission she had ever made.

And yet,—how blind and deaf are lovers! Not only had the girl not yielded an inch on the main point, but the experience of the evening had but confirmed her in her instinctive feeling. Indeed, it was the very next morning, when she and her mother were drawn into their little confidential talk over the Paris trunks, that she put her feeling into words; and it was perhaps not without a half-resentful reminiscence of the unmanageableness of Archie, and of the concessions, insignificant as they were, which had been wrested from her, that she found herself formulating the conviction: "I don't believe I shall like being married half so well as I like being engaged."

CHAPTER III

GARDEN COUNSELS

> "Old folk and young folk, still at odds, of course!
> Age quarrels because Spring puts forth a leaf
> While Winter has a mind that boughs stay bare."

IN justice to the disconsolate Archie, it should at once be stated that, had he been made aware of his prospective father-in-law's reasons for putting him on probation, he would have felt fairly confident of success in combating them. Furthermore, if such confidence was undoubtedly due in large measure to a sanguine temperament, it could hardly be conceived to exist side by side with a very bad conscience.

Yet Mr. Gerald had not been misinformed with regard to that ill-advised encroaching upon his capital which the young man had been reported guilty of. On the contrary, the facts were very much as they had been represented, and they were in large measure due to regrettable causes.

Archie, popular at college as elsewhere, had fallen in with a fast set of men,—men much richer than himself, and whose manner of cutting a dash waked in him a lively spirit of emulation. Especially during the last two years, when home influences, as personified in Katherine, had been temporarily eliminated,

—and in his case, impressionable as he was to influence of any sort, the loss was a real one,—things had come to a pretty bad pass. The boy took to drinking hard and playing high, and if he never openly disgraced himself, it was only because his excesses were the outcome rather of a genial conviviality than of any really downright vicious tendency. The upshot of it was, however, that he presently found himself in financial straits, and, having a year or two previous attained his majority, he now took the most obvious way out of his difficulties by the simple device of selling a bond or two.

The transaction proved so easy of execution, and, in its immediate consequences, so entirely innocuous, that he had the less hesitation in repeating it, when, a few weeks later, a more legitimate cause for expenditure presented itself. It happened that his attention had been called to the case of a struggling sophomore who was working his way through college, and who suddenly found himself blocked by an unlooked-for family emergency which called for immediate intervention. The young fellow was doggedly submitting to the inevitable and preparing to leave college, when help reached him anonymously and his career was saved.

If Archie did not especially pride himself on this exercise of liberality,—which was none the less creditable because it was known only to the man who acted as intermediary,—it is also true that the incident really made only a transitory impression upon him. He had, to be sure, acted upon a generous impulse, and had performed a signal service in behalf of one who was an indifferent stranger to him. But he had done so at no immediate inconvenience to himself. The sale of another government bond had cost him

scarcely a shadow of misgiving. His little fortune, the control of which he had so recently acquired, still seemed to the boy inexhaustible. But, even had it been otherwise, he was of too improvident a temperament to have been much concerned about consequences. Nor did any sense of virtue arising from this superficially magnanimous act play an appreciable part in his self-confidence. The simple fact of the matter was that although Archie would not have been in a position to deny certain damaging allegations against his conduct in the past, he was himself so heartily convinced that his wild oats were once for all sown, reaped, and scattered to the winds, that it would have seemed an easy task to bring another to the same point of view.

In the general sense of respectability attendant upon the acquisition of his degree,—an achievement, by the way, which had once seemed more than doubtful,—he had found his mind invaded with numbers of good resolutions; and, since neither poker nor punch again came in his way with quite the ease and seductiveness attending their enjoyment during his college days, it cost him little to renounce them. By the time the young spendthrift had joined his sister and her friends abroad he had almost forgotten the meaning of a poker term, and if, during the days of his courtship, he could have wished that his record had been a spotless one, he was none the less firmly persuaded that the sins of his youth were a thing of the past.

"Winny," he had said one day on the home voyage, when the two young people stood at the stern railing, behind the wheel-house of the good old *Mosel*, watching the prismatic colors in the steamer's snowy wake, "I wish I had always been good enough for you."

"Nonsense, Archie!" Miss Winny had retorted. "That 's the way novel heroes talk,—reformed reprobates who are about to confess their past."

"No, I don't mean that I was ever so bad as all that, or that I 've ever done anything worth confessing; only, when I think of you,—which I am engaged in doing pretty much all the time,—I feel as if I should like—"

"Now, Archie, you need n't get sentimental about it,"—and Winny gave him a look which made her words sound like music,—"I know perfectly well that you are plenty good enough for me."

"Yes, Winny, I believe I am now," Archie assented; "that is,—as much so as any fellow could be! But that 's only since—last summer!"

The conviction with which the young man had made this avowal had never left him. However he might have transgressed in the past, that was over and done with. Since last summer he had passed beyond the reach of temptation. And so convinced was he of his own complete reform, that he would not have doubted his ability to instill into the mind of the most obdurate father-in-law a like implicit faith.

But Mr. Gerald, as we have seen, gave him no such opportunity. The astute autocrat steadfastly kept his own counsel, and with equal steadfastness persisted in his determination to test his young neighbor before trusting him. And the worst of it was, to Archie's thinking, that many of those who should have known better were disposed to range themselves on the side of tyranny as against the sweet reasonableness of youthful desires. Indeed Winny's father had probably never stood so well with the community at large as he did at this juncture. From Grandmother Day down,

nearly all of those personally interested in the affair were ready to credit him with more good sense than they had hitherto supposed him to possess; and Archie, sensitive to a moral atmosphere long before it had distilled into words, felt cruelly chilled and checked.

As for Winny, although she had declared herself on his side, and although she had begged her father very prettily to withdraw his opposition to the June wedding, the disquieting fact remained that she had not succeeded, and it was hard for Archie to believe that she had done her best. Yet whenever he broached the subject with her, he was sure to be worsted. Her tactics were extremely simple, and she never found it necessary to vary them.

"Oh, Winny," he would protest, "you can't have done your best! Your father never could refuse anything if you used all your influence!"

"But I do, Archie, indeed I do!"

"No, Winny, it can't be! He could n't resist you if you were—like you are with me, sometimes."

"But, Archie, how can I be like that with him?"

And the fatuous lover could never refrain from asking: "Why not?"—nor did he ever fail to be propitiated, and momentarily disarmed, by the self-evident but none the less delectable reply:

"Because,—oh, Archie, you know why! because," and the sweetest voice in the world would drop so low that he was obliged to draw very near in order to catch the words: "because I don't love him,—the way I love you!"

Yes, momentarily he was disarmed; for that one delicious hour he was soothed and beguiled into something akin to acquiescence. But afterward the sense of injury was sure to reassert itself, and then, angry,

baffled, distracted, he would take refuge in a sympathy and loyalty which could not be questioned; he would go to Katherine.

It was their second Sunday at home, and brother and sister were walking together after church, up and down the box-bordered paths of Grandmother Day's garden, passing in and out of the grape-arbor that arched the main walk, and where a few fragrant clusters had yet escaped the harvesting hand of Peter.

"I don't understand it," Katherine was saying, "I've thought it all over again and again, and I don't understand it. It seems perfectly unreasonable,"—and she could have devised no comfort which would have been so acceptable to the boy's outraged self-esteem. Of course she could not understand it, of course it was irrational!—and her recognition of its unreasonableness was the very assurance that he craved.

Archie passed his arm over his sister's shoulder, as he used long ago to do when minded to be gracious, and if there was, on his part, a less patronizing intention than of old, on hers was no least falling off in the affectionate appreciation with which the big brother's favors had always been received.

They paced up and down and in and out among the garden paths that crossed and recrossed from the four points of the compass, and ever and anon other pungent autumn smells succeeded the aroma of the grapes: —here a whiff of winter apples ripening in the sun, —there the melancholy exhalation of mouldering leaves, stirred perhaps by the passing foot that had toddled in babyhood, tripped and romped in childhood, between the borders of box whose fragrance, mingling in their earnest talk, did but deepen the

sense of lifelong association,— that homeliest and most comfortable bond between next of kin.

They were a comely pair, these children of Charles Day's, straight and tall both of them, and with other points of resemblance, as well. No one would have doubted their relationship, which was apparent in a general likeness of feature and in many a fleeting expression common to the two; but neither would any observer worthy the name have failed to note their fundamental unlikeness. It was not that Archie's hair was light and Katherine's dark, nor that his complexion was fairer and more sensitively heightened by passing emotion; neither was it that the boy had more of mere physical beauty than his sister, and,—if mouth and chin counted for anything,—somewhat less of moral strength. When all is said, the dissimilarity was not so much in mould as in substance—the kind of difference that must increase as the years go on.

"Well, dear," Katherine said at last, "I suppose we can't expect old people to see things as we do," and here she stayed her step at the end of the central walk, just where an ancient quince tree, a venerated familiar of their childhood, spread in a flat, sprangling pattern over the high boundary fence. "If even grandmother and Uncle Theodore have had the same idea about it, I suppose we must admit that Mr. Gerald may perhaps think himself in the right,"—and she moved a step away that she might look into the handsome, rebellious face she was trying to conciliate.

"But even if we were to admit it," Archie replied, with more tolerance than he could have mustered an hour ago,—for he was manifestly refreshed by the liberal draught of sympathy and confidence that had been accorded him,—"I don't see any comfort in that."

"Don't you?" Katherine answered, with more lightness of tone, and with a smile that was very good to see: "Now I think there is some comfort in having one's hateful feelings changed. Do you know, I am beginning already to feel less vindictive than I did."

"I suppose there is something in that," Archie agreed. "It 's not altogether pleasant to loathe people."

"No, it 's hateful to; that kind of feeling only hurts the person who has it. So we 'll give Mr. Gerald the benefit of the doubt; 'won't us, Oliver'?"

"Well, since you put it on that ground," Archie assented, with a humorous grimace; "I suppose we had better. Only it 's understood that it is from strictly selfish reasons."

"By all means!"—and having thus made a grant of indulgence to their elders, and satisfactorily settled the ethics of their own sentiments, the two young sages resumed their walk, in somewhat better spirits for the little diversion.

"And now we must decide what to do in case he 's obdurate," Katherine urged, her step quickening to keep pace with the energy of her proposition.

"Do? Why there 's nothing to do that I can see," Archie declared, lagging a bit, by way of protest against such briskness both of walk and speech. "They 've got it all in their own hands."

"Why—but Archie! What you 've got to do is the most important thing of all;—to carry out the conditions as fast as ever you can!"

"Hm!" Archie scoffed. "That sounds well! But how is a man going to earn his living all in a minute?"

"Oh, I don't believe it will be necessary to do more than show that you are going to do some honest work.

You see you 've got plenty of money to marry on, and if once Mr. Gerald is convinced"— and Katherine paused, but only because her thoughts had taken another turn.

"Well?"—and again they stood still, this time within the grape arbor; and Katherine, reaching up, pulled a big purple globule, and absently swallowed it,—whereupon Archie, with great seriousness, followed suit.

"After all," the girl said, with an assurance that admitted of no question; "it 's not as if he could possibly have anything against you,—your family or your character,"—and a pair of dark eyes, as trusting as they were truthful, met Archie's, constraining him to a slight deflection from the point.

"I suppose," he said, with half-hearted facetiousness, "that I might get a job as hostler."

"Yes, or even footman," Katherine laughed. "A college graduate might aim as high as footman I should think. You know they sometimes wear gloves and hand cards!"

"Oh, quit fooling, Katherine!" he cried, for in truth his own jest had been rather a subterfuge than a spontaneous sally. "Don't you see there 's not an earthly thing I can do, without grubbing years to get a start?"

"No, I don't see anything of the sort!" she declared stoutly; "I don't believe anybody has better ability than you, or a fairer chance to make it tell. If you once make a beginning,"—and she looked up into his face with an ardor of conviction that Archie would have been the last to gainsay,—"I do believe you may have everything your own way by June!"

The boy's color deepened and his eyes flashed; in

a moment his mood had changed,—success seemed within his grasp. It was because his mind had overleaped the yet uncertain and possibly laborious means, and seized upon the glittering attainment of his end,—a thing to which he was ever prone.

"Oh, Katherine!" he began, and then his speech was arrested by the sound of approaching footsteps, and, looking up and out from the shadow of the vines, they saw a stalwart figure striding toward them through the noon sunshine, while a challenging kind of voice shouted:

"I 've come out on purpose to interrupt, so I 'm not going to apologize."

"Why, Tom McLean!" Katherine cried, hurrying forward with characteristic impetuosity. "How glad I am to see you!"

And Archie, who was conscious of an uncomfortable sensation, as if he had suddenly been dropped upon bed-rock,—a foundation manifestly inhospitable to air castles,—helped himself to another grape, before inquiring carelessly, "Hullo, Thomas, where did you tumble from?"

Then the three young people turned and sauntered in animated converse across the lawn, beyond which the tall figure of Grandmother Day, standing on the back veranda under an arch of crimson woodbine, gave the finishing touch to a pleasant family scene.

CHAPTER IV

TOM

> " Youth is the only time
> To think and to decide on a great course ;
> Manhood with action follows."

"I'M not sure that I should have known you, Katherine," Tom remarked, when, an hour or more later, the two cousins found themselves in undisputed possession of the long parlor, and free to compare notes in that personal vein so dear to the heart of youth. Archie had departed, directly after dinner, for a destination easy to surmise; and grandmother and Aunt Fanny had betaken themselves to the privacy of their respective chambers, where, unmolested and unobserved, they might indulge in that gentle sabbatical meditation which so easily and imperceptibly merges into a still gentler sabbatical slumber.

"Really!" Katherine exclaimed, with undisguised interest in the subject of discussion. "I suppose it 's the pigtails that you miss."

"I did n't say I missed anything," was the non-committal rejoinder, calculated rather to conceal than to betray any complimentary sentiments on the part of the speaker such as might have been supposed to prompt his previous remark.

Indeed Tom McLean was not much given to mak-

ing complimentary speeches. If, years ago, he had almost turned his little cousin's head by telling her that she acted "dumb crambo" better than any of the Delphi girls, it had been a mere statement of fact made rather in the interest of accuracy than with a view to giving pleasure. He had always liked Katherine, but it must be admitted that his regard for her was based largely upon her claim to the unenviable titles of "tom-boy," "spitfire" and the like. She was "good as a boy,"—as high a form of praise as Tom yet had at his command for any girl. To find her grown into a *bona-fide* young lady, with long dresses and pretty manners would have been disconcerting but for a reassuring something in her speech and looks which permitted one to surmise that if she no longer climbed trees and played tag she would have very much liked to do so.

The two young people had not met for close upon five years, and, meanwhile, each had been vouchsafed a taste of life, and each had found it good. Tom indeed, had had an unusually strenuous time of it for a man of his years, and so well had hard work suited him that he was inclined to think slightingly of everything else.

This minister's son had, naturally enough, been destined by his father for one or another of the liberal professions, but Dr. McLean did not press the boy in the choice of a calling until after he had passed his college entrance-examinations,—which, by the way, was done with honors. He then gave him his choice between law, medicine and the ministry; and one may imagine the excellent man's discomfiture when his son replied that he had decided to become a stock-broker.

Then why had he worked so hard at the preparatory school?

Well, partly in order to prove to himself that he had

brains enough to be doctor or parson,—if he had not that *quantum sufficit* he was sure he had better keep out of business,—and partly because he had not wanted to make up his mind prematurely.

"You know," he remarked, "I 've been rather young—up to now!"

"Now"—that is to say at eighteen—he felt himself ripe for judgment, as he certainly proved ripe for action, since he carried his point and forthwith got himself into the Wall Street office of a college class-mate of his father's.

Dr. McLean was something of a philosopher, and, after recovering from the first shock of disappointment, he came to the conclusion that if a boy of good parts who had been brought up in Delphi,—an agreeable place of residence, to be sure, but no less innocent of stock markets than of Greek oracles,—if such a boy had set his heart on a business life, there was a fair probability that he knew what he was about. The reverend doctor, for all that pioneer service, the mention of which had long ago so fired the imagination of his little niece, had sometimes been conscious of hankerings after a bit more of the storm and stress,—nay of the very noise and dust,—of life than had fallen to his share; and as he subjected his son's countenance to an unwonted scrutiny, studying especially the outline of the bony structure as visible in temple, chin and cheek,—he concluded that there was grit enough in him to ensure a fair chance in the modern arena. He had honest eyes too and a mouth that was curiously expressive, for all its proximity to a fine but unsympathetic chin. So the boy had his way, and carried his obstinate chin and his honest eyes into Wall Street.

"Do you find, sir, that your college education has been of much real use?" he asked his chief one day when there was nothing doing, and the senior partner of Ford & Bridgman seemed momentarily aware of his existence.

"Not the Latin and the Greek of it perhaps," was the reply. "It's the social advantage that tells;"—and Tom, who had yet to learn that business as well as pleasure has its social aspect, was almost inclined to resent so irrelevant an answer.

The boy was himself rather exceptionally indifferent to what he conceived as falling under the head of social advantages, and one of the chief charms of life to him in New York had been his complete exemption from the corresponding obligations. He lived in lodgings, and foraged for his meals, nor was he conscious of the faintest or most transitory craving for a closer intercourse with his kind. He liked his work, even the drudgery of it, for he had the satisfaction of knowing himself to be a square man in a square hole; and for recreation he devoured books—especially history and biography—and took lessons in boxing.

Now it chanced that Tom McLean could hardly have served his apprenticeship in Wall Street at a more favorable period; for by the time he had got his eyes well opened in the business sense,—that is, after about three years' work,—he was treated to a uniquely instructive object-lesson in the shape of the great financial panic of 1873. In this disconcerting crisis he saw one concern after another swept off its feet and engulfed in the general ruin, while the house he served stood firm; and he would not have been possessed of the business acumen which alone could justify his choice of a calling, had he been slow to perceive why

Ford & Bridgman were weathering the storm, nor why so many had been swamped.

"You 're learning a thing or two these days," Luther Bridgman, his father's friend remarked, the morning Waters & Co. went down on Q. D.

"I know it," Tom answered,—and there was something in the boy's enunciation of this laconic reply which fixed it in the mind of his superior.

"That young McLean is getting the hang of things," Bridgman remarked to his senior in the firm a day or two later.

"Yes, I 've noticed it," was the reply; which, coming from one whose notice was about as well worth having as that of any man in Wall Street, meant a good deal.

"Shall we ask Henckelmann for half a million?" inquired a voice from a neighboring desk.

Colonel Ford ran his fingers through a pile of papers before him, without, however, taking special cognizance of them.

"Hm! better make it a million," was his casual rejoinder.

Then, picking up the thread he had dropped:—
"The boy 's steady, too," he observed.

The great panic ran its course, like any other elemental storm,—growing, culminating, breaking, subsiding,—and in the period of general stagnation that ensued, the future came to look somewhat less glittering to our young broker's clerk; insomuch that he was occasionally tempted to wonder whether it might not have proved quite as stimulating to study the pulse of a patient or the conscience of a sinner as to keep the in-and-out books at Ford & Bridgman's. And then, after several years of more or less instruc-

tive drudgery,—remunerated, however, according to a gratifyingly ascending scale,—that same young McLean who had been observed to have got the hang of things, was invited to take charge of a branch office in Boston, where the development of certain new interests made it desirable for Ford & Bridgman to have a representative on the local stock exchange. The which important step brings us back to Grandmother Day's parlor, where our two young people are engaged in discovering one another.

"I should have known you anywhere," Katherine remarked, pursuing the general tenor of the conversation, while she studied her cousin's countenance with the frank interest permitted to near relatives. "The beard has not changed you as much as I should have thought it would," she added, trying to recollect what kind of a mouth it was that the heavy growth concealed.

"Oh, of course I should n't have changed as much as you," he replied, "for I am so much older. I must have been pretty well licked into shape by the last time we saw each other."

"Yes, you are a good deal older, of course," she admitted. "Four years, I think. And yet—I 'm not sure that that accounts for it. Several of the boys of your age have turned into quite different persons in the year or two we have been away. But somehow you always seemed to me grown up, even when you wore jackets. You were the only one of the boys who used to make my big brother seem young."

"I wish I had known it! It might have been a consolation to me that year—the last time I saw you—when I found Archie was taller than I. It was especially mortifying, because I had always meant to

be tall!"—and the young man looked quite seriously chagrined, as if he were not yet reconciled to having been so rudely thwarted. Katherine smiled, enchanted with this naïve admission.

"It must have seemed strange to you," she observed, with a mocking light in her eyes that he only half relished: "It must have seemed strange to have to give in."

"I did n't give in," he declared stoutly. "I 've never given in! I 'm always trying to grow taller!"

"I suppose that's what makes you look taller than you are. But, really Tom, you 're a very good height. You 're a good deal taller than I am."

"I don't think so," he answered doubtfully, and still as serious as ever.

"Come and measure,"—and Katherine went to one of the long pier-glasses where Tom promptly joined her, and where they gravely placed themselves back to back after the traditional manner of such demonstrations.

"There! you see I was right!" Katherine cried triumphantly, as they turned their heads to look at the reflection over their shoulders, and their eyes met in the glass. "You 're fully two inches taller than I, just as I thought!"—and so gratifying was the result from his own point of view that for once Tom did not at all mind being found in the wrong.

"You always did succeed in what you tried for," Katherine remarked, in a tone of comfortable assurance, as she ensconced herself in the curve of a red-velvet window seat. "I wonder how you do it."

"I never got anything without working for it,—I can tell you that!" Tom declared, casting about for an available chair.

Seizing the most portable, which chanced to be a spindle-legged, yellow-covered one, the envied and admired intimate of Katherine's childhood, he planted it in her neighborhood, and seated himself astride of it with his arms along the fragile back. The chair gave a small, protesting creak, but it stood the strain better than could have been expected of such a manifest favorite of fortune.

Thus comfortably established, Tom, quite unaware of Katherine's tender solicitude for an old friend, inquired: "Why did you ask that? Girls don't have to do things,—girls like you I mean."

"Oh no! girls don't matter, of course," she laughed good-humoredly,—"girls like me! — but there 's Archie."

"Oh, Archie does n't count either. He 's got all he wants and he would never work if he could help it."

"I'm not so sure of that," Katherine replied, bridling loyally. "He never had an object before; but he has one now."

"You mean Miss Gerald? Is she the kind of girl to make him ambitious?"

"In a way—yes. That is, her father wants Archie to make a start in life before they marry."

"Oh! that 's it!—well, if it 's business Archie's looking out for, there 's not likely to be any serious hitch, He 's got capital enough to give him a start. Why, he must have about a hundred thousand; has n't he?"

"I believe so," Katherine admitted, feeling that the conversation was taking rather a personal turn.

"Thunder! if I had half that—" and Tom stopped himself short off.

"But you 're doing well without it, are you not?"

Katherine asked. "I thought you were practically at the head of things in your office."

"Which means that I do practically all the work and somebody else gets practically all the profits. Not that I mind the work," he added, "and I don't so very much mind the profits either,—they 're no great shakes these days. But,—" and Tom thought in passing that Katherine must be as good as a boy still, in spite of the long dresses and the suppressed pigtails, or he should not be talking sense to her,—"But," he went on, "I am sure it won't be long before things take a turn for the better, and the man with capital is going to have his innings."

"What do you mean by innings? You mean just that he 's going to get rich?"

"Yes, just that!—and that 's just enough according to my thinking."

Katherine shook her head with sceptical intent.

"Perhaps if you had money you would n't think it so important," she observed, her mind turning to Archie, while she wondered, as she had often done before, whether his fortune might not prove rather a handicap than otherwise.

And Tom, thinking that she was assuming a superior wisdom based on her riches and Archie's, retorted rather scornfully: "Oh, I don't mean any beggarly little hundred thousand. I mean something really big!"

Katherine regarded him with a new interest as he sat there astride the poor little yellow chair that was never intended for such robust experiences. Yes, Tom was a full grown man, she thought, with a critical contemplation of his big frame and the lean habit that brought out the lines of shoulder and cheek-bone; he

need n't try to grow taller! A man has more than one dimension. He was big enough,—yes! big enough, physically and mentally. The young girl found herself getting an impression of brute force that half repelled her. After all, strength, mere strength and bulk, were not enough—even in things of the character. How much more attractive Tom would be, more attractive and more really admirable, if some of Archie's refinement, some of Archie's grace of mind and body could be got into him. She was not sure that the years had improved him. He had had his will of them, but,—had they not taken their revenge upon him? Had he not roughened needlessly?

"So you 're going to be very rich," she said, without feeling it necessary to add a proviso, since what he wanted he would have; "a millionaire perhaps."

"Yes, a millionaire—at least!" and he too made no proviso.

"And what do you want that for?"

"I want to be rich because I want power!" he answered, looking her straight in the face. Well, his eyes were honest,—there was no doubt about that.

"I wonder what you will do with power," she queried, answering that look of his eyes, and thinking that perhaps, after all, he might do something fine with it.

"I shall use it."

"That is, you will do good with it?"

"I don't say that; but—I don't propose to do any harm with it."

The sun was getting low, and was just peering in under the rose-trellises of the shallow veranda, and striking full into Tom's eyes. Katherine put up her hand to draw the shade.

"No," he said. "It does n't bother me. When it 's so low as that I can look it in the eye without blinking."

"Yes, and so can I; but I don't like to, for it makes you see black balls floating in the air afterward."

"So it does!"—and Tom began following with vacant gaze the floating simulacrums.

"Do you know," Katherine remarked, thoughtfully, "it seems to me just as foolish to want power that you 've no special use for as to look at the sun just for the sake of proving you can."

Tom, who had released the spindle-legged chair from unaccustomed durance, was pacing up and down the room, blinking vigorously at his black spots.

"Now, Katherine, you 're talking rubbish!" he exclaimed, coming close up to where she sat and looking down upon her with great energy of protest. "You might as well say that a man should n't want to be physically strong, to get up his muscle, and all that sort of thing, until he knew just what blows he meant to give, just what weights he meant to lift. Strength is a good thing in itself, and sure to come into play! And power,—power is better still!"

Katherine, who did not relish being looked down upon in this manner, even when her antagonist did happen to be two inches taller than she, stood on her feet, that she might face him practically on a level.

"Oh, yes!" she said. "Power 's a good thing, of course. But it is n't the only good thing,—and I 'm not at all sure it 's the best thing."

"What 's better?"

Instead of answering directly she moved over to the piano, and sat down upon the revolving stool where she always felt pleasantly at home; and not until she

had taken a turn or two on this small eminence did she say:

"I don't know whether I can tell you what I mean, but—I 'm thinking of what you said about work and capital just now. Power seems to me like the hard work; and capital—does n't that sometimes stand for something even more—what shall I say?—efficacious, —like influence, for example?"

"Yes, it does! For another kind of power—the kind I want."

"Oh, I did n't mean it literally." And, sitting sideways on the stool, she reached across with her right hand, running her fingers over the keys as absently and easily as she might have folded and unfolded a fan.

"Play me something," he cried. "Talking 's no good."

"No good? Why, I love to talk!"

"You 've probably had more practice than I. I used to forget the sound of my own voice when I lived in New York. Play me something."

As she played, Tom sat watching the shapely hands, and wondering at her control of the swift moving fingers, and at their skill and strength. To his mind, for he was no *connoisseur*, her playing seemed a marvellous thing; and, as he thought how lightly she must have acquired this power—for a kind of power it was —it occurred to him that a man might make a success without just the special sort of sledge-hammer effort he had been exerting all his life. Katherine and Archie were alike in many ways; perhaps Archie was more of a man than he had the credit of being. There was lots of stuff in Katherine; there might be stuff in Archie, too, only it had n't been brought out. Archie

was certainly clever; he had brains, he had influence of a certain kind—the kind to make him popular. What was that that Colonel Ford had said years ago? "It 's the social advantage that tells." Tom had lived seven years since he had heard that speech, uncomprehended, secretly depreciated, at the moment. He had learned a good deal in the interval, and he had acquired an inkling of what the great stock-broker's remark might signify.

"It 's the social advantage that tells." Well, Archie was possessed of social advantage as well as capital. They were both things that were bound to tell in the coming revival of business so confidently anticipated.

Tom had never cared for Archie; he had entered him on his books as a light-weight. But who could say? Perhaps the very unlikeness of the two men might be an advantage in a combination. Tom knew there was ballast enough in his own character and training to keep the ship steady. Archie might furnish the sail, a good wide spread of canvas that would bulge to the wind. Jove! they might be going at a spanking rate!

He sprang to his feet and strode to an east window that looked across the lawn and the circular driveway to the garden where he had found his two cousins that morning. He had come professedly to interrupt. Who could tell? Perhaps he had more than interrupted; perhaps that interruption was destined to give an entirely new turn to Archie's career—to his own.

Tom expressed himself much better in soliloquy than in dialogue; it was the result of long habit. If he had undertaken to say all this to another person, it would have seemed too fanciful. He would have

got pugnacious and sceptical. But talking to himself was another matter; he knew his audience and he knew his interlocutor, and they usually hit it off very well.

"You would like to get out of doors," said a voice at his shoulder.

He had not noticed when the music ceased.

"I beg your pardon!" he blurted out. "I 'm afraid I had stopped listening. But I enjoyed the first part very much."

"Oh, that 's natural enough. Music almost always sets one thinking, and then one forgets to listen."

"What tells is the social advantage!" The words came to him again as he listened to the girl's easy speech, but only to think the more persistently of her brother.

"I should like a breath of air myself," she was saying, "before it grows dark. Come; let us have a look at the poor old garden. It gets so little attention these days when Peter has finished with it."

"Are n't you going to put on a hat?" Tom asked, as he picked up his own off the hall table.

"No, I don't need one. I like to feel all the air I can."

He wished Archie were more like his sister; if he were, it would be worth thinking of!

"Katherine," he cried suddenly, as they stood together under the arching woodbine; "we 've been talking such a lot about me and what I want to do,—what would you like to do?"

She turned and looked him in the face, with a certain confident challenge he would have been glad to see in Archie's countenance.

"Do?" she said, "I should like to race you to the end of the garden walk. One, two, three,—" and off she sped, fleet as a deer across the lawn.

She had given him fair warning; the "one-two-three—" had been spoken with the conventional deliberation. But, how she had sprung from the low step! He gave chase with a will,—and Tom was a good runner. Give him a half-mile stretch and it would have been a sure thing, but this little spurt of thirty rods,—he could n't get near her!

"There, I 've done it!" she laughed, as he came up with her where she stood, with only slightly quickened breath, only slightly heightened color, beside her old friend the quince-tree. "You see what comes of being modest. If I had said I wanted to write a book or found a hospital I should n't have made half such a success of it."

"But you did n't give a fellow half a chance," he protested. "Before I knew what you were after you had a start of twenty feet."

"You did n't think quick enough," she retorted, as they turned back toward the house. "It 's better to be quick than strong—sometimes!"

CHAPTER V

PARTNERS

" Each chooses, none gainsays
The fancy of his fellow, a paradise for him,
A hell for all beside."

THE establishment of the new firm of McLean & Day, which came to pass some six months later, involved a serious step for its senior member; it was the first time in his life that he had found himself obliged to share a responsibility. Tom McLean, even when in a subordinate position, had always stood on his own feet. If, when in the Wall Street office he had been employed on the books, it was he, and he alone, who was to answer for their correctness; if he undertook the delivery of valuable securities, their safety depended solely upon his personal integrity and vigilance. Later, when at the head of the Boston office of Ford & Bridgman,—a post which involved a new and more exacting trust,—he never had occasion to consult any one else in a matter either of office routine or of immediate financial expediency. He was, in a general way, accountable to his New York principals; but as far as the details of the business were concerned he had everything in his own hands, and there was nothing to fear from the mistaken judgment or moral obliquity of another. Under the new arrangement on the

contrary, advantageous as it would be if successful, there was an unknown quantity to be reckoned with; and the consciousness of this fact irked him.

Indeed, Tom McLean was the man of all others to feel such a change in his relative status; for not only was his independence of action literally a lifelong habit, but it had its root in that most integral part of a man which we call temperament. The unquestioning decision with which he had chosen his calling in life was no more characteristic than certain manifestations of self-sufficiency in his very babyhood. If it is not recorded of him that he claimed a voice in the selection of his own christening-robe, it is at least an undisputed fact that, at a not very much later date, he reversed one of the chief results of the aforesaid function.

His mother, who was a daughter of Attorney-General Darling, and who had very naturally desired to perpetuate so distinguished a name, had called her son after his grandfather; and as Arthur Darling McLean he still stands recorded upon the parish register of All Souls' Church in Delphi. But scarcely had the boy attained to articulate speech than he calmly repudiated what certainly would have proved a misnomer. In answer to those inquiries as to his name which must afflict every intelligent child with a sense of the paucity of human ideas, he invariably stated that it was Tommy.

"But no!" his mother would protest. "Your name is not Tommy; it is Arthur Darling. Now tell the gentleman your name, like a good boy." Upon which the child would quietly, but with precocious firmness, reiterate his original statement.

He was not otherwise a troublesome little boy, being

in fact too agreeably occupied with his own legitimate pursuits to get into mischief. If he was not urging his toy horses to an imaginary gallop of the maddest description, or playing "choo-choo" with the nursery chairs, he was presumably digging unfathomable holes in the sand-bank provided for that purpose in the back yard. Owing to this same self-sufficiency then, he had never incurred anything so severe as corporal punishment, even of that gentle kind which is painful only to the fond parent who administers it. When, however, the small bundle of obstinacy had for several weeks persisted in this wilful misstatement of a patent fact it was decided that he must be disciplined, to the end that the regrettable difference of opinion which had arisen in the family should be settled once for all.

The occasion was one of much embarrassment and distress to both parents—especially to the chief executioner, who felt as if his fragile victim might break on his hands; but the castigation was resolutely accomplished, and results awaited with breathless interest. The suspense, however, was not prolonged; for scarcely had the tiny fellow emerged from the pain and indignity of his bitter experience,—very red in the face, but with eyes much drier than his father's,—than he was again asked his name; and again he stated, with a firmness only intensified by his martyrdom, that his name was Tommy.

At that dramatic moment the young minister exchanged a look with his wife, and finding writ clear in her eye the concession which already struggled for possession of his own heart, he formally capitulated.

"Very well, my son," he declared, measuring for the first time the significance of the sturdy physiognomy that confronted him,—"very well, your name shall be

Tommy;—and see that you stick to it. You are henceforth Thomas McLean."

The rite was as solemnly performed as that earlier ceremony of christening, during which the chief participant had confined himself to a succession of oratorical but inarticulate remarks; whereas, to-day, he merely took occasion to reiterate with great distinctness the now well-established proposition: "My name is Tommy."

"And I believe he's right about it," Justin McLean declared, when the conquering hero had been led away to his evening porridge. "It will be a disappointment for your father, and I am sure it is quite as disappointing for us; but, the fact is, Tommy was never intended for an Arthur Darling!"

And now, after a quarter of a century passed in the unimpeded exercise of his own judgment, this same Tommy,—for the same Tommy he was, in spite of such superficial modifications as were to be noted in his breadth of shoulder and depth of voice,—this same Tommy found himself admitting into his own affairs, and on practically equal terms, a man whom he was not in a position to answer for.

It is true that Archie had acquitted himself very well during the six months that he had spent in the office learning the routine of business. He was naturally quick-witted, and if he was somewhat fickle of inclination and unstable of purpose, the incentive at this stage of his career was sufficient to rouse in him a semblance of persistence. Yes, Archie had done extremely well as apprentice, and he had furthermore agreed to all the conditions imposed for the future by his somewhat dictatorial partner. What he wanted was Winny, and he was joyfully willing to accede to

anything which promised to bring that enchanting acquisition nearer.

With the approval of Mr. Gerald the boy contributed about half his fortune—namely fifty thousand dollars—to the new venture, while to offset this, McLean supplied the practical training and a business reputation which was in itself a good working capital, together with a seat on the stock exchange, the purchase of which pretty well exhausted his private means.

Gerald was shrewd enough to perceive that his future son-in-law had made an advantageous arrangement, and if Tom did not consider himself worsted, we may be sure that it was from no excess of modesty on his part, but rather from a very clear idea of the value which this little capital of Archie's would acquire under his own excellent management. Tom, who was —and, as he would have thought with reason—quite free of any small personal vanity, was perfectly well aware that he possessed unusual business ability.

"My father wanted to make a parson of me," he said to Katherine one day, "or a lawyer, or a doctor! A fine mess I should have made of it!"

"I don't see why," Katherine protested. "You got honors in your admission examinations."

"Of course I did! If I had n't, I should never have had the cheek to go into business. But that 's quite another thing to truckling to patients and clients and parishioners."

"Why, Tom, how absurd! Anybody would think you were accusing your own father of truckling."

"Not a bit of it! He does n't need to. He can handle people without it. Now I can't. The only thing I can handle is facts."

"But people are facts. I 'm sure, at least, that you 're a fact," and Katherine laughed in his face in a way she had, and which he was only half sure he liked.

"Well, that tallies, for I 've always been able to handle myself."

"Always?" Katherine repeated, while the direction of her thoughts changed. "Always? you are lucky!"

"It 's not luck, it' s just,—grit."

"And do you suppose it will always be so? that you will always be able to handle yourself?"

"I'm perfectly sure of it!"

There was probably nothing that Tom McLean felt so entirely sure of as this. He had fought his battles, he had suffered his defeats,—though only when the odds were overwhelmingly against him,—but in defeat as in success he had always kept himself well in hand, and nothing would have convinced him that he should ever lose his grip. Perhaps one reason of his confidence was that he had never been seriously tested; in other words, that he had never been divided against himself. Tom was presumably dual like the rest of us; there was probably in his constitution as in that of his fellows, not only the something which strives and achieves, but that other something which aspires and suffers ; and one day the achievement might be blocked and impeded by the demands of the hitherto silent partner. But up to this time he had known no emotion of a more commanding sort than that which signalizes the appearance of a first moustache, or that other more agitating but hardly more vital one which attends the fluctuations of the stock market.

It was perhaps because of his own entire immunity in this respect, that Tom regarded his new partner's sublimated frame of mind with a wonder that bor-

dered on scepticism. How a man of twenty-four—an age which to twenty-six seems but two degrees removed from complete maturity—how such a man, with the average endowment of intelligence and expeience, should be betrayed into extravagance about a mere girl, exceeded not only the comprehension, but the credulity, of our dealer in facts.

"I wish, Tom, you would be a little less supercilious, when I speak of Winny," Archie once cried impatiently. "If I were not the most amiable chap in State Street I should have called you out this morning."

Singularly enough, Tom, with all his hard sense and contempt for affectation, was not unpleasantly struck by Archie's characterization of himself as "a chap in State Street." Technically considered, they were "in State Street," though but two weeks claimants to the distinction; and in Tom's mind, quite as much as in Archie's, that was the essential fact. So the chap in State Street escaped criticism on that head, and Tom only answered calmly, as he lit his pipe,—for the business of the day was over,—"I 'm afraid I should not have come when I was called,—which might have been embarrassing for you."

"But seriously, Tom! have n't you the least interest in meeting Winny?" Archie inquired, seating himself in a revolving chair, and fixing his partner's face.

Now Archie, as it is hardly necessary to state, was not given to talking freely of Winny to other men of his acquaintance. But with Tom it was different. His very unimpressionableness piqued his cousin; it was a challenge which he could never ignore. Again and again Archie found himself returning to the subject, and little by little the desire to have Tom and Winny meet, and to witness what seemed to him the

inevitable subjugation of the sceptic, had come to assume quite unnatural proportions in his mind.

"I should really like very much to have you know her," he persisted.

"Why?"

"Why? Why because it is perfectly preposterous that you should not. Who ever heard of such a thing as a man not caring to make the acquaintance of the girl his partner is engaged to?"

"But, good Lord, Archie! I 've met Miss Gerald."

"Met her!" Archie exclaimed indignantly. "Why, she was only fifteen years old when you met her last. She told me so."

Was the man of facts momentarily flattered to know that she had marked the date? It hardly seems possible. Yet surely there was just the shade of gallantry in his reply.

"I don't know how old she was," he returned, "but she was old enough to be uncommonly pretty."

"There! have n't I always told you so?" Archie cried, triumphant. He was extremely gratified, but not yet content. "But, Tom, she was nothing then to what she is now! Those two years in Europe were the most wonderful thing. She opened right out like—like a rose. Of course that is an awfully old comparison, but, somehow,—well, you know it 's new every summer!"

The simplicity of this little speech touched Tom more than all the raptures he had heard before; but it did not move him.

"I have n't a doubt of it, Archie," he said. "I 'm willing to grant that Miss Gerald is everything that no other girl ever was, but—the long and short of it is, I don't get on with girls."

You get on with Katherine."

"Oh, of course! That 's another thing. Katherine is my cousin; and then—she 's as good as a boy."

"She 's a long sight better than a boy!" Archie protested.

"Well, that 's as you look at it. I only mean that she 's not one of those prettyish, uppish girls, such as I 've known, who either snub a man or expect him to fall in love with them."

"She may not expect men to fall in love with her, but they do!"

"Do they?" Tom asked, in a tone of frank surprise. "Now I should n't have thought it of her!"—and it was very evident that Katherine had fallen in his estimation.

But Archie, unable to conceive such a point of view, could not refrain from a little bragging on his sister's behalf.

"Indeed they do," he declared. "Winny says there was a Scotch student in Dresden who was in a very bad way indeed, and,—I know you 're a good sort, Tom, and won't try to spot him,—but there 's a fellow about here, a classmate of mine, who 's got his never-get-over. He used to come home and spend Sundays with me, and he was terribly smitten with the way she had with Cousin Elmira. I had told him what an old Tartar Elmira had been to her, and he set Katherine up as a saint from the beginning. And then when he found she was a good deal better than a saint, he tumbled—flat! The funny part of it is that he can't see that he 's out of it."

"Does she lead him on?" Tom asked severely. It was a term he had heard employed in similar cases, and one which he understood to indicate those

unhallowed arts by which harmless youths are betrayed to their undoing.

"Lead him on!" Archie repeated. "Well, I should say not! She 's a perfect iceberg! You 'd never know her! And he does n't come to the house as often as he used; but he still hopes she 'll change. He won't give in."

"Is it she who tells you all this?"

"Hardly! Why, she does n't even let on to Winny, and I supposed girls always told each other things. What I know I get straight from him. Poor old chap! he 's working like a tiger. He 's got an idea that if he makes a howling success she 'll soften."

"She probably will; that 's what girls like."

"Nonsense! girls are not so calculating as you think. That is,—there are only two girls I really know, and they don't care the turn of their hand for money and that sort of thing. I say, Tom, what has soured you on 'em? Did you ever get left?"

"No, I never got left; and if I had I should n't tell you."

"That sounds as if you had; but I know better. You have n't changed any that I can see in twenty years. I rather think you are made so. But that does n't seem to be any reason why you should n't call on Winny."

"Perhaps I will, after you are married."

"I don't see the difference."

"Neither do I; only it 's further off." And Tom got up and took his hat from a peg in the corner.

So Katherine was that kind of a girl, after all, he thought, as he marched off to his lodgings, feeling very much put about at the news. Of course she could have shaken off the fellow Archie had been telling

about,if she had n't liked to have him dangle. Girls were just alike, after all, and the less a man saw of them the better. For the next ten years, at least, Tom McLean did n't propose to have anything to do with them. Not that he considered himself in the very remotest contingency as vulnerable. He had never yet known what it was to have his fancy stirred to the faintest ripple, and he did not think he should begin at this late day. If he had escaped hitherto there was not much to fear at twenty-six and later. He was a man grown, as Katherine had pronounced him in her own mind, and henceforth he should act even more perfectly in accord with a deliberately formed plan of life than he could have hoped to do at twenty. He was to acquire power, and the kind of power he could best wield. And when he had achieved it he should know how to use it.

At thirty-five he should probably marry; he had placed the date as far in the future as he dared. But he had once heard his stepmother say that up to thirty-five a man marries; after that age he is married. He did not really believe that he should ever be the kind of man to let himself be married, and he would have given little heed to the axiom from any lips but those of his stepmother,—the woman for whose judgment he had a greater respect than for that of any other person of his acquaintance, his own father not excepted. In fact, Sarah Day McLean was exactly the type of woman he should go in search of when the time was ripe. She was strong, she was wise, she would appreciate power, and she would be an inspiration to the man who had it. Tom had heard a good deal about the intuition of women, and he associated it with the delicate, dependent variety such

as he believed Winny Gerald to belong to. He wanted something better than intuition in his helpmeet; he wanted knowledge, penetration, grasp. And that was what his stepmother possessed, which made her a power in her household, in her parish,—which would have made her a power in the great world. He believed that if his stepmother had been unmarried she would have been the woman of his choice in spite of the disparity of years! From which it may easily be inferred that Tom's vision of matrimony was singularly devoid of romance.

By the time he had reached his lodgings, a comfortable, dingy pair of rooms decorated chiefly with books and boxing-gloves, he had forgotten all about his partner's confidences. And, if a lingering resentment toward Katherine for allowing men to be foolish about her visited his mind from time to time, this caused no interruption in the pleasant companionship between the cousins.

As the season advanced, indeed, and the trees grew green, it came to seem more and more natural to give the city the slip for the sake of calling upon his grandmother; a redoubling of filial attention which in a mere stepgrandson like Tom should have been peculiarly gratifying to the recipient.

CHAPTER VI

PAUL

"And I was hers to live or to die."

KATHERINE DAY used to think, at this period of her life, that if it were not for Paul Stuyvesant she should be perfectly happy; if only he would not come any more to the house and look volumes—volumes that everybody could read, too, with an ease that was peculiarly exasperating to poor Katherine! For the worst of Paul was that he was without doubt exactly the man she ought to have married, and that she herself was as well aware of the fact as every one else appeared to be.

Not that anyone talked to her on the subject. It was merely that the general approval of the family had always been unmistakably apparent. Even Cousin Elmira used to drop commendatory remarks about Paul,—for it was as long ago as that, when Katherine was but sixteen, in fact, that he had had the ill luck to fall in love with her. Ill luck it certainly was, inasmuch as Katherine, usually so tender of other people's sensibilities, had found herself in this instance driven to the warmest resentment of a premature invasion of her girlish reserve. Indeed it was perhaps this indiscretion of his, almost as much as his obvious merits, which had sealed the young collegian's fate!

Paul Stuyvesant was a prepossessing Philadelphian whom Archie had made friends with in his freshman year. The two boys had taken to one another from the first, drawn together, partly by a personal attractiveness which characterized each, but quite as much perhaps by their unlikeness of temperament and disposition. Paul was as serious-minded as Archie was volatile, but if he was somewhat deficient in those lighter graces which distinguished his friend, these were more than offset by a certain nobility, a certain exaltation of character which never quite lost its power over the latter, though he was presently drawn into a phase of college life in which Paul would take no part. Indeed, Archie always clung to Paul as to a sort of anchor to windward, and their friendship would probably have survived a greater strain than was ever put upon it, even had the undeniable stimulus of the young man's interest in Katherine been lacking.

Stuyvesant was now in the medical school bringing a more than respectable talent and energy to bear upon his equipment for the calling of all others which Katherine herself held in highest esteem. Indeed he made no secret of the fact that it was her own ardently expressed preference for the medical profession which had years ago governed his choice. She knew she was perverse in taking such docility amiss; yet the fact remained that she was inclined to undervalue his ambition precisely because it had owed its initiative to her. It was childish in a man, she told herself, to allow a chit of sixteen to influence his career,—almost as childish as to fall in love with a schoolgirl who had hardly learned to say her *amo*, *amas*, *amat*,—much less to conjecture the meaning of its English equivalent.

Now Paul was not without perception, and it was perhaps a recognition of this perversity of Katherine's which had chiefly encouraged him in his persistence. Not only was he convinced that they were suited to one another, but he believed that in her inmost heart she knew it as well; and he was inexperienced enough to base a large hope upon the fact. His chief concern heretofore had been lest some one else should steal a march upon him, and this anxiety was much accentuated during a six weeks' visit which Katherine had recently been paying her Aunt Anne under whose wing she had seen something of the gay world.

Paul had, perhaps unwisely, failed to make the most of his social opportunities in a strange city. Up to the time of Katherine's visit there, he had imagined himself to be best serving the one great interest of his life by laboring early and late at anatomy. And just when he was beginning to feel a gratifying familiarity with the bones and muscles, the pulmonary tubes and auricular valves of the human organism, he discovered that to have been conversant with the organism of local society would have better served his turn. For he was constantly hearing of Katherine at balls and dinners, and if he was not afflicted with inordinate encomiums of her, he yet could not doubt that she had been the object of them.

Easter had fallen early that year, and it was the fashionable season's spring supplement which Katherine had participated in. Consequently she had come home to blossoming trees and greening grass and tiny garden sproutings which Peter best knew the secret of, and she would have found it hard to say which she considered more agreeable—the exercise of dancing with tall, attentive youths, in the very prettiest

gowns she had ever possessed, or the privilege of weeding, in a gingham apron, certain unimportant garden beds which Peter—neither tall nor attentive—had grudgingly entrusted to her care.

When she was not digging her garden or riding horseback or gossiping with Winny, Katherine was not infrequently to be found meekly listening to those instructive books which it was Aunt Fanny's special joy to read aloud, and which Grandmother Day could never be induced to hear.

"I prefer to do my own reading," the old lady would say, repairing to those domains of household industry or authority in which she could at least read her title clear.

It was Decoration Day. Winny and Archie were keeping the holiday together,—which is to say that they were quite inaccessible to the unimportant residue of their kind,—and Katherine had fallen an easy victim to Aunt Fanny's zeal. Roland was ordered for four o'clock and she told herself that a good canter would be ample compensation for an hour's durance.

But she was not to get off so easily; for, scarcely had the reader's voice fallen into that gently soporific monotone which reduces all authors to very much the same level of dulness, when, to Katherine's extreme dissatisfaction, Paul Stuyvesant was announced. To complete her discomfiture Aunt Fanny, clutching her instructive tome to her breast, beat a hasty retreat. It was the sort of thing that people were always doing, as Katherine reflected, impatiently. She felt it very absurd to be found, on a glorious spring day, sitting by herself in the house, immersed in a meaningless web of crochet work; and even as she rose to greet

her visitor, she became aware that Aunt Fanny's rocking chair was gently testifying to recent occupancy.

"Aunt Fanny has been reading aloud to me," she remarked, with a self-consciousness which was as unwonted as it was annoying. "I don't know why she ran off so suddenly."

"Perhaps your aunt disliked being interrupted," the visitor suggested; adding, rather tentatively,—"I only hope you did n't mind."

"Well, the book was n't as interesting to me as it was to Aunt Fanny," Katherine admitted. "It was not as if it had been a novel."

"Are you so fond of novels?" asked Paul, seating himself at a respectful distance, and casting about in his mind for some favorite romance in which might be discovered a bond of sympathy.

"Oh, yes; I adore them! But I don't suppose you have much time for such frivolities," she added. "Tell me, is the work getting to be very interesting?" —and even as she asked the question Katherine wished that she had hit upon some lighter topic. But that was the trouble with Paul; one never seemed able to think of any indifferent subject of conversation. And as for talking nonsense with him, it would be like sparring with a lay figure!

Yet there was little in Paul Stuyvesant's appearance to suggest a lay figure as he sat, to-day, with earnest eyes fixed upon Katherine's face, while his sensitive high-bred features responded to every inflection of the young girl's voice. As if aware, too, of her mental strictures upon him, he did his best to answer lightly. He was always trying not to be oppressive, and always perceiving that he had failed.

"It has been interesting to me," he was saying,

"although it is a good deal dryer than I used to imagine. Do you remember how we used to talk, you and I, as if a man had only to decide upon the study of medicine to become an immediate benefactor of his kind?"

"How young and foolish we must have been!" Katherine replied, evasively. She did not propose to be enticed into reminiscence.

"Were we? I don't believe either of us has changed very much, though,—" and Paul picked up from the neighboring table a heavy round paper-weight of clear glass, its depths starred with pretty, variegated designs. He was naturally unaware that this harmless bauble was traditional in the family as a cold resource for embarrassed lovers; and he was consequently far from surmising how fervently Katherine wished he would put it down.

On the whole, she thought, this was perhaps a well-chosen moment for the exercise of a little judicious cruelty. It really was very bad for him to build upon being a doctor. She knew he was doing so, and she was perfectly sure that the first thing he did after getting his degree would be to ask her again. So she said in a very matter-of-fact voice:

"Do you know, I have been thinking that I don't feel quite as I used to fancy I did about the medical profession. I went up to the cemetery this noon, after the soldiers had been there, just to carry a little private offering to one of our Faxon cousins who was killed at Gettysburg; and I felt as if it were a finer thing to be a soldier—especially if you got shot—than to give pills and set broken bones."

Paul did not answer at once; he felt hurt and baffled, precisely as Katherine intended he should. But

presently he set the paper-weight down, as a sort of half-conscious indication that he had got the better of himself, and observed, very simply and modestly:

"I 've often wished that I had been old enough to go to the war. You know my father was killed at Bull Run."

"Oh, I knew that," Katherine cried, with sudden penitence. "How could I have set myself up to feel anything about soldiers!"

"I 've always been so glad, though," Paul went on, "that, if he was to die then, it was before the battle was decided against us. He fell in the first charge."

This was very disconcerting to Katherine,—this quiet reminder that the modest youth whom she was bent upon snubbing possessed the one patent of nobility which she acknowledged—that he was the son of a hero.

"My father was not so happy as yours," she said, simply, while her thought closed with unspeakable tenderness upon the pitiful tragedy of the old barn. How obscure, how unapplauded that ending had been, with only the barn swallows to ruffle, with slight, silvery twitterings, the requiem of silence! And Cousin Elmira's broken heart! How that intensified and deepened the tragedy! No, she could not have this go on any longer! For Paul's sake even more than for her own, a stop must be put to it.

"I often wish," he was saying, "that I had my father's chance. I suppose the first thing a man thinks of when he can't have what he wants is to go and fight somebody,"—and he gave a short, meaningless laugh.

Katherine did not look up from her crocheting, but her attitude took no gentleness from the soft, woolly

manipulations of her fingers. The bend of her neck could hardly have been more repellent if she had been engaged in carpet making! As Paul glanced across at her in the sunny commonplace of broad day, his own features assumed an answering hardness that was far more pathetic than any look of pain could have been. And when she still kept silent:

"Besides," he added, bitterly; "if I were dead you might like me better. There would be that advantage. And yet"—he got up, and began walking up and down with the futile stride of a man in prison,—for he felt the wall of her denial, inarticulate though it was, closing in upon him, harder and more impassable than stone and mortar—"it 's assuming too much to say that you would like me better. You simply would not waste a thought on me if I were not by to prod your memory."

There was a moment's pause during which the young girl made a valiant stand against her own natural kindliness. The feeling of compunction toward Paul to which she was always vexatiously liable, was urgently asserting itself, but for once it was successfully held in check, and he keenly missed the solace of it.

"I believe," she was saying, thoughtfully, "that you are somehow right about it. And at any rate the prodding does more harm than good. I never think of you without an uncomfortable feeling, and we are such selfish things that we can't forgive people for making us uncomfortable."

"You are not selfish!" he protested, too loyal to permit detraction of her, even at her own hands.

"You don't know me very well," she replied. "If you did you would understand me better. You would see that there 's not the least use."

Instead of answering, he stepped to the table, and, picking up the paper-weight, which seemed to exercise a fatal fascination over him, he began dropping it from the palm of one hand to that of the other. Katherine felt that this trivial incident gave the finishing touch to an intolerable situation. In her effort to disregard it, the crocheting was making phenomenal progress.

Presently, holding the glass to the light: "Curious thing, that!" Paul remarked. "How do you suppose those unlikely little flowrets ever got in?"

"They must have got in before it was fired." She was wondering what he meant to spring upon her with so abrupt a change of subject. She knew his thoughts had not wandered from the point;—they never did!

"You could hardly get them out without breaking it, I suppose," he observed, reflectively.

"Hardly."

"Hm! That 's the way with things that go into your very make-up. Katherine,"—and still holding the glass in his hand he drew up a chair and seated himself quite near to her—"Katherine, did you ever think that I was only making when the thought of you got into me? Just like these little flowers here!"

But now he was playing into her hands, and she was quick to take advantage of the opening.

"If you feel that," she answered, steadily; "it only ought to make you understand me the better. For, Paul,"—she had ceased working, that her speech should lack no emphasis—"you forget that my thought of you—the thought that it never, never, never could be—entered into the making of me. It 's just as much part of me that I don't care for you, as it is part of me that I love Archie and my father and—"

with another reversion of thought to a broken life—"Cousin Elmira."

The clock on the mantelpiece struck four, and already Roland's hoofs were crunching the gravel before the door. Peter hated to be kept waiting; his rightful mistress never did it. Katherine glanced rather pointedly at the clock.

"Yes, I know," Paul said, laying the glass down with a gesture of dismissal. "I'm going pretty soon. You may not have to send me away again for a long while."

"I have n't sent you away," she protested, "though I know I ought to have."

"Katherine," he cried, suddenly. "You may be right. Perhaps I am doing myself an injury every time I come to see you; perhaps I had better keep away for a long time. But first, tell me,—is there—is there anybody else?"

"Anybody else? Why, no! How should there be?"

"Only that you 've been going out this year, and—I did n't know. There are so many fellows about, and I thought there might be somebody who—had a better chance than I. Are you sure there 's nobody you are even thinking of?"

"I should hope not!" she protested, half amused and half vexed. "Because, one thing is certain, there 's not a person thinking of me!"

As might have been anticipated, this statement was received without elation. If Katherine could have said that she had refused a dozen men, Paul would have been vastly cheered; but this assertion that she had not been tested, incredible though it was, only intensified his misgivings. There seemed no comfort anywhere. The poor fellow got upon his feet again and,

looking gloomily forth at the window, beheld Roland tramping past the door with the long-suffering Peter. The significance of the side-saddle was not to be missed.

"I suppose you knew the horse had been waiting," he exclaimed, "and have been longing to have me go."

She too had risen, and laid aside her work.

"Not on that account," she answered.

The studied rudeness of the words was so out of character that Paul pulled himself up sharp. How detestable all this must be to her, that it should drive her to such extremes!

He came and stood beside her, searching her face for some least relenting. The hardness of her attitude was assumed; that he knew—that did not count. But in the eyes that met his for an instant, in the deep sincerity of them, he read at last a rejection that was more than mere girlish perversity. As they wavered, too, and fell, before his dumb entreaty, while the color slowly deepened in her cheek, he perceived that although he could not move her, it was in his power to harass and pain her; and his spirit rose against the unfairness of it.

Drawing himself up to his full height, and looking down upon her with a sudden passion of renunciation that she dimly felt the meaning of, even before he spoke:

"Katherine," he said,—and the quiet self-mastery of his tone was full of dignity,—"I have only a word more to say. It is this. When I don't come to see you any more, when I stop prodding, as I mean to do from this time forth, don't imagine that it is because I have changed. I never shall. I am like that silly piece of glass over there; the only way to get out the things that are in it is—to smash it."

A moment more and Paul was striding down the front steps and along the path to the street. He did not see Tom McLean coming up on horseback, but Tom saw him.

Riding round to the back of the house where Peter and Roland had arrived in their resentful peregrinations, Tom dismounted and, tossing his bridle to the old man, he went in by the east door which stood wide open. As he sauntered along the passageway, wondering where he should find the family, he heard a very small sound, like a suppressed sigh—Aunt Fanny yawning over her dull books he surmised. Another step, and he stood at the library door gazing in blank astonishment at the figure of Katherine, prone upon the big lounge, crying as if her heart would break. He blundered in, with a vague idea that she had bumped her head or otherwise hurt herself; girls cried on such occasions, he believed.

"Why, Katherine, what 's the matter?" he demanded.

She jumped to her feet in dismay.

"Nothing," she cried; "nothing, really! I—I 'm apt to be weak-minded on Decoration Day; are n't you? One gets to thinking of the soldiers, you know, and of people dying, and of all kinds of tragic things."

An hour later they were riding far out in the country between blossoming hedgerows and ploughed fields. Katherine had quite recovered her spirits; she never could resist the exhilaration of a horseback ride. Tom, only half-approving, noted her high color; he had never seen it so bright. In fact it was the first time the cousins had ridden together, for his visits usually fell of a Sunday, and Grandmother Day's principles interfered with Sunday rides.

At last—"Who was the man that went out just as I came in?" he inquired, abruptly.

Katherine's face fell.

"That? oh, that was an old classmate of Archie's—Paul Stuyvesant.--See if you can't make your horse trot. One gets tired of cantering."

"All right; only mine pounds badly, and my seat is not equal to yours."

"There's only one way to learn," she called gaily, as she began rising lightly and rhythmically to the changed gait.

And Tom, riding somewhat less gracefully beside her, was saying to himself: "That's the man, of course. It 's just as I thought." He wondered if she was in such a taking merely because she had been obliged to say no. He had not supposed her so soft-hearted. She had better look out for herself or she would be saying yes, next time!

Suddenly a brood of partridges started up, with a rush and a whirr, almost under the horses' feet, and Roland shied, sharply. How well Katherine handled him, and what an easy seat she had! On the whole, Tom thought, she might be trusted to hold her own—lovers or no lovers! And at this point in his reflections it was borne in upon him that he rather liked riding with Katherine, and that there would be nothing to prevent his doing it oftener now that the days were getting so long.

CHAPTER VII

CONFIDENCES

"There is a vision in the heart of each
Of justice, mercy, wisdom, tenderness
To wrong and pain, and knowledge of its cure."

AH, those rides through the spicy June weather, far out into the open country! The rhythmic forward motion, in time to the thud of hoof-beats; the casual talk, the friendly altercation ending in unprovoked laughter! How the pleasant cousinly good comradeship throve upon it all, and how the horses themselves entered into the spirit of it!

And even when, with a wholesome fear of Peter before their eyes, our young people slackened the pace for the last mile through the gathering twilight, soft and fragrant as a hovering hint of incense in cathedral aisles, the talk, if often confidential, was, for that very reason perhaps, quite untouched by sentiment. It was their opinions and their ambitions that they discussed, and these stood out clear and matter-of-fact against the glamour of youth, as yonder white church steeple against the melting blue of the June sky.

Neither of them had ever confided his aspirations to any one else. That Tom wanted power, and that he believed money to be the essential lever, was well known; that much he had confessed to Katherine at

their first meeting after an interval of several years. But that he should one day apply his lever through the medium of a great independent newspaper, was something he had not yet confessed to friend or partner,—not even to that paragon and criterion for all women, his incomparable stepmother. Neither had he any intention of taking Katherine into his confidence—this mere girl, indeed, who let silly men fall in love with her! But it chanced that as they drew in their horses to a walk one evening after a particularly exhilarating canter, during which it had been borne in upon Tom that his seat was getting to be almost as easy as Katherine's,—a pleasant assurance which perhaps counted for something in the unwonted expansiveness of his mood,—the young girl turned toward him a face so alight with the joy of life, that a sudden impulse prompted him to lay bare his mind to the sunshine of hers. And yet he did not speak at once, and she it was who gave utterance to their common sentiments, in the unstudied ejaculation: "O Tom! Is n't this great!"

Then, while Tom still held his impulse in check, there fell a bird note from out the bit of shadowy woodland they were passing,—a sound so searchingly sweet that all his reserve melted before it, and he cried: "Katherine, you asked me once what I wanted of power. I'm going to tell you."

"I know it 's something good," she declared; yet without elation at the honor she was about to experience.

"I don't see why you should be so sure."

"Well, I am!"

Tom stooped and patted his horse's neck—Oliver he had named him out of compliment to his cousin's Ro-

land, and little did he care that the big gray was known at the livery stable as "Baker's Billy."

"I find I 'm not one of those persons people feel sure of," he remarked, dallying with his subject, as if this confidence were so pleasant a thing that he did not care to hurry it. "Oliver did not take to me at all at first."

"That was before he knew you," Katherine protested. "Besides, Roland liked you the very first day. Don't you remember, when we had dismounted to gather the pussies in the swamp, and you put me up? He did not in the least mind your coming near him."

"Really, Katherine," he jested; "you are altogether too flattering."

"Oh, you need n't be satirical. It only shows that you have less penetration than Roland; for if you had fathomed him as he did you, at first sight, you would know what his approval is worth. You should have seen him yesterday when a poor man ran out suddenly to ask me to go for a doctor for his sick wife. Roland simply stood on his tail."

"Did you get the doctor?" asked Tom, the practical.

"Yes,—but it was no good. When grandmother and I drove over to inquire this morning the poor woman had died. Her husband said it was through lack of nursing. Just think! If there had been any one to take care of her she might have lived." And Katherine's mind recurred, as it often did in those days, to the *Life of Sister Dora* which she had recently been reading, and which had opened up a new world to her ardent young imagination.

"Did she leave any children?" Tom asked.

"No; the baby had died in the winter."

"Then of course, it 's not so much matter. If she

was so awfully poor she must have been glad to get out of it."

"Ah, but you did n't see the man's face!" Then, with a long-drawn breath of great eloquence: "How I should like to be a nurse and take care of very poor people!"

"Yes, that would be something of course," Tom assented. "You could help a few. But nothing a person can do with his own hands counts for much by the side of what you can make money do. Now what I mean to do when I am rich,"— Tom had not yet learned to say "if"—"what I mean to do is to go down to the root of things and influence the conditions out of which individual suffering springs. There 's only one great influence now, only one power that reaches right out into public things that private things are built on; and that is the press."

Katherine nodded intelligently.

"You don't of course mean that you are going to edit a newspaper?"

"No, I'm not fool enough to mean that. And besides there 's no lack of editors. There are plenty of able, honest men, who could run a newspaper on the right lines if they had the right kind of a backer. I'm going to be the backer."

"How splendid!" she cried, with more enthusiasm than discrimination. "And I believe you 'll do it."

"Oh, it's not such a simple matter as you think!" Tom rejoined, half resenting her easy confidence which seemed somehow to belittle his ambition,—as if, forsooth, it were a thing in which success might be a foregone conclusion.

"No, I suppose not. And I suppose I don't know

the first thing about the difficulties. But it can't be impossible, or you would n't undertake it ; and if it 's not impossible I don't see why it should n't be done."

A few minutes later, as they drew up before the door, Tom having sprung to the ground to give her a hand in dismounting, it chanced that Oliver came pushing after him, rather clumsily, and thrust his head against his rider's shoulder.

"He likes you now," Katherine laughed, as Tom elbowed the big beast away; and she resolved, then and there, to reciprocate her cousin's confidence one of these days when it should come about naturally. Nor was the opportunity long in arriving; for Oliver's preference for the roads about Camwood increased as he knew them better.

A week or two later they were walking their horses up a long hill—the very hill up which old Chief had drawn Charles Day and his little daughter on that last evening of the master's life — and they passed the squalid little house where the poor woman had died for lack of nursing. Katherine had perhaps never before ridden that way without thinking of her father; but to-day her mind was full of the poor young wife and the desperate sorrow of the husband's face. The house was closed now, or as much closed as a house can be that has neither blinds nor shades to shut it in. One could see through the dusty window-panes that it was denuded of its few poor sticks of furniture. A dreary sight even to one who did not know its story.

"That is the house where the man ran out the other day," she said; "where the poor woman died that I was telling you about."

"It 's just as I thought. She was well out of it," Tom declared.

"But, Tom! they were fond of one another; I 'm sure of it, from the man's face."

"Then he must be thankful it 's over with."

Rough as the words were, Katherine heard, or thought she heard, a note of unconfessed sympathy. And this in turn touched her to confidence. So that a few minutes later, when they reached the top of the hill where the view was, she said:

"Tom, I have never told you what I want to do in the world."

"Well, I think it 's time you did, since I opened up to you so handsomely the other day."

"But the trouble is, that it will seem dreadfully small and contracted to you."

Tom let his eye wander over the pretty countryside spread out below them in the afternoon light. The young stock-broker's rugged face was capable of very pleasant expressions.

"I hope I 'm not so narrow-minded as you think," he said, "though when a man has set his mind on one thing nothing else seems quite so real. But what is it you 've put up for a target?"

"I want to be a trained nurse. Don't say anything yet," she went on, giving a pressure to the rein, which set Roland into a leisurely canter. "It 's not for the sake of being professional or come-outish or anything, and of course it 's not for the money. What I want to do is to get a real training so that when I know of anybody who needs nursing,—anybody who can't afford to pay for it,—I can just step in."

"Do you mean to go right at it?" Tom asked, thoughtfully.

"No; not yet,—not just at present. But I think I should like to have that to look forward to."

"I don't see what you should wait for," he argued, "if you are really in earnest."

"Perhaps I 'm not in earnest, then," she admitted, gently. "But, somehow—I don't feel ready for it yet; I seem to want to live a little first."

"Girls are so queer!" Tom opined. "They think they 're ambitious, but they take it out in dreaming. As if it were not living to be working toward the end you 're after! Now, when a man wants anything, he goes at it for all he 's worth."

"So does a girl," cried Katherine indignantly. "Lots of girls do! Any girl does if there 's any hurry about it. But there is n't any hurry about this; it will be better for waiting. I wish," she added, with some asperity, "I wish, Tom, you did n't feel so superior."

He glanced at her defiant profile, as she sat, with head thrown back, and shoulders squared more rigidly than good horsemanship required. Yes, Katherine was something of a spitfire yet, and Tom retorted, stubbornly:

"A man has got to be superior in some respects if he 's to make a success of life."

Katherine turned and looked him in the face.

"Do you know, Tom," she said, "I think it 's tempting Providence to be so cock-sure of yourself."

"As if Providence were as vulnerable as all that!" he scoffed. Whereupon they both laughed, and touched up their horses to a faster gait, feeling all the better and the gayer for their little passage at arms.

Roland and Oliver were so well matched that even

when urged to their best speed they still went neck and neck, while Katherine's long riding-habit and flying veil streamed backward as habits and veils are no longer permitted to do in these tailor-made days of ours, until Tom felt himself quite gathered up and borne along on a billow of floating draperies and manes and tails,—and again a pleasant expression settled upon his countenance.

And let it not be imagined that an occasional difference of opinion like this acted as any check to their good understanding. On the contrary, they both felt the more assured of mutual comprehension for the frankness which they could always depend upon. Tom knew that Katherine believed in his great independent newspaper as unquestioningly as if it had already reached a circulation of half a million; while she, for her part, cavalier as had been his reception of her little confidence, never doubted that she could count upon his sympathy and support. Indeed, had any such doubt existed, it would have been set at rest by the way in which his mind continued to dwell upon what she had told him, some hours after they had ceased to discuss it.

Tom had stayed to tea that day, and in the evening he had begged for some music. He had not imagined that he cared for music until he had heard his cousin play, but he was beginning to think very well of it nowadays. Moreover, and since his habit was to get what he wanted, he never hesitated to keep her at the piano as long as he pleased—which was the more easy of accomplishment, because there was nothing that Katherine better enjoyed.

She played to him a good hour that evening, and without the usual interruptions—music being apt to

set Tom thinking of all sorts of unrelated things which he found himself urgently moved to say. On this occasion, however, he sat perfectly quiet in a distant corner of the room, watching the young girl as she played, and thinking his own thoughts the while, which, as usual, had taken a practical turn. At last:

"You 've not fallen asleep, have you, Tom?" Katherine inquired, letting her hands drop in her lap.

Scorning to notice the insinuation, he came over and stood by the piano, leaning his elbows on the lid, with his chin in his hands.

"Play that slow movement again," he begged, quite without preamble.

And Katherine played it again, not in the least disconcerted by the intentness of the listening gray eyes, bent straight upon her; for, after all, and though he seemed rather stirred by the music, it was only Tom.

And when she had done his bidding, and done it with a touch that drew an almost human tenderness from the notes:

"Look here, Katherine," he declared. "I believe you would make a dandy nurse. I can tell it by the way you play that thing."

And so Katherine knew that he had been thinking about what she had said to him; and she knew also that he was on her side.

CHAPTER VIII

UNDER FULL SAIL

> "Make for port,
> Crowd sail, crack cordage! And your cargo be
> A polished presence, a genteel manner, wit
> At will, and tact at every pore of you!"

IT was well for Katherine that she had Tom's sympathy, rough as it was, to draw upon in those days of dreams and youthful aspirations; for there was little support to be looked for from any one else. Not only were Archie and Winny far too self-absorbed to give ear to visionary schemes of usefulness, but Grandmother Day, herself a conservative by nature and tradition, was the sworn foe of that worst of bugbears, "the new woman"; and she would warmly have resented any ambition, however laudable, on her granddaughter's part which should seem to associate her with the regrettable movement. That, indeed, would have been, if anything, worse than Archie's lack of ambition.

For the old lady did not for a moment deceive herself as to the true inwardness of Archie's sudden zeal for business. It was, as she felt reasonably sure, only a means to an end; and, when the end should be accomplished, there would be nothing surprising in a prompt abandonment of the means.

The really curious feature of the situation was that Horace Gerald, in spite of a certain "horse sense" upon which he openly prided himself, entertained no such misgivings. This unsuspiciousness may have been in large measure due to the inferiority of his discernment as compared to that of his old neighbor; but it was owing still more to the peculiarity of his own moral bias. In a word, he was incapable of conceiving a point of view in which money considerations played but a secondary part. Hence, from the moment that he knew Archie to be fairly launched upon the pursuit of gain, he trusted implicitly to the inherent fascination of it to keep him steady.

Accordingly, he was not slow to take his future son-in-law into favor, and before many months had passed, the two men, in spite of their constitutional dissimilarity, found themselves on a friendly, not to say confidential, footing. Horace Gerald, with all his bluster and apparent obduracy, was by no means unsusceptible to flattery, and Archie had approached him at the point where his defences were weak. Yet, if the boy was instinctively led to play upon the man's two most patent foibles,—namely, vanity and cupidity,—it must in bare justice be admitted that his action was wholly uncalculating. Archie had quick perceptions and a native persuasiveness of manner, but he was no time-server. It is, to be sure, too much to claim that when, soon after the establishment of the new firm of McLean & Day, the junior partner went to Winny's father for counsel in his inexperience, the step had been induced by any exceptional confidence in that gentleman's business acumen. It had been rather from a harmless desire to ingratiate himself with one who had, for the moment, the upper hand of him.

Archie as 'prentice in the business had been as docile and unadventuresome as the conservative Tom could ask; and he had also entered upon his partnership duly impressed with his cousin's greater experience and responsibility. No one could have been less prepared than he himself for the subtle change of attitude wrought by the corresponding change in his situation which gave him legal equality with Tom. From the moment that he found himself in a position of authority, there came new stirrings of ambition which he had not foreseen. From desiring merely to bring about his marriage by proving himself steady and trustworthy, he became eager to distinguish himself by some brilliant stroke. He had been promised the consummation of his hopes in June of the coming year. Who could say? That brilliant stroke that his imagination had conceived might hasten things by a good six months. What if there should be a Christmas wedding? The time was favorable for sudden fortunes, and a stronger head than Archie's might well have yielded to the seductions of the hour.

It was a season when the most conservative saw signs of great things. After seventeen years of greenback finance, specie payments had been resumed. The government was refunding the bonded debt at a rate that insured large profits to such brokers as had the handling of transactions in that line, and McLean & Day were gathering their share of the harvest. Under the impetus of restored credit new enterprises were springing up on every hand, among which those of legitimate promise were not easily distinguishable from the wildcat variety, and Archie was the man of all others to be dazzled by unsubstantial visions. Indeed, so imbued was he with confidence in one and

another speculation of the day, that, from taking counsel with Horace Gerald, he presently found himself proffering the same in liberal measure, and with a buoyancy of assurance that beguiled his senior into an almost equal faith.

Flattered, at first, by the boy's preferring his advice to that of his legitimate partner, Gerald presently found himself depending upon Archie for such "points" as the young stock-broker believed himself to possess. And Archie, on his side, was not unsusceptible to the implied compliment in the elder man's attitude toward him. He had perhaps never come so near a sincere liking for Winny's father as on a certain summer afternoon when the latter encouraged him by active participation in a rather precarious venture.

Archie, it will be remembered, had invested only about one half of his private fortune in the business with Tom, and enough remained to offer a good margin for speculation. It was this alone which tempted him; for, gratifying and stimulating as he had found the new powers conferred upon him by his partnership in the firm, it would not have occurred to him to take advantage of it by any act, overt or otherwise, in opposition to Tom's well-known principles. It had been agreed from the beginning that McLean & Day were not to speculate, and Archie felt himself to be the last man to violate an agreement.

Free as his hand was, moreover, where his private resources were concerned, the boy would have hesitated long before taking any chances which might involve the far worse risk of his marriage again deferred. And it was therefore with no little satisfaction that he found his father-in-law endorsing his intended action.

'Well, Archie," Mr. Gerald had exclaimed in the course of a protracted conference during which the splendid future of the "Flat River Branch" had been eloquently expounded: "Well, Archie, there does n't seem much doubt that it is a good thing, and I am glad to see that you have so much enterprise."

"And you think I should be justified in selling out of governments and into 'Flat River'?"

"Justified? If what you tell me is true I should think you would be a fool if you did n't. Why, man! nobody ever made a fortune without some courage. 'Faint heart,' you know,—eh?"—and Mr. Gerald gave the boy a look of ponderous pleasantry.

How Archie's spirits bounded at that! He forgot that his father had taxed this complacent adviser with swaggering. "Faint heart never won fair lady!" It would have sounded like a joy-bell from the lips of a less authoritative prophet than Horace Gerald.

Fired with a sudden daring, born of rising hopes, the boy cried: "What would you say to a couple of thousand on a margin? It would n't be much to lose, and there would be big chances in it."

Gerald's eyes narrowed curiously. He did not answer at once. He was taking counsel with himself. The man had not lived fifty years without acquiring ample knowledge of the dangers which beset the path of the speculator. He had seen more than one fortune lost, he had seen the disintegration of more than one character in the fatal alchemy of speculative nostrums. But because his nature was a sordid and a narrow one, because he was concerned for nothing beyond the mere money involved, he deliberately proffered evil counsel.

"No, it 's not much to lose," he agreed; "and the chances are big. I 'm not sure that I won't put up a couple of thousand myself."

If Archie had been sanguine before, what wonder if that which he hoped for seemed now fairly within his grasp. As the two walked together to the family sitting-room the boy trod on air, and again he heard the joy-bells ringing, audibly and riotously. For as they came upon Winny herself, who had been submitting with a charming, pouting tolerance to Archie's long absence, her father cried, in that sudden ebullition of spirits which only the prospect of speedy enrichment was ever known to arouse in him: "Look here, Winny; what should you say to satin for a Christmas wedding?"

The young girl did not reply directly to this unexpected sally, but she listened, not ill pleased, to Archie's fervent—"O Mr. Gerald!"—and presently when the lovers were out in the garden picking roses for the supper table, she said her little say. If her utterance was somewhat meagre and grudging it seemed to Archie the more adorable for that.

"Yes," she murmured, holding out a great creamy rose for his admiration, "I think satin is the thing for a winter wedding; it 's one reason I have wanted it to be at Christmas."

The rose was a beautiful one, but singularly devoid of perfume.

"So, that is why you like a winter wedding?" Archie asked, lifting the rose to his face, but scarcely noting its lack of fragrance.

"That is one reason," was the answer, given with a bewitching blush and smile; for Miss Winny was rarely wanting in tact. And to Archie as to Katherine

it seemed a beautiful thing in a young girl to conceal so gracefully her deepest feelings.

Surely there was no fault to be found with Winny. She was a perfect creature of her kind, as perfect as the exquisite, unfragrant rose. And it was to be a December wedding after all! The happy lover blessed his uncongenial father-in-law for that concession, he blessed his own good fortune in winning him so easily.

And yet, and yet? What was the hovering discomfort of the boy's mind? It was not misgiving as to the success of their common venture; his temperament was too sanguine for that. Neither was it a doubt of Winny's nature, or of her feeling for him,—of such a thing he would have been incapable. It was,—yes, it was—a curious sense of disloyalty toward Tom. It was as if he had entered into a second partnership, and as if, in so doing, he had cast a doubt on his own integrity.

It was useless for Archie to tell himself that his personal liberty was unimpaired, that if the partnership with Tom had involved his individual freedom of action he would never have accepted it; much less did he find consolation in the fact that he was acting with the approval and connivance of a man of far longer experience in affairs than either of the members of the firm of McLean & Day. He entertained no illusions about his future father-in-law; on the contrary, he was possessed of an inherited distrust and distaste for the man, which his recent intercourse had more than justified and he knew very well that if this new intimate of his had not been Winny's father he would have given him the widest kind of berth.

Yet their common risks did not stop at the comparatively trifling speculation just recorded. Once involved with Gerald in the game of chance, the boy found himself urged by his own sanguine temperament to increase the stakes. And Gerald, having once conceived the idea that Archie had the "inside track,"—encouraged, moreover, by certain initial successes with which a mocking fate delights in dazzling the eyes of the gambler,—grew ever more eager for "tips" and "pointers" and the like allurements of the stock market which often prove a bait as disastrous as it is seductive.

Horace Gerald, with his narrow outlook and self-important disposition, had thus far kept his eye upon a good, matter-of-fact main chance which had served him well. He was real-estate broker in a small, safe way, and he had walked so steadily in the beaten path of his trade that he had never yet been tempted astray into any unlucky venture. On the other hand, unembarrassed, as he was, by inconvenient squeamishness of conscience, he had rarely omitted to take prompt advantage of his fellow-men,—such as was furnished by the great fire, for instance, which had proved a small bonanza to him. But while his business methods had been consistently careful and advantageously unscrupulous, his vanity and ostentation of character had betrayed him into a good deal of extravagance, and he had sometimes felt the pressing need of a larger income. His selfishness, moreover, was of that repellent kind which isolates a man among men. Unquestioning affection he had enjoyed in his own home, from his wife, at least, and unquestioning obedience he had exacted from his children, of whom Winny was the eldest, but he had perhaps never,

before his daughter's engagement, been brought into intimate relations with any man.

Gerald had little understanding of Archie's love for Winny, although it would seem that the child's likeness to her mother should have enlightened him on that head. But a love affair is a two-sided matter, and Winny's mother had had no such ardent and idealizing lover as had fallen to Winny's lot. Horace Gerald had espoused her as he had espoused his business, with a matter-of-fact calculation of the advantage involved, which was far as possible removed from Archie's headlong surrender of himself to one end and aim. And thus, deluded by his own limitations, he accepted the boy's deference as a personal tribute to himself, and was quick to credit him with an equally just discrimination in other matters. And so it came about that Archie did gain a certain influence over his future father-in-law, through which he found himself drawn into an intimacy as dangerous as it was degrading.

It never seemed so degrading as it did one day in August when Tom, outspoken as he usually was, had paid his partner a little tribute of esteem.

It had been a busy day, and an exciting one, to Archie, who had twice sent the office-boy with private orders to a neighboring broker. Horace Gerald had looked in at about eleven o'clock to consult the ticker, and had placed with the firm a large order—on a margin—for a certain industrial, to the speculative promise of which the market was just waking up. He did his business through the firm, for he was rather proud of his ventures than otherwise, and he had no objection to having Tom McLean aware of the magnitude of his operations. He also liked to keep in the family,

as it were, any commissions attaching to his own transactions,—commissions which, in a marginal purchase, mount up proportionally very fast.

At last the ticker stopped, the office was deserted, and Archie sat at his desk, with fast-beating heart, figuring on a certain speculation of his own which chanced to be prospering.

Tom came in, cool and collected as if the rampant stock exchange had been a college lecture-room, and Archie, resisting an impulse to slip his papers into the drawer, looked up, remarking: "Pretty lively over there, I take it."

"Oh, so so!" was the conservative reply. Tom remembered Wall Street in '73.

"McLean & Day have been rather busy," Archie observed, copying Tom's masterly moderation.

"So it seems! Who 's the fool that 's toying with 'Ingoldsham?'"

"Gerald."

"The old man 's getting pretty frisky, is n't he?"

"Rather."

"Hm! when he busts up he may have more use for a son-in-law,—eh?"

"He 's got use for one now," Archie protested. "You know it 's fixed for December."

"Oh, I remember. Wish you joy!"—and Tom lighted his pipe, and fell upon his papers.

Not until then did Archie fold up the sheet he had been figuring on and put it into his inner pocket. It was really time he buckled down to his work on the books, for he wanted to get off in season to call at the florist's on his way home.

Presently Tom looked up, to find Archie drudging away valiantly at his work. His cigarette had gone

out, and he had not noticed it. Tom watched the picturesque head, bent over the desk. There was a certain grace and charm in the very way the hair grew; while the native distinction of the figure was more apparent than ever, here, in the prosaic atmosphere of the dingy office. "It 's the social advantage that tells," the great stock-broker had declared.

"I swear I believe it does tell!" Tom said to himself, as he thought of the genial influence which his partner's personality never failed to exercise.

It had been a big day for them, and how well Archie managed his end; and how steady he was, after all! Good stuff he must be; the Days were all good stuff,—perhaps just as solid as if they had been rough and gritty. Katherine was rather impulsive, to be sure; he often found it necessary to exercise a cousinly restraint upon her,—but Archie; why, he seemed steady as a schoolmaster. Pretty strong team they were, McLean & Day! Presently:

"I say, Archie!" Tom cried. "I had no idea you were such a grind!"

"Never had anything to grind at before," was the rejoinder; and Archie, perceiving that his cigarette had gone out, tossed it into the empty grate and lighted another.

As he picked up his pen and fell to work again, Tom regarded him with something like compunction. It was like seeing a light thoroughbred harnessed to a dray. Jove! the man deserved a lot of credit! And Tom, who did not often indulge in such effusiveness, found himself exclaiming:

"Look here, Archie; you 've turned out a bully partner!"

And then it was that Archie felt ashamed.

CHAPTER IX

A SUMMONS

"He looked at her, as a lover can;
She looked at him, as one who awakes;
The past was a sleep, and her life began."

TOM mentioned to Katherine his good opinion of Archie, a day or two later. Indeed he usually gave her the benefit of such reflections as were occupying his thoughts, for she had come to be his one close friend. That nature intended them to be more than friends would have been patent to the most casual observer,—only it happened that there were no casual observers to make the discovery. In the minds of those who witnessed the growing intimacy of the two young people, the fact of their cousinship,—though one of circumstance, not of blood,—was so firmly established, that the obvious possibilities of the situation were overlooked; while, on the other hand, the very ease of intercourse which their relationship afforded, although it greatly furthered their knowledge and understanding of one another, had heretofore been lacking in those sudden revelations which mark the rarer encounters of less familiar friends.

Moreover, and unlike as the cousins were, there was that in the make-up of each which tended to retard the final apprehension of the truth. Katherine,

warm-hearted and impulsive, was now, as in childhood, an incorrigible idealist; and Tom, the plain, straightforward, everyday Tom, was little calculated to stir the imagination. He was good to ride with, good to talk with, good to quarrel with; but, much as he was in need of idealization, there was little in his personality to induce that beautifying process. And the same hard sense, the same matter-of-fact fibre, which forced upon others the plain daylight view of him, was unfavorable to quickness of perception on his own part.

Yet there was already in Tom's attitude toward Katherine a certain benign tolerance, a cousinly indulgence, one might call it, which amused and gratified her. She loved the sunshine of approval, and it touched her none the less when it came in intermittent rays from a somewhat chill and wintry sky. Tom liked to dispute what she said, and then to admit that her fundamental idea was perhaps well enough; he liked to tell her that Archie was not the paragon she believed him to be, and then to electrify her by conceding pretty much everything she had claimed for him. And this he could do in all sincerity; for, as we have seen, Tom was most agreeably disappointed in Archie.

"What I was afraid of," he said to Katherine, as they walked home from church behind grandmother and Aunt Fanny one August Sunday,—for even to such lengths had his filial piety brought this model grandson,—"what I was afraid of was, that Archie would want to speculate."

"But he promised not to," Katherine protested, "and Archie always keeps his word."

"Archie's word is not infallible," Tom declared.

"Why should you say that? Did you ever know him to go back on it?"

"Yes, lots of times,—just as we all do," he hastened to add.

"Nonsense! You 're just saying that for effect. We are not that kind of a family; we have always been people of our word. You know perfectly well that nothing would induce you to break faith with anybody."

"I don't know anything of the kind, because I 've never been tested."

"Well, Archie has, and by your own showing he has stood the test. You say, yourself, he has n't wanted to speculate."

"No, he has not,—or rather he has not proposed doing it. He is really very steady; and it 's a time to test a man's steadiness. Why, do you know, Katherine, I am sometimes tempted myself to take a hand in the game. There have n't been such big chances since before the war. But of course I sha'n't do it; I know there 's the devil in it."

Katherine turned and looked at her cousin in some surprise.

"Why, Tom!" she exclaimed. "I did n't suppose you were ever tempted to act against your own judgment."

"I don't suppose I am,—really. There would n't be much good in toughening yourself the way I do if you could n't stand a strain."

"Do you really toughen yourself?—deliberately, I mean?"

"Of course I do! Life would soon get the better of us if we did n't."

"I don't think Archie does that."

"Perhaps he is of a better grain than I,—grows right without trying. You 're both like that; it 's the kind

your father was too, I 've been told,"—and he gave a jerk of the head toward the pleasant, rambling old house they were passing.

It was Charles Day's house, and rarely did Katherine pass that way without a glancing of memory toward the past. The old home had always a dear familiar look; the ineffable grace of tender associations. There were the broad, low steps up which Charles Day had borne a damp little form on that summer evening so many years ago; there was the piazza where the two little girls had perched while they prattled of princes; the window where Cousin Elmira had leaned, ever plying her needle, though with flagging strength. It was sometimes hard to believe that the hoof-marks on the gravel driveway were not those of old Chief, himself now gathered to his fathers.

"Yes," Katherine was saying; "Archie is of finer grain, like father; he always did grow right as you say. But I! I 've always gone stumbling along, getting myself and other people into trouble."

"If it were anybody else," was Tom's rejoinder, "I should think you were fishing."

Katherine laughed.

"If you were anybody else," she retorted, "I might be fishing. One does n't go after trout in salt water."

"And yet, deep-sea fishing is the only kind that 's worth the line," Tom returned, quite ready to amuse himself with a good, obvious metaphor like this.

"I should hate deep-sea fishing," Katherine declared. "It 's so murderous."

"I fancy the trout would think the chances of murder were quite as good in a brook as in the sea. Everything depends upon the point of view."

They had passed their grandmother's gate, by tacit

consent, and while Mrs. Day and her daughter under their parasols paced sedately up the path, the young people were walking briskly on, unmindful of the strong midsummer sun. Katherine looked cool as moonlight in her white gown and hat, and the muffled clatter of starched skirts seemed quite to take the place of a breeze. Tom, at least, entirely content with the situation, did not discover that there was any fault to be found with the meteorological conditions. He never dreamed how content he was, he never guessed that his very disputes with Katherine were more truly a communion of spirit than any intercourse, however beguiling, that Fate might have in store for him,—Fate, that stern, inflexible goddess, that often seems so at odds with nature. And the cousins pursued their way in careless unconsciousness, while soon the conversation got back to Archie, a theme of much greater interest to both than they had yet divined in one another.

Yes, Archie was doing well. He was as level-headed as even Tom could wish; and, in addition to the homelier virtues, he had a certain taking way with him to which even business men were not unsusceptible. When Tom was absent on the exchange, he knew the office was in good hands. All this he was admitting to-day with unusual cordiality, and Katherine's heart warmed to him for it.

"O Tom!" she cried, as they turned toward home again, mindful of old Hannah's uncompromising punctuality,—"O Tom, I believe it is going to be the making of Archie, being associated with a man like you!"

"It was rather a good thing for him," Tom agreed, with his usual candor. "And then the times are lucky

for both of us. I do think our concern has as good a future as any of the younger ones. I suppose, Katherine," he went on, while a sudden bounding elation of spirits seized him, "I suppose that when I 've got that newspaper going you 'll want me to endow a hospital and put you at the head of it."

"Oh, Archie will have the first claim to that," she answered, with gay confidence.

"Archie! But Archie's going to be married; he 's going to have his hands tied. I tell you, young lady, you had just better look to me for anything you want." —And the honest eyes sent her a challenge which she flashed back again with interest.

"Very well; I shall understand that I am to have anything I ask for."

"Anything that is for your good," he jested.

"Oh, but I sha'n't ask for anything for my own good! There 'll never be anything you can do for my good, only for other people's."

"Don't you be so sure of that," cried Tom; and, as he held the gate open for her, and the white draperies rustled past, he was conscious of a peremptory desire to make her want something, to force upon her acceptance a bestowal of some kind which she should not be able to refuse. He strode after her, and was on the point of pressing the subject, in his own rough way, when she turned to him with a disarming gentleness.

"What a foolish thing I said just now!"—and her voice was as soft and warm as the summer air. "As if we were not always accepting the very best things from people we are fond of, even when they are rather high-handed about it! And, O Tom! nobody ever made me happier than you have to-day!" And as they reached the foot of the steps, she held out her hand to

him with a grace of gesture which the admired Winny herself could never have compassed—perhaps because Winny would have tried for it. Katherine, indeed, was nothing if not spontaneous, whether for good or ill, and Tom took the proffered hand quite in the cousinly spirit in which it was extended.

For if there were moments when these two young people seemed on the verge of the one great discovery, they were but fleeting moments, and the old familiar relation readjusted itself so immediately that the break was scarcely perceptible. In so much that when, a month later, Tom was asked to pass a September Sunday at the seashore with Aunt Anne and Uncle Theodore, it was with little conscious quickening of interest that he learned that Katherine was to be there too. Yet if the circumstance added no agitating zest to his anticipations, it is safe to say that nothing could have contributed more to the pleasure of the actual experience.

The Glynns had a delightful place on what is known as the South Shore; a homely, comfortable cottage, made for everyday use, and standing on a rocky tongue of land so close to the sea that the great storm tides were supposed to wash the foundations of the house. The chief ornament of this unpretentious establishment, next to Aunt Anne, was the bevy of children of assorted sizes who gambolled about the place and shouted defiance to the breakers.

Children had never interested Tom particularly,—in fact he had hitherto enjoyed but slight acquaintance with them,—and at first he rather resented the manner in which these small cousins swarmed about Katherine. He found, however, that their attentions were intermittent; that after three highly dramatic

renderings of the story of *The Little Rid Hin* they were quite ready to turn to other joys, and meanwhile he had had the opportunity of remarking how becoming Katherine was to them. Their little faces as they clustered about her with wide-eyed delight in the narration, their little hands as they clung to her dress, or pulled at her sleeve, their young voices as they cried: "Oh please, Cousin Katherine, please tell it once more!"—all this pretty byplay was a revelation of childish grace, and of eager, happy child-life that struck him for the first time. Yes, Katherine was very becoming to them, he thought, and they really were nice little things, and never nicer than when they scampered off to build a fort in the sand.

"Katherine does understand children so well," Aunt Anne remarked, when her niece had gone upstairs to get ready for church. "I often wonder if it is because she had such a dreary time of it when she was a little girl."

"You mean with that old cat Cousin Elmira?" Tom inquired.

"Yes,—and with the rest of us too, I'm afraid, though I never thought much about it until I had children of my own. I used to suppose that she was as well off as a child need be."

"Imagination was never your strong point, Anne," her husband remarked, with a kindly indulgence that had no sting. "Now, Katherine is full of it. And so she knows how to make the children happy,—as she does the rest of us!"—for Uncle Theodore was still a great admirer of Katherine's.

And Tom found himself wondering whether there might not be something in that theory. Why, of course! that must be why he himself enjoyed his

cousin's society so well. He had imagined that it was only because she was good as a boy. But—come to think of it—there was no boy, no man, whose society he cared so much about. It looked almost as if she might be even better than a boy. The mere suggestion gave him quite a turn.

Tom did not go to church that day, but he did not for a moment imagine that it was because his uncle was sure to walk with Katherine. Instead, he went and climbed some very steep and dangerous rocks, where a misstep would have been fatal to that great newspaper enterprise he had so close at heart; and so satisfactory was the sense of difficulties overcome, that, late in the afternoon, after they had had their swim, he invited his cousin to risk her neck on the same perilous path.

Katherine was as sure-footed now as in the days of her childhood, and now, as then, the Lord seemed ready to preserve her,—"to some good end, let us hope; to some good end." She loved to feel her way up a cliff-side, to find small jags and notches for her feet, to discover providential projections just where her fingers must cling. She delighted in that tentative pause, as she tested a questionable support,—the sense of daring with which she trusted it. She liked to feel herself mounting ever higher above the safe beach, braving an eminence where a misstep must mean disaster. Yet if fear was a stranger to her mind the perception of danger was nevertheless keen enough to quicken her pulse and stir her imagination. And so it was with a great exhilaration of spirits that she finally set foot on top of the cliff's broad summit, and stood there with Tom looking across the wide sea.

It was a glorious September sea, sparkling and tossing as if from sheer joy of itself. The feel of it an hour ago had been like the feel of a great living power,—vitalizing as the sun and the air.

Katherine was an accomplished and fearless swimmer, and she and her Uncle Theodore had ventured far out beyond the breakers, where they had rocked and dipped with the slow, elemental motion of the great deep. Tom had pressed them hard, for he too was an expert swimmer, as, indeed, he was bound to be, with his broad chest and his powerful neck and arms. It was the first time he had seen Katherine swim, and his feeling had been a mixed one. It was fine, of course, but was it not a bit mortifying too? Where was a man to show his superiority,—an essential attribute of the manly character, as any one must admit,—if not in just these out-of-door sports where muscle carries the day. As he glanced across the sea the thought of his cousin's athletic prowess came back to him, and at the sound of her voice, he turned toward her half in resentment.

"Let us sit here and rest," she proposed, dropping lightly upon a natural shelf of rock near the edge of the cliff; and then, clasping her knees, with a sigh as for a feat accomplished: "That was something of a climb, was n't it?"

"I should think it must have been,—for you," Tom admitted, his complacence quite restored. "Of course it did n't seem to me like much."

"I think I never knew any one quite so strong as you," Katherine opined, gravely. "It made you quite a hero to my mind—long ago, when we were children."

"I believe I have got pretty good staying power,"

Tom agreed; "better than any girl of course. But somehow you seem to get there, just the same."

"Perhaps;—but sometimes there is n't much left over. It 's you who always seem to have a surplus."

And now Tom could afford to be magnanimous.

"By the way, Katherine," he remarked, throwing himself down on the broad space at her feet, and spreading his hands palm downward on the warm rock surface. "I don't wonder you have a fellow feeling with the deep-sea fish; you 're something of a one yourself."

"Oh, you mean I can swim. I suppose it 's because I always loved it."

"I heard about it the other day," Tom continued, "but I supposed you just swam pretty well for a girl."

"Who told you?"

"Why, that medical friend of Archie's,—Stuyvesant, is n't it? He was in at the office after hours the other day, and Archie was bragging about your swimming. Stuyvesant did n't say much, but somehow he managed to convey the impression that you could give a mermaid points!"—and Tom glanced up to get the effect of his words.

A look crossed the girl's face that puzzled him. It was not a blush, and no one could deny that a blush was what the moment called for; indeed, it seemed almost improper that it should be lacking. He would try again.

"Besides, I supposed Stuyvesant was not altogether unprejudiced."

But Katherine was not to be so easily caught.

"No, I don't suppose he is," she replied, tranquilly. "He is always pretty partial where Archie is concerned

or Archie's belongings." She had not seen Paul again all summer, and she was feeling very easy about him.

Tom was nettled. He had told Katherine all his secrets; why should she be so thundering close about hers? He had not yet arrived at that stage in his development where he could appreciate that there are secrets—and secrets.

Resting the back of his head in his clasped hands, he looked her full in the face.

"On the whole, Katherine," he remarked, lazily, yet with a sudden, irrational desire to be exasperating:—"I'm rather glad you did n't have him. I think you 're nicer as you are!"

Katherine sprang to her feet too angry to speak; the flaming indignation of her face was deeper than any blush could have been. If only she could have thought of words scathing enough to characterize this clumsy impertinence!

But—"Cousin Tom," came a child's voice on the land side of their cliff, "Cousin Tom!" and turning, Tom beheld ten-year-old Teddy climbing toward them with a yellow telegram held high above his head. The ascent on that side was easy enough,—just a grassy slope with occasional juttings of rock to be got over. How like Tom it had been to take Katherine the difficult way!

Tom walked toward the child and opened and read the telegram; after which he took a time-table from his pocket, and glanced quickly at the Sunday trains. The message was a summons from his stepmother; Dr. McLean had had a stroke of paralysis, and Tom was to come at once. He lifted his eyes to Katherine, still standing stiff and defiant, gazing with studied unconcern out to sea.

"Teddy," he commanded, "show the telegram to your mother, and tell her I shall take the six o'clock train."

As the child trotted off, full of importance, Tom again looked toward Katherine. She had not changed her attitude one inch.

His father had had a stroke. Yes, that was very tragical, and bye and bye he should be able to take in the fact. But now—now,—he was conscious only of a curious resentment at being cheated out of something he had a right to. He had not known that he cared so particularly for this little holiday with Katherine; he would not have supposed that he should have minded having it shortened; and even now he did not know how precious was this thing that was slipping through his fingers. He only knew that he was being defrauded of his rights. He was clearly entitled to another good hour in which they could have adjusted their quarrel and made friends again; and here he was, with scarcely ten minutes' grace.

He walked slowly, sullenly, up the slope; but she did not turn at his approach. He stood a moment by her side, and then he said, in rather a hard, indifferent voice, "You may be interested to know, Katherine, that my father has had a stroke, and I 've got to go to him."

The effect of the words was transforming; it was as if she had become another creature. The lines of her form relaxed, and she turned toward him a face from which the flush of anger had not yet died out, but seemed rather translated into a wonderful glow of sympathy and comprehension.

"O Tom!" she cried, "O Tom, I 'm so sorry!" There was a fall in the voice that made the com-

monplace words strike home, touching a chord in him, that had never been stirred before. Docile to the hand that waked it, it vibrated first to the emotion of pity for his father's hard strait, grief for himself.

"Poor old boy," he murmured,—and the words were low and very tender: "Poor old boy! It 's an awful blow!"

"Oh, I know, I know!" Katherine cried. There was consolation in the unsought words—a consolation that he felt the need of for the first time in all his busy, unsentimental life.

The leave-taking was a hurried one, but there was yet a moment—a moment on the veranda, just before the carriage drove up—when the cousins were alone together.

"Katherine," Tom cried, with something of his old rough bluntness, penetrated, however, with an incongruous note of feeling, "Katherine, I was a horrible cub up there on the rocks."

"Oh, but what is all that now? How could we ever think of it again!"

"Oh, I can think of every single thing," he answered, "clearer than ever I did before. I had no idea your mind worked so smoothly when things are crashing through you. I know now why I was so ugly. I was just a dog in the manger; I wanted to keep you to myself!" and now Tom's own voice vibrated to that chord that had never been stirred before.

As the carriage drove up, and the rest of the family, down to little Sally, came trooping out on the veranda, Katherine stood among them, bewildered and ashamed,—ashamed of the sudden selfish confusion that seized her mind at such a moment.

"Good-by," they called, while Tom and his uncle took their seats in the carriage. "Goodby, Cousin Tom," piped the children's voices, and "Good-by," Tom called back, as the carriage rounded the curve where the pine trees began. "Good-by, Katherine!"

CHAPTER X

THE DOG IN THE MANGER

"Because a man has shop to mind
In time and place, since flesh must live,
Needs spirit lack all life behind,
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
All loves except what trade can give?"

KATHERINE DAY had often had cause to chide herself for faults and blunders which she found it difficult to condone, but she had perhaps never regarded herself with such severe disapproval as now. Her actions had frequently been reprehensible; but her feeling, the fundamental integrity of her feeling, had never before been shaken. What was it that had so suddenly disturbed her equilibrium? Whose were the words that had wrought such havoc in her mind? This she asked herself a hundred times in the days that followed. What was Tom McLean,—she demanded of her abject and bewildered spirit,—what was he, that the thought of him should have entered into her soul and possessed its secret places?

And indeed, leaving heroics out of the text,—though never were they wholly left out of a young girl's first overwhelming self-discovery,—could anything have been more vexatious than this usurpation of the authority reserved for the prince of a maiden's dreams by an unromantic cousin, rough and dicta-

torial and worldly minded? Was it for this that she had had visions of a useful, independent life? Was it for this that Paul, the faithful, the devoted, the altogether superior Paul, was wearing his heart out for her? She summoned Tom into damaging contrast. A dog in the manger! Yes, that was just what he was! He was grasping, he was acquisitive,—hateful word that she had once heard applied to Winny's father, whereupon she had been filled with pity for Winny!

A dog in the manger! That was a fine compliment he had paid her indeed! Yet, even as she tried to hold the little scene at arm's length, and to analyze it into insignificance, her very soul vibrated to the memory of Tom's face, to the memory of his voice, as he said: "I wanted to keep you to myself!" She knew, and he knew—ah! he surely, surely knew,—that they had stood face to face for the first time, but not the last,—oh, not the last! It was coming,—this great incredible thing that came to other girls. It was coming,—rudely, imperatively, uncompromisingly, with none of the soft seduction, none of the insinuating gentleness, that should beguile a maiden's fancy.

All this conflict of spirit was a matter of many days; days of such emotional disturbance as to be incomprehensible in one of a less spontaneous impressionableness. But it was not in Katherine's nature to evade a conviction, to dally with a real thing. As her idealism often blinded her to the shortcomings of her friends, so the absence of idealization had hitherto blinded her to the true affinity of nature which existed between herself and her cousin. Yet, when once the time was ripe, it needed but a touch, a word, to waken her to a vivid perception of the real thing. She fought

against it, she strove to overcome it, but she never flinched from its recognition.

She was shocked to find how little concern she felt for Dr. McLean's condition, for Tom's threatened bereavement. Even as, at first, when her cousin had asked pardon for his rudeness, she had put it to one side as of no account in face of an impending sorrow,—so now the menace at the hands of death seemed remote and unimportant compared to this yet more imminent menace at the hands of life.

She had hurried to her own room after Tom's departure,—his "Good-by, Katherine," still sounding in her ears,—and she had changed her dress for supper with a feverish haste that very much prolonged the operation. She kept telling herself how sorry she was for Tom, how she hoped he would find his father recovering, how terrible it would be if the patient should really die,—and all the time she was remembering what he had said about the dog in the manger, and trying not to remember what he had said after that. At last, as she tied the fluttering ribbon of her belt, something gave way in her resolution, and her mind was once more invaded with the very tone of Tom's voice, as she had heard it say: "I wanted to keep you to myself!"

In sudden revolt, she pulled a hard knot in the ribbon, and, heedless of an entrancing sunset beckoning at her chamber window, she hurried down the stairs to the big library which looked toward the sea. There was a faint reflection of glory in the eastern sky, but the lamps were just lighting and nobody heeded it.

"O Cousin Katherine! you 're just in time to tell us a story before bed," cried a chorus of children's voices.

"And what shall it be?" she asked, gladly welcoming the diversion, and joining the children in their special corner, far as possible removed from the book-reading elders.

"*The Little Rid Hin!*" cried the small Sallie, who preferred a good familiar tale with thrills by much reiteration rendered innocuous.

"Oh, no!" Teddy protested. "We had that three times this morning. Let 's have an Indian story!"

"Oh, I hate Indians," cried Nannie, a vivacious little person with a mind of her own. "Tell us an animal story,—please, Cousin Katherine!"

"Let me think," Katherine pondered; "what kind of an animal shall it be about?" Then, in sudden defiance of herself: "Oh, I have it! I 'll tell you the story of *The Dog in the Manger!*"—and she was surprised to find with what equanimity she was bearding her lion or his unmannerly canine equivalent.

"Sounds like a Christmas story," quoth Teddy, rather doubtfully; he liked all things in their season.

"Oh, it 's not a Christmas story; it 's just an everyday kind of one, good for any day of the year,"—and Teddy, reassured, mounted the arm of a neighboring chair, and prepared for a canter into the land of make-believe.

"I 'm afraid the dog in the manger was not a very nice kind of dog," the storyteller began, while she absently disengaged Sallie's fingers from her watch chain;—for Sallie, who appeared to regard the human form as a species of migratory furniture, had promptly established herself in her cousin's lap.

"What kind of a dog was he?" asked Jack, the elder of the two boys, who sat on the floor with his setter pup spread genially across his person.

Katherine considered a moment, while her mind just grazed the thought of Tom.

"I believe he was a mastiff," she ventured.

"A full-blooded one?" asked Jack, with the interest of a budding *connoisseur*.

"Oh, yes!"

"Then he was all right! There ain't any flies on a full-blooded mastiff."

"There were plenty of flies on this one," Katherine laughed, "for he lived in a stable. He used to lie in a manger."

"But a mastiff could n't get into a manger," Jack objected.

"But this one did."

"Perhaps it was an unusually large manger," suggested Nannie, "or an unusually small mastiff."

"There was nothing small about the mastiff," Katherine protested, "although he may not have been full grown. But he was pretty big and pretty powerful, and he would n't let anybody touch the feed."

"But, of course, he did n't eat it himself," cried Jack.

"No; that was just what was n't nice about him. He did n't want it himself, and he would n't let anybody else have it."

"I guess the one it belonged to had n't come along," said a small voice from behind Katherine's chair, and a pair of little hands that had been resting on the storyteller's shoulders came round and clasped themselves under her chin.

"Hullo, Louliekin!" Katherine called, in feigned surprise. "You there?"

"Is that all the story there is?" asked Nannie, making no effort to conceal her disappointment.

"I 'm afraid it 's all I know," Katherine confessed, amazed to find that invention failed her.

"I don't call it very much of a story," said Teddy. "I think it 's about the poorest one you ever told us."

"I don't care," Jack declared, comfortably, as he rolled over on the floor with the pup in his arms. "It 's always nice to hear about a mastiff."

"Now tell us another one," cried the insatiate Teddy. Whereupon Katherine took herself in hand, and told one of her very best stories, one devoid of dogs and mangers, and unimpeded by embarrassing imagery.

For, deeply as Katherine was shaken by the self-revelation that had come to her, she was too sympathetic, too alive to the influences of the moment, to succumb to the inner storm. She not only appeared to be absorbed in the fortunes of a runaway sailor-boy, —he was, for the time being, the most interesting figure in fiction; and the childish faces, intent and eager, seemed quite to fill out her mind and heart to the exclusion of disconcerting ideas. Once, only, when Uncle Theodore, with a glance at the clock said: "The Albany train ought to be just pulling out of the station," a quick contraction of the heart caught her, and she found herself alluding to the mother of the hero. But the children brought her up very short.

"You said his mother died when he was a baby!" Teddy cried.

"Oh, yes, so she did! I had forgotten."

"I don't see how you could forget a thing like that!" Nannie exclaimed, reproachfully.

Thus jerked back to the safe confines of fiction, Katherine finished the story without further misad-

venture, and, bed-hour arriving just as the orphan sailor-boy had opportunely become master of a full-rigged ship, she was fallen upon by her young listeners with a headlong demonstrativeness in which lurked no trace of that judicial spirit that had characterized their criticisms.

"Save the fragments, children!" Uncle Theodore called, secretly rejoicing in the cumulative muscle of his healthy progeny; and presently, as the little feet went pattering over the stairs—"You don't look as battered as I expected, Katherine."

"Oh, they never batter me," she laughed. "I 've learned to parry."

"They 've pulled your belt ribbon into a hard knot," Aunt Anne observed.

"No; I did that myself; I got in a hurry,"—and Katherine meekly set herself to untie the knot.

Katherine was rather surprised at her own self-possession, then and later. She had been given to understand that girls in her situation were always on the verge of self-betrayal; that they were abstracted and nervous and altogether unequal to the claims of human intercourse. She supposed it was a sign of the deficiency of her equipment for romantic experiences, that she found it possible to pursue the even tenor of her way with such commonplace ease. When, the next day, she returned home, and related to her grandmother the circumstance of Tom's departure, she felt no special self-consciousness; nor was she thrown off her balance by the arrival of a telegram for Mrs. Day, stating that Tom had found his father already improving. Strangest of all, when on Tuesday a letter from Tom to herself was put into her hands, Katherine did not start nor change color nor

conduct herself in any particular like a damsel with a sentimental secret to conceal. She read the letter aloud to the family, as she was expected to do, and her voice did not waver, even when it came to the ending:

"Your faithful old dog in the manger,
"TOM."

"What does he mean by dog in the manger?" Mrs. Day inquired.

"Only some nonsense he was talking on Sunday." Upon which Katherine folded the letter and put it into her pocket.

"I am not sure that it is in good taste for him to make jokes in a letter like that," Aunt Fanny remarked, with unusual severity. If Sarah was to become a widow like herself, no one knew better than Fanny the requirements of the situation.

"It was not really a joke," Katherine hastened to explain; "I ought not to have called it nonsense; it was just Tom's way of criticising himself."

"A thing he does n't often do," Mrs. Day observed, rather pointedly.

And what did Tom mean by "dog in the manger?" What did he make of the situation? How did he interpret the sudden stirring of the waters of tranquil good comradeship where the cousins had so long and so securely floated?

He thought of it a good deal in the night as he sped on his westward way, sleeping only intermittently, and he was still thinking of it, when, at dawn, he alighted at the deserted railway station at Delphi. He had not telegraphed his train and there was no one there to meet him. He strode the long mile of the broad, elm-bordered street to his father's house, and he knew that

what quickened his steps was not only anxiety for his father but the desire to escape from the importunities of another subject.

He found the patient already rallying, though feebly, from the stroke. He was not fully conscious, yet he seemed dimly and gratefully aware of his son's presence. There were few trained nurses in Delphi, and none had been available for the case. As Tom watched his stepmother, strong and calm, moving about the sick-room with that air of quiet assurance which characterizes a good nurse, he had a feeling that she was drawing her husband back to life by sheer force of will. It was just what he should have expected of her,—that she should be absolutely mistress of the situation. And, curiously enough, he found that she reminded him to-day very much of Katherine. That was probably because Katherine wanted to be a nurse, he told himself; it was merely the association of ideas. But no, the bend of her head above her patient was like Katherine's when she stooped to pick up a crying child; the action of her hands as she ministered to him was like the action of Katherine's hands. He wondered if Katherine really would grow into such a woman as her aunt—he wondered very much.

From which it will be seen that Tom had not by any means lost hold of himself. If he had lain awake in his berth, pondering these things, it was because they acted as a counter-irritant to a mind already deeply moved by the news from home. His anxiety for his father was not a subject to ponder upon; it stimulated, directly, nothing but a more or less acute suspense; it was a matter of feeling only, where thought, speculation, judgment, were not specially

roused. But this new phase of his relation with Katherine was a different affair,— not so important, he would have explained, but more bothersome.

What did it come to, anyway? he asked himself, for the hundredth time, as he watched his stepmother quietly chafing the long, housebred hand, lying nerveless in her open palm. He was not in love, of course,—and the very expression, as it occurred to his mind, antagonized him violently. He was not so far gone as that! But—would he be, some years from now, when the time should be ripe? And would Katherine? And was Katherine? Ah, was she?

Perhaps Tom was right, after all—perhaps he was far indeed from being in love. Certainly he himself should have been the best judge as to that! He had had his moment of revelation, his moment of recognition, and face and voice had borne witness to it. But when would that moment recur? Not just at present, if he could help himself.

Tom McLean was not imaginative, but he was imperatively, tenaciously ambitious; and he could ill brook any influence that might interfere with the fulfilment of his ambition. When he had said to Katherine: "Oh, Archie 's going to be married; he 's going to have his hands tied,"—he had spoken with deliberate conviction. A man could not tackle fate with his hands tied,—that was an established proposition,—and Tom had no idea of shortening the term he had set. He should certainly not marry before he was thirty-five; that was nine years;—and meanwhile? Supposing Katherine should take Paul Stuyvesant, or somebody else? For an instant his mind stood still on the thought, and then there stole upon him a strange, unwarranted assurance that she never would.

Now Tom was not so fatuous as to imagine that Katherine cared for him; indeed, he was peculiarly devoid of the sort of vanity which such an assumption would have implied. He merely believed her to be as fancy free as she had always appeared. Yet deep down in a part of his consciousness which he was visiting to-day for the first time, was a conviction that he knew his cousin better than anybody else, and that she never could do anything so foreign, so out of character, as to—marry out of the family! And this amazing proposition Tom calmly propounded to himself without an inkling of its absurdity. Truly, Tom, for all his twenty-six years, for all his masterfulness, was yet but a crude, undisciplined youngster.

During the first day of his absence he and Archie had exchanged a couple of telegrams on business matters, but when it came to writing, the letter got itself addressed to Katherine. Tom sat at a little desk in his father's room reporting of the situation there,—writing more fully than he would have thought of doing to any one but Katherine. Once, in the course of his letter, he found himself putting in her name, quite as if he had been talking to her; and suddenly a strong tenderness seized him, an unaccountable desire to write "dear Katherine." He glanced at the beginning of the letter; how non-committal it was there—"dear Katherine"! Yet if he were to put it in in any other place it would look very strange—and oh, how sweet!

Yes, he did want to keep her to himself. But he must not say so again,—not for years to come! He hoped she had not caught the phrase. It would only have offended her, and it would be embarrassing to try and explain it away. As for admitting,

even to himself, that it had any special significance, —that was far, indeed, from his intention. No,—there must be no admissions whatever; for a long time yet he must play the unhandsome part of dog in the manger.

And so, when it came to the end of the letter, he signed himself as we have seen; and Aunt Fanny, had she but known, was in the right of it to be shocked.

CHAPTER XI

A THROW FOR LIFE

> "Never again elude the choice of tints!
> White shall not neutralize the black, nor good
> Compensate bad in man, absolve him so:
> Life's business being just the terrible choice."

DR. McLean meanwhile continued to improve, insomuch that at the end of three or four days his recovery seemed secure enough to permit of Tom's return to his office. But, as the patient gained a fuller consciousness, he fell under a pitiful depression of spirits, so appealing to the filial affection,—which was a matter of habit with Tom, and therefore very vigorous,—that the young stock-broker made the sacrifice of a second three days for the consolation of the sufferer.

Tom always had a preposterous notion that if he had not been so preoccupied during his week's absence at Delphi, if he had kept his mind on business, things would not have gone wrong at the office. This was, of course, an absurd theory, but the one fact remained, that—whether from causes occult or natural—things did go very wrong indeed.

It was a great week on the stock exchange,—a record-breaker the younger members were inclined to call it. The volume of business was enormous, the

rise in prices phenomenal, the speculative atmosphere electric. Yet while industrials and railroads and even "governments" themselves—nearly all securities in fact, good, bad, and indifferent—were booming, it happened, as it always does, that one or two got caught in some undercurrent and carried to one side out of the course of the great onward movement; and all the influence such stocks felt was a sinister sucking away of the undertow created by the main current in the middle there. And so it chanced that a certain venture on which Archie had recently staked everything he possessed, kept sagging, and sinking lower and lower, not with any sudden or alarming drop that might have startled him into corrective action, but with so hesitating a decline that it could hardly be recognized as definitive. And Archie, sanguine at first, desperate only at last, saw his entire personal capital sucked away, and still no staying of the decline.

On the day when he sold his last substantial security—at a handsome advance, too—and added the goodly sum to that ever vanishing margin, I think he would have held his hand and borne his losses as pluckily as another had he been left to his own devices. He was not without a delicate, if not robust, sense of honor, and there was only one thing before which he could have recoiled as he did before a breach of faith with Tom. That one thing was the loss of Winny; and, when the alternative was presented, he yielded, much as a sincere martyr, with nerves unequal to the test, might have yielded to the actual pressure of the iron upon his vital parts.

Horace Gerald, victim as much to his own fatuity as to Archie's over-confidence, had allowed himself to be

drawn deeper and deeper into their unlucky speculations, and he was not one to bear a financial loss with equanimity. When, at last, he perceived that they were playing a losing game, he stopped short off, but not without a fierce turning upon Archie whom he held personally responsible for the disaster. It was only about a fortnight since bad luck had definitively set in, but progress on the down grade is proverbially swift and that short period of time had sufficed seriously to embarrass our unlucky speculator. In short, Gerald had not only lost what ready money he could lay hands on; he had even mortgaged his gingerbread homestead, whose every meaningless excrescence, every inappropriate decoration, was dear to his self-importance. Thus galled in his vanity, mulcted of that which it fed upon, he turned, with cruel vindictiveness, upon his partner in folly.

It was the third day of Tom's absence from the office, that Gerald came in, at noon, and sat, like a lowering thunder-cloud, watching the ticker. There was not much doing in the particular stock upon which Archie and he had both recently concentrated their entire resources; but each sale recorded was a trifle lower than the previous one, and just before the closing of the stock exchange, came a quotation a half point below their margin. Gerald got up and faced Archie, who had been too busy for more than an occasional desperate glance in the direction of his own affairs. The two men were alone for the moment—Archie, pale and shaken, Gerald hard and menacing as any other brute at bay.

"Dished," he growled. The low guttural was hardly articulate.

"We 're both in the same box," Archie replied,

trying his best to take it lightly. "We 've played high and we 've lost. Of course it was on the cards."

"It was not cards we were playing," Gerald answered, slowly and significantly. "The thing was not presented to me as a game of chance. You professed to know what you were about. Either you deliberately deceived me or you are a brainless, conceited coxcomb, and you deserve exposure!"

Archie changed color and his eyes flashed. "Mr. Gerald!" he cried; and then he checked himself.

"Don't Mr. Gerald me," the other retorted; "I won't have anything of the kind. You owe me,—yes,—you owe me thirteen thousand five hundred dollars. Your first business is to pay that. When you have shown that you have a sufficient sense of decency to do so you will be at liberty to state your side of the case; but not before." And the man turned on his heel to leave the office. But:

"Wait!" Archie cried; and as Gerald stayed his step, without, however, turning toward him: "You know," the boy declared, "as well as I do, that I have not a dollar left."

Then Gerald faced about.

"So!" he said, slowly again and in a low voice, his eyes narrowing to an ugly slit. "You propose to step out of the game and let me whistle for my money."

"What else can I do?" cried Archie, feeling that it was ignoble to parley with the brute — the brute that was Winny's father! "What else can I do?"

"I understood that you still believed the stock was good; that a quick turn might set it spinning any day."

"Yes; but—"

"*Set it spinning*,—those were your words, as I re-

member, only yesterday; and you professed to have your information from one who knew."

"And so I did! But how does that help matters if I 've no more money to risk?"

Again Gerald's eyes narrowed perceptibly. He had nothing to lose, everything to gain. This man, impoverished, was nothing to him,—should be nothing to his daughter. Enriched again he could count at least upon the reimbursement of his own losses,—not in equity, but by the strong compulsion which he so well knew how to exercise. It was clearly for his interest that the game should continue.

"Are the resources of McLean & Day exhausted?" he asked significantly.

"I have never touched the resources of McLean & Day!" Archie protested hotly. "I 'm not a rascal!"

"Highty tighty, young man! What language are you giving me?"

Archie recovered himself instantly. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "I meant nothing personal!"—and as the words crossed his lips he felt himself in a measure avenged; for the man there had not perceived that they were insulting—"You have perhaps forgotten the terms of my agreement with McLean."

"The terms of your agreement are no affair of mine. I am only concerned to see to it that you are correct in your relations with me and *my family.* I give you the rest of the week to adjust matters. If, by Sunday, you have no suggestions to offer, it will be my painful duty to tell Winny that—" Archie's eyes were blazing now.

"To tell Winny what?" he demanded, taking a step forward.

Gerald was cowed, though he did not know that

Archie saw it. He ended his sentence quite differently from what he had intended, but with an ill-assumed dignity born of the enforced moderation of his words: "To tell Winny—the truth," said he.

As Gerald passed out of the office, a telegraph messenger came in. The dispatch was from Tom.

"Can't come back before Monday. Hold the helm hard,"

it read.

Archie looked it over,—after which he stood for some minutes lost in thought. Then, glancing once more at the dispatch, he tore it into the smallest possible fragments and dropped them into the waste-paper basket. No danger of forgetting the message: "Hold the helm hard"—"Hold the helm hard." The words kept repeating themselves in his mind while he thought of other things till they had quite lost their meaning.

The rest of that week Archie spent every leisure hour with Winny. She wondered that she allowed him to, for she was never lavish with her favors, and she was skilled in little pretexts of other interests by which she kept alive in him a proper sense of appreciation. But there was something about Archie that week which she found it hard to resist—a combination of meekness and importunity, a half-timid eagerness, that in one of his natural grace and ease was very captivating.

And Archie? I think he knew well enough that the end was at hand. All his sanguine confidence had deserted him from the moment that he touched the resources of McLean & Day. He knew, when he signed that first check, that all was up with him. He

believed himself to be yielding to a fatality, and so he was,—to the fatality of a weak will, of an unstable conscience. He did it as a man in a burning house leaps to destruction;—because he could not bear the agony of suspense on the uncertain chance of rescue. Anything, anything,—destruction itself, was better than that! And so, for three days, he courted it among men; for three evenings his harassed spirit found a refuge with Winny, cool and sweet as ever, and blessedly unconscious of coming ill.

On Sunday, when he presented himself at the door, he was met by Gerald,—hat in hand, that the encounter might seem a casual one.

"Well?"

No judicial interrogatory could have done more execution with Archie's case than that hard monosyllable. But he clutched at possible respite.

"McLean is coming back to-morrow," he said, "perhaps he will straighten things out."

Gerald gave him an ugly look; he had small faith in McLean's good will, yet—he could afford to grant one day of grace, he, who had the whip hand in the affair. So he only shrugged his shoulders and passed down the walk, leaving Archie to find Winny and forget if he could that she was the daughter of Horace Gerald.

And would Tom help? That was what Archie asked himself a hundred times that day, a thousand times that night. Would Tom help? There was probably not another man of Tom's acquaintance who would have asked such a question; there were few men living who, in Archie's place, would have felt the smallest spark of hope, when, the next morning, the partners met.

Archie went to the city early, but, early as he was,

he found Tom already busy at his desk. He had come through on the night train.

"Hullo, Tom!" Archie exclaimed. "What an early worm you are!"

"And you," Tom rejoined, well pleased with his partner's zeal. "Is this the sort of hours you 've been keeping?"

"Not exactly," Archie answered; "I came in to get a word with you before she started up,"—with a nod in the general direction of the stock exchange.

"That 's right! We shall have plenty of time to run things through. Where shall we begin?"

"Supposing we begin at your end; how did you leave your father?"

"Oh, he 's coming round all right; the doctor says it could n't be better. The only trouble is, he 's so devilish despondent. That was why I stayed on so; it seemed to comfort him." And Tom's mind reverted to the hours he had spent at his father's bedside, the long, thin fingers clasped about his own sturdy fist. The invalid had liked it so. When Tom clasped his hand in return, he would soon double up his son's fingers and fold his own palm around the knuckles. The impression of strength, of resistance, seemed to be what he craved.

"It was hard to leave him, even now," Tom ended, while a shadow, new to his face, deepened there.

Archie felt instinctively that if any moment could be favorable it was now; he had never seen Tom soften like that. Throwing himself into their solitary leathern arm-chair, as if an ease of attitude might give him ease of address at this critical juncture:

"Of course you had to stay on," he assented; and then, keeping his eyes fixed on his partner's face:—

"But I can't help wishing it had been different. I wish you could have got back the middle of the week."

The face he was watching changed; there were no more softening shadows there.

"Why, what do you mean? Have we lost any chances?"

"Worse than that! That is, I—"

"You?"

Archie sprang to his feet; there was no use trying to be easy and leisurely. He went over to the window, and stood, with his back to Tom, looking down into the still deserted street. How crowded it would be an hour from now! He was not the only lunatic at large,—there was comfort in that.

"Fact is, Tom," he said, "I 've been burning my fingers a bit in that boiling cauldron over there and —well, the chestnuts did not show up."

Tom turned on his stool to face the culprit; the sight of the slender, well-dressed back added contempt to his displeasure.

"So!" he said, with a slow indignation, cold yet, but smouldering. "So—you 've been speculating!"

"Nasty word; is n't it?" Archie muttered.

"Nasty thing," said Tom, "when it is n't honest!"

"What do you mean by that?"

Archie turned toward Tom with what should have been defiance; but the knowledge of worse to come quelled the impulse.

"Only that when I took you for a man of your word, I supposed it was the spirit and not only the letter of a contract you would honor."

And again Archie could not permit himself a bold retort.

"Then according to your understanding, I was not

free to handle my private fortune after my own judgment?" he asked, rather lamely.

"According to my understanding, and according to your understanding, there is no room for a gambler in the firm of McLean & Day."

And still Archie postponed the worst.

"The man who has no use for me has no use for my name," he retorted, with a momentary flickering of his natural spirit.

"All the better!" Tom declared, turning back to his desk as if he had had enough of a distasteful subject.

Archie glanced at the clock; in half an hour things would start up. Could he afford to prolong the respite? He came over to Tom's desk, and, leaning his elbows on it, said, in his most ingratiating tone: "Tom, it 's very serious, and it means a great deal more to me than money; it means more to me than life."

"Oh!" Tom replied, with ill-concealed satisfaction in his own sagacity. "You mean Miss Gerald! Is she going to throw you over?"

"Never! Winny could n't! But her father—"

"What! that old gambler?"

"Oh, that won't help any; he does n't feel any better for having got his own fingers burnt."

"Maybe not! But it would n't look very well to see him turn on you, when everybody will know that he 's the bigger fool of the two."

"I don't know how every one will know," Archie retorted; "I don't suppose his brokers will blab."

Tom drew in his breath.

"That 's so," he agreed,—and, for the moment, he felt something like relenting toward his unlucky partner. Archie had failed in the essentials, and he must take the consequences; but—he had his good points.

Katherine herself could not have been quicker to set him right. Katherine!—She would feel this thing badly; even a dog in the manger has some bowels of compassion in him.

"What are you in for?" he asked.

"All there was," said Archie.

"Great Cæsar! You have n't thrown your last copper overboard?"

"The very last! It was twenty shares of J. P., by the way."

"But that 's jumping!"

"Yes, I got the advantage of quite a high jump myself. Sold at 130."

"And pitched that in with the rest?"

Tom must have softened. Was it the week at his father's bedside that had opened his mind to so mild and unwonted a visitant as compassion? Yet it was not of the sufferer, now so many miles away, that he was thinking. It was Archie's likeness to his sister that had caught his attention. Tom had seen Katherine look like that when she was sorry for somebody. What though it was only for himself that Archie was sorry? The likeness told in his favor. It was nothing more than a certain droop of the lines of his face that touched his cousin to a leniency which took the sting out of his words as he remarked, thoughtfully: "Archie, you ought to be in swaddling clothes."

Archie tried to laugh.

"You 'll think I ought to be in a straight-jacket," he answered, "when you know the worst."

"The worst? What 's that?" All the leniency was gone from Tom's voice.

"Well, the truth is, I 've been—borrowing."

Tom stiffened and lowered.

"On what security, if I may ask?"

"On that of McLean & Day,"—and Archie straightened himself, conscious that it was the first manly thing he had said in all that interview. The very manliness of it was a challenge, and, at last, Tom had something to fight.

He did not ask how much money had been used; if it was a hundred dollars or ten thousand was all one to him. McLean & Day had been involved, the integrity of the firm—of its principles at least—was threatened, and at the hands of the man he had trusted. Archie saw the change and knew that his case was desperate.

"It was a throw for life, Tom! The old man had me under his heel. It was my only chance."

"It was not your chance," Tom interjected, while his smouldering wrath grew hot.

"Put it any way you like," Archie cried. "The chance was there, and I took it, and—I lost it. And, Tom, you're the only man that can save me. It 's not the money," he went on. "I meant it only as a loan. I 'll pay it back—somehow. I have n't had time to think how. But, if you turn me off, Tom,—if you go back on me—"

"*I* go back on *you!*"

"Yes! That's what it would be! We were friends before we were partners, Tom, and—it 's a family matter."

"That is not my view of it."

"Take what view you will of it," Archie cried, speaking more and more rapidly. "Call it any name you will,—call me any name you will, but—don't break up the concern. Not yet, at least. You may trust me, Tom! I will swear on my honor—"

"On your what?"

"On my honor," Archie repeated, scarcely heeding the interruption,—"to be as subordinate as an office-boy, and to slave like a man with a million in sight—if only you 'll leave things as they are till I 've straightened matters out with Gerald. If you don't,—well, Tom, I 'm done for till the end of time!" And the supplicating voice died out on the words, for he perceived that Tom's face was only hardening.

"When you 've done with tall talk," Tom remarked, "perhaps you might as well give me the figures."

Archie pulled himself up sharp.

"They are not more than half my interest in the firm," he answered.

Tom's face twitched; he had not thought of any such sum as that; but—"It 's not the amount," he controlled himself sufficiently to say. "It 's the thing itself."

Already his mind was swiftly running through the resources of the firm. Their credit was jeopardized but not yet touched.

Coldly dismissing Archie's plea as a closed issue, Tom turned his attention to the urgent business aspect of the situation. It called for all the executive ability he possessed, and more than all the diplomacy he had ever thought of using. The hours went by fast and furious, and when, late in the afternoon, the last effort had been made, for that day at least, it was by no means certain that the effort had been successful. His chief reliance was upon Ford & Bridgman, and from them he could not hear until the morning.

For a moment, before parting, the two men stood face to face, Archie tall and pale, Tom close-knit, and hard as hickory.

"Have you said your last word?" Archie asked.

"No!" Tom replied with emphasis. "We 'll attend to that when this is over."

"Over? How?"

"I don't know—how."

"And then?"

"And then—we'll close up this concern, and I will do what I knew I ought to do from the beginning,—stand on my own legs."

"You don't particularly mind giving me over to the demnition bowwows?" Archie inquired, with a last effort to conciliate Tom and deceive himself by speaking lightly.

"The demnition bowwows!" Tom repeated contemptuously. "I should think that you had looked after that part of the business yourself!"

CHAPTER XII

THE ONE GRACE

> "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
> Or what 's a heaven for?"

IT had been a severe shock to Tom, this sudden reverse in his fortunes, and the far graver jeopardizing of his business credit. When a man has deliberately devoted the years of his youth, the powers of early manhood, his very lien upon the future, to one exclusive aim, he has exposed himself in a single, but none the less vulnerable, quarter to the attacks of misfortune. Yet it was hardly a sense of personal injury that made Tom so hard upon Archie. The exigencies of the situation left little leisure for personal resentment, for which, indeed, he had still less natural inclination. He was not, by nature, vindictive; he was only harsh with the harshness that often comes with crudity. He saw the plain facts of life with the distinctness given to the normal but uninstructed eye; he missed the relations of things to one another, the modifications of atmosphere and perspective. Hence, when he contemplated Archie's character in the light of his recent action, Tom could see him only as an inferior order of scoundrel, weak as he was dishonest; and this unflattering

presentment stood out before him, isolated and unrelieved by any perception of the subject's inward anatomy or outward relationships.

Tom was incapable of conceiving of the temptation of circumstance, chiefly because he had no more comprehension of an emotional response to temptation than a piece of flint might be supposed to possess of the susceptibilities of a magnet. And because his condemnation of his partner was a matter, not merely of personal resentment, nor of momentary indignation, but of what he considered a clear, indisputable perception of facts, it was not immediately modified by that usually softening influence, the passage of time. If, on Monday, he perceived that Archie was a feeble villain, on Tuesday he found no reason to change his opinion. Insomuch that when, on Tuesday morning, a note from Katherine arrived, begging him to come and see her, he was betrayed into the absurdity of believing that she would share his opinion of her brother, and frankly perceive the necessities of the case.

Katherine was prejudiced, of course; she was fond of Archie, and had believed in him. Well, so had he, —Tom! They had both been deceived; they must both recognize the fact. He would tell her not to be too unhappy about it. Archie was in a bad way, of course; but he, Tom, would come out of this all right, so there would not be that to worry about;—in fact he had already had a favorable telegram from Ford & Bridgman. That would be a great comfort to her. Dear Katherine! He could almost fancy himself speaking the words he had not ventured to write— Dear Katherine! Yes, he must console her—and at the thought his heart grew so tender within him

that he was seized with a sudden apprehension;—he felt almost afraid of her.

And truly, Tom, in his hardness and intolerance, had reason to be apprehensive, though not of the gentler embarrassments he dreaded; for Archie had been before him.

On Monday evening, after that terrible day that left him stripped of his last fluttering rag of hope, the unlucky speculator had gone for sympathy, not to Winny, the girl for whose sake he had risked and lost more than a fortune, but to his sister. His avoidance of Winny was instinctive,—he himself had no comprehension of its motive,—but his appeal to Katherine was founded on something more substantial than instinct, on nothing less tangible than the experience of a lifetime. Never yet had Katherine failed him, in fair weather or foul, and so he went to her that Monday evening and told her as much of the truth as could not be avoided.

He told her how he had been beguiled by misleading information into taking unlucky risks,—such risks as had been the making of many a great fortune; of how he had tried to save himself by further risks, because he was not a coward to succumb at the first setback; how he had become more and more deeply involved, always for Winny's sake; and how, at last, he had—yes, he had—borrowed of McLean & Day.

Katherine changed color at that; she, too, had her instincts.

But,—it was his own money, he reminded her, his own capital that he had put into the concern.

"Oh, but Archie!" she cried, possessed of a new and intolerable anxiety, "You promised!"

But Archie was adroit where adroitness would serve, though he had recognized the futility of trying to fence with Tom.

"That was different, Katherine. You don't understand," he protested,—and almost he was bejuggled by his own sophistry. "It was agreed that McLean & Day should not speculate; but every firm of the kind lends money to speculators. I was acting on my own account; I merely borrowed of the firm."

Katherine was groping for the real truth,—groping for it,—yet half unconsciously evading it. All this sounded plausible; and why should she expect to understand the niceties of business ethics?

"If you had only come to me before!" she exclaimed, glad enough to waive perplexing problems.

"But what good would that have done?" cried Archie. "I had to go on, to the last drop of blood,—to the last drop of blood!"—and his voice, as he gloomily repeated the phrase, was grim as his words.

"But, Archie, you could have used my money, and not—borrowed." She hated to pronounce the word; somehow it did not sound right.

"You mean that you would give me another chance, even now?" The sudden animation with which he responded was more disquieting than all the rest.

"To speculate with? Oh, no, no! Only to make things right with McLean & Day."

"Nothing would make things right there!" Archie declared; and again despondency took him,—the black fiend that had driven him to confession,—whose presence he had all but talked down in his fluent self-defence.

"I don't see why not."

"Tom is turning me off,"—and his whole figure drooped, with his voice.

"Oh, he sha'n't turn you off!" Katherine cried. "And he would never do it! He thinks too much of you; he always speaks so well of you."

"He never will again; I 'm the dirt under his feet."

"That was only because he was angry. I can understand that so well; I have such a horrid temper myself. It 's something you can't allow for, Archie, because you have a sweet disposition. But you must not mind too much what he said when he was in a passion."

"He did n't seem in a passion."

"Yes, but people are so different when they are angry. It would n't be like Tom to storm and rage; he is always slow and deep. He 's never impulsive even when he is angry; but of course he must have been angry then. Oh, Archie, you don't know Tom as I do!"

"I only know he was hard as the nether millstone. And when I told him that if he broke up the concern, I should,—oh, Katherine! I should lose Winny—"

"Lose Winny?"

"Yes; old Gerald says that 's what it has come to, —and he 's worse than Tom."

"And Mr. Gerald knows?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Archie, why did n't you come to me first?"

"I—I could n't."

"Of course you could n't, because you thought he had a right to know. It was fine of you, Archie; I don't think I ever half did you justice! But—I wish it could have seemed right to come to me first!"

"It would n't really have made any difference.

It was—just fate! Do you believe in fate, Katherine?"—and Archie lifted his head, with a despairing look that smote her to the heart, and filled her with an unreasoning alarm. No, she did not believe in fate; how could she? And yet, if Archie believed in it, if he felt the pressure of a terrible malign influence, was he not already in its thrall? That must not be; it must not be!

Katherine Day was as sensitively reticent in her religious feeling as any other daughter of the Puritans. She had never in her life spoken confidentially of sacred things. And so she could not even now give full expression to the faith that was in her, though it rose in vehement rejection of the heathen symbolism. She only said, while the color slowly deepened in her cheeks, and her voice dropped to a lower key:

"No, Archie, I don't believe in fate. How can I—how can you?—when we remember,—what we really do believe in!"

Archie stood abashed, not so much by what she had said, as by the fact that she had said it. He had been on his feet through most of the interview, and now she too was standing.

"It 's easy to believe in all that sort of thing," he scoffed, trying to ignore the impression her words had made,—"when you are on the winning side."

"It may be easy then, but,—when you 're on the losing side it 's absolutely necessary."

She had come over to him and was carefully smoothing back a lapel of his coat which had got turned the wrong way. He laid his hand on hers, stroking it absently.

"I wonder why you always make me feel as if things

might come out right in the end?" he queried, looking down into her face, while his own cleared a bit.

"Probably because I feel so sure myself," she answered cheerfully. "And besides, there 's lots to do, and when there are things to do, nothing is too much to expect."

"Such as?" Archie inquired, while his old hopefulness tried feebly to lift its head.

She was watching his face for just that change, and when she saw it coming:—"First of all," she cried, "let 's go out and look at the stars! There 's a beauty of a planet shining over the Littlefield horse-chestnut tree, now-a-nights. I don't believe you 've so much as seen it,—you and Winny."

"Winny does n't care so much about the stars as you do," he admitted, as they closed the front door behind them, and stood looking westward. "She 's more fond of flowers."

"Yes, and you send her such gorgeous ones! And, Archie," she added, a little timidly, passing her hand through his arm as they stood looking over at the big planet, just getting itself entangled in the thinning foliage of the chestnut top,—"Archie, you won't feel that you 've got to scrimp with Winny, now? Little things mean a lot to her,—I suppose they stand for other things, and that 's why she cares so much. But, Archie, I care almost as much for Winny as you do, and, you know,—we always went snacks, you and I."

Archie slipped his arm over his sister's shoulder in the old brotherly fashion, thereby dislodging her hand from its resting-place. And Katherine welcomed the familiar pressure; it was more natural than that she should lean on him.

Then, as they paced the veranda together, passing

and repassing the windows of the long parlor where grandmother and Aunt Fanny were receiving a state visit from Dr. and Mrs. Littlefield, they fell into a quiet, practical talk, wherein Katherine's cheerful optimism gained fast upon her brother's unnatural despondency. Archie was perhaps the more easily cheered because of his recognition of the inherent unfitness of any association of himself with misfortune. There was something in his chagrins and apprehensions so contrary to what he felt to be the proprieties of the case, that he was easily persuaded of their transitoriness; while Katherine, sharing as she did this unformulated theory with regard to her brother, had the further support of a deep, sustaining faith in Tom's magnanimity. No one knew Tom as she did, she told herself. He had a rough exterior, but it covered a tender heart. She had divined it before, but only lately had it been revealed to her. Since that Sunday,—could it be but a week ago?—she had really come to know him, and she believed,—yes, she did believe,—that he would care to please her. When she wrote him to come to her she knew it would be the very next day, and on Tuesday evening she was glad that the elders of the family were taking high tea at a neighbor's house. Archie, too, was away. He had gone to Winny. His respite was to be continued yet a few days, and he was making the most of it,—eagerly sanguine, direfully despondent, by turns, but carefully guarding his varying moods from Winny, who liked people to be pleasant and self-forgetful. So Katherine sat alone by the sitting-room drop-light, turning the leaves of a new *Atlantic*.

At sight of Tom's face as he entered the room, her heart sank. That was not the Tom who had called

his "good-by, Katherine," as he drove away to minister to his father. It was not even the Tom whom she had quarrelled with so lightly there on the high rock looking out to sea. It was the old Tom, but an intensified Tom, shorn of the new gentleness.

"You 're very good to come," she said, rising, and holding out her hand, with a somewhat hesitating gesture.

But he seized it heartily enough, saying, as he sat down beside her: "I should have come out in a day or two anyway, as soon as I had got my breath. I suppose you know of this miserable business."

"Oh, yes; Archie has told me everything. That is why I wanted to see you. We are so unhappy about it."

"I knew you would feel it, Katherine, and I 'm no end sorry. It 's awfully hard on you!"—and Tom felt that for the moment he was justified in pitying his cousin as tenderly as he would.

"It is very bad, I suppose?"—She was touched by that tenderness of his tone, touched and reassured; that was the new something in him which she had been building on.

"Not so bad as I thought at first," he rejoined. "Things are straightening themselves out better than I could have believed. Tell you what, though, Katherine, it looked pretty squally yesterday. I was n't half sure of weathering it."

"But Tom, you know—you must know of course—that as far as the money goes,—"

"Well?"

"Why, as far as the money goes,—what Archie and I have is as much his as mine."

"If that is n't just like a girl!" Tom exclaimed,—

poor, blundering, cock-sure Tom. "Why, child, you know as well as I do that that has all been divided, and that Archie has n't the ghost of a claim on your property."

"Indeed he has a claim!" Katherine declared stoutly. "He has a claim on everything of mine,—as I have on everything of his," she hastened to add, fearing to assume a monopoly of generosity. "You don't suppose Archie would see me suffer?"

"Of course he would n't! It 's a man's business to look after the women of his family. But a girl—"

"Stop, Tom! don't say hackneyed things. A girl has just as much at stake in the family honor as a man. If the family is in debt the debt must be paid by the family; you know that as well as I do."

"I know that you are talking sheer nonsense. Do you suppose I would touch a cent of your money if I were starving?"

"No, I don't suppose you would touch a cent of my money, Tom McLean; any more than I would of yours," she added hotly. "But this is not my money, really; it is family money. And it is n't even that one single second after the family is in debt. Ah, Tom, be reasonable! Do forget all those silly, artificial prejudices and let us talk sensibly. What does Archie owe McLean & Day?"

It seemed as if the name of the firm, that firm he had been so proud of, that firm on which he had staked such high hopes, were more than he could bear with equanimity. But Tom, as Katherine had declared, was not one to rage and storm; he could only harden and repel. He set his chin very stiff, and his face grew rigid as he answered:

"Archie has but one obligation toward McLean &

Day which he is in a position to fulfil. He owes it to McLean & Day to resign from the firm."

Katherine grew white.

"O, Tom! take that back! Please take that back,—now,—quick,—before you begin to mean it."

"Begin to mean it? Of course I mean it, Katherine! What else should I mean?"

"But, Tom, it would be Archie's ruin."

"Archie has ruined himself," he asserted stubbornly.

"He has not!" Katherine cried. "You know he has not! He has been foolish,—reckless,—weak,—" she yielded one point after the other, as if to propitiate him; "but—"

"He has been dishonorable," said Tom, quietly, implacably.

"O Tom! don't say that! It is a wicked, cruel thing to say, and you don't mean it. Archie could n't be dishonorable! He thought he had a right to speculate with his own money, he thought he had a right to borrow of the firm—"

"Borrow!" Tom jeered; and because it was the ugly materialization of her own impalpable suspicion, she resented it a thousandfold.

"You shall not speak to me like that!" she cried, springing to her feet.

"If I am to speak at all I must speak the truth," he declared, with a lowering calm that filled her with a great foreboding. He, too, was on his feet now.—"I shall not go out of my way to persecute Archie, but when I am forced to speak of him I shall not quibble."

"And because you put hard names to his mistakes and shortcomings, because you choose to misunderstand him, you will deliberately blight his life?"

"Because I see him as he is, I will have nothing more to do with him."

Katherine knew that he was in dead earnest. If it had been anybody but Tom she would have urged her suit with a persistence that ignored opposition. But Tom meant what he said. Ah, how mistaken she had been! How utterly she had misconceived him! The hardness that she had thought but an outer crust was his very substance and centre. The fleeting tenderness that had beguiled her to—oh, to what had it not beguiled her?—had but touched the surface, as the sun touches and warms the surface of the unfruitful rock.

"Then Tom," she said, with a chill that struck him through and through,—as estranging as if fire had frozen him,—"we will have nothing more to do with one another,—you and we!"—and she made as if to pass him by and leave the room.

But he put out a detaining hand.

"Katherine," he cried; "don't speak so! Nothing can ever come between you and me."

"Something has come between us," she answered wearily, the spirit quite gone from face and voice. It was far more alarming than her anger.

"It shall not!" he cried.

"You mean?"—and she caught her breath with a sudden hope that she knew to be vain.

"I mean that we are friends, you and I. I mean,—oh, Katherine, I mean that we can't get on without each other, and that—"

"And that for the sake of our friendship you will do me the one grace I ever asked of you?"

He was silent,—silent for several seconds. Did he waver? She leaned her hand upon the edge of the

door. She was trying to think only of Archie, but oh! if Tom were to yield, what would Archie be for them, even Archie, in that moment of surrender?

Katherine held her breath; Tom breathed but the deeper. It was a severe test, but he felt that he was standing it. Was a man to be dictated to in the serious concerns of life by a mere girl, even if that girl was Katherine? He must be gentle with her; he hated to hurt her, for oh! he was fond of her; he had never been more tenderly aware of his affection for her than at this moment when he must oppose and wound her.

"Dear Katherine," he said at last, in a tone of deprecating indulgence, than which nothing could have been more galling; "you must not ask that. No man of sense could grant it. I 've got to manage my business concerns according to my own judgment. In everything else—"

"There is nothing else," she flung back. In the sudden revulsion of feeling from the moment's hope, the moment's passionate inclining of the heart toward him, she was possessed by the imperative need of shattering the whole structure of her relation with him. She saw that he recoiled at her words. He would not yield, no!—but he should suffer.

"Oh," she cried, and the scorn of her voice was more injurious than her words; "I am glad it is not you that are my brother! I should be so ashamed!"

"Katherine!"—he took a step toward her,—protesting,—but she had passed swiftly out of the door and up the stairs. He heard her steps cross the room overhead, and then silence fell upon the house.

Tom stood, for many minutes, exactly where she had left him, listening for some movement in the chamber overhead. There was something strange

and unnatural in the silence. His mind recurred to that deserted house by the lonely roadside where the woman had died. He remembered the desolation of those lidless windows. How still it must have been in there after the sound of their horses' hoofs had died away, after the sound of their voices, Katherine's and his, had ceased. Ceased! And so they had. They had said their last word. Tom was too much in earnest in his own utterances to fail to take others seriously. Katherine was hasty, often, but when she had cried: "There is nothing else!" she had meant it. And when she had said those last, bitter words, she had known well that they were final.

Tom pulled himself together with a strong effort. Well, there would be nothing more to interfere with him and his career. A narrow escape, he told himself, as he left the house, and strode down the path where he had watched the departing form of Paul Stuyvesant only a few months ago. A narrow escape.

He paused at the gate, and looked up at the windows of Katherine's room. They were quite dark. That was as it should be. He should have been sorry to see anything so cheerful as a light. She ought to be sitting in the dark.

The gate closed behind him with a sharp click, and Tom started to walk into town, but not quite with his usual vigorous tread. Yes; he had made his escape, he had held his own, but,—oh, how it had hurt!

CHAPTER XIII

BROTHER AND SISTER

"Could I wrestle to raise him from sorrow, grow poor to enrich,
To fill up his life, starve my own out, I would."

KATHERINE heard the sharp click of the gate and knew that Tom was gone. There were other things she knew as well, and that sent a pang of self-terror to her heart, casting out, for the moment, the thought of Archie himself. She sat for many minutes, letting the mere unreasoning pain possess her soul. There was luxury in that pain, luxury in its utter selfishness. Chagrin, mortification, heartache;—these were her own, these could be borne. She had cared for Tom, and he had not cared for her; she said that to herself over and over again. Well, so it had been with Cousin Elmira, and after a while she had died, and there was an end of it. Katherine, too, could bear this thing. She had been deceived, cruelly deceived, but there was no one to blame but herself. And—would she have had it otherwise? As she looked back over the past week, she seemed to forget the self-conflicts and the self-chidings, the rebellion against her own heart. She knew only that she had possessed for those short days something unspeakably precious. Yes, she had

possessed it; it had been an illusion, but it had been hers.

She remembered how she had sat in that very window, looking over at that very planet glowing above the great horse-chestnut tree, trying to think only of high and beautiful things such as the stars were a symbol of,—it was the form her devotions had been wont to take ever since she was a little child,—and how, as she sat watching the great, mysterious light, she had been conscious of a new depth within her own soul wherein the wonderful heavenly light found a new and purer reflection. And in the pain of it, too, there was a depth and preciousness. She did not in the least wish that it had never been. Only the thought of Tom, the actual Tom as she knew him, was slipping away from out this deep and precious sanctuary of the spirit, and to follow him was to leave a safe, sad haven and to put forth upon tossing breakers. She could see him tramping into town, with his firm, needlessly heavy step; she could picture to herself the determination in his face and figure, the very resolution in his soul. And she knew there was no hope for Archie.

Katherine sprang to her feet. Her own trouble she could bear, but Archie's misfortune, Archie's ruin, were intolerable to her spirit. She turned from the window, away from the beautiful planet that found no reflection in the pain for Archie, and, hastening down the stairs, with the same urgent, fleeing tread with which she had mounted them, she passed into the long parlor where the piano stood.

There was the pleasant half-light there, coming from the adjoining hall, the light she usually chose for playing; but that would not serve her turn to-

night. She lighted the gas jets in the big chandelier, and, opening her *Well-tempered Clavichord* she began a hard tussle with old Bach. She had only half learned the prelude she was working on; it seemed to her that if she could play it perfectly before she was interrupted it would be a good sign. She worked hard, with a great intensity of application, but—it was Archie himself that interrupted her.

He came in, with uncertain step, and a wild, haggard look in his face, and, crossing the room, he stood close beside her.

"They 've turned me down," he said.

"They?"

"Yes; Mr. Gerald did it, and Winny—let him!"

Katherine's hands fell upon the keys in discordant protest.

"But he promised to wait, he promised to wait till Tom—"

"He met Tom in the street, just now, and—he asked him."

"And Tom?"

"Tom 's a brute!" cried Archie, while an ugly look of hate, all the uglier because of its impotence, crossed his face.

"If you mean he has n't got a heart, I 'm afraid you 're right. And I went and thought he had," she added, sadly, as if she had been speaking to herself.

"Thinking things does n't make them true,—unfortunately. Anyhow, whether you think so or not, I 'm done for!"—and Archie threw himself into a big arm-chair and stared up at the flaming chandelier.

"No, no, Archie! You 're not done for! Not even if the worse comes to the worst." She had crossed swiftly to him and had dropped upon the arm of his

chair, and laid a strong, kind, urgent hand across his shoulder. "But it sha'n't come to the worst. Winny shall not let it! It 's all in her hands."

Then Archie looked away from the glaring lights, and, reaching up to the hand upon his shoulder, he brought it forward where his eyes could rest upon it. He sat for a moment regarding absently the beautiful, supple fingers, feeling the cool clasp of the palm about his own; and, for the moment, it seemed as if he were gathering strength from the contemplation of it. Then Katherine, looking down and watching him intently, caught a sudden, nerveless droop of hand and head. A new turn of thought had touched and wounded his quivering susceptibility.

"Winny's hands are not strong—like yours," he said, dejectedly; "they 'll let go,—easily."

"Oh, no! not for good and all! She 'll come back to you; I know she will!—She must! Oh, Archie, you forget that she loves you."

"Oh, I don't know,—" and he shook his head wearily.

Archie had seen Winny's face when her father asked if she wished to marry a dishonest beggar. He had not even forbidden her; he had only asked the question. Archie had seen the fright, the shock, the recoil,—strange and unbecoming to those flowerlike features,—but he had looked in vain for the "wish" her father challenged. She had only said: "I don't understand,"—and her eyes had wavered before the supplication of Archie's. Estranged, suspicious, she had moved a step nearer to her father. And Archie, too proud to beg an alms, had seized his hat and left them standing there, father and daughter, in a strange, unnatural unity of interest and feeling.

And the next morning, when Katherine went to Winny, eager with sisterly faith and sympathy, she found her tearful and chagrined, but utterly unresponsive.

"And you really mean," Katherine expostulated, warmly,—"you really mean that you will turn away from the man you love just because he has been unfortunate?"

"Papa says it 's worse than that," was the stubborn answer.

"Your father is—mistaken." Katherine forced herself to be moderate. "He does n't understand about it."

"That 's a very silly thing to say, Katherine. As if papa did not understand about such things better than we girls!"

"But, Winny, you love Archie; and when we love a person we can see clearer and truer than any one else. Look into your own heart, Winny! Don't you know that you could n't have loved a man who was—what your father accuses Archie of being?"

"No,—I don't know anything of the kind. I don't understand such things, and,—anyway, we should n't have anything to live on."

There spoke the Winny that Katherine had known of old; Winny the cautious, the calculating, the exacting. It was only the first of these terms that Katherine allowed herself to apply to her friend, but it was inclusive, had she but known it.

And now, at least, she could take hope,—for was it not in her power to set at rest Winny's practical misgivings?

"Oh, yes," she cried. "You would have enough to live on. There 's lots of the family money left, and I,—I shall need very little now, Winny, for—I

have plans." Katherine's mind was dwelling more than ever, in these troublous days, upon the thought of Sister Dora.

"Are you going to marry that friend of Archie's?" Winny cried.

"Indeed I 'm not going to marry any friend of Archie's!" Katherine protested. "Who ever put such a thing into your head?"

"Oh, Archie tells me everything!"—with a flickering of coquetry that gave Katherine an instant's hope. But the coquetry went out in a sudden chill and lassitude. "Anyway, it does n't make any difference about your plans," she added dejectedly. "They could n't affect us."

"But why not, Winny, if Archie were to have enough to live on?"

The girl shook her head, dully.

"Papa says if he had ten fortunes he would go through them all."

"Oh, Winny! that is not true! It was only for your sake that he tried to get rich too fast. If you were to make him believe that you did not care about money, if he knew you were content, he would do exactly as you wished. I know he would."

Then Winny roused again, and drawing herself severely away from her visitor's supplicating touch: "Katherine," she cried, "I don't see how you can advise me to do wrong!"

"But it would not be wrong!"

"Indeed it would be wrong,—to disobey papa."

"But Winny—"

"I really think, Katherine, I ought n't to listen to you any longer. I must do what is right, and you only make it harder for me. I suppose you don't

think,"—and the pretty lips quivered in sudden self-pity,—"I suppose you don't think anything about what I suffer!"

"Indeed I do, Winny; indeed I do, darling,"—and in an instant she was by Winny's side again, and Winny's head was resting on her shoulder, while the slight frame shook with sobs. "Indeed I do know that you suffer, and that is what I want to save you from. But never mind, darling. We shall find a way. Don't cry, dear, don't cry!—unless it helps you to bear it,"—and Katherine, seized by a sudden craving for that easy outlet, let her own tears come.

They were very young, these two untried souls, caught so suddenly in the stern grasp of life. Each must meet the crisis according to the law of her nature, the weak and the strong, the generous and the selfish; but, for the moment, they found consolation, as any other young things might have done, sobbing their hearts out in one another's arms.

Katherine thought of those tears in the days that followed; and because she always interpreted them in terms of her own more opulent nature, she did not quite lose courage, even when Archie, the ever sanguine, recognized the hopelessness of his cause.

That the lovers were still allowed to meet, was conclusive evidence of her father's confidence in Winny,—a confidence that was perhaps not ill-founded. It was based, indeed, upon certain fundamental traits that the two had in common, and from which it was safe to argue that the daughter was scarcely more likely than the father to be betrayed into sacrificing worldly interest to a passion of the heart.

As for Archie, it soon became distressfully clear to him that not much was to be gained, for the present

at least, from a personal appeal to Winny. He did not for a moment place the true interpretation upon her action. It was filial obedience, it was natural timidity, it was,—yes, it was the cruel disillusionment. She had thought him better than he was, and she was so ideal a creature, her sense of honor was so delicate, that she could not hold to one whom she had ceased to trust.

"Everything is changed, Archie," she would say, with the sweetest, most pensive look in her lovely eyes, — those charming eyes that had enthralled the little Katherine so long ago. "It is not that I don't love you. Of course, love, a love like mine, is not to be overcome in a moment. But,—no!"—as the object of this unique affection made a movement as if to profit by the admission of it,—"Don't come near me, Archie! We are bound in honor to do all we can to overcome it."

"Indeed we are not bound to any such thing! I am not bound in honor to anything of the kind!"

"That 's what papa says," she answered naïvely. "If he did not trust me so perfectly, he would never let me see you as I do. But he knows I could never deceive him."

"And do you mean that you take your father's word about my character?"

"I take papa's word about everything that he understands better than I do,—like business matters, or business character, which you know are very important. But if he were to undertake to tell me that you were not suited to me, that I had been mistaken in thinking that you could have made me happy if things had been different, why,—he could n't influence me the least little bit."

"But, Winny! if you know I am suited to you, if you know I could have made you happy—"

Then Winny would draw herself up and look very sternly at the unhappy petitioner. "You forget, Archie," she would admonish him, "you forget that I am on my honor."

Poor Archie! If he forgot that important fact it was from no lack of reminders; for not a day went by that he did not see Winny,—not a day that he did not plead with her, and that he did not meet with the same repulse. He called himself a miserable poltroon for not making an end of the wretched business; yet deep down within him was always the hope that she would relent,—that she would listen, if not to his beseechings, then to the voice of her own heart. For had she not declared that she loved him still?

And so this pitiful state of affairs went on, until, at last, a shocking thing occurred, putting an end, once for all, to hopes and pleadings.

It was a few weeks after Gerald's ultimatum had gone forth, that Winny was calling upon Katherine late one afternoon, when Archie suddenly appeared at the parlor door, and as he crossed the room both girls saw that he was not himself. His face was flushed, his eyes were dull, and that free carriage of the head, in the absence of which he seemed another man, was changed into a limp, hang-dog air, that was but accentuated as he found himself in Winny's presence.

"Good-afternoon, Miss—Miss Gerald," he stuttered, coming toward her, with uneven gait and uncertain motion of the outstretched hand. Winny moved away, shuddering, and Archie, seeing the gesture of repulsion, stumbled into a chair, and sat staring at her.

"Archie! You are ill!" cried Katherine, hurrying to his side.

"He is drunk," said Winny, the cold disgust in her tone cutting like a dull, rending knife through her words.

Another moment, and brother and sister were alone together.

"They have hurt you, Archie! Oh, they have hurt you!" Katherine was kneeling at his side, clinging to his hot, dry hands. "Oh, my dear! how they have hurt you!"

The fixed, glassy stare yielded; his glance wavered an instant, and then their eyes met. In Katherine's, dominating the pain, the dismay, of the sudden shock was the wonderful divining tenderness that the mother knows, the mother who in the passion of healing forgets to rebuke. And Archie, unmanned, unstrung, craving only consolation in his pitiful state, bent his head upon her breast as a little child might have done, while sobs, the sobs of a little child in his mother's arms, shook his frame. It was only for a moment; but in that moment Katherine knew that one more great reversal had accomplished itself in her inner life. The old bond to the big brother, the pride, the reliance, the joy, had transformed itself into something infinitely pitiful, infinitely precious, but as yet all strange and new.

"You are ill, dear," she said, as he lifted his head, with an effort at self-control. "You are ill—it was an accident." He opened his lips and began a stammering explanation. "I know, I know," she interposed; "I understand it all. It was just—an accident. It will never happen again. But now, we must go up-stairs," and she rose to her feet, hoping

that he would do the same. "Grandmother and Aunt Fanny will be coming in a few minutes and—you don't want to see them; do you, dear? You don't feel able to."

He shook his head miserably.

"No; I don't want to see anybody," he muttered. "I 'm a sick man; that 's what they call the Turk, don't you know? The sick man of Europe! There 's another thing they call him. What is it? You know what it is. Don't be stupid, Katherine! It is n't like you to be stupid!" Something of the old imperativeness, the old big-brotherliness crossed his voice;—just the ghost of a thing that was dead.

"Come, dear," she begged; "please come! You don't want to see anybody."

"But why don't you tell me what the other thing is?" he repeated, fretfully.

He had got upon his feet, yielding, partly to the grasp of her hand, partly to the force of her will. Resting his arm upon her shoulder, and leaning heavily, he walked with her to the stairs, up which he passed, clinging to the balustrade. Half way up, his foot paused, and he gave a short laugh.

"I 've got it," he said; "I 've got it! The *unspeakable Turk!* That 's it!"

Turning, he looked down upon her, as she stood on the stair below, close behind him, lest he should stumble. Caught thus at unawares, her face was anxious and strained. Again he gave a foolish, embarrassed laugh.

"Funny, is n't it?" he maundered, as he turned and proceeded on his way. And again, as he threw himself upon his bed,—"Funny, is n't it?"

"You 'll tell me all about it, by and by," she said,

gently, as she stooped to spread an old afghan over him. It was one she had made for his college room when he was a freshman. It was faded now, and rather shabby, but the meshes had held fast.

Archie looked up, with momentary intelligence. The bodily relaxation seemed to bring a relaxation of the unnatural mental twist.

"Not much to tell," he made an effort to say. "I just signed the papers Tom wanted, and then,—I took a glass for good luck."

His eyes closed heavily, and Katherine, pressing her hand upon his throbbing temples, heard him mutter, already half asleep: "The unspeakable! Funny, is n't it?"

CHAPTER XIV

THE RUNAWAY

> "Echoes die off, scarcely reverberate
> Forever,—why should ill keep echoing ill,
> And never let our ears have done with noise?"

KATHERINE was right; it had been an accident, and it was not likely to occur again. Yet that offence of Archie's, though but a detached incident, significant rather of a general weakness of character than of a specific evil tendency, was destined to have a decisive influence, not only upon the fastidious Winny, but upon the delinquent himself.

It was not, to be sure, his first excess of the kind; his college record, as we know, was not immaculate. But never before had he experienced the sense of utter degradation that possessed him when he awoke from that night's sleep. For the first time in his life he had deliberately got drunk, not beguiled by the allurements of conviviality, but in obedience to a cowardly animal instinct that counselled escape from pain at any price.

Up to the time that he had actually signed the papers dissolving the partnership of McLean & Day, Archie had always cherished a flickering hope that some miracle might intervene to save him,—an incredible change of heart in Tom, an impossible turn in his own business affairs,—something as little to be

foreseen as the succession of mischances which had brought about his ruin. This little flame of hope he had nursed and tended, with the fatuity of an over-sanguine temperament, of a will untrained to more legitimate exercise. Hence, the final act in that small business tragedy, inevitable as it had been, came upon him with the shock of an intolerable catastrophe. In signing the dissolution of partnership he felt himself to be setting his hand to the dissolution of the whole fabric of his life, and his tortured sensibility, his very nerves, cried out for oblivion. Well, he had got it, for an hour, and what had it cost him?

As he awoke in the early morning and lay pondering the miserable tangle he had made of his life, it was with a self-loathing that was little short of abject,—abject because it comprised as yet no impulse of self-recovery. He, Archie Day, had got drunk in broad daylight.

He had a hideous picture of himself, standing at the hotel bar, filling and refilling a small glass from an evil-looking black bottle, and congratulating himself stupidly because, having eaten nothing since breakfast, the liquor was the more sure to take effect and drive out his miseries. He knew that when he turned away he had reeled slightly in his walk; he knew that he had fumbled and dropped his money when he paid his fare in the horse-car; he knew that it was because he had seen double that his latch-key would not work, and that the hall light had done queer things when at last the door was opened by the housemaid. He knew,—a dozen times he pulled himself up short at that point in his ghastly reminiscence. And yet it was the final facing of it that roused his will and brought him morally to his feet.

Yes, he had disgraced himself before Winny, and she had perceived the enormity of it. There had been no bewilderment, no agitation in her voice. Nothing but cold disgust had been audible in word and tone. "He 's drunk!" she had declared; and then she was gone, and only Katherine remained, excusing, consoling, sustaining.

He did not dwell much upon the thought of Katherine; she was a lifelong habit,—he took her for granted. But Winny? She was gone—gone forever. He should never see her again. That pain, at least, that humiliation, he should be spared.

Nor did Archie err in his perception of the truth. Winny was lost to him as utterly as his mother had been lost to Charles Day; and, had he but known it, he was preparing to bear his loss in the same spirit which had been his father's. Evasion of pain, distraction from sorrow,—that was the instinct alike of father and son. He found a subtle relief at the very outset, in this new aspect of affairs, tragic as it really was. There should be no more begging an alms, no more whetting of the hunger of the heart in an incessant supplication, incessantly denied.

Before he knew it, he was up and dressed. A cold plunge-bath had braced his nerves, the brilliant October morning had stimulated his courage. He was standing at his mirror, tying his necktie, when Katherine rapped softly at the door.

"All right, Kitkat," he called. "I 'll be down to breakfast."

As his eye returned to the mirror, he remembered that Winny had approved that particular tie, and the recollection was like a sword thrust at his heart; but he would not suffer, he would not. He tore off

the tie, and flinging it far back in the drawer, he seized another. But that was one she had not liked,—for Winny could be very critical in such essentials. Somehow this seemed to hurt more than the other. Had it been all a matter of ties,—of rings,—of flowers? Had it been just *things?* A desolating sense took him of the hollowness of what he had possessed; it was worse than the sense of loss.

To reassure himself, Archie let his glance fall upon a photograph in a little rhinestone frame that always stood upon his bureau. It had been Winny's birthday gift to him. She had judged rightly that he could value nothing more; had she judged as rightly in choosing to surround it with those glittering, deceptive stones? This was not Archie's reflection; he was too loyal for that. He gave no thought to the frame, but only to the face within.

What a face it was! The exquisite, rounding outlines, the ineffable tenderness of the modelling, the delicate challenge of the lips! What poetry there was in that brow, in the waving shadow of the hair, the perfect line of the eyebrows! And how could such innocent, child-like eyes be anything but true? Yes, Winny was all he had loved in her,—of that he was sure. There should be no detraction of the past, only a decent burial. And against the climbing passion of the blood, with its pain, its menacing agony, Archie set nothing but that fundamental instinct which amounted to a revolt of his nature against suffering.

With a firmness of purpose that he had rarely exhibited, he gathered together the several photographs of Winny that adorned his room; he added to them the little one in a leathern case, that he always carried

in his pocket, and he laid them all in an old-fashioned portable writing-desk that had been his father's. This he carefully locked, and, carrying the key in his hand, he went down-stairs. He found the housemaid below, busy with her dusting, for it was early yet.

"That 's a stray key I picked up," he remarked, handing it to her. "You had better put it somewhere,"—and the faithful Jane took the key without a word. It was she who had opened the door for him the night before, and she was deeply dejected; for she was an old servant, and she had loved Master Archie all his life.

The door at the east end of the hall was open, and Katherine was out on the veranda. As he came toward her she saw that his face was haggard, but she saw, too, a something else there,—a look almost of determination,—and the unusual virility of it reassured while it perplexed her.

"What a glorious morning it is," she said; and then, sensible of the irrelevancy of such a remark: "What do you say to making Roland a visit?" She could hear old Peter tramping about at his morning work in the stable, and she fancied that Archie would prefer not to be alone with her just now. But, no; Archie had something to say and he was anxious to get it over.

"I want to speak to you," he said, with an abruptness quite foreign to his usual easy address. "I 'm off to the Adirondacks for two or three weeks' shooting. One of my old pals has a camp up there; he has been after me to come up. Now, of course, there 's nothing to prevent. That 's what they call compensation, you know!"—and he smiled, a little too brilliantly for Katherine's satisfaction.

She was silent for a moment, examining a bunch of berries on the crimson woodbine. The maple, in the circular grass-plot around which the driveway curved, was flaming scarlet. How splendid the year was in decay,—a little over-brilliant, perhaps, like Archie's smile. But she threw off the uncomfortable impression.

"I should think that might be a good plan, dear," she replied. "We shall know better how to manage when we 've had a little time to think things over. Shall you—" she hesitated, painfully; she hated to admonish him at such a moment,—but—"shall you not tell grandmother before you go?"

His face clouded.

"No, I 'll be hanged if I 'll undertake that chore. I say, Katherine,"—and for the moment his old wheedling tone came back to him,—"I say! should you mind breaking it to her?—everything, I mean,—the business bother, and, and—Winny?"

"What shall I tell her, Archie?"

"Tell her I—that I was n't cut out for a money-changer—horrid cads they 're apt to be! The Bible goes for them somewhere, I remember. You might remind her of that."

"And about Winny?"

"Oh;—just say that 's off."

"I think she might misunderstand, if I did n't explain; she might think it was you,—that you were reconciled to—to the break."

"Well, and so I am!"—and pulling off a bunch of the berries, he began snapping them at the old cat, sunning herself on the steps. He was a good shot, but they struck harmlessly against her thick fur. "She does n't know she 's hit," he chuckled. "That 's the kind! That 's the way to go through life!"

"You don't mean that," said Katherine, slowly,—"you don't mean that about Winny."

Archie straightened himself, at the same time flinging the whole handful of berries at the cat, who slowly got up, and, first humping her back portentously, began stretching herself to quite indefinite length.

"Well then,—I 'll tell you what I do mean, and then we 'll make an end of the subject. I 've known all along it was no good,—Winny 's not on my side. She 's in the right of it, I 've no doubt;—if there had been any doubt, last night would have settled it." A deep flush spread up his cheek and forehead, and his mouth twitched a bit. Katherine did not dare to speak or move; it was not sympathy he wanted now.

"Fact is, Katherine," he went on with the same unnatural bluntness, "fact is, if I 'm not enough of a man to behave myself, I 'm enough of a gentleman to know it, and—Winny 's quit of me. You may tell her so."

"But, Archie—" Katherine could not let it go at that,—Katherine, to whose believing love was eternal,—Katherine, who had held the weeping Winny in her arms, who was possessed of an unshakable faith that Winny loved him still, and that all would yet be well. "But Archie," she cried, taking a step toward him, eager to prove him in the wrong.

"Besides," he added, in a more natural tone; "I 'm sick of grovelling."

She stayed her protest; there spoke the Archie that she knew. The feeling that prompted those words might be transitory; it was as convincingly characteristic as the sudden self-defensive drop of dismissal with which he added: "And now, let 's go and look after Roland!"

They walked along the driveway, side by side, as they had done so many hundred times, and, as they approached the stable door, he threw her an affectionate look, remarking, as he had done so many hundred times before, but with just a thought more of the accustomed emphasis: "All the same, Katherine; you 're a brick! Of course you know that!"

And Katherine? In spite of everything, her heart responded to the word of praise and grew a trifle lighter. So that Roland, who was sensitive to people's moods, found nothing amiss in the extra handful of oats she had purloined from the crib in passing.

As for Grandmother Day, she bore the shock better than could have been anticipated. Archie had always been the favorite grandson, and none the less perhaps because of the old lady's very clear understanding of his character. She was a woman of shrewd perceptions, and much practical good sense, and she had been quite well aware of the disadvantage which an independent fortune must be to a boy of Archie's temperament. Nor had she wholly approved his business venture, although she had found no sufficient reason for opposing it. Indeed, her confidence in Tom's level-headedness had counted for much in her acquiescence.

She listened, quietly, to the sad little story of error and defeat, of wrecked ambition and forfeited happiness,—her needle slackening a bit at the critical moments in the narrative, her countenance, the while, handsome and self-possessed as her own portrait of thirty years ago which hung above the mantelpiece. They were in the pleasant family sitting-room; the sun, streaming in at the west windows, fell athwart the homely interior, throwing into high relief the keen,

vigorous features of the elder woman, but leaving in shadow the subtly kindred countenance of the granddaughter. Katherine's face, in the shadow there, was ardent and deprecating by turns, but animated ever with a steady loyalty; while on the grandmother's calm and unemotional features the strong light revealed only a reassuring force and philosophy. Truly, a man possessed of such a pair of allies might yet retrieve his shattered fortunes!

Mrs. Day had been thinking rapidly as she listened to her granddaughter's pleading, extenuating voice. She had not missed a point in the exposition, and yet she had found leisure for many a side reflection, and it was one of these to which she gave utterance as Katherine finished her story.

"Archie asked me to tell you all this," she said, "because he so hated to pain you!"

Upon which, Grandmother Day, with a quick glance at the young face, flushed and quivering with emotion, only said: "How like his father to run away!" Then, as Katherine made a protesting movement,—"When your mother died your father went to Europe. They do that—the Days. At least, some of them," she added, with another glance at her granddaughter.

"You believe so much in heredity?"

"So much? I believe it 's everything. Only it is so complicated that it 's not always easy to give chapter and verse for it."

"One would think heredity would have made Archie conservative; the Days have never gone about speculating."

"There 's where the complication comes in. Your grandfather Stafford lost every penny he had!"

Mrs. Day seemed inclined, that afternoon, to the

discussion rather of general principles than of more immediate perplexities. Little as she said, however, Katherine was able to gather much courage from her attitude and tone. And yet, accurate though the girl's perception was in the main, she could never have guessed what had really been to her grandmother the ameliorating consideration in the case.

The truth was, that Mrs. Day's satisfaction in the broken engagement went far toward reconciling her to the other disastrous features of the affair. It was not that she had any strong personal prejudice against Winny; on the contrary, she was inclined to set her down as a bright and pretty girl whom a young man might be excused for falling in love with. But the Gerald connection was one which her soul abhorred. Horace Gerald himself she disliked and distrusted; and, if it must be granted that his wife was personally unobjectionable, she came of an inferior stock. Grandmother Day's faith in heredity was too strong for any indifference to considerations of race; and she felt that the family had done well to shake off such an alliance, even at the cost of a fortune. She did not understand that Archie had committed any enormity, in his business relations. Indeed, his own very plausible account of the matter was not likely to have suffered through the medium of his sister's presentment of it. That he had made a shocking fool of himself was clear enough, and Tom was doubtless justified in washing his hands of him. But after all it was his own money that the boy had tampered with; and in so far as his grandmother could judge the transgression appeared to be a venial one.

As to his disappointment,—he could be trusted to get the better of that. He would run away; he had

in fact already run away. He might, to be sure, never marry—his father had declined a second venture—and she should be sorry for that, for she should like to have the name continued; but not with the Gerald blood.

When Winny was announced, late in the afternoon, Mrs. Day found in the visit a not unwelcome confirmation of her theories.

"Hardly in good taste," she remarked to her daughter Fanny, who had been admitted to the family confidence.

"Ah, but think how she must yearn for tidings of him," Mrs. Bliss murmured.

"I don't think Miss Winny is of the yearning kind," was the curt reply. Certain words were inherently exasperating to Grandmother Day; yearn was one of them.

Katherine found Winny in the parlor. She was even more carefully and becomingly dressed than usual, and her manner was unwontedly affectionate.

"Dear Katherine," she cried, as they sat down together on the sofa, "I do so feel for you! I almost forget my own unhappiness when I think what this must be to you!"

"You mean last night, Winny?"—and Katherine raised her head pretty proudly. "That was the merest accident such as might happen to any one in great mental trouble. Such a thing never happened to Archie before, and it never will again."

Winny sighed,—a little, fluttering sigh.

"How fortunate you are, Katherine," she said, "that you can afford to excuse it. Of course you are bound to, with your own brother. But with me it is so different; it changes everything. I—why, I can't afford to excuse it."

Katherine perfectly understood the complete repudiation implied, and her spirit rose.

"There will be no question of your excusing it," she said, withdrawing her hand from Winny's delicately gloved fingers. "Archie will never molest you again. He went away this morning, and he told me to say that he perfectly understood that everything was at an end between you. He said—'Tell her she 's quit of me'."

Winny's face changed, and quick tears came to her eyes; yet their source was mixed. She was a simple nature, excepting where her egotism was touched; but in that department of her mental processes were many curious byways and involutions. And so the feeling that blanched her cheek was a mixture of disappointed affection, wounded vanity, shrinking from the inevitable. The child had loved Archie with all there was in her to love with. He suited her; he had touched whatever there was of heart in her, and that fragment, inadequate as it was to the greater demands of life, was capable of being hurt. The hurt was not so severe as to drive her to what she would have considered an infinitely greater misfortune;—she no longer had any intention of marrying him, but his presence, his supplications, still ministered acceptably to her, and in telling her lover's sister that she could not excuse his offence, she was perhaps not quite sincere.

"You are both so cruel," she said, with a very touching air of injured sensibility.

"Indeed, Winny, we don't mean to be cruel," Katherine cried, softening at once. "Archie only wants to do the kindest, the most honorable thing; and you yourself say everything is changed."

"But I wanted him to care!"

"Care!" Katherine repeated, in quick protest. "Care!"

A firm step on the threshold gave her pause.

It was Tom. He stood an instant, hesitating, not quite himself, and the modesty of the attitude was singularly becoming to him. Then he crossed the room and confronted the two girls—for it was nothing short of that. The certainty that he had hurt them both, but the equal certainty that he had been in the right of it, called a look, half defiant, half abashed, into his sturdy, open face, that again was becoming.

"Jane told me to come in here," he said; for Katherine had not spoken.

She rose to her feet,—hard, implacable, cold as ice. Tom could not guess that if she buckled on her armor it was quite as much against herself as against him. They had not met since that bitter evening when she had suffered harsh denial at his hands. At the sight of his figure in the doorway there, her pulse had bounded in an unreasoning welcome. But instantly the reaction, the sudden curbing of the blood had thrown her into an attitude of crude antagonism.

Rising slowly to her feet: "I will tell grandmother that you are here," she said. Her words bit like an acid into her own consciousness; the tone of them struck Tom like a blow. His face went crimson.

She had not offered him her hand; she had scarcely looked at him, as she swept past him out of the room. She had forgotten Winny; he, too, had forgotten her. He stood there, staggered with the instant's revelation. He only knew that Katherine hated him, and with a hatred that had outlived the heat of anger, and

he was cut to the heart,—yes, to the heart,—that impregnable fastness of his.

"How could Katherine be so rude!"—the voice was caressing in its sweetness.

Tom pulled himself up.

"Oh! Miss Gerald!" he said, as his eyes came down to her level.

She had not left her seat; the upturned face was still tear-stained, still quivering with an emotion, past, perhaps, but worth preserving the traces of. How exquisite the face was! Not so much wonder that Archie had made a fool of himself! But—tears might be never so becoming to a woman,—a man must not be caught off his guard.

"It 's not the first tiff Katherine and I have had," he laughed, while a pang took him at the thought that it would perhaps be the last.

He rather expected the girl to go. It seemed so incongruous that they should stay on there together—he and Winny Gerald! How she must hate him, though,—Jove! she had a queer way of showing it!

And Winny, looking up into the strong, defiant face, felt the sudden need of asserting herself and her own powers. If Katherine could defy and irritate this redoubtable antagonist, why should not she be the one to placate him? Winny dearly loved the pleasing art of conquest, and it was long since she had had an opportunity of exercising it beyond the limits of her special sovereignty. She suddenly felt what had been the monotony of a long courtship.

"Are n't you going to sit down?" she asked, with a pretty hesitancy. "We are all in such dreadful trouble that I think we are losing our manners."

Mechanically he took a chair.

"You are very good to be so friendly," he declared. "You must feel that I have done you a frightful injury."

"I am sure you only did what was right," she answered, but with the saddest little smile. The contrast to Katherine's intolerance and vindictiveness could not have been more marked.

"Upon my word," cried Tom, "I do feel badly about it! It was a miserable business all round."

"Yes; but was n't it better to be outspoken and decided? A man must be like that to be really respected. And—I am sure it is kinder in the end."

"Now do you know? that's exactly the way I looked at it! But the others—"

"You mean Katherine and Archie? But do you think they are quite—reasonable—where their own feelings are concerned?"

Tom had not looked at it in that light; but it seemed certainly very plausible. Yes; surely it was Katherine's feeling, not her reason, that had made her treat him so. Curious, that a soft, girlish creature like this should see so much clearer than Katherine, who sometimes seemed so deceptively broad-minded. But there it was! She was not reasonable where her feelings were concerned!

There was a movement overhead in Mrs. Day's chamber, and Winny stood up at once.

"Good-by," she murmured, giving him her hand. Strange that he should have thought at that moment of Katherine's way of doing it; surely nothing could be more gracious than this!

He took the little hand, saying: "I can't thank you enough, Miss Gerald, for your kindness. It means a lot to me just now." He was walking with her to the door.

"I am so glad to have met you here," she answered, very prettily. "I was longing to tell you that I understood."

She paused an instant on the threshold, listening; Mrs. Day's door had not yet opened.

"I am trying to get courage to ask a favor of you," she said, with the most enchanting timidity of voice and gesture; the appeal of the supplicating eyes as they met his was subtly, penetratingly flattering.

"Ask anything you will," he exclaimed. "I should be only too glad to serve you."

"Would you—I know how busy you are, but—would you come to see me some day? I do so long to understand more about this sad business. I should know so much better how to act!"

Tom was startled, and—being a mere man—deluded. Was not this an opening? Could he not perhaps say a good word for Archie? There was a lot to be said for him; he was longing already to make restitution, and as he looked down into the pretty face, he was seized with a new sympathy for his unlucky partner. Indeed, it had been hard lines to lose a girl like that! He had had no idea she was so lovely. And what a heart she had, and what an understanding! If only he might do something to straighten this thing out,—then Katherine would see how unjust she had been. He could almost hear her voice asking him to forgive her.

It was well for Winny's vanity that she did not rightly interpret the warmth with which Tom cried: "Indeed I will come, with the greatest pleasure; the sooner the better!"

As the door closed behind the softly rustling skirts, Tom heard his grandmother's step in the upper hall,

and, turning, he watched her coming down the stairs—alone. How many times he had seen Katherine coming down those stairs—alone—to meet him ; and how pleasant, how delightfully, how inexplicably pleasant it had been!

CHAPTER XV

AT CROSS-PURPOSES

"Love, hope, fear, faith—these make humanity;
These are its sign, and note, and character."

AS Tom reflected upon his unlooked-for interview with Winny, he discovered no just grounds for regretting the promise he had made her, nor was any flaw in her reasoning apparent to him. Indeed, it must be admitted that she, in her own little, narrow way, had been right, as little, narrow minds have the vexatious knack of being on occasion. It was quite true that Katherine's reason had been, to a degree, overcome by her feelings; though how intimately, how intensely her own those feelings had been, Winny little guessed. Katherine would, to be sure, in any case, have deeply resented Tom's peremptory dealing with Archie; the old, friendly relation must have suffered a check. Yet, ardent as her championship might be, she was really too imaginative to make a good partisan. When the first heat of contest was over, she could usually put herself into her opponent's place, and take his point of view. And her comprehension of Tom's side of the question, her sympathetic understanding of the injury he had sustained, of his belief that decisive action was necessary if the ambition of his life were not to be

seriously jeopardized, would in itself greatly have modified her resentment.

But Katherine was suffering under the sting of a personal rejection which could not but be intolerable to a high-spirited girl, and all contact with the man who had beguiled her heart, and then, unconsciously to be sure, thrown it back upon her hands, terrified and afflicted her. She did not run away, as Archie had done; she simply steeled herself to repel and endure. It was all wrong, all overwrought, this sense of rejection and spurning. Poor Tom never meant it so; he had not in the least understood the situation. With all his inherent force of character, the young stock-broker was still, in his spiritual development, something of a hobbledehoy; he had not got his growth yet. And although he was already blindly reaching out to Katherine with an instinctive craving for something he was stubbornly bent upon postponing, it would never have entered his mind to conceive that she, more perceptive and more spontaneous, had already responded to the unspoken appeal of his nature. Nor did Katherine suppose that he understood. She only feared that he might; and her heart, like a coward householder, went about erecting needless and inconvenient barriers against an imagined danger.

She was unfortunately driven in upon herself at this juncture, for she found herself cut off from active participation in the readjustment of her brother's affairs. Grandmother Day had quietly assumed the reins. She had convinced herself that Tom needed no pecuniary aid, that, in fact, his affairs had already so well adjusted themselves that no better disposition could be made of the uninvolved balance of Archie's capital,

than to leave it in the hands of his former partner. Indeed, Tom's business ability had never been so clearly demonstrated as in this crisis, although the manner in which his credit had stood the sharp, though transient, strain put upon it, furnished gratifying evidence of the reputation he already enjoyed. Mrs. Day, thus relieved from any drain upon her principal, was the better able to assume that responsibility for Archie's immediate maintenance which his sister so eagerly desired to bear, and it was quickly made clear to Katherine that her grandmother had no intention of abdicating either the burdens or the honors accruing to her position as head of the family.

Archie, meanwhile, was still away, confining his communications to occasional shipments of game, very much as his father used to do. How poignantly, yet how caressingly, the past came back to Katherine, as she busied herself with the unpacking of those boxes of game! How easy life had been in the good old days, when Cousin Elmira tyrannized over her, when chocolate creams and paper-dolls were so dearly desired, and magenta frocks so deeply detested!

Yes, Katherine had far too much time for brooding; she was in danger of becoming morbid, and she knew it. And when she tried to rouse herself to her old interests, life seemed drearily flat and unprofitable. If she could only have been Archie's providence as she so longed to be, there would have been purpose and interest in the future. But she knew that the same unimpeachable authority which forbade the sacrifice of her fortune, would restrict her actions in other ways as well.

Mrs. Day, meanwhile, was clear that Archie must

not stay at home that winter; that he would never amount to anything in Winny's neighborhood.

"He has got to keep on running away," she declared, as she sat, one afternoon, deftly winding a skein of yarn into a wonderful egg-shaped ball; "he 's no fighter."

"But Archie is brave as anybody!" cried Katherine, who was dutifully holding the yarn. "Don't you remember how he stopped that runaway horse in the winter, at the risk of his own life?"

"That was not fighting; it was simply following an impulse, which he may always be trusted to do. As I was saying, he has got to go away and stay away." It was evident that Grandmother Day had thought the question out very carefully, for she added, as the egg grew in perfect symmetry under her skillful fingers: "He might go to New York and study something,—architecture, perhaps. He used to incline that way. Or,—we can't expect him to be particularly ambitious just now,—if he were to like ranching better, for the time being, why, there's that nephew of your mother's out West, somewhere."

"I wish I could go with him," said Katherine, rather hesitatingly, but without venturing to interrupt the shuttle-like action of her hands.

"To study architecture? Or to raise cattle?" Those sharp looks of Grandmother Day's were a very significant part of conversation with her.

"To make a home for him. Don't you think Archie needs a home, Grandmother?"

"No, I do not. He has had one this last year, and much good it has done him. What Archie needs is men. There have been too many women about; we've been coddling him!" As if Grandmother Day

ever coddled anybody! Yet Katherine knew what she meant; she usually understood her grandmother; for, unlike as they were in temperament, their minds were kindred.

So she was not to make a home for Archie,—not yet, at least. He did not need her; nobody needed her, she thought, as the last of the yarn slipped through her fingers. Yet, stay! What was Jane saying? Mr. Stuyvesant had called and asked for Master Archie. Would Miss Katherine see him? The announcement was like a direct refutation of her despondent fancy; yet there was little consolation in it. As Katherine passed down the stairs to receive her visitor it seemed to her as if everything in life were at hopeless cross-purposes.

They had met only in the most casual way, she and Paul, since the spring, and, to-day, as he came forward to greet her, her first thought was that he was looking well. She had forgotten that he was so tall, and the extreme refinement of his face impressed her as it had never done before. The vivid, ever-present image of Tom was throwing into strong relief the manifold personal advantages of her old lover.

Their talk was all of Archie. Paul had but just heard that the two men had dissolved partnership; he was afraid there was something wrong, that somehow or other they had come to grief, and that Archie had got the worst of it.

"I knew he was no match for McLean," he exclaimed, when Katherine had told him the tale as she understood it.

"But there was no question of his being a match for Tom, you know. They were playing on the same side."

"Technically, yes! But somehow I never could

fancy them playing together. McLean was always such a heavy-weight, and Archie,—well, he was meant for different things—better things it seems to me. Archie 's all nerve and fire. You might as well try to hammer with a Damascus blade!"

"Did you ever talk it over with him?"

"Yes; I told him he was n't cut out for business and he only said he was cut out for Winny Gerald and that nothing else mattered. How does she take it, by the way?"

Katherine flushed with a quick shame for Winny.

"Oh, Winny?" she repeated. "Her father has broken it off."

"But she does n't submit," cried Paul, leaning forward.

"I am afraid she does; she thinks he knows best. I suppose I should feel just so, if my father were living, —as if he must be right, no matter what he did."

Paul was silent a moment.

"Your father would never have been like that, I am sure," he declared, quietly. "There could never have been anything sordid about him."

"Poor Winny!" Katherine sighed. "I wish her father were different! However, Archie has stopped urging it. He has gone shooting."

"Might have known he would," Paul cried, with the affectionate indulgence which Archie's case usually commanded. "What is he going to do when he gets back?"

"Grandmother wants him to go away again,—to New York, or out West, or somewhere."

"She 's right—that is, if there is really nothing to hope from Miss Gerald."

"No, I am afraid that is over and done with—for

the present at least. Poor child; she is very unhappy."

"Curious that you should pity her! I should have said you were the last girl in the world to understand such a thing!"

Do what he would, Paul could not keep his speech quite clear of the personal note, that note that had dominated him for years. No, Katherine would never have failed the man she loved. He knew her well. Ah, it was good just to hear her voice again! He had been half-starved for the mere sound and sight of her, and here she was, her best and dearest self. And Katherine felt that urgency of his soul, so carefully held in check, and it touched her as it had never done before.

"I suppose I understand Winny better because of her being my oldest and nearest friend," she said, with a certain compassionate cadence that was meant more for Paul than for Winny, had he but guessed it. Unable as he was to interpret it aright:

"She 's not worthy of that!" he cried impetuously.

"Oh, you don't know her!" and now her thought was all of Winny.

He longed to say: "No, it is you I know!"—but he asked, instead: "And Archie? Does he think her right?"

"He told me that he thought it better so,—now."

"Then of course he must go away. And"—with the change of tone which marks the transference of attention to practical themes—"I 've been wondering, Katherine; do you think he would make anything of German university life? I am considering that for next year, when I 've got my degree, and if Archie would come along too—"

"O Paul! how wonderful that would be!—To have Archie with you, and working hard—with his brains! It 's perfectly true, as you say,"—she went on, speaking rapidly,—for as her spirits rose her words could scarcely keep pace with her swift thought, "Archie was never meant to hammer with; he 's of finer metal than that. He wants sharpening and tempering. Oh! if you could only persuade him! I know grandmother would approve!"

"If he were to take a literary turn, as he used to think of doing," Paul struck in, fired to a sympathetic fervor, "all that sort of thing would come into play first-rate."

"And, meanwhile, this winter, he really might like to go out to Cousin Rob on his ranch. Rob Stafford is the only relative we have on our mother's side, and we have always liked him so much. He writes of big game out there. I know Archie would enjoy it!"

"I could sail in June, and we could knock about somewhere for the summer!"—How exhilarating it was to be furthering Katherine's desires!—next best to accomplishing his own.

"He might begin writing then," she continued, eagerly. "Or at the ranch, even. There must be heaps of copy on a ranch."

"Of course, if he should take to writing, everything would work in."

If he should! That was the question. That was always the question with Archie. No one ever doubted his aptitudes,—the doubt always rested on his inclination; that, alas! was prone to vacillate. Yet, now? Now that a new necessity confronted him, might it not be as powerful, and more steadying, than the old inspiration that had so suddenly failed?

As time went on, Katherine's eager confidence increased; the more so, as Grandmother Day pronounced herself ready to endorse the new plan. Archie was coming home before long, but Katherine could not wait for his return and assent before telling Winny of the new possibilities. Poor Winny! How sad she must be, and with what grace and fortitude she concealed it! There were no more tears, no more appeals for sympathy. She seemed rather to avoid Katherine; but when they met she was quite her old self, the Winny of the days before disaster touched her, the Winny of longer ago than that, of the time before the engagement itself. But Katherine must break through the reserve tacitly agreed upon; she must impart the word of cheer at once. Accordingly, the next afternoon, which was Sunday, she set forth on her errand.

It was a bleak November day, sunless and chill. The autumn glory was dimmed. The half-stripped branches of the trees looked dreary in the meagre afternoon light; the very ground had lost its elasticity. Yet Katherine, as she trod the unresponsive earth, while the dead leaves faintly rustled to the swing of her skirts, was conscious of a lighter spirit than she had known for many a day.

As she approached the Gerald house, she heard the closing of the front door, and, looking up, she beheld a figure walking rapidly down the path. What was Tom doing at the Geralds'? Tom, who never in his life made a call,—excepting on the family.

They met just outside the gate, and Tom?—yes, as he lifted his hat and passed her without speaking, she saw that he was disconcerted. Reason enough, too, after their last meeting. Of course he was disconcerted; so was she.

He had probably been talking business with Mr. Gerald. At any rate his visit did not concern her. How strange it was for them to meet without speaking. She wondered,—would they never speak again? She must be the first, of course, after her rudeness the other day; and it would be necessary,—for they must constantly meet.—Only—never in the old way—never with any satisfaction! She supposed she would have spoken just now if it had not been for the shock of the unexpected encounter. As she touched the bell knob,—how strange, she thought, that Tom should have been there before her!—that he should have pulled that bell, that the door should have opened to him!

As Katherine entered the parlor Winny came forward with unusual effusiveness. She was so particularly glad to see Katherine! It was ages since they had met! She wanted all the news, and—had they had a letter from poor Archie? She had been desperately busy herself with shopping and dressmaking. Her mother had been housed with a cold, so she had been kept running about, and there was nothing the children did not seem to need just now; shoes and frocks and hats. They had been rather neglected this season, everybody had been so busy about her, Winny—with a little conscious droop of the lids, and a small, soft sigh that spoke of delicate reserves. She really had not supposed she could be so domestic, but when one's own happiness was at an end one had to be interested in the welfare of others. It was all there was left. "And I had no idea I should take to it so naturally!"

Katherine listened, bewildered. What did it mean? What was real and what was assumed, in all this eager chatter? Was Winny talking down her own heart?

She must be. Who was Katherine, that she should sit in judgment upon the manner another might elect of bearing a great sorrow? If she, herself, turned harsh and obdurate, why should not Winny's gentler nature find refuge in this lightness, this apparent indifference? No doubt she, like Katherine, was carrying—though in so jaunty a fashion — the old wound; no doubt her heart like Katherine's was as sad as when they had wept so naturally, so unrestrainedly, in one another's arms. Only, they were no longer children; they must bear their sorrows as best they might, and have a brave face to meet the world with. Perhaps it was as well that they should practise upon one another.

But there seemed no chance of saying what she had come to say, and it occurred to Katherine that it might be more fitting to wait until Archie had pronounced upon their plan for him before communicating it to others. Others! To think of Winny coming under that general category! Well, life was a great puzzle. She only wished she knew that Tom had not been calling there. And why? Why should she wish such a thing? — If only Winny would speak! Yet perhaps she did not even know he had been there.

Although her visit had been a short one, the twilight was already deepening when Katherine rose to go. Under cover of its soft shadow she bent to kiss Winny good-by, and Winny returned the caress with much affection. She was truly fond of Katherine, although she often wished she were different. It would be awkward to have a secret from a familiar friend like that; she had often found that a certain frankness paid best in the end.

"I had a call from Mr. McLean this afternoon," she

remarked, casually, as she went to the door with her visitor.

Katherine's heart stood still. But—"Yes," she said, quietly. "I met him at the gate. I—I thought perhaps he had come to see your father." That, however, was a suggestion that Winny could not brook.

"I don't know why you should have supposed that," she rejoined, bridling delicately. "Papa is n't usually the one that brings young men to the house."

"Of course,—of course! But,—Tom is not like other men; he never calls on girls."

"I should n't feel so sure of that. Girls are always imagining they know everything about men."

"Why, yes! how foolish of me," Katherine cried. Then, with a sudden insistence of trustfulness, the more urgent because it was not quite, quite spontaneous: "I am sure, Winny, you are very sweet and forgiving to him."

"I always try to be, to everybody," was the modest answer.

As the door closed behind her, Katherine started, nervously, at the sound; it was like an echo.

She passed down the path, with a swift, fleeing step, and, heedless of the deepening twilight, she chose a roundabout way home. She was in no haste to arrive—anywhere! Camwood was a safe neighborhood,—no harm had ever come to the wayfarer there. But—how cold it was, and how dreary and, —oh! how she hated the sound of that door!

CHAPTER XVI

QUICKSANDS

"Friend, your good angel slept, your star
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong!"

TOM McLEAN always looked back upon that meeting with Katherine at Winny's gate as a turning-point in his life; its outcome, as one of those sinister tricks of destiny that go far toward making fatalists of the best of us. He always believed that if his cousin had had a single kind word for him, a single kind look, the old allegiance would have declared itself, the new bondage would have loosed and fallen. He could imagine how he would have seized her hand, how the strong, friendly grasp he liked so well would have restored him to his better self. Perhaps they might have turned and walked a few paces together among the rustling leaves, while he told her how he was hoping, one day, to make good to Archie something of his pecuniary loss; how he was striving, even now, to regain for him his old place in Winny's affection and confidence. At once, the natural relation with Katherine would have been restored,—that relation without which, as he was destined to learn, he could not, with all his self-sufficiency, keep his normal balance. But now, as three weeks previous, Katherine would none of him, and, deprived of that one civil-

izing, humanizing influence of an otherwise somewhat arid existence, he fell an easy prey to certain insinuating allurements which he was too inexperienced to resist.

His first call upon Winny had been both disappointing and provocative. He had gone to her, in perfect good faith, with the purpose of setting her right about Archie,—and indeed there had been much in Archie's conduct, subsequent to that first stormy interview between the partners, to modify Tom's judgment of him. Once convinced that his plea was hopeless, that his business career, together with everything staked upon it, was at an end, the boy had proved curiously tractable. Yes, he was quite willing to leave the small remainder of his capital in Tom's hands. He knew it would be safe, and that Tom would deal fairly by him; Tom was always fair,—fair as figures. Two and two would never make anything but four with Tom, not if his immortal soul were in the balance. Secretly, Archie had small faith in Tom's having an immortal soul,—at any rate he had n't any vitals. But he could be trusted in money matters; that was sure. Archie's nature, indeed, was as devoid as Tom's of vindictiveness. He loathed Horace Gerald because he despised him; but he did not hate Tom, as Tom realized with no little compunction.

Tom would have told Katherine all this if she would have given him the chance. But after that meeting at the Geralds' gate he was less minded than ever to turn the other cheek. He could take a blow —and return it with muscular equanimity,—but not from Katherine. Katherine had been his chosen ally; he could not hit back,—but neither could he invite a repetition of her castigations.

So it was to Winny that he dwelt upon the extenuating features of Archie's case,—to Winny that he emphasized his good points, that he made that little confession of a too harsh judgment which would have been balm and elixir to Katherine's spirit. And Winny listened, a picture of graceful tolerance, of sympathetic intelligence; and, when he had eased his mind of the substance of his errand, she gently turned the conversation into other channels, parallel, to be sure, with the first, but of a differing current.

Did Mr. McLean think that business honesty was on the decline? Of course it was something she understood very little about, but she had heard such pessimistic views lately. And Tom, knowing the cause of bad humor which existed in the mind of the Gerald family oracle, gave ready testimony to his first article of faith, the general, fundamental integrity of the business community.

"Why, Miss Gerald," he cried, "if it were not so, the whole thing would go to smash! The entire system of the world's business is founded on credit; every serious breach of credit shakes us to our foundations. Why, do you realize that if a London bank fails the shock of it is felt here in Boston, is felt in San Francisco, would be felt at the North Pole, if there were banks there?"

"How interesting that is," cried Winny. "No one ever told me about that before. I wonder that Archie did n't."

"Well, you know Archie had really had very little business experience. He could n't be expected to take in the larger aspects of the case. Now, I have been eight years at this thing, much of the time with a great concern in Wall Street, that had feelers out

pretty much all over the world. It gave me a tremendous pull over a beginner like Archie. Do you know,"—and he watched her face, as he added, with what seemed to himself like the most consummate diplomacy, "do you know, I think everybody has been inclined to be too hard upon Archie."

"I am so glad you feel so," she answered, with a soft heightening of color and lowering of the lids. "But, why?"

"Why, simply because he was so inexperienced. He was dropped in over his head before he had learned to swim."

"But, ought n't he, for that very reason, to have been more careful?—to have relied entirely upon your judgment?"

There was a captivating deference in the girl's tone, —something Tom had never met with before,—and he was the less inclined to question its sincerity because of its obvious reasonableness. Yet it was not affectation that made him protest a little; it was rather an honest effort not to infringe upon Archie's rights in the direction of Winny's esteem.

"Oh," he said, "it was not my personal judgment that we should have relied upon for safety. After all, I am little more than a beginner myself. It was certain broad business principles, founded on the experience of all successful men, that made the basis of our agreement."

"And Archie violated it!"

How could the girl be so cool in her judgment——and so right? Her intelligence and self-control surprised Tom, but it made him all the more eager to win her back again for Archie. She was surely the very balance-wheel the boy needed.

"I think," Tom said, thoughtfully, "that everybody has used too hard words in speaking of Archie. Why not say—he misinterpreted our agreement?"

"It is a prettier word," Winny admitted, "and I am sure, if you can afford to be generous, I can."

Would she then be generous? That was the puzzle left in Tom's mind; that was why the interview was disappointing, and also provocative,—provocative of a desire to repeat it, to sift her utterances,—apparently so unpremeditated, so sincere,—down to the residue of intention that hid in them. Had he influenced her at all,—either her feeling or her resolution? He thought of their parting words, and he felt a need of understanding them better.

"I hope, Miss Gerald," he had said, as he rose to go; "I hope I have shown you that Archie is not—is not as black as he is painted." He had looked down upon her with a great longing to right her life for her, with a great sense of her loveliness and her misfortune. He remembered the tears he had surprised upon that sensitive cheek, and by that token he could the better measure her self-control to-day.

Tom could look down upon Winny as he could not upon Katherine, whose eyes always seemed just on a level with his. This experience of counselling, protecting, a young and confiding woman was something quite new to him. Is it any wonder if he found it pleasantly flattering to his self-esteem?

"You have consoled me very much," said Winny; "I wish that before Archie comes back you could make me see my duty more clearly."

"I think," he urged, "that if I could really do justice to Archie's good qualities, you would feel that your—your regard for him had not been misplaced."

"You make me feel that,—now, while you speak. But—I think I am too susceptible to other people's opinions; and when you are gone, why,—there is papa, and he seems to overpower me. Will you,"—and she looked up like an appealing child,—"will you, —there is so much at stake,—will you come again?"

And it was when Tom came again that Katherine met him at the gate.

This second visit had been an exciting experience to Winny. On that Sunday afternoon she had lured Tom into speaking more of himself, and more of general topics too, and the really unusual personal force of the man had been increasingly apparent to her. She was not naturally attracted to men of his type, nor had she ever exercised attraction over such. But, just now, she was the victim of a want of force in the man she had chosen, the man who had seemed so "suited" to her, and she turned instinctively to his direct counterpart.

Indeed, if the truth were known, Winny had, in her own heart, thrown her lover over the first instant that she knew he had failed her. There needed no stern father to effect the break. Horace Gerald's daughter would no more have entrusted her fortunes to a man impoverished in purse, and attainted in ability, than a person who has never learned to swim would entrust his life to an unseaworthy boat; the risk was too great. It was a pretty craft, this graceful pleasure boat that had floated so lightly on the summer seas, but in the first storm it had sprung a leak, and she could only congratulate herself that the disaster had found her still within easy reach of the shore. She might parley with the captain; she might maintain a whole system of flying signals with him;—but

no power on earth would ever persuade her to set foot upon his decks again. Was she already looking out for a good substantial merchantman?—already, while that charming yacht was still threatened by coast dangers?

Yet Winny's motives were, perhaps, not quite so far to seek. Up to this moment, at least, they were yet unformulated. In her advances to Tom she was acting in obedience to a mere instinct, that instinct of conquest which may be quite as inherent in a frail woman as in a pugnacious man. For more than a year her very considerable gifts of fascination had found but scant exercise. Her ascendency over Archie had been too complete, and her opportunities in other directions had been much restricted by her engagement to him. When Tom, appearing before her and Katherine that afternoon at Mrs. Day's, had caught her with the tears upon her cheeks, she was instantly aware of the interesting appearance she must present. It was a new, and rather piquant rôle, this of disconsolate maiden, and she felt it at once in its probable effect upon Tom. At the same moment, she was struck by the defiant power of his personality, as he stood, thrown on the defensive by Katherine's repulse of him.

Winny had not met Tom since they were boy and girl, and she had retained no very clear idea of him. But to-day he impressed her at once as being very much worth while. It would be stimulating to exercise her gifts upon him, gratifying to subjugate him. As she observed Katherine's reception of her cousin, she thought her stupid and tactless; and yet she was possessed of a curious jealousy of her. Why should Katherine have it in her power to wound a man like

that? He was hurt, he was disconcerted, and, just in so far as this was true, he was subject to Katherine. How much more fitting that he should be subject to herself! She would caress and heal his wounded sensibilities; that was a task after her own heart. And as Winny spoke the gentle words, "How could Katherine be so rude!" it would not be safe to assert that she was not animated with a sense of virtue,—of that first of all feminine virtues which makes woman the comforter of man.

For Winny was intensely, consistently feminine, wherein she had the advantage of poor Katherine. Indeed, she was the most feminine woman that Tom had ever come in contact with, and this he was dimly aware of from the outset.

Tom's career had been, on the whole, that of an ascetic; plain living and hard working had been his principle since boyhood; while in nothing had his life been more consistently abstemious than in his social relations. Indeed, barring his intercourse with Katherine, the one indulgence of the human side of him, he had scarcely had a bowing acquaintance with any woman under forty. He had never been a reader of novels or poetry; he had never gone much to the theatre. He had not that familiarity with the anatomy of the heart, the laws of human passion which, to a certain degree, discounts experience in the average boy or girl. As he had been slow to recognize the significance of that first deep impulse of his nature,—of his higher and better nature,—toward his cousin, so was he curiously off his guard in his attitude toward Winny. From the first he was charmed and fascinated by the subtle something in her personality which was too new to his experience to be understood;

from the first, too, he was beguiled by that appeal of the weaker to the stronger which she was instinctively mistress of, and which was a revelation to him of the true, the commendable, feminine attitude.

His discomfiture was not immediate; there needed yet the connivance of circumstance, not only on his side, but on Winny's, too. For, if the girl regarded Tom as a difficult subject, and therefore exceptionally worth while, it is nevertheless true that she had as yet no ulterior motive; insomuch that, had she been left to her own devices in the game, she might soon have tired of it.

It happened, however, that on the occasion of his third call, Tom stayed to tea, and that Gerald and he fell into a business talk in the course of which the visitor inadvertently dropped a remark pregnant with meaning to the initiated. It was nothing more than a casual statement that indicated indirectly the closeness of the relation which he still maintained with his former New York principals. To Gerald, who had already learned of their prompt and effective action relative to the embarrassment which had overtaken the young firm, the revelation of continued interest from that quarter was of portentous moment. A young man with such backers might go far; indeed such backing was, in itself, evidence of unusual personal ability in the man who had secured it. Gerald did not pursue the subject at the moment, but he made it his business to investigate matters by means of other channels, and he was not disappointed in what he learned.

"Winny," he said to his daughter one Sunday when for a longer interval than usual Tom had not been

seen at the house; "what 's the reason that young fellow McLean is making himself so scarce lately?"

"I 'm sure I don't know! Is it so long since he was here last?"

"It must be a fortnight or more."

"Very likely; but—how do you know that I let him come as often as he likes?"

"Oh, you have n't got tired of him yet, I 'll warrant!" Then, with a narrow, scrutinizing look at the girl: "We might have him out to dinner some evening. The fact is, Winny," he added, with the pompous air with which he was given to enunciating his own preferences, "I like the man! There 's nothing finical and shilly-shallying about him. He does n't wait to be told what 's good for him. He 's up and doing!"

"I never thought him so very attractive," Miss Winny rejoined, with a little defiant action of the baby chin—a chin as perfect as a sculptor's dream. She could not deny that it was some time since Tom's last visit; but her father was to understand that his defection did not trouble her.

"We 've had enough of attractiveness, I should think," Gerald retorted. "I, for my part, should be quite ready to swap that off for something more substantial. Mark my words, Winny; that young man will have made his pile before you know it."

"Do you mean," Winny asked, ingenuously, "that he will be very rich?"

"Precisely!—unless all signs fail. At any rate"—with another significant look at the lovely, artless face—"I would n't advise anybody to bank on the contrary!"

The dinner invitation was sent, and the two Littlefield girls invited as a foil to Winny. It was an

unusual thing for the Geralds to give a dinner,—something quite out of the common, indeed, in Camwood society of that period. But the innovation was highly approved of, especially by a certain young law student who was bidden to the feast, and who cherished the most devout and undisguised admiration for the daughter of the house.

Yet the party came very near being sadly incomplete, for Tom's first impulse on receiving the invitation had been to decline it. Archie had come home, and the sight of his face in the street one day had given his cousin a queer turn. It had caused him to ask himself just why he was cultivating the society of Archie's old love? Did the original motive still hold? And, no sooner had he put the question to himself, than he knew the futility of it.

In fact, had there been any doubt as to Tom's insuccess as mediator between the lovers, such doubt had been quite set at rest by a little speech of Winny's on the occasion of their last meeting. He had mentioned to her, with the stubborn loyalty that would not admit a change in either of them, the return of Archie from the Adirondacks.

"Yes," she had answered, with a little sigh; "I knew he was here."

"And you will see him, shall you not?"

"Hardly,—since he does n't come to see me. Do you know," she added, with that confiding air of hers which was always disarming, "do you know, I think this little separation has been the best thing for us both. It has shown us how matters really are."

"How they really are?"

"Yes. You know, after all,"—she was blushing enchantingly,—"our engagement was such a boy-and-

girl affair. We were really too young to know our own hearts."

Tom was fairly taken aback.

"And you think now that you were mistaken?" he asked, abruptly.

"I think I was, and—I know that Archie was."

"But how can you know?"

"Oh, from a message he left for me. If he had really cared, he could n't have gone away like that!" —and instantly the lovely eyes were suffused with tears,—the sweet lips took on such a pitiful droop that —he could have kissed them.

Tom had never thought before that lips were made for kissing. There had been a moment—one—when he could have snatched Katherine to his heart, in his own despite and hers!—but, as for kissing,—he had never thought of such childishness! And because the thought crossed his mind, he could have kicked himself in sheer disgust and shame. But he only said, quite judicially: "It seems as if there must have been some mistake about that message. Whom did Archie give it to?"

"It would not be honorable for me to say, but—it was another girl! So you see, I 'm not so wrong in thinking he meant it, and—really, Mr. McLean, it 's very silly for me to care,"—she wiped her eyes delicately, as if she were a little shy about it, yet would not deny an emotion that had already betrayed itself. "It is silly, because,—I really think it is only my vanity that is hurt. A girl feels a thing like that all the more because she is so helpless. You men have everything in your own hands."

And Tom, poor Tom, if not altogether fooled, was at least perplexed. He went home that evening

quite out of conceit with himself and with life in general. Was it true that Archie had given up too easily? It was more credible of him than of another. He was ardent but volatile. Perhaps he shrank from the serious responsibilities of life, now that his means were crippled. Not much wonder, indeed. Perhaps he had deliberately chosen his independence, and, if those tears of Winny's had really been wounded vanity, if it had really been a boy-and-girl affair, why,—Archie was surely behaving in the only sensible way.

Tom longed to see Winny again, to refer, if possible, to the subject, to satisfy his mind, unaccustomed to bewilderment, resentful of mystification. But he refrained from repeating the visit. Whenever he thought of doing so, the memory of those quivering lips withheld him; and the memory of something else, something that deranged his equanimity, threatened his self-respect. No, he had done what he could for Archie; he would have nothing more to do with the affair.

And, while he was yet considering his dinner invitation, Archie looked in upon him at the office, to discuss certain business arrangements that called for attention in view of his coming trip to the Rocky Mountains.

Five minutes' conversation settled the matter, and, as Archie got up, in a rather spiritless fashion, to take his departure, Tom followed him to the door, and, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder,—for little more than a boy he seemed in the curious biddableness of his present mood: "Archie," he said; "I 'd give a year of my life to straighten things out for you."

Archie did not understand.

"Oh, I was never meant for business," he said. "It was right enough to fire me."

"Of course, of course,—there was n't anything else to do; but, I did not mean that. I meant—the other thing."

"Winny?"

"Yes; are you really going to give it up?"

"No!" with a laugh that was anything but mirthful. "That was—attended to for me."

"But—did n't you rather take a hand in the break yourself?"

Archie turned sharp about. Had Katherine? But, no!—He knew Katherine better than on that day so long ago, when he had feared betrayal in the matter of the water-lily. Katherine was safe as scripture.

"Yes, I did take a hand in it," he said, soberly—"I knew it was no good, and I was—tired of grovelling."

"But, if it had not been for her father?"

"That cur!" he cried passionately. "You can't get away from him! He 's the pest! He 's over everything! Tom,"—and with blazing eyes, Archie strode across the room to the corner where his old desk stood—where Horace Gerald had sometimes sat in sinister consultation,—and, turning, confronted his cousin;—"Tom, I can stand some things as well as another man. If I can 't have—what I want, I can shoot partridges. I don't mind myself—that 's of small account. But, Winny! She 'll be contaminated; her mind is already poisoned. She 's like a flower on a dunghill; she 's got to be transplanted. When I think of her living under the roof of that—that sordid beast, I—I'd rather she married another man!"

Tom was startled; this was not the Archie he had known.

"Thunder, man!" he cried, with answering impetu-

osity; "if I felt like that I 'd marry her in spite of herself!"

Archie's excitement collapsed as swiftly as it had risen.

"No, you would n't," he said, with a sudden flatness of accent in which was a dejection so extreme that it sounded deceptively like indifference;—"No, you would n't,—not if you were I!—Because you could n't, and because—you would n't want to. Winny knows what 's best for herself, and I 'm not cad enough to dispute it."

The bitterness of those last words sounded very like disillusionment—a disillusionment that subtly communicated itself to Tom's mind. He read in it that Winny was a hard, calculating little person; therefore a person not to be feared, therefore a person not to be desired. He would not pay her the compliment of declining that invitation; she should not imagine that he thought it worth while to avoid her.

"Well, Archie," he said, "your philosophy beats me, and—I believe you 're in the right of it. I should n't wonder if things turned out better than we think for. And, by the way,"—gladly throwing off the rather oppressive subject—"that capital you left behind is doing a daisy business. I sha' n't forget that in the long run."

And Archie, whose nature was so pathetically inclined to friendliness and hopefulness, grasped at the pleasant suggestion, and called back, as he went out at the door: "Well, good luck to you, Tom!"

"By George!" Tom thought; "how recuperative he is! It looks as if he were coming out of this bungle Scot-free."

Then Tom sat down and accepted the Gerald invi-

tation, blessing his fate that he could do so with impunity. He had nothing to fear—he—Tom! His scheme of life was all laid out and there was no room in it for the vagaries of fate which poor Archie had been made a victim of.

"And yet," he said to himself, as he locked his desk, —"and yet—it 's no great wonder that he should have lost his head over a girl like that!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE CATASTROPHE

"And where we looked for crowns to fall,
We find the tug 's to come,—that 's all."

KATHERINE, meanwhile, was in eclipse. All the gay confidence of the past year was clouded, all the dim, beckoning vistas of the future, half alluring, half-terrifying, to her girlish fancy, had suffered obliteration. Her horizon was a blank. It seemed to her, sometimes, as if the very pain of it all was dulled, as if every good, honest human experience, even that of suffering itself, were henceforth to be denied her. She was very young and consequently impatient of even a momentary stagnation; for added to that inherent need of useful activity which had always characterized her, was the youthful craving for some animating, vivifying sensation.

"I think," she remarked to her grandmother one day, soon after Archie's departure for Colorado; "I think I am the most utterly useless person in the world." She was standing at the window, looking out at the first, faint flurry of snow, vague and indecisive, and but the more chilling for that.

"That 's only because things have not gone quite right with you," the old lady returned. "You 're disappointed about Archie, just as the rest of us are;

only some of us have the advantage of having outlived a trouble or two. Is n't that so, Fanny?"—and she shot a challenging look in the direction of her daughter, who had just come in and taken a seat beside them. Mrs. Day's disapproval of Fanny's attitude of mind sometimes found satisfaction in a rather gratuitous exposure of it.

"I don't think, Mother, that we ever really get over our troubles," was the reply, which, by the way, her inquisitor could have foretold, word for word. "It seems to me that our sorrows grow upon us with every year,"—and Fanny sighed profoundly over a bit of needlework in which she was about to seek elusive consolation.

"Well," quoth Grandmother Day, "if you will have it so!"

The substance of Aunt Fanny's statement was so entirely in accord with Katherine's own views that she ought, in equity, to have conceded her an unconditional sympathy. But there are few things less calculable than the laws which govern human sympathy, and Katherine found herself, as usual, siding with her grandmother. This most unsentimental of women had, to be sure, accepted her sorrows so philosophically that it was hard to believe them eternal. And what dignity could possibly attach to a transitory affliction? Yet dignity there certainly was in Grandmother Day, a dignity that lent itself to everything pertaining to her. She was possessed of a certain authoritativeness of spirit which commanded respect, and, in a congenial mind like Katherine's, sympathy. How was it, the girl would ask herself, that a woman who had lost an adored husband and an adorable son could be so evenly cheerful? Yet, while her young imagination

rebelled against the mere suggestion of a sorrow survived, there was that in the personality of this cheerful stoic which forbade any doubt of her emotional rectitude.

"If you feel particularly useless this morning, Katherine," her grandmother was saying, "why not hem some dish towels? There 's a pile of them on the work-table over there."

The young girl sprang to her feet with alacrity, and was presently hard at work upon the towels. She enjoyed it,—if only moderately. Old-fashioned enough as she was, to be a skilful needlewoman, she could put a certain artistic finish into the humblest task.

Mrs. Day glanced up at her granddaughter from time to time. She liked the speed and precision of her work—so different from Fanny's dawdling. The old lady was willing to believe it for the good of her soul that she was destined to spend the rest of her days with the least congenial of all her children, and except for an occasional thrust like the foregoing, she was ready "to be and let be," as she would have put it; but meanwhile it was pleasant to have Katherine about. How well the child used those fine hands of hers! What a pretty bend of the head that was! Grandmother Day sometimes wondered whether Katherine had caught her graceful carriage from Elmira. She hoped the girl did n't mean to mope over Archie; she certainly had not been quite herself since that time, as indeed was very natural. The two children had always been attached to one another, and Katherine had a way of taking other people's troubles to heart.

Presently Katherine, having finished the first towel, looked up, remarking, with an only half humorous intention: "The worst of dish towels is that they are so

soon done! There are only half a dozen here, and the first thing I know I shall be left without an object."

"Well, after that you might play us a tune," her grandmother suggested. "Come to think of it,—have n't you rather neglected your practising lately?"

"I don't know but I have!"

Now, if there was anything that Katherine was afraid of just then, it was her music. There was something quite alarming in the way certain modulations of harmony played upon her sensibilities. Indeed, a rash attempt at one particular slow movement had, but yesterday, proved so subversive of her self-control that, breaking off in the very loveliest passage, she had fled precipitately to her room, there to allow herself a prolonged indulgence in that moping which her grandmother would so heartily have reprobated.

No; music was clearly not what she wanted, nor yet dish towels; and she was a little shy of broaching the subject of her secret ambition. She had meant to become a nurse from the highest motives, to sacrifice in the service of her fellow creatures a good deal that she enjoyed and prized. She hated to turn to her old aspiration as a refuge from selfish suffering. Yet, after all, she was thinking to-day,—if it was right to do good works for a livelihood, for the supplying of one's material needs, why should she be too proud to do them for the satisfaction of a spiritual hunger? Since she was not to be happy, she must—oh, she must—be useful! She glanced at Aunt Fanny, who was already gathering up her work. The good lady was not a steady worker; all her persistency seemed expended in one direction. As she rose and left the room, with that slight limpness of bearing that was

so annoying to her mother, Katherine was seized with a sudden terror. Supposing she too were to grow limp as she grew older!

"Grandmother," she said, abruptly,—"do you know what I want? I want to be a nurse!"

"A what?" cried Mrs. Day, incredulous. The word "nurse" suggested to her mind, primarily at least, one of those useful but not particularly enviable members of society who trundle baby carriages about the street.

"A trained nurse," Katherine explained. "I want to go to a real training-school and learn to take care of sick people. It is so stupid to be ignorant of everything one ought to know in an emergency," she added, feeling instinctively that she had better not urge any larger philanthropic motive.

"Why should you be any stupider in an emergency than any one else?"

"I don't know that I should. But everybody must be stupid until they are taught."

"Experience is not a teacher to be despised," Mrs. Day returned. "When I nursed three children through the scarlet fever,—three at once,—the doctor seemed to think I did pretty well."

"Did you really do that, Grandmother? How wonderful! But then, there are not many like you."

"Yes; we 're all different, I admit. But when it comes to taking care of sick folks, why,—even Mrs. Gerald seemed to get on very well when Winny had the diphtheria."

"Yes; but little Horace died of it, you know."

"That 's rather a foolish argument, it seems to me. Folks have got to die when their time comes, little and big alike. Nurses can't save them."

"Perhaps not, but,—nevertheless, Grandmother, I really do want to be a nurse."

Mrs. Day did not reply at once. She was a good deal displeased by the girl's persistency in what she could but consider a mere caprice. It seemed to her that it betokened an imperfect equipment for the demands of life, an instability under reverses more like what was to be looked for in Archie. Perhaps, after all, she had overestimated her granddaughter's character, because it had not been tested.

"I 'm sorry to find, Katherine," she remarked gravely, "that you have so little fortitude. That you can't bear your troubles—and Archie's too—without thinking that you must go to extremes."

And Katherine answered, with equal gravity, and almost equal dignity: "Yes, of course I am unhappy about Archie, and I—at first I felt about this just as you do. I did not like taking refuge in nursing,—running away as you call it. But then, it seemed to me that if it—happened that way, why, that ought not to prevent. I have always meant to be a nurse," she added, taking her courage in both hands.

Now Katherine was undoubtedly truthful; but,—was she not drawing on her imagination?

"Strange that you never mentioned it to any one," her grandmother observed, sceptically.

"Oh, but I have. I have been talking of it all summer."

"With whom?"

"With—Tom." She was sewing at an accelerated speed which caught Mrs. Day's attention.

"And now that you 've quarrelled with Tom," the old lady remarked, pretty pointedly, "you want to talk about it with somebody else! Katherine, are

you two children never going to make friends again? Family feuds are inconvenient things."

"I never expect to quarrel with Tom any more," Katherine answered, quietly; "but—of course things can't be just the same after what has happened."

The perfect composure with which the reply was made ought to have disarmed suspicion,—whereas there was, in reality, no suspicion to disarm. Mrs. Day, with all her perspicacity, had quite missed the true significance of that cousinly intimacy which had grown so fast under her very eyes. Perhaps the far-sightedness of advancing years had betrayed her; perhaps she had been too preoccupied with Archie's somewhat conspicuous love affair to be as observant as usual in other directions. At any rate, Katherine had parried an embarrassing, though unintentional, thrust, very creditably, and she had every reason to congratulate herself.

It is, however, an established fact that a riddle is rarely solved except by accident; and it was the merest accident of phrase and inflection that gave Mrs. Day the key to a secret whose very existence she had not heretofore suspected. It was the way Katherine spoke the word "never," the quiet finality of tone, that had arrested her grandmother's attention. There was nothing positive in the impression, to be sure, and Grandmother Day was not one to jump at a conclusion; neither did she ever allow herself to interfere in the affairs of young people. She had merely discovered food for reflection. And for the moment she was chiefly concerned to restrain her granddaughter from any rash step. Accordingly she set herself to dissuade her, not by a downright prohibition such as might have defeated its own end,

but by an altogether reasonable deprecation of precipitate action.

And Katherine found herself acquiescing in delay, the more readily, because the ground her grandmother took was precisely that which she had herself held in the old, easy days when she could say to Tom that she wanted to live a little first. Well,—she had lived a little, and she was ready, now; but she could not expect her grandmother, uninstructed as she was touching that preparatory "living" which had been so rudely accomplished, to do justice to her readiness. She therefore entered, cheerfully enough, into the old lady's plans for her, and if these included the far from distasteful prescription of a long stay in town with Aunt Anne, that circumstance did but demonstrate again the worldly wisdom of the shrewd old philosopher to whose initiative the invitation was due.

For Katherine, as her grandmother well knew, was now as in earliest childhood peculiarly susceptible to a social stimulus; so much so in fact that she was herself shocked to find what pleasure she could still derive from the distractions of the gay world. As time went on, indeed, she wondered uneasily at her own increasing good spirits, and she had begun to regard herself as a rather shallow and irresponsible young person, when a chance encounter gave reassuring evidence to the contrary.

One brilliant winter morning Katherine was walking across the Common with Allan Delano, a clever portrait painter, with whose daughter she was on terms of friendly intimacy. They were having an animated conversation, the impressionable artist being hardly less alive than Katherine herself to the sting of the biting air and the sparkle of the sun on the

snow. It was mid-February, and the trees were spangled with frost. The steps of foot-passengers on the board walks echoed sharp and brisk; and there was something undeniably exhilarating in the noisy squabbles of the English sparrows themselves.

Suddenly Katherine, laughing appreciatively at one of Delano's somewhat caustic witticisms, found herself face to face with Tom, tramping toward them with bent head and clouded brow. He looked up, as he passed her, and he hastily lifted his hat; but his face did not clear. Whereupon an unreasoning elation possessed itself of Katherine, and set the blood tingling in her veins.

"I wish you would tell me who that is," her companion remarked. "I have noticed him before."

"That? Oh, that is my cousin, Tom McLean—a stock-broker."

"Your cousin? A good deal of a fellow, is n't he?"

"Yes, I believe he is."

"A marked face;—I should like to paint him."

"I 'm afraid you 'll never get the chance," Katherine laughed. "He is not—passive enough to sit for his portrait,"

"That 's the plague of that type of man. They 're always untractable."

Tom had looked more than untractable on that day,—he had looked morose; and when a man looks morose it is usually because he is not managing himself. Katherine felt the change in him, keenly. She told herself that he was unhappy, that he was out of conceit with life. He had looked at her as if he were afraid of her,—Tom, who was never afraid of any one! Did he then care? Was he then unhappy about their quarrel? And here it was that her spirits rose with

a bound. Had she, after all, an influence upon him? Was it in her power in this great, desolating difference, as in the familiar altercations of a happier day, to say the word that should make things right between them? Had she that power?

Katherine had learned something of her own powers that winter; she had found herself very much mistress of such slight but exacting situations as general society offers. She had quickly taken her place among the enviable minority who are sure of being attended to, and the little fillip to her vanity had played no small part in her acquisition of an easy self-confidence. She had also, perhaps, owed something to that deep and vital preoccupation of her mind which, despite her own scepticism, had never really flagged, and which left her the more genuinely disengaged in face of superficial considerations. And because she was possessed of a new consciousness of power, the sight of Tom's harassed countenance, far from distressing her, gave her courage to repudiate the old sense of rejection that had so long pained and mortified her. It had all been a cruel misunderstanding. They both had suffered. And suddenly that suffering shared became a precious and inspiring possession. The poor dog in the manger! How he had been punished! How wretched, how utterly wretched he looked—and how afraid of her!

And wretched he was, poor Tom, for the worst thing possible had befallen him. He was at last, at last, in the clutches of something stronger than he; his grip was loosening on everything he had ever cared for: self-control, the integrity of his own judgment, the ambition of years, many indeed in the yet small sum of their aggregate. And the sight of

Katherine, walking free and untrammelled, head high, step firm, eyes sparkling,—had but emphasized his own utter dissatisfaction with life.

Indeed, Tom's appreciation of the sacrifice that was to be wrung from his own will had been so strong that the thought of Archie himself had dropped out of his consideration. After that fatal dinner when he had sat for two hours beside Winny, lovelier than ever in her pretty dinner dress, he had quite dismissed the consideration of Archie's claims. A lover who could relinquish such a girl as Winny Gerald must indeed be marvellously recuperative. The word pleased him; its novelty made it delightfully interpretative. Clearly, the only safety with a girl like that was to be found either in a volatile temperament like Archie's, or in an unsusceptibility like his own. He was glad that he was so safe, that he could afford to make a study of this kind of attractiveness, faultless as it was, and never offending by excess. Everything about Winny was unstudied: the toss of the pretty hair, in such happy contrast to the elaborate water waves that adorned the heads of the two Littlefield girls; the very hue of her cheek, not red, like theirs, but delicately tinted. How sweet, how childlike were her eyes, and how maidenly the cut of her dress! The hint of a perfume that always clung about Winny, evasive as that of a wild rose, seemed to-night an exhalation from that perfect throat, the snowy modesty of that bit of neck, so soon hidden in a filmy lace. Yes, Tom reflected, it was well to get a look at life from his safe vantage-ground. He was only glad that he was in a position to indulge himself. Curious, that Archie and he were to find their safety in such opposing qualities. He wondered who would marry

this exquisite creature; perhaps that young law student across the table, who was paying so little attention to the younger Miss Littlefield. He appeared ready for the sacrifice.

Just when was it that Tom's happy security failed him? He could not himself have told. One thing, however, was sure, that on that day when Katherine drew courage and consolation from his lowering face, the fight was fairly on, and Tom, the unassailable, was wrestling hand to hand, knee to knee, with his fate.

Meanwhile, Katherine, still in the bondage of circumstance, whose name in her case was Grandmother Day, finished out her visit with the Glynns, and early in March she returned home, only a little less confident, only a little less hopeful, than on that February morning when Tom's lowering countenance had imparted fresh courage to her spirit.

Her cousin had not even called at the Glynns during her visit. Poor fellow, she thought, he had been too wretched for that! But he must come and see his grandmother. They should meet, now, very soon, and then,—oh, everything would take care of itself! What a pleasure it would be to show him Archie's letters, to let him see that she bore him no ill will, now that things were straightening themselves out with Archie! She could see, at last, how much better fitted her brother was to another life than that of a business office, how much happier he would be when he had found his natural bent, as he was sure to do another year, at the university. As for Winny,—Katherine had never brought herself to believe that that was over and done with. They loved each other, no one knew better than she how absorbingly,

how exclusively. This cruel estrangement must surely have an end; it could not last. She was sorry she had seen so little of Winny; she must go there again very soon. Winny had been out on three several occasions when she had called. That only showed that she was restless, ill content. Archie must really see her before he went abroad. Ah! here was a note from Winny; this did seem like old times!

Katherine was standing beside the carriage where her grandmother was already seated; they were to drive into town for a few errands.

"Just a minute," she said. "It 's a note from Winny, and—there may be an answer."

She broke the seal, and glanced at the beginning of the letter. Her grandmother, watching her, with some little impatience, saw a swift, a devastating change cross her features. It was not a heightening of color, it was not a marked change of expression. It was as if the life had suddenly gone out and left the vivid, eager young face mere clay.

"What is it?" the old lady asked, in keen anxiety.

Katherine looked up, expressionless, colorless, still; and then she laughed, nervously.

"Why, Winny 's engaged—to— You had better read the letter yourself, please. And—do you mind if I stay at home this morning? I must—congratulate her."

When Mrs. Day returned, two hours later, she found her granddaughter sitting at her desk in her own room, still clad as she had left her, in hat and coat. One glove lay on the desk; the other had not yet been removed. Clearly there had been no writing done.

Drawing near to Katherine, Grandmother Day gently placed her hand on the girl's shoulder and stood

looking down upon the young head so gay with its bright winter hat.

Katherine was not startled; she was only obliged to recall herself slowly from a long distance. As she rose to her feet, her grandmother was rejoiced to observe that there was no limpness in the movement; but also, alas! there was no revival of the old spirit in the still colorless face whose eyes unflinchingly met her own.

"Why, Grandmother," Katherine said, "are you back so soon?"

"Yes; I found the shops rather crowded and I wanted to wait for you before choosing the new carpet."

"I might just as well have gone,"—with an apologetic glance in the direction of the unused desk. "I—"

"Yes; I know. There 's no hurry about writing. Only—I would n't take it too hard! Winny Gerald is n't worth it."

"Oh; Winny? I think perhaps I understand Winny better than other people are likely to. I feel sure that she thought that Archie was in earnest, and—I think he thinks so too." All this was spoken in a carefully judicial voice, as if it were the result of mature reflection, and yet Katherine had not been consciously weighing the case. "Winny was mortified,—a girl is, you know,—and she is naturally so dependent, and Tom is so strong."

"And Tom? How about Tom?" Mrs. Day was exercising the merciful cruelty of the surgeon. She must probe this wound before she could treat it. It might still be that she was mistaken; the shock would have been sufficiently severe in any case.

And again Katherine's eyes did not flinch. The strain was only about the mouth as she forced herself to say: "Why, Tom just fell in love. It was—oh, I 'm afraid it was—base,—but it 's so easy to understand. And—seeing he had never been in love before—" A queer little tremor of a smile scarcely eased the stricture about the lips.

It was too much for the grandmother's equanimity. For the relief of the strain upon her own feelings the old lady drew the girl toward her and kissed her cheek.

"There, never mind, my dear," she said, a little huskily,—only Katherine did not notice that, nor the unusualness of the caress,—"we need n't puzzle our heads too much about them. Now you had better write your letter and get it off your mind; only," —with a sudden severity of accent,—"no congratulations from me! I have n't sent any!"

For a month Mrs. Day watched her granddaughter narrowly, with growing concern, yet also with a growing respect, greater than she had ever felt for a child of her own. And gradually she became satisfied that the girl's first instinct had been the true one,—that for the moment at least her salvation must lie in some form of useful activity. Why not in that she had herself chosen? She might, of course, get over this, although in her own mind Mrs. Day had grave doubts. But there was no more efficacious cure for sentimental troubles than mind and hands well occupied. Archie, to be sure, could always find his account in pleasure. There had been no outcry on his part over the news of the engagement. In fact, the letter in which he referred to it was so filled with an account of his first grizzly, that allusions to the event nearer home had got crowded into small space. But Katherine was

not like that; and something must be done for Katherine. She was behaving admirably; no one else had guessed that she had a trouble,—not even her Uncle Theodore, who always kept such jealous guard upon her interests. But her grandmother knew; she knew that there remained scarcely a single point of contact with the old familiar life that was not a pain to the girl.

Now no one understood better than Mrs. Day that an heroic endurance of pain has its uses in the world; but it must not be allowed to degenerate into torture. As the weeks went by, therefore, and the strain did not relax, the old lady came to feel that anything, even the most distasteful solution of the difficulty, would be better.

One lovely April morning she found Katherine in the garden, planting seeds under old Peter's direction. She was much in the garden of late, where she was very meek with Peter, as indeed it behooved her to be. At the sound of approaching steps, she looked up, and, rising to her feet, she shook the earth from her skirts.

"Have you seen the bits of coral in the maple tree?" her grandmother asked, casually.

"No; is it coming out already?"

"It looks so to me. Come and see,"—and the two walked toward the house near which the maple stood in the centre of its little round of green.

As they paused, looking up into the budding branches: "The coming of the spring is as pleasant as ever," Mrs. Day remarked, with that little air of authority and experience which could dignify the merest platitude.

"Yes," Katherine agreed; "but I think I enjoy it

even better in the garden beds. I suppose it 's because we can have more hand in that."

"Perhaps so. That only shows what an active disposition you have." Then, with an affectionate but not especially significant look into her granddaughter's face, which was getting a bit tanned again with the renewal of out-of-door life: "That reminds me, Katherine; I have been reconsidering your plan of a hospital training. I should, of course, never consent to your becoming a professional nurse, but—I think there is something to be said for the training. Supposing we have it in mind for another year."

She caught a fleeting look in the girl's eyes, like that of a hunted creature that sees escape at last. But, instantly the eyes grew steady again, and Katherine cried, with something of her old impetuosity : "Why not begin now,—at once?"

PART III.

"Over the ball of it,
  Peering and prying,
How I see all of it,
  Life there, outlying!
Roughness and smoothness,
  Shine and defilement,
Grace and uncouthness:
  One reconcilement."

CHAPTER I

AT WORK

> "Man's work is to labor and leaven
> As best he may, earth here with heaven."

"SHE 'll pull through,—poor thing!"

It was Paul Stuyvesant who made this somewhat despondent admission. He was standing with Katherine, in the pale light of early morning, beside a hospital cot that had been set up in the wretched tenement, where, for three days, nurse and doctor had contended valiantly for a questionably desirable life. Paul was looking down, with a curious compunction, upon the pitiful, emaciated form outlined beneath the coverlet, and upon the drawn features of the sufferer who was sleeping profoundly.

"I was sure this sleep was the right thing," Katherine answered, softly, though there was little danger of waking the patient. "But it was good of you to come in early. We nurses are trained to such abject deference to the doctors that we don't dare have an opinion of our own!"

"I like that!" Paul retorted. "Jim Elkins says you went straight against his orders with that small devil in Blossom Street, and incidentally saved the case."

"That was only because something turned up that nobody could have foreseen,—not even a doctor!"—

and she gave him a challenging look that he relished mightily.

They were on a pleasant natural footing nowadays. This interest in a labor shared had, for the time being, superseded the old disquiet of aims at variance. Together they had routed the enemy,—there could be no doubt of that,—and if Paul, at least, had some misgivings as to the value of their service to the beneficiary, there remained, nevertheless, the deep, personal satisfaction of success. To him the experience was a more novel one than to Katherine, for he had been but two or three months in practice, while nearly a year had gone by since Katherine had left the training school, where, already, her skill and capacity had found recognition among less partial judges than Paul.

"Have you had your breakfast?" the latter asked, presently, when his official business had been attended to.

"Oh, yes; an hour ago."

"And now, you will rest?"

"Not until I 've had a breath of air. The children will sleep till they 're waked up, and Mrs. Finnigan is stirring already. She promised to come in presently and take my place."

"A great institution, that Mrs. Finnigan."

"Indeed she is! She takes all our children in hand as soon as they 're up, though she has three small monkeys of her own."

"How many did you say this poor thing has?"

"Four,—and a husband in jail."

"And they call that life!"

Paul had drawn a chair up to the bed, and was sitting with his hand on the patient's pulse. Katherine had moved to the window, where she was catching

such whiffs of the keen morning air as they dared admit. She turned, at Paul's words.

"I suppose it is life, nevertheless," she said, slowly. Crossing the room, she knelt down at the opposite side of the bed, closely scrutinizing the patient's face. "There 's an entirely new expression this morning," she said, at last, "and—I 'm sure she wanted to live."

Paul, contemplating the two faces thus so closely contrasted, observed a curious thing. Although they were very nearly of an age, these two young women whom chance had drawn together from the opposite poles of human experience, the nurse it was who, despite the vigor and warmth of her aspect, looked the elder. In the wasted face of the sick woman was a singular juvenility of cast—an absence of development which, now, in the momentary respite from suffering, gave a childlike turn to the countenance; while Katherine indisputably looked her full twenty-five years. Was it altogether the long period of training, the experience of others' suffering, that had given her that subtle maturity of expression? He had watched her one day in church, as he was watching her now. She did not often go to church,—she could seldom spare the time; but Paul knew where she was sometimes to be found. And, on that morning, a fortnight ago, he had sat where he could see her profile. The preacher had chosen for his theme the great Apostle's note of victory: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors." The lofty thought had found its response with Katherine in a noble strenuousness of expression, as vital in its severer character, as the generous but undisciplined ardor of earlier years. And now, to-day, there was the same reassuring force and elevation of countenance.

As she lifted her hand, and gently adjusted a lock of hair that had strayed across the patient's forehead, it seemed to Paul as if the touch of those strong, tender fingers must impart new life to the sufferer. And yet,—he thought, returning to that persistent scruple of his,—what right had they to coerce the hard-pressed soul that had been so near escape?

"Well, it 's a big puzzle," he declared, at last, straightening himself, and drawing a deep breath. "All we can do is to chip away at the edges."

"Or else—live in the heart of it, like Mrs. Finnigan here,"—and Katherine looked up in welcome of the kind neighbor just entering, like a very substantial angel of mercy,—broad, smiling, and fairly clean.

"And what 's that, darlin'?" came a sepulchral whisper from somewhere in the generous depths of the angel in question.

"We were only saying what a splendid nurse you were," Katherine explained, rising and relinquishing her task to this capable substitute.

"And that I 'd arter be, I 'm thinkin',—me that has buried a man and three children!" was the cheerful response.

"May I come too?" Paul asked a few minutes later, as they passed out of the house door and turned in the direction where better air might be looked for.

"If you can spare the time."

"Time is rather a drug in my market," he replied. "One is not overrun with practice the first year."

"Then let us come up the hill; I feel as if I wanted to get as near the sky as possible after Dingley Court."

It was a clear, cold October morning, sharp and exhilarating. The sun was hardly an hour high and

the streets were still almost deserted. As they breasted the hill, which is steep at that point, Katherine asked: "Would n't it have been easier to get a start at home, among your own people?"

"Possibly—if they had been obliging enough to fall ill. But they are a selfish lot; they 've never had any consideration for the profession."

"Pretty hard on you!" she jested. Paul really had improved very much. The oppressive seriousness which used to embarrass her had given place to a cheerful, matter-of-fact address, capable of brightening into banter. It was really a pleasure to be walking with him.

"I had a letter from Archie, yesterday," he was saying.

"Did he write in good spirits?" she asked, with quick concern.

"Oh, yes; Archie 's always cheerful you know,—when he shows up. If he gets out of kilter he subtracts himself."

"I have n't heard from him for several weeks; I fancy he 's pretty busy."

"Pretty busy, and pretty well amused. I knew he would take to the life."

"I suppose the mere work is light."

"Yes, light and congenial. He hardly feels the traces,—which is lucky, for he was never intended for a draught-horse. Meant for the saddle, perhaps,"—and Paul's eyes followed the pretty prancing and curveting of a policeman's well-groomed steed. "How long is it, by the way, since you 've had a bout with Roland?" he asked.

"Only a month. I spent a week with grandmother in September. She drove a pretty sharp bargain with

me you know,—a fortnight every two months,—on an average, of course,—and she never 'bates a jot."

"I 'm glad of that. That 's why you keep so well."

"Oh, I should always keep well,—barring accidents. I can't remember an ache or a pain since the measles."

They were making the circuit of the Common, still in full leaf and blade, though deeply tinged with the autumn change. Paul looked down upon his companion to gather confirmation of her pleasant boast.

It was the first time that he and Katherine had shared a case, though he had manœuvred anxiously to bring about the combination. On this occasion Jim Elkins had obligingly played into his hands. Small wonder if he suddenly found himself modifying his views of this colleague of his whom he had hitherto been wont to regard with nothing more than an unenthusiastic tolerance. But dulness, it seemed,—and of dulness Jim had long stood convicted,—dulness, when judiciously combined with amiability has its uses in the scheme of things. To-day he was blessing Jim for his slow perceptions.

Paul Stuyvesant's horizon had widened somewhat in the past three years. To win Katherine was no longer all that he lived for, but it was much; and since his return home he had felt that at last he was making progress. As they walked on together, talking of Archie, he could not repress a sense of deservingness. He thought of his old classmate, moody and incalculable as he had shown himself in Vienna; somewhat wild and inclined to dangerous experiments as he had become in Paris,—yet never straying far afield so long as his faithful comrade was there to humor and control him. And, now, if his vacillating genius had really found its bent, Paul might still take credit to

himself for this desirable consummation. For, again, it was through his own personal and family influence that Archie and his peculiar aptitudes had been brought to the attention of the authorities at the American Legation in Rome, and that he had been offered that post as under-secretary which was proving so well suited to his capacity.

Yes, Paul had deserved well of Katherine, and she was generous. What if he had somewhat disarranged the programme of his life for her sake? What if he had relinquished the year's hospital-service which had been in order between the medical school and the foreign training? What if he had, for two years subordinated his own inclinations to Archie's caprices? It was all to one end, as it was all to one end that he had begun practice here in Boston where he was a comparative stranger, and where his professional advancement must be relatively slow. Had not compensation already come to him, now, when they were working for a few days side by side,—this very moment in particular, when those venerable elm trees were stretching out their sear and yellow arms in benediction above them both, united at last, if only in a transitory companionship?

Meanwhile how the minutes raced, and how their speed was defrauding him! Was it only that talk with Katherine was always so stimulating? Or was it because, in contrast to what he craved, each limit presented itself as a personal injury? At any rate, here they were, back again, finding the patient's condition so unchanged, moreover, that there was but scant professional excuse for lingering.

"And what shall you do next?" Paul asked, as Mrs.

Finnigan left the room to get breakfast for her double brood.

"Do? Oh, I have most urgent business," Katherine declared, with mock importance; "I 'm about to turn nursery-maid, and engineer the toilet of those superfluous little Caseys in the next room, after which, I shall deliver them over to Neighbor Finnigan for the day. So you must not let me detain you any longer."

Paul hesitated, and then, taking serene advantage of his little brief authority: "Perhaps I had better stay and keep an eye on the patient while you do that," he suggested.

"Very well; if you think there is any need,"—with a rather sceptical glance at the tranquil sleeper.

And presently the self-appointed watcher, left in possession of the sick-room, found himself not too absorbed in a task so unblushingly assumed, to heed the sounds that issued from the adjoining chamber,—the patter of little feet, the suppressed murmur of young voices, the cheerful splashing of water. Now and then there was a snatch of laughter, suddenly hushed; and once a subdued scuffling and scrambling became audible, dominated, the next instant, by accents of admonition, low and mild, but exceeding efficacious. He could fancy the scene; the small obstreperous Caseys of assorted sizes, scrambling and giggling under unaccustomed restraint, and Katherine moving, tall and commanding, among them, yet unable quite to hide the amused benignity which is to be found in those who have a wholesome recollection of their own childish shortcomings.

"And now,—what next?—" Paul inquired, rising to his feet as Katherine emerged, elate and smiling, from the scene of conflict.

"Oh, various small chores, preparatory to a terrific nap."

"How much have you slept lately?" It was useless to pretend that she showed fatigue but—really, she owed it to herself to do so.

"Not so very much; but I shall make up for lost time. That is, at least,"—with another glance at the sleeping patient—"if you 're a good doctor and know whereof you speak, I shall sleep,—like a *Kurfürst*—most of the day."

"In that steamer chair, I suppose."

"Yes; I never knew the bliss of slumber until I thought of bringing that with me on a long case."

"It does n't look very luxurious," he demurred.

"It is, though! But there is much yet between me and that sybaritic situation."

The inference was not to be avoided, and, picking up his hat: "Good-by, then, until this evening," he said.

"Good-by, and thank you so much."

"For going?"

"No—for coming."

"That 's better!"—and, as if encouraged by so great a concession, he came over to where she was standing and took her hand. "I wish," he said, with a sudden earnestness,—"I wish we might have other cases together, as time goes on."

"Oh, I don't know that I want to work with such a sceptic as you!" she laughed. "Your conscience might get the better of you and of the case."

Yet, in spite of her jesting answer, Katherine's face was very thoughtful as she listened to the receding footsteps on the stairs, nor did its gravity relax while she busied herself about the room, clearing the decks

for that terrific nap which she was counting upon. All the while, as she moved about, performing one and another homely task, she was pondering upon the old, old question: Was life, mere life, a boon to cherish, even when it meant great suffering? For herself she had long since decided in a strong, full affirmative. She knew the very hour when doubt had yielded to certainty.

It was during her first year's service at the training school, when she was yet in the throes of that great revolt which is the first vehement protest of youth against adversity. A case of smallpox had broken out in the hospital, requiring complete isolation in an improvised refuge without the walls. A volunteer had been called for among the nurses, and Katherine had instantly offered to take the case. She had done so with a half-formulated feeling that her life was not of value; that she, better than another, could run the risk involved—a risk no one attempted to deny. And called thus for the first time to confront the imminent danger of death, she had definitively found her bearings. She had not feared death, but she had perceived that she did not desire it. In the long hours of that perilous service in which her best powers were called into play, she had deliberately concluded that life was precious in spite of suffering,—that life might be the more precious for the very sake of the suffering itself. Her patient had pulled through an ugly crisis, thanks, the doctors said, to careful nursing,—and Katherine too had pulled through,—she too had issued from the menace of death into a new, and a newly assured possession of life.

And now, as she stood looking down at the pitiful face upon the pillow, so drawn, so wasted, and yet so

touchingly youthful, she chid herself for want of trust. What right had she to deny to this poor, struggling soul, the saving grace of that faith to which her own rebellious spirit had attained? Who could tell but that consolations, sweeter far and dearer than she, in the heat of conflict, had perceived, might be whispered low in the ear of this gentle, child-like victim of circumstance?

As Katherine stooped, and, raising the heavy head, held a cup of broth to the poor, parched lips, the woman opened her eyes, looking full into Katherine's own. She did not drink at once, and Katherine waited until she should be ready. The eyes, from which the brilliance of fever had faded quite away, wandered uneasily from side to side, as if half in longing, half in terror, and presently the hesitating lips murmured:—"Mike—dear!"

With moist eyes, Katherine bent her head and lightly kissed the pale forehead. A long-drawn breath shook the feeble form; was it a shudder, was it only a sigh? And then, her habitual submissiveness returning, the patient drank the proffered draught.

As Katherine gently lowered the heavy head upon the pillow, and tenderly adjusted the coverings about the poor, thin shoulders, she murmured softly to herself:—"Oh, I 'm glad we saved her,—I 'm glad we saved her!—She had a right to live!"

CHAPTER II

RETROSPECT

> "What is it, at last,
> But selfishness without example?"

AS may be imagined, Katherine had not been altogether pleased when she found herself committed to a case of which chance, acting through the unsuspecting Elkins, had placed Paul in charge. It had, however, turned out better than could have been anticipated. They had worked well and successfully together, and she, at least, had almost succeeded in forgetting that they had ever been anything other than fellow-workers.

But presently the victim of their skill, as Paul persisted in calling her, accomplished a fairly good recovery, and Katherine, although preserving still a helpful interest in the family, such as her means and strength made always possible, found herself released from what had been an unusually long term of service. This transference of energy and interest from a single absorbing occupation to a more scattered and general activity formed always a somewhat trying transition. Katherine was sensitive to atmospheric influences, and she could never relinquish an exacting task and return to the neutral quiet of her quarters in an old-fashioned boarding-house, without that slight relaxation of nerve

and spirit which leaves one more or less exposed to the caprice of accident.

It was, therefore, with a curious shrinking, as if from something intrusive and unwelcome, that she discovered awaiting her on the evening of her return, a box of roses, the like of which she had never seen. Paul might have waited just a day before reminding her that the real and enduring relation between them must be the personal one. Of course it must be so; that she knew well enough. He was Archie's friend, and consequently a factor in her own life not to be eluded. But—he might have waited!

The roses were American Beauties, then the latest novelty of the florist's art, and as Katherine lifted them one by one in her hand and inhaled their aromatic fragrance, she was not perverse enough to restrain a long-drawn breath of admiration. She loved a full cup, and the cup of their beauty was brimming. But the reaction was immediate. No, she did not approve them; their sumptuous loveliness and fragrance seemed unduly importunate.

As she cast about for the most suitable disposition to be made of them, her eye fell upon a tall, iridescent glass vase which Archie had once given her. Ah! that was what she wanted! She would put Paul's roses in Archie's vase, thus emphasizing the bond between the two men which was the only one she could ever recognize. But still she was oppressed and harassed; she could not escape the roses. There was something penetratingly insistent in their fragrance, something urgent in their crimson glow. The gift was eloquent as a written poem, although so discreetly inarticulate.

She picked up one book after another,—Motley's

Dutch Republic, that she had found so enchaining ten days ago,—a volume of Loti, fresh from the press,—her well-thumbed *Golden Treasury*—only to lay each one back again among its fellows. She was clearly not in the mood for reading. She had got to think things out, the only way she had ever discovered for composing her mind. Very well, then, the evening should be dedicated to her long-neglected mending, and she reflected, with some satisfaction, that darning stockings had usually proved an excellent sedative.

The house was very still, for it was one of those quiet hostelries where meek, unattached old ladies find a peaceful refuge. The sociable crackling of the fire, which alone broke the silence, sounded quite voluble, and soothingly monotonous; and, as Katherine sat beside her student lamp, her busy needle weaving its way through the meshes of the yarn, while the flickering firelight played about the room, she found herself, after all, hardly more inclined to reflection than to literature. She was evidently in a quiescent state; her mind was sluggish, she concluded, and naturally too, for she had arrears of sleep to be made up.

Yet, presently she became aware that the voices of the past were importuning her, and, lo! something in their tenor was rendering her tardily sensitive to an influence long and persistently denied. Yes; the past was speaking, and to-night its voice was all for Paul, the faithful, the chivalrous,—Archie's friend.

For Katherine knew well that if, in that past which she now so rarely admitted into her thoughts, her own deepest impulses had never suffered a check, she could not have so felt to-day the appeal of another's claims; that if she had not believed the man she loved to be

guilty of bad faith, she would have been less keenly alive to the single-minded loyalty of the man who loved her.

Ah, that disloyalty of Tom's! That was what had hurt her most in those cruel days when, as her grandmother had perceived, there had remained not a single point of contact with life that was not a pain. Katherine, as we know, had never idealized Tom; she had never felt that she had found in him that prince to whom allegiance was due. She had only loved him, as we love when nature bids us. But she was conscious that if she could have kept her faith in the integrity of his character, her self-abasement would have been less complete.

For Katherine knew naught of any extenuating circumstances in this betrayal of her brother which to-day, as in the first hour of her bitter knowledge, she felt herself constrained to characterize as base. She was ignorant of the insinuations by which Winny had led Tom to believe that the "boy-and-girl affair" had come to an inevitable end; she never dreamed of the impetuous disclaimer with which Archie himself had confirmed his cousin in a fixed idea. She did not know that, deceived by the attitude of both, Tom's mind had been driven upon but one consideration; namely, the sacrifice of his own principles demanded at the hands of this new and redoubtable rebellion of his will; that in his inexperience he had implicitly believed Archie and Winny to have lightly extricated themselves from the very toils which had so hopelessly ensnared himself. She did not guess that, up to the hour of his final and complete capitulation, he had been conscious only of a helpless envy of Archie in his escape.

Katherine was not inclined to judge Winny harshly. With all her idealization of this lifelong friend, she had ever regarded her as a creature to be indulged and allowed for—as an exquisite, wayward child, too delicately constituted for struggle and resistance. Even as she knew that if Winny had undertaken to ride Roland she would have been thrown, that if she had ventured to swim out beyond her depth she would have been drowned, so it never would have occurred to her to exact of so frail a nature that combative energy which makes for unshakable rectitude. Katherine did not judge Winny; she only pitied her. But she judged Tom, the more rigorously because she had never idealized him, the more uncompromisingly because she had loved him.

And now nearly three years had gone by, during which circumstances had held her almost entirely aloof from the old personal ties. Her engagement at the training-school in New York had furnished a sufficient excuse, had such been needed, for absenting herself from that midsummer wedding. Archie had, by that time, already left the country, and there seemed nothing remaining to divide her interest. She had not returned home during the whole period of her training, but her grandmother, who had had her own reasons for permitting this prolonged absence, had stipulated that, upon graduating, the preceding January, she should come to live in the neighborhood, at least, of her own people where she belonged.

Since her return Katherine had twice seen Winny in her city apartment, and once, six months ago, she had seen Winny's boy—a charming little person, now in his second year, possessed of much of his mother's grace breaking out into silken curls and rose-leaf

cheeks, but possessed, also, of a pair of clear gray eyes unlike as possible to those blue ones that the flower-like setting seemed to call for. Tom's eyes were gray, Katherine remembered, gray and clear and honest; and the thought had come to her, with a swift pang, as she looked into those startlingly good reproductions, that she had not once seen Tom since that day on the Common when he looked so morose and so afraid of her. Could it be that he was happy now? Could real happiness spring from such an act as his? Could the discontent, the demoralization of his face that day, have been precursor to anything but discord and misery?

Strangely enough, it had not before occurred to her that Tom might not be happy. In the stress of her own personal conflict she had scarcely considered his state. Indeed she had never been particularly concerned with Tom's happiness. He had been so self-sufficient, so consistently unemotional; he had not seemed subject to those fluctuations of feeling which answer to joy and sorrow. And now, the sudden thought that he might be remorseful, that his life might somehow be a penance, soothed and reconciled her; not as a gratification of any lingering animosity toward him—animosity was not in Katherine's nature—but because such penance was inherently fitting. There was reconciliation too, of a gentler nature in the very existence of the child. Good had surely sprung from evil,—since evil there had surely been,—for here was sign and symbol of the best, come to life in this fragile creature with eyes that promised—ah, those promises!

"Do you think he looks like me?" Winny had asked as she relinquished the child to Katherine's arms, far

more practised than her own in handling such burdens—arms into which the little fellow had settled with every evidence of satisfaction.

"He has your hair and skin and mouth."

"Pity he should have Tom's eyes," Winny fretted—it really did sound a bit like fretting—"They don't go well with the rest."

"He 'll grow to them, before you know it."

"But I don't want him to grow to them! I would rather have him pretty and attractive; I want him to be like me!"

"But, Winny, you would n't want him too much like you when he is a grown man," Katherine protested. "He would never do to buffet with life."

"I don't like buffeters," was the curt response.

Katherine had not seen Winny since then. They were all to meet at Grandmother Day's, at Thanksgiving. Tom's father was coming on with his wife,—the first time either of them had undertaken the long journey since Dr. McLean had his stroke,—and Tom and Winny could not well be omitted from the family feast to which it seemed they had not in the two previous years been bidden.

"Tom has thrown in his lot with the Geralds," Grandmother Day had remarked, with some tartness; "He may as well be as thankful as he can in their company!"

That pending Thanksgiving dinner was one of the things that formed part of Katherine's consciousness as she took up one bit of mending after another, bringing each to a point of perfection learned in the days when she and Cousin Elmira had sat stitching away the short measure of that stricken woman's span of life. It would be very strange to meet Tom again;—

and here her revery grew more clearly defined. She wondered if it would hurt much; she hoped not. She believed herself to be steeled against any new inroad of emotion. No, she assured herself that she had nothing to fear from Tom, and he, thank Heaven! had nothing to fear from her. She could be thankful now, that she had been so totally mistaken about him. That however he had erred in his relation with Archie, toward her, at least, his conduct had been perfectly consistent. For his sake she was glad of this, and for her own, although she did not often allow herself to consider the subject.

Indeed, it was part of Katherine's task of self-recovery to refrain as far as possible from thinking of these things, even as she had endeavored in the very beginning to divert her mind from any unnecessary participation in that ordeal of the heart which had cost her so dear. Despite the vivacity of feeling and expression which had characterized her in lesser matters, when real life came upon her, with its last exigency of emotional experience, she had held her thoughts severely in check. This was what her grandmother had perceived and honored in her from the hour when she had seen the life go out of the ardent young face.

Meanwhile, the life had returned to her face and to her soul—a life rich in experience, growing daily in the perception of real things. And, because she had lived deeply and sincerely, because she was not altogether shut in by the personal limitation, she found herself to-night, as thought emerged out of revery, considering more seriously than ever before Paul's strong claims to her regard. She asked herself,—was it perhaps in the interest of her own hard-won integrity of feeling?—why she should so stubbornly reject

a devotion like his? Where was her consistency,—her good faith—her sense of justice toward one to whom she owed so much—so much!

Her hands had ceased their labor, and were lying idle in her lap, as her thought at last took definite shape. Yes, Paul had claims, and it was a matter of simple equity that they should be recognized. Not now—it would not be possible now, nor for a long time yet. But, bye and bye, when the self-conquest was complete, when she had risen to the height of those who are "more than conquerors,"—who could say?

Late in the evening she stood for a long time looking down at the wonderful crimson bloom in which the firelight played so softly and capriciously. After all, she was glad that they were so beautiful,—these roses Paul had sent her. They were a fitting symbol of his character—noble and gracious, and with a fine robustness too, such as she had never before seen in a rose. How well Archie's vase supported them, even as the thought of Archie upheld and prospered the thought of Paul in her mind. She was glad they suited the vase so well. She wished Archie could see them, and, oh!—if she could only see Archie! That was the spontaneous thing. That longing for a sight of her brother. If she could only believe that he needed her!

How unworthy it all was!—she thought, as she stood quaffing that rapturous color and fragrance. Out of sheer selfishness she was ignoring her debt to Paul—Paul to whom Archie owed all that she herself had been unable to give him; and she was longing now to thrust herself into her brother's life,—not because he needed her, but because she needed him! Ah, that was the real thing—more real even than the work which had so long absorbed her best energies.

Katherine had never considered herself as having a peculiar mission in life. Ardent as had been her consecration to this labor of love among the poor, she never lost sight of the fact that she had entered upon it as an escape from her own personal entanglements. Nor did she regard her equipment as better than that of many others whose service in the same cause a little money might secure. The work interested her deeply, and her personal fitness for it was doubtless far more exceptional than she imagined; but she always looked upon it as an activity embraced primarily for her own sake.

And that same perception of the comparative unimportance of labors which might be performed as well by another, was making her to-day the more sensitive to a personal claim which she and she alone could meet. Paul had loved her for nine years; his happiness was indisputably in her hands. Was she too selfish ever to school herself to meet that need? Should she not some day succeed in so bringing it home to herself as to coerce her own heart?

Well, she would do her best, but she was afraid there would never be anything very spontaneous about it!

The roses there! They were beautiful, perfect, beyond any roses she had known. But—how soon they must fade! How long the fragile glass would outlast them! And so her affection for Archie was the real, the enduring thing.

She lifted the roses, to place them for the night in a deep, ample bowl, and as she did so, one of the stems caught in a fold of the curiously involuted glass, causing it to tilt a bit off its bottom. It startled her,

sharply,—for the best-trained nerves shrink at the threat of breaking glass. But instantly the vase had steadied itself.

"I wish," she said to herself, as she placed it in a safer position, "I wish it were not so brittle."

CHAPTER III

THE DIFFERENCE

"You were wrong, you see; that 's well to see though late."

"A HEALTH to Grandmother Day! to be drunk standing!"

In an instant all were on their feet, even Dr. McLean, to whom the act of rising was still a somewhat complicated problem. He had the seat of honor at Mrs. Day's right, and, as he steadied himself with one hand on the back of his chair, he responded to Uncle Theodore's toast with a fervent:—"God bless her!"

As all the company drained their slender sherry glasses to the innermost point, and set them on the table before them, they felt that a very solemn family function had been satisfactorily performed. A word may be eloquent as an oration when it comes from a full heart, and Grandmother Day was dearly beloved and honored.

Yet even a Thanksgiving reunion has been known to include an alien element, and:—"How could she help giving him her hand?"—Mrs. McLean exclaimed, under her breath. For Winny, whose place was next her father-in-law's, was quietly taking her seat, leaving him to meet, unaided, the still more difficult problem of sitting down. Happily, however, Grandmother Day's perceptions were no less quick than her

daughter's, and, with an alertness which belied her years, she had come to the invalid's assistance.

"Oh, I beg pardon! I did n't think!" Winny murmured, smiling up into her father-in-law's face with a sweetness that might well have atoned for any lapse.

"She did n't feel! That 's what 's the matter with that young lady!" Mr. Glynn remarked, with unaccustomed severity, and Winny's mother-in-law, distinguished though she was for an unprejudiced mind, found nothing to say in reply.

"A good looking clan, we Days; don't you think?" Theodore hastened to observe, with a facetious inclusion of himself in his encomium. He felt the asperity of his previous remark to have been ill-timed, and he was glad of the diversion, which suggested itself to his mind naturally enough, as, from his post of vantage at the foot of the table, he looked from one to another of the comely assembly. "Katherine grows handsomer every year," he added. "Have you noticed that?"

"She was sure to," was Aunt Sarah's confident reply.

"I used to think her only good looking," Uncle Theodore went on; "but if we were to meet her for the first time to-day I think we should be obliged to tax her with something very like beauty."

"Yes; I felt it at once, when we first arrived. And she has distinction too."

They were having a delightful time, Aunt Sarah and Uncle Theodore, with their little duet of praise for their unconscious favorite.

Meanwhile, the succession of winged victims,—turkey, boiled and roasted, chicken pie and ducks—had gone their ways, and now the blazing plum-pudding

was making its entry, to the extreme glee of the younger children of the family whose dinner had been served at a table in the big bay-window, and who witnessed, with unrestrained enthusiasm, the wonders of that peripatetic volcano. And it was at this juncture that Winny's nursery maid appeared at the door, holding little Arthur up to the admiration of the company—little Arthur Darling, who had, as yet, evinced no inclination to quarrel with his name.

"Bring the little man over here," cried the enthusiastic grandfather. "Bring him over here!"

"Let him walk!" Tom interposed. "He must walk to his first Thanksgiving dinner!"

As the nurse set the tiny fellow down, Tom sprang to his feet, and placed his big forefinger at the child's service. The small hand grasped it quite as a matter of course, and the little fellow toddled manfully along to his grandfather's chair. It was pretty to see Tom lift him to the old man's knees, supporting him the while, that he might not press too heavily there.

"And Grandmother Day! give her your hand, too, Arthur; she's the Head of the House!"

"Let' s have a lick at him over here!" cried Aunt Sophia's Dick, a handsome collegian whose seat was next Katherine's. And Tom, only too proud to exhibit his son's prowess, guided the charming little tottering figure all round the big table, while aunts and cousins, and uncles too, claimed toll of the baby lips and cheek.

"You 'd better sit down and eat your pudding," Winny ventured, once, with wifely regard for the proprieties; but:—

"Thanksgiving puddings are better for the keeping," Grandmother Day declared, as she watched the

progress of the little prince from subject to subject. Her attention became a trifle keener, as the two paused beside Katherine's chair.

"That 's Katherine, you know," Dick announced ceremoniously. "What have you got to say to Katherine, young man?"

The little face had lifted itself to hers, quite of its own accord, and, as she stooped and gently kissed the soft cheek, the child lisped tentatively:—"Kath-rin!"

"A new word!" cried Winny, with sudden animation.

"And a mighty good word, too!" Tom declared looking down upon his cousin half defiantly, as if he dared her not to accept the peace-offering after all those years.

"It 's much obliged for the compliment," Katherine laughed, with a friendly glance, as she lifted her head; and Tom thought a Thanksgiving party was an uncommonly comfortable sort of function.

"He 's a very forward child; don't you think so?" Winny asked, with a pretty deference to the house's head, when, a few minutes later, the baby had been carried away, and the pudding had resumed its normal importance.

"Yes, he is," Mrs. Day assented. "I don't think any of my children talked so early."

"Nor mine," said Aunt Anne. "When Teddy was eighteen months old he could say nothing but 'mamma'."

"He probably thought that that left nothing to be desired," Uncle Theodore interposed, with gratifying gallantry; and Aunt Anne blushed as prettily as ever she had done in the Lyons velvet cloak, to which she

always persisted in attributing the conquest of her admired consort.

"And yet Tom thinks he 's too young to travel," Winny continued, unmindful of the trifling interlude.

"Travel? Where to?" asked Grandmother Day.

"To Europe," Winny replied. "I want to go in the spring. Tom has never been, you know, and it 's really time he went. Do you think Arthur is too young?" She did not say "grandmother"; she had never been invited to do so, and she was just a little in awe of the handsome old woman who was Archie's grandmother, but not her husband's,—really.

Mrs. Day, for her part, was aware that she had no jurisdiction here, and where opposition was futile she preferred acquiescence. She knew Winny well enough to feel sure that she would carry her point at any cost, so she replied, to the young mother's intense gratification:—"I should think this was a more favorable time than a year or two later. A good nurse can do very well with a child of two, and you and Tom would have considerable freedom."

Everybody was surprised at Mrs. Day's answer, and no one more disagreeably so than Tom. He was sitting on the same side of the table with his wife, and Katherine could see them both. In fact, she could see more of Tom than in the old days, since, to oblige Winny, he had had his beard shaved. At his grandmother's words, his mouth, which was an expressive one, set itself in a curiously restrained line above the stubborn chin, and Katherine felt quite sorry for the exposure which rendered necessary such command of feature.

"Oh, I 'm so glad you agree with me!" Winny was saying. "It seems to me such a wise thing to do; and

now, I 'm sure Tom will come round. I only wish we could be a little more of a party," she continued. "You can make so much better arrangements for more people; don't you think so, Father?" It was surprising how easily Winny had adopted the 'father' and 'mother' toward these new relatives whom she had seen but once before in her life. She was wary of uncertain ground, but would never forbear a legitimate claim.

"It may be," the old gentleman replied, adding, with entire sincerity,—for he admired Tom's wife extremely,—"but I should n't blame Tom if he preferred keeping you to himself."

"Oh, Tom is not as polite as you," Winny cried, greatly pleased at this little tribute. "He has never thought of putting it that way!"

"Ah, my dear, 'still waters run deep'," Tom's father admonished her, wishing that he could see his son's face and gather confirmation of his pretty theories. But Katherine saw it, and saw no relaxation in its expression.

"Where should you think of going?" Uncle David Hollis inquired. Uncle David was a silent man, but his hobby was foreign travel, of which he had had but one scant taste.

"I should like to start in time for Italy," Winny answered. "I 've never been south of Florence, you know. Why, Katherine!" she cried, with a spontaneity that could not have been feigned; "why don't you come with us, and then you could see Archie!"

At this audacious suggestion the whole company caught its breath, as it were, and then everybody began talking at once on unrelated subjects, Katherine answering under cover of the general murmur:—

"I expect to be very busy at home next summer, and —Archie has half promised to come over."

"What a pity! Then we may miss him altogether!"

Tom looked a trifle annoyed, but not in the least embarrassed. The impression Katherine received was that he merely objected to having his plans discussed. He was sitting almost directly opposite her and she felt as if she knew every thought that passed through his mind. Tom had changed,—a good deal. He looked older, and somehow more complex, but the wonted familiarity of impression had reasserted itself. She had not realized how intimately she had learned to read his mind, long ago, when neither of them had anything to conceal; and to-day she could not rid herself of the idea that she knew what was passing there. No, there was no faintest indication of an uneasy conscience, nor did the face she knew so well look callous. On the contrary, there was a hint of sensitiveness which, conflicting as it did with the familiar stubbornness, was perhaps the very thing that accounted for the new complexity. This was all very contradictory, in view of the state of things that circumstances seemed to call for. In vain Katherine told herself that she had lost the key, that she could no longer trust her old ability to interpret; deep back in her mind was an unshakable conviction that she did understand him, and better than ever, now that the personal interest had died a natural death.

How they were talking—all these aunts and cousins! What a lot they did find to say! Here was Dick, in the middle of a long account of the freshman baseball team, which he had just been elected to, and she was saying; "yes, yes"—to all sorts of propositions which she did not hear. Come to think of it, she had

been saying "yes, yes," for ever so long, and looking straight into Dick's face too, without the slightest suspicion on his part, that she did not see him. After all, people knew very little of what was going on in a person's mind.

They were leaving the table now, and Tom had instantly joined her. The men were allowed to smoke all over the house on Thanksgiving day, and the family was breaking up into small knots, scattered about the various living-rooms, while a bevy of the youngest perched chattering and scuffling on the broad stairs.

"What do you think of the boy?" Tom was asking, as they passed into the long parlor, and took possession of an old satin-covered ottoman that had stood in its same corner before either of them was born. It was still broad daylight, and the sunshine was slanting through the west windows.

"He is quite wonderful," said Katherine, gently. "I should think you would never get used to him."

"I never do! And do you know, his comical little mind is just as perfect as his absurd little body. Did you notice how well he got your name? It is quite a difficult name for a child." In the enthusiasm of the moment Tom had forgotten to light his cigar. "We 'll have him in again pretty soon, before we send him home, and I want you to notice the way he plants his feet out. You can really hear his little heels go down when he 's coming toward you across the room."

"It must be all strength then, for there can't be much weight. He 's a perfect little Peasblossom."

"That 's just it; it 's sheer muscle. And yet, he weighs more than you would think. It 's nearly twenty-five pounds already!"

It did not occur to Tom to apologize for his little rhapsody. Yet if it was not the first time he had been betrayed into talking about his boy, he was usually at pains to make game of himself a bit, with a view, perhaps, to forestalling any impulse of mockery in his hearer. There was no need of that with Katherine, however; Katherine would know how to appreciate the little chap. She must see a good deal of children as she went nursing from house to house; it was not likely that she had ever met with one like Arthur. And, by the way, how about all that nursing?

Tom had changed his seat to a big arm-chair facing the ottoman. "You put it through, after all; did n't you?" he was saying. "Do you know, I had a notion at one time that it might all end in dreams."

"My being a nurse, you mean?"

"Yes; you talked about putting it off, and that 's always risky. Have you got out of it all you thought for?"

"I don't think I was expecting to get so very much out of it," Katherine answered, thoughtfully. "I believe I was young and foolish enough to fancy it was other people who were to profit by it. But I have learned better," she added, with a wise little smile that was very winning.

"Why, what do you mean? You must surely know that you 're doing a lot of good!"

"A little, perhaps,—though it 's nothing somebody else might not do just as well. As you say, it 's I who am the chief gainer; the good it does me is the thing that nobody else could take my place in. Yes," she added, musingly, "I 've got out of it a great deal more than I thought for."

Tom was leaning forward in his chair, his cigar still

unlighted. He had never depended much on the luxuries of life; even his after-dinner smoke was not essential to his comfort. His hands had dropped between his knees, and he was pondering something. He looked older than he had a few minutes ago, when he was talking of the boy.

"Curious," he said, without glancing up—the image of Katherine sitting there with her head thrown back against the cushion in an easy attitude of contemplation, the very expression of her face, as she listened to his words, was as plain to his mind as if his eyes had been fixed upon it,—"Curious, that you should have been the one of us two to do what you set out to do. Now I should have thought—"

"It was natural enough," Katherine interposed, though she was aware of the effort it cost her. "In my case nothing better intervened."

"Intervened! What an odd expression! So you would say that matrimony intervened—and that it was better!"

This would never do, and she cried, rather precipitately:—"Oh, I was not thinking of you, I was thinking of myself. It seemed altogether the best thing I could make of my life, so I did it."

"There it is again," Tom insisted; "it seemed the best thing and so you did it. Now what I wanted to do seemed the best thing all the time, and I did n't do it!"

There was no special appeal for sympathy in the remark; it seemed more in the nature of a statement of fact. Yet suddenly Katherine felt deeply, pitifully sorry for him. The impression of power checked was very strong; the man's whole attitude as he sat there, with his eyes fixed upon the floor, his unlighted

cigar in his hand, bespoke as plain as words,—at least to Katherine's understanding—a baffled ambition, a general distaste for life.

"But there 's time enough," she urged.

"Oh, yes! There 's time enough!"—and he glanced involuntarily across the room to where Winny sat talking with Ned Hollis, Dick's elder brother.

Winny was looking her very prettiest to-day—listening, with the rapt attention she was mistress of, to the young landscape-gardener's account of the projected park system.

"How interesting that is!" they heard her say. "No one ever told me that before!"—and Tom half expected her to add, as she had done on a certain memorable occasion in the past: "I wonder that Archie did n't."

"What puppets we are!" he muttered under his breath, and springing impatiently to his feet. Then, recovering himself sharply, he made as if he had only meant to change his seat.

"I always like a chair I can handle," he remarked, drawing up one devoid of arms, and seating himself in his favorite attitude astride of it, which brought him with his back to Winny's corner.

And Katherine, as they talked together of less dubious themes, glanced, from time to time, past Tom's energetic figure, toward that little group of two, noting the increasing fervor with which Ned sought to interest his pretty companion.

Was it any wonder? — Katherine asked herself. How could Winny fail to captivate every one with whom she came in contact? And why should she not enjoy doing so? How could it be anything but pleasant and amusing to see a headstrong youngster like Ned

reduced to a pulp of admiration and assiduity? We all enjoy the exercise of our peculiar powers! How happy she herself had been, the other evening, when one of her poorest patients had cried: "O Miss Day! It makes me feel better just to have you take hold of my hand!"

What was that Tom was saying? That his father and mother were coming to spend Sunday with them. That sounded pleasant and homelike. Perhaps, after all, what he had got was better than what he had relinquished! If only—and the thought of Archie gave her pause.

"Let us go and find Aunt Sarah and your father," she proposed, abruptly. "They must want all they can get of you."

"And of you," Tom chimed in, rising at once.

As they crossed the room, he did not again glance in Winny's direction. He, at least, did not appear to be abnormally sensitive to his wife's charms. Suddenly, and quite against her will, Katherine found herself feeling almost as sorry for him as for Archie.

"I wonder, oh, I wonder," she thought to herself, while an unspeakably dreary feeling settled upon her, "I wonder how it ever came about."

An hour later, when the children were at their revels, Katherine playing jig after jig for their dances and games, Tom chanced to be sitting beside his grandmother at one end of the long parlor, whence she liked to watch the gambols of the little ones. Dr. McLean had been resting since dinner, and when Arthur and his nurse were sent home in the carriage with Peter, Winny had pleaded a headache and gone with them. She had found Ned Hollis almost too impres-

sionable to be interesting, and she did not feel herself inspired by the prospect of an interminable succession of round games.

"Is Winny subject to headaches?" Grandmother Day was asking.

"Apparently," Tom answered, drily. "But I don't imagine they are very serious."

Mrs. Day did not imagine so either, but husbands should not be allowed to entertain unchastened theories.

"Men never understand women's suffering," she replied, with emphasis, "because we make so little fuss."

Tom raised his eyebrows. "You may be right," he answered politely. "We are a blundering lot."

"When did you find that out?"

"Oh, some years ago, when I came to my growth." His grandmother gave him a look that had measurement in it and discernment.

"Don't flatter yourself, Tom, that you 've come to that yet," she rejoined, thinking, with a twinge of compassion, that the poor fellow had not by any means seen the last of his growing pains. And, as for blundering;—what a gift he had for it! Following out this train of thought to its logical issue:—

"Tom," she said, suddenly, and so sharply that he was startled into acute attention,—the uproar was at its height, and they were as isolated as if they had been on a desert island,—"Tom, you 're not going to do anything so ill-judged as to take Winny to Rome—while Archie is there?"

"Why, what do you mean?—You don't think—"

"Don't think what?"

"What do you think?" he asked, shortly.

"I think that it would be in extremely bad taste,—to say the least."

"And—to say the most?" He was sitting bolt upright in his chair staring at his grandmother in utter amazement.

"It would be—foolhardy.".

"I don't know what you can mean by that," he exclaimed. "They don't care a fig for each other. If I had not known that, do you suppose I would have —interfered?"

"What made you think that they did n't care?" the grandmother asked.

"Think it? I knew it. They both as good as told me that it had been a boy-and-girl affair and they were well out of it."

"And you had never happened to know that a boy-and-girl affair was harder to recover from than anything else?"

"I had never thought anything about such things," Tom answered, doggedly. Then, after a moment:—"Great heavens, Grandmother!" he cried, with growing uneasiness. "You don't suppose anybody believed that I—that I played the traitor?"

As the black word left his lips Tom's face testified to the recoil of his spirit. He had clutched the arm of his chair, and Mrs. Day placed her hand on his in quick pity of him.

"That 's too hard a word," she said, gently.

"No word would be too hard for the thing," he declared.

They sat silent for some minutes, the long, thin hand of age lying lightly upon the hard young knuckles, till presently Tom released his hold upon the mahogany rest, and the kindly hand was withdrawn.

"Grandmother," he asked, at last, with a visible effort; "do you think,—do you think that—Katherine thought that?"

The question was secretly gratifying to Mrs. Day, who recognized the unconscious tribute of that instant reference to Katherine's judgment. It was well that Katherine should get her dues, even at this late day. Yet the grandmother hardened a little with the old resentment toward Tom,—poor, blundering fellow!—and she replied with much dignity:—"I can 't tell you what Katherine thought. It is a subject which we have never discussed."

"She must have thought—something, if only because of Archie. Do you think she thought he cared?"

"Everybody thought he cared. You would have thought so yourself if you had had your senses about you."

Tom had sunk back in his chair again.

"Good God! Why did n't somebody tell me!" he muttered,—yet not so low but that the still acute hearing of the old woman had caught the words.

"And that would have made a difference?"

Again Tom turned sharp about and faced his grandmother. The children were romping wildly to the tune of Katherine's rapid fingers. How those fingers were dancing over the keys! How cruelly gay it all was—the rollicking measure of the tune, the peals of childish laughter, the smiling sympathy of the elders, happy fathers and mothers looking on in mutual joy and sympathy! Only Winny had gone of all that company, Winny and the boy,—her boy, whom she had the first right to. A fierce rebellion seized Tom at this right of Winny's in the boy; ah!—there it was

that his distrust of her got the better of his indifference.

Tom had no confidants; however he might chafe at having been outdone by Katherine in consistency of purpose, the admission of regret would go no further. But that little question, half sceptical, half challenging?—"And that would have made a difference?"

Looking straight into the eyes of this redoubtable judge,—baring his soul, as it were, obedient to the imperative need of confession,—he said, grimly, but without the least touch of melodrama:—"It would have made just the difference between heaven and hell!"

CHAPTER IV

FELLOW PRISONERS

> "I cannot feed on beauty for the sake
> Of beauty only; nor can drink in balm
> From lovely objects for their loveliness."

"I ALWAYS knew I should n't like being married half as well as I liked being engaged,"—and Winny drew a small regretful sigh which Katherine did not find herself taking very seriously.

The latter had been watching little Arthur as he sat on the floor in a streak of sunshine, crowing and cooing over his blocks; and now she turned toward his mother, with a view to making a suitable reply. But, really, she thought—with a prompt revival of her old susceptibility to her quondam playmate's personal charm,—the tongue might well afford to rest, in favor of the eyes!

Winny, clad all in dove-color, with a touch of creamy lace at the throat, was leaning among the cushions of a deep red velvet chair, the soft outline of the head delicately enunciated against the warm background. Every detail of the picture was complete: —the unstudied grace of the hair-dressing, the momentary languor of the eyes, the careful cut of the long, flowing morning-gown, which lent a dovelike character of line as well as hue to the slender form.

Winny indeed was not one of those who neglect themselves when the cares of life begin; in all practical things, at least, she appeared quite equal to coping with the situation which she professed to deprecate. Her parlor was as tasteful and as well ordered as her toilet; her little white-becapped maid as decorous as an accomplished butler. In the speech of the young mistress, too, was a certain decision both of accent and phrase which left no doubt of competency—within limits.

"All the same," she went on, "a girl can 't be engaged forever, and of course one would hate to be an old maid. Are you never afraid of that, Katherine?"

"Why no!" Katherine laughed. "I can't say that I am particularly apprehensive. I think my nerves would bear the strain!"

"I suppose there would always be somebody you could marry if you wanted to," and Winny cast a glance of critical approval upon her visitor. Katherine was certainly very effective—partly because she dressed so well.

"Yes, I fancy there would always be somebody, if one were bent upon just that!" was the rejoinder.

"Well," Winny continued, dismissing Katherine's case, and returning to the consideration of her own, "there are two sides to the question, of course. And I 'm ready to admit that the fault is partly in me—in the way I am made. I always try not to be prejudiced, and I understand these things better than I used to. It 's only that men are too selfish to suit me. I thought, at first,"—she was still leaning back in her chair, the gravity of her subject not permitted to mar the lightness and grace of her attitude; "I thought at first that Tom was worse than others; but

I have seen a great deal of life the past two years,—nearly all of my friends in the city are married women; they interest me more,—and I 've come to the conclusion that husbands are all a good deal alike. The only really happy time for a girl is being engaged."

"And even the boy does n't make you feel differently?"

"Oh, of course, he 's an amelioration, and I love him to distraction!"—such an unimpassioned distraction it would seem to be!—"I think too, the influence has been good for Tom. He 's not nearly so exacting as he used to be. He was always a person of one idea, you know."

"Papa," the child murmured, dreamily. He had made his way over to Katherine, and was leaning his little head against her, apparently lost in contemplation. Nap-time was drawing near, and the morning had been one of strenuous activity.

"It seems almost as if he must understand what we are saying," Katherine exclaimed, quite abashed at the improbable suggestion.

"He always says 'papa' when he hears Tom's name," Winny explained. "As I was saying," she went on, "Tom is a great deal less exacting than he used to be. He has given up insisting that I shall think and feel precisely as he does on every subject. I suppose a man must have something to tyrannize over, and now that he can make little Arthur do everything he wants, he does n't seem to expect so much of me. It 's a great relief! All the same," she added,—the phrase was one which Winny constantly used in her definite little summings-up—"I was delighted that your grandmother took my part on Thanksgiving

day. Tom has quite agreed to go abroad for the summer, only not in time for Italy. It seems as if I never had anything quite as I wanted it."

"Where shall you go? To England first?"

"Yes; so Tom says, though I don't care so much about England. And then we shall do Holland and Switzerland, and perhaps the Italiàn Lakes. But what I really look forward to is Paris. Only Tom says Paris is stupid and expensive, and he would rather not stay there more than a fortnight. As if he could know anything about it when he has never been there!"

This constant reiteration of Tom's name on Winny's lips, not as if he were her first thought, but rather as if he were a part of the commonplace of life not to be evaded, had the effect of making him seem quite sordidly domestic. There was a kind of bread-and-butter familiarity about it that was subtly derogatory. So much so, indeed, that it was a relief when Winny presently entered a formal complaint against him; for in its sequence she unconsciously presented him in a detached position.

"So foolish of Tom," she was saying, "to talk of expense! One does n't marry a rich man for the sake of economizing."

There was no use in arguing with Winny; all the terms of her proposition were too foreign to Katherine's habit of thought. Neither was it possible to change the subject. The visitor had already tried it unsuccessfully more than once. So she only said, with polite interest:—"Has Tom got to be so rich as all that?"

"Papa says so. He says that New York firm he used to work for is playing into his hands all the time,

and that he has twice made a very big thing. I don't see myself," she added, "but that he has been doing exactly what poor Archie tried to do, when you were all so terribly down on him. I always thought everybody was so cruel to Archie!"

Katherine, rarely at a loss for a retort, found nothing to say in reply to this astonishing proposition. As she sat, regarding Winny across the slightly tousled head of the child, who still leaned at her knee, sleepily twisting and turning the ring upon her finger, she reflected that it was perhaps just as well that Tom had given up expecting his wife to think and feel precisely as he did on every subject. Their point of view was hardly identical!

"If Tom were only reasonable," Winny was saying, "we might be living in good style by this time, instead of cooped up in an apartment. We might have our own horses and not go trundling about in corner cabs. I asked him, nearly a year ago, if he was spending anything like his income, and he was obliged to admit that he was not. In fact, he as good as told me that he never intended spending his income. I asked him what he wanted to save his money for, and he said he was not saving it, he was using it; —he was using it for its own increase. Of course I could n't but approve of that, for papa says that 's the only way to get really rich. But, all the same, I have a feeling that there 's something behind it; that Tom has schemes that he does n't tell me about. I 'm sometimes terribly afraid he may turn into a philanthropist."

"And don't you approve of philanthropists?" Katherine asked, secretly rejoicing that Tom did cling to his old ambitions: that he would have, at least, that outlet of broader interest.

"No, I don't. I can't bear visionary people, and—I think that charity should begin at home."

Katherine had picked the baby up and he was already half asleep in her arms. But that would never do, for she must get back to her grandmother's by one o'clock. She had chosen the morning for her visit. Was it because she was shy of meeting Tom? Well, she should never shrink from that again. The unconscious exposition of Winny's claim had been too matter-of-fact to leave any margin for the play of the imagination. That muttered protest of the puppet on Thanksgiving day had been the mere episode of a moment; she need give herself no uneasiness about it. He was clearly married — hand and foot! Winny might fret a bit, or coquette with the facts; the atmosphere of matrimony pervaded every inch of the little establishment, and, holding in solution equally, as it did, Winny's loveliness and Winny's childishness, must encompass Tom like the air he breathed.

Ah, how good it was to get away, to escape, out of doors! Katherine was to have a canter with Roland early in the afternoon. At the mere thought of it her spirits rose. Well, freedom was a great gift! To go one's ways, unmolested; not to be entangled in any close personal relation! How much that counted for, after all!

And Tom, when he came home, late that afternoon, was almost as sensible as Katherine had been of the oppression of circumstance that dwelt within his four walls.

He was somewhat later than usual, too late for his daily romp with the boy who had been resolutely carried off to bed in his nurse's arms, at six o'clock,

amid rebellious cries for "papa." Little Arthur had not learned to bear his reverses with fortitude; he still labored under the delusion that the natural concomitant of a desire is its gratification. But his father, having the advantage of greater experience, was more submissive. Consequently, when told that the boy was just dropping asleep and must not be disturbed, he did not press the point.

Tom had learned certain lessons of life very thoroughly, and he had, as Winny admitted, become far less exacting, in trifles, at least. Whether he had also become truly amenable in essential things, was, however, less certain. Winny should go abroad if she desired, but—not in time for Rome. Beguiled by his ready acquiescence in half her programme, she still hoped to carry out the whole.

After dinner, when Tom was established in his own den,—rather a forbidding depository of dingy books and maps, of well-worn furniture and shabby rep hangings, redolent of pipe smoke,—Winny joined him there. It was a thing that did not often happen, for Winny disliked the room, resenting particularly its shabbiness and smokiness; and by that same token Tom liked it above everything else. It was the one spot in the house—the one spot in the world!—where he felt like a bachelor. There was not an inkstain on the big desk, not a threadbare inch of the old furniture, that did not speak to him affectionately, comprehendingly, of the good old days when he was his own master. He always spent an hour there after dinner with his paper and his pipe, safe, usually, from intrusion.

He looked up as Winny came in. She had a bit of fancy-work in her hand, though she had always

maintained that the green-shaded drop-light was useless for purposes of embroidery.

"Did you want anything?" Tom asked, dutifully rising from his chair. He thought it a very absurd ceremony to be gone through with, but Winny had made no secret of her views on points of etiquette.

"Nothing in particular," she replied, quietly establishing herself on the other side of the desk. "It was rather hot in the parlor, so I came in to cool off."

"Shall I open a window? I am afraid it 's pretty stuffy here."

"Yes, it is stuffy; it always is! But it 's always cold too. No, don't open the window. What 's the news to-night?"

"There does n't seem to be much."

"That 's what you always say. I wonder what you read the papers for."

"Oh, there are lots of things that interest me, that you would n't care for."

"For instance?"

"Well; politics, and money, and—here 's an article about Hampton Institute. Would you like to hear it?"

"No, thank you. You had better read it to yourself. I sha'n't stay long, anyway."

"You might be more interested than you think. They are doing a lot down there."

"I know; papa says he saw your name on the subscription list. It seemed to me rather a pity."

"So it did to me; I hate subscription lists, but they will do it that way."

"Oh, but if you give the money, I should think it was better to get the credit of it."—This with a little toss of the head which was an exhaustive commentary on charities in general.

"Well; I should never do anything anonymously," Tom returned, already absorbed in the article. He thought the negro question a big problem, immensely vital to the interests of the country. He already had his eye on the one man whose opinions on that subject he respected. This thinker did not get much of a hearing in the papers, but Tom had met him and talked with him. He should have his chance one of these days, whenever Tom should have got his grip on a great newspaper. The prospect, to be sure, seemed somewhat more distant than it used, but that was only a matter of perspective. The main thing was to keep headed right. One rarely got anything of value without taking one's time about it. Tom, at least, had never found it profitable to be precipitate. If one rode too hard, one was liable to come a cropper!

Rather a rubbishy article this that he was reading; the kind that sounds well and leaves no impression. He must get hold of Hartwell again. Hartwell was the kind of rough diamond that one could take satisfaction in. He might be persuaded to come to the house, if only Winny—but, no; she would n't!

Tom glanced across at his wife; her pretty head, bent over her work, was half in bright light, half in deep shadow. A pity it was that Tom was not artistic! He might still have prized those graces which had become as dust and ashes to him.

Winny, looking up, caught his eye; whereupon she remarked, casually:—"Katherine was here this morning."

"Did she see the boy?"

"Yes; he almost went to sleep in her lap. It was just his nap-time." Then, with a light, but very telling, emphasis: "I thought she was a good deal

surprised that we were not going to Rome. She knew how I had always set my heart on it; she remembered how disappointed I was when that stupid Miss Hancock would not take us south of Florence, because she was afraid of the fever."

"Did Katherine say she was surprised?"

"Not in so many words; but—one has one's intuitions. I knew she must feel it rather a slight to Archie."

"Did she mention Archie's name?"

"I don't recollect; but you know how touchy she always is about Archie. You remember how rude she was to you that time when you turned him off!"

"Yes, I remember."

There was a long pause. Then:—

"Don't you believe you may think better of it, Tom? I would n't ask you to be gone any longer time; we could come back earlier, and I 've heard you say that the summer is just as important as any other season on the stock exchange."

"I am sorry to seem disobliging, Winny; but I can't change the dates, and—I certainly should not consent to taking the boy to Rome late in the season," —and Tom returned to his paper in the hope of making an end of a subject which had, within one short week, become the most painful of all subjects to him. "It would be in extremely bad taste,"—and—"It would be foolhardy." He did not want to get morbid about it, but—Grandmother Day's words were not to be lightly disregarded.

Winny said no more, and presently Tom was aware that she had gathered up her work and left the room; but he did not imagine for a moment that she had yielded the point. She would never gain it,—that could not be,—but she would have her revenge in the

interpretation she would put upon his persistence. He should know what it was, even though it did not again get itself expressed in words. Some things, articulate once, require no further speech.

On that occasion, now a year previous, when Winny had so strenuously urged a fundamental change in their scale of living, she had openly bemoaned her own dowerless state. "If only I had money of my own, like Katherine," she had cried; "I could live as I liked! It is dreadfully humiliating to be dependent."

Tom had answered cynically:—"You should have thought of that before!—" And the next day he had brought her home a new bangle as a peace offering.

They never really quarrelled—these two unlucky prisoners. Indeed, superficially considered, they got on remarkably well. There had been no great disillusionment on the part of either of them; Winny, at least, had crossed the threshold of matrimony with a very clear understanding of what she was about. It was a prison, and the jailer was not precisely the one she should have selected on his own merits; but his jail purported to be a well-appointed, luxurious abode such as she considered indispensable to her happiness. The life did not suit her any better than she had anticipated, but she did not mean to aggravate the situation by unnecessary antagonisms.

Tom, on the other hand, had recognized the coercion practiced upon his better judgment, and had vigorously fought against it; but his foe had been unscrupulous, and had outmanœuvred him. Within a very short time after his marriage, he had characterized it in his own mind, in parody of the boy-and-girl affair it had superseded, as a "damn fool affair." Yet it was not until the moment of Winny's little

speech anent her own impecuniosity, that he had been struck by that particular feature of his folly. Indeed, with all his practical sense, with all his appreciation of the value of money, it is only fair to say that it had never entered Tom's mind to attach the slightest importance to the question of private fortune in a wife. If he had desired to postpone such personal bonds until his career was assured, it had never been from any consideration of mere expense. He had thought only of the conflicting interests that must be called into play; he had feared to forego the singleness of purpose which he believed essential to success. And so it happened that Winny's lack of fortune had never struck him as a factor to be considered, until the day when she startled him with a direct allusion to Katherine's advantage over herself.

Tom did his best to forget the incident, for it was contrary to his deliberate intention to allow any thought of Katherine to enter into his relation with Winny. He knew, now, by the law of contraries, that he could have loved Katherine. He did not put it to himself in any exaggerated form. He could have loved her; that in itself meant freedom, action, life,—as again he had learned by the law of contraries. But it would not be safe to work out that very cogent law too freely, and, to the end that there might be no disastrous conflict, he must hold the thought of Katherine as far as possible removed from the thought of Winny. In this respect he had himself so well in hand that he had succeeded in establishing a truce with disturbing fancies, and for a year past—that is, since the boy had begun to emerge from the chrysalis of early infancy—Tom had found life a very tolerable undertaking.

It was only his grandmother's words that had again thrown him out of gear. Not that they had aroused any serious commotion in his conscience; he was too clear —as to his own motives at least,—to be subject to the views of another. He knew, well enough, that there had been no disloyalty of intention toward Archie; and, furthermore, he had far too lively a realization of what his cousin had escaped to feel any compunctions toward him, even now that his theory in regard to the latter's indifference had been called in question. But it was not pleasant to know that his action had been misjudged, that he stood before his small world attainted of treachery.

He could imagine how all those aunts and uncles and cousins must regard him, how the men he and Archie both knew must consider him, and he found himself confronted with the possibilities of nightmare. Yet, somehow, the horror did not materialize. He appeared to be curiously callous, in every direction but one. His first spontaneous outcry:—"Did Katherine think that?"—expressed,—now, as then,—the very pith and marrow of the dissatisfaction that was embittering him as nothing else had done. "Did Katherine think that?" He did not love Katherine, he never should, and heaven knew he did not want her to love him! But she must respect him; that was something he could not forego. The mere thought of her misprision was insupportable.

The clock struck nine. His customary hour had grown into two, and he had been thinking of Katherine every minute. And Winny? What would she say to being left alone a whole evening? After all, Winny had her rights; he had no business to neglect her. Roughly shaking off his preoccupation, he rose from

his chair and stepped along the passageway to the gay little parlor that made so pretty a setting for its mistress. She was reading a novel, but he knew, when she looked up, that she had marked the hour.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed, as he came in. "I wonder where the time has gone. I think I must have been dreaming."

"You probably have," Winny answered, somewhat mollified. "You do look sleepy."

CHAPTER V

ALL, OR NOTHING

> "All my days I 'll go the softlier, sadlier,
> For that dream's sake."

AT first Katherine thought that Archie had changed very little. When she saw him springing down the gangway of the steamer, on that August morning of his arrival, the curious shyness which had possessed her while she waited gave place to a joyful sense of satisfaction. It was the old step, the old free carriage of the head, the old flashing smile. And the voice, when he cried:—"Why, Kitkat!"—sounded as natural as if she had heard it every morning in the year. Paul was there, and Uncle Theodore; and Grandmother Day would be driving up by the time the custom house was passed. Meanwhile, how good it was to see Archie making friends with that ungenial looking inspector who had clearly set his heart upon finding something dutiable.

"Only a few odds and ends, you see; nothing to interest Uncle Sam. I 'm in his service, myself, by the the way," the traveller added, confidentially. "Our Uncle does n't make us a very large allowance for jimcracks; perhaps you 've noticed that!" And the stern features relaxed, and the ferret fingers seemed to lose their scent and go wandering vaguely among collar-boxes and well worn guide-books.

"Been over long?" the official condescended to inquire.

"Three years last June. Tell you what, it seems good to hear a bit of Yankee talk!"

"I hope he 's had the foresight to bring you a diamond tiara, Katherine," Uncle Theodore chuckled; "he would n't have to pay a copper on it."

And Paul remarked:—"That 's just the way he used to ravel out the foreign red-tape for them. We never had any trouble on a frontier."

"Yes," Katherine thought, with deep content; "he has n't changed a bit."

But he had.

"He 's not so much different as more so," Aunt Fanny concluded, when she had sufficiently recovered from having her hand kissed to express an opinion.

"I 'm not sure," was Grandmother Day's thoughtful rejoinder; "I have n't made him out yet."

She had a week in which to pursue her studies, and then her visitor went off to shoot shore-birds. He said he had a special appointment with a family of yellow-legs whose grandparents were former clients of his and he did not like to go back on his word.

Meantime, there had been that one delightful week during which the favorite grandson had pervaded the house like a strain of gallant music, gay and graceful, and sometimes tender, as he had never been in the old days. Especially with Katherine he was unwontedly affectionate. It seemed now, in thinking of the past, as if even he had perhaps not been wholly free from the New England limitation. He had always seemed expressive, to be sure; but, had not the old easy demonstrativeness been a form of that same reserve that may find its account as well in a smile as in a frown? There

were days in that one week, the only real week of the visit vouchsafed her, when it seemed to Katherine that Archie loved her and clung to her as he had never done before. He would follow her about the garden, he would ride with her, as he had used not to care to do, he would get her to play to him by the hour; and he was never tired of hearing about her work. He wanted to know just the sort of cases she had had, just the kind of people she had been good to, and what came of them afterward. He seemed solicitous too, for her future; he did n't want her to give her life to that sort of thing.

"You had to have your fling, of course; I understand that," he said one evening, when they were strolling together in the moonlit garden. "But sooner or later you 're bound to tire of it. You were never made for promiscuous good works! You want something of your own."

"If only you wanted me," she had answered, quickly, "you would see how soon I would throw over my good works!"

"Oh, no; don't save up for that! I 've been a free lance too long; I should n't take to anything else." Whereupon, he left her side, abruptly, and, stepping across one of the box-bordered flower-beds, he proceeded to shake an old sickle-pear tree, standing solemn and shadowy in the moonlight. A single hard, green ball dropped to the ground and Archie picked it up.

"Remember how we used to shake the old fellow, and how tickled we were if one of those small paving-stones tumbled off?" he asked, knocking his teeth on the stony surface.

"Yes; and how sour they were, and how we thought we enjoyed them!"

"They made me sick one day and I would n't eat another all that year, even when they got ripe. Katherine," he cried, with a sudden earnestness of conviction, while the moonlight shone full in his face, defiantly lifted, "that's just what ails life. You try the green fruit and it turns your stomach, and then you don't care for the ripe."

"But that is only for one year," she interposed, hastily.

"True;—and the other 's for only one life. I wish there were nightingales here," he went on, without giving her time to answer; "or whippoorwills, or something to make a noise. It 's so still, it seems as if the trees would hear what you say."

"But they won't tell," she laughed, as they pursued their walk.

"Not much to tell either," he admitted.

Nor was there much to tell, after all their confidences. Once in a very great while there would be a flash of self-betrayal, a touch of bitterness, a hint of something else,—of something foreign and disquieting. But, when all was told, it seemed to Katherine that in spite of these flash-light revelations, in spite of his outspoken pleasure in her society, Archie was more than ever a stranger to her. It was only when he talked of Paul that they seemed to be on firm familiar ground. Yes, Paul was the best fellow he knew anything about. He had such a lot of sense too; he never interfered. Yet he kept things right side up every time.

"He 'll always come next to you, Katherine, in my alleged heart," Archie declared one day when Paul had just left the house, after dining with them; and then, with unusual seriousness;—"I wish—I do wish you could fancy him!"

"I wish I could," Katherine replied, with answering fervor.

It was the first time in all those years that the brother and sister had ever alluded to Paul in this connection. Archie had been big brother enough to tease her about other men, but he had never ventured to speak in that way of Paul; he was perhaps afraid of damaging his friend's cause. Nor was anything further said on that occasion. But Katherine's reply had made him hopeful; so much so, that he told Paul about it just before he went on his shooting trip, and he could not understand Paul's lack of enthusiasm.

"I knew she felt that way," Paul said, quietly.

"Have you talked with her about it, since you got back?"

"No."

"Then you don't know where you are. Katherine does n't wear her heart on her sleeve, and—look here, Paul! I would n't be afraid of her, if I were you; she would n't like a man to be mousey."

"And supposing she were to show me the door," Paul suggested, picking up his stethoscope and examining it with grave interest. They were having their talk in the doctor's office.

"Well,—then you 'd be quit of the whole thing and could look about you."

"I 've not the slightest wish to look about me," Paul retorted. "I like the view I 've got."

"Oh, I don't mean that you would pick out another girl;—I know better than that. But—perhaps you could throw this thing off."

"I don't want to," Paul persisted;—"but if you like, I 'll show you something pretty!"—and he invited his visitor to apply an eye to the microscope

which occupied a place of honor among his books and retorts. "That 's a bunch of those pernicious rascals that Koch has got on the track of."

"Oh, yes; I know," Archie exclaimed; and then, as he lifted his head from the glass:—"It does n't take much to wind things up for you, does it? Now I suppose one of those little shavers is n't bigger than the fraction of a pin point."

"Not more than a millionth part as big," was the answer. "As you say, it takes mighty little to upset things for us."

Paul was wondering just what that line meant that had appeared in his friend's face since they parted. It was very slight,—starting from the sensitive nostril and losing itself in the shadow of the light moustache. And the eyes, too,—they had a way of clouding, suddenly, as if they were tired of their own brightness, and would n't mind going out for a while. Paul was less pleased than the others with the impression that Archie made. He thought he was using himself up; he wished he knew in what way. It was not overwork.

"Don't get going too fast," he had said to him one day. They had been talking of matters at the Legation, and Paul had been glad to learn that Archie meant to hold on there in spite of a considerable increase of income which his capital had developed in Tom's hands.

"Tom has been regularly fine all through the business," Archie had declared. "He was not bound to anything beyond a clean six-per-cent., and he has reckoned things exactly as if I had had an interest in the firm."

"I 'm glad he 's blessed with a sense of decency in one direction," Paul had declared.

"Good Lord, Paul! what are you talking about?" Archie cried. "Tom 's straight enough."

"Is that your opinion?"

"Yes; it is. Of course I know what you mean,—and I see you might misjudge him. But, I tell you, you 're wrong! He—he only blundered. Those positive chaps are liable to that."

"Glad to hear it," Paul replied, quietly, but in perfect good faith. "And I 'm glad all this does n't make you feel you want to throw the job up; for I think it is a good job and may lead to something better."

"Oh, well," Archie answered, indifferently; "I might as well be humoring old Dixon as killing time with snap-shots. It 's rather a jolly kind of life, too."

"I know it; I can imagine just the kind of life it is, and of course you have things in your own hands, a good deal. Only—don't get going too fast."

"Why not?" Archie inquired.

"Because it does n't pay."

"What does pay?"

"Several things," Paul answered. "Bacteriology, for one thing, and—keeping a level head, for another."

Archie shrugged his shoulders.

"I catch on," he replied. "But—I 'm not as much in need of a nurse as I was a year or two ago. Though I don't forget," he added, with one of his sudden, and most beguiling, changes of mood, "I don't forget who it was that kept me steady on my pins when I was—learning to walk!"

When Archie had been at home a week, he went into town with his sister to have a look at her lodgings. It was part of his new interest in everything that concerned her.

"Snug little place; is n't it?" he remarked. "And

you 've got some trees in the square there. Quiet a bit of sky, too, for star-gazing. Are you at it as much as you used to be?"

"Oh, yes; I like to keep an eye on them still."

Archie poked about in both rooms, interested in every detail, until presently he came upon a photograph of little Arthur that Winny had sent Katherine just before sailing. He picked it up and examined it closely, without asking any questions. But, as he set it down:—"I suppose that 's Tom's kid," he opined, casually. And the next day he remembered his appointment with the shore-birds.

After he was gone, life seemed to Katherine very flat and empty. Archie's leave of absence was short, and she felt pretty sure that the yellow-legs and plover would get a good share of the ten days remaining. In the uncertain interim she did not return to her work in the city. She contented herself with a few odd hours of nursing in the family of Peter's daughter, where an epidemic of influenza had broken out. Peter did not approve of his young lady "demeaning" herself in such a way, but he found her less tractable than when she was wont to be among the flower-beds.

"Peter," she said to him one morning, when he had stoutly refused to report upon the family,—maintaining that Miss Katherine was not to bother her head about them;—"Peter, I have minded you all my life, because you knew just how far in to stick the flower-seeds. But nursing is what I know about, and you may as well give in!"

Peter's daughter was, happily, more appreciative, and the grandchildren tyrannized over Katherine quite as if their social positions had been reversed.

But even so there was a blank in her days, and in her thoughts, that did not get filled.

She pondered a good deal upon Archie, wishing that she had had the forethought to hide little Arthur away. "It was so different from seeing the child himself," she reflected. "If Archie could do that, he would feel that it somehow made things right—just as I do." She wished she might know that Archie was as heart-whole as she. "If only he could see them in their own home," she said to herself, over and over again; "it would be like passing a sponge over the slate. Any lingering regrets would be wiped out."

Yes, she thought of Archie pretty much all the time—of Archie's future and of Archie's past. And so closely allied to the thought of that past was the thought of Paul, that when, one evening, he came to see her, he met with a quite distractingly cordial welcome.

She was playing the piano when he came in, and Paul asked her to go on. He did not care for music, nor had he ever pretended to do so; which, considering the circumstances of the case, was rather remarkable. But he could think of no better way of forestalling any suggestion of an adjournment to the library, where he had seen Mrs. Day and her daughter playing cards. So:—"Do go on," he begged, wishing devoutly that he knew whether it was more likely to be Beethoven or Strauss that was responsible for those inconsequent sounds.

"But you don't like music," Katherine protested. "You know you don't!"

"Oh, but I like to see you play!"

She laughed as she left the piano. "Perhaps you would like just as well to hear me work Archie's

initials," she suggested, proceeding to light the drop light and make things cozy.

"I should like that even better," Paul assented with enthusiasm, as he drew up a second chair, blessing his stars, the while, that fate had spared him the music.

It was raining hard, and a damp, pungent smell came in, as of gardens that were getting their fill of a good thing.

"Archie says you showed him your microscope the other day," Katherine remarked, as she picked up one of the pocket handkerchiefs that she was embroidering. "It 's a long time since you 've told me anything about it."

"It 's a long time since I 've had the chance; we 've both been so busy."

Katherine had not appeared to be at leisure for any case of Paul's, and he had again found an opportunity for the exercise of that acquiescence which he had already had so much practice in.

"And do you find your microbes remunerative?"

"Very! That modest genius over in Prussia has opened up a new world for us. The only difficulty is, —it 's so big that it 's easy to lose your way in it."

"How lucky you are, to be starting in just now, when everything is simmering!"

"Yes; it is an interesting moment, and it 's a great thing to be free to work. The only trouble is, one is tempted to keep at it day and night, and not bother about practice; and of course they 've got to complement each other to be of any good."

"But you 're getting practice?"

"Oh, yes; there 's no lack of practice if one is not fastidious."

"You mean if one is not mercenary."

"I mean if one is not entirely impecunious. I don't suppose you, for instance, find yourself out of employment very often!"

"No; but I often wish you doctors would hurry up your discoveries, and give us a little more light. Tell me what is really being done. I read all I can get hold of but I sometimes think that I understand less of it than I should if I had not the smattering of knowledge that a nurse gets. For instance,—just what do they mean by infectious wound diseases?"

Now Paul was steeped in the new science. He had got a smattering of it, as Katherine would have said, in Vienna, and later in Paris where he had had the luck to fall in with one of the few men who then possessed an notion of what Pasteur was about. His mind had thus been well prepared for the flood of new suggestion that had been let loose, when, in the previous March, the first reports of Koch's investigations had found their way into the public press. He had thrown himself into the great movement with much enthusiasm, and in the labors of investigation he had found a satisfaction such as he had not dreamed of apart from the one ambition that had been so long and persistently frustrated. He did not forget Katherine in this new and absorbing interest, but in a broader and deeper sense he found himself. He knew at last that his fate was not entirely in her hands; that, though her refusal should shadow all his days, yet life, thus shadowed, would still be very much worth while. He loved the sunshine and longed for it as much as ever, but—after all, he reflected, the unchanging north light is very good to work by. To-night, however, for the first time, he had a feeling that the sun was getting round to the north, as it does at

the genial season, and that, after all, it might prove illuminating, even in a laboratory.

"You *are* in luck," she cried again. "Just think of standing on the very threshold of all that!"

"I 'm certainly in luck to have you interested in it."

"How could I help being?" she exclaimed. "It is so intensely interesting in itself,—and then—your going in for it supplies the personal equation,—if you know what that means! I 'm afraid I don't! Anyhow, it makes it seem as if the curtain had gone up on a perfectly tremendous drama, with an actor, too, that is real and not just acting."

Paul had known that she was grateful, that she had esteemed him as Archie's friend; but—here was no question of Archie. She was clearly thinking of him to-day without any reference to her brother. Was Archie right? Was it a mistake to be mousey? At least he might make his manners in return for all this sympathy.

"Do you know," he declared, "I think you 're uncommonly kind to take so much interest!"—and he ventured to let his voice speak a bit. It had been tutored out of all expression of late years.

"Kind? why, how could I fail to be interested?"

"Yes; but then you say yourself that it 's not just the play you care about. You let fall a remark about the actor!—" and as he spoke the word, Paul's heart gave a tremendous thump. It was very disconcerting; he had thought he had himself better in hand.

But things quieted down at her first word, and indeed Katherine herself felt that she was only saying the self-evident thing, as she answered: "But when the actor happens to be the best friend of a person's brother?"

Paul's face fell.

"Yes, I know," he returned, quietly, while the old resignation stole in quite soothingly among the agitations of the preceding moment, "and of course I take nothing to myself."

"But indeed you may take much to yourself," she exclaimed, with quick compunction. "You must know,"—she hated the conventional phrase that was forming on her lips,—"you must be aware of—my regard for you."

"Based largely, I am afraid," he rejoined, with a sudden bitterness,—he had not meant to let it come to that,—"on the fact that I have let you alone for several years; that I have—stopped prodding."

"No," she protested, looking him straight in the face, eager to do justice to herself and him. "It is based on better things than that,—not on what you have done—or left undone."

"And yet?"

She was silent, while the query echoed through the empty places of her heart—and yet?

"And yet, if I were to say the word you hate to hear, that dearly bought regard might fail."

She shook her head reflectively, almost as much interested as he in these speculations.

"No," she returned; "it 's not so bad as that, only—if I were you, I would n't say it—yet."

A flash of something sharper, intenser than joy crossed his face. But Katherine did not see it. She had taken up her work again, and was stitching away at Archie's initials, thinking—not so much of the momentous little word that had just got itself spoken, as of the curious fact that those initials stood for *Anno Domini*. She had always felt that coincidence to be an augury of good to Archie.

Paul had recovered his composure. There was, after all, a chill, a remoteness, in that meagre concession, as he almost instantly perceived. And so he was able to say, with scarcely a deepening of the voice, and with no undue and alarming emphasis:

"I think I understand. You mean that a long time from now, many years perhaps, you might be so—disciplined, so—utterly changed from what you are to-day,"—there again he could not quite suppress a bitterness of phrase,—"that I might risk a word."

And Katherine answered, quietly, but with an intense effort to speak the exact truth, to give Paul his full dues,—Paul, who was Archie's friend,—"I can only say that—I wish it might be so. But—I can't tell. It is very, very far away."

And Paul perfectly understood the exact truth, better, I think, than Katherine did herself.

"I said you were kind," he answered without elation; "and I know you are weighing every word you say, but—don't let it go any further, this kindness. Don't ever let it hasten things. I mean," he went on, leaning forward with his arm on the table, and searching her face, still bent over her work,—"I mean—that the kindness must never get the upper hand of the truth. You will never be so mistaken as to make a sacrifice for me. It must be—all, or nothing."

His voice had taken on an authoritative tone and she was seized with a sudden panic. All, or nothing! Could it ever be all? And, if not, what right had she to open even that remote vista of possibility? She did not misinterpret him; she knew that it was magnanimity, and not selfishness, that prompted his

protest, and she knew, too, that under that imperative disclaimer, lending it force indeed, was a reviving hope which her words had rashly awakened. For the first time in her life she felt herself at a disadvantage with Paul.

"Then we had better play I had n't said it!"—she was trying to speak lightly.

"Why? Because you did n't mean it?"

"Oh, yes; I meant it—the little bit I said. Only—I had no idea you were so exacting. It makes one quite afraid of you!"

She certainly was at a disadvantage and Paul was seized with an uneasy sense of it.

"Did you suppose that a man who loved you could —feel any differently?" he asked, with a seriousness, in strong contrast to her pretty evident effort at the reverse. But she did not dare change her tone.

"I was only thinking," she heard herself say, forced by some strange automatic movement of conscience to touch upon dangerous ground; "I was only thinking what an inquisitor you used to be. Do you remember, for instance, asking me, years ago—how long ago it seems, and how young we were!—whether there was—anybody else?"

Her head was bent above her needlework, the hands composedly doing their office. What was it that whispered to Paul that this was a confession in guise of a jest? It was a thing he had never dreamed of, yet it was a thing that confirmed him finally and utterly in the chill scepticism regarding that first little word of hope she had ever given him. In one of those instantaneous revulsions of feeling that sometimes revolutionize a man's life, the old hope of possession transformed itself into an urgent need to shield her, at

all cost, even from himself. It was not her lover, it was her knight that answered, in a tone as light as her own had meant to be:

"Was I such a sentimental idiot as to ask you that? Well,—you won't lay it up against me, will you? Because, you know—there would n't be much chance for any of us if we were called to book for the follies of the past!"

CHAPTER VI

A VINDICATION

"Blame I can bear, though not blameworthiness."

"IT is quite what I should have expected," Grandmother Day declared, with condemnatory asperity. "She was the very woman to do it."

"Really, mother?"—and Aunt Anne's pretty face, within its rose-decked bonnet, expressed an artless surprise. "Now I should have thought she was too dependent for such a step. I can 't help thinking that there may be some reason that we do not understand."

"Dependent!"—her mother repeated, quite overlooking the theory of revelations to come—"What ever made you think Winny Gerald dependent?"

"Well, several things. I should have said she was one of those women who would do as their men bid them. Think how docile she was when her father turned Archie off."

"So, you thought that was docility?"

"What else could it be? She certainly seemed very fond of Archie. I have even sometimes feared that it was docility that made her marry Tom. Her father wanted it, I am sure."

Mrs. Day's gold-bowed spectacles flashed a look upon her daughter that was almost disdainful.

"Did it ever occur to you," she inquired, "that

there was any resemblance between Horace Gerald and that girl of his?"

"Why, no! she 's the image of her mother."

"Yes; she has her mother's features and coloring. But did it never occur to you that she had inherited anything from her father?"

"I can't say that it ever did."

"Well, my dear; Theodore has n't kept you in a cabinet all your life for nothing, and—I don't know that it has hurt you either!"—with a look of pleasant relenting at the sweet, puzzled face under the pink roses. She was very proud of Anne, of the spotless spirit of her, no less than of her lovely face. "However, it won't harm you to know that Winny is just as hard, and just as sordid, and just as unscrupulous as Horace Gerald himself. She obeyed him because she wanted to."

"Strange," Anne repeated, "Theodore seems to have something the same idea of her, though he does not put it that way. He was never willing that I should do anything for her after she and Tom settled in town. I wanted to give them a dinner. Dear me! I 'm afraid Mrs. Gerald must feel this very much," she went on reflectively, as her mind recurred to the stumbling, apologetic manner in which that lady had, a few minutes previous, made the announcement which had created so unfavorable an impression.

The Days were old-fashioned people; even Anne, who had been subjected to the sophistications of modern society, still clung to the theory that wives should abide with their husbands and not strike out into foreign paths. When, accordingly, Winny's mother had announced, as easily as she could,—and just at the end of her call when she was already

on her feet and retreat was near,—that Winny had decided to spend the winter abroad and let Tom come home without her, Anne had found nothing to say in reply. As Mrs. Gerald, however, missed the animus of her old neighbor's comment, she felt that she had got through with a ticklish task rather creditably.

"I 'm not surprised to hear it," Mrs. Day had answered, drily, thinking, the while, that Louisa Gerald had a vacuous look which her daughter would never sink to; there being nothing vacuous about your thorough-going egoist, as this experienced observer had long since discovered.

It was the day after Archie's sailing, and Katherine had gone back to her work, with a satisfaction only less complete than Paul felt in the society of his precious microbes. Yes, they were both "in luck," to use Katherine's phrase,—they were both in luck to be living at a time when men were learning the value of work for its own sake. A few years earlier, Paul might have spent his uninspired days waiting for patients, while Katherine might still have been under the dominion of fancy-work and small accomplishments, casual charities, or still more casual social offices.

She was thinking about this one Saturday afternoon a week later, as she walked across the Common to the Public Library. She was thinking what a tonic it was, this drudgery which nursing usually resolves itself into—something very different, to be sure, from anything she had anticipated in the old days, when the *Life of Sister Dora* was firing her to emulation. She had imagined herself relieving extreme suffering, saving the day in critical cases, soothing the last hours of dying martyrs. Yet, for the last week, as often enough in the past, she had spent her time passing

from house to house,—dispensing drugs, making gruel, changing bed-linen,—with nothing more exhilarating to reward her than a quiet consciousness that there was perhaps a microscopic quantity less of misery and dirt in this big city because a girl named Katherine Day was devoting her life to its amelioration. And, meanwhile, she had stopped worrying about her duty to Paul, stopped speculating about Tom and Winny, stopped,—almost stopped,—grieving over Archie's departure. Of Tom and Winny, she only knew that they were expected home about this time, for she had left her grandmother's house just before Mrs. Gerald's call.

As she entered the old Library, a massive brick building that has since fallen from its first estate, she came upon an unusual commotion. Half a dozen persons were collected about a figure lying upon the marble floor, evidently the victim of a slight attack of epilepsy. Katherine had never witnessed such a thing before, but she remembered what she had learned about it. Even as she crossed the broad entrance-hall, the crowd had closed in about the sufferer, concealing him from view, and, incidentally, shutting out the air. There was clearly no one to take direction. Katherine stepped swiftly across the hall.

"Please move away; he must have air." Her voice was low, but authoritative, and, as the crowd drew back:—"Can you let me have a couple of coats?" she asked. "Thank you! Now, will two of you lift him a bit, so that I can get the coats under him? And somebody,"—she was on her knees beside the sufferer,—"will somebody please hold his head?"

No trained attendants at a hospital could have been

more swift to obey than these men and boys whom chance had brought together.

"No;—no water, thank you," she said, as she swiftly loosed the man's tie and collar, and held her hand to the clammy forehead. "No; thank you—we don't need that,"—for a woman had approached with smelling salts.—"Just keep the doors open, and don't come too close. It 's passing already."

"Why, Tom!" she exclaimed under her breath. He had been coming down the stairs, and had reached the spot in time to obey her summons for an assistant. Now, as she looked up and found it was he that was holding the man's head,—holding his own hat, too, between the poor convulsed face and the group of lookers-on, who had all crowded to one side,—she was scarcely surprised to see him there. Indeed, she was too absorbed in the emergency to think of anything else.

It was soon past however. In a very few minutes the patient showed signs of returning consciousness, and there remained nothing to do but to tie his necktie hurriedly in a loose knot, and to straighten his disordered toilet.

"It 's all over," she said, quietly. "You had better all go away. He may not know anything about it."

As the man moved uneasily, she dexterously pulled the borrowed coats from under him, and returned them to their owners.

"When he tries to get up," she whispered to Tom, "just lend a hand, and tell him he had a fall—if he asks. It was a very light attack, and he may not realize much about it."

By the time the man was on his feet, a passing cab had been hailed, but not before a bright looking

young fellow of a reportorial air had come up for information. Katherine, who stood at one side, having disengaged herself from the affair, saw him accost Tom, walking to the door with the invalid, who was still somewhat dazed, but quite clear as to his identity and domicile. She could not hear the reporter's question, but Tom's words were quite audible, as he replied:

"I can't stop to talk, but if you can find a one-armed man with black side whiskers in the reading-room, he can probably tell you all you want to know. I have n't seen him go out."

A moment later, even as the brisk form of the reporter disappeared from view, Katherine heard the bang of the carriage door, and moved forward to meet Tom, just entering again.

"He knew his address?" she asked.

"Oh, yes; his wits were quite disentangled. I know the cabbie, too. He 'll be all right. But you! How neatly you handled that crowd! I should think you had had them in training for a month past!"

"Oh, they just saw that I understood about it, and they were glad to know how to help. I am only thankful it was not a severe attack. It would have made such a commotion, and—that reporter might not have been so tractable. How did you ever invent the one-armed man?"

"Happened to see one this morning, trying to do something he could n't. Been hugging myself ever since because I had two! He naturally popped into my head. Ah! there comes our friend the reporter."

"He does n't seem to recognize you," Katherine remarked, somewhat relieved that the man passed without speaking.

"Oh, he recognized me fast enough, but he knew

he had been fooled. Now, that 's not the kind of reporter I propose to have on my paper!"—and Tom looked mightily pleased with himself at the thought.

"How is that coming on, by the way?" Katherine inquired.

They were standing near the foot of the great double stairway, where the holiday crowd, passing and repassing, brushed against them without disturbing their talk.

"Not very fast," he answered; "I 've learned a thing or two about the difficulties since I—grew up! Spend a good deal of my leisure time, in fact, coaching myself on how not to do it. Indeed, that 's about as far as I 've got! However, there 's time enough, for, of course, it must be years and years before I can get the thing going."

"I suppose it will take a very large capital," Katherine said.

"Yes; a good deal larger than I had supposed. But it 's not only that. The main thing is experience and judgment, and I 'm afraid that 's even more slow to materialize than the other. "You see," he went on, warming to his subject, "my idea of a paper is not one of those scholarly sheets that are only read by men who think in one particular way, but something broad and popular, with room in it for airing both sides of a question;—something, too, that will have reach and grip enough to tackle the big international complications that we are bound to run into sooner or later. You would be surprised to know how many snags there are in the way of an enterprise like that. I met a man on the steamer—Lansyng, of the *Chicago Headlight*. He made me feel like a member of the infant class!"

"Was he interested in the scheme?"

"Oh, I did n't let on! We merely discussed the thing on general principles. Fact is, I 've never told anybody what I was aiming at—anybody but you, that is."

"And when did you land?" Katherine asked, with a somewhat precipitate change of subject which her companion promptly fell in with.

"Last evening, in New York. I took the night train."

"How did you ever persuade Winny? She hates a sleeping-car."

Tom's face changed; the animation that had been so becoming gave place to a cold tolerance which Katherine hated to see.

"There did n't happen to be any Winny to persuade," he returned, curtly. "She is, at present—let me see! It must be about ten o'clock in the evening over there. —I should say that unless she is amusing herself in the gay world, she is presumably in her own small *salon* at the *Hotel de Castiglione*, her attention divided between one of Levy's recent publications and a box of very superior *bonbons!*"

"She did n't come back with you? And—"

"And the boy? He would be dreaming dreams in the fluent French which he is rapidly acquiring from a much recommended *bonne*, the purity of whose accent I have under suspicion."

This loquacity seemed a trifle forced.

"But, Tom!" Katherine protested, casting about for some inoffensive manner of getting assurance that things were not so wrong as they seemed, and ending, as one is apt to do after such a casting about, rather lamely and bluntly; "But, Tom—why?"

The small query was so very eloquent that Tom became suddenly serious. If he was to put a good face on a bad business it was time to begin, and certainly it was essential that Katherine, of all others, should take the view he had decreed.

"Well," he answered, carelessly, "there were various reasons. Winny took the voyage rather hard, and it seemed a pity to drag her home again after such a short summer. She thinks too that the boy will be better for an out-of-door winter. Some people we met—one of them was a girl she went to school with at Peachgrove Priory—have asked her to join them on the Riviera for three months. Rather pleasant to think of the little chap tumbling about in the sunshine all winter, instead of cooped up here in the city. Not such a bad plan, perhaps."

But Katherine, certain in her own mind that it was the worst plan possible, equally certain, too, that Tom thought so as well, could not find it in her heart to express an approval she did not feel. So she took refuge in a general question.

"Will Winny travel much?" she asked; and if, even as she spoke the words, there was a swift glancing of the mind toward another traveller, still on the high seas, it was unpremeditated. Yet, because it took her at unawares, it found a fleeting reflex,—in voice or look,—it would be hard to say which.

Tom, conversant of old with his cousin's every varying phase of countenance, with each changing inflection of her voice, was more conscious than she of the turn her thought had taken. And, suddenly, that sense of an old understanding restored, struck in him the familiar note of blunt outspokenness.

"You mean to Rome?" he asked, as roughly as he

might have done four years ago. "No; she will not go to Rome. That 's in the contract."

"But, Tom!" Katherine protested, answering his thought rather than his words; "I did n't mean that!"

"You did n't know you meant it, but you did."

"I don't know how you should know what I meant, better than I know myself!" she began, quite in the old vein of eager altercation; but instantly she felt the folly of it. They were scarcely on that footing any longer. She moved away, uneasily. "I must really be going on if I 'm to look up something I came for," she said.

"I wish you would give that up," Tom begged, but also with a somewhat more distant manner. "There 's a thing I 've wanted to say to you for a year past, that it has never before been possible to say. It may never be possible again. It is—quite important. Will you let me walk home with you?"

"Why, of course," she assented, wondering very much what it was that could have come up within the year. It was nearly that since they had last met.

They crossed the hall and passed out at the door. It was growing dark, but the lights in the streets and on the Common were bright and numerous. Tom, who had taken matters into his own hands, made no motion to cross over and enter the Common. Those elm-embowered thoroughfares were too conventionally appropriate to suit his mood. If he must speak on a critical subject to—well—to Katherine—he preferred it should be in the open street where they should be more or less jostled by the indifferent foot-passenger. The evening was a mild one and he had set the pace rather slow. Katherine felt that this

enterprise was his affair, not hers, and she left matters to his initiative. She had not to wait long.

"Last Thanksgiving Day," he began, abruptly, "grandmother said something to me that—made quite an impression. She as good as told me that I enjoyed the reputation of a—traitor in the family."

"You can't be putting it fairly," Katherine protested. "It 's not grandmother's way to be— startling."

"Perhaps not. But it seems that the general view of my conduct is essentially—startling."

"What did grandmother really say? since you seem to want to tell me," Katherine asked. She was bracing herself for something very difficult and she must know her ground.

"She told me I was not to take Winny to Rome while Archie was there, for two reasons; firstly, because it would be in extremely bad taste, and, secondly, because it would be—foolhardy. When I expressed surprise at what that implied she paid me the compliment of asking me whether a knowledge of what she believes to have been the true state of the case would have made a difference in my action. One gets one's share of ugly hours, but I think that was the ugliest I ever passed—if I can be said to have passed it," he added, rather savagely.

They walked on for some little distance.

"Have you anything to say?" he asked, after a long pause in which they had unconsciously quickened their pace.—"Because if you have, I should be glad to hear it."

"I 'm afraid I can't say anything very comforting," she answered. "I 'm afraid everyone must have thought—ill of you."

"You, among the others?"

Katherine felt a suffocating sense of compulsion upon her.

"Yes; I, among the others."

Again they walked on in silence,—Katherine with a dull, grinding pain at her heart that seemed like the dead and buried past coming to life again.

"Would anything I could say make a difference in your opinion?" he inquired.

"I wish it might."

He glanced at her face, so nearly on a level with his own. Its sadness was subtly reassuring. She thought ill of him, but—she was not happy in it.

"Unfortunately," he was saying, "it is a subject which will not bear amplification. There seems, in fact, nothing for me to offer for your consideration but a bald, unsupported denial. I was doubtless an incredible blockhead, but I acted with a perfectly clear conscience towards Archie. Can you believe me?"

He was intently watching the face beside him, so expressive even in profile, and he saw the cloud lighten before she spoke. Then her eyes met his in frank good faith, and she said:

"Yes, Tom;—I can't of course understand it,—it is too blind to me,—but—I believe you with all my heart. It lifts an immense weight from my mind."

"Thank you," he replied; "that 's all I wanted."

A few minutes later they had arrived at their destination.

"Do you think grandmother understands better now?" Katherine asked, pausing a moment at the foot of the steps.

"I don't know," he answered; "I 'm afraid nothing

short of explanations would convince her, and—I can't explain. But a man must n't bother too much about what people think of him. The main thing is, that you understand."

With a hearty hand-shake he was gone, and Katherine was hurrying up the steps and up the stairs, a tumult of joyful emotion in her heart. Of course she believed him; how could one help it? Ah, she it was who had been the traitor to doubt him! What if it was a mystery? What was faith for? What were friends for —if mystery was to baffle them? She had his word, and that was enough; something precious was restored to her, something to which she had an indubitable right. She could respect Tom;—oh, she could respect him! And now, at last, after all these years, she could respect herself.

CHAPTER VII

IN BACHELOR QUARTERS

"This way, men are men,
No difference! best and worst they love their boys
After one fashion."

LIFE was not without its consolations for Tom that winter, and, if they were of a homely nature, they were perhaps for that very reason the better suited to his needs. He was no great stickler for the amenities of life, either in practical matters or in matters of sentiment, and a return to his old bachelor quarters, opportunely vacant, suited alike the rustic simplicity of his personal tastes, and that habit of independence which had been so rudely broken in upon. Nor was it from any taint of miserliness that he elected to return to his old roost in the top of a dingy lodging-house. He loved its dinginess, he loved its height above the world, he loved the very stairs that led to it; even as he loved the labor that was fast turning his days into all work and no play, but that led him ever nearer to the goal he had in view.

He gave himself little time for reflection on the past or speculations on the future, excepting where these involved his old ambitions and his new hopes of fulfilment. The thought of Katherine, especially, was

rigorously excluded from his conscious meditations, —an elimination which was the easier now that the chief sting of that association had been removed. If he met her on the street, if he heard her name, he was aware of the deep satisfaction of knowing that all was clear between them—that he had succeeded in straightening out a difficult matter without becoming caught in any serious emotional disturbance. It had been her mind, her judgment, that he had appealed to; nothing else had concerned him. The ardor with which she had declared her faith in him, the feeling she had expressed and that had so transformed and illumined her countenance, was not allowed to count for anything. He all but resented her undeniable loveliness, the strong attractiveness of her personality. He would not admit the something deeper and more vital still which mastered him now as it had mastered him when he was yet too inexperienced—too headstrong — to know himself subject to it. For Tom was under bonds to believe that he did not love Katherine; he merely recognized the wisdom of avoiding her, now and always. It was a great pity, he told himself, that such precautions should be necessary, for he had never found anyone else to talk things over with. But even that he would not allow himself to hanker after. He had his pipe and his books, he had his independence, and he had success.

Undoubtedly, Tom possessed the trick of success. Only a little past thirty, he was already, comparatively speaking, a rich man; not as rich as he meant to be, not nearly as rich as he must be before he could launch his great venture,—but richer than any other self-made man of his years whom he happened to

know. Winny should not again have occasion to tax him with penuriousness. Since money could content her, she should have all she asked, and there would still remain an ample margin for the satisfaction of broader miscellaneous interests, pending the time when purse and judgment should alike be adequate to the demands of the one enterprise the postponement of which did but mature and strengthen his inflexible ambition.

Nor was mere enrichment all that Tom's success signified. His achievement was of the kind which comprises a recognized standing in the business community. He was already considered available for positions of trust,—positions in which the honor involved is esteemed an equivalent for ability of the first class. And this, to a man of his sober but very definite ideals, was more intimately gratifying than financial success alone, however brilliant.

Yes; Tom had his consolations, and he valued them at their full worth. And yet?

One of the wisest of men has found it worth while to point out the patent fact that Nature has been at pains to prevent even the tallest and most vigorous tree from growing into the skies; and it would seem that equally rigid restrictions have been found advisable in the matter of human aspirations. Tom, at least, with all his philosophy, with all his success, was not yet master of his fate. He could mould his worldly fortunes to his liking, because he had attained to that power which his early ambition had coveted; he could school himself to forego that which would have been dearer yet than power, because he had the conscience and the will to acquiesce in the forfeit his blundering youth had incurred. But, when all was

said, he had given hostages to fortune, and in the consequences of this rash act was involved not only his duty but his affection.

His infatuation for Winny, as we know, had been as short-lived as it had been swift of growth;—it had not survived his perception of her true character. But Winny could not be considered apart from little Arthur, and Tom loved his son with the tenderness and the tenacity of a deep, slow nature. He had not been quick to take the child into the innermost sanctuary of his heart—when had Tom ever been quick, where his true and better self was in question? But little by little, day by day, the ineffable mystery and grace of that budding intelligence had enthralled his mind,—the ineffable tenderness of the appeal which the little child puts forth in its weakness, in its unconscious importunity, had stolen into his heart of hearts, till it seemed sometimes as if his very soul trembled under it, as St. Christopher once trembled beneath the weight of a sovereign burden. And now that the boy was withheld from him, now that he could not know each morning that all was well with him, that he could not warm his heart each evening in the light of that childish recognition, he was aware that there was something very much amiss.

Had it not been for Arthur, Tom would have accepted with unflattering resignation Winny's proposal to remain abroad; and even as it was he had not trusted himself to oppose the plan very strenuously. It would have involved a discussion of things that were best left alone. For Arthur's sake he could not afford to come to close quarters with the truth. There were certain fictions that must be maintained, certain decorums that must be preserved, since these flimsy

artifices were the sole bond that held between himself and Arthur's mother.

Hence, when Winny divulged her little plan, and when, in the light of her character, which he now knew so well, Tom perceived that it was in accordance with her intention from the beginning, he made but a half-hearted stand for his rights. The child, he reflected was scarcely more than a baby. The experiment could hardly do a mischief to his bit of a mind, and, as for the small body, it was such an astonishingly perfect little machine that there was not much to fear for that. In fact, Tom was inclined to take himself severely to task for making so much of a slight matter. He told himself that he was like a child whose plaything is to be laid on the shelf over Sunday; that he objected to the interruption, not from any harm that would come to the toy, but because he hated to stop playing. Wherefore, he put a good face upon a bad business, and came home prepared to defend Winny against any strictures that might be made upon her conduct.

It was a little disconcerting to find that no such strictures were made. Mr. and Mrs. Gerald clearly approved the plan. The former, indeed, took no little satisfaction in announcing that his daughter, Mrs. McLean,—"McLean the banker, you know,"—was wintering abroad; while, as for Winny's mother, since Mrs. Day was "not surprised," her last misgiving was removed, and she could indulge herself in visions of the charming toilets that the child would be in a position to acquire.

"I hope, Tom," she had said, on the single occasion on which her son-in-law had called, "I hope that you realize how Paris prices have advanced. Winny

has lovely taste, and it would be a pity that she should not gratify it."

"It would indeed, Mrs. Gerald," Tom assented blandly. "As I have heard her say,—where would be the good of marrying a rich man if you were obliged to economize?"

"It is really wonderful how he appreciates Winny," Mrs. Gerald had remarked to her husband, after Tom's departure. "He knows so thoroughly what is due her."

"If he did n't, she would soon teach him," was Horace Gerald's blunt reply. He had never lost that unquestioning confidence in his daughter which can only exist between congenial minds.

Nor did the Day contingent seem more inclined than the Geralds to criticise Winny's action. Grandmother Day did not go so far as to tell Tom that she was not surprised,—she had not lived close upon four-score years without learning to adapt her conversation to her interlocutor,—but she said that since Tom did not object there seemed no reason why anyone else should.

"Was it your suggestion, Tom?" she had asked, so casually that he had almost wondered why it should not have been.

"Why, no!" he had replied; "I should not have thought of it. But I can see that it will be good for the little chap to tumble about in the sunshine at Mentone all winter, instead of being cooped up here in the city. He 's a great fellow for that sort of thing; he plays out of doors all day, and makes friends with everything that grows! Why, Grandmother, he got the names of the Alpine flowers as pat as a dictionary! I wish you could hear him say

Edelweiss. You would think he was a little Dutchman."

"And he 's picking up French, I 'll be bound," the grandmother opined, with a movement of indulgent sympathy for the poor misguided fellow who had made such a mess of things all round, yet was so lovable after all. She had never found Tom particularly lovable in the old days when he was always coming to the house, and giving his opinion unsolicited. He was a good deal chastened since then,—she could see that; yet he had never seemed half so manly as he did now, when he was acquiescing so philosophically in the defection of that miserable little minx who was stealing away from him a whole year of his boy's life. Perhaps after all Katherine had understood better than her grandmother how to value him. The young have their intuitions,—convenient appliances that get dulled with age. Only a pity that Tom had been denied his share!

"Oh, yes! He jabbers French like everything," Tom was saying. "Talks right over my head half the time already. Luckily, there are one or two pretty important words that are the same in all tongues. For instance, when he says 'papa,' you would n't know whether he was speaking French or English."

"Then he won't unlearn that," Grandmother Day surmised, with a sudden movement of tender reminiscence. She was thinking of her own young husband's riotous joy the first time their boy, their little Charles, had said that pretty word that seems born anew on every baby lip, as if it had sprung there untaught.

If, however, Grandmother Day was feeling the pressure of advancing years, it was manifest rather

in a softening of the heart than a dimming of the intelligence. She was growing gentler, more sympathetic, as Aunt Fanny would have testified with grateful wonder. Indeed there had never been a time when Fanny's mother was so willing to talk of George, to admit the magnitude of that loss to a woman who had no children for her consolation. Yet the old lady was by no means changing her nature. She was still alert, cheerful, philosophical, and often quite alarmingly penetrating.

One day, when Katherine was paying her a visit, Paul Stuyvesant came out to call, and stayed to dinner. He was in a talkative vein, and Mrs. Day, with whom he had always been a favorite, made no secret of her pleasure in his conversation. What was Katherine's surprise, then, when they were out sleighing the next morning, to hear her grandmother ask, abruptly:

"Have you refused him, Katherine?"

"Refused him?" Katherine repeated, while her eyes, in avoidance of those sharp black ones, fixed themselves upon the ramrod back of the old coachman.

"Not Peter!" was the satirical rejoinder. "Have you refused Paul Stuyvesant?"

"Why, no! That is—"

"That is?"

"That is—not lately; not since ages ago when we were boy and girl."

"I thought it must have been more recent," Mrs. Day observed, drily; "because he has improved so much."

Katherine laughed outright at this unexpected sally.

"Is it such an improving experience?" she asked,

with an appreciative glance over her shoulder at the vigorous figure clad in immemorial zibeline. She was thinking how well her grandmother's face and speech fell in with the sparkling winter landscape and the gay sleigh-bells. The old lady's color was responding bravely to the sting of the frosty atmosphere; her hair, still as black as the keen old eyes, had lost none of its lustre, while a flash of sound white teeth still further heightened the incisiveness of the picture, as the lips parted in enunciation of the clear-cut axiom:

"It 's always improving to a man to get on his own feet,—especially when he has been at a girl's beck and call for years!"

"Well, it must be something else that has improved Paul," Katherine declared. "It 's not that."

"I 'm not so sure. Of course I don't doubt your word, and whatever you 've done it has evidently been unintentional on your part. But—he has given you up."

"Oh, Grandmother! If I could only think so!"

It seemed to Katherine as if there were already the easing, if not yet the lifting of a great weight from her mind. What a strain it had been, this effort to force her feeling! And how absurd and artificial her attitude suddenly appeared in the light of her grandmother's clear good sense!

"So. you 've been trying to come to it," the old lady rejoined, composedly, "and he has found you out. He won't have it that way,—and he 's perfectly right. Well; he 'll have his reward! It will make a man of him."

"I don't think he needed that to make a man of him."

"Yes, he did! He needed just that! A person can't play the suppliant for years without sacrificing something. Paul was always at a disadvantage before. He never stood squarely on his own feet. Everything he said and did had a twist in your direction. He has thrown that off now, and, mark my words,—he 'll never ask you again."

"I was not afraid of that," Katherine protested; "I had it in my own hands. Paul 's no beggar," she added, in grateful recollection of years of generous forbearance.

"Well, you 're safe now,—or, if you 're not, you 'll have yourself to thank for it. He has made a stand—doubtless for your sake,—I admit that. But he 's going to feel the good of it himself. What 's this he 's working at?"

"Germs. I don't understand much about it, but the doctors are finding out what makes things catching."

"Hm! I could have told them that, any time these fifty years! It 's bad air, and close quarters, and,"—with a very impressive lowering of the voice,—"I 've had my suspicions of pocket handkerchiefs! However," the old lady continued, bowing pleasantly to a passing sleigh, "they 'll put long names to it, and print pamphlets about it,—I know 'em!—and Paul will make up one of the names and write a treatise on it, and then he 'll be famous. Men are different from us, Katherine," she added, confidentially. "I should n't wonder if there were to come a time when your young doctor will recognize that life has its compensations."

Katherine pondered a good deal upon her grandmother's words, and they did not lack subsequent

confirmation. There was certainly no denying that Paul was more disengaged than he used to be, that his moods were far less dependent on hers. She was seeing him oftener, too. He came out, not infrequently, when she was spending her prescribed week with her grandmother, and they all enjoyed his visits. There was a new ease and breadth in the impression he made; one felt the freer grasp of a mind no longer warped in one direction. It made Katherine think of the fine harmonies of modern orchestral music, wherein the theme, the melody, gets so completely merged. It may still be an integral part of the development, but it does not persist in any recognizable iteration. Curious, that Paul, the unmusical, should suggest so elaborate and technical a comparison. But she had thought of it at the Symphony Concert the other day. Yes, Paul was modern and subtle; different as possible from Tom.

Katherine found herself pursuing the fanciful analogy one Sunday afternoon when they had all three chanced to meet at Grandmother Day's. Paul had been telling her of an experiment of his, and without the implication that his chief aim in pursuing it at all was to engage her interest. After a while Tom came in, and took a hand in the talk. He had got hold of some reports of recent work upon anthrax, and he had read them to good purpose. The two men threshed out the subject pretty thoroughly. Both talked well, but of course it was Paul that was master in his own province, and again Katherine was reminded of that harmony she had been thinking of,— that complicated modern harmony. Tom seemed primitive in comparison; he was all made up of a few big persistent themes that would never lose them-

selves in the subtleties of counterpoint. They would come to nothing more involved than a strong, harsh dissonance; yet—is there anything in all music more satisfactory than a dissonance resolved?

"Never shirk a dissonance," the Dresden music-teacher used to say. "Strike it boldly, or it will sound like a discord. That 's confusing the best with the worst."

When Paul was gone, Tom stood at the window with his hands in his pockets, watching the straight tall figure passing down the path. How he had changed since the day Tom saw him first, striding down that same path, in full retreat as it seemed! He wondered how in thunder it had happened that a man of his calibre had failed with any girl—even Katherine. He, Tom, would never have given in. He had never met his match but once, and that was in himself. He had been floored, fatally floored, but not by any external adversary. Tom never gave even Winny the credit of getting the better of him. She had been an accident,—it might have been anyone else. The real enemy had been himself.

He turned on his heel, and came face to face with Katherine, just returned from speeding the parting guest. Well; Paul had failed with her,—that was sure. If there had been the ghost of a chance for him she would not have escorted him to the door; he would have had to find his own way out. Would anyone succeed any better with her? Hardly. And the poor dog in the manger felt a quite savage exultation in that assurance which nothing had ever really shaken, that Katherine would never—marry out of the family!

By way of penance for such unjustifiable sentiments,

and for the outrageous egotism that prompted them Tom remarked, "I had no idea of finding you here, Katherine! I don't think I 've caught on to your, times and seasons yet."

"They are not very regular," she replied, thinking that he really might have been more polite, and yet finding it delightfully natural that he should say the wrong thing. "I only came out yesterday because Aunt Fanny was in bed with a cold."

"And sha'n't I see grandmother?"

"Yes, indeed! She 'll be down presently. In fact, there she is."

"Well, Tom," Mrs. Day asked, when she had enthroned herself in her favorite chair, "have you heard from your family lately?"

"Oh, yes; Winny writes once a week. That I should of course insist upon," he added, a trifle sharply.

"And the boy?"

"Oh, he 's first rate! He 's playing out all day, and growing like a mushroom! What I really came out for, Grandmother, was to consult with you about a house. You know, I never meant to live in an apartment after the boy was big enough to run about; and a city yard does n't amount to anything. I am going to try and persuade Winny to have a house out of town. I think if you would back me up in it, you would have great influence with her."

"You are going after them in the summer?"

"Yes, in August. Winny thinks the late autumn would do, but I don't want the cold weather to come on suddenly after the warm winter in the south. Arthur 's strong as a little horse, but he might feel it if it came too suddenly."

"Let me see, Arthur will be three years old."

"Yes; quite a boy, you see! I suppose he 'll have a sled another winter, and a little snow-shovel. He will have forgotten all about the snow."

And Grandmother Day, with the new indulgence that she was acquiring, encouraged him to talk of the boy; while Katherine, sitting by, thought how wonderfully that great dissonance that was Tom resolved itself into the strong, simple tonic chord of love for a little child!

CHAPTER VIII

A BLEAK CORNER

"Here, blindfold through the maze of things we walk
By a slight thread of false, true, right and wrong."

BUT Winny was not persuaded to consider the house out of town, nor did the boy have his sled and snow-shovel that winter. For again, in September, Tom came home—alone. He did not report at once, even to his grandmother, and only by chance did it become known that he had returned to his old quarters. When, at last, he made his appearance among his kinsfolk, it was armed with a crust of reserve which repelled inquiry.

Yes; Winny had decided to spend another winter abroad,—on account of her health, it seemed. No, there was nothing serious amiss. She acted entirely on her own judgment in the matter, and Winny's judgment was usually very good where her own interests were concerned. The boy? Oh, he was thriving.

But it was noticed that Tom did not brag about the boy any more; nor did a thousand indifferent things seem to remind him of the "little chap" as in times past. Indeed, he never voluntarily spoke Arthur's name nor Winny's. Not that there was much opportunity for observation touching his speech or his silences, for he was rarely seen. During the whole

winter, in fact, he came but twice to his grandmother's house, and, although bidden for both the Thanksgiving and Christmas festivities, he failed to take advantage of his invitations. On each of these occasions he found himself obliged to go west on business,—that business that had apparently come to be the one interest of his life.

Katherine saw him but once that season. It was on the occasion of a chance meeting in the street. She had herself been under a long strain on a critical case, and her patient had died that morning. Perhaps that circumstance colored her views,—for she took a very black view indeed of the impression Tom made. His speech was curt, his manner constrained, and in his face was a look of settled cynicism, hard and forbidding.

Katherine did not dare ask for Winny and the boy; she knew better than that. Instead, and that there should be no awkward gap, she made inquiries for Tom's father which proved a grateful theme.

The old gentleman was doing first-rate; he was writing a book, it seemed,—a biography of some great gun of a radical. Tom was glad his father had started in on a new sort of work, now that he was obliged to leave so much of the preaching to his colleague.

"After all, there 's nothing like work," Tom opined. "If it was the serpent that introduced it, it 's really time we put up something to him, a temple, or a statue, or something."

Katherine tried to answer in the same vein. It was a bitterly cold day, and they were standing on an exposed street corner.

"Somebody ought to have thought of that before we stopped believing in myths," she returned.

"Some of us have n't stopped that yet," Tom retorted, with a significant look toward a new church, just building on the opposite corner.

"You don't mean that, Tom," she protested. "You believe in what that stands for, just as much as I do!"

"Do I? Well; I 'm glad you think so! But—look here, you 'll take cold if you stand about in this wind!"—and Tom strode off to prevent himself from telling Katherine how tired she was and begging her to take a rest. He did n't propose to worry about Katherine. He had enough to do, to put through that matter that Ford & Bridgman had turned over to him, and that had sent him into this part of the city to tackle a bedridden capitalist.

And Katherine went home to rest confirmed in all the gloomy forebodings that had haunted her mind for weeks past. It was well that Paul had given her up. There would have been little chance for him now—the less chance for him, perhaps, the greater the chance of happiness it had been his to offer her. She would not have taken happiness on any terms—not if it had been complete. She would not be happy now, when Tom—ah, Tom! What had she been thinking of when she hoped he was suffering, that he was remorseful? Even if he had deserved the worst, his suffering would have been intolerable to her. But now, when he had deserved no ill at all,—to be defrauded of his rights, to be deprived of the one creature in the world he loved! For Winny's best friend had no more illusions about Winny, nor about Tom's sentiments towards her. She was an idealist, but not a dupe, and, although her chances of observation had been restricted, she had come to understand that ill-starred relation pretty clearly. But,—the boy!

Katherine was not given to weeping for herself or others, but on that dreary morning as she threw herself down upon her lounge, spent with the day's emotions more yet than with the labors of the night, slow, bitter tears found their way to the eyes that had watched so faithfully and so wisely, and that sleep which the nurse is trained to command was long in coming.

And Tom went his ways, haunted, in spite of himself, by Katherine's face. She was using herself up, and that was perfect folly! He must see his grandmother about it. A stop must be put to it. What business had a girl like that to throw herself away on a lot of paupers? She ought to be living her own life, not casting pearls before swine,—and, at this point in his meditations, Tom flung a look of such vindictive rage upon a ragged, half-clad girl hurrying by, that he felt obliged to go after her and give her a quarter. She was a shrunken, shivering little creature, with Italian eyes, and a ready "*Grazie Signore!*" Was it the Italian eyes that made him think of Katherine, as he recalled her on that far-away evening when they played "dumb crambo," and she made such an animated Maud Muller? He remembered riding up on a sawhorse, and that she was flourishing her rake so energetically that her father called: "Take care, Katherine, or you 'll have a hole in the carpet!" Katherine always used to do everything with tremendous spirit, and she always had Italian eyes,—only franker than that, more open, more New England, uncommonly frank, when one considered the length of the lashes. With those eyes Katherine might have had things pretty much her own way; she might have been what they called a "success"—he believed she was a good deal of a favorite, long ago, when she used

to stay with Aunt Anne, and go about junketing. That was the sort of thing girls liked—it was the sort of thing they were for—until they married, of course. And as Katherine apparently had no intention of marrying, she might have prolonged that period quite indefinitely. Because, attractive as she had been in the old days, it was nothing to what she might be now if she would throw over her paupers and come out into the world and shine. She had no business to use herself up that way—she had no business to work like that.

To work! What had they been saying about work? Oh, yes; that it was the best thing there is. But that was only from his standpoint, or his father's; from the standpoint of a man whose life had gone off its natural bias. It ought not to be true of Katherine, —of her, who had kept such a steady hand on herself, —who had never come to grief. To grief! Had she then never come to grief?—and suddenly Tom caught his breath. Her face as he saw it just now? Was that merely the result of a little overwork ?—that look of experience, yes, of suffering,—of comprehension?

Tom was seated at his desk in the office when there came to him a hint, a fleeting vision of the impossible. Where did it come from? Who could tell? Certainly not from the perusal of those letters awaiting his signature; surely not from the contemplation of that telegram that was to put a small fortune into his pocket!

"Harris," he heard himself saying,—"you 'd better try again at this memorandum to the Millers. It 's too final! Leave an opening, or, here—I 'll dictate." And as he dictated,—clear, concise, tactful,—he was aware that he was holding something at arm's length.

Tom held it at arm's length all winter, as he held

everything else at arm's length excepting business. And when summer came, when the mild weather could be depended upon, and our rough New England had turned gay and sunny, and fit for a child to play in, he crossed the great seas and brought his boy home. And when he had his boy back, Tom turned suddenly human again.

He was no more inclined than before to talk of Winny, to give any opinion as to the wisdom of her decision to spend another winter in Paris. She was under treatment over there, he told Grandmother Day; some nervous affection, he believed, that the doctors at home had not got hold of yet. No, she would not be lonely. She had made a good many friends in Paris, even among French people. In fact, she was very much admired. He had met a title or two in her parlor. He did not take much stock in them himself, but Winny seemed to think them embellishing. Yes, he believed it was the genuine article —this segment of the French aristocracy which she had fallen in with. It had all come about through an old countess she had met at Mentone, quite a whooping old swell, he believed—the kind that has n't room on her visiting list for any recent social creations, no matter how long their handles may be. But she had taken a liking to Winny, and had given her a start, and Winny had made the most of it. She had a pretty *suite* in a good hotel not far from the *Bois;* lots of sun, and plenty of passing. She seemed likely to have a pleasant winter, but he thought he might as well bring the little chap home.

"If he had known me, I might have let Winny keep him with her; but—he called me *Monsieur!*" Tom's face, as he pronounced the word, was a study.

"Perhaps it was the beard," Mrs. Day suggested, soothingly. "I hardly knew you myself last winter. But,"—and here, at least, she could speak her mind—"I hope you mean to keep him now, whatever happens!"

"I shall keep him until I hear him call his mother *Madame!*" Tom returned, with grim facetiousness. And that was as near as he came to any open expression of resentment.

"And now you will both come and stay with me for the winter!"

"Oh, Grandmother! That is too much for you to offer!"

"I don't see what could be more natural," she urged, as if it were quite a matter of course. "Here 's this great house with only your Aunt Fanny and me to go purring about in it. It would be much snugger with you two to help us keep warm. Ah, there he comes! Arthur," she asked, as the little four-year-old entered, looking comically mannish in his tiny French trousers.—"How should you like to come and live with Grandmother Day?"

"Is that your garden?" the child inquired, with a queer little French accent. He had been playing about in the sunshine under Peter's benign supervision.

"Yes; that is my garden, and perhaps Peter will let you have a little flower-bed of your own in the spring."

"You would like that; would n't you, Arthur?" Tom put in. "You could plant the seeds, and then water them until the flowers came up."

"We used to buy our flowers in a shop," the child answered, doubtfully.

"But it 's twice the fun to grow them yourself," said Tom.

"And you will come and live with grandmother?" she asked again—whereby the inference could hardly escape an observant mind, that Grandmother Day had undergone something of that modern process which teaches the consideration of childish preferences.

Arthur hesitated, while his serious gray eyes looked from one to the other of his two interlocutors. Then, suddenly flinging himself upon his father: "No! no! I want to stay with papa!" he cried.

"He knows what to call you now," Mrs. Day observed, with a benignant smile at father and son who, to tell the truth, seemed to her almost equally in need of care and kindness.

"Yes, Arthur," Tom was saying. "Of course we shall stay together, you and I. But Grandmother Day is so kind and so hospitable that she is going to let us both come and live in this beautiful house where papa used to visit when he was a little boy. You will like that; shall you not?"

"If you come too," the child insisted.

"Then let us thank Grandmother Day, and tell her nobody was ever half so kind as she."

"Nobody half so kind," little Arthur repeated; but his eyes were fixed on his father's face, and Grandmother Day was well content.

CHAPTER IX

READJUSTMENTS

"A breath of God made manifest in flesh
Subjects the world to change from time to time."

IT was quite wonderful how things fell back into their normal relation after this, how easy it became to take the sane, undistorted view of life. The coming among them of that little child was reviving and restorative as the blowing of a spicy breeze across a sultry plain.

Arthur was the most natural little creature in the world—affectionate and headstrong, unconscious and exacting. He tyrannized over Grandmother Day, and he came to fearful conflicts of will with his father; he trampled old Peter under foot, and wrought peculiar havoc with Aunt Fanny's nerves; and always he hailed the rare advents of Katherine—to whose name he stoutly refused to prefix any courtesy title—as a special compliment to himself. In short, he was altogether a boy like any other boy, to be loved and petted, punished and forgiven, but not to be sentimentalized over.

Katherine could not think without blushing, of her hour of weakness on that day when she had sacrificed her much-needed rest to an overwrought solicitude for Tom, to a morbid consideration of his wrongs. It had been hard, of course,—the two years' separa-

tion—but, after all, the child had thriven on it, and now, here he was, a lusty little comrade, and if Katherine knew anything about Tom, that far from weak-kneed personage was not like to loosen his grip on his own again. Probably another year would bring Winny home. She would have had her fill of the foreign life,—its distractions, its artificialities,—and she would discover the good natural hunger of a mother for her child. Winny was childish and self-indulgent—that even Katherine could no longer deny—but she was made of flesh and blood like other women. Katherine thought of the mothers she had known in her years of service; the destitute, the vicious,—worst, perhaps, of all, the narrow and sordid. Not one among them would have relinquished her child for the sake of mere self-interest. They might neglect their boys and girls, they might even maltreat them, but—as for voluntarily giving them up—that was out of nature.

Yes; Winny would be back again another year,—glad to be at home,—ready to meet Tom half way in that fine, sensible effort of his to keep life sweet and healthy. How consistent he was, and how steady! If Winny might only grow up, at last, and acquire the conscience and the understanding of a woman, all might yet come clear between them.

Katherine was not much at her grandmother's that winter. The old lady had discovered—a little tardily, she admitted—that her granddaughter needed something more enlivening in her periodical vacations than was to be found in the society of two old ladies and a small boy, and the Glynns were not slow to take advantage of the concession. Katherine, amused to find herself once more under marching orders,

dutifully fell into line. If she had never yet failed to profit by her grandmother's generalship, however, the present instance formed no exception to the rule; for life at Aunt Anne's was always agreeable. One met there all sorts of pleasant people. Girls whom Katherine had made friends with years ago had grown into the right kind of women of the world, and she found them more congenial than ever; men of mark,—her Uncle Theodore's bar associates or writers and artists mustered to her standard by her old admirer Allan Delano,—treated her with flattering consideration. She had a peculiar charm for people of imagination, due in no small measure to a general knowledge of the circumstances of her life. When one who is well equipped with personal and worldly advantages, unobtrusively sacrifices these to an ideal aim, few there are who are unsusceptible to the added grace thereby conferred. It is something when you are discussing with an attractive girl, becomingly attired, that brilliant socialistic romance of Henry Haelstrom's—*The Under Dog*—suddenly to remember that your companion knows presumably several times as much as you do of the unlucky canine in question, his constitution and habitat; and if, when lightly skimming the surface of things, it occurs to you that those fine eyes, bent in answering mockery upon yours, are by way of making excursions below the surface which it would tax your penetration to follow, you may find yourself impelled to give their owner a hint of that something real inside yourself which you are ordinarily so shamefaced about! And such men and women, the best that society offers, gave of their best to this girl who still remembered an ambitious childhood when she had stood on the high beam and harangued her wondering

playmates, twenty feet below. That obstreperous little person had learned, meanwhile, that listening has many advantages over haranguing; and, if she enjoyed her new honors and opportunities with an engaging and very genuine unconsciousness, she relished them none the less for that.

It was no wonder then if Tom, on the rare occasions when they met, found himself relieved of any sentimental concern about Katherine. So manifest, indeed, was the balance and harmony of her attitude toward life, that he, too, found cause for blushing when he thought of that encounter of theirs on the bleak street corner, and of the unchastened imaginings it had given rise to. He did not think of it often, but, as often as he did so, he called himself a donkey. Good Lord! Katherine was all right! And if it gave him a jealous twinge to think how all right she was, that circumstance would have caused him to apply to himself a more opprobrious epithet still than donkey, had his vocabulary afforded such.

Tom, meanwhile, as has been said, was getting rapidly humanized. While his life undoubtedly centred upon the boy, it broadened out from that centre in a quite new and adventuresome manner. He found himself taking a more sympathetic interest in his fellow-creatures, for the simple reason that they were the kind of men among whom the boy was to grow up. He must try to get the hang of these social matters for the boy's sake, and really it was high time that he began making friends. He was not going to have Arthur grow up a narrow, self-opinionated cub, foredoomed to blunders, like a certain youth whom he used to see in the looking-glass. Arthur should not wreck his life on such avoidable rocks as ignorance of

himself and the world. He must brush against men, and especially women. He must learn to discriminate between paste and diamonds; he must not be beguiled into bankruptcy before he had fairly discovered that he had a heritage to lose.

Tom's metaphors may have been mixed, but they were at least forcible, and he lived up to them. Yes, Arthur must know people, and of the right sort. And as a step in that direction Tom joined a club. He got his invitation to do so from an unexpected quarter.

It happened that Paul Stuyvesant looked in at the office one day with a stock certificate that he wanted split in two. Tom had not chanced to see his new customer, but when the certificate for the unsold remainder of shares came under his notice it struck him that he might hand it to Stuyvesant himself. That assiduous investigator interested him. He had brains and ambition, and also he was a man of the world. In short, he belonged to the class of men with whom he should wish to associate Arthur.

Tom found Paul alone in his office, that evening, occupied with a dry looking pamphlet which he seemed quite ready to relinquish in exchange for a taste of human intercourse.

"Why, McLean! This is first-rate," he declared. "Come in, and have a smoke."

"Thanks; I brought you a certificate I came across that had your name on it."

Paul colored slightly, at having been caught sacrificing his patrimony.

"Oh, you 're very good," he said. "You ought n't to have bothered."

"I did n't bother. I only made a pretext. I was hankering after my kind."

"Yes; a man does now and then. Why don't you join a club?"

"I have thought of it. I don't know that I should use it much, but I should really like to wake up a bit. I sometimes feel as if I had been napping it down there in State Street like any old Rip Van Winkle."

"It did n't look particularly soporific when I dropped in at your shop the other day. I could n't catch your eye, so I put up with an underling."

"Yes; I did n't know you had been in until yesterday, when they brought me your check to sign. That 's a jolly good stock, by the way, that you 've been unloading. I wish I had known about it; you might have decided to hold on."

"Oh, well; it was too small a matter to be worth talking about, and I wanted the money. Would you like to see what it 's going into?"

Paul led the way into a small alcove which he had fitted up as a laboratory. Close by the gaslight, that was made to shine through a shoemaker's globe filled with glycerine, was an up-to-date microscope of the most powerful grade.

"There!" he exclaimed, with naïve pride. "The old stock may double up for all I care. I would n't swap back!"

"So you 've been wasting your substance on riotous microscopes!" Tom observed, regarding the new treasure with much respect.

"Yes; would you like to take a look at the prodigality?" Paul had already found that this money-changer had some inklings about anthrax. Perhaps he would have a soul for an oil-immersion lens.

Since his talk with Archie, Paul had taken more

interest in Tom; and when a subject has once made its way within our range we are apt to find light striking it from unexpected quarters. He had been listening at the club the other day to a discussion of the moral aspect of stock-broking, and Thomas McLean had been cited as an instance of what ability could do without any aid from questionable methods. "Yes; he 's sound!"—had been the laconic comment of an old hand in the business, a man who for forty years had stood for integrity and acumen.

Paul had wondered then, as he had often done before, how a fellow of such brains and force could have blundered so egregiously—and so disastrously; for no one knew better than he what Tom's blundering had cost Archie. However, Archie ought to know the rights of it, and Archie bore no malice. After all, it was clear that there was a discrepancy on one side or the other of the account, and it was perhaps as easy to believe that a man of brains should be betrayed into a lapse of gumption as that one habitually honorable should prove guilty of sporadic treachery. On the whole, and quite apart from Archie's assurances, Paul was inclined to think that integrity of character was a more consistent thing than mental shrewdness; that a blunder was more credible in the intelligent than moral obliquity in the upright. Anyhow the man had a mind open to the blandishments of the streptococcus germ, and he did n't have to be told that aniline colors have the selective affinity. Paul thought he should like to see more of him, and to that end he would offer to put him up at the St. Swivin Club.

"And where do you bunk?" Tom asked, when, an hour later, he was taking his leave. The St. Swivin

was the club he had had in his eye, and his appreciation of the bacteriologist's offer had roused him to an unusual personal interest.

"Oh, I bunk here! It 's handy to be on deck at all hours!"

"So!" Tom cogitated, as he walked back to his own quarters,—for he had kept his bachelor lodgings, and often spent a night there. "So! You 're immolating yourself on the altar of science. You sacrifice your securities for a microscope, and you sleep in your office for the luxury of working for nothing! Don't suppose you get much practice,—too preoccupied, I should say."

Tom mounted slowly to his rooms. He was thinking that Stuyvesant must be an uncommonly good fellow.

"But he 's given her up," he told himself. "He 's transferring his affections to the streptococcus germ!" Tom's sense of humor was not abnormally developed, but this view of the matter struck him as funny.

And after all, poor Stuyvesant, what better could he do? He had n't any little chap to keep him going! And here Tom, lightly dismissing the image of his less fortunate friend, took from his overcoat pocket some half-dozen brightly decorated advertisement cards which he had carefully gleaned from the day's mail. He examined them gravely, and he rejoiced much to discover, depicted on one of them, Arthur's latest passion, a sailor boy, endeavoring, somewhat ineptly, to call attention to the claims of the "Queen of Cereals." One by one the cards were returned to his pocket, with sentiments of satisfaction differing only in degree, until at last a specimen

turned up on which the French tongue predominated. The single word *parfumerie* was enough to seal the fate of the violet-strewn appeal for trade. It was summarily torn in two, and cast into the waste-paper basket.

"Thank heaven!" the ruthless censor growled, under his breath: "He 's outgrowing that gibberish!" Whence it will be seen that Tom's pride in his son's linguistic accomplishments had suffered a check. Could it be that the child's innocent *faux-pas* on the occasion of their meeting in Paris still rankled?

There was little to remind Tom of that, or indeed of Paris or its inhabitants, native or foreign. Winny, being no longer under bonds to send a weekly letter, was taking their correspondence very easily. In fact, her signature appeared more frequently upon a banker's draft than upon any more personal document.

Tom answered her letters no less punctiliously than he honored the drafts. He always told her a great deal about Arthur, and he also never failed to have the boy scrawl a time-honored bit of hieroglyphic somewhere on the margin in red or blue pencil, and imprint a kiss thereon. He did not wish them to forget one another, Winny and Arthur, and he sometimes felt as if the mother needed almost as much prompting as the boy. No, they must not be allowed to forget one another, and therefore the letters were invariably answered by return mail.

It cannot, however, be claimed that Tom ever rose to the height of issuing an extra. It was Katherine who did that. She never caught the smallest glimpse of the boy, walking with his nurse in the street, or sitting beside Peter on the box of his grandmother's carriage, without sending Winny a minute descrip-

tion of his appearance and behavior; and, when she had been spending a day with her grandmother. Katherine invariably devoted a good part of her evening to telling the voluntary exile everything which a mother must long to know.

Winny seemed not all unmindful of these favors. She wrote Katherine many letters on exceedingly thin note-paper, a good deal crossed, and once she sent her a piece of point-lace in a newspaper which was unfortunately confiscated as contraband.

Tom, when Winny wrote him about it, replied that he was glad of it, and invited her to send her next offering through legitimate channels and allow him to pay duty, decently and in order. At which Winny was so offended that she favored him with three drafts before writing again. This tacit expression of displeasure was the limit, however. Her next letter was as friendly, and no more friendly, than its predecessors. For Winny prided herself upon being always a lady,—wherein Grandmother Day thought she perceived a negation of the claim.

And so the winter passed happily and busily for our young people, and it would have seemed as if the storms of youth were to fret no more. From Archie came satisfactory letters, more frequent too than they used to be, and this was in itself a gain; for, if he was a somewhat capricious correspondent, he was almost invariably felicitous. Furthermore, he had been recently promoted in the service, and had not scorned to mention the circumstance. The promotion was one thing, but the fact that Archie took pride in it was more significant still, and a particularly delightful communication from him, received that day, doubtless played an important part in

Katherine's excellent spirits on a certain evening in early March when she was staying with the Glynns.

It was the second day of her visit, and she had been devoting the twilight hour to the entertainment of her young cousins. Although Jack was a sophomore, just recovering from the strain of the mid-year's, and although Sallie the baby had meanwhile arrived at pig-tails and common fractions, these young persons were nevertheless unmistakably identical with Katherine's cronies of seven years ago, who had displayed such critical interest in the classic dog in the manger, and who had so frankly resented the tax put upon their credulity by the casual resurrection of an orphan's mother. Katherine had, now, as then, a gift at discovering diversions in which young people of assorted ages could unite, and to-day as they entered with much zest into a new round game which she had half learned, half invented, for their delectation, she found herself wondering whether it was really true that every scrap of bone and tissue is renewed once in seven years. Well, then, that only went to show of what secondary importance the bone and tissue must be, since the type was so persistent. Now as then, Jack liked to sprawl on the hearth-rug, and if his setter-pup, grown to dog's estate, was at the moment imbibing learning in the classic shades of Harvard, evidences of his existence were discernible in the shape of sundry reddish hairs still clinging to his master's garments. Nor had Nannie become any less literal-minded, nor Teddy less demonstrative, nor Loulie less demure. It seemed as if none of them had changed as much as she herself had done, Katherine reflected; and, with a sudden and quite unusual turn of introspection, she found herself

hoping that they might be spared certain transmogrifying processes through which she had been put. Now, however, the process was over and done with, and, really! she believed that she was enjoying the game as much as any of them.

And even before the shadow of the dog in the manger had quite vanished from her mental horizon, the conventional name of his human prototype was announced. Mr. McLean desired to see Miss Day a moment in the hall. No; he would not come up-stairs, he would not even go into the drawing-room. And Katherine, with anxious thoughts of her grandmother, hastened down the stairs.

"I suppose I am an awful fool to bother you, Katherine!" Tom cried, before she had reached the lower landing. "I don't suppose it 's serious—really. But—it 's the boy; he 's ill. Will you come out?"

A few minutes later they were in the carriage, driving rapidly out of town, Peter for once consenting to urge his horses to their full speed.

"It seemed only a cold until yesterday morning," Tom was saying, "and then the doctor said bronchitis,—and I got a nurse."

"Oh, why did n't you send for me at once?"

"I could n't bear to bother you,—just now, too, when you have n't had a vacation for so long. But he hates the nurse, and he won't do anything for her. She 's a good sort, too; but he was always shy of strangers, and—well, to-night he 's worse."

"He must be worse before he can be better," Katherine said, cheerfully; and then they both fell silent that the consoling thought might find fit entertainment.

But presently Tom pulled a white envelope out of his pocket.

"I cabled to Winny yesterday," he explained, with a sudden harsh constraint; "and this is her answer."

Katherine took the paper and read it by the fitful light of passing street lamps.

"Impossible. Send for Katherine."

The perusal of those four words proved a curiously long undertaking;—perhaps because the light from the street lamps was but intermittent.

But at last: "Then you asked her to come?" she ventured.

"Yes: I cabled quite explicitly. It was a distinct summons."

"I 'm glad she thought of me," said Katherine, gently. "You might have waited even longer."

"No, I should not have waited longer.—It was time you came."

And so it was. When, at last, Katherine stood beside the child, lying in the big bed, clutching, with a small, feverish hand his beloved snow-shovel;—when she saw the bright spot of scarlet on one cheek, when she heard the quick, difficult breathing,—there needed no interchange of glances with the nurse to quicken her perception of the truth.

Grandmother Day was there, calm and efficient, betraying no anxiety. She had just been feeding the boy. A glance at the wise old face sufficed to show that she was practising at eighty her lifelong precept: "Hope for the best,—prepare for the worst."

Tom watched Katherine with eyes that searched her soul.

"Pretty serious, is n't it?" he whispered, hoarsely,

—yet as if he dared her to answer in the affirmative. His face, more clearly seen than in the carriage, had grown old and gray.

"We can tell better, to-morrow," Katherine answered. "All symptoms are more alarming in a little child, but—they usually throw them off."

"Thank God for that!"—and Tom's voice, as he spoke the words, had the wonderful organ-note of feeling that comes from the deep places of the soul.

CHAPTER X

THE LITTLE SOLDIER

"Your hopes and fears, so blind and yet so sweet,
With death about them."

BUT Arthur was very, very ill,—how ill became more apparent as the long hours of the night wore away.

The doctor had looked in toward ten o'clock,—his third visit that day,—and had confirmed Katherine in the great dread which she would not before admit even to the nurse. The mischief had indeed worked its way down; there was no more talk of bronchitis. When Tom heard the ominous word,—pneumonia,—he flinched, visibly, as the bravest must when struck near the heart. But he steadied himself at once. Katherine had just lifted the child so that his little head was supported on her arm. The change of position seemed to give him relief. Ah! Katherine understood,—Katherine had the instinct, the power. It was something that no mere training could bestow, that gift of the healer that was a part of Katherine's very nature. How vital and yet how restrained was her every act! How different from the zealous ministrations of that unexceptionable recruit from the Bureau of Nurses whom Arthur would none of!

Tom did not, however, dismiss the nurse; she would be a useful subordinate,—one that Katherine would know how to employ. And if the acquiescence of the deposed was at the outset a trifle reluctant, yet their vigil was not far spent before it became evident that she had yielded to this colleague of hers,—so gently bred, yet so efficient,—an unconditional surrender.

The hours of the night passed slowly, so slowly that they seemed a lifetime, utterly dissevered from any previous existence. Yet there was no monotony; the patient required constant attention. There was the frequent nourishment and stimulant, the repeated taking of the pulse, the incessant shifting of position. Every little while the child was warmly wrapped about and carried in his father's arms, up and down the big square chamber. And when Tom felt the weight of the sturdy little body, when the heavy head drooped on his shoulder, he was consoled and reassured. There must be staying power in that tough little frame; there was, there should be,—ah! there should be!—a constraining force in his own strong arms! How could the little body ever slip from them? How could the little soul ever elude that infinitely more tenacious hold of a great love?

But presently the "little chap" would weary of the motion, the breath would become short again, and difficult, and his father would lay him gently back among the pillows, trusting him to the strong, tender hand that knew so well its gentle office.

From time to time they talked a bit, and that seemed to ease the strain.

"Have you ever had a case like this?" Tom asked, when, for a few minutes, the boy had fallen into a restless slumber.

"Oh, yes! I have taken care of several little children like that this very winter."

"And did—" Tom hesitated and stammered like a guilty schoolboy,—"did any of them get well?"

"They all got well," said Katherine, deftly straightening the coverlet as the child tossed and turned in his sleep. "One of them, a delicate little fellow, younger than Arthur, was worse than this. And everything seemed against him. There was a wretched inheritance, and he had never been half nourished, and the house was noisy, and draughty with bad air. But he pulled through."

"How long did it last?"

"The worst was over in four days."

"Four days! Why, that 's an eternity!"

"Yes," Katherine assented, "it is an eternity!"—and Tom blessed her for not disputing him.

Once, in the night, Grandmother Day looked in, a strange, unfamiliar figure, in her night-cap and her long, flowing double-gown.

"Katherine says she had a case worse than this," Tom told her. "A seedy little beggar, too, without any constitution. But he pulled through. And Arthur 's tough as any little pine knot. The doctor said that, the first day, Grandmother!"—and Tom looked prepared to wrest confirmation from her lips, should they dare to hesitate.

"It 's a strong little man," Grandmother Day assented, taking the bit of a clenched fist in her own wrinkled hand; "and—children are wonderful!"—But she did not feel the confidence she expressed, and she was glad when the morning came and she could take her turn in the sick-room.

"You were right, Katherine," she said, once, as

she sat watching her granddaughter,—for Katherine had not gone to rest as the nurse had prudently consented to do. "Experience won't take the place of training. You 're a better nurse than ever I was, for all my bragging."

"They 've learned things since then, Grandmother," Katherine answered, with affectionate loyalty; "but no one ever made me take my medicine so easily as you did that time when I had the measles. I often think of it when children are troublesome."

During the morning, Arthur seemed very bright, although the fever burned steadily and the pulse hurried faster. He ordered them about with much spirit, making many demands upon "Kath-rine," whose name he had always pronounced with that bit of a hiatus in the middle that had marked his first attempt. He invited her to tell him stories; he was very severe with "Gamma" for refusing to regale him with molasses and water,—the which old-fashioned remedy had been administered, to his extreme delight, on the day when he first took cold, —and he commanded his father, in no uncertain terms, to lift him up, or to lay him down, or to fetch him his various toys. He seemed to take special satisfaction in exhibiting his newly acquired ascendency over this ultimate authority, and more than once his meek attendants were stirred to that laughter which is so perilously near to tears.

"I wish he would take to his steamboat or his rag-doll," Tom fretted, when the child had one by one discarded all the rest in favor of his miniature shovel, with which it pleased him to make futile digs among the bed-clothes. "I feel as if it were that shovel that

did the mischief. He was playing in the snow half the day on Monday."

"He had been playing in the snow half the winter," Grandmother Day remonstrated. "There was no unusual exposure."

"Then what was it?" Tom demanded, fiercely. If only it had been some tangible thing that he could wreak his vengeance on!

"It was something in the air," the grandmother answered, while a sibyline speculation glimmered in her far-seeing eyes. "Who knows? A germ, perhaps young Stuyvesant would say."—And Tom thought of the things he had seen through Paul's microscope, the tiny shreds and dots, blue on a reddish ground, and he shuddered in his soul.

Presently Tom stood at the window, looking out.

"Come here, a minute," he said to Katherine who was bending over the spirit lamp. "Do you see that little hump in the snow under the maple tree?"

"Yes, I see it."

"That was a fort the little chap was building on Monday. It was a capital little fort, with holes for the guns. I wonder what put it into his head."

"Teddy was out here Saturday," Mrs. Day suggested. "He worships Teddy, you know. He must have got the idea from him."

"Like as not," Tom agreed. Then, as Katherine turned to watch the lamp: "He 'll be disappointed when he finds it has tumbled to pieces."

But Katherine knew that the transient March snow would be gone long before the boy could be out again. And when, that night, the child's other cheek had flushed scarlet she ceased to think of dates and seasons.

"You must n't watch a second night" Tom protested, when evening came, and it was clear that his cousin had no thought of going to bed. "It will never do;—I can't have it!"

"Why not? I have often done more than that for a stranger's child. But you? You 're not hardened to it. Won't you try to sleep to-night?"

"I would, if it were—a stranger's child!" Tom answered, gruffly.

But he did sleep at intervals, sitting in a big armchair, where, as often as he opened his eyes, he could see the boy. And always he saw Katherine too, moving softly about the room in the shaded light, bending over the child, speaking in low tones to the nurse. Tom would rouse himself, and ask to be allowed to do something; and sometimes she would let him carry the child about the room. But oftener she told him there was nothing,—he had better rest and keep his strength against the time when the boy should be calling for him.

"Yes," Tom answered, once, with a stubborn optimism that hurt worse than despondency,—"yes, they 're apt to be exacting when they 're convalescing. I 've always heard that."

Then, as he felt his strong frame succumbing again to the strong necessity, he would curse himself for a stolid, unfeeling block,—and again he would sleep and wake, and always when he awoke, Katherine was there, alert and efficient; and the nurse, refreshed by a long day's sleep, could be seen moving about, silent and intelligent, like a gray familiar, meekly doing a conjuror's bidding.

The next day the child became more talkative, and at times he appeared deceptively bright and vigorous;

but now and again, when he babbled French phrases, they knew that his mind wandered. Tom winced inwardly as often as the baby speech fell into that redoubted "gibberish."

And on the third evening Tom no longer urged Katherine to rest. He could not have let her go,—any more than he himself could have yielded then to sleep. The poor little soldier, who had built his snow fort so pluckily, had come to his last ditch, and he had nothing left to fight with.

They watched and wrestled for the life that had burned with such a gay, heart-warming flame for four happy years; but the faint, uneven pulse was hurrying, hurrying to be still. All night they plied him with nourishment, with stimulants,—if perchance the valiant little spirit might yet rally to the support of the laboring, fainting breath.

Grandmother Day sat with them through those hours that were neither long nor short,—as eternity is neither long nor short,—and sometimes Aunt Fanny could be seen, as in a dream, hovering on the outskirts. They admitted nothing to one another, these desperate watchers. Did they dare to hope? Did they dare to fear? And was it faith, or was it a blind amaze, that let them live, when at last the little soul slipped away and the very foundations rocked with its flitting?

He died in his father's arms, the "little chap."

"Arthur!" Tom whispered, bending close above him, as the painful breath grew shorter still and feebler. Was it the sheer agony of that stifled cry that pierced to the baby soul just poised for flight?

"Papa!" the ebbing breath returned,—"papa!"

And, when the breath had ceased, Tom rose and walked the room,—up and down, up and down,—the

lifeless head against his breast, the still lips parted in that last dear word, the unconscious valediction of a faithful little comrade.

Not until the white dawn entered at the windows, paling the yellow gaslight, did Tom surrender the little form to Katherine, and, as she took to her heart the piteous burden, she saw those empty arms drop nerveless, as, with hanging head and lagging step, Tom left the room.

CHAPTER XI

SMOULDERING EMBERS

"Love, wrong, and pain, what see I else around?"

IT was evening, and Katherine sat in her little parlor, thinking of Tom. She had thought of nothing else for ten days past; she felt as if she should never think of anything else as long as she lived. And always she saw him pacing the floor with the dying child in his arms.

The days that had followed immediately upon that night had left scarcely any impression on her mind. Tom, slipping out of the house the first morning, to attend to the necessary business of the moment, remaining away till they had finished their dreary meal; Tom, discussing with his grandmother quite clearly and composedly such details as were not to be avoided, then stealing away to that upper chamber where they scarcely dared let their thoughts follow him! Tom, when all was over, fagged and dull, taking a spiritless leave of them! All this had become vague and blurred to her recollection, and to-night she saw only the stricken man pacing the floor with the dying child in his arms.

More than a week had passed since Arthur died, and this morning Grandmother Day, always alert and

aware, had asked Katherine whether she had not better go back to her work; and Katherine, who seemed, herself, to have lost all initiative, had come to her city lodgings, glad to be alone. And to-night she was sitting, her hands clasped in her lap, in unaccustomed idleness, thinking of Tom.

For Katherine, who had for years so guided and controlled her thoughts, so governed the most imperious impulses of her heart, had ceased to be vigilant with herself. What mattered her own state of mind, her own state of feeling? That long, long effort to thrust the thought of Tom from her heart would have seemed to-day hideously egotistical. Nothing could concern her now,—nothing but his hurt, his sorrow, the desolation of his life. What love could not wrest from her, a love that for seven years had dwelt in the secret places of her soul, crushed, suppressed, denied, yet holding every approach against the world,—to pity, that self-effacing pity, that had become the keynote of her life, it was yielded without a struggle. To-night she could think only of Tom in his dire need. She would fain have arisen and gone to him, brushing conventionality aside, bent only upon consoling, sustaining, revivifying a fellow creature in extremity. And if she knew well that he was more to her than a fellow creature, that, mingling with a natural human compassion, was a personal tenderness more compelling still, she felt that that imported nothing,—less than nothing. For Katherine, like many another generous soul, was weak through her very strength.

She endeavored, ineffectually enough, to extend to Winny something of that abounding compassion that possessed her; and the better to visualize those claims

upon her sympathy that had become curiously remote and unreal, she drew from her pocket Winny's letter, written after first hearing of Arthur's illness, and received but yesterday. And Katherine wondered at her own coldness and indifference. Why should she fail here, for the first time in her life, to bring home to herself the misfortune of another?

Here was the letter, cool and confident, unsuspicious of coming ill. Should not such unsuspiciousness, such unpreparedness, render more vivid still her own realization of what the final shock must have been? She set herself to read the letter, couched in terms of that conscious infallibility that was so characteristic of Winny,—an infallibility based, too, upon a narrow, unimaginative logic that was always difficult to controvert.

"Dear Katherine:

"I write to you instead of to Tom, because you have always understood me better than he. His cable came this morning, and gave me a terrible shock. I prefer to think that he would not have sent it if he had stopped to reflect what a shock it would be, for it is just the sort of thing the doctor told him should be avoided if I was ever to regain my nervous strength. However, I am willing to think he did not realize. And indeed no man, perhaps no unmarried woman, can realize the love of a mother for her child. It seems to me that a mother is really the only one that has a claim upon the child. I never felt that Tom had the slightest right to take Arthur from me. But I never oppose Tom. He is too overbearing. Not in little things,—I will do him that justice,—but in things of importance he always overrides me. His cable was like that. He practically ordered me to come home,—now, at this terrible season too! And where would have been the use? Arthur would have been well before I could have got there, or if there had still been nursing to do I might not have been in condition for it for weeks and weeks to come. You know how a voyage some-

times upsets me, even in fine weather, and the storms this winter have been unprecedented. How fortunate it is that you are a nurse! For I am sure you went to Arthur at once, though Tom has not taken the trouble to cable me that. I suppose he is distracted about Arthur. His feeling about him was always overwrought,—not the quiet, deep, unselfish love of a mother, but the exacting, intolerant kind of affection that wants everything for itself and can't bear to be crossed. I could see from his cable that he had quite lost his head.

"I wish, Katherine, that when you get this you would send me a cable just to say that Arthur is convalescing. It would never enter Tom's mind to do so. He has not the gift of putting himself in another person's place, and he may not consider that letters must be ten days in reaching me, and that I shall be on tenterhooks for news. So be sure and send me a cable. I shall be expecting it, and so it will not be any shock to me.

"You see I take it for granted that everything will go well with Arthur. That is partly because he is so strong. He never had a day's illness, and never would have had if he had not been exposed to a New England winter. I have felt apprehensive whenever Tom has written about his playing so much in the snow. But after all, he has a good constitution, and I do not mean to worry, because it has always been my principle to keep cheerful if only for the sake of those about me. So I am diverting my mind as much as possible. I am going out a great deal this winter, as you know. I have found it a great resource in my loneliness, and now that I have this new trouble to contend with I do not know what I should do if I did not have so many delightful friends to make me forget myself.

"If you are still with Arthur, give him a dear kiss from his poor lonely mother, and tell Tom that I will write him in a few days.

"Ever your devoted

"WINNY.

"P. S.—Don't fail to cable at once."

Poor little letter! How pathetic it was, for all its hardness and light-mindedness,—how much more

pathetic for that! Alas! if shocks were to be feared, how had that real shock, that all but mortal shock been borne, that had followed so swiftly upon the first? In vain Katherine tried to bring it home to herself; in vain she told herself what Winny's suffering must be. A stubborn something in her own heart refused the sympathy it clearly owed. Where was Winny now? What was her state? And—had she written to Tom? Ah, there was the real apprehension, the real terror that clutched the heart and shook the nerves. What had she written to Tom?

Katherine lifted the letter again and read: "He never had a day's illness and never would have had if he had not been exposed to a New England winter. I have felt apprehensive whenever Tom has written about his playing so much in the snow."

Would Winny dare write that to Tom—when she knew? And would it wake in his soul that terrible, consuming remorse that is the last bitterness of the cup of sorrow?—that remorse, unfounded, illogical, to which the mourner is susceptible just in proportion to the nobility of his nature.

Katherine folded the letter and laid it to one side. No, it was not the perusal of those crisp little sentences that was to induce the proper spirit of sympathy toward the poor mother. Better let that lie and not even think of answering it at present. And indeed she might perfectly well wait a few days. She had already written several letters to Winny;—she had spared Tom all she could. He had written once after the terrible cable that could not but be brutal in its directness,—yet could anything be less than brutal, any announcement of the brutal fact, however worded? It could not be many days before

Winny's answer would come; and, oh, might it be merciful! There was not much to be hoped for from Winny of positive heroism or self-abnegation,—unless, indeed, this crucial experience should leave her transformed and clarified,—but—let her only refrain—only this once!

There was a knock at the door, and a card was brought in,—probably from one of the doctors to whom Katherine had that morning sent a note, reporting herself ready for service. She took it, with an indifferent glance,—her work had become but an indifferent matter to her. It was Tom's card. Ah, how glad she was, and yet how perturbed! She had never dreamed of his coming there.

"The gentleman called last evening, Miss, and the evening before," Christine was saying, "but he did n't leave any name, so I did n't tell you."

"Yes," Katherine replied. "He is my cousin. You will have to show him the way, Christine."

As the maid passed down the stairs, leaving the door open behind her, Katherine bethought herself of the letter lying there on the table—the letter that Tom must not see. She hastily tore it into a dozen pieces, and laying them among the charred embers, pressed them down, out of sight. The fire had burned very low. As she rose from her knees she heard Tom's step, and went to meet him.

"How good you were to come," she said,—and yet she knew that she was not speaking naturally.

And Tom, as he closed the door behind him, answered, not less formally: "I have been before. I was sure you would come back before long to your work. One does, you know. I 've gone back to mine."

And so, under an oppression of spirit, ominous

as the hush that precedes a great storm, they took their seats before the dying fire.

"You came in to-day, I suppose," Tom remarked, in the same dry, dull voice.

"Yes; grandmother thought I had better."

"You don't usually have to be pushed," he observed, with a dreary attempt at a smile.

"Not usually, but—we all have our lapses, you know. I find I have grown quite unambitious. See! I have not even kept up the fire."

"Where would be the good? It 's not a little heat, more or less, that one bothers about."

He sat for some minutes gazing gloomily into the ashes; then, almost as if a ghost of the letter had prompted him:

"Have you heard from Winny?" he asked, abruptly.

"Yes; I had a letter yesterday."

"Written after the ninth?"

"Yes; it was written the next day."

"Could you—could you lay your hand on it?"

"No; I have n't it with me,"—and Katherine's eyes involuntarily followed the direction of his; but the winking ashes kept their secret. "It came while I was at grandmother's," she added, with as near an approach to deceit as she was ever likely to compass.

There was another long pause. Finally:

"Did she write anything—quotable?" he asked.

"It was a long letter, and she said a good many things. But they did n't seem to mean anything—now. She was evidently not apprehensive."

"No;—she would n't be."

Tom sat with his elbow resting on the table, his chin in his hand. The lamplight shone full upon him,

and Katherine noticed for the first time that the crown of his head was powdered with gray. It had not been so a fortnight ago. She had often watched him, as he stooped with bowed head above the boy. She surely would have noticed that sprinkling of gray where the hair was so thick and dark.

The change was infinitely touching to Katherine. She attributed it to sorrow, pure and simple. She did not dream that this thing that Tom was undergoing was something far more complicated, more discomposing, than unalloyed grief, however deep. She never guessed that these days of his great bereavement had been days of strenuous self-conflict, as well.

In truth, nothing could have been more insidious nor more formidable than the assault he had sustained. Broken, disheartened, dispossessed, the poor fellow had turned, as a hurt child will turn, to the one being he loved and trusted; his nature cried out for the healing of her hand. Yet because he was not a hurt child, but a grown man, a man of conscience and experience, with years of self-discipline behind him, and generous ideals within, he had laid violent hands upon those impulses of the soul which seemed so beguilingly natural and right, and had brought himself, captive as he believed to his own will, to render to Katherine the carefully guarded word of thanks that was her due. If he was profoundly aware that he loved her to-day as he had never loved her before, he believed that his love was sanctified at last, sanctified in that vision of her, that would never leave him, when she had watched and wrestled like a holy angel for the little life that was his own, and of which a ruthless fate had yet despoiled him.

Tom wondered, as he sat there with his chin buried in his hand, how he could best make manifest his gratitude, and yet betray nothing else,—nothing beyond the danger line. He wondered, too, why Katherine was so inexpressive to-night,—she who so rarely measured her words,—she who had nothing to conceal. She did not seem her usual spontaneous self. Had she felt a lack in him? Did she think he was ungrateful, self-absorbed? Did she think he had not noted every instant of that divinely lovely service to his child? That a single ministration of her hand, a single accent of her dear voice, had been lost upon him? He was a dull, unimpressionable brute, he knew well; but did she fancy him so dull, so unimpressionable as that? He looked up. Ah, no! It was not of herself she was thinking,—not with that face, with that look!

"I believe," he said, feeling his way carefully lest he should lose his footing,—and that would be shame and disaster beyond all the rest,—"I believe I came to thank you for — everything. But I might have spared us both the pains. I cannot say it. It is too deep down ever to get to the surface."

"Don't try," she answered, gently. "We don't thank our friends for loving our children. We know they could n't help it."

"You did love him, Katherine?"

"Everybody did."

"And you?—no more?"

"I never loved a child so well."

"I thought so—I felt sure! How could you help it? The little chap!" And again his chin dropped in his hand, and again Katherine saw that the dark hair was sprinkled with gray.

She could not bear it. There seemed a hand at her throat, strangling her. She could not speak,—there were no words to fit the need of that hour that had come at her call,—that hour when she might bring him consolation. She could not sit like that,—dumb, cold, letting the moments slip.

With a sudden, overmastering impulse, she rose from her chair and moved toward him. He did not look up; he did not imagine that the movement concerned him. She drew near to him, and gently, tenderly, as if he had been a suffering child, she let her hand rest upon his shoulder. It was the very same gesture with which she had essayed to console her brother on that evening so long ago when he was suffering, and at Tom's hands. She was aware that her touch was a caress; she meant it should be. Nothing was too much for her to give to-night.

"Tom," she said,—and her voice was sweet with the garnered sweetness of seven years,—"dear Tom, be comforted."

He reached up, slowly, hesitatingly at first, and drew her hand down from his shoulder,—even as Archie had done on that evening, years ago. Then, with a sudden, passionate movement, he pressed it to his heart.

"Tom!" she faltered, confused, abashed—"Tom!"—and she would have drawn her hand away. But he held it fast.

"Katherine," he cried, "Katherine!"

He had sprung to his feet, he had relinquished her hand, that remained lifted, as it were in sudden terror of him. For a moment they faced one another,—with eyes that could not lie.

"Katherine!—you too!" he cried.

Her arm dropped to her side and, moving slowly, unsteadily away, she sank into a chair and covered her face with her hands.

In an instant he was by her side, kneeling before her, beseeching her to look at him,—to forgive him,—to forget. But she did not dare face him yet. And he?—He too would have shrunk from facing her. They were like two comrades who have fought through a long campaign, shoulder to shoulder,—who have suffered uncomplainingly hardship and privation and wounds, only to betray one another at last, by a ghastly trick of fate, into the hands of the enemy.

"Forgive me, Katherine! Forgive me!" he implored. "You did not know,—how could you?—that it had been always, always! How could you, dear? My life has been such a monstrous lie! And you,—because you are heavenly compassionate, because you never count your gifts to the meanest and the most miserable—it was as if you too—" He could see how her hands shook. "But it was nothing,—it was nothing, dear! It was only pity!" He was clinging to the two arms of her chair, that his hands might be withheld from seeking hers—"Say it was only pity, Katherine!" he cried, again. "Say it was only pity!"

Then Katherine lifted her face, and looked upon him kneeling there before her.

"O Tom," she moaned, brokenly, beseechingly—"it was my fault! I did n't know—I never dreamed—I—"

"But you do not love me! You never loved me! Say that you never loved me, Katherine!—that it was only pity! Say it, Katherine! or—God help us both!"

She did not speak, she could not. She could only look down upon him with eyes dark with pain, dark with remorse, but eyes that could not lie.

Then Tom got upon his feet, and walked to the fireplace, where he stood, looking down into the smouldering ashes. And Katherine did not leave her seat, —only her eyes followed him.

He stood for many minutes, looking down. At last:

"I am going, Katherine," he said. "Perhaps I ought never to have come. I can't tell; I don't see plainly any more. But—I shall come again,—and you must see me. We must think of this thing, you and I, and we must think quietly and reasonably. We meant no harm. We had done our best—both of us—up to our lights. But we were looking at only one side. Now we know both,—and we must begin at the very beginning again, and work our way out. We shall work our way out. We do not deserve this cruel thing, —you and I. I deserved it, and I—accepted it. But you! There 's no justice in it for you! I—even I—shall find salvation yet through your deservingness."

Then Katherine, seeing him so calm, so reasonable, so like himself, plucked up her courage, and, rising, went and stood beside him.

"It was horrible, Tom;—a horrible moment," she said,—and the shudder had not yet left her voice, though her form was straight and steady again. "But the years count for more—one does not overturn them in a moment! We can trust each other still."

"Yes,—we can trust each other, Katherine. And —I shall come again!"

He was gone. And still she stood looking down upon her cold hearth.

After many, many minutes, she stooped and mechanically brushed together the gray ashes. There was a bit of glow there in the middle. She wondered whether she could start it up again, if she were to put

fresh logs upon it. There was one, a piece of birch, with the bark hanging loose. How easy it would be to make a blaze with that!

The room had grown very cold, but—"Where would be the good? It 's not a little heat, more or less, that one bothers about!" She could hear Tom's voice, steady, restrained, as he spoke the words. Was it the same voice with which, a little later, he had called her name—"Katherine! Katherine!"

"And it was my fault," she whispered, hoarsely, cowering there before the spent ashes. "It was my fault! It was my fault!"

CHAPTER XII

CONFLICT

> "Into the truth of things
> Out of their falseness rise, and reach thou and remain."

IF Katherine's disposition had not been singularly free from morbidness, the experience of that evening, with its sudden shattering of a wholesome illusion, due, as she was aware, to a lapse of vigilance on her own part, might have wrought a serious disturbance of that hard-won equanimity on which the single-hearted rectitude of her life was based. In a nature as sensitively conscientious as hers, an excessive and persistent self-condemnation may prove hardly less demoralizing than an out-and-out violation of conscience in one of more facile mould. The probity of Katherine's character was perhaps never so imperilled as in that hour when she crouched before the fire, in a passion of self-accusation. It seemed to her that the mischief was done, that the great admission which she had been betrayed into constituted in itself the unpardonable sin.

So long as Tom had stood before her she had held herself upright for his sake; for his sake she had forced herself to believe that they could trust each other still. But when he was gone—gone with the reiterated assurance that he should come again — all her courage

failed her. He loved her, he had always loved her, and he knew that she loved him. "It was my fault," she lamented, less in self-condemnation than in self-abandonment. "It was my fault—it was my fault!" And all that night the one refrain assailed her soul. She had erred, she had failed,—the mischief was done.

She had no abiding faith in her own confident assertion that the years counted more than that one disastrous moment,—that there could be no reversal of their just result. The reversal had taken place; the years of self-conquest on both their parts,—alas, on both their parts!—had been annulled.

Katherine felt no single throb of elation because Tom loved her. She was only appalled at the knowledge. She saw herself, she saw him, bereft of the one sure refuge that had existed in their mutual unconsciousness. Yes, he would come again,—he would come again with the irresistible appeal of his double burden of a great bereavement and a great love. Katherine no more doubted the depth and the reality of his feeling for her, than she doubted the genuineness of his grief for the child. That simple, human gesture with which he had pressed her hand to his heart, had been far more eloquent than the most impassioned caress; his imploring voice, as he besought her to deny that she loved him, was more moving, and more intimately convincing, than the most ardent protestations could have been. She knew he loved her, profoundly, irrevocably; and she understood his love.

In the luminousness of vision that comes to us only in the watches of the night, and then only under the stimulus of a great emotional shock, she reviewed the whole course of their two lives; and the contradictions and inconsistencies of Tom's conduct, even to

the fatal inconsistency of his infidelity to her, was apprehended and interpreted as he himself could never have interpreted and apprehended it She understood both the extreme fascination of Winny's loveliness and the cause of Tom's strong though transient susceptibility to it. She knew that he had been betrayed to his undoing, not by any inherent weakness of moral fibre, but by a certain rough guilelessness which could never have been maintained through the years of his youth in the absence of exceptional force of character. And if she understood that fascination,—its rise, its culmination, and its swift decline,—with no less clearness and sympathy did she comprehend the expiation that had been exacted of him almost from the first. It was as if she had personally witnessed each stage in that untoward sequence.

She did not condemn Tom, she did not condemn Winny;—it was only herself that she condemned—the hardness and the lack of faith that had repelled him just when he had most urgent need of her. She had failed him then,—she had failed him now. It was her fault—her fault that they stood to-day, face to face, exposed, disarmed, imperilled.

In vain she asked herself what she feared,—as if forsooth her fears had been chimerical. She knew well what she feared. She feared the long, long strain of that mutual consciousness which must warp if not disorganize their inner lives; she feared that, however rigidly they might govern their conduct, the integrity of their feeling, that moral integrity which ensures sincere, spontaneous living, was lost to them forever. And she feared,—yes, in the intensification of feeling and apprehension which came in the watches of that cruel night,—she feared more definite things;

—the touch of his hand, the sound of his voice, the very approach of his step.

But Katherine was not by nature morbid, and, happily for those of us who are imaginative, the more distorted is a vision of the night, the more certain it is to pass with the coming of the morning. If Katherine had not slept that night, she had certainly dreamed, and from all dreams, however terrifying, there is a sure awakening. And with the dawning light she awoke,—spent, half-stunned, but perfectly sane.

She found that she could live her natural life again, because it must be lived; she believed that she could meet Tom as an honest woman should, because she must meet him. As she went about those duties of the day which she found awaiting her hand to do, she recovered something of the old balance, the old self-confidence, and she knew that the visions of the night had been false, with the plausible falseness of exaggeration. She would have died rather than have betrayed herself to Tom,—she would have died again rather than he should have betrayed himself to her. But the crisis had come, and it must be met. If her untried girlhood had withstood the strain of self-discovery, how should she not, in her disciplined womanhood, meet the new, the far more critical strain of self-betrayal. If the test was immeasurably more severe, was not she immeasurably stronger?

And Tom? He was even more to be trusted, inasmuch as his self-conquest had been greater than hers. All that had been required of her had been a passive acceptance of the inevitable, and under conditions, too, of absolute personal freedom; while Tom had lived in bondage, yet loyal to that bondage, as if it had been the most spontaneous allegiance. She

glorified in Tom's loyalty, she built upon it now as upon a rock of refuge. She should not be tempted to fail him, since he would never fail her. Let him come and prove to her that all was well between them, that the old normal relation would be sustained to the very end. The end! How far away, how infinitely far away the end seemed! She thought of Grandmother Day, of the fourscore years of her life. How they reached back to nearly thrice her own years! Her spirit quailed as she recognized in her own constitution the likelihood of an equal longevity. And all those years, made up of days and hours like these, must be lived.

What was that the poor child was saying, the poor little seamstress who had been run over, whose pain Katherine was striving to ease?—"I 've been suffering so long, so long! Why, Miss Day, it 's more than forty-eight hours since it happened, and I 've suffered every minute!"

"It is a long, long time to suffer," Katherine answered,—and for the moment she felt that the time was indeed long,—"but you are young and sound, and presently the hurt will heal and the pain will be gone. The doctor says there will be hardly any suffering by next week; only a bit more of discomfort. Think how good that will be!"

"I can't think about next week," the girl sobbed. "I can't think of anything but the pain."

And Katherine could not chide her want of faith. Did she herself see much farther with her own more enlightened vision?

Yes, the years looked long,—those years that Grandmother Day had lived,—and the thought of them daunted her. Yet from the present she no

longer shrank, and when, an evening or two later, Tom came to her, she only welcomed the chance of proving how well they could trust each other.

He was grave and stern, but the dejection that had so wrought upon her sympathy had given place to the old force and decision of manner. The hair must still be sprinkled with gray, but there was nothing to remind her of it; the head was no longer bowed.

"I hope you don't mind my coming again so soon," he said. "One lives by strides sometimes and gets as far in a day as in a year."

"Yes," Katherine assented,—speaking from her own experience that apparently matched his so well. "One understands sometimes what those mystical old philosophers mean who say time is a condition, and not a succession of hours at all."

"Ah,—but it is a succession of hours,—only they go at a slower rate when they are heavily weighted."

"It 's clear that you 're no mystic," she returned. "And when it comes to that, no more am I. People who work hard never are."

"Have you been working hard?"

"Very. My doctors seem to have saved up all their cases to spring them on me now. Happily, none of the patients are in need of night service," she added, congratulating herself upon the casual, conversational note she had struck. "Otherwise, I could n't do justice to them all. One has one's limits—unluckily."

"Yes, unluckily,—or luckily,—one has one's limits. And circumstances have their limits too." Then, leaning a bit toward her, he said, with a certain emphasis that caught her attention sharply: "I have come to one of those limits myself."

His voice to-night was as stern as his face, stern and harsh,—not with the old easy masterfulness that it was so natural to combat, but with a deliberate inflexibility of accent that hardly invited contradiction. Katherine felt in it an indefinable menace which she secretly shrank from. But she answered, tranquilly enough:

"I once heard a sermon on holy limitations. It is a great subject."

"No doubt," he returned, politely. "But there is nothing particularly holy about the limitation I have reference to." Then, with a sullen obduracy that was more ominous than his words: "I have simply come to the limit of Winny," he declared.

A creeping presentiment of ill invaded Katherine's mind, putting an unnatural constraint upon her, as she asked: "You have had a letter from her?"

"Yes, I have had her letter," he answered, coldly. "But that is nothing. It happens to be just—over the limit. It does not concern me."

"Oh, Tom, does she—"

"Does she reproach me?" he broke in. "No—she explicitly states that she does not! She opines that self-reproaches will be sufficient."

"Tom!"

"I am only telling you what she writes,—you seemed to want the information."

How worn and haggard he looked!—and how dark the shadows had grown in his face! Ah, he had felt it, for all his disavowal.

"Was the letter all as cruel as that?"

She was leaning forward, with supplicating eyes fixed upon the stern, haggard face. He could almost hear her beseeching him to be gentle for all their sakes.

And Tom, who had tried so hard to cultivate urbanity toward Winny, could not bring himself to modify, for the girl he loved, the asperity of his manner.

"Cruel? Oh, that 's rather too much of a word, perhaps. It was at least mercifully short. I must admit, too," he added, bitingly,—"that she seemed —sorry—about Arthur."

"Sorry! Oh, don't speak like that! She is a human mother. She does n't know how to say it, but —she is desolate!"

"Very possibly;—although she seems inclined to derive some consolation from her mourning. She warns me that it will be expensive. She apparently credits me with sensibility where my purse is concerned."

As Katherine listened to this terrible arraignment, that was but the more scathing for being so restrained, her feeling underwent a curious reaction. She became aware that she was no longer on Tom's side. His cause was too strong,—Winny's was too pitifully weak. She found herself suddenly in an attitude of advocacy.

"I think you are unjust " she said, simply;—but Tom saw in her face a resistance that was almost hostility.

"That may be. But, as I was saying, these details are of small concern. They are—just over the limit."

"What do you mean by that?"

A challenge rang in the intonation of her voice which he could not refuse. He had not meant to come to the point so soon. He had meant to be diplomatic and persuasive. But it was an art he did not possess.

For three days Tom had been grinding away at a tough moral problem, and he had, as he believed, solved it. He had informed himself thoroughly as to the legal aspects of his case; he had brought to bear upon it all the hard sense that usually characterized him; he had tried to study it from the standpoint of another,—to eliminate the personal bias,—and he had honestly reached a conclusion which he considered incontrovertible. But he knew that hard sense did not predominate in Katherine's mental processes, that she had an inconvenient way of piercing the obvious shell of things, and of discovering subtleties of motive and feeling that had no place in a well-constructed argument. He must therefore choose his ground carefully. But, when she challenged him with that direct question, he knew but one way to meet her,—the old way he had always used with her, because she was good as a boy,—the downright way of the man who can fight but has never learned to fence.

"I mean," he said, bluntly, brutally,—"I mean that my marriage with Winny Gerald is a mockery. There is nothing left to sustain it."

"Tom!" she gasped, while an overwhelming protest surged through her,—"Tom!"

The horror in her face struck cold to his heart. But he would not recede.

"I repeat," he said, more quietly,—"I repeat—there is nothing left to sustain it."

But she too had gathered her forces in that instant's pause.

"Nothing," she said, in a level, passionless voice,—"nothing but the law of man and of God."

"The law of man is elastic," he declared, eagerly

ready to meet her on that ground which he had so carefully examined. He felt something solid under his feet, and he went on with increasing confidence. "I have been making a study of it," he explained. "Our laws are entirely rational; so much so, in fact, that I find that with a little connivance on Winny's part,—which I have the means to secure,—the matter may be adjusted in something like two years."

Katherine was leaning back in her low chair, her hands clasped together with all the force of the supple fingers, with all the force of a will roused to desperate resistance. The light struck full upon her face which was lifted, her lips parted, eager for speech.

"And the law of God?" she interposed, breathlessly,—while her eyes clung to his, and would not let them go.

But his glance did not waver, as he answered, defiantly:

"The law of God I am not in a position to study. But I do not believe it to be less liberal."

"You are in a position to study it," she insisted, while the clasping fingers made white grooves in the firm young flesh. "It is written on your conscience."

"I do not find it there."

And still they faced each other, positive, absolute, uncompromising.

It was Tom who broke the silence, after what seemed to both a very long interval.

"Am I to understand," he inquired—"that you oppose divorce,—always?"

"No! No more than I oppose amputation,—always!"

"It is merely that you do not consider this a case for amputation?"

"Most assuredly I do not."

And still they faced each other, in utter, hopeless opposition,—for still her eyes compelled his, as the clutch of the wrestler compels his antagonist whose withdrawal would rob him of victory.

Tom felt, uneasily, that he was losing ground. He shifted a bit in his chair. His eyes wandered to her hands,—those wonderfully expressive hands that were clasped in agonized protest against him.

"I wish," he said, at last,—and it seemed to him that he was making a great concession—"I wish that you could put personal considerations aside for a moment, and show me your grounds—your impersonal grounds—for feeling as you do in this particular case."

"My grounds?" she repeated, while her heart sank because he had looked away.—"It is you that— But no!—don't!"—and relaxing her grasp she lifted her hand in sudden deprecation of more words. "We can't discuss such a thing as that,—you and I."

"There is nothing that we cannot discuss, Katherine,"— and again his eyes met hers, but with renewed assurance. "We are wronging ourselves,—we are wronging each other,—when we evade a vital question."

"I do not recognize the existence of a question," she retorted, stubbornly.

He leaned a bit toward her, persuasive now, conciliatory, as he had meant to be from the first.

"That is because you think it would be an injustice to Winny," he answered, with a great effort at sobriety of statement. "But you are mistaken. Nothing would suit Winny's views better, provided she could make her own terms—that is, in bald English,

provided she were not to lose her banker! I assure you that it is so," he urged, taking heart of hope,—for she was listening in silence, at least. "It would leave her a free hand. She has already acquired actual liberty, but she would value it more if it were nominal as well. She could use it more effectively."

So it seemed they must discuss this unthinkable thing. There was to be no evasion.

"It is you who are mistaken," she returned,—and it was evident that she was doing violence to herself in speaking at all—"You do not know Winny as I do,—I who have known her all our lives."

"Nor do you know her as I do. You know her so little,"—he was watching her face, eager to note the effect of his words,—"so little that you will perhaps be surprised to learn that she received an offer of marriage a year ago from one of her French counts over there, and that she thought it amusing to mention the fact to me."

"Impossible!"

"That may be. I have only her own statement as evidence. I admit that it seems incredible. It must at least have been a case of extreme infatuation on the part of the—candidate, for the most superficial inquiry as to her financial status—not usually a matter of indifference to foreigners—would have disclosed an obstacle!" He could see that she was taken aback, and he hastened to follow up his advantage. "However that may be," he continued, "the fact would seem to be established that you need not be at pains to defend Winny's rights. She does not place a high value on them."

"And my own?" she asked, in a low, penetrating voice.

"Katherine!"

"What would be your next step—after?"

Tom's face flushed crimson, and those honest eyes of his took up the challenge.

"Do you fear an affront?" he demanded.

"I must—since one is threatened."

"An affront to you?"

"Is not this whole conversation an affront to me, since—since—"

"Since you knew I loved you?"

"Since you knew—more than that!"

"Katherine!"

She had risen from her chair and turned away from him, and now she was standing at the window, looking out into a starless night.

He was beside her in a moment.

"If what you say is just, Katherine,"—and his voice vibrated keenly,—"I ask your pardon from the bottom of my heart."

She had leaned her forehead against the window sash, looking down. She was glad there were no stars; she could not have faced those lifelong monitors to-night.

He took courage from her disheartenment.

"You ask me what my next step would be. My next step would be to place myself under your orders for the rest of my life. Don't fancy that I have any illusions,—that I imagine for a moment that you would be easily reconciled,—that I feel any real assurance that you would ever be reconciled. What right have you ever given me to assume such a thing? If any such fool's paradise floated before me yesterday, it is gone to-day. I should simply place myself under your orders for the rest of my life. If you commanded

silence, even by a look, I would be dumb forever. You would be as free of me as you are to-day—more free! That is a thing you have a right to require.—But," —and here his manner changed—" you have no right to require that I should go on living a lie. Anything else I will do for you,—anything else I will forego! Only, do not ask a lifelong lie."

He crossed the room and returned again, his hands in his pockets like a stubborn schoolboy.

"And do you think," she asked,—while her voice shook a little in spite of herself,—"that you could live up to that?—that I could live up to it?"

"You!" he repeated with a sudden climbing exultation that he dared not betray. "You, Katherine? Ah, I would stand or fall with you!"

"Yes ; and life would be a bitter thing—more bitter a thousand times than the years we have been living through, till now. Tom, we should have purchased—not happiness—by a great disloyalty."

"Disloyalty to what? To a mere convention—a mere theory—an empty form!"

"Disloyalty to my friend—and to your child!"

"To Arthur?" Tom stammered—and she knew that the pain of it shook him rudely. "To Arthur?"

"Is it not so, Tom?" she urged, gently, pitifully. "You say there is nothing left to sustain your relation with Winny. But what has sustained it, till now? Was it not for Arthur's sake that you have been so faithful, so forbearing, so magnanimous, all these years? And is Arthur's claim any less, now that he is —not here—to press it home?"

But he had steadied himself again in face of this pitiless onslaught.

"Arthur's claim is less because his needs have ceased," he said, with a composure that was shot through with anguish.

"And Winny's claims are greater, because her need has just begun."

"What need?"

"The need of comfort—the need of love and kindness.—Tom," and she turned and faced him, fearless again and sure of her cause; "you do not know the heart of a mother if you believe that Winny's letter is a reflection of her real feeling. She wrote in desperation—she struck out at you, because you were nearest, as any wounded creature will do. She wrote of foolishness because she did not know how to write of the soberness of her grief. She is a poor, desolate, stricken child. She must be comforted. We cannot leave her there, alone in her grievous need! Look in your own heart, and think what her suffering must be! She too,—oh, Tom! she too has lost Arthur!"

Crossing the room, slowly, she paused before a little frame where Winny's face looked out, in its perennial girlishness and innocence. Alas, this was not the Winny whose image possessed her to-night! That Winny was a changed woman,— broken-hearted, and in exile. As she stood, thoughtfully regarding the lovely face, Tom's voice broke in upon her reverie,—a voice gruff with contending emotions.

"Don't look at that," he cried, "it's not the truth!"

"No; it is not the truth," she answered, while her hand just touched the little frame. "This is a light-hearted girl, who never dreamed of sorrow. She did not shut me out from her happiness—while she had it, poor child! I will not fail her now! Tom," —and again she came toward him, but a great resolve

was forming within her and reflecting itself in her face; "she shall not be left alone in her sorrow. I myself will go and comfort her."

"You? Katherine!"

"What could be more natural? I am her oldest friend, and she is mine. You cannot go yet. I understand that. You are too hurt, too prejudiced, too wronged! Ah, Tom, I do understand! I do indeed! You cannot go—yet. But I! What is there to hinder?"

Tom stood for a moment in silence, his brain working swiftly, logically, as it would have worked in a sudden business emergency. He was trained to recognize a strategic advantage, and he had instantly concluded that nothing could be more favorable to his cause than this step which had so suddenly, yet so naturally, suggested itself to Katherine. He was convinced that she was deceived, and he was sure that nothing could so disillusionize her as a taste of Winny's society in her new environment. So deeply rooted was his scepticism as to the chastened and regenerate Winny that Katherine had conjured up, as it were, out of the affluence of her own spiritual endowment, that he firmly believed that the unreality of it must speedily become apparent to Katherine herself.

Well as Tom knew the generosity of Katherine's impulses, his faith in the ultimate rectitude of her judgment was such as to assure him that the opposition which he considered ill founded, based upon a false conception of actual conditions, must crumble and fall before a perception of the truth. Here, then, was a chance to act,—to break through the entanglement of sentiments and theories,—to deal hand to hand with facts.

In a moment Tom was his most normal and confident self. Motioning to a chair:

"Let us sit," he said, "and discuss this plan of yours quietly and in order. It seems to me a good one, if it can be carried out. In the first place—can you get away?"

"Yes," she answered, placing herself exactly where he had indicated; it was good to yield, even that trifle. "Yes; there never was a time when I could do it better. I have had an understudy this year, a young woman, capitally equipped. The dream of her life has been to do my kind of work. She only lacks the means of livelihood. That can be provided."

"Provided by you?"

"Yes,—for the present at least. But it can't be very long before society undertakes this thing. There is a strong movement in that direction, already."

"Capital!" Tom answered, dismissing that subject, and turning to the next. "And the voyage? Should you have to make it alone?"

His questions came terse, pointed, businesslike,—and she answered promptly and exhaustively. The more the project took shape in her mind, the more it commended itself to her. Indeed they were both so young, so vigorous, so earnest, that they could find in action the best corrective of mental trouble.

"No, I shall not have to go alone," she replied, "though I should not mind that. But the Delanos are sailing next week."

"And grandmother? Would she consent?"

"She said, only the other day, that it was time for me to go abroad. I believed I knew better. But I did n't—I never do!"—and at the thought of that

unimpeachable mentor, her sagacity, her penetration, they all but smiled. The mere mention of her name was like the letting in of daylight upon darkened counsels. Both were aware that the strain was relaxed.

They talked long and earnestly of Katherine's plan, —she, caught up and sustained in an atmosphere of ardent faith,—Tom, always at home in the consideration of practical details, encouraging, advising, suggesting.

At last he sprang to his feet, with more natural spirit and confidence than he had felt for many a long day; and Katherine, still somewhat pale and shaken, rose too.

"Good-bye, Tom," she said,—while her eyes met his again with the old trustfulness. "You have been all that was generous and kind."

"And you, Katherine," he pleaded, very earnestly. "Don't think you must keep all your generosity and kindness for—others. Remember, dear, that you and I are not the only human creatures that have no rights."

"Ah, Tom," she answered. "When I write you from Paris—"

"When you write me from Paris," he broke in, with sudden energy,—"I shall answer!"

She shrank a little and drew back, daunted by that prompt energy. In truth she had no heart for further conflict.

He perceived his misstep, and hastened to recover it. It would never do to lose the little he had gained. She must be reassured,—and, ah, how sweet a task it was!

"Don't be disturbed, Katherine," he said, gently. "You may trust me as you trust yourself."

Coming a step nearer, he took her hand, and she saw that his eyes were alight with a boyish good faith that was infinitely beguiling.

"Remember, dear," he was saying,—"I am under your orders. I am only your faithful squire,—now and always. You need not be afraid that I shall ever grow rebellious, for you must know, in your heart of hearts, that I would rather be your squire than the sovereign lord of any other woman that lives!"

As if the chivalry of his soul, come to its own at last, had transformed his very manners, he lifted her hand, and bowed his head above it, just brushing it with his lips. The action was too restrained, too courtly, to be disconcerting, even to the sensitive poise of Katherine's mood. It was only the after-vibration of it that shattered her composure.

When he was gone, she stood a moment where he had left her,—breathless, tremulous. Then, as the sound of the closing door below echoed through the house, an overwhelming sense of desolation seized her, and, ere she could check the mutinous impulse, she had lifted and pressed to her own lips, for one swift instant, the hand his had so reverently touched.

CHAPTER XIII

FLIGHT

"I see my way as birds their trackless way."

LIKE the homing of a bird,—urgent, unwavering, strong of wing and sure of vision,—was that flight of Katherine's to the friend of her childhood days. She saw in Winny's presence the one refuge the world held for her hard-pressed soul,—hard-pressed, not alone by the importunity of another, but by the far more serious menace of her own nature stirred at last to its ultimate depths. That need of escape from herself—from the pitiless revelation of her own strength no less than of her own weakness—would have spurred her to a yet swifter and more impetuous flight, had such been possible.

Happily for her, the immediate stress of preparation gave a sense of speed, of forward movement, that was steadying to the still uncertain poise of her spirit. The wholesome fatigue, too, of exertion in unaccustomed channels helped dull the sensibilities, and tranquillize the nerves. Yet for all that there was a tension discernible, at least to the keen and instructed perception of Grandmother Day, and that wise and vigilant guardian was scarcely less thankful than Katherine herself when the hour of departure came.

"You must take good care of her while I am gone, Aunt Fanny," Katherine admonished, with a humorous appreciation of her own audacity. As if anybody, forsooth, had ever been allowed to take care of Grandmother Day!

"Saucebox!" the old lady retorted, pinching the rather pale cheek that was soliciting a farewell caress.

Then, as Aunt Fanny turned away to conceal a tear,—for the really tender-hearted woman could never go through a parting dry-eyed,—Grandmother Day put her two hands on her granddaughter's shoulders, and, looking into the dark eyes, shadowed a little of late, but brave and steady always:

"It is someone else that needs care," she said, gently. "Not old ladies that are kept in cotton-wool."

The diffident tenderness of word and tone, so rare on those shrewd old lips, took Katherine at unawares. With a quick sob, she hid her face on the kindly shoulder, and the grandmother's arms held her close.

It was only for a moment, but to both women that unwonted crisis of emotion, controlled though it was, had a searching significance. To the grandmother, it attested the severity of the strain which she had only surmised; in Katherine's mind, it did but accentuate the need of flight. Not until she was fairly at sea, with the waste of waters widening astern,—not until she could hear the rhythmic heart-beat of the engine, and feel the steady forward impulse of the great ship, straining toward the goal,—did she fully regain her inner poise.

She used to sit far forward, where the deck narrows to a wedge, and watch the tall prow cutting its way through the heaving billows. It gave her a sense of difficulties overcome, of progress made toward a safe

haven. She liked it there, on fresh, salt mornings, or of a keen evening, when the stars were abroad, and their far light only intensified the mystery of those moving waters, so vast, so illimitable to the imagination, when night has obliterated the low horizon.

There were usually others with her,—Allan Delano and his daughter Grace perhaps, inseparable as always,—or again some chance fellow passenger, moved, it might be, by the hour and the scene, and the something in Katherine that ever invited confidence, to talk of himself. She was rarely found wanting on her social side, and she herself got much diversion from this easy intercourse with new minds. Yet nothing of all this interrupted for a moment the sense of onward movement, the sense of a goal, a refuge, just ahead.

"The voyage is doing you no end of good," Allan Delano remarked, one morning, when they had been tramping the deck for an hour to the tune of a whistling wind. They had stopped in the shelter of the deckhouse, and were watching the sea come up. "I never saw you look done up as you did the day we sailed. I rather think you must have shaken off a lot of bother when you came aboard."

Katherine's face was aglow with the stinging wind, and her eyes shone clear through the flying spray.

"That 's what voyages are for; is it not?" she asked, flicking the moisture from her brow and lashes.

"Yes; they blow the cobwebs off about as quick as anything. You ought to have made that stockbroking cousin of yours come along too. When I saw him standing with Glynn on the pier in New York the other day, I thought he looked as if he needed it as much as any of us."

"I hope he will come over before long," Katherine answered quietly, as she steadied herself against a coming lurch of the deck. "His wife is in Paris now. You know, I am to join her there."

"Do you remember once, years ago, I told you I should like to paint McLean?"

"Yes; I remember."

"I would rather do it now, than then. In fact, I don't know of anyone I should like so well to paint."

"Why don't you propose it?"

"I would, if he were a poor man. He has joined the St. Swivin, and I 've made a point of meeting him. But where a man is as well off as McLean has the reputation of being, one feels a bit delicate. Besides, I remember your telling me that he was not tractable."

Katherine smiled assent. There was something about the riot of the elements that left her singularly composed.

"No, I don't think that word would describe him much better now than then," she said,—noting with some amusement, how Delano's bold moustache had dwindled in the dampness. "However,—if it did, you might not care to paint him."

"No; it would not be worth while to risk any modifications. I want him just as he is. What I don't understand, though," he added,—"is how handling stocks and studying the ticker can turn out a face like that. Of course there 's grip enough, and penetration enough to account for success, — but there 's something in the cut of the brow and the look of the eyes that sticks me. Did you ever happen to see him when something stirred him a good deal? Something he believed in,—or did n't believe in?"

"Yes, I know what you mean."

"Well, then, if you know, I wish you would tell me! I 've never quite made it out."

Katherine was not conscious of the slightest desire to change the subject. On the contrary, this open discussion of Tom in his external aspect, taken together with her own self-possession, was subtly reassuring.

"I don't think," she answered, balancing herself with a free, supple inclination, as the ship plunged deep on their side,—"I don't think it 's anything more than that he looks—well,—supposing we say—unspoiled."

"That 's it! As usual, the simplest explanation is the subtlest," Delano answered, clinging to a friendly rail that followed the wall of the deckhouse.

Katherine had been studying her companion's face as they talked, wondering whether, artist and idealist though he was, he could show as scrupulously fair a record as Tom. He was a charming man, and he carried his fifty-odd years jauntily enough, but—would anyone call him unspoiled?

"What kind of a wife has McLean?" he was asking.

"The kind to make an artist open his eyes," Katherine bragged. "She 's the prettiest woman I know, and my oldest friend, please observe! I have n't seen her now for a long time, however, and I am looking forward to it every minute. There 's Grace, by the way, clutching the rope."

"Grace? Why it 's too rough up here for her! What is she thinking of!"

As Delano hastened to the rescue of his daughter, Katherine was left reflecting upon that meeting with Winny, now so near at hand.

It seemed to her, during those days of the voyage, that it was the one thing she lived for,—to see Winny,

to assure herself that she had been right about her, that the poor child had at last come alive. Let the pain be what it would! It was better that she should suffer,—suffer cruelly, bitterly,—than that her nature should prove to be too meanly wrought for suffering. If only Winny had come alive, there was nothing to fear;—nothing to fear for Winny, nothing for herself, nothing to fear even for Tom. For Katherine implicitly believed that a conviction of Winny's need of him would suffice to bring Tom back to her,—that his character was totally free of that levity that alone can render the conscience indifferent to a bond, once recognized as valid.

Singularly enough, the thought of Archie did not especially associate itself with the subject that was so absorbing her through the long monotony of the voyage. Indeed, so possessed was she with the personal crisis of the last few weeks, that she all but forgot that other, and no less momentous one, in her brother's life, which had centred upon the same vacillating pivot. So bent was her mind, her will so enlisted, in the effort to think of Winny in but one light, the light of the present emergency, that all that previous history of broken ties and hopes betrayed had receded into dim unreality. The shock of revival was all the sharper when, on landing at Havre, one bright spring morning, she found Archie awaiting her there. Even in the joy of seeing him,—and when had the sight of his face ever failed to give her pleasure?—even in that first spontaneous joy, was an undertone of disquiet.

"Why, Archie!" she cried, anxiously, as soon as they got within speaking distance. "When? How?"

"Oh, I happened to be in Paris," he answered

lightly. "So I ran up to pick you off the steamer. It 's only a step, you know, and I thought I would give you a little surprise.—My sister was always fond of surprises, Miss Delano," he added,—lifting his hat in acknowledgment of the introduction, and performing the small ceremony with a certain foreign accent of manner added to his own native grace.

Archie was, if not more prepossessing than ever, at least more effective; for he had acquired an indescribable something that stimulated the imagination. One felt that he had seen life, but that he might never tell how he liked it!

Grace Delano thought him charming, and very like his sister,—while her father was puzzled by the unlikeness. Delano was artist enough to perceive the structural resemblance, and man of the world enough to note that subtler unlikeness that had been superinduced—was it through the action of external circumstance, or as the result of a deeper, more fundamental variation? And, while artist and man of the world were alike engaged in conjecture, brother and sister had already vanished from the scene, together with whatever problems they presented to the curious.

When, at last, they were on the train, speeding southward, Archie told his story, very simply and soberly. He did not wait to be questioned, but, satisfying himself, by a practised glance from one to the other of their fellow passengers, that there were no Anglo-Saxons among them:

"I came on," he said, "because Winny sent for me. She was so broken up about the boy—she just reached out for the nearest creature that belonged to her, and I could n't refuse to come. They made a bully row at the Legation, too, he added, with an observant glance

at his sister, if perchance she should give special weight to his words.

But Katherine had but one thought in mind.

"Did she write you?" she asked.

"No; she telegraphed. I believe she stuck it out for several days, and then something gave way."

He had set his handsome, facile mouth in a firm line, that was more pathetic than the most touching droop would have been. His eyes were rather hard and bright.

"I had not heard anything till then," he went on, looking out at the flying landscape. "Supposed the boy was sound as a nut. It must have been pretty rough, all round."

"Yes; it was heart-breaking. But—we could n't save him."

The cadence of her voice struck home, and straightway they fell silent.

As Katherine too turned to look from the window at the green of the April fields flying past, she felt that they were both grown old—and tired—and again she glanced at Archie who was sitting opposite her. He was extremely thin, and the delicately modelled face, if not as haggard as Tom's, looked far more worn.

What had it been to him,—this meeting with Winny, after nearly seven years? How had they both endured the strain? She knew now as she would not have known a month ago what that strain must have been.

"How did you find her?" she asked.

"Rather shaky. And she has not rallied much yet. It has been a good deal of a chore for us both."

"You must have been here nearly two weeks."

"Is that all? It seems like two centuries.—I say, Katherine, I 'm glad you came! You always did have

a trick of turning up when you were wanted!"—and he gave her an affectionate look that was illogically soothing to her misgivings.

"I only wish I could have got here before," she returned, with a grateful smile. "It seemed as if we should never, never land! And yet we came so fast,—almost twice as fast as—before," she ended, rather lamely.

"A pretty voyage we had in '78; did n't we?" Archie had not lost his gift of being casual. "How was it this time?"

"It was rough, but I enjoyed it. We always seemed to be going even faster than we were."

"Yes; that 's the queer thing about head winds. You always think you are going a great deal faster than you are. It 's well you 're not, though! You 'd tear your rigging to flinders!"

Presently they were crossing the bridge over the river at Rouen, and, as they looked out upon the gray old city, wearing its soaring towers with such historic dignity, yet with a grace unimpaired by the passage of centuries:

"I say, Katherine," Archie said. "I wish we might put in a little trip around here, while you 're on this side. Just you and I, you know,"

"Perhaps we can, when Tom comes."

"I suppose he could n't get away at once."

"Not very well."

"Tom was always such a grind! Did he—did he take it very hard, Katherine?"

"Yes—he took it very hard."

"I suppose he has more feeling than he shows. Most of us do, as far as that goes."

"Of course."

"Lucky that 's the way of it! Things might not look so smiling if we wore our hearts under glass! I suppose now there has been pillage and slaughter all along the line here" he went on, musingly. Then, glancing forth at a sunny meadow half encircled in a shimmering loop of the Seine: "It would n't look so pretty if we could see the skulls and cross-bones underneath."

"It might not be so bad. I suppose they are just turned into good black loam that makes things grow and blossom."

"Are you as much of an optimist as ever?" he inquired. This meeting with Katherine, after so long an interval, had something of the piquancy of a new discovery.

"A great deal more so, I think. And you?"

"Oh, I don't bother my head much about theories, anyway," was the evasive reply. "However," he went on,—and now his carelessness of tone seemed somewhat studied—"I 'm glad you are optimistic, for then you won't perhaps so much mind when I tell you that they 've dropped me at the Legation."

"Dropped you for good?"

"Yes. My chief was recalled a month or two ago. I had been expecting it ever since the new administration came in."

"But—they kept you on!"

"To be sure; but they were not very enthusiastic about it. They did n't altogether like my being promoted just before Dixon left, and,—I suppose I 've not been very conciliatory. I took a fortnight off last month,—without much encouragement from the authorities,—and this second defection, coming so soon, was more than they cared to stomach."

"But, did n't you tell them it was a case of necessity?"

"Well, I did n't expatiate much,—it was not a favorable subject. I just mentioned that I 'd got to go. They hinted that I might not find it necessary to return, and, in the course of time, they sent me an official endorsement of their little threat."

So, Archie had really sacrificed his career to Winny's whim,—as if he had indeed been what he had called himself, a creature that belonged to her! A sudden, fierce resentment possessed itself of Katherine. How many more victims were to be offered up, a living sacrifice, at the altar of Winny? How many more hearts were to be broken at her wheel? And why were they all to lay their hopes and ambitions, their welfare and their happiness, at her feet? What was she herself doing? Leaving her life behind her, crossing the seas, hastening to immolate herself, and one a thousand times dearer than herself, before this shallow pretence of a woman!

But soon the very violence of her resentment gave her pause, and her conscience took quick advantage of the respite. See! It was of herself she was thinking, and of Tom, her more vital and essential self. Already her mind had dropped back into that sinful preoccupation that she was fleeing from, and Archie,—even Archie—was forgotten!

The train had stopped at a way-station. People were pulling things down from the racks above their heads, and stumbling over their feet. Katherine felt herself jostled out of a reprehensible mood, and, in the reaction that at once set in, she was almost ready to hold Winny blameless. The child had asked a difficult thing of Archie, but was it not proof of a

singular unconsciousness that she should fail to suspect the severity of the ordeal she had subjected him to? As for the complication at Rome,—that, at least, was something for which she could not justly be held responsible.

"Could you not have gone back at once and made things right with them?" Katherine inquired, when they were again under way.

"Hardly. You see, I had ceased to be *persona grata*. Everything hinges on that in such affairs. And, besides, I could n't have left Winny until somebody came to lend a hand. She can no more stand alone—now, when she 's unhappy—than one of those shivering poplars could if you were to dig it up by the roots and set it in the wind. However,"—and he threw his head back in characteristic disavowal of serious things,—"there 's really nothing to worry about, as far as I am concerned. There are other ways of passing the time besides dancing attendance upon our amateur diplomats. And, as far as Winny goes, you 're worth two of me. I shall be off again to-morrow."

"Where shall you go?"

"Almost anywhere—out of Paris. I hate the beastly hole!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE LITTLE BLACK FIGURE

"Ay, dead loves are the potent!
Like any child they used you,
Mere semblance you, but substance they!"

IT was a new and somewhat perplexing Winny that Katherine found awaiting her in the little pink satin *salon* redolent of violets. The slender, girlish figure in its deep mourning contrasted hardly more sharply with the rose-colored setting of the room than with the still childlike contour of the mourner's face,—a trifle wan now and drawn, yet not greatly modified in its essential lines.

"I 'm glad you 've come," she said, as Katherine stooped and kissed her. "I think it was time somebody did!"

They had met in the middle of the room, where Winny had been standing when Katherine entered. The slight black figure had not taken a step in welcome of the traveller. It was as if, now that the superficial brightness of manner was dimmed, no underlying warmth remained to take its place.

"It must have been a lonely time," Katherine answered, with a shy sympathy that ventured on no further expression.

"Yes, it was—in spite of Archie. Where is he? Is n't he coming up?"

"No; he said he would come in this evening. He thought we might like to be by ourselves for a little."

"Oh, he 's always that way!"—and Winny drew Katherine to a seat beside her on a fragile gilt sofa. "He always seems to count off his minutes."

She had not asked her guest to lay aside her coat and hat, she had made no motion to show her the way to her room. "It has been very disappointing,—Archie's being here,"—she went on. "I thought it would be such a comfort, but,—I think he 's a good deal changed,—I don't think he 's improved."

"He has changed, of course, Winny. We all have. That can't be helped."

"You have n't,—not a bit. You look just exactly as you used to!"—and she gave Katherine one of those critical surveys that misses no detail. "Why, I should think you had on the very same clothes you wore three years ago! But of course you have n't, for that dress is quite in the fashion. You did n't wear it on the steamer, did you?"

"Indeed I did n't! This is altogether too good for a ducking."

"I suppose you were on deck in all weathers,—just as you used to be."

"Yes; I like a bit of weather as much as ever!"

Winny put out her hand and touched Katherine's glove.

"Why don't you take it off?" she asked. Her own fingers were sparkling with rings. There was something about the look of them thus bejewelled that recalled to Katherine's reluctant memory a saying of her grandmother's, to the effect that there was no breeding in a Gerald hand.

As Katherine obediently drew off her glove, Winny asked: "Have n't you any rings of your own?"

"Why, this is my own!" Katherine protested. "It was my mother's engagement ring. What more could I want?" And in fact it was a finer diamond in its low, old-fashioned setting, than any Winny wore.

"You never buy rings?"

"Why,—no!"

"I suppose you save your money for the poor!"—This with an expostulatory air which made her listener smile an amused disclaimer.

"Not a bit of it!" Katherine declared. "I spend a lot on myself."

"To be sure. You always did dress well, I must admit, and that takes money!"

There was a rap at the door. A tall, sophisticated French maid appeared.

"Did Madame call?" she inquired.

No, Madame had not called.

"And Mademoiselle? Might one be of service to Mademoiselle?"

Thus admonished: "Would you like to go to your room, Katherine?" Winny asked.

"Perhaps I might as well brush up a little. It was a dusty journey!"—and Katherine stood up, glad to be on her feet again.

"You 've had your luncheon, I suppose."

"Oh, yes,"—with a rueful memory of the sour wine and still more sour bread they had snatched from a passing tray. "We had our luncheon on the train."

It was Mélanie and not Winny, who escorted the new arrival to her room across the corridor.

As the assiduous maid proceeded to ply her with

attentions to which she was not accustomed, Katherine indemnified herself with a question or two.

"Madame has been well?" she inquired.

"*Oui, Mademoiselle.* She has been well; but in deep affliction."

"Certainly. But—she has kept fairly well, all this time?"

"*Oui, Mademoiselle.* For all her delicate face, she has the strong mind. At first she was somewhat *en négligée*," Mélanie continued, as she dexterously unpacked the toilet articles from Katherine's handbag. "But since Monsieur, her cousin, has arrived, she has had thought for her toilet. As Mademoiselle is aware, nothing gives better effects than a rich mourning. Let it be but *chic*,—it excels the colors."

Any translation of the Frenchwoman's remarks is a gross injustice; happily, however, her auditor of the moment had the benefit of them fresh from the source.

Plain New Englander as she was, Katherine knew better than to refuse Mélanie's attentions, and the matter-of-course air with which she accepted them made a most satisfactory impression. If a lady who held her head like that considered herself entitled to service, it was doubtless because she understood how to reward it.

Left to herself, Katherine began speculating as to why she found Winny perplexing. She had not said a word that was out of character. There was the old frank interest in externals, the familiar assumption that if she had not got her dues in attention and sympathy it was the worse for the delinquents. Archie had changed, had not improved; it was time the others bethought themselves of her. But she, Winny,

could wait. She was in the right; she was doing her part, in her faultless mourning, with just the degree of pensive loveliness that the situation required.

And yet, had it been so studied as all that, there would not have been lacking some allusion to her sorrow. Had she really been striving for effect, she would have mentioned Arthur's name—she would at least have glanced at his picture which stood on the table with the violets before it. And Tom's name? She had not mentioned that—not even in censure. What had she in her heart toward Tom? Indifference it could not be. Resentment? Perhaps. Yet when did Winny ever fail to give expression to her resentments?

There was a constraint, on both sides, the rest of the day; for if Winny was manifestly suppressing herself, Katherine too, and from this very circumstance, was debarred from spontaneous speech or action. Her heart ached for the crisp, cool, artificial little mourner, —she surmised a thousand reticences, a thousand hidden pangs. But she was incapable of intruding, even here, where her mission was so clear and authentic.

When Archie came, in the evening, the situation grew even more difficult. His stay was short, and he talked almost exclusively to Katherine. For the first time in his life he seemed ill at ease. Winny sat, a little apart from them, somewhat more wan and remote than before, yet with a certain look of discontent, intensified once or twice to ill humor.

Archie had been inquiring about Roland, and whether old Peter was still holding his own; and Katherine, feeling that Winny was a bit left out, said to her: "Your mother came to see us the day before I left home. She was looking so young and pretty!"

"Oh, don't feel obliged to talk about my family," Winny cried, with a quick petulance. "Pray tell Archie all he 's interested in."

"But I am interested to hear about your mother, too," Archie protested. "I always admired her very much."

"And we know how constant you are!" The little sentence shot out like the dart of an adder's tongue.

Archie colored, hotly.

"You 're tired, Winny," he said, with an appealing look at Katherine—Katherine would be patient, Katherine would understand. "It 's a shame for you to have to hear us talk about our own affairs! We ought to have done that up on the train."

"Yes; of course we ought," Katherine agreed, emulating her brother's forbearance. "But we were so full of the thought of you, Winny, that we did n't get round to home matters."

"Anyhow,—I 'm not going to keep you girls up any longer," cried Archie, springing to his feet with alacrity. It was the first unforced thing he had done since he had entered the room.—"I 'm such a night owl, myself, that I 'm always forgetting that there are such things as bed hours." Then, as he took Winny's hand in parting: "I shall go back to Rome with an easy mind to-morrow, Winny; Katherine will be such a comfort to you."

"Oh, I shall get on very well," she returned, with a pitiful straightening of her pretty neck. "I shall try not to tax anybody too much."

Archie dropped her hand, and turned sharp on his heel.

"Good-night, Katherine," he said,—and as he bent to kiss her, she saw that his lip was quivering. But he

lifted his head with the old, free gesture and, in another moment, they could hear his step ringing down the corridor.

As Katherine turned away from the door, she heard a small, suppressed sob. Winny had dropped into a corner of the unconsoling gilt sofa, her face hidden against the satin cushion. Katherine came toward her, still a little shy and hesitating. She stood an instant at the head of the couch, and then she stooped, and lightly kissed the pretty fluff of golden hair.

"Dear child," she murmured,—"you should be kinder to yourself!"

"How can I?" Winny sobbed, "when nobody is kind to me?—Nobody but you, and—I don't dare let you come near me for fear you 'll tell me all about his dying, and—I could n't bear it! I could n't bear it!"

Then Katherine knelt down beside her.

"Come, dear," she begged, drawing the sobbing figure toward her with a gentle compulsion, the less alarming for the whimsical turn of her speech. "Don't cry against that hard old sofa! I 'm ever so much softer!" And as the charming head sank upon her breast: "You may trust me, Winny," she whispered. "I will not hurt you. I will not tell you anything. You shall just—tell me."

When, after a little, Winny lifted her head, her face was stained with tears,—not those mild, æsthetic drops that she used to have always at command, but hot, salt tears that are not becoming, and that only embitter grief. Yet the eyes she turned full upon Katherine were already dry, though red and swollen about the lids, as she asked, with sudden vehemence:

"Katherine, is Tom coming?"

"I am sure he is, if you want him to come."

"I don't see what that has to do with it. He ought to come, anyway. I am so ashamed of his not coming!"

"Have you written to him again,—more than once?"

"No; but he has never answered my first letter."

Katherine rose from her knees, and, drawing up a chair, seated herself close to the head of the sofa where Winny could take her hand or not, as she liked. The look in those hard blue eyes—for they had grown very hard and bright—had once more thrown her back into unaccustomed diffidence.

"Perhaps it was not an easy letter to answer," she ventured, while her pitiful gaze rested upon the tear-stained face. "Have you thought of that?"

"Did you see the letter?" Winny asked, indifferently.

"No; I did not see it, but—I know it made him cruelly unhappy. He was not—he was not the same after he got it."

"He ought to have been unhappy! I 'm glad he was unhappy!" Winny cried, with a certain small fierceness. "Why should I be the only one to suffer?"

Katherine leaned toward her a face that was grave and almost stern, yet more subtly pitiful than ever.

"You told me just now," she said, with careful emphasis,—"that you were afraid of me lest I should tell you of Arthur's dying. You could not bear even the story of it. But Tom bore the thing itself. Do you think he did not suffer?"

"He did n't suffer as I did,—he could n't! And—I was n't weak about it. I made a struggle!" She was speaking rapidly now, and the color in her cheek was deepening. "For three days I would n't think,—I

would n't realize. Nobody knew anything about it but Mélanie. She ordered my mourning for me. She did everything,—and she has such taste! She is invaluable! The people came and tried me on here, and not a soul beside knew. I did everything just the same. I said—if I don't think about it, it 's just as if it had n't happened. I could n't see him or hear him before,—I did n't know for how long,—and now I could n't see him and hear him, and there was no need of thinking for how long. I would keep about, and get tired, and then I could sleep. If I must lose Arthur, that was no reason why I should lose everything else too. I saw people, and I did all the things I promised to do, and nobody suspected a thing. Why, Katherine, I had n't the least idea that I had such a strong will! It seemed to me as if I could go on so forever. I thought perhaps I should never wear my mourning after all."

She was fingering the crape on her cuffs, while she talked rapidly, without pause.

"It all went smoothly for three days. Mélanie said I was wonderful. She says she never had a mistress she respected so much!"—and here Winny stopped speaking, while a singular expression of self-satisfaction spread itself over the superficially sensitive features.

Katherine listened, as she would have listened to a doctor's diagnosis of an unprecedented case. It seemed that the pathology of the mind had its unexplored provinces, as well. She formed no opinion of this phenomenon,—she merely waited for light.

"And then?" she asked, somewhat coldly. "After three days?"

The eager face changed; two narrow, vertical lines appeared between the eyes,—their hard, blue light was suddenly blurred.

Winny leaned forward, eager still, and speaking more rapidly than ever, with little catchings of the breath between sentences.

"The third evening," she hurried on, "I went to the opera with some French people. It was *Lohengrin.* I had never seen it before. I did n't understand it very well, and it seemed long. All I knew was that Elsa, the soprano, had lost a brother in some mysterious way. I had n't thought of him as a child. I had n't thought of him much anyway. I was trying to make out the love story. And suddenly—I think it must have been toward the end, it was so late—the brother came to life, and—he was a little boy! Katherine! Do you understand?" She had seized Katherine's hand, and was clutching it tightly. "He was a little boy! And they had thought he was dead! And he had come to life! And all the chorus shouted, and Elsa forgot her lover, and ran forward, and knelt beside the boy, and—kissed him! And—then—Katherine! — they said I fainted!"

The strong, warm hand folded itself about the clutching fingers; as if soothed, composed by the touch, Winny let her head fall back against the satin cushion, her eyes still turned on Katherine's face.

"You don't say you 're sorry," she complained,—"but I suppose you are!"

"No, Winny," Katherine answered, very quietly. "I am not sorry. I 'm glad—glad you came alive."

"Came alive!" Winny repeated, drawing her hand away. "It was not coming alive! I have n't been half alive since then! It has been just dull and dreary! Nobody comes near me any more. They just leave condolence cards. They seem to think I 'm as good as dead. It got so dreary,—it got to be such a

nightmare! There was no one but Mélanie. She 's wonderful about toilets, and about keeping things nice, but she 's no real companion. I don't even understand all she says.—I wanted somebody that really cared—and understood—"

"You did n't think of your mother?"

"Mamma? Oh, no!" she answered, impatient of the interruption. "I knew beforehand everything she would say. And so—I sent for Archie. He used to understand me so well. No one ever suited me as Archie did. I thought when he came it would be better. But it was not. He 's so changed! I don't think he 's improved. He does n't seem to care any more. Katherine!"—with a sudden strident emphasis—"Katherine! Have I changed too? Have I grown ugly?"—and again she leaned her face forward, eager, anxious. "Have I grown ugly?" she asked.

Katherine met the pretty face half-way and kissed the questioning lips for answer, and Winny never noticed that she had not spoken.

"When I asked Archie that," she said, with a curious, childish fretfulness,—"for it seemed as if I must have changed, because he had stopped caring,—when I asked him if I had grown ugly, he was n't sweet with me, the way you are. He just said, so roughly that I felt as if I had been struck: 'I wish to God you had, Winny!' Why, Katherine, it made me feel like the ground under his feet!"

Katherine listened, speechless, bewildered. Was it possible that Winny did not understand? Had she played with Archie, mercilessly? Was she a cruel, heartless coquette? Or was she really so dulled by the egotism of her pain and loneliness that she was incapable of comprehending anything else?

"I see, you feel as I do, that it was inexcusable," Winny was saying. And as Katherine opened her lips in protest: "Oh, of course you would stand up for Archie; you always did. But you would n't, if you understood life as I do. I know perfectly well why he is so restless and irritable, and selfish. It is because he is dissipated!"

"Winny!"

"Oh, I know! I 've seen a great deal of life. You were always so unsophisticated, Katherine! That day when he came home intoxicated, it was I who saw it first. And now, I know by so many little signs that he is—"

Katherine seized Winny's hand to check her words.

"Hush, Winny!" she commanded. "You shall not speak so of Archie! It is cruel—it is false! He is only too noble, too high-minded! Not one man in five thousand would have been to you what he has been! He has sacrificed everything to serve you; he has sacrificed everything to protect you,—to protect you from yourself, Winny!"

"I did n't want him to sacrifice anything!" Winny stammered, intimidated more by the grasp of the strong hand than by the words she heard. "I did n't need to be protected. I only wanted him to be sorry, and to be sweet with me, the way he used to be. Oh, you need n't look shocked, Katherine! I did n't want him to make love to me. That 's something I never allow—when I can help it! I only wanted him to be—like he was before we were engaged, when he was just always considerate, and amusing, and seemed to like best to be with me. I wanted—just a little comfort!"—and again the soft lip trembled—"I was so lonely and forlorn! And now that you 've come,

he 's going away, just the first possible minute. He won't even stay on to see you!"

"If I were you, Winny," Katherine answered, gravely, "I would n't talk any more about Archie,—nor think any more about him. It 's not right. It 's not fitting."

"As if I cared what was right,—what was fitting!" Winny cried, irritably. "As if I cared for such things, when I 'm miserable! Oh, I 'm so miserable, Katherine!" And leaning her head back, she stared, dry-eyed, into the face that had set itself in lines of unmistakable censure.

"Would n't it be better to go to bed?" Katherine asked, still rather coldly. "You are tired and unstrung. You ought to sleep."

"But I should n't sleep! I should read a French novel half the night,—a horrid novel,—and then, when it was finished, I should find life just as dreadful as ever. I should remember, like a shot, that Archie was afraid of me,—that Tom despised me,—that you disapproved of me, and that—that Arthur was dead!"

She was speaking fast again. It became more evident every moment that she was really unbalanced and unstrung. She was like the uprooted poplar which Archie had imagined, that could not stand against the wind,—against the wind of adversity. And Katherine once more responded to the old appeal; and little by little, the warm human sympathy, that is almost as much an attribute of the imagination as of the heart, reasserted itself; and Winny rested upon it, all the more gratefully for its momentary withdrawal.

They talked far into the night, and gradually Winny regained her composure,—a composure that

was far more appealing than her lamentations. The outpouring of her heart to Katherine, stormy and incoherent as it was, had tranquillized and steadied her. She was beginning to lean a bit against the stronger will, the stronger intelligence, the stronger affection, that would fain make of itself a bulwark for her sake.

Katherine stayed with her until long after midnight, soothing, guiding, consoling. Little by little Winny's mind began to hover timidly about the thought of the boy. She asked questions about him, at first about the days when he was strong and well and playing in the snow. She liked to hear how fond Grandmother Day was of him. She seemed to think it a distinction that the old woman whom she herself stood so much in awe of should have made a favorite of her child. And quite late in the night she began questioning about his illness,—what they had done for him,—how they had cared for him. She no longer shrank and sobbed at the thought, but, as Katherine told how his father had carried the child up and down to ease the pain, and then, how he had long held him in his arms when all the pain had ceased,—slow tears brimmed the lovely eyes, and fell, unheeded, on the pretty cheek, still so touchingly round and childlike.

"Tom *is* good!" Winny whispered, at last. "Tom *is* good! I wish he would come."

Then, seeing her so quiet and so reasonable, Katherine led her into her chamber where Mélanie was sleeping in her chair, and together they helped undress the little black figure. And when they had transformed it into a white figure, and had seen it sink among the pillows, tired but relaxed, and ready for rest, Katherine stole quietly away to her own room and wrote to Tom.

She wrote rapidly, and the letter was very short.

"I found Archie here," she wrote. "Winny had sent for him in her sorrow, which is very, very real, though she is afraid of it, and hardly owns it. He has done what he could to help her through a hard time, but he could not do much, —neither can I. It is you she wants, it is you she needs, Tom, and I told her I was sure you would come."

Katherine sealed the letter without rereading it, so confident was she that she had written the one thing needful. And then she went to her window that gave on the open, paved court of the hotel, the silent fountain, and the whispering palms. All was dark and deserted. Not a light gleamed anywhere, not a footfall sounded. It must be very late.

The casement was wide open. She leaned far forward over the iron railing, and looked up into the deep sky. There among the twinkling stars was one great serene planet. She did not know its name, but she recognized it as a companion of her voyage. She used to wonder whether it was shining at home. Well,—it was shining here,—so far—so far from home! What was it that brought back to her mind the very inflection of her grandmother's voice, a lifetime ago, as she stood, so tall above the two little children on the woodbine-hung veranda, and said: "They always shine with a steady light."

"O Archie!" she murmured, sadly,—"O Archie! If I had only been half as true and steady as you—one half as true and steady!"

CHAPTER XV

TOM'S LETTER

"Why comes temptation but for man to meet
And master and make crouch beneath his foot?"

PROBABLY no one would have been more amazed than Archie, if he had known that Katherine had been drawing comparisons between them, favorable to himself. For no one knew as Archie did, by what devious and doubtful paths he had lured his feet away from the one pitfall his soul dreaded.

His code of morals was as easy now as it had always been. He had never taken life seriously enough to embarrass himself with hard-and-fast rules of conduct. If his deflections from the prescribed course had hitherto betrayed him into no very deep or defiling mire of iniquity, it was less because of any strenuousness of the moral sense than because his instincts were essentially refined, essentially those of a gentleman.

There had been times when, as Paul suspected, he had lived pretty hard; but these periods were never of long duration. They were usually a form of evasion. Yet even when he found himself in mental or emotional straits, he was quite as likely to seek a harmless issue as a harmful one. He oftener took to the woods than to the wine-cup, and his seasons

of conviviality, when they did occur, were usually passed in decent society. If his tastes had been low, his life would scarcely have risen above their level. As it was, while not entirely guiltless of deviations from the straight and narrow path, he did not find such vagaries sufficiently to his taste for frequent indulgence.

In Paris, however, from the moment of his arrival there in the new rôle of comforter in ordinary to poor Winny, he found himself confronted with an entirely new situation. For the first time in his life he was forced to do persistent violence to his own sensibilities, because, for the first time in his life, he was unable to run away. It was a predicament he would not voluntarily have faced,—one which he had, in fact, hitherto consistently avoided. If, during the three years of Winny's sojourn in Europe, he had made no effort to meet her, it was because he had not had the least desire to do so. He had never in his life submitted to unnecessary pain; and, when her summons came, he heartily wished himself in another hemisphere.

Those two weeks had been, as he graphically expressed it, "a good deal of a chore." He had found himself as susceptible as ever to the personal charm of his old love, and, if he was somewhat less blind than he had formerly been to her imperfections of character, they scarcely made him like her less. It was not an ideal he had fallen in love with at the most impressionable period of his life,—it was a flesh-and-blood girl, with a face, a voice, a manner, that his nature responded to, because it was set to just that key and no other. Moreover, if the Winny he found in Paris was somewhat jangled and out of tune, he was well aware that his hand had the power to restore the broken harmony, to wake again the slumbering sweetness of

her spirit, so long denied. And because he did not dare follow the dictates of his own heart,—because he trusted her even less than he trusted himself,—he became as restless, as unsatisfactory, as—dissipated—as she charged him with being. Just in so far as he felt himself compelled to be chary of his hours with her, was he lavish of outside distractions. There were men of his acquaintance in Paris who knew its glittering resources by heart, and nothing loth were they to do the honors of the city in his behalf. He had found distraction, but he had not liked it; he had eluded Winny, but he felt that he had done so clumsily, and he was glad to be gone.

"How enchanting Paris is!" Katherine cried, as they drove to the station through the fresh spring morning. It was Sunday, and all the world was out in holiday attire, gay and sparkling as only a Paris populace can be.

"Matter of taste," Archie rejoined. "I hate it, myself."

"Do you?"—and Katherine gave him a quick, inquiring glance. His face, exposed to the uncompromising out-of-door light, did not look right. She felt sure he had not slept. Well,—neither had she. It was Winny who had slept, and slept so late that she had missed Archie's good-bye call. Had Archie felt it, the discourtesy, the ingratitude of it? Katherine longed to make good Winny's lapse of manners,—to tell him how dear and fine he had been. It would be news to him too, for he might be trusted never to suspect it himself.

"I don't wonder you dislike Paris, this time," she remarked, easily. "I don't wonder you have found it a chore! Poor Winny is not herself just now."

"Oh, yes, she is;—that 's just exactly what she is!" he declared. "And of course she has been pretty trying,—but not in the way you think. I don't in the least mind her little digs. They 're all on top. It 's what does n't come to the surface that one gets afraid of. Why, Katherine, I 've been so rattled sometimes that I 've —well—never mind. I hate Paris! It 's—a rocky place when you 've lost your bearings!"

"I should say if anyone had ever kept his bearings it was you, Archie," she exclaimed, warmly. "Winny ought to be eternally grateful to you."

"No," he protested, with evident dejection. "I have n't done it well. I had n't the nerve. It has been a wretched fiasco."

"A fiasco that most of us would be proud of," she persisted.

"Oh, no! There 's nothing to be proud of; it had to be—Paris against Winny! I tell you, Katherine," he went on, excitedly—he was clearly a trifle off his balance this morning—"I tell you, if I had sat holding hands all day the way she would have liked—it might have been a comfort to her too, poor little thing!—but, if I had done that, it would have ended in my picking her up and carrying her off to the ends of the earth!"

"Yes, dear; but you did n't."

She would not take it too seriously, lest he should repent his frankness; but she knew all that he meant. Indeed, she could best measure the compulsion his elastic nature had undergone, by the force of the rebound. He, who so rarely talked of himself, even to her, seemed eager for confession. Did he think that sins that he could even hint of to Katherine must after all be venial?

"No, I did n't! But I paid high for exemption. And—I tell you what, these Paris streets don't look so pretty to me as they do to you!"—and his chin dropped, while he glanced mistrustfully, from under scowling brows, at the holiday throng.

Was Winny right? Was Archie really changed? Was he—not improved? Was he—dissipated? Had he been squandering himself as a brutal horsebreaker will overdrive a spirited colt which he cannot otherwise subdue? Alas, he looked it! She heard it, too, in the tension of his voice,—she had felt it already in the laxness of his grasp.

"Never mind, dear," she said, gently, and without undue or alarming emphasis. "When we have our little trip next month, you and I, there won't be any more nightmares—for either of us."

"Nightmares? Nightmares for either of us? Why, Katherine! Do you have them too?"

"Sometimes," she said,—and there was a subtle inflection in her voice that touched him instantly. "Everybody does, I suppose. But—I am counting upon you to drive them away for me. Oh, Archie!" she cried, letting the eloquence of sincerity have its way, "Oh, Archie! it will be such a comfort to have someone to depend upon—after all these years!"

He had turned suddenly grave, with a self-possessed, responsible gravity.

"I 'm not accustomed to playing prop," he said, quietly; "but I believe I might take a brace, even at this late day, for your sake, Katherine!"

And Katherine knew that for once she had not erred in following the promptings of her heart.

The echo of Archie's talk, the echo of his mood, abode with her on her return drive, and it was only in

the still deeper recesses of consciousness that her mind recurred to that other poor fellow across the seas to whom she had just mailed her unconditional summons.

Indeed there was something so invigorating in the mere thought of Tom, his strength and his rectitude, that she had found it a source rather of courage than of solicitude throughout this crisis. She believed him equal to any heroism, provided it were of the kind that called for action. His bereavement, the necessarily passive suffering of that, had shaken her profoundly; but she was far from a true understanding of the sacrifice she was now demanding of him. It was his duty to come to Winny; it was his duty to comfort and protect her. This she knew, with a positive knowledge that left no margin for doubt. If, then, the simple question of right and wrong was established to her own satisfaction,—now, when she was in a better position than he to judge,—she had only to communicate the truth to him. To that end had she forced this great solution; to that end had he encouraged her action. And what remained for him, once in possession of the truth, but to be guided by it? He would suffer? Ah, yes! They must both suffer, now and always. Such was their destiny. But no suffering, not even this—not even this!—should betray them into forfeit of their faith in one another.

Yet, if Katherine, with all her insight, all her sympathy, quickened by a surpassing love and tenderness, failed to measure the severity of the blow she was dealing through that terrible little letter, it was not that she overestimated Tom's strength of character, but rather that she totally misconceived the attitude of mind in which he was awaiting it. As a

matter of fact, so convinced was he of the utter callousness of Winny's nature, so certain of the disillusionment which Katherine must meet with, that he was looking forward, almost without misgiving, to the outcome of the experiment. He did not of course anticipate an immediate surrender of judgment on her part; he did not expect her to perceive at once, even when in possession of the facts, the justice of his own deductions. But he was far from apprehending any such ultimatum as was on its way to him.

When Katherine was gone, when the last sight of her, standing, serene and confident, on the deck of the steamer, had vanished in the distance, he had merely possessed his soul in patience.

"I do hope the trip will be a great success," Uncle Theodore had remarked, as the two men walked down the long, draughty freight house, and out into the noisy street.

"I hope it may," Tom had rejoined, fervently. "I hope it may be a success in every particular."

The weeks that followed were busy ones, for he put in an amount of work that would have made a day-laborer stare. But when he was alone with his pipe and his books he made no special effort to distract his mind. He read a good deal, but also he indulged in prolonged ponderings. He thought much and tenderly of Arthur, and with a manly acceptance of the pain of it all that was far as possible removed from that distrust of emotional disturbance which he had entertained in the old days, when the thought of Katherine assailed him. He allowed his mind to linger with unspeakable love and sadness on all those slight incidents, those trifling looks and acts of the child, that acquire such pathos when they have ceased

to be. Nor did he shrink from the memory of those last days and nights of agonized hope, of intolerable despair. When he had closed his book he would sit until deep into the night, brooding upon the pictures that were graven in his heart forever, pictures of the suffering child, and of the tender, unwearying devotion that had sustained the pitiful weakness, and soothed the cruel pain. And always his thought of Katherine was as the thought of his own.

He did not dwell upon that hour of strenuous conflict,—he hardly stayed his mind upon the great admission of their previous meeting. His love for her so possessed him, his knowledge of her love for him so filled the whole horizon of his thoughts, that he hardly remembered that there had ever been any question, any doubt.

Yet, absorbing as was his sense of possession,—of that possession which makes existence a great and harmonious thing,—his visions of the future were singularly indefinite. A certain austere loyalty to his pledge to Katherine restrained him from undue assumption. He, the always practical, the always efficient, moulder of his own fortunes, found himself refraining from taking the initiative, here, where everything was at stake. He had given his word to Katherine; he had sworn to be her faithful squire. He would not, even in his innermost thoughts, assume a control of their common destinies which he had conceded once for all to her. Bye and bye, when he had attained his freedom, and when Winny was in the full and manifest enjoyment of hers,—then—well—that would be one step accomplished. That step was his to take. And after? As Katherine had asked—after? He might have to wait for years. There were

depths in Katherine's nature that he knew he had not sounded; there might be undreamed-of reluctances on the one hand, and wrestlings on the other, that he dared not think upon. But some day,—some day—those eyes would speak again;—some day he should come to his own.

Tom was a patient man, and the time did not seem long while he waited for Katherine's letter. In fact, it was there before he had really begun to look for it. He found it in his letter-box when he arrived at his lodgings after dinner one April evening. He took it out, and scrutinized it, carefully, noting the clear, flowing hand he had always approved, and thinking how he should never again hate the Paris postmark. She must have written at once. Would she be surprised, he wondered, as he passed up his four flights of stairs, that he had not written meanwhile? No; he knew better than that; she would not have wished it.

So, she had seen Winny, he thought, as he filled and lit his pipe and pulled up a chair to the drop-light. He was not eager for his pipe, but this letter from Katherine was no light matter, to be seized upon precipitately. It must be read slowly and carefully. The things she would say would not be in themselves weighty; it was what she left unsaid that would call for consideration. He must read between the lines.

He broke the seal and drew the letter from the envelope, remembering that hers had been the last hand to touch that small white sheet of paper.

It was a short letter,—only one page. Of course! There would be but little to say at first.

And now he began to read.

Why did the first words give him pause? Supposing Archie was there? What was that to him? But

—"Winny had sent for him in her sorrow." So—Winny had made Katherine believe in her sorrow. She had seduced her better judgment from the outset! The old boyish spirit of altercation with Katherine seized him. He had thought she had more sense than that!

"But he could not do much,—neither can I." Of course not! How could there be any point of contact between the mind of Katherine and the mind of Winny,—between the real and the sham,—between the noble and the ignoble?

And then, suddenly, the running commentary ceased, as the pulsebeat ceases when the heart stops.

"It is you she wants, it is you she needs, Tom, and I told her I was sure you would come."

Tom took his pipe from his mouth and laid it on the table, very carefully, with the bowl over the edge that it should not burn the cloth. And then he read the letter again. Not because he had not fully understood it. He was neither dazed nor bewildered; he was hardly surprised. It was almost as if he had anticipated its tenor. There was something about it as inevitable as death, as useless to contend against. "I told her I was sure you would come."

Tom felt as if he were caught in some horrible machine that knew no more of any resistance on his part than the lacerating steel knows of the resistance of the nerves,—all his force of will, all his fighting energies, set at naught.

For hours he sat with the letter in his hand, while a deliberate clock in the corner, a clock that had told the hour of his birth, calmly ticked away the minutes of his anguish. He should not submit. Well? Neither does the nerve submit when severed by the

steel. He should not go to Winny. But what mattered that? What was Winny, more than the handle to the hand, by means of which the steel is wielded?

The room was perfectly still excepting for the ticking and the striking of the clock which seemed to be of the opinion that the hours were passing. Tom began wondering, dully, whether he need ever move again. He believed you could bear things better if you kept perfectly still. And, then, suddenly, without any apparent inducing cause, his pipe reversed itself and emptied the dead ashes over his boot.

Tom rose, and carefully brushed the ashes off; and then, as the surface of the leather remained clouded, he got out his blacking brush and polished off the spot. After that he went for a walk.

It was a beautiful night, mild and balmy, with a sky full of stars. As he closed the house door behind him and passed down the steps he remembered that he had left his latch-key on the table. All the better—so much less to carry! That letter in his breast pocket was load enough for anybody. Besides, it would be time enough to come back when the house was astir.

Without any special premeditation, he bent his steps out of the city toward the road that led to Camwood; and when that familiar highway was fairly entered upon, he found that he was beginning to think consecutively. And why not? He had been rather dodging thought, but after all, he knew much better how to deal with thoughts than with feelings.

Yet he got little comfort from his meditations. They were all of Katherine,—not of the Katherine that loved him,—only of the Katherine that he loved, and who now, for all time, was lost to him. He was not going back to Winny, but neither was Katherine

coming back to him. He knew her well,—the tenderness of her nature and its generosity,—the breadth and the insight of her sympathy. But he knew, too, that essential substratum of New England granite which its appreciators call conscience; and he knew that when her will was planted upon that she could be inexorable.

He should not go back to Winny, but Katherine would never come back to him. She had not written that letter carelessly. It was a simple, dispassionate little letter to the eye,—even to the eye of the mind; yet he knew it had been written with her heart's blood. The torturing passion of her tenderness for him, as it had revealed itself in her dumb admission, and, more clearly still in her spoken protest, had been better understood by him than by herself. It was not impatience at his own suffering that had prompted him to seek release from the chains he had himself forged;—it was the perception of her unmerited participation in his punishment. As he had said to her, in sober truth: "I deserved it, and I accepted it. But, you! There is no justice in it for you! I—even I—shall find salvation yet through your deservingness!" And now she had rejected, once and for all, that salvation, so rational, so just, which he was prepared to achieve.

He had arrived in front of Grandmother Day's house, and his foot paused from mere force of habit. But it would not do to enter at the gate. The night was so still that his steps, coming up the gravel walk, would rouse the house; and he would not skulk along the grassy borders. He passed on, and down the side street, whence he could look over the top of the high board fence into the garden.

He could see, in the starlight, the old grape-arbor where he had found Katherine with Archie on that Sunday noon when he had so resented the disappearance of the pigtails, and all the other changes which young ladyhood involved. There was the old quince-tree where she had paused, fresh and cool, after winning her impromptu race with him. What a flash of white teeth and laughing eyes she had turned upon him as he came up, two seconds behind her! Ah, those fatal two seconds by which the race is lost! It was typical of his whole life!

He thought of that little scene, and of a score of other trifling incidents that were no less distinct in his memory. Each one came to him like a waft of perfume from a lost Eden.

As he stood looking over that prosaic board fence, he suddenly remembered an execrable old daub of the *cinque cento* that he had seen in a foreign picture-gallery, the which portrayed our first parents, gazing dejectedly over the hedge into Paradise. He knew exactly how they felt,—those poor things whose creator had painted them all askew. To be sure, he reflected, there were two of them. That did not tally. And yet? if Katherine were to have her way, it would. For a sudden conviction had seized him, then and there, that Eve's other name was Winny!

Almost cheered by that little spurt of malice, Tom turned, and continued his walk. It took him quite out of the suburban district into the open country, and little by little the monotonous tramp, tramp of his feet on the highroad began to exercise a soothing effect upon his rasped sensibilities. The steady physical exertion was gratefully stupefying to his overwrought mind.

"I don't know when I 've enjoyed a walk so much," he caught himself thinking,—and that brought him up short, face to face with reality.

He looked about him and, finding by certain landmarks which he had come to know in his rides with Katherine, that he had walked a long distance, he turned his steps toward a deserted railway station, and sat down on a bench outside, to wait for an inward-bound train. The station-master, arriving at six o'clock to open the doors, found him there, asleep; when, however, the wayfarer roused himself and demanded a ticket it became evident that he was no tramp.

The one thing that Tom was afraid of in the days that followed was that he might yield,—that his better judgment might be overruled. He did not know just why he feared it, for he clearly perceived that what he did or left undone could have no effect upon the actual situation. Neither resistance nor acquiescence would substantially modify his status with Katherine. She would be gratified if he yielded, but, if he refused to yield, she would not therefore censure him. She would be the first to recognize his title to decide such a matter for himself. If he declined to be guided by her, she would respect him none the less. She would admit that he had as good a right as she to be governed by his own conscience rather than by that of another. As good a right as she? Yes; but no better. If he could count upon tolerance from her, it was but a measure of the tolerance she would exact of him. He had his own problems to deal with, as she had hers. She would never brook an interference that she would not offer.

Tom passed no more vagrant nights, nor did his

daily routine differ materially from its usual course. He did not mean that it ever should. He did not propose to undermine his health and reason with vain speculations and futile rebellions. His course was clear, and he was good at steering. There were storms ahead? Very well! He was conscious of sound timbers and a stout rudder.

Katherine's letter had come on a Monday evening,—that evening that seemed always like an anniversary, because it was on a Monday evening that little Arthur fell ill. On Saturday morning Tom awoke with the early light, and he remembered the day of the week. He had had a long and dreamless sleep, and he awoke refreshed. He felt that his brain was unusually clear, and the first thought that came to him associated itself with Arthur.

"Four days and five nights," he said to himself. "Just as long as it took Arthur to die!"

He wondered why he had said that;—he wondered what had been going on in his mind while he slept that dreamless sleep. And then he perceived that he was about to write to Katherine.

He got up and made a scrupulously careful toilet. If he was to write to Katherine,—at last,—it must be done decorously and in order. He had not thought of what he was going to say; he only knew that he was about to write.

He passed into the front room and drew up the shades; and then he flung open the window. It was a heavenly spring morning, soft and spicy even here in the narrow city street. There was an ivy growing on the wall of the house. As he leaned forward to breathe the good air he chanced to look down, and he saw that the tendrils of the vine had almost reached

the sill of his window. The vigorous growth had worked its way up three stories since first he came there to live, that year when Katherine was abroad, —when Archie was getting engaged to Winny.

He reached down and picked a pale new leaf and stuck it in his buttonhole; after which he went to his desk and pulled out a sheet of paper. He regarded it with a good deal of interest for a few minutes, and presently, with a sort of tense composure, he began writing.

"KATHERINE":

"Seven years ago I refused you the one grace you had ever asked of me, and the just gods pushed me down into hell. You shall not be denied again. But the gods are no longer just. It is not to them I yield, but to you.

"TOM."

He read the letter through several times, but he could find nothing to alter. And when he had sealed and stamped it he carried it to the main post-office and dropped it into the box.

After he had had his breakfast, he walked to the office of the Transatlantic Cable Company, and dispatched a message to Winny. He wondered why all this should be so easy. Yet he knew perfectly well why it was easy. It was simply that the time was ripe. And an hour later, as he issued from the office of the Steamship Company, where he had engaged his passage, he said again, as he had said on first awaking:

"Four days and five nights,—just as long as it took Arthur to die!"

CHAPTER XVI

MONT ST. MICHEL

"Oh, which were best, to roam or rest?
The land's lap or the water's breast?"

"ALL loss, all pain, is particular; the universe remains to the heart unhurt."

These words of Emerson's were not inscribed in the *Guide St. Michel* which Katherine held absently in her hand, but the luminous spirit of them seemed brooding visibly on the face of the vast *Grève* as she gazed dreamily down upon it from a vine-embowered terrace far up on the precipitous side of the Rock.

It was high noon of their first day at Mont St. Michel, where they had arrived, Katherine and Archie, the previous evening, just in time to hurry to the ramparts and watch the tide come in. Now it was dead low water, and it appeared that the landward view across the wide sweep of sand was as fair and as enchaining as the more famous sight for which so many thousands make the pilgrimage to this ocean shrine.

The travellers had been up soon after sunrise in order to row around the Mount while the tide served; and then, after breakfast, they had spent the morning in fortress and abbey, climbing to the topmost perch available, penetrating to the deepest dungeons;

wandering among the huge supporting pillars of the crypt, or sunning themselves in the windowless arches of the refectory. It was the off season, and the guide had been indulgent to their whims. They had returned by way of the ramparts to an eleven-o'clock omelette, and as they climbed the eighty-odd steps, hewn out of the face of the rock, that led from kitchen and dining-room of the famous inn to one of its high-perched dependencies, Archie had cried:

"I say, Katherine! What a traveller you are! I had no idea a girl was equal to such a pace as we have been keeping up ever since we left Paris!"

"I 'm very strong, you know," she had answered, "and horribly insatiate."

Of a truth, the zest with which Katherine had carried out this somewhat taxing programme, her freshness and vigor now, after several weeks of unintermittent sight-seeing, were not a little gratifying to Archie, who had imagined that he should have to take an occasional "brace" of patience in the new rôle of "prop" which he had impulsively assumed. They had not been a week among the *châteaux* of Touraine, however, before he had discovered his error; and he was even sometimes a trifle sceptical as to that nightmare which his sister had apparently improvised out of the kindness and solicitude of her heart.

And yet—there were moments when some trifling change of countenance or turn of phrase on Katherine's part recalled, like an echo, the subtle inflection of her voice, the wistful look of her eyes, as she had cried, out of the brightness of the gay Paris streets: "Oh, Archie! it will be such a comfort to have someone to depend upon after all these years!"

Well, doubtless she did depend upon him,—he would assure himself, with a pleasant sense of satisfaction,—though not with the feminine weakness that would have been more obviously, more superficially appealing.

That they had been travelling hard, Archie knew, for he had observed in himself a quite unprecedented inclination to early hours which could only be accounted for on the theory of unusual fatigues; and, since Katherine was holding out so famously, he was glad to draw the inference that she would be anything but a drag upon their movements in the coming year, which they had mutually dedicated to far-reaching plans of globe-trotting.

"I suppose you would like to repeat the exercises of the morning straight over again," he had remarked, teasingly, as Katherine perched on the stone parapet of the terrace, and sat looking down among the huddled roofs and gay hanging gardens below.

"Nothing better," she had rejoined, with exaggerated seriousness. "I 've not had half enough."

"Meanwhile, do you think you could curb your energies for a few seconds, while I go and unpack the Norway guide-books? It 's early yet, and I, for one, should n't mind loafing for an hour."

"Oh, do get the guide-books, and—here—leave me the *Guide St. Michel.*"

But Katherine did not open the book. Instead, she took a few turns, the length of the terrace, with the little paper volume in her clasped hands behind her back, while the cool May sunshine flecked her hair and dress. And presently she dropped into a chair, facing the view, and fell into a reverie which gradually became articulate in those confident words

of the New England sage: "All loss, all pain, is particular; the universe remains to the heart unhurt."

Her eye traversed the wide reaches of sand, crossed only by watery serpentine channels, between which the deep green of some amphibious growth glimmered bright and yet elusive. How the level yellow floor melted away at last in the golden mist, scarce seeming to reach the wide curve of the low-lying Breton coast, broken here and there by a single tall tree or a sharp roof that only served to accentuate the insubstantiality of this vision of the mainland.

Moving cloud shadows were enacting a ghostly drama on that treacherous waste, fraught, as she knew, with quicksands. How nobly the great Mount towered above them! What a rock of refuge it formed, there among the shifting, treacherous sands! Katherine wondered why this seemed like a loftier vantage-ground than many a summit of ten times its height,—and at once the answer came. It was the isolation—the detachment. It was like looking from some lonely height of personal experience off to the great mainland of life. There it lay, out there, not remote, but utterly apart; the actual, the difficult, the all but intolerable, floating in a golden mist of beauty.

And little by little Katherine forgot the palpable dream spread out before her, while her mind lost itself in that inward vision it was so fair a symbol of. For to-day she was sufficiently at peace for quiet contemplation; to-day she could venture to face the immediate past,—that near, that poignant past, which may sometimes be so much more appalling than the worst menace of the future.

To-day, for the first time, she could think tran-

quilly and reasonably of these things,—of the weeks she had spent alone with Winny,—of the sharp misgivings, the desolating compunctions, that had visited her, when, not infrequently, the Winny she so ardently desired to believe in rang false as any counterfeit coin. She could think now of those torturing doubts, for their chief sting had been removed,—not by any fundamental rehabilitation of Winny, but by the simple, sensible acquiescence of Tom. She could think now of the days immediately preceding his arrival, when the words of his letter were knocking at her heart like the admonition of an accusing angel;—when Winny clung to her and would not let her go, until he should come.

All this she could bear, because she had also the memory of Tom's face as she had seen it that one evening which they all three spent together, before Archie came and carried her away;—of the new look graven there, the dignity, the significance it had gained, and which Winny must have dimly recognized, when she cried, "Why Tom, how good looking you have grown!"

To-day she dared remember his gentleness with Winny,—the chivalrous reserve of his manner with herself; she dared recall even the pain of those remembering eyes when Winny, no longer fearful of Arthur's name, plied him—and in her presence—with questions about the boy. All this she dared reflect upon because she could stay her soul on the memory of certain words he had said to her, and to her alone.

In answer to Winny's inquiries Tom had reported of the voyage, that the sea had been a mill-pond,—just the sort of sea he proposed to secure for their home trip! And Winny, enamoured for the moment

of the thought of home, and of care and of kindness, had said, very prettily, that she should try to be a better sailor this time. And they had talked of Rome, whither they were to go in the interim, Tom declaring that he was almost as eager as Winny for a sight of the Coliseum.

And presently Winny had bethought herself of Mélanie and of some small task she wished to set her, and had left Katherine and Tom alone together in the little pink satin *salon*.

When Katherine came to that point in her meditations an unreasoning contraction of the heart seized her. It was as if a rude hand had swept away the golden haze off there and left some grim headland of the coast laid bare to the sight. How she had hastened to be the first to speak and to say the most commonplace thing she could think of!

"I am glad you had such a good voyage," she had remarked, aware though she was that such considerations were a matter of complete indifference to Tom.

And Tom's eyes had met hers, straight and clear, piercing the artificiality of her foolish speech, of her foolish attitude.

"Katherine," he had said, with a deep, straightforward sincerity: "It was a hideous storm from start to finish. But we made the port, and—we know what we owe the pilot."

"What 's that you two are talking about?" came Winny's voice at the door. "You look as solemn as two owls."

"Katherine was asking about the voyage," Tom answered, quietly, as he placed Winny's chair nearer the light,—for she had brought her embroidery with her,—"I was telling her what a capital pilot we had."

"I wonder," said Winny, "that captains should need a pilot when they are coming into their own port."

"It seems they do," he returned, while his eyes sought Katherine's, grave and steady and significant. "I suppose, in some kinds of weather, the home port looks very strange, and—there are sunken rocks that only a pilot knows."

Then Katherine, looking into those steady eyes, knew that she had been right about Tom,—that she had not overestimated either his strength or his conscience;—that if it had been granted her to give the one turn to the rudder that avoided the sunken rock, he was ready now to steer his own course, unaided and unurged. And with the inconsistency of poor human nature, her heart sank at the thought; and many a time in the weeks that followed, when she was journeying with Archie in the heart of sunny Touraine, a cruel pang had seized her at the recollection of what Tom had achieved, of how she might never again be called upon to make a sacrifice for him.

But to-day it seemed that that selfish pang was past. The pain remained,—the old, old pain would abide with her as long as she lived;—that she knew. And after? Ah, heaven would not be heaven without it!—But to-day, at last, she had reached a height where all that was ugly, all that was egotistical and narrow and unworthy was lost in that golden haze which may sometimes brood on the high noon of endeavor.

At the sound of Archie's approaching step she looked up, and saw him crossing the flagstones before the house. What a gallant figure he made, here, on the mighty Rock, as yonder in the glamour and

poetry of old Touraine! As he came toward her, through the sunshine, with his light step, the red guide-book in his hand lending a touch of color to the picture, he seemed to her like a figure of old romance, lingering yet among the relics of a knightly past. Ah!—she told herself, with a strong effort to believe it,—life would never be a blank while she had that figure to give it point and meaning! How well he was looking! How his face had cleared, and how in tune he seemed! She was glad, after all, that he had left the life there in Rome, glad they were to have a year together, with the world before them where to choose. He did enjoy it; there was no doubt of that. He had not appeared so to relish anything for—seven years. Oh, they would be happy—they would be happy, they two, in spite of nightmares!

"I stopped to write a line to Paul," Archie was saying, as he drew near. "I left it open in case you should have any message for him."

"Why, yes," Katherine returned, bringing her thoughts with some difficulty to bear upon the subject. "You must give him my congratulations on the new chair."

"Shall I tell him you are sorry it 's going to take him away from Boston?"

"No—oh, no! You need n't say that! I think it 's perhaps quite as well for him." Her eyes were following a moving wagon that seemed fairly to creep along the causeway, so deceptive was the featureless distance.

Archie had seated himself on the parapet, and was apparently lost in contemplation of the view. Presently:

"How bully it was, seeing the tide come in yesterday!" he remarked.

"Yes; how it raced! It will be half an hour later this evening; just about at sunset."

"It must be refreshing to that poor old *Grève* when it does come! I say, Katherine,"—and he suddenly fixed her face with unaccustomed earnestness,—"don't answer unless you like, but—had Paul anything to do with your nightmare?"

"Paul?" she repeated, wondering. It required an effort of the mind to remember that she had ever stood in any particular relation with Paul, so had the thought of him receded into the dim, inconsequent past. "Why, no! I hardly ever think of Paul nowadays,—excepting to remember how much we owe him,—you and I. My nightmares are all of my own contriving," she added as she came and sat beside Archie on the stone coping, and drew in an appreciative whiff from his cigarette. "I 'm not always as manageable as I ought to be at my age. That 's all."

"At your age! Twenty-eight is n't any age!"

"It 's the best I have," she jested. But Archie was too serious for that.

"Paul would say that you were never manageable at any age," he persisted, studying his sister's face with grave interest.

"Perhaps now he sees that it was better so," she answered, musingly. "At any rate, he 's getting to be so distinguished that I don't believe he bothers much about me." The logic of the remark was a trifle obscure; but logic had always proved but a broken reed where Paul was concerned.

"I wonder why you could n't fancy him," Archie

speculated. The writing of his letter had brought Paul so vividly before him that his mind could not detach itself at once from the subject.

"I 'm sure I don't know, for he was everything a girl could ask; and I did try, I did indeed—on your account, Archie!"

"As if trying were any good!" Then, with a sudden change of mood, which was refreshing to them both: "It seems as if the brother and sister game were the only one you and I were up to, Katherine,—and I swear we 'll make a go of that!"

"We always have!" she answered, with a confident little smile. "Only we never had half a chance before."

"Well, we 've got it now, and it 's my opinion that we 're going to make a howling success of it. If we don't ransack the ages, spoil the climes, in the next twelve months, I lose my bet!"—and, suddenly quitting his improvised seat, Archie fell upon *Murray's Hand-Book of Norway*, and began reading unpronounceable Scandinavian names, with a judicious combination of Italian vowels and German consonants that would have baffled the understanding of a Norseman.

It was very delightful,—this guide-book work with all it promised. To Archie, especially, who had joyfully thrown off the depression and the agitations of the Paris experience, this freedom to make plans, and the equal freedom to break them, was truly congenial; and it was thanks to his taste for the impromptu in travel that they were snatching a bit of Normandy and Brittany on their northward trip. Owing to this change of plan their letters had doubtless been accumulating for ten days past in the London lodg-

ings where brother and sister were to join the Delanos on their way to the Midnight Sun, and it was not until yesterday that they had telegraphed Munroe in Paris to forward once to Mont St. Michel.

"I shall quite hate to have the letters come," Archie remarked, as he closed his *Murray*. "I 'm so afraid they 'll break the spell!"

"It does n't seem as if anything could do that," Katherine answered, dreamily. "I can't even make those preposterous names you are mispronouncing seem like plain prose. I believe if our letters were to arrive this moment—"

"*Pardon, Monsieur! Pardon, Mademoiselle! Voilà un dépêche!*" and a harmless bit of blue paper was placed in Archie's hands.

"What the dickens!" he exclaimed, absently extracting a small coin from his pocket; and then, observing that the messenger was an elderly woman, much out of breath, substituting therefor a larger piece.

Was the spell broken? Or was it only intensified by the words he read?—so unreal,—so incredible were they!

"If possible, come at once.

"Tom."

Archie handed the little paper to Katherine. They looked at one another, dazed, bewildered; and then, swiftly but mechanically, they went about their preparations for departure.

It was not until they sat, half an hour later, the only passengers in the old black becurtained barge, driving the slow length of the causeway toward Pontorson, that they lent their minds to speculation. Archie was the first to speak.

"I suppose," he muttered, half under his breath,—"I suppose it means that Winny is ill,—dying, perhaps,—who knows?"

"Oh, not that!" Katherine cried, in terror at hearing her own shrinking thought put into words. "Not that, Archie! Anything but that!"

CHAPTER XVII

WINNY'S MECCA

"Good to forgive;
Best to forget!
Living, we fret;
Dying, we live."

TOM, meanwhile, in his own unpretending common-sense fashion, had been making the best of life as it presented itself for his acceptance. It was not what he had so confidently demanded at the hands of fate;—it was not even what his deliberate judgment, his unaided conscience, had dictated. But it was what had been finally revealed to him as right, and therefore inevitable. In obeying Katherine's summons, to be sure, he had acted under a relentless compulsion, and that coercion of the will which had been practised upon him could scarcely have accomplished itself without evoking the "hideous storm" he had so narrowly weathered. Thanks, however, to a tough moral fibre no less than to the clear vision of the pilot, he had made his port.

As the time drew near when he was to meet Winny he had found himself regarding her in the old light,—that of a primary obligation,—and to a recognized obligation Tom had never yet failed to respond. For years he had schooled himself in a loyalty of life as

impeccable as the loyalty of his business dealings; for years he had forced himself to recognize in this relation, so rashly assumed, so bitterly repented of, a bond as authoritative as any which he was capable of contracting. If he had brought himself to believe that the contract might, by mutual consent, be honorably annulled, it was because he had, under the stress of an overmastering experience, lost sight of the fact that he was the one responsible party to it. He had honestly believed, he believed still, that Winny might easily be persuaded to set her hand to its dissolution; but Katherine, with the swift insight which is often surer than logic, had seized at once upon the weak point in his argument. In the very heat of contest she had perceived that all his careful reasoning must be brought to naught by Winny's weakness, by Winny's need.

In a word, as Tom would now have put it, the other party to the bond was unfit to act in the matter; to induce her acquiescence would be like taking advantage of a minor whose interests he was bound to guard. And hence it was that he met Winny, not only prepared for the pettiness, the artificiality, the instability of purpose and of feeling, which had so tormented Katherine's conscience, but prepared also to find in these very defects an added motive for that acceptance of the inevitable to which he was steeled.

Each day that he passed in Winny's society made more manifest her need of protection. He saw her, as it were. unnerved, unbalanced, by the bit of sorrow, the bit of loneliness, the bit of pique, she had undergone. He knew well that her sorrow was not deep, and he believed that pique was as dignified a name as her newly awakened interest in Archie deserved.

But he did not therefore underestimate the power of these alternating emotions upon a nature correspondingly weak and vacillating.

It was all a matter of proportion. He perceived that her fanciful, intermittent mourning for the child was as severe a strain upon her lighter nature as his own profound bereavement had imposed upon his; and he felt assured that her childish hankering for Archie's affection was a more serious menace to her than the master passion of his love for Katherine could ever prove to him.

Once clear in his own mind, then, that Winny was still, and must henceforth be, his paramount obligation, he resumed the old relation with the simplicity and the sincerity which were characteristic of him,—and with that generous admission of its justice which was so reassuring to Katherine's harassed soul.

And so they parted, only more faithful friends than ever,—these two who had come so near to attaining the one gift that is greater than friendship;—they parted, each pledged tacitly, but with all the force of a strong will and an indomitable conscience, to live as if they had known naught of that better gift.

And Tom and Winny journeyed southward, in amity at least, and when they came to Rome they tried at least to think, each in his own fashion, that their Mecca was reached at last.

For they had this in common,—that Tom, as well as Winny, had all his life dreamed of Rome. He had always had a predilection for the ancient Romans,—those manly, practical, executive conquerors of the world,—and he found much satisfaction in the tangible evidences of their power that met the eye in their

ancient capital. If the heart must be starved, the mind at least might be fed.

Indeed, Tom was not the man to reject such meagre compensation as offered. If he had had the misfortune to lose his right hand, it is safe to assume that he would scarcely have waited for the pain to moderate before taking his left under special training. He had lost something far more precious, more vital to his happiness than his right hand,—he felt himself maimed more cruelly than that,—and he was suffering still, suffering profoundly. But, meanwhile, here was Rome, here was the capital of the Cæsars, those men who put the world—including, doubtless, many a heartache—under their feet! And if there was anything the old records had to say to him, he was there to hear it.

He probably enjoyed his wanderings among the ruins and the excavations, the tombs and the desolated pleasure-grounds, none the less for the fact that he was mostly unaccompanied. There was something in Winny's personality that scarcely composed well with the hoary fragments of an heroic past. And yet, he rather wondered why, on the single occasion when she had consented to set foot within the Forum. That flower over there which had planted itself, heaven knew how, in the crevice of a fallen column, did but lend an added grace to the picture. The ragged little barefoot, sunning himself at the base of the Arch of Fabius, seemed as native to the spot as any fragment of antiquity with which the ground was strewn. Only Winny, in spite of her crape and her languor, in spite, too, of her flower-like face and form, made a small, shrill dissonance that grated upon those nerves which Tom would stoutly have denied the possession of.

It was when they drove together on the Pincian Hill, or in the Borghese Park, that the figure of Winny lent itself naturally to the scene; and the two never got on better than on these occasions when they were disporting themselves, in sufficient style to gratify Winny, behind a pair of horses and a coachman in livery.

It was at such a favorable moment as this, when their little victoria wound in the gay procession among the trees and the serried busts of the Pincian,—when, moreover, the Queen with her scarlet liveries had passed them, with a gracious acknowledgment of lifted hat and beaming smile,—that Tom ventured upon the subject of the return voyage. He had left things very much at loose ends, and he was impatient to get back.

"Yes, Winny," he agreed, good-naturedly,—"I think she really did mean that bow for us, and I only hope she appreciated that our intentions were equally flattering!"

"Oh, you need n't make fun!" Winny retorted, with a not unfriendly pout. "You care just as much for royalties as I do;—only you must have yours several million generations old! If you thought there was any chance of Julius Cæsar coming along, you 'd be the first to get down and let him walk over you!"

"I should like to have the chance!" Tom laughed. This was quite a sally for Winny; he was half inclined to think she was beginning to get an inkling.—"And, —speaking of Julius Cæsar,—have you ever been to Bar Harbor?"

"No! What has that to do with Julius Cæsar?" —and she gave him a look of quick suspicion.

"Nothing particular! But—I was thinking—if we should decide to go home early in July, how would you

like to spend the rest of the summer there? You might invite your mother to go with you."

"Why, yes! I think it would be very nice. I 've always wanted to go to Bar Harbor."

"Supposing you were to write and suggest it to your mother, so that she could arrange for it."

"Dear me! I wish I could have Katherine! She 's a great deal better company. I wonder whatever put it into her head to stay over here—just as I 'm going home! I suppose—"

"Well; it seems natural enough, now that she and Archie can get off together. Strikes me it 's a great scheme, their going to Greece and to Japan, and all the rest of it. I don't know when I 've heard of anything so jolly."

Winny glanced at her companion. The carriage had drawn up near the band-stand, and Tom's gaze, as his eye rested upon the dome of St. Peter's,—floating like a disembodied spirit above the city,—had grown quite remote and almost melancholy.

"It seems to me," Winny retorted, with her small, dry censoriousness—"it seems to me a dreadfully selfish thing to go travelling about for a whole year just for pleasure."

Tom's gaze returned from its little excursion, but Winny was not quick enough to catch the look that crossed his countenance.

"Oh, well!" he rejoined. "We can't expect all the world to be as domestic and generally exemplary as we married people."

"I do hate the word 'domestic'," Winny cried. "Don't you?"

"I do, indeed!" Tom admitted, with fervor. "I believe I was trying to make a joke!"

It had been about as near an approach to conversation as he had yet achieved with Winny, and it had, at least, the advantage of a concession gained. For it appeared that they were really to sail for home the last of June. Well, that was something to look forward to. Tom had not realized how homesick he was for his desk and that rather exasperating Harris. He wondered if the prodigal son, reduced to short rations, had not perhaps found himself smacking his lips over the husks!

And presently Winny tired of her Mecca, and became conscious of certain aching voids in her outfit which only Paris could supply;—with the result that they were quitting Rome to-morrow.

It was the middle of May, and Tom, nothing loth to take the first step toward home, fell in with all Winny's plans. Only, this last morning, he would leave her with Mélanie and her packing, while he went to have a look at a certain *Columbarium* that was emerging from a thousand years' burial outside the city walls.

He spent an hour there, wandering about in the hot sunshine, stooping now and then to pick up a fragment of ancient sculpture, until, presently, he came upon a bit of a baby foot, roughly modelled, rudely chipped,—the merest hint of a baby foot,—yet with such a strange, such a seizing resemblance to a little foot that had been to him one of the wonders of creation, only a short while ago, that his heart smote him at the sight.

"Could I buy that?" he asked of the guardian.

"That?" quoth the Italian, contemptuously. "But it is nothing—that! *Ecco, Signore!—Una piccola testa!*—almost complete, for five *lire*."

"I will give you five *lire* for this," Tom answered;—and he carried the little foot in his hand, as he retraced his steps toward the city gate.

He was walking, and the way was long,—but not too long. Somehow he felt more companioned than he had done in all that Roman visit. Now and again he would pause and examine the little foot, pondering upon many things.

How he used to dread Winny's influence over the child, he was thinking, as he trudged along the dusty road. How integral a part of his dissatisfaction with her, that dread had formed! Was that why he seemed less to do violence to himself in his relation with her, now, than in the old days? There was nothing more to dread for Arthur,—alas, nothing more! No frivolity, no disingenuousness, could contaminate the little comrade now. He was safe and far—ah, how far! Tom looked up at the great Italian sky. It seemed as high, as remote, as heaven. He lifted the little stone foot and pressed it surreptitiously to his cheek; and then, as he passed within the city walls, he hid it away in his breast pocket, and walked on, glad of the hard, cold pressure of it against his heart.

He did not mean to show the little foot to Winny. If she should not understand, he could not bear it, and —ah! how could he bear it, if she did understand!

It was close upon dinner-time when Tom reached the hotel, and Winny hated to be late. He looked in at their little parlor, to tell her not to wait for him, and Mélanie, hearing his step, came and met him at the door.

Madame was ill,—she was *souffrante*. Mélanie thought it was more than headache. She had seen Madame suffering,—but not like that; not true suffer-

ing. Would Monsieur go to her room, and see for himself?

Yes; it was—true suffering;—there could be no doubt of that. Tom recognized it on the instant, as that which Miss Hancock had feared for the girls,—that which he himself had feared for Arthur. It was the Roman fever.

In the days that followed, when, for a little while, the case appeared to be a light one, Tom meditated a good deal upon that somewhat hackneyed subject, the irony of fate. How everything had seemed to conspire to keep Winny out of Rome!—Miss Hancock, Grandmother Day, his own determination. But all the time fate was quietly, imperceptibly clearing the way for her. Miss Hancock as travelling companion, had been exchanged for himself—on the whole, the most improbable candidate for the position that could have been discovered. Then Archie's career had to be interrupted in order to circumvent Grandmother Day;—and deep down at the bottom of it all was the ultimate sacrifice,—Arthur's death. Because Arthur had died,—and Tom's hand stole to his breast pocket, and clasped the little stone foot,—because Arthur had died, Archie's career had been broken, and he, Tom, had found himself relegated once more to the incongruous rôle he had once for all blundered into.

His thoughts used to get a good deal involved in this labyrinth. There was nothing particularly consecutive about them,—only a general impression that, under fate, Winny was perhaps the most potent influence that had made itself felt in the lives of three apparently free agents.

That impression of her potency—under fate—got so strong, as he brooded over these tangled threads of

thought, that he was not quick to take alarm at the graver view of her case which doctor and nurse seemed inclined to.

The Signora, in spite of her apparent delicacy, had really an excellent constitution, Tom assured the good Sister; she had scarcely ever been really ill. And nurse and doctor, glad to keep up his courage, acquiesced in all his theories.

It was not until the patient grew gently delirious that Tom became anxious,—it was not until he stood beside her one day and perceived that she did not know him.

Tom was unaccustomed to illness; he had never but once witnessed the strange and disquieting phenomenon of a mind astray; and when he had assured himself that all association with his own personality had escaped that wandering intelligence, he wrote again to his cousins.

He had sent a line to Katherine the evening Winny was taken ill,—not to alarm her, but merely to report on a fact of general family interest. But to-day he wrote to Archie. He felt a curious aversion to confessing to Katherine that he had let Winny grow seriously ill on his hands.

That was the last letter he wrote; for, as the delirium increased, the name of Archie fell more and more often from the eager, fevered lips,—and so it was no longer easy to write to either of them about it. And now Winny had been ill ten days, the fever increasing in a steady flame, the name of Archie ever on her lips, —and always no gleam of recognition in her eyes for Tom.

"Will she live?" Tom asked, at last. He had not before admitted any doubt. The admission of a doubt

was like the admission of some horrible, mystical blood-guiltiness on his part. And yet, poor fellow!—the thought of Winny's death was as abhorrent to him as it had hitherto been inconceivable.—"Will she live?" he asked.

And the doctor, seeing him so moved,—this cold, reserved American,—could place but one interpretation upon it.

"Poor man!" he thought to himself. "It 's no wonder! she must have been a lovely creature!"

"Must have been!"—The doctor thought of her already in the past tense! And yet, for very pity, he looked Tom in the face and lied.

"I hope so," he answered. "There is really every hope. She is young,—not yet thirty, you say. And she has a good constitution—or so you tell me. Oh, there is every hope,—every possible hope!"

And Tom knew he lied. And when he could bear no more, he picked up his hat, and went out into the brilliant Roman sun, and telegraphed to Archie.

It did not occur to him that his letters might have failed to reach them. They were supposed to be settled in London by this time, and Munroe would be sure to forward; because he always carried out his own plans, he never questioned their having held to theirs.

He hated to use any unnecessary words,—to take the telegraph operators and bank clerks, all along the line, into his confidence. They would understand, Katherine and Archie. They knew she was ill,—they knew she was delirious. So he only wrote: "If possible, come at once." It looked so harmless—that little line—that he seemed hardly to mind it. And yet, how authoritative it would be! "If possible!"

As if anything could make it otherwise than possible! What if they did have to give up the Midnight Sun? There would always be time enough for that!

It used to seem to Tom, in those days when Winny did not know him, as if, at last, he knew Winny. He felt that now, for the first time in her life, she was sincere. And in the light of her sincerity he perceived that she had a soul. For years she had denied it, for years she had trodden it under foot, but now, in the extremity of her bodily weakness, the poor little mis-handled soul had come to its rights. And that soul was all Archie's.

"Archie!" she would moan—"Archie! Why don't you come? Why don't you say you 're sorry too! Archie!"

And Tom would sit watching there, in a shadowy corner of the room, while bitter, scorching tears,—tears he had never shed for Arthur, tears he had never shed for Katherine,—burned his cheek. And in those dark hours when that plaintive, persistent voice would not, could not, cease, Tom judged his own soul and found it guilty,—guilty of a blindness that was criminal, because it need not have been,—guilty of a levity that in him of all others was not to be condoned,—guilty of a treachery to his own better nature that had involved four lives in disaster. Nay,—was not Arthur as much a victim as any of them all?

But at that his soul revolted. Arthur was no victim! That dear young life had been its own best justification,—happy, wholesome, beneficent,—quickening the life of each and all with whom it came in contact. A short life? Yes! But the more perfect, the more rounded, the more unsullied for that! And little by little, with the thought of the child as a guid-

ing light, Tom groped his way back to the day,—a dreary and ominous day, but with light enough to walk by, light enough to live by, penetrating the low-hanging clouds.

And when, on the evening that Katherine and Archie were due, the delirium yielded, he could meet the wandering, uncertain eyes that recognized him at last, with the old, simple kindliness that the poor child had been learning to depend upon.

"Am I going to die, Tom?" she had whispered,—yet as if she hardly understood what she was saying.

"Not if I can help it, Winny," he returned, folding the thin little hand in his own firm grasp,—"not if I can help it!"

"And you were always so strong," she murmured, feebly; "so strong,—so strong!"

She slept a little from time to time, and she was sleeping when, at last, Tom heard the sound of wheels stopping in the street below.

"Are we in time?" Katherine asked,—for the sight of Tom's face had confirmed her worst foreboding.

"Just in time," he answered.

As Katherine drew near the bed, noiselessly, as one fain must move at such an hour, the eyes of the patient opened, and fixed themselves imploringly upon her.

"Katherine," she whispered, with a last flickering eagerness,—"Katherine,—where 's Archie?"

"He 's here, dear."

And Archie came, and, sinking upon one knee beside the bed, he lifted her gently in his arms.

"Archie!" she cried. "Archie!"

"Yes, darling! Yes—it 's I!"

"O Archie! Don't leave me!"

"Never any more, Winny! Never any more!"

. . . .

A little later, when Archie turned, a bowed and broken figure, to leave the room, he came face to face with Tom.

"Forgive me, Tom," he muttered, huskily.

"And me!" Tom answered, as their hands met in a grip that neither would ever forget.

And the nurse, seeing Katherine the most composed of them all, remarked, as she made the sign of the cross:

"It was well that the *fratello* arrived in time!"

"Yes," said Katherine, reverently. "It was well."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BIRD OF TIME

"Waft of soul's wing!
What lies above?"

THE ineffable tenderness of death was never more gently manifest than when it touched and stilled the futile fever that had been the life of Winny Gerald. Even as the chrysm of immortality seemed visibly to rest upon the lovely sleeping face, purifying and exalting it to an unearthly beauty,—so the thought of her which dwelt in the hearts of those whom she had so wantonly, yet in a measure so unwittingly, wronged, was transfigured in the light of an inviolable loyalty.

There was a hush upon them all during the little time that they remained together,—a reserve, a remoteness, in which they moved as in a dream.

And no one felt this mystical compulsion more deeply than Tom. When, a few days later, he bade them good-bye, Katherine knew that he was still estranged from life, still estranged from her,—most of all, indeed, estranged from her. And she blessed him for the remoteness, the unrelatedness, of his look, when his eyes met hers at parting. She could not have borne it otherwise,—she, whose soul too was possessed of Winny, as the ear is possessed of one

haunting strain of music that seems to have hushed the very pulse of the life-blood.

And Tom left Rome,—the Rome of the conquerors, the Rome that stood for that virile power in man which he had worshipped all his life,—awestruck—not by the spell of heroic associations, but by the passing of a slight and fugitive soul. He entered upon the homeward journey bowed beneath the weight of a profound experience.

It was no longer remorse that oppressed him;—indeed he dared not entertain remorse. In his clear and logical mind his self-accusations were inseparably associated with shortcomings in Winny's character and conduct which he was too magnanimous willingly to remember. It was nothing so personal as remorse that weighed upon him in those days, but rather that overwhelming sense of the mystery of life and death, whose power is never greater than when brought home to a strong but unimaginative mind. There was no surmise in the mental state that dominated Tom's spirit to-day; it was contemplation, clear and direct, of an actual experience, witnessed and shared to the very dregs. And so he went his ways, absorbed, possessed;—and if his voyage hitherward had been a hideous storm, his homeward voyage was a calm more pregnant and more formidable than any tempest.

It was long before Tom shook off the oppression of that calm; for days and weeks he walked in voluntary subjection to it. He shrank, indeed, from emerging into a normal relation with life, because he knew well that the revival of his natural energies which such a restoration would involve, must bring in its train the revival of certain importunities of the spirit which

he chose to keep in immediate abeyance. Always, deep down below that strange, unnatural calm, were the vital currents of his being, setting ever in one direction, and he dared not let the daylight in upon them yet.

That scrupulous consideration of Winny's rights which had so often dominated his strongest impulses while she lived, had lost nothing of its potency now that she had died. If as his wife she had been entitled to indulgence, her memory, now that death had loosed that fragile bond, must command its full meed of respect.

And, mingling with this punctilious deference to Winny's claims, was a resolute loyalty to Katherine. He could not do her the wrong of implicating her, even unknown to herself, in any transgression of those rights in behalf of which she had so unflinchingly sacrificed herself—and him. And since the sacrifice had had its perfect work,—since they had both been saved, though so as by fire, from a faithlessness which her instinct had so unerringly recognized, her conscience so passionately repudiated,—it behooved him to guard their common integrity until such time as it should become merged in their common happiness.

He used to think much of Katherine in the days when he had returned to the familiar scenes so eloquent of her, but he thought of her always in her relation to Archie. He had been profoundly stirred by Archie's love and grief, fleeting as had been the expression of it. Tom knew, in a part of his consciousness which he refused to penetrate, that no abstention on his own part would have preserved to Archie the faith of the girl he loved. He knew, though it was a part of his loyalty to Winny not to

think about it, that even if she had not married him she would scarcely have been deterred from making some other worldly marriage. Yet the reflection, for all that, was not less insufferable, that he should have been the instrument of Archie's spoliation. It was only when he forced his mind away from his own dereliction, and let it dwell upon the thought of Katherine, cheering and sustaining her brother, as she alone possessed the art of doing, that the contemplation of Archie's state became tolerable to him.

He liked to imagine the brother and sister wandering in fair, foreign lands. He liked to remember the fine endowment they had in common,—their natural spirits, their quickness of observation, their sensitiveness to beauty of every sort. When he heard that they had gone to India, he rejoiced mightily, and he promptly provided himself with a whole library of Oriental literature, that so he might make real to his imagination the brilliancy of their experiences. And when, in the spring, news came that they were returning home by way of Japan, he transferred his attention to the literature of that enchanted island. But always, when he travelled with them in spirit, he schooled himself to remember that it was Archie who was claiming Katherine's exclusive devotion.

Nor did Tom exaggerate the importance of Katherine's mission to her brother. For, in truth, if Archie had never needed her before, he needed her in those days and weeks after Winny died.

The poor fellow had faced his pain at last; he knew there was no escape from it. He tried only, and with a degree of effort that was pathetic in one of his pliant nature, to keep his footing until the worst should be over. And when, after a day or two, they resumed

their wanderings,—not toward the Midnight Sun, but here in Italy, deserted now of foreign travel,—he knew, and Katherine knew, that his spirit leaned upon hers, as a wounded man leans upon an unscathed comrade.

It was characteristic of them both that Archie, despite his native quickness of perception, should never have divined that his sister too was passing through deep waters. He was gratefully, intimately aware of her unobtrusive comprehension of his own sorrow; and so accustomed was he to regard Katherine in the light of comforter and sustainer of her stumbling fellow creatures, that he found it natural to interpret in terms of sisterly affection and sympathy, the shadow that sometimes rested visibly upon her. Yet he liked, best of all, to associate her with Winny,—to dwell upon the thought of that devotion which had brought her to Winny's side; to believe that she too grieved for Winny. Winny had not been fortunate in most of her relations in life, but she had had a friend in Katherine, and it was as Winny's friend, even more than as his own sister that he found comfort in Katherine's society.

One day, at Orvieto, where they had been studying the mosaics above the pointed doorways of the cathedral — the rain had just ceased, and the sudden sun struck each bit of stone into a jewel,—they turned, and wandered on to the *Giardino Pubblico*, hanging like an eagle's nest above the valley, still glittering with raindrops. The clouds were breaking away, and far down below they could see the meeting of the Tiber with some lesser stream, the two shining like silver ribbons where they joined.

"How well the earth looks in diamonds!"

Katherine remarked. "See; there is nothing that does n't sparkle! Even that grim old tower up there has a kind of coronet on!"

"Yes! nature seems to like diamonds as well as we do! I never cared for any other stone, myself."

And presently, pulling out a cigarette, and lighting it: "Katherine," Archie asked,—so casually that she hardly caught his meaning,—"would you like to wear Winny's ring—to please me? Say so, if you 'd rather not," he begged, imagining that she hesitated. "Of course it 's not what you would call a lucky ring!"

"It was the only lucky ring the poor child ever had," she answered, gently. "I should love to wear it. Where is it?"

"Where should it be?" he asked, drawing it from an inner pocket, and holding it to the light.

"It has outlived a good many rain drops," he remarked, as he made a motion to take his sister's hand. "No—not on that one!" he objected, with that little air of big-brotherliness which Katherine always loved to see. "It might have to abdicate—some day—and that would never do. Why should n't it come here, beside mother's?"

"How pretty they are together!" she said, moving her hand, that the rings should catch the light.

"Yes; and I am glad ours is not too small for you. But your fingers are slender, Katherine, although your hands are so much larger than Winny's."

"And you have always carried it?" Katherine asked, still looking, not at him, but at the sparkling stone.

"Of course!"

He flung his arm across her shoulder, and, reaching up, she placed her hand in his. As they walked along the edge of the high cliff, he fingered the ring, absently.

"I 'm glad to have you wear it," he said, after a while. "I think it will be happier now—and so shall I! A ring like that can't like to live in the dark!"

The raindrops, meanwhile, were vanishing from the earth, and only the two stones flashed in the sun.

"How good it is to have things last," Archie observed, as they paused a moment to watch a film of mist floating among the treetops down below. "So many things escape you! Now this view, and all the other beautiful sights that we shall see! There will be very little left, even in our memories, ten years from now."

"Yes,—but it sinks in, and becomes a part of us."

"True! And that 's what sometimes half kills you—the things that have sunk in and have become a part of you, and yet that you can't see any more." And presently: "I wish I could sketch," he said.

"I wish you could! And yet you could n't get much of that into a sketch. Do you know, Archie,"—with a sudden glance from his face to the view and back again—"I think words might be better than colors here. You used to think you would like to write."

"Was there anything I did n't use to think I should like to do?"

"Perhaps not! You were always rather audacious! But then, you know, I too always thought you could write."

"You thought I could do anything I wanted to do."

"I still think so, in a general way," she jested. "And in a particular way I think you could go back to the *Aquila Nera*, and put Orvieto into words that would beat any sketch. See,—it will rain again in a few minutes;—that black cloud over there is devouring the sky! It makes one think of the horrible Signorellis

in the *Capella Nuova*. Just think of the subject!—the Signorellis, and the mosaics and the storm and the view, and those dear little ragamuffins with the eyes; and then the *Aquila Nera*, and the loquacious landlady, and the head-waiter that reproves her for talking! Just try your hand at it!"

They were walking swiftly toward the inn, but not swiftly enough to escape the first big drops of the returning storm. And when, after changing her dress, Katherine looked in at the tiny *salotto* where were no other *forestieri* to intrude, she found Archie in a fine frenzy of composition that was inspiring to witness.

From time to time, after that, he did a bit of writing, which he sent home to Paul, and early in the new year when the travellers were already on the other side of the world, these fugitive sketches began appearing in a leading New York journal, and busy people found time to read them, and wished they came oftener.

One day in the early spring Katherine was sitting on the deck of a big P. & O. boat, in the shadow of the forward mast, dreaming of many things. They were crossing an arm of the Indian Ocean, making for Yokohama, and she found the high forecastle of the East Indiaman a no less congenial resort than the bow of the Atlantic Liner where she had spent so many hours in April of last year.

Her meditations now, as then, were much of Winny, but to-day an older memory of her than that was uppermost, as she watched the low horizon where the blue sea melted into the blue sky,—the low horizon that was always just as far away, however the big steamer strained and panted to draw near.

And as she mused of still another voyage, and of the two whom she had sailed the seas with so many

years ago, the sound of Archie's step, approaching, was scarce an interruption to her reverie. It was with that eager step, seldom so quickened nowadays, that he used to come and join them, on that happy voyage when Winny was the exquisite, flawless creature she had once more grown to be in their thoughts.

And Archie, coming close, and standing tall above her, looked down on Katherine with something of the old ardor, the old zest in life.

"What is it, dear?" she asked, smiling an indolent welcome. "You look exactly as if you knew something pleasant!"

And, standing there upon the level deck—for they were sailing tranquil seas unvexed by tossing waves—he drew a thick roll of papers from under his reefer, and, dropping them into her lap, he said, half shamefacedly:

"Read that, and if you don't like it—a lot—just chuck it overboard! Unless it 's very good, it 's no good at all!"

Whereupon, and before his receding step had ceased to echo in the distance, Katherine began to read.

She read for two hours, while her breath came fast, and her cheeks burned, and more than once the tears sprang to her eyes. And when she had finished, she leaned her head back against the coil of ropes, and looked straight up into the sky. She never thought to go and look for Archie, and tell him he had done a wonderful thing ; she was in no haste to talk about it, even to him. She liked better to lean there against the big coil of ropes, and look straight up into the Indian sky.

He had called it: *The Bird of Time*—and on the title page were Omar's lines:

"The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing."

It must be a volume by itself,—this marvellous romance, with its swift, unerring action, and its heart of fire,—just a mere wisp of a volume. That it could never be printed side by side with other tales was clear. It must take its flight alone, like an exquisite, vagrant bird that has lost its way in a foreign clime, and finds no mate, no nesting, here. And how men's eyes would dim at the sight,—and how women's hearts would soften when it alighted for its little hour beside their lattice!

All would love the strange, exotic visitant, with the perfume of the Orient in its wings, and the deeps of a New England woodland in its note. But only she and Archie—and one other—would know its name; they alone would guess whence came the little pilgrim of the skies.

Yes, the hand of death had dealt more gently with Winny than life had done. Kind death had restored to her every grace that life had mocked her with, and here, in these fluttering leaves, was the spirit of Winny as she might have been.

Presently, after a long interval, Archie's step again sounded on the level deck. He came and threw himself down beside his sister, looking off across the water, from under the visor of his cap, drawn low over his eyes.

"Well?" he queried, at last. "You did n't chuck it overboard?"

"No! I should have had to go with it! For,—look, Archie!—it 's here, in my heart!"

"You understood?"

"Yes, I understood."

"Will anyone else?"

"Only Tom."

"And will he mind?"

"No;—Tom will not mind. It will comfort him."

"That 's right! Then—we 'll let Paul have a try with it!"

And when, early in July, the travellers landed at San Francisco, *The Bird of Time* was alight on every bookstall, and fluttering in the hands of old and young.

And Tom, who had crossed a continent to meet them, wrung both their hands at once, crying:

"Everybody 's reading it! And then, when they 've read it—everybody reads it again!"

CHAPTER XIX

A BIRTHDAY

"Feel where my life broke off from thine,
How fresh the splinters keep and fine,—
Only a touch and we combine!"

HOW good it was to see Tom standing on the pier, his head bared in the blazing July sun! How the mere sight of him filled, for Katherine, the measure of her content! She wanted nothing more, but just to see his face and hear his voice, and when his first words were of the book she felt that all was as it should be.

He was changed,—more changed than either of the others. That sprinkling of gray had spread, and the vigorous chiselling of the face was much accentuated. Yet there was nothing in the change to regret,—no swerving from the essential significance of the man,—only a development, a working out toward the highest potentiality. It needed no artist to-day, no careful student of line and shadow, to recognize in Tom McLean a man of real distinction among his fellows. Ah! if Allan Delano might paint him now, Katherine thought! And ere she could check the audacious impulse: "He shall, some day!"—she had said in her heart.

Katherine did penance for that rash assumption

of hers; but penance and transgression alike were her own secret.

It seemed to Tom, as he sat and talked with her, through the hot, dusty, delectable hours of that homeward journey, as if she had grown younger and fairer since they parted. Her eyes had somehow the look of one who has quaffed of the spring,—not of forgetfulness,—but of a universal reconciliation; that droop of lip and lid that had made for the sadness of maturity in her face, had somehow vanished. The possibility of tender comprehensions remained, but to-day, at least, it cast no shadow there. And as they talked together, of many things,—of the book—of foreign lands—of home matters,—of all, indeed, but the one thing that had set their pulses to a music which needed not the interpretation of words,—they were conscious of no impatience for fulfilment. The sure promise of their lives sufficed.

Archie was not very much with them; he liked better to sit among the smokers, gathering copy, perhaps,—or did he feel himself the third in their little party? Had his natural perception reasserted itself, now that his heart had had its say,—now that his genius had wrought the ransom of his spirit? If that were so, he gave no sign, either then or in the months that followed, when gradually their small world came to apprehend the truth.

At first it seemed only that Tom and Katherine had resumed the old cousinly good comradeship. At first it seemed so natural that they should walk together, and ride together, that Tom should be forever at the house, telling Katherine everything that concerned him, hearing everything that concerned her, —making her play all the things he used to love, then

interrupting her to tell her something more,—at first this seemed so like the good old times, that no one understood,—no one but Grandmother Day, and, possibly, Archie. The cousins had used to be great friends, it was remembered, and, now that the old conditions were restored, what could be more natural than this resumption of the old relation?

And there was naught to restrict that happy intercourse; for Katherine was always at the old home now, pledged indeed to Grandmother Day for the one year.

"You have been gone a long time, my dear," her grandmother had said to her, "and I have missed you very much. So you must make up your mind to play the model granddaughter for a while at least. After this year," she added, with one of those penetrating glances that always made Katherine feel like a very little girl,—"after this year you may go back to your nursing—if you like!"

And Katherine, with a hasty assent, had turned her face away, lest the wise old eyes should fathom her most secret consciousness.

And Tom did not press the issue. He was her faithful squire, he told himself, and nothing more to all time, if she willed it so. But he knew her better than that. He knew that just as surely as the spring was at hand and the queenly summer,—just as surely and by just as natural an unfolding, would the fruition of his hope perfect itself.

And on the first day of June, which was Katherine's birthday, he went to her. It was a busy season on the stock market; many interests were pending there, and much was at stake. But all that might go by the board. He would not grime his mind with busi-

ness on this birthday of Katherine's, that had somehow come to seem to him the birthday of their new life.

He bore no gift for her—not so much as a handful of flowers. He had never sent her a flower in his life—he had never thought of such a thing! Other men had been sending her flowers all these years, and much good it had done them! He would none of such poor, rootless, perishable things, doomed at last to the ash-barrel,—things that other men had to content themselves with giving her! And to-day he came empty-handed to her birthday,—yet with gifts fit for a queen, though his modesty knew it not.

He found Katherine in the garden with Archie. They were early risers at Grandmother Day's, and the first morning freshness was still upon garden bed and bower as brother and sister strolled up and down the box-bordered paths, examining the newly opened roses, and praising Peter for their forwardness. Archie had picked a lovely red one, and set it in her hair, where it shone warm and sweet against the darkly gleaming coil.

But when they heard Tom's step upon the gravel coming toward them, and when Archie saw his sister's face, he remembered something he had to say to Peter, over in the farther corner of the garden, and he left Katherine to meet Tom alone.

They met in the old grape-arbor that arched the path, fragrant now with an abundant blossoming, where the foliage was still so sparse that the sunshine found its way warm and bright among the shadows. And Tom took both her hands in his, and looking into the dear eyes, true in joy as they had been faithful in sorrow, he dared to draw her to him, close and closer,

and at last, at last, he dared to kiss the dear, consenting lips.

Now, when the great fulfilment was upon them, they were calm and sure, as nature is sure and calm, when her sun broods full upon the summer fields.

"And when shall it be?" Tom asked, as she drew her head back, and her eyes met his, with all her heart in them. "When shall it be?"

"Whenever you will—dearest!"

"This very month?"

"This very month—the month when I was born!"

"And when I am born again," he whispered.

And presently, as they passed out into the full sunshine, they saw Grandmother Day, standing under the arching woodbine on the east veranda, shading her eyes from the morning sun. Hand in hand, like little children, they went toward her, and pausing, where she stood a step above them, they looked up into the wise, benignant face, like little children asking an indulgence.

The grandmother stooped and kissed them both—but not on the lips. It was too soon for that, she knew, for in that hour her memory had travelled back sixty years.

And even as she bent above them, they heard a quick step across the lawn, and a voice that meant to be only gay, calling:

"Save one for me, Grandmother! Save one for me!"

It was Archie's lips that she kissed; and, as his sensitive face flushed a bit,—for all those kisses meant a thousand things to him,—Grandmother Day said, with a dim, far-away look in the old eyes bent still upon his:

"Do you know, Archie,—you make me think of your grandfather to-day!"

Then they all turned, and passed in together at the wide doorway, facing the open western door beyond, where a bit of a rose-hung trellis showed in delicate tracery against the sunny air, hinting of endless vistas of bloom and sunshine, reaching all the long way from the rising of the sun to the yet distant setting thereof.

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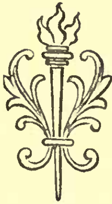

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