

Elsie's Girlhood

Martha Finley

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A SEQUEL TO

"ELSIE DINSMORE" AND "ELSIE'S HOLIDAYS AT ROSELANDS"

BY

MARTHA FINLEY

1872

"Oh! time of promise, hope, and innocence, Of trust, and love, and happy ignorance! Whose every dream is heaven, in whose fair joy Experience yet has thrown no black alloy."

--THOUGHTS OF A RECLUSE

PREFACE

Some years have now elapsed since my little heroine "ELSIE DINSMORE" made her debut into the great world. She was sent out with many an anxious thought regarding the reception that might await her there. But she was kindly welcomed, and such has been the favor shown her ever since that Publishers and Author have felt encouraged to prepare a new volume in which will be found the story of those years that have carried Elsie on from childhood to womanhood--the years in which her character was developing, and mind and body were growing and strengthening for the real work and battle of life.

May my readers who have admired and loved her as a child find her still more charming in her fresh young girlhood; may she prove to all a pleasant companion and friend; and to those of them now treading the same portion of life's pathway a useful example also, particularly in her filial love and obedience.

M.F.

CHAPTER I.

It is a busy, talking world.

--ROWE.

"I think I shall enjoy the fortnight we are to spend here, papa; it seems such a very pleasant place," Elsie remarked, in a tone of great satisfaction.

"I am glad you are pleased with it, daughter," returned Mr. Dinsmore, opening the morning paper, which John had just brought up.

They--Mr. Dinsmore and Elsie, Rose and Edward Allison--were occupying very comfortable quarters in a large hotel at one of our fashionable watering-places. A bedroom for each, and a private parlor for the joint use of the party, had been secured in advance, and late the night before they had arrived and taken possession.

It was now early in the morning, Elsie and her papa were in his room, which was in the second story and opened upon a veranda, shaded by tall trees, and overlooking a large grassy yard at the side of the building. Beyond were green fields, woods, and hills.

"Papa," said Elsie, gazing longingly upon them, as she stood by the open window, "can't we take a walk?"

"When Miss Rose is ready to go with us."

"May I run to her door and ask if she is?--and if she isn't, may I wait for her out here on the veranda?"

"Yes."

She skipped away, but was back again almost immediately. "Papa, what do you think? It's just too bad!"

"What is too bad, daughter? I think I never before saw so cross a look on my little girl's face," he said, peering at her over the top of his newspaper. "Come here, and tell me what it is all about."

She obeyed, hanging her head and blushing. "I think I have some reason to be cross, papa," she said; "I thought we were going to have such a delightful time here, and now it is all spoiled. You could never guess who has the rooms just opposite ours; on the other side of the hall."

"Miss Stevens?"

"Why, papa; did you know she was here?"

"I knew she was in the house, because I saw her name in the hotel book last night when I went to register ours."

"And it just spoils all our pleasure."

"I hope not, daughter. I think she will hardly annoy you when you are close at my side; and that is pretty much all the time, isn't it?"

"Yes, papa, and I'll stick closer than ever to you if that will make her let me alone," she cried, with a merry laugh, putting her arm round his neck and kissing him two or three times.

"Ah, now I have my own little girl again," he said, drawing her to his knee and returning her caresses with interest: "But there, I hear Miss Rose's step in the hall. Run to mammy and have your hat put on."

Miss Stevens' presence proved scarcely less annoying to Elsie than the child had anticipated. She tried to keep out of the lady's way, but it

was quite impossible. She could scarcely step out on the veranda, go into the parlor, or take a turn in the garden by herself, but in a moment Miss Stevens was at her side fawning upon and flattering her--telling her how sweet and pretty and amiable she was, how dearly she loved her, and how much she thought of her papa too: he was so handsome and so good; everybody admired him and thought him such a fine-looking gentleman, so polished in his manners, so agreeable and entertaining in conversation.

Then she would press all sorts of dainties upon the little girl in such a way that it was next to impossible to decline them, and occasionally even went so far as to suggest improvements, or rather alterations, in her dress, which she said was entirely too plain.

"You ought to have more flounces on your skirts, my dear," she remarked one day. "Skirt flounced to the waist are so very pretty and dressy, and you would look sweetly in them, but I notice you don't wear them at all. Do ask your papa to let you get a new dress and have it made so; I am sure he would consent, for any one can see that he is very fond of you. He doesn't think of it; we can't expect gentlemen to notice such little matters; you ought to have a mamma to attend to such things for you. Ah! if you were my child, I would dress you sweetly, you dear little thing!"

"Thank you, ma'am, I daresay you mean to be very kind," replied Elsie, trying not to look annoyed, "but I don't want a mamma, since my own dear mother has gone to heaven; papa is enough for me, and I like the way he dresses me. He always buys my dresses himself and says how they are to be made. The dressmaker wanted to put more flounces on, but papa didn't want them and neither did I. He says he doesn't like to see little girls loaded with finery, and that my clothes shall be of the best material and nicely made, but neat and simple."

"Oh, yes; I know your dress is not cheap; I didn't mean that at all: it is quite expensive enough, and some of your white dresses are beautifully worked; but I would like a little more ornament. You wear so little jewelry, and your father could afford to cover you with it if he chose. A pair of gold bracelets, like mine for instance, would be very pretty, and look charming on your lovely white arms: those pearl ones you wear sometimes are very handsome--any one could tell that they are the real thing--but you ought to have gold ones too, with clasps set with diamonds. Couldn't you persuade your papa to buy some for you?"

"Indeed, Miss Stevens, I don't want them! I don't want anything but what papa chooses to buy for me of his own accord. Ah! there is Miss Rose looking for me, I must go," and the little girl, glad of an excuse to get away, ran joyfully to her friend who had come to the veranda, where she and Miss Stevens had been standing, to tell her that they were going out to walk, and her papa wished to take her along.

Elsie went in to get her hat, and Miss Stevens came towards Rose, saying, "I think I heard you say you were going to walk; and I believe, if you don't forbid me, I shall do myself the pleasure of accompanying you. I have just been waiting for pleasant company. I will be ready in one moment." And before Rose could recover from her astonishment sufficiently to reply she had disappeared through the hall door.

Elsie was out again in a moment, just as the gentlemen had joined Rose, who excited their surprise and disgust by a repetition of Miss Stevens' speech to her.

Mr. Dinsmore looked excessively annoyed, and Edward "pshawed, and wished her at the bottom of the sea."

"No, brother," said Rose, smiling, "you don't wish any such thing; on the contrary, you would be the very first to fly to the rescue if you saw her in danger of drowning."

But before there was time for anything more to be said Miss Stevens had returned, and walking straight up to Mr. Dinsmore, she put her arm through his, saying with a little laugh, and what was meant for a very arch expression, "You see I don't stand upon ceremony with old friends, Mr. Dinsmore. It isn't my way."

"No, Miss Stevens, I think it never was," he replied, offering the other arm to Rose.

She was going to decline it on the plea that the path was too narrow for three, but something in his look made her change her mind and accept; and they moved on, while Elsie, almost ready to cry with vexation, fell behind with Edward Allison for an escort.

Edward tried to entertain his young companion, but was too much provoked at the turn things had taken to make himself very agreeable to any one; and altogether it was quite an uncomfortable walk: no one seeming to enjoy it but Miss Stevens, who laughed and talked incessantly; addressing nearly all her conversation to Mr. Dinsmore, he answering her with studied politeness, but nothing more.

Miss Stevens had, from the first, conceived a great antipathy to Rose, whom she considered a dangerous rival, and generally avoided, excepting when Mr. Dinsmore was with her; but she always interrupted a tete-a-tete between them when it was in her power to do so without being guilty of very great rudeness. This, and the covert sneers with which she often addressed Miss Allison had not escaped Mr. Dinsmore's notice, and it frequently cost him quite an effort to treat Miss Stevens with the respectful politeness which he considered due to her sex and to the daughter of his father's old friend.

"Was it not too provoking, papa?" exclaimed Elsie, as she followed him into his room on their return from their walk.

"What, my dear?"

"Why, papa, I thought we were going to have such a nice time, and she just spoiled it all."

"She? who, daughter?"

"Why, papa, surely you know I mean Miss Stevens!"

"Then why did you not mention her name, instead of speaking of her as she? That does not sound respectful in a child of your age, and I wish my little girl always to be respectful to those older than herself. I thought I heard you the other day mention some gentleman's name

without the prefix of Mr., and I intended to reprove you for it at the time. Don't do it again."

"No, sir, I won't," Elsie answered with a blush. "But, papa," she added the next moment, "Miss Stevens does that constantly."

"That makes no difference, my daughter," he said gravely. "Miss Stevens is the very last person I would have you take for your model; the less you resemble her in dress, manners, or anything else, the better. If you wish to copy any one let it be Miss Allison, for she is a perfect lady in every respect."

Elsie looked very much pleased. "Yes, indeed, papa," she said, "I should be glad if I could be just like Miss Rose, she is always kind and gentle to everybody; even the servants, whom Miss Stevens orders about so crossly."

"Elsie!"

"What, papa?" she asked, blushing again, for his tone was reproofing.

"Come here and sit on my knee; I want to talk to you. I am afraid my little daughter is growing censorious," he said, with a very grave look as he drew her to his side. "You forget that we ought not to speak of other people's faults."

"I will try not to do it any more, papa," she replied, the tears springing to her eyes; "but you don't know how very annoying Miss Stevens is. I have been near telling her several times that I did wish she would let me alone."

"No, daughter, don't do that. You must behave in a lady-like manner whether she does or not. We must expect annoyances in this world, my child; and must try to bear them with patience, remembering that God sends the little trials as well as the great, and that He has commanded us to 'let patience have her perfect work.' I fear it is a lack of the spirit of forgiveness that makes it so difficult for us to bear these trifling vexations with equanimity. And you must remember too, dear, that the Bible bids us be courteous, and teaches us to treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated."

"I think you always remember the command to be courteous, papa," she said, looking affectionately into his face. "I was wondering all the time how you could be so very polite to Miss Stevens; for I was quite sure you would rather not have had her along. And then, what right had she to take your arm without being asked?" and Elsie's face flushed with indignation.

Her father laughed a little. "And thus deprive my little girl of her rights," he said, softly kissing the glowing cheek. "Ah! I doubt if you would have been angry had it been Miss Rose," he added, a little mischievously.

"Oh, papa, you know Miss Rose would never have done such a thing!" exclaimed the little girl warmly.

"Ah! well, dear," he said in a soothing tone; "we won't talk any more about it. I acknowledge that I do not find Miss Stevens the most agreeable company in the world, but I must treat her politely, and

show her a little attention sometimes; both because she is a lady and because her father once saved my father's life; for which I owe a debt of gratitude to him and his children."

"Did he, papa? I am sure it was very good of him, and I will try to like Miss Stevens for that. But won't you tell me about it?"

"It was when they were both quite young men," said Mr. Dinsmore, "before either of them was married: they were skating together and your grandfather broke through the ice, and would have been drowned, but for the courage and presence of mind of Mr. Stevens, who saved him only by very great exertion, and at the risk of his own life."

A few days after this, Elsie was playing on the veranda, with several other little girls. "Do you think you shall like your new mamma, Elsie?" asked one of them in a careless tone, as she tied on an apron she had just been making for her doll, and turned it around to see how it fitted.

"My new mamma!" exclaimed Elsie, with unfeigned astonishment, dropping the scissors with which she had been cutting paper dolls for some of the little ones. "What can you mean, Annie? I am not going to have any new mamma."

"Yes, indeed, but you are though," asserted Annie positively; "for I heard my mother say so only yesterday; and it must be so, for she Miss Stevens told it herself."

"Miss Stevens! and what does she know about it? what has she to do with my papa's affairs?" asked Elsie indignantly, the color rushing over face, neck, and arms.

"Well, I should think she might know, when she is going to marry him," returned the other, with a laugh.

"She isn't! it's false! my"--but Elsie checked herself and shut her teeth hard to keep down the emotion that was swelling in her breast.

"It's true, you may depend upon it," replied Annie; "everybody in the house knows it, and they are all talking about what a splendid match Miss Stevens is going to make; and mamma was wondering if you knew it, and how you would like her; and papa said he thought Mr. Dinsmore wouldn't think much of her if he knew how she flirted and danced until he came, and now pretends not to approve of balls, just because he doesn't."

Elsie made no reply, but dropping scissors, paper, and everything, sprang up and ran swiftly along the veranda, through the hall, upstairs, and without pausing to take breath, rushed into her father's room, where he sat quietly reading.

"Why, Elsie, daughter, what is the matter?" he asked in a tone of surprise and concern, as he caught sight of her flushed and agitated face.

"Oh, papa, it's that hateful Miss Stevens; I can't bear her!" she cried, throwing herself upon his breast, and bursting into a fit of passionate weeping.

Mr. Dinsmore said nothing for a moment; but thinking tears would prove the best relief to her overwrought feelings, contented himself with simply stroking her hair in a soothing way, and once or twice pressing his lips gently to her forehead.

"You feel better now, dearest, do you not?" he asked presently, as she raised her head to wipe away her tears.

"Yes, papa."

"Now tell me what it was all about."

"Miss Stevens does say such hateful things, papa!"

He laid his finger upon her lips. "Don't use that word again. It does not sound at all like my usually gentle sweet-tempered little girl."

"I won't, papa," she murmured, blushing and hanging her head. Then hiding her face on his breast, she lay there for several minutes perfectly silent and still.

"What is my little girl thinking of?" he asked at length.

"How everybody talks about you, papa; last evening I was out on the veranda, and I heard John and Miss Stevens' maid, Phillis, talking together. It was moonlight, you know, papa," she went on, turning her face toward him again: "and they were out under the trees and John had his arm round her, and he was kissing her, and telling her how pretty she was; and then they began talking about Miss Stevens and you, and John told Phillis that he reckoned you were going to marry her--"

"Who? Phillis?" asked Mr. Dinsmore, looking excessively amused.

"Oh, papa; no; you know I mean Miss Stevens," Elsie answered in a tone of annoyance.

"Well, dear, and what of it all?" he asked, soothingly. "I don't think the silly nonsense of the servants need trouble you. John is a sad fellow, I know; he courts all the pretty colored girls wherever he goes. I shall have to read him a serious lecture on the subject. But it is very kind of you to be so concerned for Phillis."

"Oh, papa, don't!" she said, turning away her face. "Please don't tease me so. You know I don't care for Phillis or John; but that isn't all." And then she repeated what had passed between Annie and herself.

He looked a good deal provoked as she went on with her story; then very grave indeed. He was quite silent for a moment after she had done. Then drawing her closer to him, he said tenderly, "My poor little girl, I am sorry you should be so annoyed; but you know it is not true, daughter, and why need you care what other people think and say?"

"I don't like them to talk so, papa! I can't bear to have them say such things about you!" she exclaimed indignantly.

He was silent again for a little; then said kindly, "I think I had better take you away from these troublesome talkers. What do you say to going home?"

"Oh, yes, papa, do take me home," she answered eagerly. "I wish we were there now. I think it is the pleasantest place in the world and it seems such a long, long while since we came away. Let us start to-morrow, papa; can't we?"

"But you know you will have to leave Miss Rose."

"Ah! I forgot that," she said a little sadly; but brightening again, she asked: "Couldn't you invite her to go home with us and spend the winter? Ah! papa, do! it would be so pleasant to have her."

"No, my dear, it wouldn't do," he replied with a grave shake of the head.

"Why, papa?" she asked with a look of keen disappointment.

"You are too young to understand why," he said in the same grave tone, and then relapsed into silence; sitting there for some time stroking her hair in an absent way, with his eyes on the carpet.

At last he said, "Elsie!" in a soft, low tone that quite made the little girl start and look up into his face; for she, too, had been in a deep reverie.

"What, papa?" she asked, and she wondered to see how the color had spread over his face, and how bright his eyes looked.

"I have been thinking," he said, in a half hesitating way, "that though it would not do to invite Miss Rose to spend the winter with us, it might do very nicely to ask her to come and live at the Oaks."

Elsie looked at him for a moment with a bewildered expression; then suddenly comprehending, her face lighted up.

"Would you like it, dearest?" he asked; "or would you prefer to go on living just as we have been, you and I together? I would consult your happiness before my own, for it lies very near my heart, my precious one. I can never forgive myself for all I have made you suffer, and when you were restored to me almost from the grave, I made a vow to do all in my power to make your future life bright and happy."

His tones were full of deep feeling, and as he spoke he drew her closer and closer to him and kissed her tenderly again and again.

"Speak, daughter, and tell me what you wish," he said, as she still remained silent.

At last she spoke, and he bent down to catch the words. "Dear papa," she whispered, "would it make you happy? and do you think mamma knows, and that she would like it?"

"Your mamma loves us both too well not to be pleased with anything that would add to our happiness," he replied gently.

"Dear papa, you won't be angry if I ask another question?"

"No, darling; ask as many as you wish."

"Then, papa, will I have to call her mamma? and do you think my own mamma would like it?"

"If Miss Allison consents to take a mother's place to you, I am sure your own mamma, if she could speak to you, would tell you she deserved to have the title; and it would hurt us both very much if you refused to give it. Indeed, my daughter, I cannot ask her to come to us unless you will promise to do so, and to love and obey, her just as you do me. Will you?"

"I will try to obey her, papa; and I shall love her very dearly, for I do already; but I can not love anybody quite so well as I love you, my own dear, dear father!" she said, throwing her arms around his neck.

He returned her caress, saying tenderly, "That is all I can ask, dearest; I must reserve the first place in your heart for myself."

"Do you think she will come, papa?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know, daughter; I have not asked her yet. But shall I tell her that it will add to your happiness if she will be your mamma?"

"Yes, sir; and that I will call her mamma, and obey her and love her dearly. Oh, papa, ask her very soon, won't you?"

"Perhaps; but don't set your heart too much on it, for she may not be quite so willing to take such a troublesome charge as Miss Stevens seems to be," he said, returning to his playful tone.

Elsie looked troubled and anxious.

"I hope she will, papa," she said; "I think she might be very glad to come and live with you; and in such a beautiful home, too."

"Ah! but everyone does not appreciate my society as highly as you do," he replied, laughing and pinching her cheek; "and besides, you forget about the troublesome little girl. I have heard ladies say they would not marry a man who had a child."

"But Miss Rose loves me, papa; I am sure she does," she said, flushing, and the tears starting to her eyes.

"Yes, darling, I know she does," he answered soothingly. "I am only afraid she loves you better than she does me."

A large party of equestrians were setting out from the hotel that evening soon after tea, and Elsie, in company with several other little girls, went out upon the veranda to watch them mount and ride away. She was absent but a few moments from the parlor, where she had left her father, but when she returned to it he was not there. Miss Rose, too, was gone, she found upon further search, and though she had not much difficulty in conjecturing why she had thus, for the first time, been left behind, she could not help feeling rather lonely and desolate.

She felt no disposition to renew the afternoon's conversation with Annie Hart, so she went quietly upstairs to their private parlor and sat down to amuse herself with a book until Chloe came in from eating her supper. Then the little girl brought a stool, and seating herself

in the old posture with her head in her nurse's lap, she drew her mother's miniature from her bosom, and fixing her eyes lovingly upon it, said, as she had done hundreds of times before: "Now, mammy, please tell me about my dear, dear mamma."

The soft eyes were full of tears; for with all her joy at the thought of Rose, mingled a strange sad feeling that she was getting farther away from that dear, precious, unknown mother, whose image had been, since her earliest recollection, enshrined in her very heart of hearts.

CHAPTER II

O lady! there be many things
That seem right fair above;
But sure not one among them all
Is half so sweet as love;--
Let us not pay our vows alone,
But join two altars into one.

--O. W. HOLMES

Here still is the smile that no cloud can o'ercast,
And the heart, and the hand, all thy own to the last.

--MOORE.

Mr. Horace Dinsmore was quite remarkable for his conversational powers, and Rose, who had always heretofore found him a most entertaining companion, wondered greatly at his silence on this particular evening. She waited in vain for him to start some topic of conversation, but as he did not seem disposed to do so, she at length made the attempt herself, and tried one subject after another. Finding, however, that she was answered only in monosyllables, she too grew silent and embarrassed, and heartily wished for the relief of Elsie's presence.

She had proposed summoning the child to accompany them as usual, but Mr. Dinsmore replied that she had already had sufficient exercise, and he would prefer having her remain at home.

They had walked some distance, and coming to a rustic seat where they had often rested, they sat down. The moon was shining softly down upon them, and all nature seemed hushed and still. For some moments neither of them spoke, but at length Mr. Dinsmore broke the silence.

"Miss Allison," he said, in his deep, rich tones, "I would like to tell you a story, if you will do me the favor to listen."

It would have been quite impossible for Rose to tell why her heart beat so fast at this very commonplace remark, but so it was; and she could scarcely steady her voice to reply, "I always find your stories interesting, Mr. Dinsmore."

He began at once.

"Somewhere between ten and eleven years ago, a wild, reckless boy of seventeen, very much spoiled by the indulgence of a fond, doting father, who loved and petted him as the only son of his departed mother, was spending a few months in one of our large Southern cities, where he met, and soon fell desperately in love with, a beautiful orphan heiress, some two years his junior.

"The boy was of too ardent a temperament, and too madly in love, to brook for a moment the thought of waiting until parents and guardians should consider them of suitable age to marry, in addition to which he had good reason to fear that his father, with whom family pride was a ruling passion, would entirely refuse his consent upon learning that the father of the young lady had begun life as a poor, uneducated boy, and worked his way up to wealth and position by dint of hard labor and incessant application to business.

"The boy, it is true, was almost as proud himself, but it was not until the arrows of the boy-god had entered into his heart too deeply to be extracted, that he learned the story of his charmer's antecedents. Yet I doubt if the result would have been different had he been abundantly forewarned; for oh, Miss Rose, if ever an angel walked the earth in human form it was she!--so gentle, so good, so beautiful!"

He heaved a deep sigh, paused a moment, and then went on:

"Well, Miss Rose, as you have probably surmised, they were privately married. If that sweet girl had a fault, it was that she was too yielding to those she loved, and she did love her young husband with all the warmth of her young guileless heart; for she had neither parents nor kinsfolk, and he was the one object around which her affections might cling. They were all the world to each other, and for a few short months they were very happy.

"But it could not last; the marriage was discovered--her guardian and the young man's father were both furious, and they were torn asunder; she carried away to a distant plantation, and he sent North to attend college.

"They were well-nigh distracted, but cherished the hope that when they should reach their majority and come into possession of their property, which was now unfortunately entirely in the hands of their guardians, they would be reunited.

"But--it is the old story--their letters were intercepted, and the first news the young husband received of his wife was that she had died a few days after giving birth to a little daughter."

Again Mr. Dinsmore paused, then continued:

"It was a terrible stroke! For months, reason seemed almost ready to desert her throne; but time does wonders, and in the course of years it did much to heal his wounds. You would perhaps suppose that he would at once--or at least as soon as he was his own master--have sought out his child, and lavished upon it the wealth of his affections: but no; he had conceived almost an aversion to it; for he looked upon it as the cause--innocent, it is true--but still the cause of his wife's death. He did not know till long years afterwards

that her heart was broken by the false story of his desertion and subsequent death. Her guardian was a hard, cruel man, though faithful in his care of her property.

"With him the child remained until she was about four years old when a change was made necessary by his death, and she, with her faithful nurse, was received into her paternal grandfather's family until her father, who had then gone abroad, should return. But my story is growing very long, and you will be weary of listening. I will try to be as brief as possible.

"The little girl, under the care of her nurse and the faithful instructions of a pious old Scotchwoman--who had come over with the child's maternal grandparents, and followed the fortunes of the daughter and granddaughter, always living as housekeeper in the families where they resided--had grown to be a sweet, engaging child, inheriting her mother's beauty and gentleness. She had also her mother's craving for affection, and was constantly looking and longing for the return of her unknown father, which was delayed from time to time until she was nearly eight years of age.

"At last he came; but ah, what a bitter disappointment awaited the poor child! His mind had been poisoned against her, and instead of the love and tenderness she had a right to expect, he met her with coldness--almost with aversion. Poor little one! she was nearly heartbroken, and for a time scarcely dared venture into her father's presence. She was gentle, submissive, and patient; he cold, haughty, and stern. But she would love him, in spite of his sternness, and at length she succeeded in winning her way to his affections, and he learned to love her with passionate tenderness.

"Still her troubles were not over. She was sincerely pious, and conscientiously strict in many things which her father deemed of little importance; especially was this the case in regard to the observance of the Sabbath. He was a man of iron will, and she, though perfectly submissive in other respects, had the firmness of a martyr in resisting any interference with her conscience.

"Well, their wills came in collision. He required her to do what she considered a violation of God's law, although he could see no harm in it, and therefore considered her stubborn and disobedient. He was firm, but so was she. He tried persuasions, threats, punishments--all without effect. He banished her from his arms, from the family circle, deprived her of amusements, denied her to visitors, broke off her correspondence with a valued friend, sent away her nurse; and finding all these acts of severity ineffectual, he at length left her, telling her he would return only when she submitted; and even refusing her a parting caress, which she pleaded for with heart-breaking entreaties."

Mr. Dinsmore's voice trembled with emotion, but recovering himself, he went on:

"Don't think, Miss Allison, that all this time the father's heart was not bleeding; it was, at every pore; but he was determined to conquer, and mistook the child's motives and the source of her strength to resist his will.

"He had bought a beautiful estate; he caused the house to be handsomely fitted up and furnished, especially lavishing trouble and

expense upon a suite of rooms for his little girl, and when all was completed, he wrote to her, bidding her go and see the lovely home he had prepared for her reception as soon as she would submit,--and presenting, as the only alternative, banishment to a boarding-school or convent until her education was finished. This was the one drop which made the cup overflow. The poor suffering child was prostrated by a brain fever which brought her to the very gates of death. Then the father's eyes were opened; he saw his folly and his sin, and repented in sackcloth and ashes; and God, in His great mercy, was pleased to spare him the terrible crushing blow which seemed to have already fallen;--for at one time they told him his child was dead. Oh, never, never can he forget the unutterable anguish of that moment!"

Mr. Dinsmore paused, unable to proceed. Rose had been weeping for some time. She well knew to whose story she was listening, and her gentle, loving heart was filled with pity for both him and for his child.

"I have but little more to tell," he resumed; "the child has at length entirely recovered her health; she is dearer to her father's heart than words can express, and is very happy in the knowledge that it is so, and that henceforward he will strive to assist her to walk in the narrow way, instead of endeavoring to lead her from it.

"Their home has been a very happy one; but it lacks one thing--the wife and mother's place is vacant; she who filled it once is gone--never to return!--but there is a sweet, gentle lady who has won the hearts of both father and daughter, and whom they would fain persuade to fill the void in their affections and their home.

"Miss Rose, dare I hope that you would venture to trust your happiness in the hands of a man who has proved himself capable of such cruelty?"

Rose did not speak, and he seemed to read in her silence and her averted face a rejection of his suit.

"Ah, you cannot love or trust me!" he exclaimed bitterly. "I was indeed a fool to hope it. Forgive me for troubling you; forgive my presumption in imagining for a moment that I might be able to win you. But oh, Rose, could you but guess how I love you--better than aught else upon earth save my precious child! and even as I love her better than life. I said that our home had been a happy one, but to me it can be so no longer if you refuse to share it with me!"

She turned her blushing face towards him for a single instant, and timidly placed her hand in his. The touch sent a thrill through her whole frame.

"And you will dare trust me?" he said in a low tone of intense joy. "Oh, Rose! I have not deserved such happiness as this! I am not worthy of one so pure and good. But I will do all that man can do to make your life bright and happy."

"Ah, Mr. Dinsmore! I am very unfit for the place you have asked me to fill," she murmured. "I am not old enough, or wise enough to be a mother to your little girl."

"I know you are young, dear Rose, but you are far from foolish," he said tenderly, "and my little girl is quite prepared to yield you a daughter's love and obedience; but I do not think she will be a care

or trouble to you; I do not intend that she shall, but expect to take all that upon myself. Indeed, Rose, dearest, you shall never know any care or trouble that I can save you from. No words can tell how dear you are to me, and were it in my power I would shield you from every annoyance, and give you every joy that the human heart can know. I have loved you from the first day we met!--ah, I loved you even before that, for all your love and kindness to my darling child; but I scarcely dared hope that you could return my affection, or feel willing to trust your happiness to the keeping of one who had shown himself such a monster of cruelty in his treatment of his little gentle daughter. Are you not afraid of me, Rose?"

His arm was around her waist, and he was bending over her, gazing down into her face, and eagerly awaiting her answer.

Presently it came, in calm, gentle tones; "No, Horace; 'perfect love casteth out fear,' and I cannot judge you hardly for what may have been only a mistaken sense of duty, and has been so bitterly repented."

"Heaven bless you, dearest, for these words," he answered with emotion, "they have made me the happiest of men."

Horace Dinsmore wore upon his little finger a splendid diamond ring, which had attracted a good deal of attention, especially among the ladies; who admired it extremely, and of which Miss Stevens had hoped to be one day the happy and envied possessor. Taking Rose's small white hand in his again, he placed it upon her slender finger.

"This seals our compact, and makes you mine forever," he said, pressing the hand to his lips.

"With the consent of my parents," murmured Rose, a soft blush mantling her cheek.

Elsie was still in her papa's private parlor, for though it was long past her usual hour for retiring, she had not yet done so; her father having left a message with Chloe to the effect that she might, if she chose, stay up until his return.

Chloe had dropped asleep in her chair, and the little girl was trying to while away the time with a book. But she did not seem much interested in it, for every now and then she laid it down to run to the door and listen. Then sighing to herself, "They are not coming yet," she would go back and take it up again. But at last she started from her seat with an exclamation of delight that awoke Chloe; for this time there could be no doubt; she had heard his well-known step upon the stairs.

She moved quickly towards the door--stopped--hesitated, and stood still to the middle of the room.

But the door opened, and her father entered with Miss Rose upon his arm. One look at his radiant countenance, and Rose's blushing, happy face told the whole glad story. He held out his hand with a beaming smile, and Elsie sprang towards him.

"My darling," he said, stooping to give her a kiss, "I have brought you a mother."

Then taking Rose's hand, and placing one of Elsie's in it, while he held the other in a close, loving grasp, he added: "Rose, she is your daughter also. I give you a share in my choicest treasure."

Rose threw her arm around the little girl and kissed her tenderly, whispering: "Will you love me, Elsie, dearest? you know how dearly I love you."

"Indeed I will; I do love you very much, and I am very glad, dear, darling Miss Rose," Elsie replied, returning her caress.

Mr. Dinsmore was watching them with a heart swelling with joy and gratitude. He led Rose to a sofa, and seating himself by her side, drew Elsie in between his knees, and put an arm round each. "My two treasures," he said, looking affectionately from one to the other. "Rose, I feel myself the richest man in the Union."

Rose smiled, and Elsie laid her head on her father's shoulder with a happy sigh.

They sat a few moments thus, when Rose made a movement to go, remarking that it must be growing late. She felt a secret desire to be safe within the shelter of her own room before the return of the riding party should expose her to Miss Stevens' prying curiosity.

"It is not quite ten yet," said Mr. Dinsmore, looking at his watch.

"Late enough though, is it not?" she answered with a smile. "I think I must go. Good-night, dear little Elsie." She rose, and Mr. Dinsmore, gently drawing her hand within his arm, led her to her room, bidding her good-night at the door, and adding a whispered request that she would wait for him to conduct her down to the breakfast room in the morning.

"Must I go to bed now, papa?" asked Elsie, as he returned to the parlor again.

"Not yet," he said; "I want you." And, sitting down, he took her in his arms. "My darling, my dear little daughter!" he said; "were you very lonely this evening?"

"No, papa; not very, though I missed you and Miss Rose."

He was gazing down into her face; something in its expression seemed to strike him, and he suddenly turned her towards the light, and looking keenly at her, said, "You have been crying; what was the matter?"

Elsie's face flushed crimson, and the tears started to her eyes again. "Dear papa, don't be angry with me," she pleaded. "I couldn't help it; indeed I could not."

"I am not angry, darling; only pained that my little girl is not so happy as I expected. I hoped that your joy would be unclouded to-night, as mine has been; but will you not tell your father what troubles you, dearest?"

"I was looking at this, papa," she said, drawing her mother's

miniature from her bosom, and putting it into his hand; "and mammy was telling me all about my own mamma again; and, papa, you know I love Miss Rose, and I am very glad she is coming to us, but it seems as if--as if--" She burst into a flood of tears, and hiding her face on his breast, sobbed out, "Oh, papa, I can't help feeling as though mamma--my own dear mamma--is farther away from us now; as if she is going to be forgotten."

There were tears in his eyes, too; but gently raising her head, he pushed back the curls from her forehead, and kissing her tenderly, said, in low, soothing tones, "No, darling; it is only a feeling, and will soon pass away. Your own dear mother--my early love--can never be forgotten by either of us. Nor would Rose wish it. There is room in my heart for both of them, and I do not love the memory of Elsie less because I have given a place in it to Rose."

There was a momentary silence; then she looked up, asking timidly, "You are not vexed with me, papa?"

"No, dearest; not at all; and I am very glad you have told me your feelings so freely," he said, folding her closer and closer to his heart. "I hope you will always come to me with your sorrows, and you need never fear that you will not find sympathy, and help too, as far as it is in my power to give it. Elsie, do you know that you are very like your mother?--the resemblance grows stronger every day; and it would be quite impossible for me to forget her with this living image always before me."

"Am I like her, papa? I am so glad!" exclaimed the little girl eagerly, her face lighting up with a joyous smile.

It seemed as though Mr. Dinsmore could hardly bear to part with his child that night; he held her a long time in his arms, but at last, with another tender caress, and a fervent blessing, he bade her good-night and sent her away.

CHAPTER III.

She twin'd--and her mother's gaze brought back
Each hue of her childhood's faded track.
Oh! hush the song, and let her tears
Flow to the dream of her early years!
Holy and pure are the drops that fall
When the young bride goes from her father's hall;
She goes unto love yet untried and new--
She parts from love which hath still been true.

--MRS. HEMANS' POEMS.

"How did it happen that Mr. Dinsmore was not of your party last night, Miss Stevens?" inquired one of the lady boarders the next morning at the breakfast-table.

"He had been riding all the morning with his little girl, and I presume was too much fatigued to go again in the evening," Miss

Stevens coolly replied, as she broke an egg into her cup, and proceeded very deliberately to season it.

"It seems he was not too much fatigued to walk," returned the other, a little maliciously; "or to take a lady upon his arm."

Miss Stevens started, and looked up hastily.

"I would advise you to be on your guard, and play your cards well, or that quiet Miss Allison may prove a serious rival," the lady continued. "He certainly pays her a good deal of attention."

"It is easy to account for that," remarked Miss Stevens, with a scornful toss of the head; "he is very fond of his little girl, and takes her out walking or riding every day, and this Miss Allison--who is, I presume, a kind of governess--indeed, it is evident that she is, from the care she takes of the child--goes along as a matter of course; but if you think Horace Dinsmore would look at a governess, you are greatly mistaken, for he is as proud as Lucifer, as well as the rest of his family, though he does set up to be so very pious!"

"Excuse me, madam," observed a gentleman sitting near, "but you must be laboring under a misapprehension. I am well acquainted with the Allison family, and can assure you that the father is one of the wealthiest merchants in Philadelphia."

At this moment Mr. Dinsmore entered with Rose upon his arm, and leading Elsie with the other hand. They drew near the table; he handed Miss Allison to a seat and took his place beside her.

A slight murmur of surprise ran round the table, and all eyes were turned upon Rose, who, feeling uncomfortably conscious of the fact, cast down her own in modest embarrassment, while Elsie, with a face all smiles and dimples, sent a triumphant glance across the table at Annie Hart, who was whispering to her mother, "See, mamma, she has Mr. Dinsmore's ring!"

That lady immediately called Miss Stevens' attention to it, which was quite unnecessary, as she was already burning with rage at the sight.

"They walked out alone last evening, and that ring explains what they were about," said Mrs. Hart, in an undertone. "I am really sorry for you, Miss Stevens; for your prize has certainly slipped through your fingers."

"I am much obliged to you," she replied, with a toss of her head; "but there are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught."

The next moment she rose and left the table, Mrs. Hart following her into the public parlor, and continuing the conversation by remarking, "I would sue him for breach of promise if I were you, Miss Stevens. I understood you were engaged to him."

"I never said so; so what right had you to suppose it?" returned Miss Stevens snappishly.

And upon reflecting a moment, Mrs. Hart could not remember that she had ever said so in plain terms, although she had hinted it many times--talking a great deal of Mr. Dinsmore's splendid establishment,

and frequently speaking of the changes she thought would be desirable in Elsie's dress, just as though she expected some day to have it under her control. Then, too, she had always treated Mr. Dinsmore with so much familiarity that it was perfectly natural strangers should suppose they were engaged, even though he never reciprocated it; for that might be only because he was naturally reserved and undemonstrative; as indeed Miss Stevens frequently averred, seeming to regret it very deeply.

Presently she burst out, "I don't know why people are always so ready to talk! I don't care for Horace Dinsmore, and never did! There was never anything serious between us, though I must say he has paid me marked attentions, and given me every reason to suppose he meant something by them. I never gave him any encouragement, however; and so he has been taken in by that artful creature. I thought he had more sense, and could see through her manoeuvres--coaxing and petting up the child to curry favor with the father! I thank my stars that I am above such mean tricks! I presume she thinks, now, she is making a splendid match; but if she doesn't repent of her bargain before she has been married a year, I miss my guess! She'll never have her own way--not a bit of it--I can tell her that. Everybody that knows him will tell you that he is high-tempered and tyrannical, and as obstinate as a mule."

"The grapes are very sour, I think," whispered Mrs. Hart to her next neighbor, who nodded and laughed.

"There is Elsie out on the veranda, now," said Annie. "I mean to go and ask her what Miss Allison had her father's ring for; may I, mamma?"

"Yes; go, child, if you want to; I should like to hear what she will say; though, of course, everybody understands that there must be an engagement."

"Well, Elsie, what made you run away in such a hurry yesterday?" asked Annie, running up to our little friend. "Did you ask your papa about the new mamma?"

"I told him what you said, Annie, and it wasn't true," Elsie answered, with a glad look of joy. "I am going to have a new mother though, and papa said I might tell you; but it is Miss Allison instead of Miss Stevens, and I am very glad, because I love her dearly."

"Is she your governess?"

"No, indeed! what made you ask?"

"Miss Stevens said so," replied Annie, laughing and running away. And just then Elsie's papa called her, and bade her go upstairs and have her hat put on, as they were going out to walk.

Edward Allison had been talking with his sister in her room, and they came down together to the veranda, where Mr. Dinsmore and Elsie were waiting for them. Edward was looking very proud and happy, but Rose's face was half hidden by her veil. She took Mr. Dinsmore's offered arm and Elsie asked, "Aren't you going with us, Mr. Edward?"

"Not this time," he answered, smiling. "I have an engagement to play a

game of chess with one of the ladies in the parlor yonder."

"Then I shall have papa's other hand," she said, taking possession of it.

She was very merry and talkative, but neither of her companions seemed much disposed to answer her remarks. They were following the same path they had taken the night before, and the thoughts of both were very busy with the past and the future.

At length they reached the rustic seat where they had sat while Mr. Dinsmore told his story, and he inquired of Rose if she would like to stop and rest.

She assented, recognizing the place with a smile and a blush, and they sat down.

"Papa," said Elsie, "I am not tired, mayn't I run on to the top of that hill yonder?"

"Yes, if you will not go out of sight or hearing, so that I can see that you are safe, and within call when I want you," he replied, and she bounded away.

Rose was sitting thoughtfully, with her eyes upon the ground, while those of her companion were following the graceful figure of his little girl, as she tripped lightly along the road.

"Mr. Dinsmore," Rose began.

"I beg pardon, but were you speaking to me?" he asked, turning to her with a half smile.

"Certainly," she replied, smiling in return; "there is no one else here."

"Well then, Rose, dear, please to remember that I don't answer to that name from your lips, at least not when we are alone. I am not Mr. Dinsmore to you, unless you mean to be Miss Allison to me," he added, taking her hand and gazing tenderly into her blushing face.

"Oh! no, no; I would not have you call me that!"

"Well then, dear Rose, I want you to call me Horace. I would almost as soon think of being Mr. Dinsmore to Elsie, as to you. And now, what were you going to say to me?"

"Only that I wish to set out on my homeward way to-night, with Edward. I think it would be best, more especially as mamma has written complaining of our long absence, and urging a speedy return."

"Of course your mother's wishes are the first to be consulted, until you have given me a prior right," he said, in a playful tone; "and so I suppose Elsie and I will be obliged to continue our journey by ourselves. But when may I claim you for my own indeed? Let it be as soon as possible, dearest, for I feel that I ought to return to my home ere long, and I am not willing to do so without my wife."

"I must have a few weeks to prepare; you know a lady's wardrobe cannot

be got ready in a day. What would you say to six weeks? I am afraid mamma would think it entirely too short."

"Six weeks, dear Rose? why that would bring us to the middle of November. Surely a month will be long enough to keep me waiting for my happiness, and give the dressmakers sufficient time for their work. Let us say one month from to-day."

Rose raised one objection after another, but he overruled them all and pleaded his cause so earnestly that he gained his point at last, and the wedding was fixed for that day month, provided the consent of her parents, to so sudden a parting with their daughter, could be obtained.

While Rose was at home making her preparations, Mr. Dinsmore and his daughter were visiting the great lakes, and travelling through Canada. He heard frequently from her, and there were always a few lines to Elsie, which her father allowed her to answer in a little note enclosed in his; and sometimes he read her a little of his own, or of Miss Rose's letter, which she always considered a very great treat.

New York City was their last halting place on their route, and there they spent nearly two weeks in shopping and sight-seeing. Mr. Dinsmore purchased an elegant set of furniture for his wife's boudoir, and sent it on to his home, with his orders to Mrs. Murray concerning its arrangement. To this he added a splendid set of diamonds as his wedding gift to his bride, while Elsie selected a pair of very costly bracelets as hers.

They arrived in Philadelphia on Tuesday afternoon, the next morning being the time appointed for the wedding. Mr. Dinsmore himself went to his hotel, but sent Elsie and her nurse to Mr. Allison's, as he had been urgently requested to do, the family being now in occupation of their town residence.

Elsie found the whole house in a bustle of preparation. Sophy met her at the door and carried her off at once to her own room, eager to display what she called "her wedding dress." She was quite satisfied with the admiration Elsie expressed. "But I suppose you bought ever so many new dresses, and lots of other pretty things, in New York?" she said inquiringly.

"Yes; papa and I together. And don't you think, Sophy, he let me help him choose some of his clothes, and he says he thinks I have very good taste in ladies' and gentlemen's dress too."

"That was right kind of him, but isn't it odd, and real nice too, that he and Rose are going to get married? I was so surprised. Do you like it, Elsie? and shall you call her mamma?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I should be quite wretched if papa were going to marry any one else; but I love Miss Rose dearly, and I am very glad she is coming to us. I think it is very good of her, and papa thinks so too."

"Yes," replied Sophy honestly, "and so do I; for I am sure I shouldn't like to leave papa and mamma and go away off there to live, though I do like you very much, Elsie, and your papa too. Only think! he is going to be my brother; and then won't you be some sort of relation

too? I guess I'll be your aunt, won't I?"

"I don't know; I haven't thought about it," said Elsie; while at the same instant Harold put his head in at the half-open door, saying, "Of course you will; and I'll be her uncle."

The little girls were quite startled at first, but seeing who it was, Elsie ran towards him, holding out her hand.

"How do you do, Harold?" she said; "I am glad to see you."

He had his satchel of books on his arm. "Thank you, how are you? I am rejoiced to see you looking so well, but, as for me, I am quite sick--of lessons," he replied in a melancholy tone, and putting on a comically doleful expression.

Elsie laughed and shook her head. "I thought you were a good boy and quite fond of your books."

"Commonly, I believe I am, but not in these wedding times. It's quite too bad of your father, Elsie, to be carrying off Rose, when he won't let us have you. But never mind, I'll be even with him some of these days;" and he gave her a meaning look.

"Come in Harold, and put your books down," said Sophy; "you can afford to spend a few minutes talking to Elsie, can't you?"

"I think I will!" he replied, accepting her invitation.

They chatted for some time, and then Adelaide came in. Elsie had heard that she was coming on to be first bridesmaid. "Elsie, dear, how glad I am to see you! and how well and happy you are looking!" she exclaimed, folding her little niece in her arms, and kissing her fondly. "But come," she added, taking her by the hand and leading her into the next room, "Miss Rose came in from her shopping only a few minutes ago, and she wants to see you."

Rose was standing by the toilet-table, gazing intently, with a blush and a smile, at something she held in her hand. She laid it down as they came in, and embracing the little girl affectionately, said how very glad she was to see her.

Then, turning to the table again, she took up what she had been looking at--which proved to be a miniature of Mr. Dinsmore--and handed it to Adelaide, saying, "Is it not excellent? and so kind and thoughtful of him to give it to me."

"It is indeed a most perfect likeness," Adelaide replied. "Horace is very thoughtful about these little matters. I hope he will make you very happy, dear Rose. I cannot tell you how glad I was when I heard you were to be my sister."

"You have seemed like a sister to me ever since the winter I spent with you," said Rose. And then she began questioning Elsie about her journey asking if she were not fatigued, and would not like to lie down and rest a little before tea.

"No thank you," Elsie said; "you know it is only a short trip from New York, and I am not at all tired."

Just then the tea-bell rang, and Rose laughed and said it was well Elsie had not accepted her invitation.

On going down to tea they found Mr. Dinsmore and Mr. Travilla there. Elsie was delighted to meet her old friend, and it was evident that he had already made himself a favorite with all the children, from Harold down to little May.

The wedding was a really brilliant affair. The bride and her attendants were beautifully dressed and, as every one remarked, looked very charming. At an early hour in the morning carriages were in waiting to convey the bridal party and the family to the church where the ceremony was to be performed. When it was over they returned to the house, where an elegant breakfast was provided for a large number of guests; after which there was a grand reception for several hours. Then, when the last guest had departed, Rose retired to her own room, appearing shortly afterwards at the family dinner-table in her pretty travelling dress, looking very sweet and engaging, but sober and thoughtful, as were also her father and brothers; while Mrs. Allison's eyes were constantly filling with tears at the thought of losing her daughter.

There was very little eating done, and the conversation flagged several times in spite of the efforts of the gentlemen to keep it up. At length all rose from the table, and gathered in the parlor for a few moments. Then came the parting, and they were gone; and Mrs. Allison, feeling almost as if she had buried her daughter, tried to forget her loss by setting herself vigorously to work overseeing the business of putting her house in order.

Rose's feelings were mingled. She wept for a time, but the soothing tenderness of her husband's manner, and Elsie's winning caresses, soon restored her to herself, and smiles chased away the tears.

They had a very pleasant journey, without accident or detention, and arrived in due time at their own home, where they were welcomed with every demonstration of delight.

Rose was charmed with the Oaks, thought it even more lovely than either Roselands or Elingrove, and Mr. Dinsmore and Elsie intensely enjoyed her pleasure and admiration.

Then came a round of parties, which Elsie thought extremely tiresome, as she could have no share in them, and was thus deprived of the company of her papa and mamma almost every evening for several weeks. But at last that too was over, and they settled down into a quiet, home life, that suited them all much better, for neither Mr. Dinsmore nor Rose was very fond of gayety.

And now Elsie resumed her studies regularly, reciting as before to her father; while Rose undertook to instruct her in the more feminine branches of housekeeping and needlework, and a master came from the city several times a week to give her lessons in music and drawing. She had been so long without regular employment that she found it very difficult at first to give her mind to her studies, as she had done in former days; but her father, though kind and considerate, was very firm with her, and she soon fell into the traces and worked as diligently as ever.

Elsie did not find that her father's marriage brought any uncomfortable change to her. There was no lessening of his love or care; she saw as much of him as before, had full possession of her seat upon his knee, and was caressed and fondled quite as often and as tenderly as ever.

And added to all this were Rose's love and sweet companionship, which were ever grateful to the little girl, whether they were alone or with her father. Elsie loved her new mamma dearly and was as respectful and obedient to her as to her father, though Rose never assumed any authority; which, however, was entirely unnecessary, as a wish or request from her was sure to be attended to as if it had been a command.

And Rose was very happy in her new home. Mr. Dinsmore's family were pleased with the match and treated her most kindly, while he was always affectionate, thoughtful, and attentive; not less devoted as a husband than as a father. They were well suited in taste and disposition; seldom had the slightest disagreement on any subject, and neither had ever cause to regret the step they had taken, for each day they lived together seemed but to increase their love for each other, and for their little daughter, as Mr. Dinsmore delighted to call her, always giving Rose a share in the ownership.

CHAPTER IV.

Of all the joys that brighten suffering earth
What joy is welcomed like a new-born child?

--MRS. NORTON.

"Massa wants you for to come right along to him in de study, darlin', jis as soon as your ole mammy kin get you dressed," said Chloe, one morning to her nursling.

"What for, mammy?" Elsie asked curiously, for she noticed an odd expression on her nurse's face.

"Massa didn't tell me nuffin 'bout what he wanted, an' I spects you'll have to az hisself," replied Chloe evasively.

Elsie's curiosity was excited, and she hastened to the study as soon as possible. Her father laid down his paper as she entered, and held out his hand with a smile as he bade her good-morning, and it struck her that there was an odd twinkle in his eye also, while she was certain that she could not be mistaken in the unusually joyous expression of his countenance.

"Good-morning, papa. But where is mamma?" she asked, glancing about the room in search of her.

"She is not up yet, but do you sit down here in your little rocking chair. I have something for you."

He left the room as he spoke, returning again in a moment, carrying what Elsie thought was a strange-looking bundle.

"There! hold out your arms," he said; and placing it in them, he gently raised one corner of the blanket, displaying to her astonished view a tiny little face.

"A baby! Oh, the dear little thing!" she exclaimed in tones of rapturous delight. Then looking up into his face, "Did you say I might have it, papa? whose baby is it?"

"Ours; your mamma's and my son, and your brother," he answered, gazing down with intense pleasure at her bright, happy face, sparkling all over with delight.

"My little brother! my darling little brother," she murmured looking down at it again, and venturing to press her lips gently to its soft velvet cheek. "Oh, papa, I am so glad, so glad! I have so wanted a little brother or sister. Is not God very good to give him to us, papa?" And happy, grateful tears were trembling in the soft eyes as she raised them to his face again.

"Yes," he said, bending down and kissing first her cheek, and then the babe's, "I feel that God has indeed been very good to me in bestowing upon me two such treasures as these."

"What is his name, papa?" she asked.

"He has none yet, my dear."

"Then, papa, do let him be named Horace, for you; won't you if mamma is willing? And then I hope he will grow up to be just like you; as handsome and as good."

"I should like him to be a great deal better, daughter," he answered with a grave smile; "and about the name--I don't know yet; I should prefer some other, but your mamma seems to want that, and I suppose she has the best right to name him; but we will see about it."

"Better give little marster to me now, Miss Elsie," remarked his nurse, stepping up, "I reckon your little arms begin to feel tired." And taking the babe she carried him from the room.

Nothing could have better pleased Mr. Dinsmore than Elsie's joyous welcome to her little brother; though it was scarcely more than he had expected.

"My own darling child; my dear, dear little daughter," he said, taking her in his arms and kissing her again and again. "Elsie, dearest, you are very precious to your father's heart."

"Yes, papa, I know it," she replied, twining her arms about his neck, and laying her cheek to his; "I know you love me dearly, and it makes me so very happy."

"May I go in to see mamma?" she asked presently.

"No, darling, not yet; she is not able to see you; but she sends her love, and hopes she may be well enough to receive a visit from you

to-morrow."

"Poor mamma! I am sorry she is ill," she said sorrowfully; "but I will try to keep everything very quiet that she may not be disturbed."

That evening, after tea, Elsie was told that she would be allowed to speak to her mamma for a moment if she chose, and she gladly availed herself of the privilege.

"Dear Elsie," Rose whispered, drawing Her down to kiss her cheek, "I am so glad you are pleased with your little brother."

"Oh, mamma, he is such a dear little fellow!" Elsie answered eagerly; "and now, if you will only get well we will be happier than ever."

Rose smiled and said she hoped soon to be quite well again, and then Mr. Dinsmore led Elsie from the room.

Rose was soon about again and in the enjoyment of her usual health and strength. Elsie's delight knew no bounds the first time her mamma was able to leave her room, and take her place at the table with her father and herself. She doted on her little brother, and, if allowed, would have had him in her arms more than half the time; but he was a plump little fellow, and soon grew so large and heavy that her father forbade her carrying him lest she should injure herself; but she would romp and play with him by the hour while he was in the nurse's arms, or seated on the bed; and when any of her little friends called, she could not be satisfied to let them go away without seeing the baby.

The first time Mr. Travilla called, after little Horace's arrival, she exhibited her treasure to him with a great deal of pride, asking if he did not envy her papa.

"Yes," he said, looking admiringly at her, and then turning away with a half sigh.

A few minutes afterwards he caught hold of her, set her on his knee, and giving her a kiss, said, "I wish you were ten years older, Elsie, or I ten years younger."

"Why, Mr. Travilla?" she asked rather wonderingly.

"Oh, because we would then be nearer of an age, and maybe you would like me better."

"No, I wouldn't, not a bit," she said, putting her arm round his neck, "for I like you now just as well as I could like any gentleman but papa."

The elder Mr. Dinsmore was very proud of his little grandson and made a great pet of him, coming to the Oaks much more frequently after his birth than before.

Once he spoke of him as his first grandchild.

"You forget Elsie, father," said Horace, putting his arm round his little girl, who happened to be standing by his side, and giving her a tender, loving look.

He greatly feared that the marked difference his father made between the two would wound Elsie's sensitive spirit, and perhaps even arouse a feeling of jealousy towards her little brother; therefore, when his father was present, he was even more than usually affectionate in his manner towards her, if that were possible.

But Elsie had no feeling of the kind; she had long ceased to expect any manifestation of affection from her grandfather towards herself, but was very glad indeed that he could love her dear little brother.

"Ah, yes! to be sure, I did forget Elsie," replied the old gentleman carelessly; "she is the first grandchild of course; but this fellow is the first grandson, and quite proud of him I am. He is a pretty boy, and is going to be the very image of his father."

"I hope he will, father," said Rose, looking proudly at her husband. And then she added, with an affectionate glance at Elsie: "If he is only as good and obedient as his sister, I shall be quite satisfied with him. We could not ask a better child than our dear little daughter, nor love one more than we do her; she is a great comfort and blessing to us both."

The color mounted to Elsie's cheek, and her eyes beamed with pleasure. Mr. Dinsmore, too, looked very much gratified, and the old gentleman could not fail to perceive that the difference he made between the children was quite distasteful to both parents.

CHAPTER V.

A lovely being, scarcely formed or moulded,
A rose with all its sweetest leaves yet folded.

--BYRON.

Elsie was nearly twelve when her little brother was born. During the next three years she led a life of quiet happiness, unmarked by any striking event. There were no changes in the little family at the Oaks but such as time must bring to all. Mr. and Mrs. Dinsmore perhaps looked a trifle older than when they married, Elsie was budding into womanhood as fair and sweet a flower as ever was seen, and the baby had grown into a healthy romping boy.

At Roselands, on the contrary, there had been many and important changes. Louise and Lora were both married; the former to a resident of another State, who had taken her to his distant home; the latter to Edward Howard, an older brother of Elsie's friend Carrie. They had not left the neighborhood, but were residing with his parents.

For the last two or three years Arthur Dinsmore had spent his vacations at home; he was doing so now, having just completed his freshman year at Princeton. On his return Walter was to accompany him and begin his college career.

Miss Day left soon after Lora's marriage and no effort had been made to fill her place, Adelaide having undertaken to act as governess to

Enna, now the only remaining occupant of the school-room.

Taking advantage of an unusually cool breezy afternoon, Elsie rode over to Tinegrove, Mr. Howard's plantation--to make a call. She found the family at home and was urged to stay to tea; but declined, saying she could not without permission, and had not asked it.

"You will at least take off your hat," said Carrie.

"No, thank you," Elsie answered, "it is not worth while, as I must go so soon. If you will excuse me, I can talk quite as well with it on."

They had not met for several weeks and found a good deal to say to each other. At length Elsie drew out her watch.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "I have overstayed my time! I had no idea it was so late--you have been so entertaining; but I must go now." And she rose hastily to take leave.

"Nonsense!" said her Aunt Lora in whose boudoir they were sitting, "there is no such great hurry, I am sure. You'll get home long before dark."

"Yes, and might just as well stay another five or ten minutes. I wish you would; for I have ever so much to say to you," urged Carrie.

"It would be very pleasant, thank you, but indeed I must not. See how the shadows are lengthening, and papa does not at all like to have me out after sunset unless he is with me."

"He always was overcareful of you, erring on the right side, I suppose, if that be an allowable expression," laughed Lora, as she and Carrie followed Elsie to the door to see her mount her horse.

The adieus were quickly spoken and the young girl, just touching the whip to the sleek side of her pony, set off at a gallop, closely followed by her faithful attendant Jim.

Several miles of rather a lonely road lay between them and home, and no time was to be lost, if they would reach the Oaks while the sun was still above the horizon.

They were hardly more than half a mile from the entrance to the grounds, when Elsie caught sight of a well-known form slowly moving down the road a few paces ahead of them. It was Arthur, and she soon perceived that it was his intention to intercept her; he stopped, turning his face toward her, sprang forward as she came up, and seized her bridle.

"Stay a moment, Elsie," he said, "I want to speak to you."

"Then come on to the Oaks, and let us talk there; please do, for I am in a hurry."

"No, I prefer to say my say where I am. I'll not detain you long. You keep out of earshot, Jim. I want to borrow a little money, Elsie; a trifle of fifty dollars or so. Can you accommodate me?"

"Not without papa's knowledge, Arthur. So I hope you do not wish to

conceal the matter from him."

"I do. I see no reason why he should know all my private affairs. Can't you raise that much without applying to him? Isn't your allowance very large now?"

"Fifty dollars a month, Arthur, but subject to the same conditions as of old. I must account to papa for every cent."

"Haven't you more than that in hand now?"

"Yes, but what do you want it for?"

"That's neither your business nor his; let me have it for two weeks, I'll pay it back then, and in the meantime he need know nothing about it."

"I cannot; I never have any concealments from papa, and I must give in my account in less than a week."

"Nonsense! You are and always were the most disobliging creature alive!" returned Arthur with an oath.

"Oh, Arthur, how can you say such wicked words," she said, recoiling from him with a shudder. "And you quite misjudge me. I would be glad to do anything for you that is right. If you will let me tell papa your wish, and he gives consent, you shall have the money at once. Now please let me go. The sun has set and I shall be so late that papa will be anxious and much displeased."

"Who cares if he is!" he answered roughly, still retaining his hold upon her bridle, and compelling her to listen while he continued to urge his request; enforcing it with arguments and threats.

They were alike vain, she steadfastly refused to grant it except on the conditions she had named, and which he determinately rejected--and insisted being left free to pursue her homeward way.

He grew furious, and at length with a shocking oath released her bridle, but at the same instant struck her pony a severe blow upon his haunches, with a stout stick he held in his hand.

The terrified animal, smarting with the pain, started aside, reared and plunged in a way that would have unseated a less skilful rider, and had nearly thrown Elsie from the saddle: then darted off at the top of its speed; but fortunately turned in at the gate held open by Jim, who had ridden on ahead and dismounted for that purpose.

"Whoa, you Glossy! whoa dere!" he cried, springing to the head of the excited animal, and catching its bridle in his powerful grasp.

"Just lead her for a little, Jim," said Elsie "There, there! my poor pretty Glossy, be quiet now. It was too cruel to serve you so; but it shan't happen again if your mistress can help it," she added in a voice tremulous with sympathy and indignation, patting and stroking her pony caressingly as she spoke.

Jim obeyed, walking on at a brisk pace, leading Glossy with his right hand, and keeping the bridle of the other horse over his left arm.

"I'll walk the rest of the way, Jim," said Elsie presently, "just stop her and let me get down. There," springing lightly to the ground, "you may lead them both to the stable now."

She hurried forward along the broad, gravelled winding carriage road that led to the house. The next turn brought her face to face with her father.

"What, Elsie! alone and on foot at this late hour?" he said in a tone of mingled surprise and reproof.

"I have been riding, papa, and only a moment since dismounted and let Jim lead the horses down the other road to the stables."

"Ah, but how did you come to be so late?" he asked, drawing her hand within his arm and leading her onward.

"I have been to Tinegrove, sir, and Aunt Lora, Carrie, and I found so much to say to each other, that the time slipped away before I knew it."

"It must not happen again, Elsie."

"I do not mean it shall, papa, and I am very sorry."

"Then I excuse you this once, daughter; it is not often you give me occasion to reprove you."

"Thank you, papa," she said with a grateful, loving look. "Did you come out in search of me?"

"Yes, your mamma and I had begun to grow anxious lest some accident had befallen you. Our little daughter is such a precious treasure that we must needs watch over her very carefully," he added in a tone that was half playful, half tender, while he pressed the little gloved hand in his, and his eyes rested upon the sweet fair face with an expression of proud fatherly affection.

Her answering look was full of filial reverence and love. "Dear papa, it is so nice to be so loved and cared for; so sweet to hear such words from your lips. I do believe I'm the very happiest girl in the land." She had already almost forgotten Arthur and his rudeness and brutality.

"And I the happiest father," he said with a pleased smile. "Ah, here comes mamma to meet as with little Horace."

The child ran forward with a glad shout to meet his sister, Rose met her with loving words and a fond caress; one might have thought from their joyous welcome, that she was returning after an absence of weeks or months instead of hours. Letting go her father's arm as they stepped upon the piazza Elsie began a romping play with her little brother, but at a gentle reminder from her mamma that the tea bell would soon ring, ran away to her own apartments to have her riding habit changed for something more suitable for the drawing room.

Chloe was in waiting and her skilful hands made rapid work, putting the last touches to her nursling's dress just as the summons to the

supper table was given.

Mr. Dinsmore was quite as fastidious as in former days in regard to the neatness and tastefulness of Elsie's attire.

"Will I do, papa?" she asked, presenting herself before him, looking very sweet and fair in a simple white dress with blue sash and ribbons.

"Yes," he said with a satisfied smile, "I see nothing amiss with dress, hair, or face."

"Nor do I," said Rose, leading the way to the supper room, "Aunt Chloe is an accomplished tirewoman. But come, let us sit down to our meal and have it over."

On their return to the drawing room they found Mr. Travilla comfortably ensconced in an easy chair, reading the evening paper. He was an almost daily visitor at the Oaks, and seldom came without some little gift for one or both of his friend's children. It was for Elsie to-night. When the usual greetings had been exchanged, he turned to her, saying, "I have brought you a treat. Can you guess what it is?"

"A book!"

"Ah, there must be something of the Yankee about you," he answered, laughing. "Yes, it is a book in two volumes; just published and a most delightful, charming story," he went on, drawing them from his pockets, and handing them to her as he spoke.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" she cried with eager gratitude, "I'm so glad, if--if only papa will allow me to read it. May I, papa?"

"I can tell better when I have examined it, my child," Mr. Dinsmore answered, taking one of the volumes from her hands and looking at the title on the back. "'The Wide, Wide World!' What sort of a book is it, Travilla?"

"A very good sort. I think. Just glance through it or read a few pages, and I'm pretty sure it will be sufficient to satisfy you of, not only its harmlessness, but that its perusal would be a benefit to almost any one."

Mr. Dinsmore did so, Elsie standing beside him, her hand upon his arm, and her eyes on his face--anxiously watching its changes of expression as he read. They grew more and more satisfactory; the book was evidently approving itself to his taste and judgment, and presently he returned it to her, saying, with a kind fatherly smile, "Yes, my child, you may read it. I have no doubt it deserves all the praise Mr. Travilla has given it."

"Oh, thank you, papa, I'm very glad," she answered joyously, "I am just hungry for a nice story." And seating herself near the light, she was soon lost to everything about her in the deep interest with which she was following Ellen Montgomery through her troubles and trials.

She was loath to lay the book aside when at the usual hour--a quarter before nine--the bell rang for prayers. She hardly heeded the summons till her papa laid his hand on her shoulder, saying, "Come, daughter,

you must not be left behind."

She started up then, hastily closing the book, and followed the others to the dining room, where the servants were already assembled to take part in the family devotions.

Mr. Travilla went away immediately after and now it was Elsie's bed-time. Her father reminded her of it as, on coming back from seeing his friend to the door, he found her again poring over the book.

"Oh, papa, it is so interesting! could you let me finish this chapter?" she asked with a very entreating look up into his face as he stood at her side.

"I suppose I could if I should make a great effort," he answered laughingly. "Yes, you may, for once, but don't expect always to be allowed to do so."

"No, sir, oh, no. Thank you, sir."

"Well, have you come to a good stopping-place?" he asked, as she presently closed the book and put it aside with a slight sigh.

"No, sir, it is just as bad a one as the other. Papa, I wish I was grown up enough to read another hour before going to bed."

"I don't," he said, drawing her to a seat upon his knee, and passing his arm about her waist, "I'm not ready to part with my little girl yet."

"Wouldn't a fine young lady daughter be just as good or better?" she asked, giving him a hug.

"No, not now, some of these days I may think so."

"But mayn't I stay up and read till ten to-night?"

He shook his head. "Till half-past nine, then?"

"No, not even a till quarter past. Ah, it is that now," he added, consulting his watch.

"You must say good-night and go. Early hours and plenty of sleep for my little girl, that she may grow up to healthful, vigorous womanhood, capable of enjoying life and being very useful in the church and the world." He kissed her with grave tenderness as he spoke.

"Good-night then, you dear father," she said, returning the caress. "I know you would indulge me if you thought it for my good."

"Indeed I would, pet. Would it help to reconcile you to the denial of your wish to know that I shall be reading the book, and probably enjoying it as much as you would?"

"Ah yes, indeed, papa! it is a real pleasure to resign it to you," she answered with a look of delight. "It's just the nicest story! at least as far as I've read. Read it aloud to mamma, won't you?"

"Yes, if she wishes to hear it. Now away with you to your room and

your bed."

Only waiting to bid her mamma an affectionate good-night, Elsie obeyed, leaving the room with a light step, and a cheerful, happy face.

"Dear unselfish child!" her father said, looking after her.

"She is that indeed," said Rose. "How happy, shall I be if Horace grows up to be as good and lovable."

Elsie was a fearless horsewoman, accustomed to the saddle from her very early years. Thus Arthur's wanton attack upon her pony had failed to give her nerves the severe shock it might have caused to those of most young girls of her age. Her feeling was more of excitement, and of indignation at the uncalled-for cruelty to a dumb animal, especially her own pet horse, than of fright at the danger to herself. But she well knew that the latter was what her father would think of first, and that he would be very angry with Arthur; therefore she had tried, and successfully, to control herself and suppress all signs of agitation on meeting him upon her return.

She felt glad now as the affair recurred to her recollection while preparing for the night's rest, that she had been able to do so. For a moment she questioned with herself whether she was quite right to have this concealment from her father, but quickly decided that she was. Had the wrong-doing been her own--that would have made it altogether another matter.

She was shocked at Arthur's wickedness, troubled and anxious about his future, but freely forgave his crime against her pony and herself, and mingled with her nightly petitions an earnest prayer for his conversion, and his welfare temporal and spiritual.

CHAPTER VI.

O love! thou sternly dost thy power maintain,
And wilt not bear a rival in thy reign.

--DRYDEN.

It was the middle of the forenoon, and Elsie in her own pretty little sitting room was busied with her books; so deep in study indeed, that she never noticed a slight girlish figure as it glided in at the glass doors opening upon the lawn, to-day set wide to admit the air coming fresh and cool with a faint odor of the far-off sea, pleasantly mingling with that of the flowers in the garden, on the other side of the house.

"Buried alive in her books! Dear me! what a perfect paragon of industry you are," cried the intruder in a lively tone. "I wish you would imbue me with some of your love of study."

"Why, Lucy Carrington! how did you get here?" and Elsie pushed her books away, rose hastily and greeted her friend with an affectionate

embrace.

"How? I came in through yonder door, miss; after riding my pony from Ashlands to the front entrance of this mansion," replied Lucy, courtesying low in mock reverence. "I hope your ladyship will excuse the liberty I have taken in venturing uninvited into your sanctum."

"Provided your repentance is deep and sincere," returned Elsie in the same jesting tone.

"Certainly, I solemnly pledge myself never to do it again till the next time."

"Sit down, won't you?" and Elsie pushed forward a low rocking chair. "It's so pleasant to see you. But if I had thought about it at all I should have supposed you were at home, and as busy over books and lessons as I."

"No; my respected governess, Miss Warren, not feeling very well, has taken a week's holiday, and left me to do the same. Fancy my afflicted state at the thought of laying aside my beloved books for seven or eight whole days."

"You poor creature! how I pity you," said Elsie, laughing; "suppose you stay here and share the instructions of my tutor; I have no doubt I could persuade him to receive you as a pupil."

"Horrors! I'm much obliged, very much, but I should die of fright the first time I had to recite. There, I declare I'm growing poetical, talking in rhyme all the time."

"Let mammy take your hat and scarf," said Elsie. "You'll stay and spend the day with me, won't you?"

"Thank you, no; I came to carry you off to Ashlands to spend a week. Will you come?"

"I should like to, dearly well, if papa gives permission."

"Well, run and ask him."

"I can't; unfortunately he is out, and not expected to return till tea-time."

"Oh, pshaw! how provoking! But can't your mamma give permission just as well?"

"If it were only for a day she might, but I know she would say the question of a longer visit must be referred to papa."

"Dear me! I wouldn't be you for something. Why, I never ask leave of anybody when I want to pay a visit anywhere in the neighborhood. I tell mamma I'm going, and that's all-sufficient. I don't see how you stand being ordered about and controlled so."

"If you'll believe me," said Elsie, laughing a gay, sweet, silvery laugh, "I really enjoy being controlled by papa. It saves me a deal of trouble and responsibility in the way of deciding for myself; and then I love him so dearly that I almost always feel it my greatest pleasure

to do whatever pleases him."

"And he always was so strict with you."

"Yes, he is strict; but oh, so kind."

"But that's just because you're so good; he'd have an awful time ruling me. I'd be in a chronic state of disgrace and punishment; and he obliged to be so constantly improving me and frowning sternly upon my delinquencies that he'd never be able to don a smile of approval or slip in a word of praise edgewise."

"Indeed you're not half so bad as you pretend," said Elsie, laughing again; "nor I half so good as you seem determined to believe me."

"No, I've no doubt that you're an arch hypocrite, and we shall find out one of these days that you are really worse than any of the rest of us. But now I must finish my errand and go, for I know you're longing to be at those books. Do you get a ferruling every time you miss a word?--and enjoy the pain because it pleases papa to inflict it?"

"Oh, Lucy, how can you be so ridiculous?" and a quick, vivid blush mounted to Elsie's very hair.

"I beg your pardon, Elsie, dear, I had no business to say such a thing," cried Lucy, springing up to throw her arms round her friend and kiss her warmly; "but of course it was nothing but the merest nonsense. I know well enough your papa never does anything of the kind."

"No; if my lessons are not well prepared they have to be learned over again, that is all; and if I see that papa is displeased with me, I assure you it is punishment enough."

"Do you think he'll let you accept my invitation?"

"I don't know, indeed, Lucy. I think he will hardly like to have me give up my studies for that length of time, and in fact I hardly like to do so myself."

"Oh, you must come. You can practise on my piano every day for an hour or two, if you like. We'll learn some duets. And you can bring your sketch-book and carry it along when we walk or ride, as we shall every day. And we might read some improving books together,--you and Herbert, and I. He is worse again, poor fellow! so that some days he hardly leaves his couch even to limp across the room, and it's partly to cheer him up that we want you to come. There's nothing puts him into better spirits than a sight of your face."

"You don't expect other company?"

"No, except on our birthday; but then we're going to have a little party, just of our own set,--we boys and girls that have grown up--or are growing up--together, as one may say. Oh, yes, I want to have Carrie Howard, Mary Leslie, and Enna stay a day or two after the party. Now coax your papa hard, for we must have you," she added, rising to go.

"That would be a sure way to make him say no," said Elsie, smiling; "he never allows me to coax or tease; at least, not after he has once answered my request."

"Then don't think of it. Good-bye. No, don't waste time in coming to see me off, but go back to your books like a good child. I mean to have a little chat with your mamma before I go."

Elsie returned to her lessons with redoubled energy. She was longing to become more intimately acquainted with Ellen Montgomery, but resolutely denied herself even so much as a peep at the pages of the fascinating story-book until her allotted tasks should be faithfully performed.

These, with her regular daily exercise in the open air, filled up the morning; there was a half hour before, and another after dinner, which she could call her own; then two hours for needlework, music, and drawing, and she was free to employ herself as she would till bed-time.

That was very apt to be in reading, and if the weather was fine she usually carried her book to an arbor at some distance from the house. It was reached by a long shaded walk that led to it from the lawn, on which the glass doors of her pretty boudoir opened. It was a cool, breezy, quiet spot, on a terraced hillside, commanding a lovely view of vale, river, and woodland, and from being so constantly frequented by our heroine, had come to be called by her name,--"Elsie's Arbor." Arthur, well acquainted with these tastes and habits, sought, and found her here on the afternoon of this day--found her so deeply absorbed in Miss Warner's sweet story that she was not aware of his approach--so full of sympathy for little Ellen that her tears were dropping upon the page as she read.

"What, crying, eh?" he said with a sneer, as he seated himself by her side, and rudely pulled one of her curls, very much as he had been used to do years ago. "Well, I needn't be surprised, for you always were the greatest baby I ever saw."

"Please let my hair alone, Arthur; you are not very polite in either speech or action," she answered, brushing away her tears and moving a little farther from him.

"It's not worth while to waste politeness on you. What's that you're reading?"

"A new book Mr. Travilla gave me."

"Has no name, eh?"

"Yes, 'Wide, Wide World.'"

"Some namby-pamby girl's story, I s'pose, since you're allowed to read it; or are you doing it on the sly?"

"No, I never do such things, and hope I never shall; papa gave me permission."

"Oh; ah! then I haven't got you in my power: wish I had."

"Why?"

"Because I might turn it to good account. I know you are as afraid as death of Horace."

"No, I am not!" cried Elsie indignantly, rich color rushing all over her fair face and neck; "for I know that he loves me dearly and if I had been disobeying or deceiving him I would far sooner throw myself on his mercy than on yours."

"You would, eh? How mad you are; your face is as red as a beet. A pretty sort of Christian you are, aren't you?"

"I am not perfect, Arthur; but you mustn't judge of religion by me."

"I shall, though. Don't you wish I'd go away?" he added teasingly, again snatching at her curls.

But she eluded his grasp, and rising, stood before him with an air of gentle dignity. "Yes," she said, "since you ask me, I'll own that I do. I don't know why it is that, though your manners are polished when you choose to make them so, you are always rude and ungentlemanly to me when you find me alone. So I shall be very glad if you'll just go away and leave me to solitude and the enjoyment of my book."

"I'll do so when I get ready; not a minute sooner. But you can get rid of me just as soon as you like. I see you take. Yes, I want that money I asked you for yesterday, and I am bound to have it."

"Arthur, my answer must be just the same that it was then; I can give you no other."

"You're the meanest girl alive! To my certain knowledge you are worth at least a million and a half, and yet you refuse to lend me the pitiful sum of fifty dollars."

"Arthur, you know I have no choice in the matter. Papa has forbidden me to lend you money without his knowledge and consent, and I cannot disobey him."

"When did he forbid you?"

"A long while ago; and though he has said nothing about it lately, he has told me again and again that his commands are always binding until he revokes them."

"Fifteen years old, and not allowed to do as you please even with your pocket money!" he said contemptuously. "Do you expect to be in leading-strings all your life?"

"I shall of course have control of my own money matters on coming of age; but I expect to obey my father as long as we both live," she answered, with gentle but firm decision.

"Do you have to show your balance in hand when you give in your account?"

"No; do you suppose papa cannot trust my word?" she answered, somewhat indignantly.

"Then you could manage it just as easily as not. There's no occasion for him to know whether your balance in hand is at that moment in your possession or mine; as I told you before, I only want to borrow it for two weeks. Come, let me have it. If you don't, the day will come when you'll wish you had."

She repeated her refusal; he grew very angry and abusive, and at length went so far as to strike her.

A quick step sounded on the gravel walk, a strong grasp was laid on Arthur's arm, he felt himself suddenly jerked aside and flung upon his knees, while a perfect rain of stinging, smarting blows descended rapidly upon his back and shoulders.

"There, you unmitigated scoundrel, you mean, miserable caitiff; lay your hand upon her again if you dare!" cried Mr. Travilla, finishing the castigation by applying the toe of his boot to Arthur's nether parts with a force that sent him reeling some distance down the walk, to fall with a heavy thud upon the ground.

The lad rose, white with rage, and shook his fist at his antagonist. "I'll strike her when I please," he said with an oath, "and not be called to account by you for it either; she's my niece, and nothing to you."

"I'll defend her nevertheless, and see to it that you come to grief if you attempt to harm her in any way whatever. Did he hurt you much, my child?" And Mr. Travilla's tone changed to one of tender concern as he turned and addressed Elsie, who had sunk pale and trembling upon the rustic seat where Arthur had found her.

"No, sir, but I fear you have hurt him a good deal, in your kind zeal for my defence," she answered, looking after Arthur, as he limped away down the path.

"I have broken my cane, that is the worst of it," said her protector coolly, looking regretfully down at the fragment he still held in his hand.

"You must have struck very hard, and oh, Mr. Travilla, what if he should take it into his head to challenge you?" and Elsie turned pale with terror.

"Never fear; he is too arrant a coward for that; he knows I am a good shot, and that, as the challenged party, I would have the right to the choice of weapons."

"But you wouldn't fight, Mr. Travilla? you do not approve of duelling?"

"So, no indeed, Elsie; both the laws of God and of the land are against it, and I could not engage in it either as a good citizen or a Christian."

"Oh, I am so glad of that, and that you came to my rescue; for I was really growing frightened, Arthur seemed in such a fury with me."

"What was it about?"

Elsie explained, then asked how he had happened to come to her aid.

"I had learned from the servants that your father and mother were both out, so came here in search of you," he said. "As I drew near I saw that Arthur was with you, and not wishing to overhear your talk, I waited at a little distance up there on the bank, watching you through the trees. I perceived at once that he was in a towering passion, and fearing he would ill-treat you in some way, I held myself in readiness to come to your rescue; and when I saw him strike you, such a fury suddenly came over me that I could not possibly refrain from thrashing him for it."

"Mr. Travilla, you will not tell papa?" she said entreatingly.

"My child, I am inclined to think he ought to hear of it."

"Oh, why need he? It would make him very angry with Arthur."

"Which Arthur richly deserves. I think your father should know, in order that he may take measures for your protection. Still, if you promise not to ride or walk out alone until Arthur has left the neighborhood, it shall be as you wish. But you must try to recover your composure, or your papa will be sure to ask the cause of your agitation. You are trembling very much, and the color has quite forsaken your cheeks."

"I'll try," She said, making a great effort to control herself, "and I give you the promise."

"This is a very pleasant place to sit with book or work," he remarked, "but I would advise you not even to come here alone again till Arthur has gone."

"Thank you, sir, I think I shall follow your advice. It will be only a few weeks now till he and Walter both go North to college."

"I see you have your book with you," he said, taking it up from the seat where it lay. "How do you like it?"

"Oh, so much! How I pity poor Ellen for having such a father, so different from my dear papa; and because she had to be separated from her mamma, whom she loved so dearly. I can't read about her troubles without crying, Mr. Travilla."

"Shall I tell you a secret," he said, smiling; "I shed some tears over it myself." Then he went on talking with her about the different characters of the story, thus helping her to recover her composure by turning her thoughts from herself and Arthur.

When, half an hour later, a servant came to summon her to the house, with the announcement that her father had returned and was ready to hear her recitations, all signs of agitation had disappeared; she had ceased to tremble, and her fair face was as sweet, bright, and rosy as its wont.

She rose instantly on hearing the summons. "You'll excuse me, I know, Mr. Travilla. But will you not go in with me? We are always glad to

have you with us. I have no need to tell you that, I am sure."

"Thank you," he said, "but I must return to Lon now. I shall walk to the house with you though, if you will permit me," he added, thinking that Arthur might be still lurking somewhere within the grounds.

She answered gayly that she would be very glad of his company. She had lost none of her old liking for her father's friend, and was wont to treat him with the easy and affectionate familiarity she might have used had he been her uncle.

They continued their talk till they had reached the lawn at the side of the house on which her apartments were; then he turned to bid her good-bye.

"I'm much obliged!" she said, taking his offered hand, and looking up brightly into his face.

"Welcome, fair lady; but am I to be dismissed without any reward for my poor services?"

"I have none to offer, sir knight, but you may help yourself if you choose," she said, laughing and blushing, for she knew very well what he meant.

He stooped and snatched a kiss from her ruby lips, then walked away sighing softly to himself, "Ah, little Elsie, if I were but ten years younger!"

She tripped across the lawn, and entering the open door of her boudoir, found herself in her father's arms. He had witnessed the little scene just enacted between Mr. Travilla and herself, had noticed something in his friend's look and manner that had never struck him before. He folded his child close to his heart for an instant then held her off a little, gazing fondly into her face.

"You are mine; you belong to me; no other earthly creature has the least shadow of a right or title in you; do you know that?"

"Yes, papa, and rejoice to know it," she murmured, putting her arms about his neck and laying her head against his breast.

"Ah!" he said, sighing, "you will not always be able to say that, I fear. One of these days you will--" He broke off abruptly, without finishing his sentence.

She looked up inquiringly into his face.

He answered her look with a smile and a tender caress. "I had better not put the nonsense into your head: it will get there soon enough without my help. Come now, let us have the lessons. I expect to find them well prepared, as usual."

"I hope so, papa," she answered, bringing her books and seating herself on a stool at his feet, he having taken possession of an easy-chair.

The recitations seemed a source of keen enjoyment to both; the one loving to impart, and the other to receive, knowledge.

Mr. Dinsmore gave the deserved meed of warm praise for the faithful preparation of each allotted task, prescribed those for the coming day, and the books were laid aside.

"Come here, daughter," he said, as she closed her desk upon them, "I have something to say to you."

"What is it, papa?" she asked, seating herself upon his knee. "How very grave you look." But there was not a touch of the old fear in her face or voice, as there had been none in his of the old sternness.

"Yes, for I am about to speak of a serious matter," he answered, gently smoothing back the clustering curls from her fair brow, while he looked earnestly into the soft brown eyes. "You have not been lending money to Arthur, Elsie?"

The abrupt, unexpected question startled her, and a crimson tide rushed over her face and neck; but she returned her father's gaze steadily: "No, papa; how could you think I would disobey so?"

"I did not, darling, and yet I felt that I must ask the question and repeat my warning, my command to you--never to do so without my knowledge and consent. Your grandfather and I are much troubled about the boy."

"I am so sorry, papa; I hope he has not been doing anything very bad."

"He seems to have sufficient cunning to hide many of his evil deeds," Mr. Dinsmore said, with a sigh; "yet enough has come to light to convince us that he is very likely to become a shame and disgrace to his family. We know that he is profane, and to some extent, at least, intemperate and a gambler. A sad, sad beginning for a boy of seventeen. And to furnish him with money, Elsie, would be only to assist him in his downward course."

"Yes, papa, I see that. Poor grandpa, I'm so sorry for him! But, papa, God can change Arthur's heart, and make him all we could wish."

"Yes, daughter, and we will agree together to ask Him to do this great work, so impossible to any human power; shall we not?"

"Yes, papa." They were silent a moment; then she turned to him again, told of Lucy Carrington's call and its object, and asked if she might accept the invitation.

He considered a moment. "Yes," he said kindly, "you may if you wish. You quite deserve a holiday, and I think perhaps would really be the better of a week's rest from study. Go and enjoy yourself as much as you can, my darling."

"Thank you, you dearest, kindest, and best of papas," she said, giving him a hug and kiss. "But I think you look a little bit sorry. You would rather I should stay at home, if I could content myself to do so, and it would be a strange thing if I could not."

"No, my pet, I shall miss you, I know; the house always seems lonely without you; but I can spare you for a week, and would rather have you go, because I think the change will do you good. Besides, I am willing

to lend my treasure for a few days to our friends at Ashlands. I would gladly do more than that, if I could, for that poor suffering Herbert."

CHAPTER VII.

How many pleasant faces shed their light on every side.

--TUPPER.

"Remember it is for only one week; you must be back again next Wednesday by ten o'clock; I can't spare you an hour longer," Mr. Dinsmore said, as the next morning, shortly after breakfast, he assisted his daughter to mount her pony.

"Ten o'clock at night, papa?" asked Elsie in a gay, jesting tone, as she settled herself in the saddle, and took a little gold-mounted riding whip from his hand.

"No, ten A.M., precisely."

"But what if it should be storming, sir?"

"Then come as soon as the storm is over."

"Yes, sir; and may I come sooner if I get homesick?"

"Just as soon as you please. Now, good-bye, my darling. Don't go into any danger. I know I need not remind you to do nothing your father would disapprove."

"I hope not, papa," she said, with a loving look into the eyes that were gazing so fondly upon her. Then kissing her hand to him and her mamma and little Horace, who stood on the veranda to see her off, she turned her horse's head and cantered merrily away, taking the road to Ashlands on passing out at the gate.

It was a bright, breezy morning, and her heart felt so light and gay that a snatch of glad song rose to her lips. She warbled a few bird-like notes, then fell to humming softly to herself.

At a little distance down the road a light wagon was rumbling along, driven by one of the man-servants from the Oaks, and carrying Aunt Chloe and her young mistress' trunks.

"Come, Jim," said Elsie, glancing over her shoulder at her attendant satellite, "we must pass them. Glossy and I are in haste to-day. Ah, mammy, are you enjoying your ride?" she called to her old nurse as she cantered swiftly by.

"Yes, dat I is, honey!" returned the old woman. Then sending a loving, admiring look after the retreating form so full of symmetry and grace, "My bressed chile!" she murmured, "you's beautiful as de mornin', your ole mammy tinks, an' sweet as de finest rose in de garden; bright an' happy as de day am long, too."

"De beautifullest in all de country, an' de finest," chimed in her charioteer.

The young people at Ashlands were all out on the veranda enjoying the fresh morning air--Herbert lying on a lounge with a book in his hand; Harry and Lucy seated on opposite sides of a small round table and deep in a game of chess; two little fellows of six and eight--John and Archie by name--were spinning a top.

"There she is! I had almost given her up; for I didn't believe that old father of hers would let her come," cried Lucy, catching sight of Glossy and her rider just entering the avenue; and she sprang up in such haste as to upset half the men upon the board.

"Hollo! see what you've done!" exclaimed Harry. "Why, it's Elsie, sure enough!" and he hastily followed in the wake of his sister, who had already flown to meet and welcome her friend; while Herbert started up to a sitting posture, and looked enviously after them.

"Archie, John," he called, "one of you please be good enough to hand me my crutch and cane. Dear me, what a thing it is to be a cripple!"

"I'll get 'em, Herbie, this minute! Don't you try to step without 'em," said Archie, jumping up to hand them.

But Elsie had already alighted from her horse with Harry's assistance, and shaken hands with him, returned Lucy's rapturous embrace as warmly as it was given, and stepped upon the veranda with her before Herbert was fairly upon his feet. As she caught sight of him she hurried forward, her sweet face full of tender pity.

"Oh, don't try to come to meet me, Herbert," she said, holding out her little gloved hand; "I know your poor limb is worse than usual, and you, must not exert yourself for an old friend like me."

"Ah," he said, taking the offered hand, and looking at its owner with a glad light in his eyes, "How like you that is, Elsie! You always were more thoughtful of others than any one else I ever knew. Yes, my limb is pretty bad just now; but the doctor thinks he'll conquer the disease yet; at least so far as to relieve me of the pain I suffer."

"I hope so, indeed. How patiently you have borne it all these long years," she answered with earnest sympathy of tone and look.

"So he has; he deserves the greatest amount of credit for it," said Lucy, as John and Archie in turn claimed Elsie's attention for a moment. "But come now, let me take you to mamma and grandma, and then to your own room. Aunt Chloe and your luggage will be along presently, I suppose."

"Yes, they are coming up the avenue now."

Lucy led the way to a large pleasant, airy apartment in one of the wings of the building, where they found Mrs. Carrington busily occupied in cutting out garments for her servants, her parents Mr. and Mrs. Norris with her, the one reading a newspaper, the other knitting. All three gave the young guest a very warm welcome. She was evidently a great favorite with the whole family.

These greetings and the usual mutual inquiries in regard to the health of friends and relatives having been exchanged, Elsie was next carried off by Lucy to the room prepared for her special use during her stay at Ashlands. It also was large, airy, and cheerful, on the second floor--opening upon a veranda on one side, on the other into a similar apartment occupied by Lucy herself. Pine India matting, furniture of some kind of yellow grained wood, snowy counterpanes, curtains and toilet covers gave them both an air of coolness and simple elegance, while vases of fresh flowers upon the mantels shed around a slight but delicious perfume.

Of course the two girls were full of lively, innocent chat. In the midst of it Elsie exclaimed, "Oh, Lucy! I have just the loveliest book you ever read! a present from Mr. Travilla the other day, and I've brought it along. Papa had begun it, but he is so kind he insisted I should bring it with me; and so I did."

"Oh, I'm glad! we haven't had anything new in the story-book line for some time. Have you read it yourself?"

"Partly; but it is worth reading several times; and I thought we would enjoy it all together--one reading aloud."

"Oh, 'tis just the thing! I'm going to help mamma to-day with the sewing, and a nice book read aloud will make it quite enjoyable. We'll have you for reader, Elsie, if you are agreed."

"Suppose we take turns sewing and reading? I'd like to help your mamma, too."

"Thank you; well, we'll see. Herbert's a good reader, and I daresay will be glad to take his turn at it too. Ah, here comes your baggage and Aunt Chloe following it. Here, Bob and Jack," to the two stalwart black fellows who were carrying the trunk, "set it in this corner. How d'ye do, Aunt Chloe?"

"Berry well, tank you, missy," replied the old nurse, dropping a courtesy. "I'se berry glad to see you lookin' so bright dis here mornin'."

"Thank you. Now make yourself at home and take good care of your young mistress."

"Dat I will, missy; best I knows how. Trus' dis chile for dat."

Elsie's riding habit was quickly exchanged for a house dress, her hair made smooth and shining as its wont, and securing her book she returned with Lucy to the lower veranda, where they found Herbert still extended upon his sofa.

His face brightened at sight of Elsie. He had laid aside his book, and was at work with his knife upon a bit of soft pine wood. He whiled away many a tedious hour by fashioning in this manner little boxes, whistles, sets of baby-house furniture, etc., etc., for one and another of his small friends. Books, magazines, and newspapers filled up the larger portion of his time, but could not occupy it all, for, as he said, he must digest his mental food, and he liked to have employment for his fingers while doing so.

"Please be good enough to sit where I can look at you without too great an effort, won't you?" he said, smiling up into Elsie's face.

"Yes, if that will afford you any pleasure," she answered lightly, as Lucy beckoned to a colored girl, who stepped forward and placed a low rocking chair at the side of the couch.

"There, that is just right. I can have a full view of your face by merely raising my eyes," Herbert said with satisfaction, as Elsie seated herself in it. "What, you have brought a book?"

"Yes," and while Elsie went on to repeat the substance of what she had told Lucy, the latter slipped away to her mamma's room to make arrangements about the work, and ask if they would not all like to come and listen to the reading.

"Is it the kind of book to interest an old body like me?" asked Mrs. Norris.

"I don't know, grandma; but Elsie says Mr. Travilla and her papa were both delighted with it. Mr. Dinsmore, though, had not read the whole of it."

"Suppose we go and try it for a while then," said Mr. Morris, laying down his paper. "If our little Elsie is to be the reader, I for one am pretty sure to enjoy listening, her voice is so sweet-toned and her enunciation so clear and distinct."

"That's you, grandpa!" cried Lucy, clapping her hands in applause. "Yes, you'd better all come, Elsie is to be the reader at the start; she says she does not mind beginning the story over again."

Mrs. Carrington began gathering up her work, laying the garments already cut out in a large basket, which was then carried by her maid to the veranda. In a few moments Elsie had quite an audience gathered about her, ere long a deeply interested one; scissors or needle had now and again to be dropped to wipe away a falling tear, and the voice of the reader needed steadying more than once or twice. Then Herbert took his turn at the book, Elsie hers with the needle, Mrs. Carrington half reluctantly yielding to her urgent request to be allowed to assist them.

So the morning, and much of the afternoon also, passed most pleasantly, and not unprofitably either. A walk toward sundown, and afterward a delightful moonlight ride with Harry Carrington and Winthrop Lansing, the son of a neighboring planter, finished the day, and Elsie retired to her own room at her usual early hour. Lucy followed and kept her chatting quite a while, for which Elsie's tender conscience reproached her somewhat; yet she was not long in falling asleep after her head had once touched her pillow.

The next day was passed in a similar manner, still more time being given to the reading, as they were able to begin it earlier: yet the book was not finished; but on the morning of the next day, which was Friday, Lucy proposed that, if the plan was agreeable to Elsie, they should spend an hour or two in a new amusement; which was no other than going into the dominions of Aunt Viney, the cook, and assisting in beating eggs and making cake.

Elsie was charmed with the idea, and it was immediately carried out, to the great astonishment of Chloe, Aunt Viney, and all her sable tribe.

"Sho, Miss Lucy! what fo' you go for to fotch de company right yere into dis yere ole dirty kitchen?" cried Aunt Viney, dropping a hasty courtesy to Elsie, then hurrying hither and thither in the vain effort to set everything to rights in a moment of time. "Clar out o' yere, you, Han an' Scip," she cried, addressing two small urchins of dusky hue and driving them before her as she spoke, "dere aint no room yere fo' you, an' kitchens aint no place for darkies o' your size or sect. I'll fling de dishcloth at yo' brack faces ef yo' comes in agin fo' you sent for. I 'clare Miss Elsie, an' Miss Lucy, dose dirty niggahs make sich a muss in yere, dere aint a char fit for you to set down in," she continued, hastily cleaning two, and wiping them with her apron. "I'se glad to see you, ladies, but ef I'd knowed you was a-comin' dis kitchen shu'd had a cleanin' up fo' shuah."

"You see, Aunt Viney, you ought to keep it in order, and then you would be ready for visitors whenever they happened to come," said Lucy laughingly. "Why, you're really quite out of breath with whisking about so fast. We've come to help you."

The fat old negress, still panting from her unwonted exertions, straightened herself, pushed back her turban, and gazed in round-eyed wonder upon her young mistress.

"What! Missy help ole Aunt Viney wid dose lily-white hands? Oh, go 'long! you's jokin' dis time fo' shuah."

"No indeed; we want the fun of helping to make some of the cake for to-morrow. You know we want ever so many kinds to celebrate our two birthdays."

"Two birthdays, Miss Lucy? yo's and Massa Herbert's? Yes, dat's it; I don't disremember de day, but I do disremember de age."

"Sixteen; and now we're going to have a nice party to celebrate the day, and you must see that the refreshments are got up in your very best style."

"So I will, Miss Lucy, an' no 'casion for you and Miss Elsie to trouble yo' young heads 'bout de makin' ob de cakes an' jellies an' custards an' sich. Ole Aunt Viney can 'tend to it all."

"But we want the fun of it," persisted Lucy; "we want to try our hands at beating eggs, rolling sugar, sifting flour, etc., etc. I've got a grand new receipt book here, and we'll read out the recipes to you, and measure and weigh the materials, and you can do the mixing and baking."

"Yes, missy, you' lily hands no' hab strength to stir, an' de fire spoil yo' buful 'plexions for shuah."

"I've brought mamma's keys," said Lucy; "come along with us to the store-room, Aunt Viney, and I'll deal out the sugar, spices, and whatever else you want."

"Yes, Miss Lucy; but 'deed I don't need no help. You's berry kind, but ole Viney kin do it all, an' she'll have eberything fus'-rate fo' de young gemmen an' ladies."

"But that isn't the thing, auntie; you don't seem to understand. Miss Elsie and I want the fun, and to learn to cook, too. Who knows but we may some day have to do our own work?"

"Bress de Lord, Miss Lucy, how you talk, honey!" cried the old negress, rolling up her eyes in horror at the thought.

"Take care; Miss Elsie will think you very wicked if you use such exclamations as that."

"Dat wrong, you t'ink, missy?" asked Aunt Viney, turning to the young visitor, who had gone with them to the store-room, and was assisting Lucy in the work of measuring and weighing the needed articles.

"I think it is," she answered gently; "we should be very careful not to use the sacred name lightly. To do so is to break the third commandment."

"Den, missy, dis ole gal won't neber do it no more."

Chloe had been an excellent cook in her young days, and had not forgotten or lost her former skill in the preparation of toothsome dainties. She, too, came with offers of assistance, and the four were soon deep in the mysteries of pastry, sweetmeats, and confections. Novelty gave it an especial charm to the young ladies, and they grew very merry and talkative, while their ignorance of the business in hand, the odd mistakes they fell into in consequence, and the comical questions they asked, gave much secret amusement to the two old servants.

"What's this pound cake to be mixed up in, Aunt Viney?" asked Lucy.

"In dis yere tin pan, missy."

"Is it clean?"

"Yes, missy, it's clean; but maybe 'taint suffishently clean, I'll wash it agin."

"How many kinds of cake shall we make?" asked Elsie.

"Every kind that Chloe and Aunt Viney can think of and know how to make well. Let me see--delicate cake, gold, silver and clove, fruitcake, sponge, and what else?"

"Mammy makes delicious jumbles."

"Will you make us some, Aunt Chloe?"

Chloe signified her readiness to do whatever was desired, and began at once to collect her implements.

"Got a rollin' pin, Aunt Viney?" she asked.

"Yes, to be shuah, a revoltin' roller, de very bes' kind. No, Miss

Elsie, don' mix de eggs dat way, you spile 'em ef you mix de yaller all up wid de whites. An' Miss Lucy, butter an' sugar mus' be worked up togedder fus', till de butter resolve de sugah, 'fore we puts de udder gredinents in."

"Ah, I see we have a good deal to learn before we can hope to rival you as cooks, Aunt Viney," laughed Lucy.

"I spec' so, missy; you throw all de gredinents in togedder, an' tumble your flouah in all at once, an' you nebber get your cake nice an light."

They had nearly reached the end of their labors when sounds as of scuffling, mingled with loud boyish laughter, and cries of "That's it, Scip, hit him again! Pitch into him, Han, and pay him off well for it!" drew them all in haste to the window and door.

The two little darkies who had been ejected from the kitchen, were tussling in the yard, while their young masters, John and Archie, looked on, shaking with laughter, and clapping their hands in noisy glee.

"What's all this racket about?" asked Grandpa Norris, coming out upon the veranda, newspaper in hand, Herbert limping along by his side.

"The old feud between Roman and Carthaginian, sir," replied John.

"Why, what do you mean, child?"

"Hannah Ball waging a war on Skipio, you know, sir."

"History repeating itself, eh?" laughed Herbert.

"Ah, that's an old joke, Archie," said his grandfather. "And you're too big a rogue to set them at such work. Han and Scip, stop that at once."

CHAPTER VIII.

"All your attempts
Shall fall on me like brittle shafts on armor."

Lucy came into Elsie's room early the next morning to show her birthday gifts, of which she had received one or more from every member of her family. They consisted of articles of jewelry, toilet ornaments, and handsomely-bound books.

They learned on meeting Herbert at breakfast that he had fared quite as well as his sister. Elsie slipped a valuable ring on Lucy's finger and laid a gold pencil-case beside Herbert's plate.

"Oh, charming! a thousand thanks, mon ami!" cried Lucy, her eyes sparkling with pleasure.

"Thank you, I shall value it most highly; especially for the giver's

sake," said Herbert, examining his with a pleased look, then turning to her with a blush and joyous smile, "I am so much better this morning that I am going out for a drive. Won't you and Lucy give me the added pleasure of your company?"

"Thank you, I can answer for myself that I'll be very happy to do so."

"I, too," said Lucy. "It's a lovely morning for a ride. We'll make up a party and go, but we must be home again in good season; for Carrie and Enna promised to come to dinner. So I'm glad we finished the book yesterday, though we were all so sorry to part from little Ellen."

They turned out quite a strong party; Herbert and the ladies filling up the family carriage, while Harry on horseback, and John and Archie each mounted upon a pony, accompanied it, now riding alongside, now speeding on ahead, or perchance dropping behind for a time as suited their fancy.

They travelled some miles, and alighting in a beautiful grove, partook of a delicate lunch they had brought with them. Then, while Herbert rested upon the grass the others wandered hither and thither until it was time to return. They reached home just in season to receive their expected guests.

Carrie Howard was growing up very pretty and graceful; womanly in her ways, yet quite unassuming in manner, frank and sweet in disposition, she was a general favorite with old and young, and could already boast of several suitors for her hand.

Enna Dinsmore, now in her fourteenth year, though by some considered even prettier, was far less pleasing--pert, forward, and conceited as she had been in her early childhood; she was tall for her age, and with her perfect self-possession and grown-up air and manner, might be easily mistaken for seventeen. She had already more worldly wisdom than her sweet, fair niece would ever be able to attain, and was, in her own estimation at least, a very stylish and fashionable young lady. She assumed very superior airs toward Elsie when her brother Horace was not by, reproving, exhorting, or directing her; and was very proud of being usually taken by strangers for the elder of the two. Some day she would not think that a feather in her cap.

Elsie had lost none of the childlike simplicity of five years ago; it still showed itself in the sweet, gentle countenance, the quiet graceful carriage, equally removed from forwardness on the one hand, and timid self-consciousness on the other. She did not consider herself a personage of importance, yet was not troubled by her supposed insignificance; in fact seldom thought of self at all, so engaged was she in adding to the happiness of others.

The four girls were gathered in Lucy's room. She had been showing her birthday presents to Carrie and Enna.

"How do you like this style of arranging the hair, girls?" asked the latter, standing before a mirror, smoothing and patting, and pulling out her puffs and braids. "It's the newest thing out. Isabel Carleton just brought it from New York. I saw her with hers dressed so, and sent Delia over to learn how."

Delia was Miss Enna's maid, and had been brought along to Ashlands

that she might dress her young lady's hair in this new style for the party.

"It's pretty," said Lucy. "I think I'll have Minerva dress mine so for to-night, and see how it becomes me."

"Delia can show her how," said Enna. "Don't you like it, Carrie?"

"Pretty well, but if you'll excuse me for saying so, it strikes me as rather grown up for a young lady of thirteen," answered Carrie in a good-naturedly bantering tone.

Enna colored and looked vexed. "I'm nearly fourteen," she replied with a slight toss of the head; "and I overheard Mrs. Carleton saying to mamma the other day, that with my height and finished manners I might pass anywhere for seventeen."

"Perhaps so; of course, knowing your age, I can't judge so well how it would strike a stranger."

"I see you have gone back to the old childish way of arranging your hair. What's that for?" asked Enna, turning to Elsie; "I should think it was about time you were beginning to be a little womanly in something."

"Yes, but not in dress or the arrangement of my hair. So papa says, and of course I know he is right."

"He would not let you have it up in a comb?"

"No," Elsie answered with a quiet smile.

"Why do you smile? Did he say anything funny when you showed yourself that day?"

"Oh, Elsie, have you tried putting up your hair?" asked Carrie; while Lucy exclaimed, "Try it again to-night, Elsie, I should like to see how you would look."

"Yes," said Elsie, answering Carrie's query first. "Enna persuaded me one day to have mammy do it up in young-lady fashion. I liked it right well for a change, and that was just what mamma said when I went into the drawing-room and showed myself to her. But when papa came in, he looked at me with a comical sort of surprise in his face, and said. 'Come here; what have you been doing to yourself?' I went to him and he pulled out my comb, and ordered me off to mammy to have my hair arranged again in the usual way, saying, 'I'm not going to have you aping the woman already; don't alter the style of wearing your hair again, till I give you permission.'

"And you walked off as meek as Moses, and did his bidding," said Enna sarcastically. "No man shall ever rule me so. If papa should undertake to give me such an order, I'd just inform him that my hair was my own, and I should arrange it as suited my own fancy."

"I think you are making yourself out worse than you really are, Enna," said Elsie gravely. "I am sure you could never say anything so extremely impertinent as that to grandpa."

"Impertinent! Well, if you believe it necessary to be so very respectful, consistency should lead you to refrain from reproving your aunt."

"I did not exactly mean to reprove you, Enna, and you are younger than I."

"Nobody would think it," remarked Enna superciliously and with a second toss of her head, as she turned from the glass; "you are so extremely childish in every way, while, as mamma says, I grow more womanly in appearance and manner every day."

"Elsie's manners are quite perfect, I think," said Carrie; "and her hair is so beautiful, I don't believe any other style of arrangement could improve its appearance in the least."

"But it's so childish, so absurdly childish! just that great mass of ringlets hanging about her neck and shoulders. Come, Elsie, I want you to have it dressed in this new style for to-night."

"No, Enna, I am perfectly satisfied to wear it in this childish fashion; and if I were not, still I could not disobey papa."

Enna turned away with a contemptuous sniff, and Lucy proposed that they should go down to the drawing-room, and try some new music she had just received, until it should be time to dress for the evening.

Herbert lay on a sofa listening to their playing. "Lucy," he said in one of the pauses, "what amusements are we to have to-night?--anything beside the harp, piano, and conversation?"

"Dancing, of course. Cad's fiddle will provide as good music as any one need care for, and this room is large enough for all who will be here. Our party is not to be very large, you know."

"And Elsie, for one, is too pious to dance," sneered Enna.

Elsie colored, but remained silent.

"Oh! I did not think of that!" cried Lucy. "Elsie, do you really think it is a sinful amusement?"

"I think it wrong to go to balls; at least that it would be wrong for me, a professed Christian, Lucy."

"But this will not be a ball, and we'll have nothing but quiet country dances, or something of that sort, no waltzing or anything at all objectionable. What harm can there be in jumping about in that way more than in another?"

"None that I know of," answered Elsie, smiling. "And I certainly shall not object to others doing as they like, provided I am not asked to take part in it."

"But why not take part, if it is not wrong?" asked Harry, coming in from the veranda.

"Why, don't you know she never does anything without asking the permission of papa?" queried Enna tauntingly. "But where's the use of

consulting her wishes in the matter, or urging her to take part in the wicked amusement?--she'll have to go to bed at nine o'clock, like any other well-trained child, and we'll have time enough for our dancing after that."

"Oh, Elsie, must you?--must you really leave us at that early hour? Why, that's entirely too bad!" cried the others in excited chorus.

"I shall stay up till ten," answered Elsie quietly, while a deep flush suffused her cheek.

"That is better, but we shall not know how to spare you even that soon," said Harry. "Couldn't you make it eleven?--that would not be so very late just for once."

"No, for she can't break her rules, or disobey orders. If she did, papa would be sure to find it out and punish her when she gets home."

"For shame, Enna! that's quite too bad!" cried Carrie and Lucy in a breath.

Elsie's color deepened, and there was a flash of anger and scorn in her eyes as she turned for an instant upon Enna. Then she replied firmly, though with a slight tremble of indignation in her tones: "I am not ashamed to own that I do find it both a duty and a pleasure to obey my father, whether he be present or absent. I have confidence, too, in both his wisdom and his love for me. He thinks early hours of great importance, especially to those who are young and growing, and therefore he made it a rule that I shall retire to my room and begin my preparations for bed by nine o'clock. But he gave me leave to stay up an hour later to-night, and I intend to do so."

"I think you are a very good girl, and feel just right about it," said Carrie.

"I wish he had said eleven, I think he might this once," remarked Lucy. "Why, don't you remember he let you stay up till ten Christmas Eve that time we all spent the holidays at Roselands, which was five years ago?"

"Yes," said Elsie, "but this is Saturday night, and as to-morrow is the Sabbath, I should not feel it to be right to stay up later, even if I had permission."

"Why not? it isn't Sunday till twelve," said Herbert.

"No, but I should be apt to oversleep myself, and be dull and drowsy in church next morning."

"Quite a saint!" muttered Enna, shrugging her shoulders and marching off to the other side of the room.

"Suppose we go and select some flowers for our hair," said Lucy, looking at her watch. "Twill be tea-time presently, and we'll want to dress directly after."

"You always were such a dear good girl," whispered Carrie Howard, putting her arm about Elsie's waist as they left the room.

Enna was quite gorgeous that evening, in a bright-colored silk, trimmed with multitudinous flounces and many yards of ribbon and gimp. The young damsel had a decidedly gay taste, and glanced somewhat contemptuously at Elsie's dress of simple white, albeit 'twas of the finest India muslin and trimmed with costly lace. She wore her pearl necklace and bracelets, a broad sash of rich white ribbon; no other ornaments save a half-blown moss rosebud at her bosom, and another amid the glossy ringlets of her hair, their green leaves the only bit of color about her.

"You look like a bride," said Herbert, gazing admiringly upon her.

"Do I?" she answered smiling, as she turned and tripped lightly away; for Lucy was calling to her from the next room.

Herbert's eyes followed her with a wistful, longing look in them, and he sighed sadly to himself as she disappeared from his view.

Most of the guests came early; among them, Walter and Arthur Dinsmore; Elsie had not seen the latter since his encounter with Mr. Travilla. He gave her a sullen nod on entering the room, but took no further notice of her.

Chit-chat, promenading and the music of the piano and harp were the order of the evening for a time; then games were proposed, and "Consequences," "How do you like it?" and "Genteel lady, always genteel," afforded much amusement. Herbert could join in these, and did with much spirit. But dancing was a favorite pastime with the young people of the neighborhood, and the clock had hardly struck nine when Cadmus and his fiddle were summoned to their aid, chairs and tables were put out of the way, and sets began to form.

Elsie was in great request; the young gentlemen flocked about her, with urgent entreaties that she would join in the amusement, each claiming the honor of her hand in one or more sets, but she steadily declined.

A glad smile lighted up Herbert's countenance, as he saw one and another turn and walk away with a look of chagrin and disappointment.

"Since my misfortune compels me to act the part of a wallflower, I am selfish enough, I own, to rejoice in your decision to be one also," he said gleefully. "Will you take a seat with me on this sofa? I presume your conscience does not forbid you to watch the dancers?"

"No, not at all," she answered, accepting his invitation.

Elsie's eyes followed with eager interest the swiftly moving forms, but Herbert's were often turned admiringly upon her. At length he asked if she did not find the room rather warm and close, and proposed that they should go out upon the veranda. She gave a willing assent and they passed quietly out and sat down side by side on a rustic seat.

The full moon shone upon them from a beautiful blue sky, while a refreshing breeze, fragrant with the odor of flowers and pines, gently fanned their cheeks and played among the rich masses of Elsie's hair.

They found a good deal to talk about; they always did, for they were

kindred spirits. Their chat was now grave, now gay--generally the latter; for Cad's music was inspiring; but whatever the theme of their discourse, Herbert's eyes were constantly seeking the face of his companion.

"How beautiful you are, Elsie!" he exclaimed at length, in a tone of such earnest sincerity that it made her laugh, the words seemed to rush spontaneously from his lips. "You are always lovely, but to-night especially so."

"It's the moonlight, Herbert; there's a sort of witchery about it, that lends beauty to many an object which can boast none of itself."

"Ah, but broad daylight never robs you of yours; you always wear it wherever you are, and however dressed. You look like a bride to-night; I wish you were, and that I were the groom."

Elsie laughed again, this time more merrily than before. "Ah, what nonsense we are talking--we two children," she said. Then starting to her feet as the clock struck ten--"There, it is my bed-time, and I must bid you good-night, pleasant dreams, and a happy awaking."

"Oh, don't go yet!" he cried, but she was already gone, the skirt of her white dress just disappearing through the open hall door.

She encountered Mrs. Carrington at the foot of the stairs. "My dear child, you are not leaving us already?" she cried.

"Yes, madam; the clock has struck ten."

"Why, you are a second Cinderella."

"I hope not," replied Elsie, laughing. "See, my dress has not changed in the least, but is quite as fresh and nice as ever."

"Ah, true enough! there the resemblance fails entirely. But, my dear child, the refreshments are just coming in, and you must have your share. I had ordered them an hour earlier, but the servants were slow and dilatory, and then the dancing began. Come, can you not wait long enough to partake with us? Surely, ten o'clock is not late."

"No, madam; not for another night of the week, but to-morrow's the Sabbath, you know, and if I should stay up late to-night I would be likely to find myself unfitted for its duties. Besides, papa bade me retire at this hour; and he does not approve of my eating at night; he thinks it is apt to cause dyspepsia."

"Ah, that is too bad! Well, I shall see that something is set away for you, and hope you will enjoy it to-morrow. Good-night, dear; I must hurry away now to see the rest of my guests, and will not detain you longer," she added, drawing the fair girl toward her and kissing her affectionately, then hastening away to the supper-room.

Elsie tripped up the stairs and entered her room. A lamp burned low on the toilet table, she went to it, turned up the wick, and as she did so a slight noise on the veranda without startled her. The windows reached to the floor and were wide open.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"I," was answered, in a rough, surly tone, and Arthur stepped in.

"Is it you?" she asked in surprise and indignation. "Why do you come here? it is not fit you should, especially at this hour."

"It is not fit you should set yourself up to reprove and instruct your uncle, I've come for that money you are going to lend me."

"I am not going to lend you any money."

"Give it then; that will be all the better for my pocket.

"I have none to give you either, Arthur; papa has positively forbidden me to supply you with money."

"How much have you here?"

"That is a question you have no right to ask."

"Well, I know you are never without a pretty good supply of the needful, and I'm needy. So hand it over without any more ado; otherwise I shall be very apt to help myself."

"No, you will not," she said, with dignity. "If you attempt to rob me, I shall call for assistance."

"And disgrace the family by giving the tattlers a precious bit of scandal to retail in regard to us."

"If you care for the family credit you will go away at once and leave me in peace."

"I will, eh? I'll go when I get what I came for, and not before."

Elsie moved toward the bell rope, but anticipating her intention, he stepped before it, saying with a jeering laugh, "No, you don't!"

"Arthur," she said, drawing herself up, and speaking with great firmness and dignity, "leave this room; I wish to be alone."

"Hoity-toity, Miss Dinsmore! do you suppose I'm to be ordered about by you? No, indeed! And I've an old score to pay off. One of these days I'll be revenged on you and old Travilla, too; nobody shall insult and abuse me with impunity. Now hand over that cash!"

"Leave this room!" she repeated.

"None of your ---- impudence!" he cried fiercely, catching her by the arm with a grasp that wrung from her a low, half-smothered cry of pain.

But footsteps and voices were heard on the stairs, and he hastily withdrew by the window through which he had entered.

Elsie pulled up her sleeve and looked at her arm. Each finger of Arthur's hand had left its mark. "Oh, how angry papa would be!" she murmured to herself, hastily drawing down her sleeve again as the door opened and Chloe came in, followed by another servant bearing a small

silver waiter loaded with dainties.

"Missus tole me fetch 'em up with her compliments, an' hopes de young lady'll try to eat some," she said, setting it down on a table.

"Mrs. Carrington is very kind. Please return her my thanks, Minerva," said Elsie, making a strong effort to steady her voice.

The girl, taken up with the excitement of what was going on downstairs, failed to notice the slight tremble in its tones. But not so with Chloe. As the other hurried from the room, she took her nursling in her arms, and gazing into the sweet face with earnest, loving scrutiny; asked, "What de matter, darlin'? what hab resturbed you so, honey?"

"You mustn't leave me alone, to-night, mammy," Elsie whispered, clinging to her, and half hiding her face on her breast. "Don't go out of the room at all, unless it is to step on the veranda."

Chloe was much surprised, for Elsie had never been cowardly.

"Deed I won't, darling" she answered, caressing the shining hair, and softly rounded cheek. "But what my bressed chile 'fraid of?"

"Mr. Arthur, mammy," Elsie answered scarcely above her breath. "He was in here a moment since, and if I were alone again he might come back."

"An' what Marse Arthur doin' yer dis time ob night, I like ter know?--what he want frightenin' my chile like dis?"

"Money, mammy, and papa has forbidden me to let him have any, because he makes a bad use of it." Elsie knew to whom she spoke. Chloe was no ordinary servant, and could be trusted.

"Dear, dear, it's drefful that Marse Arthur takes to dem bad ways! But don't go for to fret, honey; we'll 'gree together to ask de Lord to turn him to de right."

"Yes, mammy, you must help me to pray for him. But now I must get ready for bed; I have stayed up longer than papa said I might."

"Won't you take some of de 'freshments fust, honey?"

Elsie shook her head. "Eat what you want of them, mammy. I know I am better without."

CHAPTER IX.

There's not a look, a word of thine
My soul hath e'er forgot;
Thou ne'er hast bid a ringlet shine,
Nor given thy locks one graceful twine,
Which I remember not.

--MOORE.

The clock on the stairway was just striking nine, as some one tapped lightly on the door of Elsie's room, leading into the hall. Chloe rose and opened it. "Dat you, Scip?"

"Yes, Aunt Chloe; de missis say breakop's is ready, an' will Miss Dinsmore please for to come if she's ready. We don't ring de bell fear wakin' up de odder young ladies an' gemmen."

Elsie had been up and dressed for the last hour, which she had spent in reading her Bible; a book not less dear and beautiful in her esteem now than it was in the days of her childhood. She rose and followed Scip to the dining-room, where she found the older members of the family already assembled, and about to sit down to the table.

"Ah, my dear, good-morning," said Mrs. Carrington; "I was sure you would be up and dressed: but the others were so late getting to bed that I mean they shall be allowed to sleep as long as they will. Ah! and here comes Herbert, too. We have quite a party after all."

"I should think you would need a long nap this morning more than any one else," Elsie said, addressing Herbert.

"No," he answered, coloring. "I took advantage of my semi-invalidism, and retired very shortly after you left us."

"You must not think it is usual for us to be quite so late on Sunday morning, Elsie," observed Mr. Carrington as he sent her her plate, "though I'm afraid we are hardly as early risers, even on ordinary occasions, as you are at the Oaks. I don't think it's a good plan to have Saturday-night parties," he added, looking across the table at his wife.

"No," she said lightly; "but we must blame it all on the birthday, for coming when it did. And though we are late, we shall still be in time to get to church. Elsie, will you go with us?"

"In the carriage with mother and me?" added Herbert.

Elsie, had she consulted her own inclination merely, would have greatly preferred to ride her pony, but seeing the eager look in Herbert's eyes, she answered smilingly that she should accept the

invitation with pleasure, if there was a seat in the carriage which no one else cared to occupy.

"There will be plenty of room, my dear," said Mr. Carrington; "father and mother always go by themselves, driving an ancient mare we call old Bess, who is so very quiet and slow that no one else can bear to ride behind her; and the boys and I either walk or ride our horses."

It was time to set out almost immediately upon leaving the table. They had a quiet drive through beautiful pine woods, heard an excellent gospel sermon, and returned by another and equally beautiful route.

Elsie's mind was full of the truth to which she had been listening, and she had very little to say. Mrs. Carrington and Herbert, too, were unusually silent; the latter feeling it enjoyment enough just to sit by Elsie's side. He had known and loved her from their very early

childhood; with a love that had grown and strengthened year by year.

"You seem much fatigued, Herbert," his mother said to him, as a servant assisted him from the carriage, and up the steps of the veranda. "I am almost sorry you went."

"Oh, no, mother, I'm not at all sorry," he answered cheerfully; "I shall have to spend the rest of the day on my couch, but that sermon was enough to repay me for the exertion it cost me to go to hear it." Then he added in an undertone to Elsie, who stood near, looking at him with pitying eyes, "I shan't mind having to lie still if you will give me your company for even a part of the time."

"Certainly you shall have it, if it will be any comfort to you," she answered, with her own sweet smile.

"You must not be too exacting towards Elsie, my son," said his mother, shaking up his pillows for him, and settling him comfortably on them; "she is always so ready to sacrifice herself for others that she would not, I fear, refuse such a request, however much it might cost her to grant it. And no doubt she will want to be with the other girls."

"Yes, it was just like my selfishness to ask it, Elsie, and never think how distasteful it might be to you. I take it all back," he said, blushing, but with a wistful look in his eyes that she could never have withstood, had she wished to do so.

"It's too late for that, since I have already accepted," she said with an arch look as she turned away. "But don't worry yourself about me; I shall follow my own inclination in regard to the length of my visit, making it very short if I find your society irksome or disagreeable."

The other girls were promenading on the upper veranda in full dinner dress.

Carrie hailed Elsie in a lively tone. "So you've been to church, like a good Christian, leaving us three lazy sinners taking our ease at home. We took our breakfasts in bed, and have only just finished our toilets."

"Well, and why shouldn't we?" said Enna; "we don't profess to be saints."

"No, I just said we were sinners. But don't think too ill of us, Elsie, it was so late--or rather early--well on into the small hours--when we retired, that a long morning nap became a necessity."

"I don't pretend to judge you, Carrie," Elsie answered gently, "it is not for me to do so; and I acknowledge that though I retired much earlier than you, I slept a full hour past my usual time for rising."

"You'll surely have to do penance for that," sneered Enna.

"No, she shan't," said Lucy, putting her arm around her friend's slender waist. "Come, promenade with me till the dinner-bell rings, the exercise will do you good."

The lively chat of the girls seemed to our heroine so unsuited to the sacredness of the day that she rejoiced in the excuse Herbert's

invitation gave her for withdrawing herself from their society for the greater part of the afternoon. She found him alone, lying on his sofa, apparently asleep; but at the sound of her light footstep he opened his eyes and looked up with a joyous smile. "I'm so glad to see you! how good of you to come!" he cried delightedly. "It's abominably selfish of me, though. Don't let me keep you from having a good time with the rest."

"The Sabbath is hardly the day for what people usually mean by a good time, is it?" she said, taking possession of a low rocking-chair that stood by the side of his couch.

"No, but it is the day of days for real good, happy times; everything is so quiet and still that it is easier than on other days to lift one's thoughts to God and Heaven. Oh, Elsie, I owe you a great debt of gratitude, that I can never repay."

"For what, Herbert?"

"Ah, don't you know it was you who first taught me the sweetness of carrying all my trials and troubles to Jesus? Years ago, when we were very little children, you told me what comfort and happiness you found in so doing, and begged me to try it for myself."

"And you did?"

"Yes, and have continued to do so ever since."

"And that is what enables you to be so patient and uncomplaining."

"If I am. But ah! you don't know the dreadfully rebellious feelings that sometimes will take possession of me, especially when, after the disease has seemed almost eradicated from my system, it suddenly returns to make me as helpless and full of pain as ever. Nobody knows how hard it is to endure it; how weary I grow of life; how unendurably heavy my burden seems."

"Yes, He knows," she murmured softly. "In all their afflictions He was afflicted; and the angel of His presence saved them."

"Yes, He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Oh, how sweet and comforting it is!"

They were silent for a moment; then turning to her, he asked, "Are you ever afraid that your troubles and cares are too trifling for His notice? that you will weary and disgust Him with your continual coming?"

"I asked papa about that once, and I shall never forget the tender, loving look he gave me as he said: 'Daughter, do I ever seem to feel that anything which affects your comfort or happiness one way or the other, is too trifling to interest and concern me?' 'Oh, no, no, papa,' I said; 'you have often told me you would be glad to know that I had not a thought or feeling concealed from you; and you always seem to like to have me come to you with every little thing that makes me either glad or sorry.' 'I am, my darling,' he answered, 'just because you are so very near and dear to me; and what does the Bible tell us? 'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him!'"

"Yes," said Herbert, musingly. "Then that text somewhere in Isaiah about His love being greater than a mother's for her little helpless babe."

"And what Jesus said: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.' And then the command: 'In everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.' Papa reminded me, too, of God's infinite wisdom and power, of the great worlds, countless in number, that He keeps in motion--the sun and planets of many solar systems besides our own--and then the myriads upon myriads of tiny insects that crowd earth, air, and water; God's care and providence ever over them all. Oh, one does not know how to take it in! one cannot realize the half of it. God does not know the distinctions that we do between great and small, and it costs Him no effort to attend at one and the same time, to all His creatures and all their affairs."

"No, that is true. Oh, how great and how good He is! and how sweet to know of His goodness and love; to feel that he hears and answers prayer! I would not give that up for perfect health and vigor, and all the wealth of the world beside."

"I think I would give up everything else first; and oh, I am so glad for you, Herbert," she said softly.

Then they opened their Bibles and read several chapters together, verse about, pausing now and then to compare notes, as to their understanding of the exact meaning of some particular passage, or to look out a reference, or consult a commentary.

"I'm excessively tired of the house; do let's take a walk," said Enna, as they stood or sat about the veranda after tea.

"Do you second the motion, Miss Howard?" asked Harry.

"Yes," she said, rising and taking his offered arm. "Elsie, you'll go too?"

"Oh, there's no use in asking her!" cried Enna. "She is much too good to do anything pleasant on Sunday."

"Indeed! I was not aware of that." And Harry shrugged his shoulders, and threw a comical look at Elsie. "What is your objection to pleasant things, Miss Dinsmore? To be quite consistent you should object to yourself."

Elsie smiled. "Enna must excuse me for saying that she makes a slight mistake; for while it is true my conscience would not permit me to go pleasuring on the Sabbath, yet it does not object to many things that I find very pleasant."

"Such as saying your prayers, reading the Bible, and going to church?"

"Yes. Enna; those are real pleasures to me."

"But to come to the point, will you walk with us?" asked Lucy.

"Thank you, no; not to-night. But please don't mind me. I have no right, and don't presume to decide such questions for anyone but myself."

"Then, if you'll excuse us, we'll leave mamma and Herbert to entertain you for a short time."

The short time proved to be two hours or more, and long before the return of the little party, Mrs. Carrington went into the house, leaving the two on the veranda alone.

They sang hymns together for a while, then fell to silent musing. Herbert was the first to speak. He still lay upon his sofa; Elsie sitting near, her face at that moment upturned to the sky, where the full moon was shining, and looking wondrous sweet and fair in the soft silvery light. Her thoughts seemed far away, and she started and turned quickly toward him as he softly breathed her name.

"Oh, Elsie, this has been such a happy day to me! What joy, what bliss, if we could be always together!"

"If you were only my brother! I wish you were, Herbert."

"No, no, I do not; for I would be something much nearer and dearer. Oh, Elsie, if you only would!" he went on, speaking very fast and excitedly. "You thought I was joking last night, but I was not, I was in earnest; never more so in my life. Oh, do you think you could like me, Elsie?"

"Why, yes, Herbert; I do, and always have ever since we first became acquainted."

"No, I didn't mean like, I meant love. Elsie, could you love me--love me well enough to marry me?"

"Why, Herbert; what an idea!" she stammered, her face flushing visibly in the moonlight. "You don't know how you surprise me; surely we are both too young to be thinking of such things. Papa says I am not even to consider myself a young lady for three or four years yet. I'm nothing but a child. And you, Herbert, are not much older."

"Six months; but that's quite enough difference. And your father needn't object on the score of our youth. You are as old now as I've been told your mother was when he married her, and another year will make me as old as he was. And your Aunts Louisa and Lora were both engaged before they were sixteen. It's not at all uncommon for girls in this part of the country to marry before they are that old. But I know I'm not half good enough for you, Elsie. A king might be proud to win you for his bride, and I'm only a poor, good-for-nothing cripple, not worth anybody's acceptance." And he turned away his face, with something that sounded very like a sob.

Elsie's kind heart was touched. "No, Herbert, you must not talk so. You are a dear, good, noble fellow, worthy of any lady in the land," she said, half playfully, half tenderly and laying her little soft white hand over his mouth.

He caught it in his and pressed it passionately to his lips, there holding it fast. "Oh, Elsie, if it were only mine to keep!" he cried, "I'd be the happiest fellow in the world."

She looked at his pale, thin face, worn with suffering, into his eyes so full of passionate entreaty; thought what a dear lovable fellow he had always been, and forgot herself entirely--forgot everything but the desire to relieve and comfort him, and make him happy.

"Only tell me that you care for me, darling, and that you are willing some day to belong to me! only give me a little hope; I shall die if you don't!"

"I do care for you, Herbert; I would do anything in my power to make you happy."

"Then I may call you my own! Oh, darling, God bless you for your goodness!"

But the clock was striking nine, and with the sound, a sudden recollection came to Elsie. "It is my bed-time, and--and, Herbert, it will all have to be just as papa says. I belong to him, and cannot give myself away without his permission. Good-night." She hastily withdrew the hand he still held, and was gone ere he had time to reply.

"What had she done--something of which papa would highly disapprove? Would he be very much vexed with her?" Elsie asked herself half-tremblingly, as she sat passively under her old mammy's hands; for her father's displeasure was the one thing she dreaded above all others.

She was just ready for bed when a light tap on the door was followed by the entrance of Mrs. Carrington.

"I wish to see your young mistress alone for a few moments, Aunt Chloe," she said, and the faithful creature went from the room at once.

Mrs. Carrington threw her arms around Elsie, folded her in close, loving embrace, and kissed her fondly again and again, "My dear child, how happy you have made me!" she whispered at last. "Herbert has told me all. Dear boy, he could not keep such good news from his mother. I know of nothing that could have brought me deeper joy and thankfulness, for I have always had a mother's love for you."

Elsie felt bewildered, almost stunned. "I--I'm afraid you--he has misunderstood me; it--it must be as papa says," she stammered; "I cannot decide it for myself, I have no right."

"Certainly, my dear, that is all very right, very proper; parents should always be consulted in these matters. But your papa loves you too well to raise any objection when he sees that your heart is interested. And Herbert is worthy of you, though his mother says it; he is a noble, true-hearted fellow, well-educated, handsome, talented, polished in manners, indeed all that anybody could ask, if he were but well; and we do not despair of seeing him eventually quite restored to health. But I am keeping you up, and I know that your papa is very strict and particular about your observance of his rules; so

good-night." And, with another caress, she left her.

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