CICELY

AND OTHER STORIES

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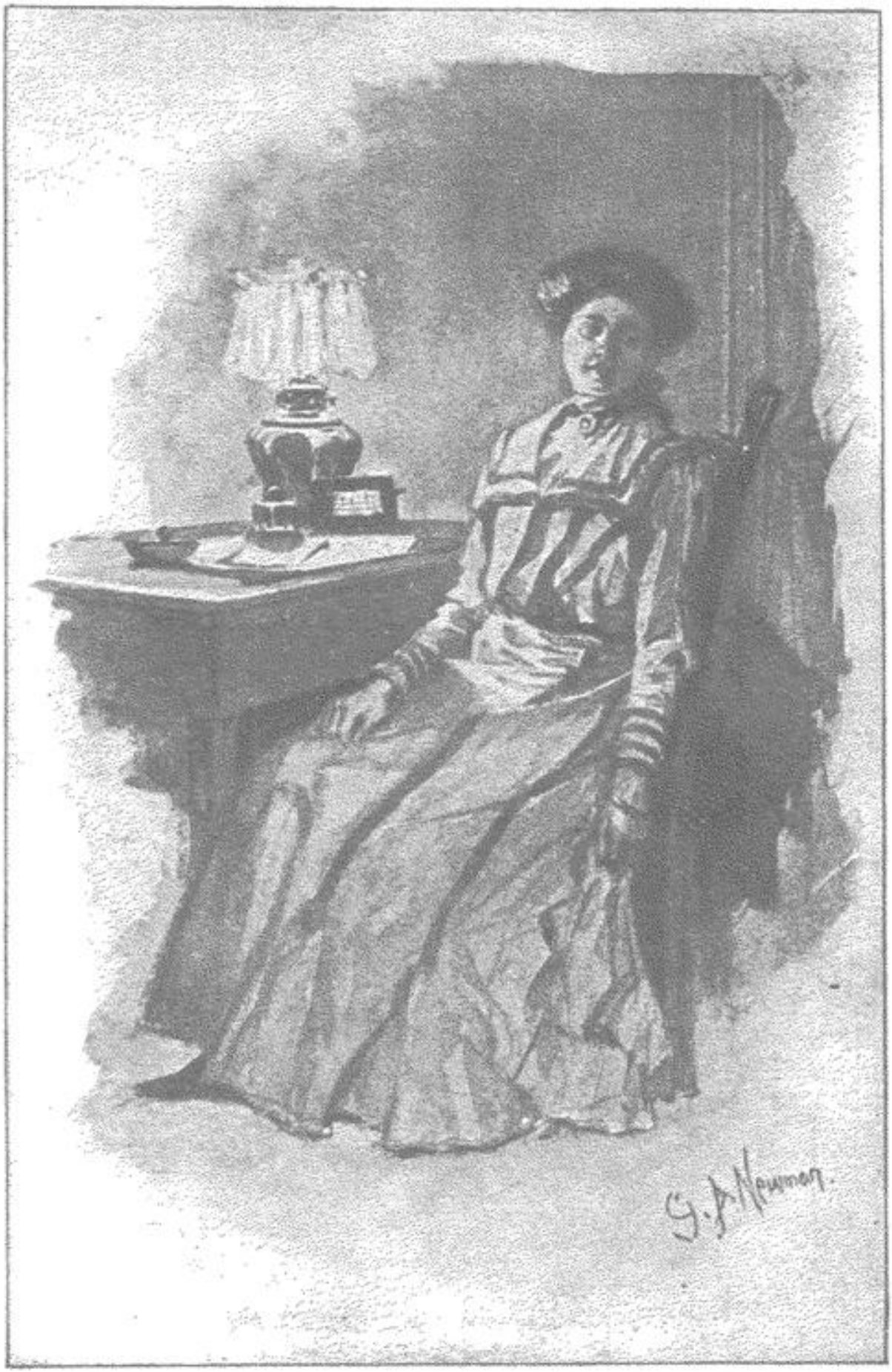

"THERE WERE VOICES PASSING HER DOOR."

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Cosy Corner Series

CICELY

AND OTHER STORIES

By

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"The Little Colonel's House Party," "The Little Colonel's Holidays," "Two Little Knights of Kentucky," etc.

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ILLVSTRATIONS

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CICELY

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CICELY

THERE was a noisy whir of sewing-machines in Madame Levaney's large dressmaking establishment. Cicely Leeds's head ached as she bent over the ruffles she was hemming. She was the youngest seamstress in the room, and wore her hair hanging in two long braids.

It seemed a pity that such girlish shoulders should be learning to stoop, and that her eyes had to bear such a constant strain. The light was particularly bad this afternoon. Every curtain was rolled to the top of its big window, but the dull December sky was as gray as a fog. Even the snow on the surrounding housetops looked gray and dirty in the smoky haze.

Now and then Cicely looked up from her work and glanced out of the window. The cold grayness of the outdoor world made her shiver. It was a world of sooty chimney-tops as she

saw it, with a few chilly sparrows huddled in a disconsolate row along the eaves. It would soon be time to be going home, and the only home Cicely had now was a cheerless little back bedroom in a cheap boarding-house. She dreaded going back to it. It was at least warm in Madame Levaney's steam-heated workrooms, and it was better to have the noise and confusion than the cold solitude.

Cicely's chair was the one nearest the entrance to the parlour where madame received her customers, and presently some one passing through the door left it ajar. Above the hum of the machines Cicely could hear a voice that she recognised. It was that of Miss Shelby, a young society girl, who was one of madame's wealthiest customers.

"I've brought my cousin, Miss Balfour," Cicely heard her say, "and we want to ask *such* a favour of you, madame. You see my cousin stopped here yesterday on her way East, intending to remain only one night with us, but we've persuaded her to stay over to our party on New Year's eve. Her trunks have gone on, and of course she hasn't a thing with her in the way of an evening dress. But I told her you would

come to the rescue. You are always so clever, — you could get her up a simple little party gown in no time. So, on the way down, we stopped at Bailey's, and she bought the material for it. Show it to madame, Rhoda. It's a perfect dream!"

Cicely heard the snapping of a string, the rustling of paper, and then madame's affected little cry of admiration. But at the next word she knew just how the little Frenchwoman was shrugging her shoulders, with clasped hands and raised eyebrows.

"But, mademoiselle," Cicely heard her protesting, "it is *impossible!* If you will but step to ze door one instant and obsairve! Evair' one is beesy. Evair' one work, work, work to ze fullest capacitee. Look! All ze gowns zat mus' be complete before ze New Year dawn, and only two more day!"

She stepped to the door, and with a dramatic gesture pointed to the busy sewing women and the chairs and tables covered with dresses in all stages of construction.

"Only two day, and all zese yet to be feenish for zat same ball! Much as I desire, it is not *possible!*"

Every one looked up as the two girls stood for a moment in the doorway. Miss Shelby glanced around in a coldly indifferent way, holding up her broadcloth skirt that it might escape the ravellings and scraps scattered over the floor. She was a tall brunette as elegantly dressed as any figure in madame's latest Parisian fashion-plate.

"Why can't you put somebody else off to accommodate me just this once?" she said. "It is a matter of great importance. My cousin has already bought the material on my promise that you would make it up for her. I think you might make a little extra effort in this case, madame, when you remember that I was one of your first customers, and that I really brought you half your trade."

The little Frenchwoman wrung her hands. "I *do* remember, mademoiselle! Indeed! Indeed! But you see for yourself ze situation. What can I do?"

"Make some of the women come back at night," answered Miss Shelby, turning back into the parlour, "and have them take some of the work home to finish. I'm sure you might be obliging enough to favour me."

Miss Balfour had taken no part in the conversation. She stood beside her cousin, fully as tall and handsome as she, and resembling her in both face and figure, but there was something in her expression that attracted Cicely as much as the other girl had repelled her.

Miss Shelby had not seemed to distinguish the sewing women from their machines, but Rhoda Balfour noticed how pallid were some of the faces, and how gray was the hair on the temples of the old woman in the corner bending over her buttonholes. When her glance reached Cicely, the appealing little figure in the black gown, she could not help but notice the admiration that showed so plainly in the girl's face, and involuntarily she smiled in response, a bright, friendly smile.

As she turned away she did not see the sudden flush that rose to Cicely's cheeks, and did not know that her recognition had sent the blood surging warmly through the sad and discouraged heart. It had been two months since Cicely Leeds had been left alone in the strange city, and this was the first time in all those weeks that any one had smiled at her.

Sometimes it seemed to her that the loneliness would kill her if she knew it must go on indefinitely. But Marcelle's promise helped her to bear it. Marcelle was her older sister, the only person in the world left to her, and Marcelle was teaching the village school at home. In another year the last penny of the debts their father had left when he died would be paid, and Marcelle would be free to send for Cicely then, and life would not be so hard. Just now there was no other way for Cicely to live but to take the small wages madame offered, and be thankful that she was having such an opportunity to learn the dressmaker's trade. She could set up a little establishment of her own some day, when she went back to Marcelle.

Cicely did not hear the final words of Miss Shelby's argument, but a few minutes later madame came back to the workroom with a bundle in her arms. There was a worried frown on her face as she unrolled it and called sharply to her forewoman.

Every seamstress in the room bent forward with an exclamation of pleasure as the piece of dress-goods was unrolled. It was a soft, shimmering silk, whose creamy surface was covered

with rosebuds, as dainty and pink as if they had been blown across it from some June garden. Cicely caught her breath with a little gasp of delight, and thought again of the sweet face that had smiled on her. Miss Balfour would look like a rose herself in such a dress.

The next day Cicely saw the cutter at work on it, and then the forewoman distributed the various parts into different hands. Cicely wished that she could have a part in making it. She would have enjoyed putting her finest stitches into something to be worn by the beautiful girl who had smiled on her. It would be almost like doing it for a friend. But she was kept busy stitching monotonous bias folds.

Just as she was slipping on her jacket to go home that evening, the forewoman came up to her with a bundle. "I am sorry, Cicely," she said, "but I shall have to ask you to take some work home with you to-night. We are so rushed with all these orders we never can get through unless every one of you works over-hours. Miss Shelby's extra order is just the last straw that'll break the camel's back, I'm afraid. Try to get every bit of this hand work done some way or other before morning."

It was no part of the rose-pink party dress that Cicely had to work on; only more monotonous bias folds. But as she turned up the lamp in her chilly little room and began the weary stitching again, she felt that in a way it was for Miss Balfour, and she sewed on uncomplainingly.

She had intended to write to Marcelle that evening in order that her sister might have a letter on New Year's day, but there would be no time now. She wrapped a shawl around her and spread a blanket over her feet, but more than once she had to stop and warm her stiff fingers over the lamp. It was long after midnight when she finished, and she crept into bed, her head still throbbing with a dull ache.

"The last day of the old year!" she said to herself, as she waded through a newly fallen snow to her work the next morning. "Oh, Marcelle, how can I ever hold out ten months longer? Nobody in this whole city cares that I caught cold sitting up in a room without a fire, or that I feel so lonely and bad this minute that I can't keep back the tears."

It seemed to Cicely that she had never had such a wretched morning. The loss of sleep the night

before left her languid and nervous. Her cold seemed to grow worse every moment, and madame and the forewoman were both unusually cross. She felt ill and feverish when she took her seat again after the lunch hour.

Presently madame came in, looking sharply about her, and walked up to Cicely with the rosebud silk skirt in her hands. "Here!" she said, hurriedly. "Put ze band on zis. Ze ozair woman who do zis alway have gone home ill. An' be in one beeg haste, also, for ze time have arrive for ze las' fitting. You hear?"

Cicely took it up, pleased and smiling. After all, she was to have a part in making the beautiful rose gown that would surely give Miss Balfour such pleasure. Her quick needle flew in and out, but her thoughts flew still faster.

She had had a gown like that herself once; at least it was something like that pattern, although the material was nothing but lawn. She had worn it first on the day when she was fifteen years old, and her mother had surprised her by a birthday party. And they had had tea out in the old rose-garden, and had pelted one another with the great velvety king roses, and she had torn her hand on a thorn. Ah, how cruelly it

hurt! It was a very present pain that made her cry out now, not the memory of that old one.

Some one had overturned a chair just behind her, and Cicely's nervousness made her jump forward with a violent start. With that sudden movement the sharp needle she held was thrust deep into her hand and two great drops of blood spurted out. With that sudden movement, also, the silk skirt slipped from her lap, and she clutched it to save it from touching the floor. Before she was aware of anything but the sharp pain, before she saw the blood that the needle had brought to the surface, two great stains blotted the front breadth of the dainty skirt.

She gave a stifled scream, and grew white and numb. Almost instantly madame saw and heard, and pounced down upon her. "I am ruin'!" she shrieked, pointing to the stains. "Nozzing will take zem out! Mademoiselle will be so angry I will lose ze trade of her!"

The irate woman took Cicely by the shoulders and shook her violently, just as Miss Shelby and Miss Balfour were announced. They had come for the final fitting, expecting to take the dress home with them.

Madame, still wildly indignant, went storming in to meet them, and poor Cicely shrank back into the corner, with her face hidden against the wall. Never in her life had she been so utterly friendless and alone.

Miss Balfour's disappointed exclamation over the stained dress reached the girl's ears. She heard madame's eager suggestions of possible remedies, and then Miss Shelby's cold tones:

"Now if it had been the bodice, it would not have been so bad. It could have been hidden by some of the ribbons or lace or flowers; but to have it right down the middle of the front breadth — that's *too* hopeless! There's nothing for it but to make over the skirt and put in a whole new breadth. There isn't time for that, I suppose, before this evening."

Madame looked at the clock and shook her head. "Ze women air rush to ze grave now," she said. "Zay work half ze night las' night. Zat is why zis girl say she air so nairvous zat she could not help ze needle stab herself."

"I could just sit down and cry, I am so disappointed!" exclaimed Miss Balfour. "I had set my heart on going to the party, and in that dress."

Cicely's sobs shook her harder than ever as the words reached her, and her tears started afresh. Miss Shelby's voice broke in:

"I am surprised that you would keep such a careless assistant, madame. Of course, you will expect to make the loss good to my cousin. It will ruin your trade to keep incompetent employees. It would be better to let the woman go."

"It is a young girl which I have jus' take," said madame, with another shrug. "I have feel for her because she was an orphan, and I take her in ze goodness of my heart. Behold how she repay me! Disappoint my customers, ruin my beesness!"

She was pointing to the stains and working herself up into a passion again, when Miss Balfour interrupted her.

"I should like to see the girl, madame. Will you please call her?"

"*Certainement!* Willingly, mademoiselle! Ze plaisure shall be yours for to scold ze careless creature."

Cicely heard and shivered. It had been hard enough to bear madame's angry reproaches, but to have the added burden of Miss Balfour's dis-

pleasure was more than she could endure — the displeasure of the only one who had smiled on her since she left Marcelle! A moment later madame confronted her, and Rhoda could hear the girl's sobs.

"Oh, I can't go in! Indeed I can't, madame! It nearly kills me to think I have spoiled that lovely dress, and that she cannot go to-night after all. I wouldn't have done it for the world, for it was almost like having her for my friend. She — she smiled at me — the other day."

Rhoda looked at her cousin wonderingly. Could it be some one that she knew, who seemed to care so much about her pleasure?

Then her eyes fell on the shrinking Cicely, whom madame was pushing somewhat unceremoniously into the room. Rhoda saw the little black-gowned figure with the tear-swollen face, and suddenly the crimson spots on her evening gown held a new significance.

It flashed through her mind that the very life-blood of such girls was being sacrificed for her own selfish pleasure. If she had not hurried madame so, there would have been no night-work for this poor child, no fagged-out nerves for her the next day.

Suddenly Miss Balfour crossed the room and, to her cousin's astonishment, caught Cicely's cold hands in hers.

"Look up here, you poor little thing," she said, kindly. "Now don't cry another tear, or grieve another bit about this. It's no matter at all. I'll just get some new stuff to replace the front of the skirt, and madame can make it over next week for me and send it on East after me. I'll pay for it myself, of course, for I'll be very glad to have the silk that must be ripped out. Mamma is making me a silk quilt, and the rose-buds will work in beautifully. I shall have it put in, blood-spots and all, to remind me that my selfish pleasure may often prove a cruel thorn to somebody else. I don't want to go through the world leaving scratches behind me."

"Why, Rhoda!" gasped Miss Shelby; but with a proud lifting of her head, Miss Balfour went on:

"I realise it is my own fault in rushing you with the work, madame, and the consequences of my own unreasonableness are not to be laid at this girl's door. Do you understand, madame? Not a cent is to come out of her wages, and you are to keep her and be good to

her, if you want my good-will. I am coming back this way in the spring, and this gown is so beautifully made that I shall be glad to order my entire summer wardrobe from you."

"Why, Rhoda Balfour!" exclaimed her cousin again, while madame bowed and smiled and bowed again.

As for Cicely, she went back to the work-room almost dazed, and tingling with the remembrance of Miss Balfour's friendly tones. It was several hours later when she climbed the stairs to her little back bedroom to light her coal-oil stove, and make her toast and tea. Her eyes were still swollen from crying, but she had not felt so light-hearted for weeks.

Just inside her door she stumbled over a big pasteboard box. There was a note on top, and she hurried to light her lamp. "I know that you will be glad to hear I am going to the party, after all," she read. "I have found a very pretty white dress in my cousin's wardrobe that fits me well enough. As long as you have had such a thorny time on my account, it is only fair that you should share my roses; so I send them with the earnest wish that the coming year may bring you no thorn without some rose

to cover it, and that it may be a very, very happy New Year indeed to you. Sincerely your friend, Rhoda Balfour."

Cicely tore aside the paraffine paper, and found six great roses, each with a leafy stem half as long as Cicely herself. She caught them up in her arms and laid her face against their velvety petals. For a moment, as she stood with closed eyes, drinking in their summer fragrance, she could have almost believed she was back in the old garden.

"Marcelle, dear," she murmured, "I can be brave now! I can hold out a little longer, for she wrote, 'Sincerely your friend.'"

The little room was glorified in Cicely's eyes that night by the flowers she loved best. She ate her scant supper as if she were at a festival, sent a little letter of thanks that made the tears come to Miss Balfour's handsome eyes, and afterward wrote a bright, hopeful letter to Marcelle that lifted a burden from the elder sister's heart. Marcelle had been half afraid that Cicely would be growing bitter against all the world.

"Think of it, sister!" Cicely wrote. "American Beauties are a dollar apiece, and I have *six!*

There is a music-teacher who has the room across the hall from mine. She is at home this week with a cold on her lungs, and to-morrow, when I go to work, I am going to loan her all my beautiful roses. It's too bad to have them 'wasting their sweetness on the desert air' all day while I am gone. So she shall have them until I come home at night."

Madame Levaney gave no holiday to her employees on New Year's day, but Cicely did not care. She left her roses at Miss Waite's door with the announcement that they were hers for the day, but that she would have to call for them and claim them at night. The oddness of the arrangement, and the quaint way in which Cicely made it, won Miss Waite's heart, and when she heard the girl's step in the hall that evening, she opened the door.

"Come right in," she called, cordially. "I can't spare the roses until after supper, so you will have to come in and eat with me. You've no idea how much I have enjoyed them!"

Cicely paused timidly on the threshold. There were the gorgeous American Beauties in a tall vase in the middle of the table, between some softly shaded candles. And there was a bright

lamp on the open piano, and a glowing coal fire in the grate. The little table was spread for two, and a savoury smell of oysters stole out from the chafing-dish Miss Wade had just uncovered.

"We'll celebrate the New Year together, and drink to our friendship in good strong coffee," said Miss Waite, lifting the steaming pot from the hearth. "Draw your chair right up to the table, please, while everything is hot."

Only one who has been as cold and hungry and homesick as Cicely was, can know how much that evening meant to her, or how the cheer and the warmth of it all comforted her lonely little heart. The best of it was that it was only a beginning, and there were few nights afterward, during that long winter, when the warmth and light of Miss Waite's room was not shared for awhile, at least, with the little seamstress.

The roses lasted more than a week; then Miss Waite helped Cicely to gather up the petals as they fell, and together they packed them away in a little rose-jar, according to an old recipe that Miss Waite read out of her grandmother's time-yellowed note-book.

Then Cicely brought Miss Balfour's note.

"THE CHEER AND WARMTH OF IT ALL COMFORTED HER."

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"I want to preserve this, too," she said, dropping it in among the dried rose-leaves. "You told me that Rhoda means 'little rose,' and that line, 'Sincerely your friend,' was as sweet to me that day as the flowers themselves. As long as I live I shall think of her as an 'American Beauty.'"

She lifted the little rose-jar for one more whiff of its faint, sweet fragrance, and said, slowly, as she closed it again, "And as long as I live the thought of her will help to take the sting out of all my thorns."

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ALIDA'S HOMELINESS

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ALIDA'S HOMELINESS

With a sigh of relief Alida Gooding saw the dentist put away his instruments. Her nerves seemed all aquiver as she slowly rose and went into the little dressing-room to put on her hat and coat, and to wait for the family carriage which was to call for her at this hour.

She was a plain-looking girl of eighteen, with homely, irregular features, a sallow complexion, and a reserved, haughty manner that tended to repel all friendly advances. All that clothes could do to improve a girl's appearance had certainly been done for her. Every part of her costume, from her fashionable gown to her stylish hat, indicated wealth and good taste; but the face that looked wistfully back at her from the little dressing-room mirror was not pretty.

The door into the adjoining parlour was slightly

ajar, and she could hear some one pacing restlessly about, awaiting his turn. "I'll be ready for you in about three minutes, Charley!" called the dentist from the inner room; and Alida heard the reply, "No hurry. I want to speak to one of the boys I see coming down the street."

The voice was a familiar one. She recognised it as belonging to Charley Jarvis, a friend of her sister. The next instant she heard a window thrown up, and a shrill whistle sounded out on the snowy air. Peering cautiously out of the window where she stood watching for the carriage, she saw another acquaintance, Phil Bently, look up and wave his hand in response to the whistle. A moment later he came bounding up the stairs, three steps at a time, and into the adjoining parlour.

"What's up, old fellow?" he asked. "What's wanted now?"

"I've been trying to see you for three days," answered Charley, "but they told me that you were out of town when I inquired at the office. Mrs. Lancaster has a pretty little girl visiting her from Alabama, and she intends to give an old-fashioned valentine party for her entertainment

next week. I am helping with the invitations. Here's the list of the boys she wants, and each one is to bring one of the girls of our set as his valentine, in fancy costume, you know. I've seen all the boys but you and Ben Fuller, and they've chosen the girls they want to invite."

"Who's left for us?" queried Phil. "Let me see the list a minute. Nannie Mason," he read, slowly. "No wonder she was left to the last; she's such a silly little thing and does nothing but giggle. Alida Gooding! Jarvis, you haven't left me much choice. Alida's the homeliest girl in town. It is a pity that she is so ugly when her sister May is such a beauty. Now if it were only May who was one of the left-overs, I'd jump at the chance. Any fellow would be proud to take her."

"But you see," interrupted Charley, with a tantalising drawl, "May is *my* valentine. Come on, now, which do you choose — Nannie or Alida? Ben is good-natured; he'll take whoever is left."

"Well, then — Nannie," said Phil, in a martyrlike tone. "Ben can escort the comic valentine."

"Oh, I say, Bently," exclaimed his friend,

"you needn't talk about the girl that way! She can't help being so plain!"

"That's so. It's brutal of me, and I'm sorry I said that. But she might at least be jolly," answered Phil. "You wouldn't want to take a girl that wasn't even —"

Alida did not hear the rest of the sentence. The moment that she realised they were talking about her, she had begun to struggle into her coat in order to leave. Without looking into the mirror, — her eyes were too full of tears to see, even if she had done so, — she pinned on her hat and hurried out into the hall. The coupé had just drawn up at the curbstone, and with a curt order to the coachman to drive home as rapidly as possible, she sank down on the cushions, shrinking back from the carriage windows.

Mortified by the cruelly careless speech that she had overheard, she gave herself up to an uncontrollable fit of crying. "I know that I've always been uh-uh-ugly," she sobbed, "but I never knew before that people felt and talked that way about me! I'll never show my face outside of the house again, and Ben Fuller shall certainly be spared the mortification of escort-

ing a 'comic valentine' to Mrs. Lancaster's party. Oh, I would rather be dead than so homely and unattractive!"

She was still sobbing when she reached the house, and stood shivering on the steps in the chill February wind while she waited for the front door to open. A cheerful wood fire blazed in the fireplace in the wide reception hall. A bowl of hothouse violets greeted her with their fragrant springlike odour; but heedless of the luxurious warmth and cheer that pervaded the house, she hurried up-stairs, with the gloom of the cloudy winter day in her tear-stained face.

"Lunch is served, Miss Alida," said the maid, meeting her in the upper hall.

"Tell mamma that I don't want any," she answered, passing into her own room. "I'm going to lie down. My head aches, and I do not wish to be disturbed by any one."

A slight expression of annoyance crossed Mrs. Gooding's handsome face. She and May were alone at lunch, and when the servant had left the room she said impatiently to May: "I particularly wanted Alida to go out with us this afternoon to call on Mrs. Lancaster's guest. She takes so little interest in people outside the

family, and it really mortifies me to see how silent and stiff she is in company. She always has some excuse to stay at home. She can never overcome her reticence unless she goes out more. Oh, May, I wish she were more like you!"

As Alida lay up-stairs, battling with her tears and a throbbing headache, a note was brought to her. It was from Ben Fuller, asking her to be his valentine at Mrs. Lancaster's party. By this time she had worked herself up to such a state of morbid sensitiveness that she could not even write a gracious refusal. It was so curt and cool that Ben gave a low whistle of surprise when he received it.

"I shall never ask *her* to go anywhere again!" was his mental comment, as he tossed the note into the fire.

All the rest of the week Alida stayed in her room as much as possible. Phil Bently's speech so rankled in her mind that she could take no pleasure in anything, not even in the making of May's costume, in which all the family were interested. It was an odd affair — a white silk gown dotted with red hearts and bordered with dozens of old-fashioned lace-paper valentines,

with their bright array of cupids and doves and flowers; and to May it was most becoming.

"Where did you ever get all the things to put on it?" asked her father as she slowly revolved before him the night of the party.

"Oh, I saved them as an Indian brave does his scalp-locks," she answered. "They were sent to me ages ago, before I left the nursery. I had them all packed away, and had forgotten them until I began planning this costume. I wonder if Charley Jarvis will recognise that row, or Phil Bently remember when he sent this. They were barely out of the kindergarten then."

The judge looked at the trophies with an amused smile. "I remember sending valentines to your mother once upon a time. It is too bad the custom is dying out. Young people seem to be discarding their patron saint."

"Oh, no, indeed, father," answered May. "We have got beyond hearts and darts and lace-paper affairs; but cast your judicial eye over that table at all I have received to-day: books and music and boxes of candy and no end of flowers."

"Where is your share, Alida?" asked the judge, kindly, peering over his eye-glasses at his

youngest daughter. "What did St. Valentine bring you?"

"Nothing," answered Alida, rising suddenly to leave the room, lest he should notice the tears she could not force back. "He's like everybody else," she added, bitterly, as she reached the door. "He doesn't care for homely people."

The judge looked annoyed. "I wish she were not so self-conscious and sensitive!" he exclaimed.

"She hasn't seemed well for some time," said her mother, apologetically. "It might be a wise thing to have the doctor see her soon. The next time Agnes drops in I shall speak to her."

"If the child is ailing, have her come at once," said the judge, decidedly, and a few minutes later he was at the telephone, sending a message for Doctor Agnes Mayne to call that evening, if possible.

Instead of going to her own room, Alida opened the door of the old nursery, turned on the gas, and began searching through closets and drawers. At last she found the object of her search, a little portfolio in which she had laid away some of her childish treasures, as her older sister had done. Kneeling on the floor

beside it, she took out the valentines it contained and counted them. There were only six — all that she had ever received; and now she noticed that each little lace envelope was addressed in her father's familiar handwriting. She had failed to see that in those earlier years.

"So, really, St. Valentine has never brought me anything," she thought, bitterly, "and he never will! I wonder how it feels to be loved and admired by everybody, as May is!"

Going into her own room, she sat down before her little mahogany dressing-table, and tilting back the oval mirror, studied the reflection in it. As she looked, the tears began to roll down her cheeks, and finally she crossed her arms on the table and laid her head on them with a choking sob. There was a knock at the door presently, but she paid no attention. It was repeated, and then some one came in softly, pausing as she saw the girl's dejected attitude.

Alida looked up. "Oh, Doctor Agnes!" she exclaimed; then, despite a strong effort to control her nervous tears, down went her head on the table, and she sobbed harder than before.

Doctor Agnes Mayne was the warm friend of all the family, and on the most familiar footing

with them. As she was a woman of strong personal magnetism, and knew just how to win Alida's confidence, it was not long before her judicious questions had drawn out the reason of the girl's grief. After Alida had finished her recital of the conversation at the dentist's, there was a long silence.

"Well, Alida," said Doctor Agnes at last, "what you need is a dose of definitions, and I am going to give them to you at once. I wish you would go to your dictionary and look for the word 'homely.' That seems to be such a bugbear to you."

Much surprised, Alida crossed the room and opened the ponderous volume on her writing-table. While she ran her finger slowly down the page, the doctor continued: "It has several definitions, but the original meaning was home-*like*, and it is only in that archaic sense that I want you to take it. Now, what is given as the definition of homelike?"

"Comfortable; cheerful; cozy; friendly," read Alida.

"Now look for comfortable," directed the doctor. "Not any modern meaning. I want the good old ones that have become obsolete."

"Strong; vigorous; serviceable; helpful," read Alida again.

"Now just one word more," said the doctor. "Find cozy, the meaning that the English give it."

Alida searched the columns a moment and then read: "Chatty; talkative; sociable."

"There!" exclaimed the doctor, taking the girl's feverish wrist in her firm, cool hand. "That is my prescription for you. Take those definitions faithfully to heart for a year, and you will become so homely, in the good old sense of the word, that by another St. Valentine's day you will find yourself admired by everybody."

Alida shrugged her shoulders so incredulously that the doctor took out her watch and showed her a picture inside the case. "There is my proof," she said. It was the picture of a sweet, kindly old face, plain in features, but with a beauty of expression that made Alida's eyes soften as she looked at it.

"My mother," said Doctor Agnes, gently. "She might be called a homely woman in both senses of the word. Every one feels the cheer of her presence as of a warm, comfortable fire-

side. Nobody can come into contact with her without being helped by her sunny, friendly interest. People feel at home — at their easiest and best — with her, and she is the 'cozy corner' they naturally turn to, old and young alike."

"Then she must have been born with such a nature," interrupted Alida.

"No, she was as reserved and timid as you are — always worrying about her appearance and thinking that people were criticising her, until she went to visit an eccentric old aunt, who spent her time in finding employment for friendless young girls.

"Aunt Winifred soon found that mother was in as great need of employment as the poorest little seamstress on her list. So she interested her in her charities, drawing her by degrees into the active work of them until her unhappy little niece had learned the beautiful gospel of self-forgetfulness. Afterward, when mother was married and had the happiness of her five daughters at heart, she induced each one of us to take up something of absorbing interest, in order that there might be no empty, idle days when discontent could creep in. That is how

I came to study medicine, and that is how I learned to love the word 'homely' in its first and best sense. She taught me the definitions which I have just given you."

Half an hour later Judge Gooding was surprised to see Alida and Agnes Mayne coming gaily into the room with their arms around each other. There was more animation in Alida's face than it had shown for days.

"Papa, I am going to study medicine," she announced. "Doctor Agnes has told me so many interesting things about her profession, and the cases she has in the children's hospital, that I can hardly wait to begin. She has promised to take me round with her and lend me all her books. I think I shall begin to-morrow morning."

The judge smiled indulgently. "I have no fears of your going into the practice of medicine seriously," he said. "I should not like a daughter of mine to do that; but if you think you would enjoy the study as a pastime and Doctor Mayne recommends it, I shall not object if your mother is willing."

The family thought that "Alida's fad," as they called it, would not last long; but under

Agnes Mayne's wise supervision it became an unfailing source of pleasure to the girl. Winter slipped into spring, and the crocuses gave way to the summer roses, and still her interest grew daily. She even begged not to be taken to the seashore, where the family always spent their summers.

"Mrs. Mayne has asked me to stay with her," she said, "and she has such a dear little house, and I am sure that the children at the hospital would miss me now if I were to go away. There is so much that I can do to make the poor little things happier."

Alida had her own way finally. She studied on through the summer, learning much about anatomy and physiology from the doctor's big books in the office, but unconsciously learning the higher wisdom of a spiritual hygiene from her sweet-souled old hostess, the doctor's mother. It cleared her mental vision. It made her quick to understand other people, warm in her sympathies, and forgetful of self in her intercourse with them.

"She do be such a comfortable sort of body, that young doctor," said a poor washerwoman, suffering from a scalded arm, as Doctor Mayne

made her rounds alone one morning. "She is that chatty and sociable that I forget the pain while she is about, and it would do your heart good to see how she do cozy up the place before she leaves it."

Doctor Mayne repeated this to Alida. "You are getting on bravely with your definitions," she said, with an approving pat on her shoulder.

"What do you think of 'Alida's fad' now?" she asked Mrs. Gooding, several months later. It was a dull December day, and she had called for a hasty visit.

"My dear Agnes," said Mrs. Gooding, "we are simply delighted! It has waked her up and made a different creature of her. She is almost as easy and sociable with May's friends now as May is herself. Yesterday afternoon half a dozen of them came in with May to get warm after a long sleigh-ride. Alida prepared a delicious little chafing-dish lunch for them, and made herself so agreeable and entertaining that I was really surprised.

"I thought that she looked almost pretty, too. Her complexion is so clear now, since she has put to such good use what she has learned about hygiene. She looked so bright and animated,

laughing and talking there in the firelight, that it did not seem possible she had ever been a cold, reticent girl, who always repelled people."

One morning, not long after this conversation, the family were surprised by Ben Fuller's driving up in his sleigh soon after breakfast, and asking for Alida. They were all in the library, and he announced his errand without taking a seat. "My sister Ada — Mrs. Cranford, you know — is very anxious for you to come over for a little while. She was so prostrated yesterday by the shock of what happened in her absence that she couldn't talk coherently to you then; but she feels that she must see you for a few moments, if possible, and she is unable to come out this morning. May I take you over in my sleigh?"

Alida, showing no trace of surprise at the message, rose at once to go up-stairs for her hat, but Mrs. Gooding plied him with astonished questions.

"Is it possible that she has not told you?" he exclaimed. "My sister is spending the winter here with her little daughter Doris. We all idolise the child, and she is never left alone a moment. But yesterday we were all out of

town at a wedding, and Doris had to be left with only the nurse. Nobody will ever know how it happened, but she slipped away and got into the little cottage around the corner. There was a child there that she had taken a fancy to from seeing it at the window whenever she passed.

"Nobody can find out how long she was there, or what the two children did. She says that they played party and had 'good fings' to eat that they 'finded' by themselves. Miss Alida met her coming home about four o'clock, and turned to walk with her and see her safely into the house, for she suspected that Doris had run away. Doris was eating some of the pink candy that she had brought home from the cottage, although we did not know where it came from until this morning.

"She offered Miss Alida a taste out of the little pasteboard box she carried. To Miss Alida's horror, she found it was a package of roach paste, warranted to be a deadly poison to insects. Miss Alida hurried the child into the house and set to work so skilfully that by the time the doctor reached there, nothing was left for him to do. He said that Doris would have died but

for Miss Alida's medical knowledge and immediate attention. If nothing had been done until he arrived, it would have been too late to save the child.

"Ada got home about the time he pronounced Doris entirely out of danger, and was so frightened when she heard what had happened that she went from one fainting spell into another. This morning we found where Doris got the poison, and learned that the little child at the cottage died in the night. Ada is so unnerved that she is nearly frantic, thinking how near she came to losing Doris. She is so grateful to Miss Alida that she would go through fire and water to serve her in any way. Well, we all would, in fact," added the young man, with a suspicion of huskiness in his voice. "You see, Doris is the only grandchild in the family, and we are almost foolishly fond of her."

Detaching a locket from his watch-chain, he handed it to the judge. "Here is a miniature of her," he said. The judge looked at the beautiful baby face framed in its golden curls, and then glanced up at Alida, who had returned, dressed for her drive.

"Thank God for such a sensible little daugh-

"HID HER FACE IN A GREAT BUNCH OF ROSES."

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ter!" he said with fervour, as he rose and kissed her.

This was not the last time that Ben Fuller was sent to escort Alida to his sister. Mrs. Cranford's gratitude grew into an intense affection for the girl. All winter she sent for her on every possible occasion, to drive with her, to dine, to go to the opera, or attend some entertainment. She was constantly planning some new way to give Alida pleasure. Finding her deeply interested in the children at the hospital, she sent a beautiful tree out to them on Christmas day, in Alida's name. When February 14th came again, a great package of valentines found its way to Alida for the children — enough for every child in every ward, and the finest that could be bought in the city.

Doctor Agnes came up to Alida's room to help her sort and address them. "You certainly have your share this year," she said, laughing. "Do you remember what a slough of despond you were in a year ago?"

Alida smiled happily, and then hid her face in a great bunch of roses on her dressing-table. The little note that had come with the flowers was still in her hand, and she had just reread it.

"St. Valentine has brought me something else," she said, hesitatingly. "Doctor Agnes, I'm to be Ben's valentine at the party to-night, and he — he thinks that I am really homely in the archaic sense."

THE HAND OF DOUGLAS

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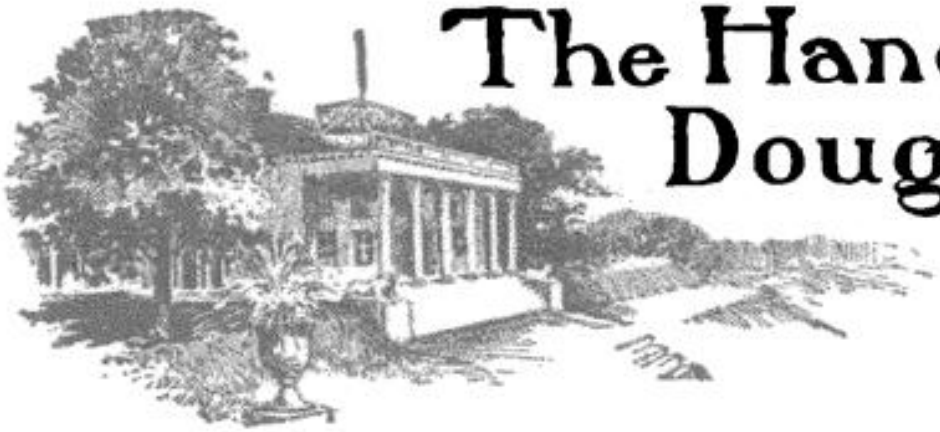


The Hand of Douglas

"HURRY, Mary Lee, it is nearly train time!" called Mrs. Marker, where she sat in a dingy little dining-room, pouring out a cup of coffee in nervous haste for her daughter's early breakfast. The brand-new hand-satchel on the lounge, packed for its first journey, was the only thing in the room undimmed by service. Even at this early hour the house felt hot and stuffy, for the August sun was fast warming the great Southern city to a heat that would be intolerable by noon.

"I wish you were going with Mary Lee, Henry," said Mrs. Marker, looking across the

table at her husband as he seated himself. "You need the rest."

There was a weary stoop in the man's shoulders that told of years spent over a bookkeeper's desk, and his face was pale and worn. "Don't say that in Mary Lee's hearing," he answered. "It is the child's first real outing, and I would not have her pleasure marred by a single thought of my work or ill health."

It was the greatest disappointment of Henry Marker's life that he had not been able to give his daughter all that other fathers gave theirs. Both he and his wife had been gently reared, and it was through no fault of his that their property had been swept away just as he was launching into his profession. A place at a bookkeeper's desk had been the first thing that he had been able to obtain.

He felt Mary Lee's lack of advantages more than she did. With the exception of a few excursions into the country, she had lived all her seventeen years in this dingy little house on a side street. Her mother had been her only teacher, and the men and women found in the books of her father's library her only companions. Mary Lee was a sociable creature; she

longed for the companionship of girls of her own age. To be a debutante, to have the seasons filled with a round of visiting and receiving, to meet brilliant people, and to number one's friends by the score — this to her simple little heart seemed the height of happiness.

Now for the first time in her life she was to have a taste of it. Miss Travis Dent had invited her to spend a month with her at Wicklett Springs, a fashionable summer resort, in a house full of interesting people, whose sayings and doings were already familiar to her through the society columns of the daily papers. She was to be Travis's guest. The rest of it, the railroad expenses, the new trunk and the new clothes which footed up to such an enormous sum in her eyes, were of her father's giving, and she promised herself a happiness in proportion to the sacrifice he had made to provide for her.

"Hurry, Mary Lee!" called her mother, again. At the second call there was a light rustle through the hall, and the bright face looking in at the door seemed to transform all its surroundings.

"I couldn't come any sooner, mother dear, for

admiring myself in my new travelling-clothes. Oh, I'm such a fine peacock in all my fine feathers!" she said, pausing to give her father a quick hug before she took her place at the table. "Do tell me that I look like a real born-to-the-purple, tailor-made girl.

Her father looked at her critically from the crown of her simple travelling-hat to the tips of her little shoes, and there was an unmistakable gleam of pride in his eyes as he completed his survey. "Yes, you do," he said, slowly. "You would pass muster anywhere. I don't mean your clothes alone; but it is written all over you, so plainly that even a stranger must see at a glance, 'This is a real little lady!'"

A little later they were bidding each other good-bye on a parlour car in the Union Depot. Travis Dent had joined them.

"I could not send my little girl in better company," thought Mr. Marker, as he shook hands with the serene young woman who came forward to meet them, with a sweet unconsciousness of self in her greeting. There were depths in Travis Dent's grave, gray eyes that bespoke a strong, self-reliant character.

The train was beginning to move. Mary

Lee waved a last good-bye and went back to Travis. Settling herself luxuriously in the big cushioned chair, she smiled across at her friend. "Isn't it lovely!" she exclaimed. "I want to begin a letter home this minute and tell them the good times have begun."

For ten summers the ancestral home of the Wickletts had been turned into a boarding-house, but apparently it ignored the change with the same high-born ease of manner that characterised its gentle old mistress. The hospitality it extended to its paying guests was the same with which it welcomed its many visitors in ante-bellum days. And Miss Philura Wicklett was the same. They were wonderfully alike, the aristocratic old mansion and Miss Philura. Indeed, one could scarcely think of her apart from her familiar background of tall, white pillars, as stately and dignified as herself. The old portraits looking down on the faces round the great polished table, saw familiar ones, for the same family types were repeated there year after year among the boarders that had been welcomed at Wicklett generations before. The long mirrors, reflecting dimly the

young faces peering into them now, had flashed back the smiles of mothers and grandmothers of these girls many a time, when gay house parties thronged the old mansion.

People flocked from all over the country to drink the waters of the chalybeate springs near by, which the name of Wicklett made famous; but a new hotel had been built for the strangers. Only the first families, who claimed Miss Philura's friendship, knew the open sesame to her great front door. It was for this reason that there was much surprise and many exclamations of wonder, and a stir all round the luncheou table, when Miss Philura announced that she was expecting Miss Marker and Miss Dent to spend August with her. "Where are they from, Miss Philura?" asked Molly Glendenning, a tall brunette, who was the acknowledged belle of the springs that season.

"From your own city, my dear," was the placid answer. "They live somewhere on Bank Street, I believe."

"Why, I have never even heard of them," said Molly Glendenning, with a slight arching of her black eyebrows at mention of the street.

Miss Philura hesitated and coloured slightly.

"I must acknowledge," she said, with some hesitation, "that I have departed from my usual custom, and it is only fair to you to inform you that they do not move in your set at home.

Miss Dent's father was a painter by trade, but is now a wealthy contractor. She has had every advantage, is a college graduate, and has had her voice cultivated abroad. She will be quite an acquisition to us. Miss Marker is just

a little schoolgirl, but well connected, I understand. Her mother was a Monroe. I knew her father when he was just beginning the study of law. He had a very brilliant career in prospect, apparently, but through some sad freak of fate lost his money and was obliged to abandon it. He is bookkeeper now for Bement & Ahlering."

A stony silence greeted Miss Philura's explanation, for a moment, and then several expostulatory voices asked in chorus, "Oh, Miss Philura! How could you consent to their coming? A common workingman's daughter! We don't want to know her, I'm sure!"

There was a touch of hauteur in Miss Philura's manner, that any one should question any act of hers. "As I stated before," she said, coldly, "I had the best of reasons. Surely, if I with my conservative ideas can endorse them, that ought to be enough. There are not two more ladylike girls in the South than Travis Dent and Mary Lee Marker. I hope you will find one another agreeable during the little time they will be here."

Miss Philura, somewhat deaf, did not hear the undertone passing round the table, as she

turned her attention to the making of the salad dressing. "A sign-painter's daughter!" said Molly Glendenning, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Well, I for one do not care to know her. People educated above their station in life are apt to be presuming. It might make matters a trifle awkward next winter if she should attempt to push her acquaintance when we go back to town."

"It will be easy enough to ignore them," answered her cousin Cora, "and I shall do it with a vengeance. It is one thing to be nice and friendly with shopgirls and factory hands, and quite another to take up with the well-to-do middle class. Give them an inch and they'll take an ell every time. First thing you know they'll turn round and patronise you."

The subject was still under discussion when they rose from the table and followed Molly Glendenning out into the wide hall. "They'll not stay long!" she exclaimed when they were well out of Miss Philura's hearing; "I'll promise you that. They can push in here if they want to, but they'll have to learn Marmion's lesson —'The hand of Douglas is his own!'" She swept her pretty pink palm outward with a

tragic gesture, as she ran lightly up the stairs, and the girls, laughing as they flocked after her, scattered to their rooms for their afternoon siesta.

It was in the heat and drowsiness of mid-afternoon that Travis and Mary Lee reached Wicklett, and stood looking down the long shady avenue leading to the house.

"Oh, Travis!" exclaimed Mary Lee, catching her breath with a gasp of admiration. "Isn't it beautiful and still? It seems as if we might be on enchanted ground, and that the palace of the Sleeping Beauty. I never dreamed that anything could be so lovely."

She nodded toward the velvety green terraces, with their marble urns of flowers, stretching one above another until they reached the stately white pillars of the old mansion, where two stone lions guarded the white steps. On the highest terrace a peacock stood motionless, his resplendent feathers spread to the sun. Here and there deserted hammocks swung under the trees, with books and magazines scattered invitingly underneath. Mary Lee turned aside from the path to look at the title of one in passing.

"'Gray Days and Gold,'" she read aloud. "How can any one leave such a treasure on the grass? Surely, Travis, they must be all golden days here. I have never imagined anything so beautiful."

Miss Philura met them in the hall in a white wrapper, waving a huge palm-leaf fan. "I was up waiting for you," she said, cordially. "Every one else in the house is asleep. That is all one can do these hot afternoons."

"I shall soon follow everybody's example," said Travis, when they had been shown to their rooms and the trunks brought up.

"And I shall begin a long letter home," said Mary Lee, spreading out her writing material on an old claw-footed table, by the window overlooking the peacock.

All the trivial incidents of the trip had been stored away for this very purpose. They ceased to be trivial when recorded as Mary Lee's alert eyes had seen them, and with the colour her amusing descriptions lent. It was a letter that seemed to carry a breath of fresh air with it into the stuffy dining-room on Bank Street, where her mother first read it, and into the hot office where Henry Marker took it later to reread at

his leisure. Just that one enthusiastic letter, bubbling over with a young girl's happiness, was enough to repay him for any sacrifice he had made to give her such pleasure, and the smile the letter awakened stayed on in his tired eyes all day.

A sound of voices broke out through the house long before Mary Lee had finished writing. There was much opening and shutting of doors, and calling of gay messages across the halls as the old mansion awoke to life. Long before she was dressed for dinner, Mary Lee saw a flutter of ribbons and white gowns under the trees as some of the girls strolled down to the springs through the lengthening shadows. Soon she and Travis would be strolling there, too.

Some one began playing on the piano in the drawing-room below, and a familiar air came floating up to her, clear and sweet. It thrilled her with a festive holiday feeling that seemed to give wings to her spirits. "Listen, Travis," she cried, running into the adjoining room, "to-morrow you'll be singing with them."

The music stopped, and the singer came out of the house and stood on the white steps below between the lions, still humming. It was Molly

Glendenning, in her rose-coloured hat and dainty ruffled dress of palest pink organdy.

"Oh, isn't she beautiful!" exclaimed Mary Lee, peeping out between the curtains. "Look, Travis. What a picture she makes! 'Queen rose of the rosebud garden of girls,'" she quoted softly. "Oh, I know I shall love her," she declared, with all the intense enthusiasm of seventeen.

Four more pages were added to Mary Lee's letter that night. She described everybody whom they had met at dinner, from her Queen Rose, as she called Molly Glendenning, to the courtly old Confederate general at the end of the table. She had been so absorbed in the repartee and bright speeches round her that she had not noticed that she and Travis were not included in the conversation. But Travis had noticed. There were many callers that night after dinner; men who took the girls away singly, in groups, and in pairs, to some sort of an entertainment at the Inn near by. Travis and Mary Lee, sitting all alone on the porch in the moonlight, could hear the music of the band stealing across the lawn. There was a wistful little note in Mary Lee's voice as she

exclaimed, "I wish that we had been here long enough to know everybody and go, too. Oh, Travis, it will be so nice when we're really acquainted and are a part of it all," and again her first enthusiasm manifested itself in her voice.

When the end of the week came, Mary Lee's lonely little heart still cried out at being kept "a stranger within the gates." It puzzled her that all her gentle advances should be politely ignored. Nobody seemed to hear either Travis or herself if they ventured a remark. Not an eyelid lifted in recognition if they joined a group on the porch or under the trees by the hammocks. But Travis did not seem to notice. She planned drives and excursions and long walks that kept them away from the house much of the time after the first two days, and Mary Lee was still more puzzled that Travis should be so blind. She wondered if she were not overly sensitive herself, and decided not to cloud Travis's evident enjoyment by a single whisper of her suspicions.

Still it was not drives and excursions for which Mary Lee had longed. It was compan-

ionship and many friends she wanted, and it was hard to hide her disappointment when she wrote home, and to make her letters as buoyant and cheery as at first. One evening, after one of these expeditions, she left Travis on the porch and went up-stairs with a heavy heart to write the usual daily letter. She had heard the girls planning a musicale to be given the following night, and she had a sore, left-out feeling, because Travis had not been included. Sitting down by the lamp, she picked up the pen and wrote three words: "Dear, dear father!" Then she laid down her pen and leaned wearily back in the chair. Somehow there seemed so little to tell. Her door was open into the hall to admit the breeze, and she heard some one coming up the stairs. There were voices passing her door, and she recognised the first as Hester Tyler's. She was a young artist, lately arrived, who was a favourite with every one. "It's hardly fair, Molly," she was saying. "People who are sure of their own social position have no need to snub anybody. Miss Dent is certainly a lady, any one can see that, and if her voice is as good as Miss Philura says, she ought to be included in the programme."

"That might do for you, Hester," — and Mary Lee recognised the voice of her Queen Rose, — "but you are too absorbed in your art to know anything about conventionalities. We society girls have to put up some sort of hedge. If people of that class want to push themselves in where they are not wanted, and Miss Philura lets them come, that's their affair. But, as I told the girls in the beginning:

"'The hand of Douglas is his own, and never shall in friendly grasp
The hand of such as — the mushroom aristocracy of Bank Street — clasp!'

"No sign-painter's daughter nor bookkeeper's daughter, whichever she may be, on the programme with me, thank you. If there is, I'll not sing. That's all there is about it."

"Molly Glendenning, you're a snob! The worst sort!" replied Hester, but she laughed as she said it, and in a moment they were out of hearing. Several minutes later they passed the door again on their way down-stairs.

Mary Lee sat staring at the paper before her with dazed, tear-blinded eyes, as bit by bit her innocent little air-castle crumbled into nothing-

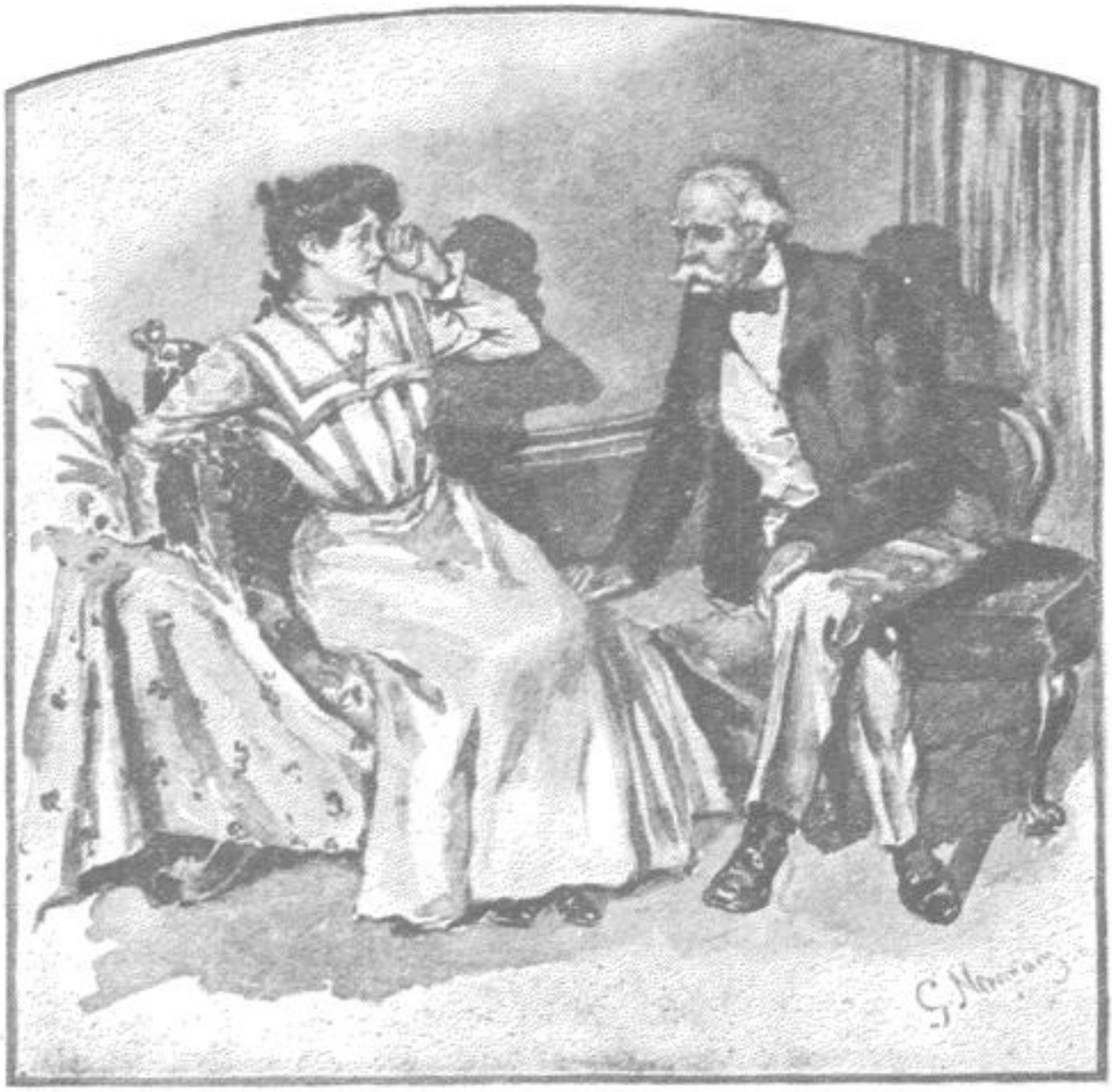
ness. Then her glance fell on the words she had written, and laying her face down on them she began to sob. "Dear old father," she whispered, brokenly. "I asked them for bread and they gave me a stone. And it's because you have to work. They despise you for that, you dear old daddykins, with your high ideals and knightly notions of honour. Oh, how can they be so snobbish and blind! I'll not stay another day under the same roof with such heartless people!"

Wiping her eyes, she went slowly down-stairs to look for Travis, but the porch and halls were deserted. Every one must have gone over to the Inn, she thought, as she heard the notes of the violins stealing out on the night air. Travis was nowhere to be found. At last Mary Lee wandered into the empty, dimly lighted drawing-room, and throwing herself face downward on a long velvet divan, gave way to the feelings she could no longer control. She had never been so miserable in all her life before. Great, choking sobs shook her convulsively.

"Why, my dear child! What is the matter?" asked a deep voice, suddenly, and Mary Lee started up to see the kind face of the old gen-

eral bending anxiously over her. "Are you ill? What is the matter?" he repeated.

Mary Lee sat up, wiping her eyes with a little,



wet ball of a handkerchief. "Nothing, thank you, sir," she said, politely, feeling all of a sudden that the wise old general would think her very silly, if he knew the cause of her crying.

She tried to keep the sobs out of her answer, but the effort was a dismal failure, and the tears began to flow again.

"People often break their hearts over nothing," answered the general, courteously, but with a smile lurking under his white moustache. "It isn't wise to do it, and maybe I could convince you of the fact, if I knew what particular nothing is making you unhappy."

The general had often noticed the eager, attentive little face at the table, and had been attracted by its bright intelligence. Mary Lee blinked up with red, tear-swollen eyes into the fatherly old face with its crown of white hair, and recognised the stamp of the true knight in every aristocratic feature. With a sudden, instinctive feeling of confidence she cried out: "You are not like the rest. You would understand, and I must tell somebody."

It was a pitiful little tale that she poured out to her sympathetic listener, revealing a sweet, unspoiled nature as she laid bare her fond girlish hopes and longings, in a way that would have surprised her had she realised what she was doing. It gave him an insight into her home life, too, and when she had finished, he could appre-

ciate what a cruel wound had been given her sensitive heart by the words which disparaged her father. For a minute after she stopped speaking, the general sat quite still. Then he said:

"Will you take the advice of an old man who has lived a long time and learned a great many lessons? Don't go home to-morrow, as it is your first impulse to do. Be brave and unselfish enough not to say anything to your friend that will mar her enjoyment." He broke off suddenly and sat musing a minute. "Do you know Browning's 'Saul'?" he asked, after a little pause. Mary Lee nodded, a gleam of pleasure lighting her eyes for an instant.

"Then you will remember these lines:

"'Round me the sheep
Fed in silence — above, the one eagle wheeled slow as in sleep;
And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that might lie
'Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt the hill and the sky.'

"Now these girls who have hurt you so cruelly, have done it solely through ignorance. They have never seen anything beyond their

own little strip 'twixt the hill and the sky,' and they can only follow a leader like a flock of pretty sheep. It is true that they ought to have a broader horizon than the boundary of the little social circle in which they were born, but you must make allowances for them, my child. From their cradles they have been hedged round with conventionalities which have made them short-sighted. It is your privilege to rise above the petty social hollows of life. Learn to take an eagle view, my dear. What does the eagle care for the happenings down in the hollows?

"'With wing on the wind, and eye on the sun,
He swerves not a line, but bears onward — right on!'

That is a true American motto, learned from our national emblem.

"It is absolute foolishness for us to prate of old-world castes when it is a part of our national creed that any one among us may rise as high as the best of us, provided he can grow the wings wherewith to soar. That little speech which almost broke your heart is a part of our creed, too. 'The hand of Douglas *is* his own.' The American Douglas reserves the right to extend it, regardless of all arbitrary social lines, to any

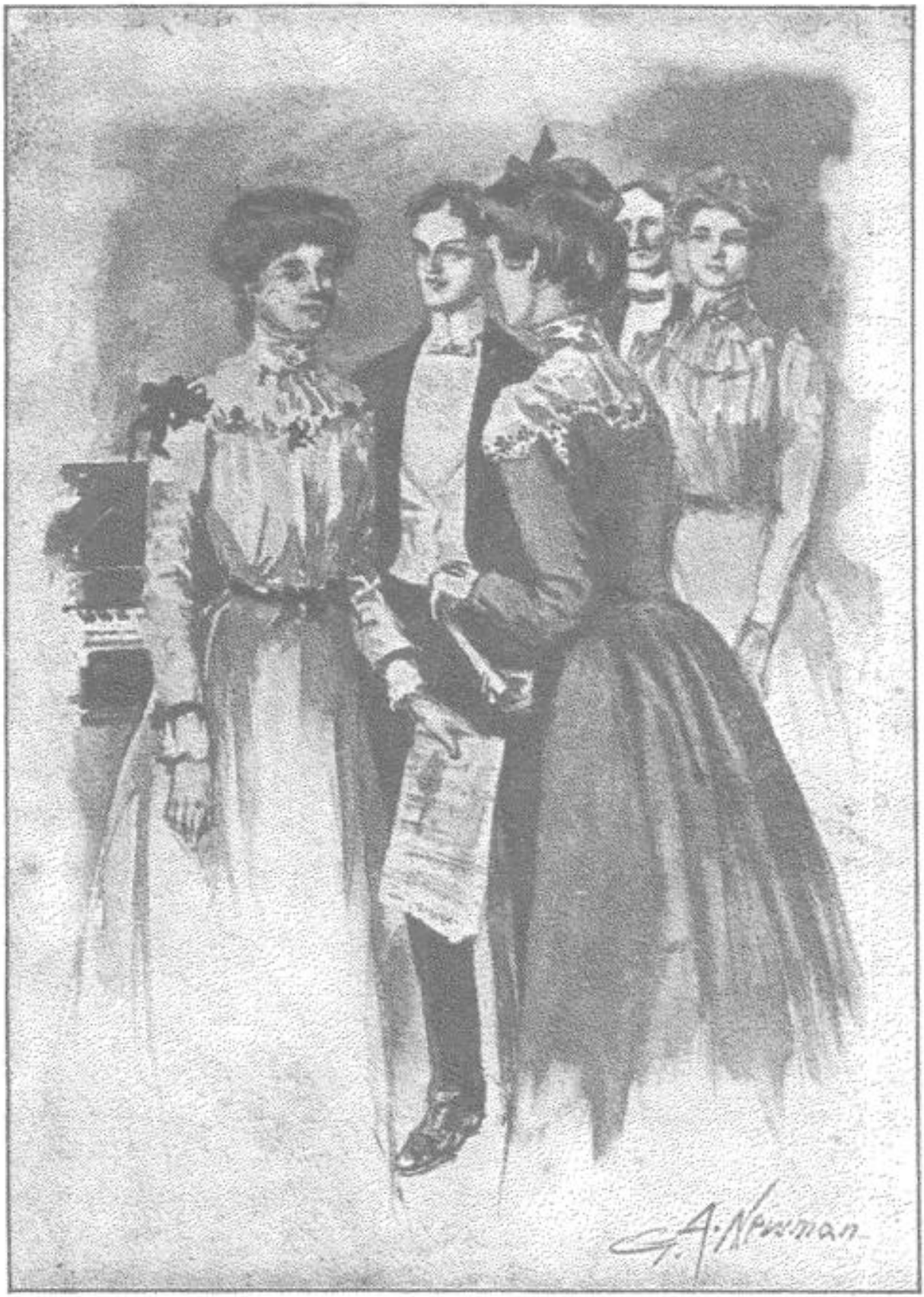
palm that has proved itself worthy, no matter how hard and toil-stained it may be. Only snobbishness refuses."

There was a long pause, while Mary Lee considered the old general's little sermon, and he watched her, with a kindly twinkle in his eyes.

"Are you strong enough to do that, child?" he asked, presently; "to rise to the eagle view of the situation, and stay on here regardless of the slights that have stung you, for your friend's sake? And your father's sake, too," he added. "It would grieve him sorely to know of your disappointment, as he would have to know it, if you went back before the appointed time."

Mary Lee looked up quickly. "I don't believe that you understand, after all," she cried. "I could rise above the snubbings. It is not that that hurts, but it is the disappointment. Oh, you don't know how I longed to be friends with those girls! They are so bright and attractive, and seem to have such good times together. It is the missing of all that I had hoped to find that hurts."

The wistfulness of the fair little face touched the general's gallant soul to the quick. "'Pon my word," he declared. "If you care as much



"IT WAS NOT HER VOICE ALONE WHICH DREW SO MANY ADMIRERS."

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as that for their friendship, you shall have it. I'll conduct a campaign into the enemy's quarters, and capture it for you, myself!"

And nobly the old general kept his promise. The night of the musicale Travis Dent was not on the programme, but she sang more than once, and each time, except the first, at the request of the most noted musical people among the guests. It was the general who led her to the piano, first saying that no programme was complete without his favourite ballad.

But Mary Lee saw, with a thrill of gratified pride in her friend's triumph, that it was not her voice alone which drew so many admirers round her, and kept them drifting back many times during the evening. It was the charm of Travis Dent's own gracious personality. Mary Lee had her share of the lions, too, that evening, for the general saw to that. He introduced them himself, and his deferential attentions to the two girls had the effect he intended. It argued that they were well worth the knowing.

"Didn't I tell you they were a flock of pretty sheep?" he asked, several days afterward. "Hasn't a change come over the spirit of your dream?"

"Yes, indeed," answered Mary Lee, gaily. "All thanks to you. And it seems so funny. All the girls have been talking so much about that Mr. Hendrick Lang, and exclaiming over his new novel. He has called on Travis twice since the musicale, and this afternoon he took us both out for a drive. When we came back Miss Glendenning asked us to walk down to the spring with her as cordially as if we had been old friends always."

"'The hand of Douglas!'" exclaimed the general, with a laugh. "Well, it's the way of the world to give it in that fashion, and I'm glad you've got what you wanted, at last."

"And to think," cried Mary Lee, "that Travis knew from the first they were trying to freeze us out. But she didn't care a bit. All those drives and excursions she planned were simply to keep me away from the house so that I should not notice it. She was going on perfectly serene and untroubled, herself."

"'With wing on the wind, and eye on the sun,'"

quoted the general, softly. "Ah, my little friend. Miss Travis has a broader outlook than the petty hollows. She has risen to the eagle's view."

ELSIE'S "PALMISTRY EVENING"

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ELSIE'S "PALMISTRY EVENING"

As Helen Jaynes stood before the mirror in her room, putting the last touches to her toilet, there was a rap at the door.

"I'm ready, Jane," she called, thinking it was the maid who had come to tell her the carriage was ready. But instead, her fifteen-year-old sister Sara peeped into the room. "Oh, sister Helen!" she exclaimed, in a disappointed tone. "Are you going out? Olive and I wanted to ask you something very particularly."

"Come in, dear," answered Helen, nodding pleasantly to the rosy-cheeked girl who peered over Sara's shoulder. "What do you want? I am at your service."

"What is it you want, Sara?" asked Helen again, as the girls seated themselves by the cozy, tiled fireplace, and looked round admiringly.

Sara hesitated. "I had planned to break it to you gently," she began, "but as you are going out there is no time to lead up to the subject gradually. I hope you'll not be shocked, but there is a clairvoyant at the Metropole this week. Some of the girls have been there, and they say it is simply wonderful how she can tell fortunes. She charges only fifty cents. Olive and I are wild to go, and we thought maybe you might take us Saturday afternoon."

Helen buttoned her gloves as if considering. "Do you think it would make you any happier, little sister, to know what the future holds for you?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Sara, decidedly. "The clairvoyant told Addie Roberts things in her past life that positively nobody but Addie knew had happened. Then she told her that a large fortune is coming to her soon, and she has a long journey ahead of her. She is to fall in love with a young man whom her parents will oppose her marrying, but 'love will find out a way,' and all will end happily."

"Does Addie believe all that the clairvoyant told her?" asked Helen.

"I don't know," answered Sara, but Olive put in eagerly, "I am sure she does, for she talks so much about it, and says if the woman could tell her past so accurately, she cannot help thinking that there must be some truth in her predictions for the future."

"Sara," said Helen, gravely, "suppose that woman were to tell you that sometime you will quarrel with your family, and be driven from home, and finally die in a poorhouse. Wouldn't it make you miserable every time you thought of it?"

"No, indeed, sister," answered the girl, indignantly. "I hope I am not quite so weak-minded as to believe all that. I'd simply think that she had made a mistake. Imagine me quarrelling with my family!"

"But clairvoyants often tell people things that seem just as improbable. What is the use of wasting half a dollar to hear predictions that you might not be able to believe, or if you could believe them, would make you utterly miserable?"

"Oh, it is just for the fun of it, Helen," urged

Sara. "Please take us. All the girls are going, and we have never had our fortunes told in our lives."

Before there was time for a reply, Jane came to the door. "The carriage is waiting, Miss Helen," she said. For a moment Helen stood irresolutely beside her dressing-table, stroking her muff in an absent-minded sort of way. Then she said: "I shall have to think about it awhile before I can promise. I shall not be out long. If you girls have nothing planned for the afternoon, suppose you wait for me here. Get out my old college chafing-dish and make yourselves some chocolate, string up my banjo, and I'll give you a package of old letters to read, telling of some of our pranks at school."

"Oh, that will be lovely, Miss Helen," cried Olive; "especially the letters;" and Sara ran to give her sister an impulsive hug.

Unlocking her desk, Helen selected a bundle of letters from one of the pigeonholes. It was tied with her class colours and marked "From Sophia Gordon." "She was my best friend at school," explained Helen, "and my roommate for three years; but being in the class just below me, she had to go through her senior year

without me. These letters were written during that time. I have a reason for asking you to read them. Perhaps you will be able to discover it before I come back." With a smile and nod to Olive, and a light kiss on Sara's cheek, she left them to amuse themselves during her absence in any way they chose.

"You read the letters aloud while I make the chocolate," said Sara, as the door closed behind her sister. "We can do the other things afterward."

"There is a photograph in this one, of a girl about your size, Sara," announced Olive, as she opened the first letter. "What's this written under it? 'Timoroso.' What a queer name! But see what a sweet face she has. I wonder who it can be?"

"The letter will probably tell," answered Sara, striking a match to light the alcohol-lamp. "Go on, I am ready to listen."

"My dearest Helen," read Olive. "Here I am back at school in our sunshiny old south room in Baxter Hall, with the same jolly set of girls popping their heads out of their doors, all along the corridor, to joke with each other; the same old teachers and furniture and surround-

ings; the same dear old everything, with one exception — my old roommate.

"I know you are dying to hear about my new roommate. She is a freshman by the name of Susannah Talbot, but we have never called her that since the first day. You will find her photograph enclosed, and can see for yourself what a shy little rabbit she is.

"Elsie Gayland came into our room while I was showing Susannah where to put her things as she unpacked. You know how regardlessly outspoken Elsie is, and how thoroughly saturated with her music. She is worse than ever this year, and talks almost entirely in musical terms.

"'How are you two going to chord?' she said, abruptly, to Susannah. 'If Sophia were a sheet of music, she would be marked on every score, *Fortissimo*, because she is so forcible and aggressive. But you are just the opposite; it seems to me that *Timoroso* would just suit you. You do not object to a nickname, I hope? Everybody has to put up with one here.'

"Susannah blushed and managed to stammer out that she didn't mind, and ever since then she has been 'Timoroso' to us all. You know Elsie Gayland. She is the same old Elsie.

What the Pied Piper was to Hamelin town, she is to this school. We all still flock after her in spite of ourselves, and no matter what she chooses to pipe for us, we dance after her.

"She has a new fad now — palmistry. Yesterday she showed me a book on the subject, that she studied all vacation. It is the weirdest looking thing, bound in black, with white serpents crawling all over the cover. It made me creep to look at it. She says that she is going to give a 'Palmistry Evening' soon, whatever that may be, and tell our fortunes. Timoroso has just come in and says that Elsie is waiting for me, so with 'these few broken remarks,' and a heart full of love, I must leave you for the present. Devotedly,

"SOPHIA."

As Olive laid down the letter and took up another, Sara exclaimed, "I see now why sister wanted us to read them. It is something about fortune-telling."

"The next letter is dated a week later," said Olive, beginning to read again.

"It was so lovely of you, Helen, dearest, to write me that good long letter in answer to the

scrap I sent. I have put off answering it until I could tell you about our palmistry evening which Elsie gave us last night. She almost got into trouble by passing round little slips of paper in class, on which was written:

8♯ XXIV. Lc.
Palmistry.

"Miss Hill caught sight of one as it was being passed to Timoroso, and called her up to the desk. Seeing that Tim was almost ready to faint from embarrassment, Elsie spoke up quickly: 'It's mine, Miss Hill. It is just a reference. I had several slipped in here, between the leaves of my algebra.'

"Of course it was a reference. You can easily tell what it referred to when interpreted in the old way. *Eight o'clock sharp. Room 24. Elsie.*

"'A reference to what, Miss Gayland?' asked Miss Hill, in her most frigid tones.

"'To palmistry,' answered Elsie, calmly. 'A subject which I have been investigating for some time.'

"With that Miss Hill sent Tim back to her seat, and read us a lecture on the folly of such

things, and the harm of allowing them to absorb our valuable time. Elsie was cross at some of the things she said, for she firmly believes in chiromancy. 'There can't be anything wrong in it,' she declared to us afterward, 'for papa would not have given me this big, expensive book about it, with all these fine plates. See! Here is an impression of Gladstone's hand, and lots of celebrated people. Miss Hill has no right to class all believers in palmistry with mountebanks and gypsies, and she certainly betrays her ignorance of a noble science when she mixes it up with clairvoyance and common fortune-telling.'

"Still, Miss Hill's remarks made some change in Elsie's plans, for when we gathered in her room at the appointed time, it looked just as usual, although she had intended to have it darkened and hung with black curtains.

"After we had all taken our seats, Elsie retired behind a heavy screen in the corner. She had previously cut two slits in it, through which we were to thrust our hands. She made us take off our rings, so that she could not recognise us by them, and commanded absolute silence. The light was on her side of the screen, and the

semi-darkness in which we sat, added to the breathless silence, made us unnaturally solemn. The girls motioned me to put my hands through the screen first; and I wish you could have seen the pantomime they went through as she enumerated my familiar traits of character. They nodded their heads in emphatic agreement, each one growing more eager every moment for her turn, as all recognised the truth of Elsie's reading. Some of us found that we had very odd propensities, but it was Timoroso who made the sensation of the evening. When her turn came I could see that she had become almost frightened at Elsie's remarkable power of discernment, and was much wrought upon by the impressive silence of the dimly lighted room.

"After a moment of careful examination Elsie began: 'This is a psychic hand which shows a delicate constitution, great sensitiveness, and abnormal nervousness. The life line is very short, the head line good, but running too far down into the mount of Luna. That may indicate only unusual imaginative power, or if other lines confirm it, it may mean a tendency to insanity.' Then she gave a startled exclamation and paused a moment. 'Oh, girls!' she cried.

'How interesting! I have never found this mark in a hand before, but it is in one of the plates.'

"'What?' we cried in chorus, breaking the long-enforced silence.

"'*It is the suicide line!*'

"Poor little Timoroso jerked her hands away, and turned toward us with a frightened face gleaming through the dusk as white as her collar. Her distress was pitiful.

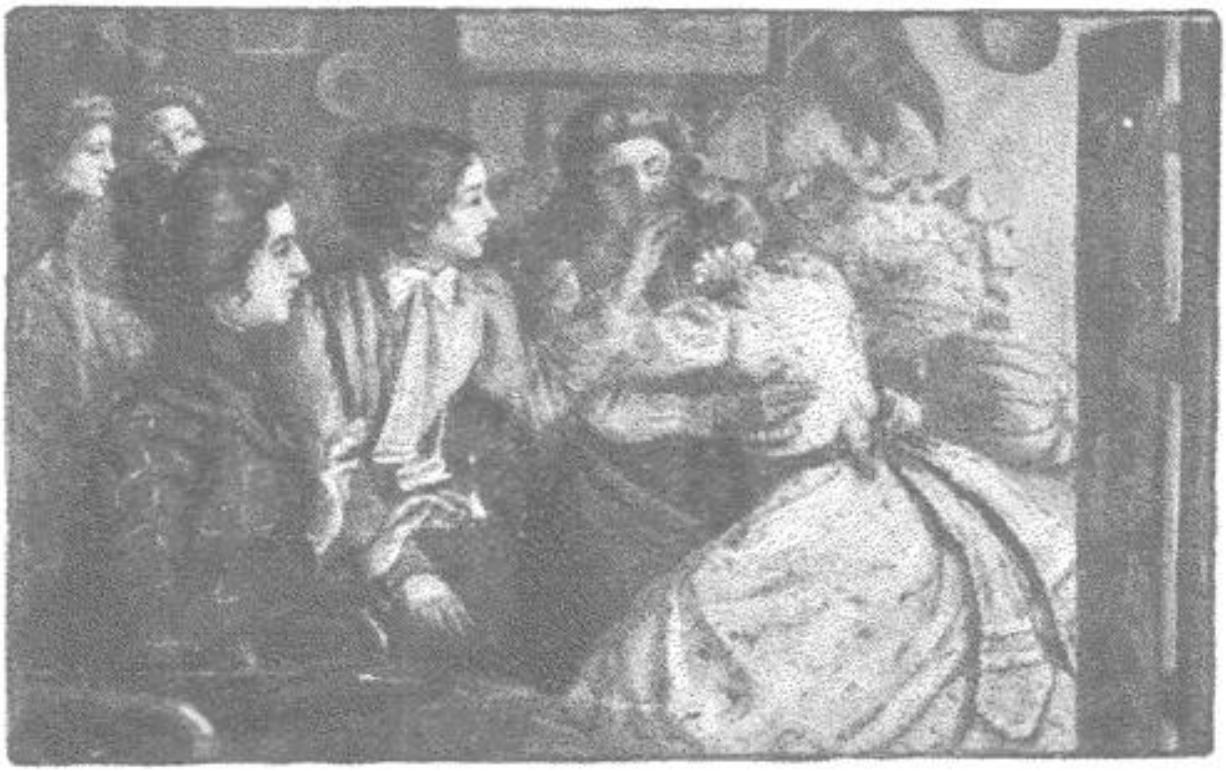
"You see, Elsie had been telling so many truths about us, that poor little Tim believed implicitly in her fortune-telling ability. She felt that her doom was sealed; that the cruel finger of a relentless fate had written it so plainly in her tell-tale palm, that all who saw it might read. She hid her face on my shoulder and sobbed so violently that it put an end to the seance.

"Elsie had to come out from behind the screen to help soothe her. 'Why, Tim, dear, you mustn't take it so to heart!' she insisted. 'Let me look at your hands again. There may be plenty of lines to counteract that one; besides, I am only a beginner, and liable to make a wrong interpretation.'

"By sheer force of her strong, cheery person-

ality, she calmed Tim after awhile, and had her laughing like the gayest of us. Nobody but Elsie could have done it.

"When Miss Hill made an excuse to come in a little after nine o'clock, we were eating apples and telling riddles as demurely as Quaker ladies."



When Olive had finished reading this letter aloud, she had to read several more before she came to another mentioning the subject in which she and Sara were most interested; and after that there were only occasional paragraphs scattered here and there among pages of personal news and school happenings.

"I am afraid that Timoroso is going to be ill," wrote Sophia, in one of those gossipy epistles. "She is as white and listless as a tired little ghost. She has slept scarcely any since our palmistry evening, but I did not discover the fact until last night. I woke suddenly to find her standing by the window in the moonlight, with a blanket thrown round her. She was catching her breath in long, choking sobs, and wringing her hands in the greatest distress. The idea that she must sometime take her own life haunts her night and day. I found that she had been brooding over it, taking a morbid interest in all the sensational reports of suicides that she can find in the papers, and that she has been rereading Cleopatra's experiments with poisons."

"Timoroso's case is growing alarming. I have told Elsie, and she feels she is directly responsible for her condition, and bemoans her thoughtlessness in ever telling Tim what she saw in her hand. She is doing all she can now to cheer Tim up and ridicule her out of her morbidness. She is always running in with some funny speech to make us laugh. Of course, all the other girls follow her example, so that poor

little Tim is the most popular girl in school now; but I catch her looking at her hand a dozen times a day, with all the horror in her face that Lady Macbeth's had, over the spots that would not out."

"The crisis came last night. I was awakened by hearing a window stealthily opened, and the moonlight was bright enough to show me Timoroso stepping up on the sill.

"'Tim!' I cried, 'what on earth are you doing?' She turned and looked at me wildly for an instant, and then, running across the room, flung herself down on the bed beside me.

"'Oh, I am so glad I did not do it!' she cried, with a little moan. 'I felt that I must jump out of the window. I am glad you called me. Still,' — she looked round wildly again, — 'if I am doomed to such an awful fate, it will have to come sometime, and it might be better to have it over with soon, than to live in this constant dread.'

"When I told Elsie about it, this morning, she cried, and that is something I never saw Elsie Gayland do before.

"'You've got to go with me to see Doctor

"'LOOKING AT HER HAND A DOZEN TIMES A DAY.'"

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Phelps about Tim!' she said. 'I can manage to get leave of absence for both of us in one way or another, for I am desperate enough to accomplish anything.'

"Doctor Phelps listened like a father to Elsie's confession of her thoughtlessness in giving Tim such a nervous shock. 'I used to dabble in phrenology and chiromancy, and such things, when I was young,' he said. 'As guides to character they are certainly interesting and often helpful, but, one should remember, by no means infallible.'

"Then he showed us a little mark on his palm. 'Years ago,' he said, 'I was told that that presaged an early death by drowning. It was to occur between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, and although I was on the water almost daily, I never had the slightest accident. I am over sixty now. Had I been a nervous man, I would probably have suffered much from my apprehensions of danger. Tell that to Miss Talbot for her comfort.'

"He walked back to school with us, and while he waited for Miss Hill to be summoned, Elsie went up-stairs to get her book. When she came down there was the queerest expression on her

face I ever saw. 'I have made *such* a mistake!' she said, in an embarrassed way. 'I can never forgive myself for it. I mistook one line for another, and the one in Tim's hand means something entirely different from what I thought it did. That poor little soul has been suffering all this time solely on account of my ignorance!'

"Doctor Phelps smiled. 'When I was a lad,' he said, 'there was a couplet in my grammar that I often had to parse, which ran in this wise:

"'A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring!'"

"Tim's father came to-day. Doctor Phelps telegraphed for him immediately after leaving here yesterday, and they have taken her away to a sanitarium. Doctor Phelps said that she was not able to stand the long journey home, and that her nervous condition was so serious that she must have immediate attention.

"Elsie is inconsolable, although Doctor Phelps assures her that Tim would undoubtedly have broken down before the close of the year, from the mere strain of school life; she is such a delicate little thing."

"Just a month to-day since Tim left. It will be a full year before she is well and strong again, Doctor Phelps says, and maybe longer. He was invited to speak in the chapel, this morning, and I wish you could have heard what he said on the influence of the imagination. He told some comical stories of patients he had had, who could imagine themselves possessed of a new disease every week.

"Then he spoke of clairvoyants, and mediums, and fortune-tellers of every kind. 'It is one of the kindest provisions of Providence,' he added, 'that we are allowed to see only one minute at a time. Suppose that we could look ahead into the years, and see some terrible calamity coming upon us, with the deadly certainty that every nightfall was bringing it one step nearer. What an agony of apprehension we would be in as the month approached — then the week, the day, and finally the hour! What man could stand the strain of such prolonged torture?

"'Or, suppose it were some joy that we looked forward to. When it came it would be robbed of its bloom by those long years of constant anticipation. It is the unexpected good fortune, the bits of happiness that come to us as

complete surprises, which give us the keenest thrills of enjoyment.'

"Whatever Doctor Phelps says is law and gospel with Elsie Gayland, and as she never does anything half-way, I was not surprised when she walked into my room with her book on chiro-

mancy, and put it in the fire. As she stood, grimly watching it burn, she said: 'I thought I should go through the floor when Doctor Phelps called me into the library just now. He gave me this big concordance, and asked me to hunt up all the references in my Bible under the words "hand" and "path," and all the promises for guidance and safety that are given to those who commit themselves into the Eternal keep-

ing. He wants me to read them to Timoroso sometime soon, for he says that nothing but an abiding consciousness that she is in the hollow of an Omnipotent hand will bring her the peace of mind that is essential to her recovery.'"

Olive gathered the letters together, and as she tied them with the white and scarlet ribbons, Helen came back from her frosty drive.

"I thought you would want to hear the sequel," she said, smiling at their eager questions, as she sat down to the cup of steaming chocolate that Sara poured for her.

"Timoroso is entirely well now. She spent this winter in the south of France, and I want you to see the calendar she sent me this Christmas. Such a beautiful little water colour, with the text illuminated as the old monks used to do it."

Sara and Olive leaned over her shoulder to examine the card Helen took from her desk, and read the verse together, half under their breath:

"Build a little fence of trust
Around to-day.
Fill the space with loving deeds
And therein stay.

Look not through the sheltering bars
Upon to-morrow;
God will help thee bear what comes
Of joy or sorrow."

Helen did not see the glance that passed between the girls as they finished reading, but she was not surprised that there was never anything more said about consulting the clairvoyant at the Metropole.

THEIR ANCESTRAL LATCH-STRING

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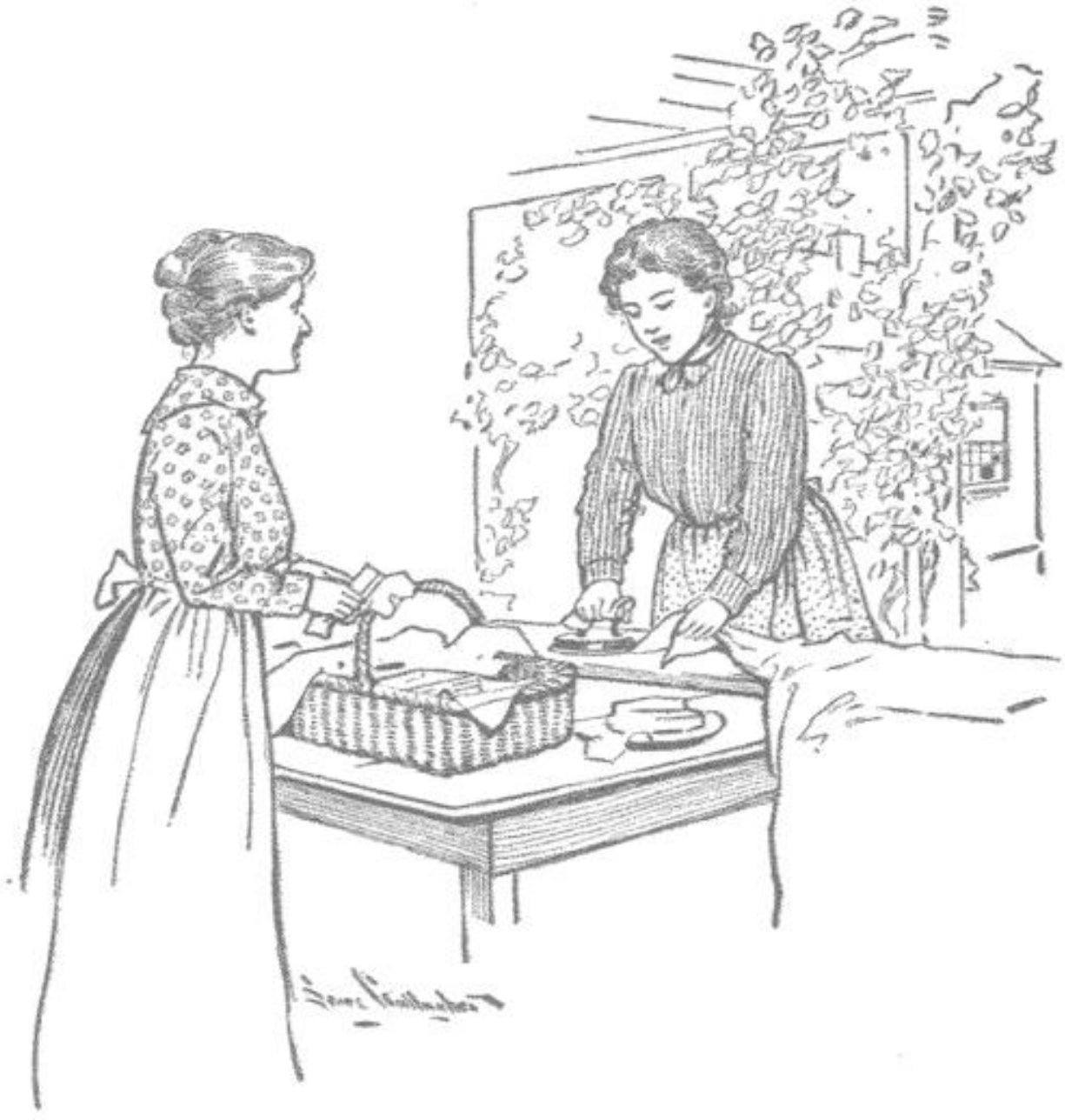
THEIR ANCESTRAL LATCH-STRING

It was an ideal day for a picnic; mid-June in the heart of the Blue Grass. On the rose-covered back porch of an old Southern mansion two pretty girls were enthusiastically preparing for their day's outing. It did not cloud their happiness that Claribel had to iron her own shirt-waist for the occasion, or that the dainty lunch Wilma was packing into the basket would leave the larder almost empty. They had always been used to that order of things.

But old Mam Daphne, bumping her scrubbing-brush over the kitchen floor, shook her woolly head sadly. She could remember the time when every day was a gala day in the old mansion, because it was always overflowing with guests

to be entertained with free-handed hospitality. Store-room and smoke-house were filled to overflowing then, and there was a swarm of negro



servants always in attendance. It hurt the faithful old mammy's pride to see one of her young mistress's daughters bending over the ironing-

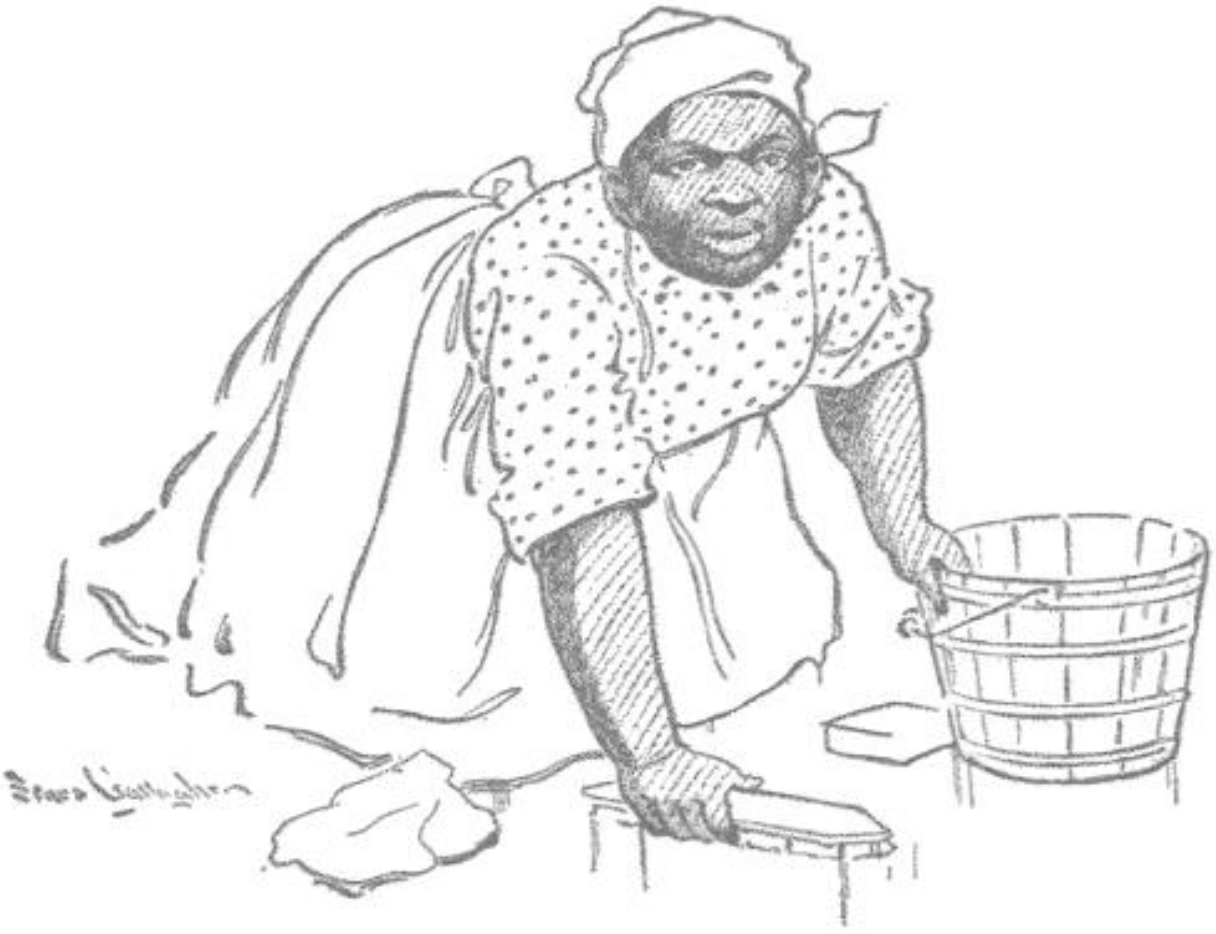
board, and to hear the other exclaiming over the fried chicken and frosted spice cake in the picnic basket, when such luxuries had once been their family's daily fare. She was their only servitor, now, coming once a week to scrub and clean.

This morning she looked down the grass-grown walk to the broken-hinged gate and sighed. She was looking through a bower of climbing roses, but even the Gloire de Dijon, with its thousands of gold-hearted blossoms, could not hide the fact that the old place was fast going to decay.

To Claribel and Wilma, not yet out of their teens, repairs on the old house did not seem half so important as their own personal ones of shoe soles and skirt braids. It was their sister Agnes, ten years older, who shouldered all such worries.

There had been girls in the country place where they lived, girls of the best old families, too, who, feeling the pinch of poverty that followed the changed conditions of the South after the war, had gone away to teach school or learn typewriting. But Agnes, bringing up her sisters in strict accordance with the old family traditions, carefully weeded out of their young

minds any such tendencies toward self-support. With the city only fifteen miles away, where they might have had the society and advantages they longed for, her prejudices and family pride kept them in their cage of circumstances,



waiting helplessly like two irresponsible little canaries, for some outside hand to open the door.

"Honey," said Mam Daphne, pausing in her scrubbing as Claribel came into the kitchen for a hot iron, "I'se been studyin' ovah you-all's

case right smaht, lately. You'se done had to move out'n de front o' de house, count o' de roof leakin', an' you shet up de west wing, so many windows was broke. Soon you-all will be movin' into de kitchen. Why don't you sell this great place fo' it goes clean to destruction, an' buy a little cottage jes' big enough fo' you three chillun? You'd be so much more comf't-able."

"Sell *Marchmont*, Mam Daphne," cried Clari-bel. "Why, it has never belonged to any one but a Mason since the days of Boone! Besides," she explained, with the consideration they had always shown their mother's old nurse, "there'll be no need for it when sister's book is published. Last spring, when the *Southern Sentinel* gave her their book reviewing to do every week, we discovered that she had been at work for years on a novel of her own. When that is published she is going to take us to the city every winter. She'll be so rich and famous then we'll meet all the lions and people worth knowing. Wilma and I will study designing and take painting lessons, and we'll go to parties and concerts and have as many beaux as mamma had when she was young. And, best of all, we'll repair March-

mont, and you are to come and live with us again. That is part of sister's plan."

Mam Daphne listened with a look of incredulous wonder on her old face.

"Aw, go 'long, honey, you'se a-foolin' me!" she exclaimed, dipping her brush into the suds again. But an eager voice in the doorway made her look up to see the careworn face of the oldest sister.

"Yes, it's true, Mam Daphne," cried Agnes. "I am almost through, now, and as soon as these noisy children are off to the picnic I shall begin my last chapter. I am just in the mood for it, and I shall not even stop to get any lunch."

"Then I'll leave you a devilled egg and a spice cake to nibble on," said Wilma, "for there won't be a crust of bread left in the house when this lunch is taken out of it. I'm glad genius burns. What a heavenly day this is going to be for all of us!"

As she spoke, they were startled by a loud bang of the knocker on the big front door. Rarely in their remembrance had the great brass griffin's head sent that hollow booming through the hall. Since they had been living

in the south wing the neighbours always came to the side entrance.

"Who can it be at this hour of the morning?" cried Claribel, dropping her iron and clutching at her light curly hair, which was always in pretty disorder. "We're none of us dressed to meet strangers. Run, Mam Daphne! How fortunate you are here to go to the door!"

A moment later the old coloured woman was fumbling at the long unused bolts, while the girls listened breathlessly at the dining-room door. It was a lady's voice that reached them. Evidently some one who had been at the house in its palmy days, for she recognised Mam Daphne as an old servant.

"I want to see all the young ladies, Daphne," she said. "Tell them that it is Mrs. Gorham, their mother's old friend and schoolmate, from Lexington. Tell them I am on my way to Louisville, and have taken the liberty of stopping off to spend the day, without sending them word." Then, as if to herself, they heard her say: "I've lived in Kentucky too long, and enjoyed Alice Mason's hospitality too often not to be sure of a welcome from her daughters."

Wilma sank down limply in a disconsolate heap on the floor. "Oh, sister, what *shall* we do?" she whispered to Agnes. "*Must* we give up the picnic, and that glorious ride home by moonlight, when it's probably the only outing of the kind we'll have this summer? The boys were going to take their banjos and mandolins, and they counted on us to help serenade —"

Claribel interrupted her with a grim face. "There's no help for it. Don't you see, Wilma, that we've got to give it up? Don't you know that everything fit to eat in the house went into that picnic basket? We can't go without it, and we can't take it and leave sister to entertain the company without its help. But oh, it's certainly too provoking! Why, of all days in the year, should she drop down on us to-day, when this is the first time she has been here since we were out of the nursery!"

"I'm afraid there's nothing left for us to do but to keep up the old traditions, and entertain her in the best style we can, dears," said Agnes, gently. "Poor mamma's best friend must be showed the hospitality that she always found here. But, oh, girls, I *did* hope to finish that

book to-day! It may be weeks before I'm keyed up to the pitch again where I feel equal to writing the climax as it should be done."

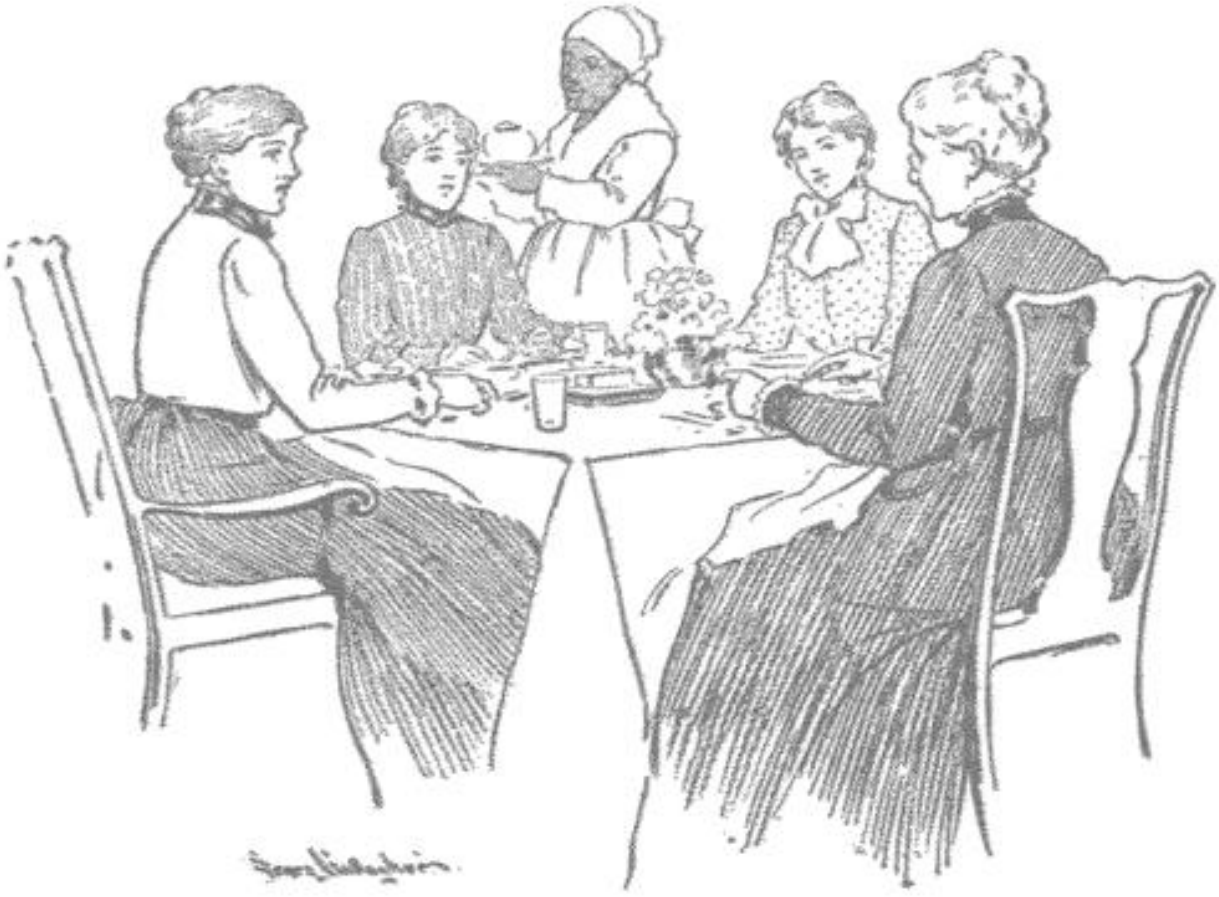
There were tears in Wilma's eyes as she carried the lunch-basket into the pantry, but she giggled as, passing the old portraits on the stairs, as they went up to dress, Claribel shook her fist in their faces.

"That's what we get for having the latch-string of our ancestors in our keeping," she exclaimed. "It's pretty well frayed out by this time, and cannot stand many more strains like this. It seems to me that we are sort of acting a lie. Mam Daphne will wait on the table to-day, and Mrs. Gorham will see what a spread we have, and will think that we live that way all the time."

"Well," said Wilma, hopefully, "we will live that way all the time when sister's 'Romance of Carrington' is published. How good it will be to feel able to ask the girls to stay to lunch any time they happen to drop in, and not have to be wondering if the butter will hold out!"

Despite their disappointment, the day proved a pleasant one, for Mrs. Gorham brought with her a breath from the outside world for which

they longed. She entertained them with stories of her travels, of her daughter's experiences at boarding-school and her son Tom's escapades at college. She praised Claribel's embroidery and Wilma's little water-colour sketches, and she



left without discovering all the ravages time had wrought in beautiful old Marchmont. For they sat out on the porch nearly all day, and the rose mantle of the Gloire de Dijon hid a multitude of sins of omission in the way of neglected repairs.

Several days later, when Mrs. Gorham wrote to Agnes, thanking her for the pleasure the visit had given her, she added: "I have talked so much about Marchmont since my return, of its roses, of its hospitality and its charming girls, that Tom declares he intends to follow my example and drop by some day for a call. He may carry out his threat this summer, as a little business matter may call him to that part of the State. I have assured him your latch-string will be out to him as it was to me, for old time's sake. I shall be very glad to have him know the daughters of my old friend."

"Oh," cried Wilma, as Agnes read the letter aloud, "if he is half as interesting as his mother's tales of him, he must be a real Prince Charming. But, oh, girls, *don't* you hope he'll wait until 'Carrington' is out? It would be dreadfully embarrassing if, after his mother's account of our hospitality, we could give him only scraps. There can't always be a picnic basket to fall back on."

The prospective guest was often discussed during the summer that followed; and, although he never came, Wilma was always alarming the family, when affairs were especially unpropitious,

by the query, "What if he should suddenly drop in upon us *now?*"

"There's no use of your crying 'wolf' any longer," said Claribel, impatiently, one rainy morning, near the middle of September. "He's surely gone back to college by this time. What if a letter did come to sister this morning, addressed in a strange handwriting? It is from some new man on the *Sentinel*, probably."

"At any rate," insisted Wilma, "I wish it had come before sister went to town, and if it should be from Mrs. Gorham's son, of all the unlucky days in creation, he couldn't have chosen a worse time to arrive. The situation is absolutely hopeless."

The two girls were in the attic, arrayed in their oldest wrappers. Claribel, with her curly hair carefully tied up in a towel, was ripping open an old feather bolster to convert it into sofa pillows. Wilma, dragging out dusty boxes from under the eaves, was looking through them for some remnants of linen for covers.

Their noses were blue with cold, for the wind whistled through the broken panes of the attic windows. Early that morning Agnes had started on her weekly trip to town to the *Sentinel's*

office. Her face was white and set, and she had passed a sleepless night. The day before, her manuscript, that was to have made the fortunes of her little world, was returned to her from the publishers. It was more than a disappointment to the three who had counted so confidently upon its success. It was almost a tragedy in the shattering of such high hopes. An intangible sense of loss had weighed on their spirits ever since, almost as if some one lay dead in the great empty parlours below.

It was a desire to rid themselves of the strange feeling of desolation that brooded over the familiar rooms that sent the girls to the attic as soon as Agnes left. Mam Daphne had brought the mail, as she often did in rainy weather, and gone again. The sight of the letter addressed to Agnes had given rise to Wilma's usual supposition, and then silence followed for nearly an hour. It was broken by a sudden thundering of the griffin's head against the great front door. The girls' hearts seemed to leap up in their throats. They had not heard that sound since the June day of Mrs. Gorham's visit.

"*Tom!*" ejaculated Wilma, in a terrified whis-

per, looking wildly into Claribel's startled eyes. "Oh, we can't let him in! Neither of us is fit to go down, and there isn't a spark of fire in this big barn of a house, even in the kitchen stove."

"I can't go," announced Claribel. "I am simply covered with feathers. It will take an hour at least to pick them off."

Wilma held up two grimy hands, and pointed to the front breadth of her wrapper, which had been torn to ribbons on a lurking nail.

"Do you think he would recognise in either of us one of the 'charming girls of Marchmont' that his mother painted?"

"Maybe it's only a book-agent after all," suggested Claribel, hopefully. But the knocking sounded again, and Wilma shook her head.

"No, there was that letter to sister, you know, and it sounds just as I've imagined Tom would knock, from what his mother told of him — so peremptory and lordly, somehow, as if he wouldn't take no for an answer."

"What shall we do?" groaned Claribel, desperately. "Even if we were fit to go down, there's nothing but bread and tea for lunch. Oh, if sister were only home!"

While they hesitated and exclaimed and de-

"AT THE GATE HE TURNED FOR A LONG BACKWARD LOOK."

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bated, they heard a step crunch on the gravel far below, and looking down, saw a dripping umbrella, a broad back, and two long legs striding down the walk. Just above the attic window where they crouched, a grinning gargoyle spouted a stream of water past the tiny diamond panes. Through this miniature cataract they watched their departing guest. At the gate he turned for a long backward look, and they had a glimpse of a handsome boyish face, as he gazed up at the stately pillared old mansion. The roses were gone, and the rain beating against it made it look unspeakably old and cheerless. All the front shutters were closed, and no smoke wreathed from any of its chimneys. Evidently he thought the place deserted, seeing no signs of life anywhere about it.

As his gaze wandered upward to the grinning old gargoyle, the girls hastily drew back. When they peeped out again, he had gone.

"Do you realise what we have done?" asked Claribel, with tears of mortification springing to her eyes. "We have kept still and acted another lie for the sake of our ancestral latch-string. Oh, why haven't we servants and plenty to eat and wear as they had in the good old times Mam

Daphne tells about, so that we could always be at home to everybody?"

"And he looked *so* interesting," wailed Wilma. "I'd love to know a man like that — a real, wide-awake college fellow — and now he's walked right out of our lives as everything else worth while has done. Now that 'Carrington' has failed and sister lost hope — "

She did not finish the sentence, but sat there on the attic floor in a disconsolate little heap, staring out the tiny window while the rain beat a dirge on the leaky roof. Suddenly she was startled by Claribel scrambling to her feet.

"You hear me, Wilma Mason," she cried. "I'll never be mortified again in this way! I don't care what sister says, I am going to work for the honour of the family latch-string. I swear this shall never happen again." Her tragic manner was in such comical contrast to her befeathered appearance that Wilma laughed, for the first time since the return of the manuscript. Then they went down to rekindle the kitchen fire, and plan for the repairing of their family fortunes.

"I don't know what practical shape your fine resolutions will take," said Wilma, as they took

their bread and tea at lunch, "but for my part, no one shall ever again look at that poor old broken-hinged gate with the quizzical glance Tom gave it. His very eyebrows seemed to say 'Lor', how shiftless!' I shall put on a new hinge myself as soon as it stops raining. There's a big box of screws and locks and things down in the granary, and the remains of a tool-chest."

Once started on her round of repairs, Wilma found herself viewing the entire premises from the standpoint of the sharp gray eyes that had looked so reprovingly at the broken-hinged gate.

"If Tom ever comes here again," she vowed to herself, "he shall not see this grand old place in such a pitiful state of dilapidation. I can at least see that the porch floor has paint, and the garden chairs more than three legs apiece. I feel that I have the making in me of a first-class carpenter." So here and there she went, hammering, and screwing, and puttying, and painting, finding an outlet for much latent energy, and a use for her long repressed, although long suspected mechanical ability.

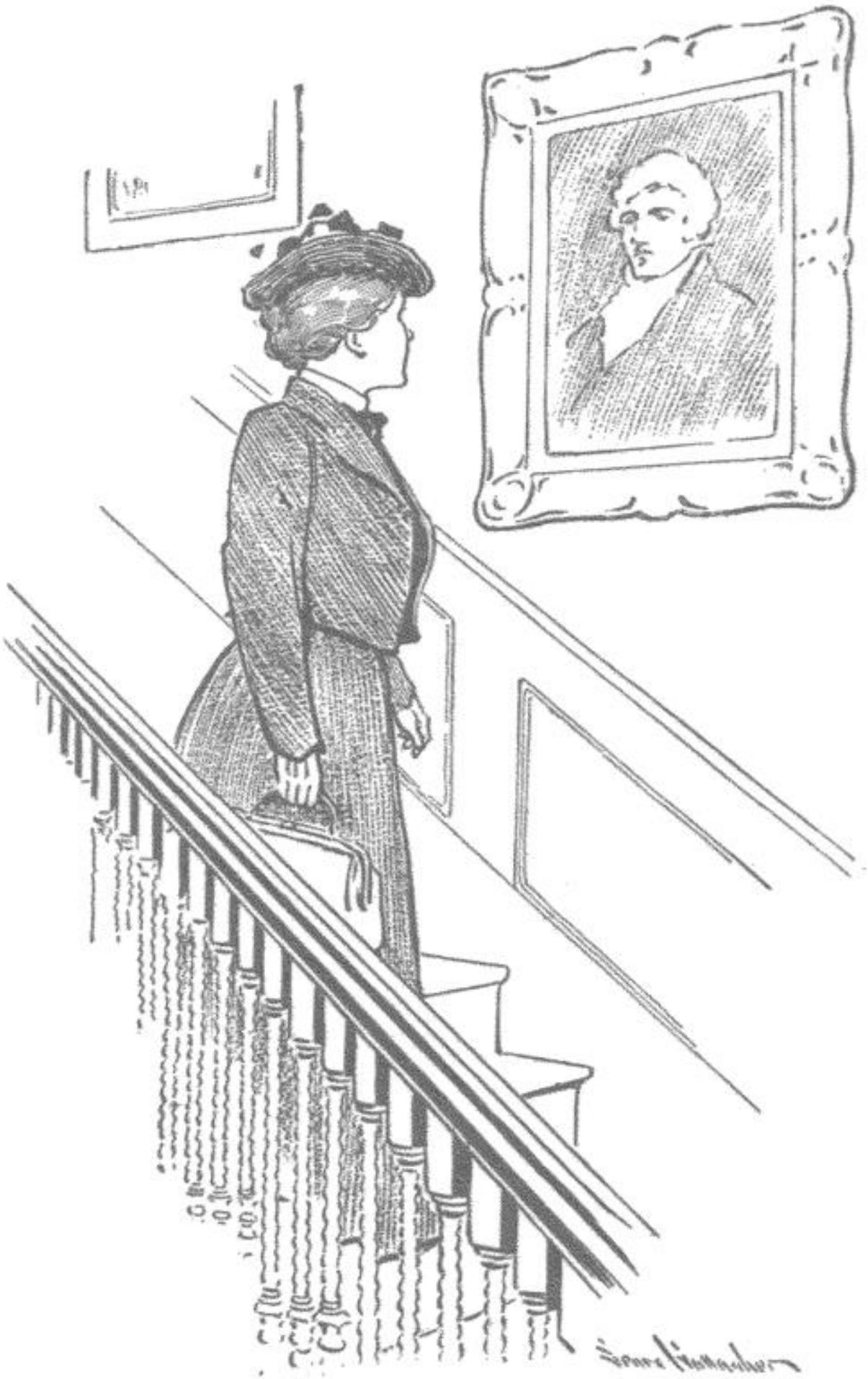
Claribel's plans did not put themselves into practical shape so readily. For days she went about with a preoccupied air. There was some

mysterious correspondence that Agnes wondered over, many hours spent in her room with locked doors. Then one day she stole down the stately stairway with a little valise in her hands.

"You needn't look at me in that way," she whispered, defiantly, as she met the disapproving gaze of the long line of family portraits. "It is to keep up your own old traditions that I am doing it."

Then something of the proud spirit of her ancestors seemed to take possession of her as she passed out of their patronising presence. It helped her to hold her head high, and carried her through a trying interview with the most fashionable dressmaker in the city, whither she had slipped away with some little models of children's dresses of her own designing and making.

At the end of an hour she came away triumphant. Madame, impressed by her references, quick to see the value of her original ideas, and shrewd enough to know how useful this artistic young girl could be to her, consented to her proposition to establish a department for the making of children's fancy costumes, of which Claribel was to be in charge. At first



"'YOU NEEDN'T LOOK AT ME IN THAT WAY,' SHE WHISPERED, DEFIANTLY."

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the woman named a salary so low that she would not have dared propose it, had she not thought that necessity had driven the girl to such a step. She was used to beating down her employees to absurdly low wages. Then it was that the pride of all her ancestors seemed to blaze out of Claribel's eyes, and she drew herself up haughtily.

"You know that the designing alone would be worth four times that sum, madame," she said, quietly. "If that is the best you can do, we will not discuss the subject farther."

Madame hastily retracted then. She knew it would never do to let this opportunity slip into the hands of a rival, and the names of Claribel's references were too prominent to overlook. So a little later, when the next train bore the excited young girl homeward, it was a triumphant voice that poured out the story of her success to Wilma, who met her at the gate.

"And at a salary that will put new shingles on old Marchmont," she cried, "and put Daphne in the kitchen, and picnic fare in the pantry every day."

"You needn't think you're going to do it all," exclaimed Wilma. "This very day I discovered

all the old hothouse frames stored away in the carriage-house, as good as new; and Mam Daphne told me so many tales about the violets and the lettuce that used to be the boast of Marchmont every winter, that I went over to consult papa's old gardener. Sister has actually consented to let me try my hand at raising both. I haven't told her yet that it is my ambition to furnish the fashionable club houses this winter with extra fine lettuce at fancy prices. Poor sister! She'll be horrified, after all her precautions, to have one of us turn out a market-gardener and the other a dressmaker."

"Say designer, if you please, when you break my news to her, and tell her that my creative ability simply had to have an outlet of some kind, and that this will be a stepping-stone to my career as artist. Maybe that will help to soften the blow."

"Really, it was Tom who began it. He ought to have all the credit, or otherwise," said Wilma, as they passed on into the wide front hall. "I hadn't realised the condition of our family latch-string until I saw it through his eyes. Then I began to trace it back and found that it began in the door of a pioneer log cabin; and oh, what

do you think, Claribel, the two ancestors we are proudest of, the ones we all quote the oftenest, and plume ourselves the most on being their descendants, had to dig and delve for everything they got. Old Mrs. Carter told me so this morning." She pointed to the two portraits that headed the long line. "*Now* if sister makes any objections to our plans, I'll just refer her to the first of the grandmammas who made our hospitality proverbial, and, hardening her hands with the work of the wilderness, was yet the truest gentlewoman of them all."

THE END.

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