

A Fancy of Hers

Horatio Alger

Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----------|
| <u>A Fancy of Hers</u> | 1 |
| <u>Horatio Alger</u> | 1 |
| <u>Chapter 1</u> | 1 |
| <u>Chapter 2</u> | 6 |
| <u>Chapter 3</u> | 13 |
| <u>Chapter 4</u> | 18 |
| <u>Chapter 5</u> | 22 |
| <u>Chapter 6</u> | 27 |
| <u>Chapter 7</u> | 35 |
| <u>Chapter 8</u> | 39 |
| <u>Chapter 9</u> | 41 |
| <u>Chapter 10</u> | 49 |
| <u>Chapter 11</u> | 53 |
| <u>Chapter 12</u> | 63 |

A Fancy of Hers

Horatio Alger

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- [Chapter 1.](#)
- [Chapter 2](#)
- [Chapter 3](#)
- [Chapter 4](#)
- [Chapter 5](#)
- [Chapter 6](#)
- [Chapter 7](#)
- [Chapter 8](#)
- [Chapter 9](#)
- [Chapter 10](#)
- [Chapter 11](#)
- [Chapter 12](#)

The strange experiment of a New York girl – a Village Romance, and a series of sketches of Village Types – A Novel Complete in this Issue.

Chapter 1.

The stage rumbled along the main street of Granville, and drew up in front of the only hotel of which the village could boast. The driver descended from his throne, and coming round to the side opened the door and addressed the only passenger remaining within. "Where do you want to go, miss?" A girl's face looked out inquiringly. "Is this the hotel?" she asked. "Yes, miss."

"I will get out here," she said quietly.

There were a few loungers on the piazza, which extended along the whole front of the building. As she descended with a light and springy step, disregarding the proffered aid of the driver, they eyed her curiously.

"Who is she, Abner?" asked Timothy Varnum of the driver, as the stranger entered the house.

"I reckon she's the new school teacher," said Abner; "I heard Squire Hadley say she was expected today."

"Where does she come from?"

"York State, somewhere. I don't justly know where."

"Looks like a city gal."

"Mebbe, though I don't think it would pay a city gal to come to Granville to teach."

A Fancy of Hers

Unconscious of the curiosity which her appearance had excited, the girl entered the open entry and paused. A middle aged woman, evidently the landlady of the inn, speedily made her appearance. "Good afternoon, miss," she said. "Shall I show you to a room?"

"Thank you," said the stranger, gratefully. "I shall be very glad if you will. The ride has been warm and dusty. My trunks are on the stage — —"

"All right, miss, I'll have them sent up. If you'll follow me up stairs, I'll give you a room."

She led the way into a front room, very plainly furnished, but with a pleasant view of the village from the windows. "I think you will find everything you require," she said, preparing to go. "Supper will be ready in half an hour, but you can have it later if you wish."

"I shall be ready, thank you."

Left alone, the stranger sank into a wooden rocking chair, and gazed thoughtfully from the window.

"Well, I have taken the decisive step," she said to herself. "It may be a mad freak, but I must not draw back now. Instead of going to Newport or to Europe, I have deliberately agreed to teach the grammar school in this out of the way country place. I am wholly unknown here, and it is hardly likely that any of my friends will find me out. For the first time in my life I shall make myself useful — perhaps. Or will my experiment end in failure? That is a question which time alone can solve."

She rose, and removing her traveling wraps, prepared for the table.

The new comer's two trunks were being removed from the stage when Mrs. Slocum passed, on her way to the store. Being naturally of a watchful and observant turn of mind, this worthy old lady made it her business to find out all that was going on in the village.

"Whose trunks are them, Abner? she asked, in a voice high pitched even to shrillness.

"They belong to the young lady that's stoppin' in the hotel. She came in on the stage."

"Who's she?"

"I don't know any more'n you do," said Abner, who knew Mrs. Slocum's failing, and was not anxious to gratify it.

"There's her name on a card," said the old lady triumphantly, pointing to one of the trunks. "I hain't got my glasses with me. Just read it off, will you?"

Probably Abner had a little curiosity of his own. At all events he complied with the old lady's request, and read aloud: "MISS MABEL FROST, Granville, N. H."

"You don't say!" ejaculated Mrs. Slocum, in a tone of interest. "Why, it's the new school teacher! What sort of a looking woman is she?"

"I didn't notice her, partic'lar. She looked quite like a lady."

"Are both them trunks hern?"

"Yes, ma'am."

A Fancy of Hers

"What on airth does she want with two trunks? said Mrs. Slocum, disapprovingly. Must be fond of dress. I hope she ain't goin' to larn our gals to put on finery."

"Mebbe she's got her books in one of 'em," suggested Abner.

"A whole trunkful of books! Land sakes! You must be crazy. Nobody but a minister would want so many books as that. An' it's a clear waste for the parson to buy so many as he does. If he didn't spend so much money that way, his wife could dress a little more decent. Why, the man's got at least two or three hundred books already, and yet he's always wantin' to buy more."

"I guess his wife wouldn't want the trunks for her clothes," suggested Abner.

"You are right," said Mrs. Slocum, nodding. "I declare I'm sick and tired of that old bombazine she's worn to church the last three years. A stranger might think we stinted the minister."

"Precisely, Mrs. Slocum," said a voice behind her. That's my opinion."

"Oh, Dr. Titus, is that you?" said the old lady, turning.

"What is left of me. I've been making calls all the afternoon, and I'm used up. So you think we are stinting the minister?"

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Slocum, indignantly. "I think we pay him handsome. Five hundred dollars a year and a donation party is more'n some of us get."

"Deliver me from the donation party!" said the doctor hastily. "I look upon that as one of the minister's trials."

"I s'pose you will have your joke, doctor," said Mrs. Slocum, not very well pleased. "I tell you a donation party is a great help where there's a family."

"Perhaps it is; but I am glad it isn't the fashion to help doctors in that way."

Dr. Titus was a free spoken man, and always had been. His practice was only moderately lucrative but it was well known that he possessed a competency, and could live comfortably if all his patients deserted him; so no one took offense when he expressed heretical notions. He had a hearty sympathy for Mr. Wilson, the Congregational minister, who offended some of his parishioners by an outward aspect of poverty in spite of his munificent salary of five hundred dollars a year.

"The doctor's got queer notions," muttered Mrs. Slocum. "If he talks that way, mebbe the minister will get discontented. But as I say to Deacon Slocum, there's more to be had, and younger men, too. I sometimes think the minister's outlived his usefulness here. A young man might kinder stir up the people more, and make 'em feel more convicted of sin. But I must go and tell the folks about the new school teacher. I'd like to see what sort she is."

Mrs. Slocum's curiosity was gratified. On her way back from the store she saw Miss Frost sitting at the open window of her chamber in the hotel.

"Looks as if she might be proud," muttered the old lady. "Fond of dress, too. I don't believe she'll do for Granville."

A Fancy of Hers

Although Mrs. Slocum was in a hurry to get home she could not resist the temptation to call at Squire Hadley's and let him know that the school teacher had arrived. Squire Benjamin Hadley was the chairman of the School Committee. Either of the two Granville ministers would have been better fitted for the office, but the Methodists were unwilling to elect the Congregational minister, and the Methodist minister was opposed by members of the other parish. So Squire Hadley was appointed as the compromise candidate, although he was a man who would probably have found it extremely difficult to pass the most lenient examination himself. He had left school at twelve years of age, and circumstances had prevented his repairing the defects of early instruction. There were times when he was troubled by a secret sense of incompetence — notably when he was called upon to examine teachers. He had managed to meet this emergency rather cleverly, as he thought, having persuaded Mr. Wilson to draw up for him a series of questions in the different branches, together with the correct answers. With this assistance he was able to acquit himself creditably.

"Can't stay a minute, Squire," said Mrs. Slocum, standing on the broad, flat door stone. "I thought I'd jest stop an' tell ye the school teacher has come."

"Where is she?" asked the Squire, in a tone of interest.

"She put up at the hotel. I was there jest now, and saw her two trunks. Rather high toned for a school teacher, I think. We don't need two trunks for our clothes, Mrs. Hadley."

"Young people are terrible extravagant nowadays," said Mrs. Hadley, a tall woman, with a thin, hatchet-like face, and a sharp nose. It wasn't so when I was young."

"That's a good while ago, Lucretia," said the Squire, jokingly.

"You're older than I am," said the lady tartly. "It don't become you to sneer at my age."

"I didn't mean anything, Lucretia," said her husband in an apologetic tone.

"Did you see the woman, Mrs. Slocum?" asked Mrs. Hadley, condescending to let the matter drop.

"I jest saw her looking out of the window," said Mrs. Slocum. "Looks like a vain, conceited sort."

"Very likely she is. Mr. Hadley engaged her without knowin' anythin' about her."

"You know, Lucretia, she was highly recommended by Mary Bridgman in the letter I received from her," the Squire mildly protested.

"Mary Bridgman, indeed!" his wife retorted with scorn. "What does she know of who's fit to teach school?"

"Well, we must give her a fair show. I'll call round to the hotel after tea, and see her."

"It's her place to call here, I should say," said the Squire's wife, influenced by a desire to see and judge the stranger for herself.

"I will tell her to call here tomorrow morning to be examined," said the Squire.

"What hour do you think you'll app'int?" asked Mrs. Slocum, with a vague idea of being present on that occasion.

The Squire fathomed her design, and answered diplomatically, "I shall have to find out when it'll be most convenient for Miss Frost."

A Fancy of Hers

"Her convenience, indeed!" ejaculated his wife. "I should say that the School Committee's convenience was more important than hers. Like as not she knows more about dress than she does about what you've engaged her to teach."

"Where is she going to board?" asked Mrs. Slocum, with unabated interest in the important topic of discussion.

"I can't tell yet."

"I s'pose she'd like to live in style at the hotel, so she can show off her dresses."

"It would take all her wages to pay for board there," said the Squire. "Mebbe I might take her," said Mrs. Slocum. "I could give her the back room over the shed."

"I will mention it to her, Mrs. Slocum," said the Squire diplomatically, and Mrs. Slocum hurried home.

"You don't really intend to recommend Mrs. Slocum's as a boarding place, Benjamin?" interrogated his wife. "I don't think much of the teacher you've hired, but she'd roast to death in that stived up back room. Besides, Mrs. Slocum is the worst cook in town. Her bread is abominable, and I don't wonder her folks are always ailing."

"Don't be uneasy about that, Lucretia," said the Squire. "If Miss Frost goes to Mrs. Slocum's to board, it'll have to be on somebody else's recommendation."

The new school teacher was sitting at the window in her room, supper being over, when the landlady came up to inform her that Squire Hadley had called to see her.

"He is the chairman of the School Committee, isn't he?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, miss."

"Then will you be kind enough to tell him that I will be down directly?"

Squire Hadley was sitting in a rocking chair in the stiff hotel parlor, when Miss Frost entered, and said composedly, "Mr. Hadley, I believe?"

She exhibited more self-possession than might have been expected of one in her position, in the presence of official importance. There was not the slightest trace of nervousness in her manner, though she was aware that the portly person before her was to examine into her qualifications for the post she sought.

"I apprehend," said Squire Hadley, in a tone of dignity which he always put on when he addressed teachers, "I apprehend that you are Miss Mabel Frost."

"You are quite right, sir. I apprehend," she added, with a slight smile, "that you are the chairman of the School Committee."

"You apprehend correctly, Miss Frost. It affords me great pleasure to welcome you to Granville."

"You are very kind," said Mabel Frost demurely.

"It is a responsible, office — ahem! — that of instructor of youth," said the Squire, with labored gravity.

"I hope I appreciate it."

A Fancy of Hers

"Have you ever — ahem! — taught before?"

"This will be my first school."

"This — ahem! — is against you, but I trust you may succeed."

"I trust so, sir,"

"You will have to pass an examination in the studies you are to teach — before ME," said the Squire.

"I hope you may find me competent," said Mabel modestly,

"I hope so, Miss Frost; my examination will be searching. I feel it my duty to the town to be very strict."

"Would you like to examine me now, Mr. Hadley?"

"No," said the Squire hastily, "no, no — I haven't my papers with me. I will trouble you to come to my house tomorrow morning, at nine o'clock, if convenient."

"Certainly, sir. May I ask where your house is?"

"My boy shall call for you in the morning."

"Thank you."

Mabel spoke as if this terminated the colloquy, but Squire Hadley had something more to say.

"I think we have said nothing about your wages, Miss Frost," he remarked.

"You can pay me whatever is usual," said Mabel, with apparent indifference.

"We have usually paid seven dollars a week."

"That will be quite satisfactory, sir."

Soon after Squire Hadley had left the hotel Mabel Frost went slowly up to her room.

"So I am to earn seven dollars a week," she said to herself. "This is wealth indeed!"

Chapter 2

It is time to explain that the new school teacher's name was not Mabel Frost, but Mabel Frost Fairfax, and that she had sought a situation at Granville not from necessity but from choice — indeed from something very much like a whim. Hers was a decidedly curious case. She had all the advantages of wealth. She had youth, beauty, and refinement. She had the entree to the magic inner circle of metropolitan society. And yet there was in her an ever present sense of something lacking. She had grown weary of the slavery of fashion. Young as she was, she had begun to know its hollowness, its utter insufficiency as the object of existence. She sought some truer interest in life. She had failed to secure happiness, she reasoned, because thus far she had lived only for herself. Why should she not live, in part at least, for others? Why not take her share of the world's work? She was an orphan, and had almost no family ties. The experiment that she contemplated might be an original and unconventional one, but she

A Fancy of Hers

determined to try it.

But what could she do?

It was natural, perhaps, that she should think of teaching. She had been fortunate enough to graduate at a school where the useful as well as the ornamental received its share of attention, and her natural gifts, as well as studious habits, had given her the first place among her schoolmates.

The suggestion that the opportunity she sought might be found in Granville came from the Mary Bridgman to whom Squire Hadley referred. Mary was a dressmaker, born and reared in Granville, who had come to New York to establish herself there in her line of business. Mabel Fairfax had for years been one of her customers, and — as sometimes happens with society girls and their dressmakers — had made her a confidante. And so it happened that Mary was the first person to whom Miss Fairfax told her resolution to do something useful.

"But tell me," she added, "what shall I do? You are practical. You know me well. What am I fit for?"

"I hardly know what to say, Miss Fairfax," said the dressmaker. "Your training would interfere with many things you are capable of doing. I can do but one thing."

"And that you do well."

"I think I do," said Mary, with no false modesty. "I have found my path in life. It would be too humble for you."

"Not too humble. I don't think I have any pride of that kind; but I never could tolerate the needle. I haven't the patience, I suppose."

"Would you like teaching?"

"I have thought of that. That is what I am, perhaps, best fitted for; but I don't know how to go about it."

"Would you be willing to go into the country?"

"I should prefer it. I wish to go somewhere where I am not known."

"Then it might do," said Mary, musingly.

"What might do?"

"Let me tell you. I was born away up in the northern part of New Hampshire, in a small country town, with no particular attractions except that it lies not far from the mountains. It has never had more than a very few summer visitors. Only yesterday I had a letter from Granville, and they mentioned that the committee were looking out for a teacher for the grammar school, which was to begin in two weeks."

"The very thing," said Mabel quickly. "Do you think I could obtain the place?"

"I don't think any one has been engaged. I will write if you wish me to, and see what can be done."

"I wish you would," said Mabel promptly.

"Do you think, Miss Fairfax, you could be content to pass the summer in such a place, working hard, and perhaps without appreciation?"

A Fancy of Hers

"I should, at all events, be at work; I should feel, for the first time in my life, that I was of use to somebody."

"There is no doubt of that. You would find a good deal to be done; too much, perhaps."

"Better too much than too little." "If that is your feeling I will write at once. Have you any directions to give me?"

"Say as little as possible about me. I wish to be judged on my own merits."

"Shall I give your name?"

"Only in part. Let me be Mabel Frost."

Thus was the way opened for Mabel's appearance in Granville. Mary Bridgman's recommendation proved effectual. "She was educated here; she knows what we want," said Squire Hadley; and he authorized the engagement.

When the matter was decided, a practical difficulty arose. Though Mabel had an abundant wardrobe, she had little that was suited for the school mistress of Granville.

"If you were to wear your last season's dresses — those you took to Newport," said Mary Bridgman, "you would frighten everybody at Granville. There would be no end of gossip."

"No doubt you are right," said Mabel. "I put myself in your hands. Make me half a dozen dresses such as you think I ought to have. There is only a week, but you can hire extra help."

The dresses were ready in time. They were plain for the heiress, but there was still reason to think that Miss Frost would be better dressed than any of her predecessors in office, partly because they were cut in the style of the day, and partly because Mabel had a graceful figure, which all styles became. Though Mary Bridgman, who knew Granville and its inhabitants, had some misgivings, it never occurred to Mabel that she might be considered overdressed, and the two trunks, which led Mrs. Slocum to pronounce her a "vain, conceited sort," really seemed to her very moderate.

At half past eight in the morning after Miss Frost's arrival in Granville Ben Hadley called at the hotel and inquired for the new school teacher.

"I guess you mean Miss Frost," said the landlord.

"I don't know what her name is," said Ben. "Dad wants her to come round and be examined."

Ben was a stout boy, with large capacities for mischief. He was bright enough, if he could only make up his mind to study, but appeared to consider time spent over his books as practically wasted. Physically and in temperament he resembled his father more than his mother, and this was fortunate. Mrs. Hadley was thin lipped and acid, with a large measure of selfishness and meanness. Her husband was pompous, and overestimated his own importance, but his wife's faults were foreign to his nature. He was liked by most of his neighbors; and Ben, in his turn, in spite of his mischievous tendencies, was a popular boy. In one respect he was unlike his father. He was thoroughly democratic, and never put on airs.

Ben surveyed Miss Frost, whom he saw for the first time, with approval, not unmingled with surprise. She was not the average type of teacher. Ben rather expected to meet an elderly female, tall and willowy in form, and wearing long ringlets. Such had been Miss Jerusha Colebrook, who had wielded the ferule the year before.

A Fancy of Hers

"Are you the school teacher?" asked Ben dubiously, as they left the hotel.

Mabel smiled. "I suppose," said she, "that depends on whether I pass the examination."

"I guess you'll pass," said Ben.

"What makes you think so?" asked Mabel, amused.

"You look as if you know a lot," answered Ben bluntly.

"I hope appearances won't prove deceptive," said Mabel. "Are you to be one of my scholars?"

"Yes," replied Ben

"You look bright and quick."

"Do I?" said Ben. "You can't always tell by looks," he added, parodying her own words.

"Don't you like to study?" Mabel inquired.

"Well, I don't hanker after it. The fact is," said Ben in a burst of confidence, "I'm a pretty hard case." "You say so because you are modest."

"No, I don't; the last teacher said so. Why, she couldn't do nothing with me."

"You begin to alarm me," said Mabel. "Are there many hard cases among the scholars?"

"I'm about the worst," said Ben candidly.

"I'm glad to hear that."

"Why?" asked Ben, puzzled.

"Because," said Mabel, "I don't expect to have any trouble with you."

"You don't?" said Ben, surprised.

"No, I like your face. You may be mischievous, but I am sure you are not bad."

Ben was rather pleased with the compliment. Boy as he was, he was not insensible to the grace and beauty of the new teacher, and he felt a thrill of pleasure at words which would scarcely have affected him if they had proceeded from Jerusha Colebrook.

"Do you feel interested in study?" Mabel continued.

"Not much," Ben admitted.

"You don't want to grow up ignorant, do you?"

"Of course I want to know something," said Ben.

A Fancy of Hers

"If you improve your time you may some time be chairman of the School Committee, like your father."

Ben chuckled. "That don't take much larnin'," he said.

"Doesn't it? I should think it would require a good scholar."

Ben laughed again. "Perhaps you think my father knows a good deal?" he said interrogatively.

Ben seemed on the brink of a dangerous confidence, and Mabel felt embarrassed.

"Certainly," said she.

"He don't," said Ben. "Don't you ever tell, and I'll tell you something. He got the minister to write out the questions he asks the teachers."

"I suppose the minister was more used to it," said Mabel, feeling obliged to proffer some explanation.

"That ain't it," said Ben. "Dad never went to school after he was twelve. I could cipher him out of his boots, and he ain't much on spelling, either. The other day he spelled straight s-t- r-a-t-e."

"You mustn't tell me all this," said Mabel gravely. "Your father wouldn't like it."

"You won't tell him?" said Ben apprehensively, for he knew that his father would resent these indiscreet revelations.

"No, certainly not. When does school commence, Ben?"

"Tomorrow morning. I say, Miss Frost, I hope you'll give a good long recess."

"How long have you generally had?"

"Well, Miss Colebrook only gave us five minutes. She was a regular old poke, and got along so slow that she cut us short on recess to make it up."

"How long do you think you ought to have?" asked Mabel.

"Half an hour'd be about right," said Ben.

"Don't you think an hour would be better?" asked Mabel, smiling.

"May be that would be too long," Ben admitted.

"So I think. On the other hand I consider five minutes too short. I will consult your father about that."

"Here's our house," said Ben suddenly. "Dad's inside waiting for you."

Squire Hadley received Mabel with an impressive air of official dignity. He felt his importance on such occasions. "I am glad to see you, Miss Frost," he said.

"Are there any other teachers to be examined?" asked Mabel, finding herself alone.

A Fancy of Hers

"The others have all been examined. We held a general examination a week ago. You need not feel nervous, Miss Frost. I shall give you plenty of time."

"You are very considerate, Squire Hadley," said Mabel.

"I will first examine you in arithmetic. Arithmetic," here the Squire cleared his throat, "is, as you are aware, the science of numbers. We regard it as of primary — yes, primary importance."

"It is certainly very important."

"I will — ahem — ask you a few questions, and then give you some sums to cipher out. What is a fraction, Miss Frost?"

Squire Hadley leaned back in his chair, and fixed his eyes prudently on that page of the arithmetic which contained the answer to the question he had asked. Mabel answered correctly.

"You have the correct idea said the Squire patronizingly, "though you ain't quite got the phraseology of the book."

"Definitions vary in different arithmetics," said Mabel.

"I suppose they do," said the Squire, to whom this was news. To him arithmetic was arithmetic, and it had never occurred to him that there was more than one way of expressing the same thing.

Slender as was his own stock of scholarship, Squire Hadley knew enough to perceive, before going very far into the text book, that the new school teacher was well up in rudimentary mathematics. When he came to geography, however, he made an awkward discovery. He had lost the list of questions which the minister had prepared for him. Search was unavailing, and the Squire was flustered.

"I have lost my list of questions in geography," he said, hesitatingly.

"You might think of a few questions to ask me," suggested Mabel.

"So I can," said the Squire, who felt that he must keep up appearances. "Where is China?"

"In Asia," answered Mabel, rather astonished at the simple character of the question.

"Quite right," said the Squire, in a tone which seemed to indicate surprise that his question had been correctly answered. "Where is the Lake of Gibraltar?"

"I suppose you mean the Straits of Gibraltar?"

"To be sure," said the Squire rather uneasily. "I was — ahem! thinking of another question."

Mabel answered correctly.

"Where is the River Amazon?"

"In South America."

Squire Hadley had an impression that the Amazon was not in South America, but he was too uncertain to question the correctness of Mabel's answer.

A Fancy of Hers

"Where is the city of New York situated?" he asked.

Mabel answered.

"And now," said the Squire, with the air of one who was asking a poser, "can you tell me where Lake Erie is located?"

Even this did not overtask the knowledge of the applicant.

"Which is farther north, New York or Boston?" next asked the erudite Squire.

"Boston," said Mabel.

"Very well," said the Squire approvingly. "I see you are well up in geography. I am quite satisfied that you are competent to teach our grammar school. I will write you a certificate accordingly."

This the Squire did; and Mabel felt that she was one step nearer the responsible office which she had elected to fill.

"School will begin tomorrow at nine," said the Squire. "I will call round and go to school with you, and introduce you to the scholars. I'll have to see about a boarding place for you."

"Thank you," said Mabel, "but I won't trouble you to do that. I will stay at the hotel for a week, till I am a little better acquainted. During that time I may hear of some place that I shall like."

Squire Hadley was surprised at this display of independence.

"I apprehend," he objected, "that you will find the price at the hotel too high for you. We only pay seven dollars a week, and you would have to pay all of that for board."

"It will be for only one week, Squire Hadley," said Mabel, "and I should prefer it."

"Just as you say," said the Squire, not altogether satisfied. "You will be the first teacher that ever boarded at the hotel. You wouldn't have to pay more'n three dollars at a private house."

"Of course that is a consideration," said Mabel guardedly.

As she left the Squire's house and emerged into the road she heard steps behind her. Turning, she saw Ben Hadley.

"I say, Miss Frost, was you examined in geography?" he asked.

"Yes, Ben."

"Did dad ask you questions off a paper?"

"No; he couldn't find the paper."

I thought so," said Ben grinning.

"Do you know what became of it?" asked Mabel, with sudden suspicion.

A Fancy of Hers

"Maybe I do and maybe I don't," answered Ben, noncommittally. "What sort of questions did dad ask you?"

"Wait till school opens," answered Mabel, smiling; "I will ask you some of them there."

"Did he really and truly examine you in geography out of his own head?" asked Ben.

"Yes, Ben; he didn't even open a book."

"Good for dad!" said Ben. "I didn't think he could do it."

"It is quite possible that your father knows more than you give him credit for," said Mabel.

"Guess he must have remembered some of the questions," thought Ben.

In the course of the day the list of geographical questions found its way back to Squire Hadley's desk.

"Strange I overlooked it," he said.

Perhaps Ben might have given him some information on the subject.

Chapter 3

The Granville schoolhouse was not far from the center of the village. It was wholly without architectural ornament. The people of Granville, it must be admitted, were severely practical, and were not willing to spend a dollar in the interest of beauty. Their money was the result of hard labor, and frugality was not to be wondered at. In a commercial community architecture receives more attention.

The schoolhouse was two stories in height, and contained two schools. The primary school, for children under eight, was kept in the lower room. The grammar school, for more advanced scholars, which Mabel Frost had undertaken to teach, occupied the upper portion of the building.

As Mabel approached the schoolhouse, escorted by Squire Hadley, she noticed, a few rods in advance, a tall, slender woman, with long ringlets falling over a pair of narrow shoulders.

"That lady is your colleague, Miss Frost," said the Squire.

"My colleague?" repeated Mabel, in a tone of inquiry.

"Yes; she keeps the primary school."

"Indeed! Then there is another school besides mine!"

"To be sure. Miss Clarissa Bassett teaches the youngest children."

"Is she — does she live here?"

"Yes; she has taught the same school for fifteen years. All your scholars began with her."

"Then she isn't a very young lady?"

A Fancy of Hers

"Clarissa," replied the Squire, with that familiarity which is common in small villages, "must be thirty five, though she only owns up to twenty five," added he, chuckling. "Might spile her matrimonial prospects if she confessed her real age."

"Fifteen years a teacher!" said Mabel enthusiastically. "Miss Bassett ought to feel proud of such a term of service. How much good she has done!"

"Well, I dunno," said Squire Hadley, whose practical mind conceived of no other motive for teaching than the emolument to be derived from it. "Clarissa wanted to teach the grammar school — the same that you're a goin' to teach; but we didn't think she was qualified to teach advanced scholars."

"And you preferred me before a teacher of fifteen years' experience!" said Mabel, with unaffected humility. "I am afraid, Squire Hadley, you will find that you have made a mistake."

"You are a better scholar than Clarissa, Miss Frost. She knows enough to teach the little ones, but — —"

"She has fifteen years' experience, and I have none," interrupted Mabel.

"You wouldn't be willing to change schools with her?" suggested the Squire, with mild satire.

"Yes, I would," said Mabel promptly.

"She don't get but six dollars a week — a dollar less than you."

"I don't care for that."

"The deestrick wouldn't be satisfied," said the Squire, in a decided tone. Mabel was an enigma to him. "They wouldn't be willing to have Clarissa teach the older pupils," he repeated.

By this time they had reached the schoolhouse. Some twenty pupils were outside, most of them Mabel's future scholars. Miss Bassett had paused in the entry, and awaited the arrival of Squire Hadley and her fellow teacher. She had a thin face, and that prim expression regarded as the typical characteristic of an old maid. It had been her lot to see the companions of her early days sail off, one after another, on the matrimonial sea, while she had been left neglected on the shore. She had even seen some of her pupils — mere chits, as she called them — marry, while their teacher, with all her experience of life, was unappropriated.

"Miss Frost," said Squire Hadley, with a wave of his hand toward Clarissa, "let me make you acquainted with Miss Bassett, who has kept our primary school for fifteen years with general acceptance and success."

"You ought to be regarded as a public benefactor, Miss Bassett," said Mabel cordially.

"I was very young when I commenced teaching," said Miss Bassett, rather uneasy at the allusion to her term of service.

"I am a beginner," said Mabel. I shall be glad to have an experienced teacher so near to me, to whom I can refer in cases of difficulty."

Clarissa, who had been prejudiced against Mabel, because, although so much younger, she had been placed over the other's head, was flattered by this acknowledgment of inferiority.

A Fancy of Hers

"I shall be very glad to give you any help in my power, Miss Frost," she said. "You will excuse me now; I must go in and look after my young pupils."

Miss Frost followed Squire Hadley up stairs to the scene of her future labors.

The room itself was an average country schoolroom. It had accommodations for about fifty scholars. The desks, on the boys' side, were covered with ink spots of all shapes and sizes, and further decorated with an extensive series of jackknife carvings. Mabel's neatness was rather offended by these things, which she took in in her first general survey. It was not much like any school that she had ever attended; but a private academy for girls differs essentially from a country schoolroom for both sexes.

"I see most of the scholars are here," said Squire Hadley.

Mabel looked around the room. Between forty and fifty scholars, varying in age from eight to sixteen, were seated at the desks. At her entrance, they had taken seats previously selected. For the most part she liked their appearance. Several looked mischievous, but even they were bright eyed and good natured. All eyes were fixed upon her. She felt that she was being critically weighed in the balance by these country boys and girls.

"I wonder what are their impressions of me," she thought. "I wonder if they suspect my inexperience!"

The children did not pronounce judgment at once. Their first impressions were favorable. They were surprised by the sight of so attractive a teacher. Mabel did not look like a school mistress — certainly not like Clarissa Bassett. Ben Hadley had told his friends something of her, and had even spoken in enthusiastic terms.

"She's as pretty as a picture," he had told them. "I bet she won't be an old maid."

The boys, in particular, had their curiosity excited to see her and judge for themselves. Now that they saw her they fully coincided with Ben's opinion. They were still regarding their new teacher when Squire Hadley broke the silence.

"Scholars," he said, clearing his throat, and assuming the attitude of an orator, "I have great pleasure in introducing to you your new teacher, Miss Frost. I have examined Miss Frost," he proceeded, in a tone of importance, "and I find that she is thoroughly competent to lead you in the flowery paths of learning." (This was a figure on which the Squire rather prided himself.) "She comes to us highly recommended, and I have no doubt you will all like her. As chairman of the committee," (here the Squire's breast expanded with official pride), "I have tried to obtain for you teachers of the highest talent, without regard to expense." (Had the Squire forgotten that Mabel was to receive only seven dollars a week?) "I trust — the town trusts — that you will appreciate what we are doin' for you. We want you to attend to your studies, and work hard to secure the blessin's of a good education, which is the birthright of every citizen. I will now leave you in charge of your teacher, and I hope you will study to please her."

The Squire sat down, and drawing an ample red handkerchief from his pocket wiped his brow with some complacency. He felt that his speech was a success. He had not stumbled, as he sometimes did. He felt that he had done credit to his position.

"Now I must go down to Miss Bassett's school," he added, rising to go. "I must say a few words to her scholars. Miss Frost, I wish you success in your — ahem! — very responsible task."

"Thank you, sir."

A Fancy of Hers

The ample form of the Squire vanished through the closing door, and Mabel was left face to face with her new responsibilities. For a moment she was nervous. She knew little of the routine of a country school, and felt like a civilian who without a particle of military training finds himself suddenly in command of a regiment.

"I wonder what I ought to do first," she thought, in some perplexity. She would have consulted Squire Hadley on this point had she not hesitated to reveal her utter lack of experience.

While glancing about the room in an undecided way she detected Ben Hadley slyly preparing to insert a pin into the anatomy of the boy next him. This gave her an idea.

"Ben Hadley, please come to the desk," she said quietly.

Ben started guiltily. He decided that the school teacher had seen him, and was about to call him to account. His face wore a half defiant look as he marched up to the desk, the observed of all observers. All the scholars were on the qui vive to learn the policy of the new administration. This summons seemed rather a bold move, for Ben was generally regarded as the head of the opposition. Not from malice, but from roguery, he gave successive teachers more trouble than any other scholar. Had the new school mistress found this out, and was she about to arraign the rebel as her first act of power? Such was Ben's suspicion, as, with his head erect, he marched up to the teacher's desk.

To his surprise Miss Frost met him with a friendly smile.

"Ben," said she pleasantly, "you are one of the oldest scholars, and the only one whom I know. Are you willing to help me organize the school?"

Ben was, astonished. That such a proposal should be made to him, the arch rebel, was most unexpected.

"Guess she don't know me," he thought. But yet he felt flattered; evidently he was a person of some consequence in the eyes of the new teacher. "I'll help you all I can, Miss Frost," he said heartily.

"Thank you, Ben, I felt sure you would," said Mabel, with quiet confidence. "I suppose the first thing will be to take the names of the scholars."

"Yes, Miss Frost; and then you sort 'em into classes."

"To be sure. How many classes are there generally?"

"Well, there are three classes in reading, and two in arithmetic, and two in geography."

"That is just the information I want. Now, Ben, I will ask you to go about with me, and tell me the names of the scholars."

But before entering upon this formality, Mabel, for the first time in her life, made a speech.

"Scholars," she said, "I am a stranger to you, but I hope you will come to regard me as your friend. I am here to help you acquire an education. I am sure you all wish to learn. There is a great satisfaction in knowledge, and it will help you, both boys and girls, to become useful men and women, and acquit yourselves creditably in any positions which you may be called upon to fill. I am not so well acquainted with the method of carrying on a country grammar school as most of my predecessors, having myself been educated in the city. I have, therefore, asked Ben Hadley to assist me in organizing the school, and preparing for work."

A Fancy of Hers

The scholars received the announcement with surprise. It presented Ben to them in a novel character. They waited with interest to see how he would acquit himself in his new office.

Ben accompanied Miss Frost from desk to desk, and greatly facilitated her task by his suggestions. At length the names of all the scholars were taken.

"Now I must arrange the classes," said Mabel, with increased confidence. "Have you any advice to give, Ben?"

"You'd better ask the first class to come up," suggested her young assistant. "Then you'll know exactly who belong to it."

"That will be the best plan," said Mabel; and she followed his advice.

Ben left her side and took his place in the class. He scanned the class, and then said: "Miss Frost, there's one boy here who belongs in the second class."

At this revelation a boy standing next but one to Ben showed signs of perturbation.

"Who is it?" asked the teacher.

"John Cotton."

"Do you belong to this class, John?"

"I ought to; I know enough," said he sullenly.

"Today you will oblige me by taking your place in the second class. In a few days I can decide whether you are able to go with this class."

John retired, discontented, but hopeful.

"I shall be glad when any of you are fit for promotion," proceeded Mabel. "At first it will be best for the classes to remain as they were during the last session."

So the organization continued. By noon the school was ready for work; lessons had been assigned in grammar, geography, and arithmetic, and the first class had read.

"I think we have done a good morning's work," said Miss Mabel Frost as the clock struck twelve. "I believe our afternoon session commences at one. I should like to have you all punctual."

In leaving the schoolroom to go to dinner, Mabel passed Ben Hadley. "You have been of great service to me, Ben," said she with a smile. "I really don't know how I should have got along without you."

Ben blushed with gratification. It was long since he had felt so proud and well pleased with himself.

"How do you like your new teacher, Ben?" asked his father at the dinner table.

"She's a trump, father," said Ben, warmly.

"Then you like her?" asked the Squire in some astonishment, for he understood perfectly well Ben's school reputation. Indeed, more than one teacher had come to him to complain of his son and heir's mischievous conduct,

A Fancy of Hers

and he had had misgivings that Miss Frost would have occasion to do the same thing.

"Yes, I do," said Ben, emphatically. She knows how to treat a feller."

"Then there was no disturbance?"

"Not a speck."

The Squire was greatly surprised.

"I helped organize the school," proceeded Ben proudly.

"YOU!" exclaimed the Squire, in small capitals.

"Certainly. Why shouldn't I?"

"I apprehend that you might need organizing yourself," said the Squire, smiling at what he considered a witty remark.

"Maybe I do, sometimes," said Ben, "but I like Miss Frost, and I mean to help her."

"I didn't see much in her," said Mrs. Hadley, opening her thin lips disapprovingly. "In my opinion she dresses too much for a teacher."

"I don't see why she shouldn't if she can afford it," said Ben, who had constituted himself Mabel's champion.

She can't afford it on her wages," retorted his mother,

"I guess that's her lookout," said Ben, hitting the nail on the head.

"Ben's taken an uncommon fancy to the school mistress," said Squire Hadley, after Ben had returned to school.

"It won't last," said Mrs. Hadley, shaking her head. "He'll soon be up to his old tricks again, take my word for it. I don't believe she'll suit, either. A new broom sweeps clean. Just wait a while."

"If it does last — I mean Ben's fancy — it will be surprising," said the Squire. "He's been a thorn in the side of most of the teachers."

"It won't last," said Mrs. Hadley decidedly, and there the conversation dropped.

Chapter 4

Ben Hadley's conversion had indeed been sudden, and, as in most similar cases, he found some difficulty in staying converted. While his pride was flattered by the confidence reposed in him by Miss Frost, there were times when his old mischievous propensities almost overcame him. On the third day, as John Cotton was passing Ben's desk, the latter suddenly thrust out his foot into the passageway between the desks, and John tumbled over it, breaking his slate.

"What's the matter?" asked Mabel, looking up from the book from which she was hearing another class.

A Fancy of Hers

"Ben Hadley tripped me up," said John, rubbing his shins, and looking ruefully at his broken slate.

"Did you, Ben?" asked Mabel.

Ben was already sorry and ashamed, as he would not have been under any other teacher. With all his faults he was a boy of truth, and he answered "Yes," rather sheepishly.

"You should be careful not to keep your feet in the aisle," said Miss Frost quietly. "I suppose you'll be willing to buy John a new slate."

"Yes," said Ben promptly, glad to have the matter end thus.

"I need a slate now," grumbled John.

"I'll lend you mine," said Ben at once, "and buy you a better one than I broke."

Mabel quite understood that the accident was "done on purpose." She did not want to humiliate Ben, but rather to keep him on his good behavior. So she was as friendly and confidential as ever, and Ben preserved his self respect. He kept his promise, and bought John the most expensive slate he could find in the village store.

Mabel very soon found herself mistress of the situation. Experience goes for a good deal, but it does not always bring with it the power of managing boys and girls. Mabel seemed to possess this instinctively. Before the week was out, all was running smoothly in her department, a little to the disappointment of Miss Clarissa Bassett, who felt that the school should have been hers.

Mabel still boarded at the hotel. She was quietly on the look out for a more desirable boarding place.

Among her scholars was a little girl of nine, whose cheap dress indicated poverty, but who possessed a natural refinement, which in her was more marked than in any other pupil. Mabel inquired into her circumstances, and learned that her father had been an officer in the army, who had died soon after his marriage. All that he left to his widow was a small cottage, and a pension of twenty dollars a month to which his services entitled her. On this small sum, and a little additional earned by sewing, Mrs. Kent supported her family, which, besides Rose, included a boy two years younger, who was in Miss Bassett's school. One afternoon Mabel walked home with Rose, and introduced herself to Mrs. Kent. She found her a delicate and really refined woman, such as she imagined Rose would grow to be in time. Everything in the house was inexpensive, but there were traces of good taste about the little establishment.

"I am glad to see you, Miss Frost," said Mrs. Kent, with quiet cordiality. "I have heard of you continually from Rose, who is your enthusiastic admirer."

"Rose and I are excellent friends," said Mabel, smiling kindly on the little girl. "She never gives me any trouble."

"I have never heard of any complaints from any of her teachers. One thing that I have heard surprises me, Miss Frost. You have wonderfully changed Ben Hadley, who had been the torment of previous teachers."

Mabel smiled. "I like Ben," she said. "From the first I saw that he had many good points. He was merely mischievous."

"Merely?" repeated Mrs. Kent smiling.

A Fancy of Hers

"Mischief may give a good deal of trouble, but the spirit that leads to it may be turned into another channel. This I think I have done with Ben. I find him very bright when he exerts his abilities.

"You understand managing boys, I can see clearly. Yet I hear that this is your first school."

"I have never entered a country school till I commenced teaching here."

"Your success is wonderful."

"Don't compliment me prematurely, Mrs. Kent. Failure may yet be in store for me."

"I think not."

"And I hope not."

"You are living at the hotel, I believe?"

"Only temporarily. I am looking for a pleasant boarding place."

"Mrs. Breck might be willing to take you. She has boarded several teachers before."

Mabel had met Mrs. Breck. She had the reputation of being a good housekeeper, but withal she was a virago, and her husband a long suffering victim of domestic tyranny. She was a thin little woman, with a shrewish face, who was seldom known to speak well of anybody.

"I don't think I should enjoy boarding with Mrs. Breck," said Mabel. "I'm sure I should like your house much better."

"You don't know how plainly we live," said Mrs. Kent. "I should like very much to have you here, but my table doesn't compare with Mrs. Breck's."

"Let me make you a business proposition, Mrs. Kent," said Mabel, straightforwardly. "I don't pretend to be indifferent to a good table, and I know the small amount usually paid for a teacher's board would not justify you in changing your style of living. I propose, if you will be kind enough to receive me, to pay you ten dollars a week as my share of the expenses."

"Ten dollars ejaculated Mrs. Kent in utter amazement. "Why, Mrs. Breck only charges three."

"But I would rather pay the difference and board with you."

"Excuse me, Miss Frost, but how can you? Your salary as teacher must be less than that."

"I see that I must tell you a secret, Mrs. Kent. I depend on your not making it public. I am quite able to live without touching a penny of my salary."

"I am glad of that," said Mrs. Kent, "but it seems so extortionate, my accepting ten dollars a week!"

"Then don't let any one know how much I pay you. It will imperil my secret if you do. Am I to consider myself accepted?"

"I shall be very glad of your company, Miss Frost, and I know Rose will be delighted."

A Fancy of Hers

"Will you come here, really and truly, Miss Frost?" asked Rose eagerly.

"Since your mother is willing, Rose."

Rose clapped her hands in delight, and showed clearly how acceptable the arrangement was to her.

Mabel's choice of a boarding place excited general surprise in Granville. "I wish the school teacher joy of her boarding place," said Mrs. Breck, tossing her head. "Why, Widder Kent has meat only once or twice a week; and once, when I called about supper time, I noticed what she had on the table. There wasn't nothing but cold bread and butter, a little apple sauce, and tea. It'll be something of a change from the hotel."

"She lives better now," said Mrs. Cotton. (This was several days after Mabel had become an inmate of Mrs. Kent's house.) "I called yesterday on purpose to see what she had for supper, and what do you think? She had cold meat, eggs, preserves, warm bread, and two kinds of pies" {sic }

"Then all I can say is, that the woman will be ruined before the summer's out," said Mrs. Breck, solemnly. "What the school teacher pays her won't begin to pay for keepin' such a table as that. It's more'n I provide, myself, and I don't think my table is beat by many in Granville. Mrs. Kent's a fool to pamper a common school teacher in any such way."

"You're right, Mrs. Breck; but, poor woman, I suppose she has to. That Miss Frost probably forces her to it. I declare it's very inconsiderate, for she must know the widow's circumstances."

"It's more than inconsiderate — it's sinful," said Mrs. Breck, solemnly.

"Mrs. Kent can't be very prudent to go to such expense," said the other party to this important discussion.

"Miss Frost flatters Rose, and gets around the mother in that way. She's a very artful young woman, in my opinion. The way she pets that Hadley boy, they say, is positively shameful."

"So I think. She wants to keep on the right side of the School Committee, so as to get the school another term."

"Of course. That's clear enough," chimed in Mrs. Breck. "I should like to know, for my part, a little more about the girl. Nobody seems to know who she is or where she came from."

"Squire Hadley engaged her on Mary Bridgman's recommendation, I hear."

Mrs. Breck sniffed. "Mary Bridgman may know how to cut dresses," she remarked, "though it's my opinion there's plenty better; but it's a new thing to engage teachers on dressmakers' recommendations. Besides, there's Clarissa Bassett, one of our own folks, wanted the school, and it's given to a stranger."

Miss Bassett boarded with Mrs. Breck, and this may have warped the good lady's judgment.

"I don't know as I'm in favor of Clarissa," said Mrs. Cotton, "but there's others, no doubt, who would be glad to take it."

"As for Miss Frost, I don't see how she is able to dress so well. That gown she wears to school must have cost two weeks' salary, and I've seen her with two other dresses."

"And all new?"

A Fancy of Hers

"Yes, they don't look as if they had had much wear."

"Perhaps she's seen better days, and has saved them dresses from the wreck."

"But you forget that they look new."

"Well, I give it up. It's clear she puts all her money on her back. A pretty example for our girls!"

Such were the comments of the mothers. Among the children, on the other hand, Mabel grew more and more popular. She succeeded in inspiring an interest in study such as had not been known before. She offered to teach a class in French and one in Latin, though it entailed extra labor.

"She knows an awful lot, father," said Ben Hadley.

"She was my selection," said the Squire complacently. "You predicted she would make a failure of it, Mrs. Hadley. The fact is we have never had a better teacher."

"The school term isn't closed," said Mrs. Hadley oracularly. "Appearances are deceitful."

It is rather singular that Mabel was favorably regarded by the fathers, while the mothers, to a man, were against her. There is something wrong in this sentence, but let it stand.

Chapter 5

In an old fashioned house a little east of the village lived the Rev. Theophilus Wilson, pastor of the Congregational Church in Granville. The house was considerably out of repair, and badly needed painting. It belonged to Squire Hadley, of whom the minister hired it, together with an acre of land adjoining, for seventy five dollars a year. An expenditure of one or two hundred dollars would have improved its appearance and made it a little more habitable, and the Squire, who was not a mean man, would have consented to this outlay but for the strenuous opposition of his wife.

"It's good enough for the minister," she said. "Ministers shouldn't be too particular about their earthly dwellings. I believe in ministers being unworldly, for my part."

"The house does look rather bad," said the Squire. "Mrs. Wilson says the roof leaks, too."

"A few drops won't hurt all the furniture she's got," said Mrs. Hadley contemptuously.

Mrs. Hadley was rather inconsistent. She regarded the minister's poor furniture and his wife's worn dresses with scornful superiority; yet, had either complained, she would have charged them with worldliness.

"One coat of paint won't cost much," said the Squire, watching his wife's countenance for signs of approval or the opposite.

"It will do no good," said she positively. "It won't make the house any warmer, and will only conduce to the vanity of the minister and his wife."

"I never thought either of them vain," expostulated her husband.

"You only look to the surface," said his wife, in a tone of calm superiority. "I go deeper. You think, because Mrs.

A Fancy of Hers

Wilson can't afford to dress well, that she has no vanity. I can read her better. If she had the means she'd cut a dash, you may depend upon it."

"There's one thing I can't understand, Lucretia," said her husband. "Why are things worldly in them that are not in us?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"You like to dress well, and I like my house to look neat. Why doesn't that show a worldly spirit in us?"

"Because you are not a minister nor I a minister's wife."

"What difference does that make?"

"You are very dull this morning, Mr. Hadley," said his wife scornfully.

"Perhaps I may be, but still I should like an explanation."

"Ministers should set their hearts on things above."

"Shouldn't we?"

"Not in the same way. They should be humble and not self seeking. They should set a good example to the parish. Does Mr. Wilson pay his rent regular?" she asked, suddenly changing the subject.

"Tolerable."

"Isn't he in arrears?"

"I can't tell exactly without looking at the books," said the Squire evasively.

"I understand; you don't want to tell me. I dare say he is owing you half a year's rent." This was quite true, but Squire Hadley neither confirmed nor denied it. He could quite understand that Mr. Wilson, with a wife and three children, found it hard to keep even with the world on his scanty stipend, and he did not feel like pressing him.

"I think it shameful for a minister not to pay his debts," said Mrs. Hadley, in an acid tone.

"Suppose he can't, my dear."

"Don't dear me. I am out of patience with you," said the lady sharply.

"Why?"

"You needn't ask. You encourage the minister in his shiftless course."

"Suppose I had three children, and all our clothing and household expenses had to be paid out of five hundred a year."

"If you was a minister you ought to do it."

"A minister can't make a dollar go any farther than other people."

A Fancy of Hers

"He can give up luxuries and vanities."

"Our minister indulges in very few of those," said the Squire, shrugging his shoulders.

"I don't know about that. I saw Sarah Wilson in the store the other day buying some granulated sugar, when brown is cheaper and would do equally as well."

"I believe we use granulated sugar, Lucretia," said Squire Hadley, his eyes twinkling.

"You're not a minister."

"And I shouldn't want to be if the sinners are to get all the good things of this life, and the saints have to take up with the poorest."

"Call yourself a sinner if you like, but don't call me one, Mr. Hadley," said his wife with some asperity.

"Ain't you a sinner?"

"We are all sinners, if it comes to that, but I consider myself as good as most people. How much rent did you say the minister was owing you?"

"I didn't say," said the Squire shrewdly.

"Keep it a secret if you please. All I say is that it's a duty you owe your family to collect what is honestly due you. I would do it if I were a man."

"I think you would, Lucretia. However, to please you, I'll attend to it within a week."

"I am glad you're getting sensible. You allow your good nature to run away with you."

"I am glad you allow me one good quality, Lucretia," said her husband with an attempt at humor.

Mrs. Hadley did not fail to inquire of her husband, a few days afterward, if the rent had been collected, and heard with satisfaction that it had been paid up to the current month.

"I told you he would pay it if you pressed him," she said triumphantly.

Her husband smiled. He thought it best not to relate the circumstances under which it had been paid. He had called at the minister's study the day after the conversation above detailed, and after a few remarks on indifferent topics said:

"By the way, Mr. Wilson, in regard to the rent — —"

"I regret being so much in arrears, Squire Hadley," said the minister uncomfortably; "but really it is a very perplexing problem to make my salary cover the necessary expenses of my family. I hope in a few weeks to be able to pay something."

"Don't trouble yourself, my dear sir," said the Squire genially. "You must find it difficult, I am sure. I find, by my books, that you are owing me six months' rent."

"I am afraid it is as much as that," said Mr. Wilson, sighing.

A Fancy of Hers

"And I am going to help you to pay it."

The minister looked at his guest in surprise. Squire Hadley took out his pocket book, and drew there—from four ten dollar bills.

"Mr. Wilson," said he, "I make you a present of this, and now, perhaps, you will be able to pay me the rent due — thirty seven dollars and a half, I think the exact amount is."

"My good friend," said the minister, almost overcome, "how can I thank you for this generosity?"

"By paying me my rent," said the Squire smiling. "I am very particular to have that paid promptly. If you will furnish me with writing materials I will write you a receipt. Now, Mr. Wilson," he added, as he rose to go, "I am going to ask you a favor."

"Only mention it, my friend."

"Let this little transaction be a secret between us."

It is hard to promise that; I should like to speak to others of your goodness. If I say nothing about it, it will seem ungrateful."

"If you do mention it, you will get me into hot water."

"How is that?" inquired the minister, in some perplexity.

"The fact is my wife is very frugal, and just a leetle stingy. She can't help it, you understand. Her father was pretty close fisted. She wouldn't approve of my giving away so much money, and might remonstrate."

"Yes, I understand," said the minister, who knew, as all the village did, that Mrs. Hadley was quite as close fisted as her lamented father.

"So we had better say nothing about it."

"I can tell my wife?"

"Yes, you may tell her, for it may relieve her from anxiety. Of course she won't mention it."

"You are a firm friend, Squire Hadley," said Mr. Wilson, grasping the hand of his parishioner cordially. "You are one of those who do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame."

"No, I ain't," said Squire Hadley bluntly; "I should be perfectly willing to have all my good deeds known if it was not for Mrs. Hadley. And that reminds me, I would willingly paint the house for you if she did not object."

"That is not of so much consequence; but the roof does leak badly, and troubles my wife a good deal."

That ought to be fixed," said the Squire. "How shall I manage it?"

He reflected a moment, and his face brightened with a new idea.

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Wilson, we must use a little strategy. You shall see a carpenter, and have the roof repaired at your own expense."

A Fancy of Hers

"Mr. Wilson's countenance fell. "I fear — — " he commenced.

"But I will repay you whatever it costs. How will that do?"

"How kind you are, Squire Hadley!"

"It is only what I ought to do, and would have done before if I had thought how to manage it. As Mrs. Hadley will wonder how you raised the money, I will say you had a gift from a friend, and that I told you to repair the house at your own expense."

A few days later Mrs. Hadley came home in some excitement.

"Mr. Hadley," said she, severely, "I find that the minister's house is being new shingled."

"Is it?" asked her husband indifferently.

"This is the way you waste your money, is it?"

"What have I to do with it? If Mr. Wilson chooses to shingle the house at his own expense, I am perfectly willing."

"Didn't you order it done?" inquired his wife, in amazement.

"Certainly not. The minister spoke of it when he paid the rent, and I told him he could do it at his own expense if he chose to."

"That's just what you ought to have said. But I don't understand where the minister finds the money, if he is so poor as you say he is."

"I understand that he has received a gift of money from a friend," said the diplomatic Squire.

"I didn't know he had any friend likely to give him money. Do you know who it is?"

"He didn't tell me, and I didn't inquire," answered the Squire, pluming himself on his strategy.

"Was it a large sum?"

"I don't think it was."

"I wish his friend had given him enough to pay for painting the house, too."

"Why? The house wouldn't be any warmer for painting," said the Squire slyly.

"It would look better."

"And so minister to his vanity."

"You seem to be very stupid this morning," said Mrs. Hadley, provoked.

"I am only repeating your own observations, my dear."

A Fancy of Hers

"If Mr. Wilson can afford to paint the house, I am in favor of his doing it; but I don't think you have any call to pay for it. The house will be better property if it is newly painted."

"Then don't you think I ought to do it, Lucretia?"

"No, I don't," said Mrs. Hadley sharply.

"I think myself," said the wily Squire, "considering the low rate at which the minister gets the house, he could afford to put on one coat of paint at his own expense. I have a great mind to hint it to him."

"You'd better do it, Mr. Hadley," said his wife approvingly.

"I will; but perhaps he won't look at it in the same light."

Within a week the painters were at work on the parsonage. The coat of paint improved its appearance very much. I suspect the bill was paid in the same way as the shingling; but this is a secret between the minister and Squire Hadley, whose strategy quite baffled his wife's penetration.

Chapter 6

"Please, Miss Frost, the sewing society is going to meet at our house this afternoon, and mother wants you to come round after school, and stay to supper."

The speaker was Annie Peabody, daughter of Deacon Uriah Peabody, a man who lived in a groove, and judged all men according to his own experience of life, which was very limited. He was an austere, old fashioned Calvinist, who believed that at least nineteen twentieths of his fellow men were elected to perdition. Mr. Wilson's theology was not stern enough to suit him. He characterized the minister's sermons as milk and water.

"What we want, parson, is strong meat," he more than once remarked to the minister. "You're always exhortin' men to do right. I don't take much stock in that kind of talk."

"What shall I preach then, Deacon Peabody?" asked the minister mildly.

"If I were a minister I'd stir up the sinners," said the deacon emphatically.

"How would you do it?"

"I'd describe the lake of fire, and the torments of the damned, an' let 'em understand what is prepared for 'em if they don't fear God and do his commandments."

The minister shuddered a little. He was a man of sensitive organization, upon whom these gloomy suggestions jarred unpleasantly. "I can't paint such lurid pictures, deacon," he answered; "nor do I feel that they would do any good. I don't want to paint our Maker as a cruel tyrant, but as a merciful and considerate Father."

"I'm afeared, parson, that you ain't sound in the doctrines. or know what the Scriptures say, `Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.'"

"We also read, `Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.'"

"But suppose they don't fear him," said the deacon triumphantly.

A Fancy of Hers

"I believe in the punishment of sin," returned Mr. Wilson. "We cannot err without incurring the penalty, but I believe God, in punishing the sinner, does not cease to love him. `Whom he loveth he chasteneth:' or, as we have a right to say, he loves those that he chastens."

"I don't know about that," said the deacon. "I think that's twistin' Scripture to our own ends. How many do you think are goin' to be saved, Parson Wilson?"

"I cannot hazard a conjecture, deacon. Heaven forbid that I should seek to limit the goodness and mercy of God."

"Do you think a quarter will be saved?" persisted the deacon. "Of course I don't mean the heathen. There ain't no hope for any of them, unless they've been converted by the missionaries. I mean of them that's brought up under Christian institutions." "A quarter? Most certainly. If I felt that three quarters of the race were destined to be lost, my soul would be weighed down with grief."

"Well, for my part," said the deacon, "I've no idea that as many as a quarter will be saved. About one in twenty is full as high as I calc'late on."

"Good Heavens! Deacon Peabody, you can't be in earnest."

"Yes, I be. Why, Parson Wilson, look at the people as they are," (the deacon pronounced it air) — "ain't they steeped in folly and vice? Ain't they carnally minded? Ain't they livin' for this world without no thought of the other? Air they fit for the mansions of the blest? Tell me that."

The deacon's voice rose in a sort of crescendo, and he put the last question triumphantly.

"We are none of us fit for Heaven," replied the minister, "but we can rely on God's mercy. Your doctrine is simply horrible. If but one in twenty is to be, saved, don't you feel anxious about your own soul?"

"Of course I'm a poor, miserable sinner," said the deacon complacently; "but I'm a professin' Christian, and I have faith in Christ. I think I come within the promises."

"Suppose you were sure of your own salvation, doesn't the thought of the millions who are to perish ever give you anguish?"

"Of course I'm sorry for the poor, deluded sinners," said the deacon, who managed nevertheless to maintain a cheerful exterior; "but the peace of God remains in my soul, and I don't allow the folly of others to disturb me."

The minister shook his head.

"If I believed as you do, deacon," he said, "I could not close my eyes at night. I could not rejoice in the bright sunshine and glorious beauty of outward nature. I should put on sackcloth and ashes, and pour out my soul to God in earnest prayer that he would turn his soul from wrath."

"I don't feel like interferin' with God's arrangements. I've no doubt they're for the best."

"You think it best that all heathen and nineteen twentieths of those that live in Christian countries should be damned?" asked the minister with some vehemence.

"If it's the Lord's will," said Deacon Peabody, in a sanctified tone, "I'm resigned to it."

A Fancy of Hers

Deacon Peabody should have lived at least fifty years earlier. He found few of his contemporaries to agree with him in his rigid notions. Most of the parish sympathized rather with the milder theology of Mr. Wilson. Had it been otherwise, had the deacon thought it possible to obtain a preacher in harmony with his own stern views, he would have headed a movement to get rid of the minister. As it was, he contented himself with protesting, in public and private, against what he regarded as pernicious and blinding error.

This has been a long digression, but the deacon was a prominent man in Granville, and interesting as the representative of a class numerous in Puritan days.

When Mabel entered the deacon's parlor, after school was over, she found some dozen ladies congregated, including the most prominent matrons of Granville. There were but two other young ladies besides Miss Frost. One of them was Miss Clarissa Bassett, the other a grown up daughter of the deacon — Miss Charity Peabody, who was noted for a lack of that virtue which had been given her as a designation. Mrs. Peabody, in strange contrast to her husband, had a heart overflowing with kindness. and was disposed to look on the best side of everybody.

"I am very glad to see you, Miss Frost," said Mrs. Peabody cordially, advancing to meet the school teacher. "I've meant to call, but I couldn't seem to get time. I suppose you know some of these ladies. I'll introduce you to such as you don't know."

So Mabel made the rounds and was generally introduced. Though the society was so unlike that in which she had been accustomed to mingle, she had a natural grace and tact which carried her through the ordeal easily and naturally. She finally found a seat next to Mrs. Priscilla Pulsifer, an old lady of an inquiring turn of mind, who was a new acquaintance, and promptly seized the opportunity to cross-examine Mabel, as she had long desired to do.

"You're the new school teacher, ain't you?"

"Yes, I am."

"How old be you?" asked the old lady, glaring at her through her glasses.

"Twenty two," answered Mabel, resenting what she considered an impertinent question by a counter inquiry. "How old are you, Mrs. Pulsifer?"

"Seventy one; and I ain't ashamed on't, either," answered the old lady, bridling.

Mabel was already sorry for her question. "Age is not a thing to be ashamed of," she said. "You don't look so old as that."

"So folks say," said Mrs. Pulsifer, quite appeased, and resuming her inquiries: "You're from the city, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Ever taught afore?"

"This is my first school."

"How do you like teachin'?"

"Better than I expected. I feel repaid for my labor by watching the progress of the scholars."

A Fancy of Hers

"How much wages do you get?" asked the old lady practically.

"Seven dollars a week."

"That's pooty good pay for a single gal," remarked Mrs. Pulsifer. "You don't have anybody dependent on you?"

"Do you mean a husband, Mrs. Pulsifer?" asked Mabel, her eyes sparkling with fun.

"I didn't know but you might have a mother, or brother an' sister, to support."

"No," said Mabel sadly, "I am alone in the world."

"Sho! I s'pose you calc'late on bein' married some time," said the old lady, with directness.

"Perhaps I may be," said Mabel, amused, "but I can't say I calculate on it."

"I guess you can get somebody to marry you," said the practical old lady. "You're good lookin', and are likely to please the men. Clarissa Bassett's tried hard, but somehow she don't make out."

Miss Bassett was sitting at the other end of the room, and, fortunately, was engaged in conversation with Mrs. Hayden, so that she did not hear this last remark.

"Thank you," said Mabel demurely. "You quite encourage me."

"I was twenty five myself before I was married," continued Mrs. Pulsifer. "Not but what I had offers before. Maybe you've had a chance?" and the old lady scrutinized Mabel's countenance.

"Maybe I have," she answered, wanting to laugh.

"That's a pooty gown you have on," said Mrs. Pulsifer, her attention diverted by Mabel's dress. "Was it made in the city?"

"Yes."

"Looks like nice cloth," continued Mrs. Pulsifer, taking a fold between her thumb and finger.

"I think it is," answered Mabel. "How much was it a yard?"

"I'm afraid I don't remember," Mabel replied.

The fact is, she had intrusted the purchase of her summer dresses to her dressmaker, who rendered her the bill in a lump. If there were any details she did not remember them.

"That's strange," said the old lady, staring. "I know the price of all the clothes I ever bought."

"You probably have a better memory than I," said Mabel, hoping by this compliment to turn the attack, but in vain.

"Haven't you any idee of the price?" asked the old lady.

"It may have been a dollar a yard."

A Fancy of Hers

"How many yards did you get?"

"I — am not sure."

"How much did you pay for that collar?"

"I am really sorry I can't tell you," said Mabel, who felt somewhat embarrassed.

"Perhaps you don't like to tell."

"I would tell you with pleasure, if I knew."

"Pears to me you must be a poor manager not to keep more account of your expenses," said Mrs. Pulsifer.

"I am afraid I am," said Mabel.

"How many dresses did you bring with you, Miss Frost?"

The old lady's catechizing was getting annoying, but Mabel understood that she meant no offense and answered patiently, "Six."

"Did they all cost as much as this?"

"I should think so."

"I don't see how you can afford to spend so much on dress," said Mrs. Pulsifer, "considering you have only seven dollars a week salary."

"I shall try to be more prudent hereafter, Mrs. Pulsifer."

"You'd better. The men will be afraid to marry you if they think you're extravagant. I told my son Jotham, 'Jotham,' says I, 'don't you marry a woman that wants to put all her money on her back.' Says I, 'An extravagant wife is a curse to a man that wants to be forehanded.'"

"Did your son follow your advice?"

"Yes; he married a likely girl that makes all her own dresses. Jotham told me only last week that he didn't buy her but one dress all last year."

"You must be pleased with your daughter-in-law, Mrs. Pulsifer."

"Yes; she's pretty good as wives go nowadays, but I don't think she's a good cook."

"That is a pity."

"Can you cook, Miss Frost?"

"I don't know much about cooking."

Sho! You'll want to know how when you're married."

A Fancy of Hers

"When I see any chance of marrying I mean to take lessons," said Mabel.

Just then, to Mabel's relief, supper was reported to be ready, and the members of the sewing society filed out with alacrity to the sitting room, where a long table was bountifully spread with hot biscuit, preserves, and several kinds of cake and pies. The mistress of the household, rather flushed by the heat of the kitchen, welcomed her guests, and requested them to take seats. Mabel took care not to sit in the neighborhood of Mrs. Pulsifer. The old lady's curiosity had come to be annoying, yet could not well be resented.

She congratulated herself on finding her next neighbor to be Mrs. Wilson, the minister's wife, a small woman, in a well worn silk, ten years old, which had been her only "company dress" during that entire period. There was a look of patient anxiety on the good woman's face which had become habitual. She was sorely perplexed at all times to make both ends meet. Even now she was uncomfortable in mind from this very cause. During the morning Mr. Bennett, the butcher, had called at the parsonage, and urgently requested payment for his "little bill." It amounted to only twenty five dollars, but the minister's stock of ready money was reduced to five dollars, and to pay this on account would have left him penniless. His candid statement of his pecuniary condition was not well received.

"I don't think people ought to buy meat if they can't pay for it," said the butcher bluntly.

"The parish is owing me more than the amount of your bill, Mr. Bennett," said the perplexed minister. "Just as soon as I can collect the money — —"

"I need it now," said the butcher coarsely. "I have bills to pay, and I can't pay them unless my customers pay me."

"I wish I could pay you at once." said Mr. Wilson wistfully. "Would you take an order on the parish treasurer?"

"No; he's so slack it wouldn't do, me any good. Can't you pay half today, Mr. Wilson?"

"I have but five dollars on hand, Mr. Bennett; I can't pay you the whole of that. I will divide it with you." "Two dollars and a half! It would be only ten per cent of my bill."

He closed, however, by agreeing to take it; but grumbled as he did so.

"These things try me a good deal," said the minister, with a sigh, after the departure of his creditor. "I sometimes think I will leave the profession, and try to find some business that will pay me better."

"It would be hazardous to change now, Theophilus," said his wife. "You have no business training, and would be as likely to do worse as better."

"Perhaps you are right, my dear. I suppose we must worry along. Do you think we could economize any more than we do?"

"I don't see how we can. I've lain awake many a night thinking whether it would be possible, but I don't see how. We couldn't pinch our table any more without risking health."

"I am afraid you are right."

"Why not call on Mr. Ferry, the treasurer, and see if he cannot collect some more money for you?"

"I will do so; but I fear it will be of no use."

A Fancy of Hers

The minister was right. Mr. Ferry handed him two dollars.

"It is all I have been able to collect," he said. "Money is tight, Mr. Wilson, and everybody puts off paying."

This was what made Mrs. Wilson's face a shade more careworn than usual on this particular day. To add to her trouble, Mrs. Bennett, the wife of her husband's creditor, who was also a member of the sewing circle, had treated her with great coolness, and almost turned her back upon her. The minister's wife was sensitive, and she felt the slight. When, however, she found Mabel at her side, she smiled pleasantly.

"I am glad to have a chance to thank you, Miss Frost, for the pains you have taken with my little Henry. He has never learned so fast with any teacher before. You must have special talent for teaching."

"I am glad if you think so, Mrs. Wilson. I am a novice, you know. I have succeeded better than I anticipated."

"You have succeeded in winning the children's love. Henry is enthusiastic about you."

"I don't think I should be willing to teach unless I could win the good will of my scholars," said Mabel, earnestly. "With that, it is very pleasant to teach."

"I can quite understand your feelings. Before I married Mr. Wilson, I served an apprenticeship as a teacher. I believe I failed as a disciplinarian," she added, smiling faintly. "The committee thought I wasn't strict enough."

I am not surprised," said Mabel. "You look too kind to be strict."

"I believe I was too indulgent; but I think I would rather err in that than in the opposite direction."

"I fancy," said Mabel, "that you must find your position as a minister's wife almost as difficult as keeping school."

"It certainly has its hard side," said Mrs. Wilson cautiously; for she did not venture to speak freely before so many of her husband's parishioners.

Just then Mrs. Bennett, the butcher's wife, who sat on the opposite side of the table, interrupted their conversation. She was a large, coarse looking woman, with a red face and a loud voice.

"Miss Frost," she said, in a tone of voice audible to all the guests, "I have a bone to pick with you."

Mabel arched her brows, and met the glance of Mrs. Bennett with quiet haughtiness.

"Indeed!" said she, coldly.

"Yes, indeed!" replied Mrs. Bennett, provoked by the cool indifference of the school teacher.

"Please explain," said Mabel quietly.

"You promoted two girls in my Flora's class, and let her stay where, she was."

"I would have promoted her if she had been competent."

"Why ain't she competent?" Mrs. Bennett went on. "Of course there can be only one answer to that question, Mrs. Bennett. She is not sufficiently advanced in her studies."

A Fancy of Hers

She knows as much as Julia Fletcher or Mary Ferris, any day," retorted Mrs. Bennett.

Suppose we defer our discussion till we leave the table," said Mabel," finding it difficult to conceal her disdain for her assailant's unmannerly exhibition.

Mrs. Bennett did not reply, but she remarked audibly to the woman who sat next to her; "The school teacher's rather uppish. 'Pears to me she's carryin' things with a high hand."

"You see a school teacher has her trials, Mrs. Wilson," said Mabel, turning to her neighbor with a rather faint smile.

"I feel for you," said the minister's wife sympathetically.

"Thank you, but don't suppose I mind it at all. I shall exercise my own discretion, subject only to the committee. I am wholly independent."

"I wish I could be," sighed Mrs. Wilson; "but no one can be less so than a minister's wife."

"Is your husband to be here this evening?" asked Mabel.

"He has a bad headache and was unable to come. I shall go home early, as I may be needed."

In fact, about half an hour later, Mrs. Wilson made an apology and took her leave.

"Mrs. Wilson is looking pale and careworn," said Mrs. Kent. "Don't you think so, Mrs. Hadley?"

"She hasn't much energy about her," replied the Squire's wife. "If she had, the minister would get along better."

"I think she's no sort of manager," said Mrs. Bennett. "She runs her husband into debt by her shiftless ways."

"I think you're mistaken," said Mrs. Pratt quietly. "I know her well, and I consider her an admirable manager. She makes a little go as far as she can, and as far as any one else could."

"I only know my husband can't get his bill paid," Mrs. Bennett went on. "He presented it this morning — twenty five dollars — and only got two dollars and a half. Seems to me there must be poor management somewhere."

It would be unfair to the femininity of Granville to say that Mrs. Bennett was a fair specimen of it. Except Mrs. Hadley, there was not one who did not look disgusted at her coarseness and bad breeding.

"You must excuse me, Mrs. Bennett," said Mrs. Kent, "but I don't think that follows, by any means, from what you say."

"Then how do you explain it?" asked the butcher's wife.

"The trouble is that Mr. Wilson's salary is too small."

"He ought to live on five hundred dollars a year, I think," said Mrs. Hadley; "especially when he gets his rent so cheap."

"Is five hundred dollars actually the amount of his salary?" asked Mabel, amazed.

A Fancy of Hers

"Yes."

"How do you expect him to support his family on such an amount as that?" she exclaimed almost indignantly.

"It is very small, Miss Frost," said Mrs. Pratt, "but I am afraid we couldn't pay much more. None of us are rich. Still I think something ought to be done to help Mr. Wilson. What do you say, ladies, to a donation visit?"

"It's just the thing," said Clarissa Bassett enthusiastically.

It may be better than nothing," said Mrs. Kent; "but I am afraid donation visits don't amount to as much as we think they do."

The proposal, however, was generally approved, and before the meeting closed it was decided to give the minister a donation visit a fortnight later.

"Shall you be present, Miss Frost?" asked Mrs. Pratt.

"Oh, yes, I won't fail to attend."

"Your colleague, Miss Bassett, always carries a large pincushion on such occasions. The minister must have at least five of her manufacture."

"In that case," said Mabel, smiling, "I think I will choose a different gift."

Chapter 7

A few evenings later, at Mrs. Pratt's house, Mabel met an individual of whom she had frequently heard since her arrival in Granville. This was Mr. Randolph Chester, a bachelor from New York, who generally passed part of the summer in the village. He was reputed to be rich, and, though his wealth was exaggerated, he actually had enough to support a single man in comfort and even luxury. Though a bachelor, he allowed it to be understood that he was in the matrimonial market, and thus received no little attention from maneuvering mothers, single ladies of uncertain age, and blooming maidens who were willing to overlook disparity in age for the sake of the wealth and position which it was understood Mr. Chester would be able to give them.

Why did Mr. Randolph Chester (he liked to be called by his full name) summer in Granville when he might have gone to Bar Harbor or Newport? Because at these places of resort he would have been nobody, while in a small New Hampshire village he was a great man. In Granville he felt, though in this he was perhaps mistaken, that he could marry any of the village belles to whom he chose to hold out his finger, and this consciousness was flattering.

On his arrival at the hotel, where he had a special room reserved for him summer after summer, he was told of the new school teacher, a young, beautiful, and accomplished girl from New York.

"If I like her looks," thought he to himself, "I may marry her. Of course she's poor, of she wouldn't be teaching here for the paltry wages of a country school mistress, and she'll be glad enough to accept me."

When he was introduced to her Mabel saw before her a middle aged man, carefully dressed, passably good looking, and evidently very well pleased with himself. On his part, he was somewhat dazzled by the school teacher's attractions.

A Fancy of Hers

"Why, the girl has actual style," he said to himself. "Egad, she would appear to advantage in a New York drawing room. I wonder if she's heard about me."

He felt doubtful on this point, for Mabel received him with well bred indifference. He missed the little flutter of gratified vanity which the attentions of such an eligible parti usually produced in the young ladies of Granville.

"I believe you are from New York, my own city," he said complacently.

"I have passed some time there."

"You must — ahem! — find a considerable difference between the city and this village."

Undoubtedly, Mr. Chester. I find it a pleasant relief to be here."

"To be sure. So do I. I enjoy leaving the gay saloons of New York for the green glades of the country."

"I can't say," returned Mabel mischievously, "that I know much about the saloons of New York."

"Of course I mean the saloons of fashion — the shining circles of gay society," said Mr. Chester hastily, half suspecting that she was laughing at him. "Do you know the Livingstons, Miss Frost?"

"There is a baker of that name on Sixth Avenue, I believe," said Mabel innocently. "Do You mean his family?"

"No, certainly not," said Mr. Randolph Chester, quite shocked at the idea. "I haven't the honor of knowing any baker on Sixth Avenue."

Neither had Mabel, but she had fully made up her mind to tease Mr. Randolph Chester, whose self conceit she instinctively divined.

"Then you don't live on Sixth Avenue," she continued. "I wonder where I got that impression!"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Chester, scandalized. "I have apartments on Madison Avenue." "I know where it is," said Mabel.

"She can't move in any sort of society, and yet where on earth did she get that air of distinction?" Randolph Chester reflected. "Do you like school teaching?" he asked in a patronizing tone.

"I find it pleasant."

"I wonder you do not procure a position in the city, where you could obtain higher wages."

"Do you think I could?" asked Mabel.

"My friend, Mr. Livingston, is one of the School Commissioners," said Mr. Chester. "I can mention your name to him, and you might stand a chance to obtain the next vacancy."

"Thank you, Mr. Chester, you are exceedingly kind, but I don't think that I wish to become a candidate at present,"

"But you are really throwing away your talents in a small country village like this."

A Fancy of Hers

"I don't think so," said Mabel. "I find many of my scholars pretty intelligent, and it is a real pleasure to guide them."

"Mr. Randolph Chester, you mustn't try to lure away Miss Frost. We can't spare her," said Mrs. Pratt.

"You see, Mr. Chester, that I am appreciated here," said Mabel. "In the city I might not be."

"I think," said the bachelor gallantly, "that you would be appreciated anywhere."

"Thank you, Mr. Chester," returned Mabel, receiving the compliment without seeming at all overpowered by it; "but you see you speak from a very short acquaintance."

Mr. Randolph Chester was piqued. He felt that his attentions were not estimated at their real value. The school mistress could not understand what an eligible parti he was.

"Do you propose to remain here after the summer is over, Miss Frost?" he asked.

"My plans are quite undecided," said Mabel.

"I suppose she isn't sure whether she can secure the school for the fall term," thought the bachelor.

There was a piano in the room, recently purchased for Carrie Pratt, Mrs. Pratt's daughter.

"I wonder whether she plays," thought Mr. Chester. "Will you give us some music, Miss Frost?" he asked.

"If you desire it. What is your taste?"

"Do you know any operatic airs?"

"A few; and Mabel began with an air from La Sonnambula." She played with a dash and execution which Mr. Chester recognized, though he only pretended to like opera because it was fashionable.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed, clapping his hands in affected ecstasy. "Really you are an excellent player. I suppose you have attended the opera?"

"Occasionally," said Mabel.

"And you like music? But I need not ask."

"Oh, yes, I like music. It is one of my greatest pleasures."

"You would make a very successful music teacher, I should judge. I should think you would prefer it to teaching a country school."

"I like music too well to teach it. I am afraid that I should find it drudgery to initiate beginners."

"There may be something in that."

"Do you sing, Miss Frost?" asked Mrs. Pratt.

"Sometimes."

A Fancy of Hers

"Will you sing something, to oblige me?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Pratt. What would you like?"

"I like ballad music. I am afraid my ear is not sufficiently trained to like operatic airs, such as Mr. Randolph Chester admires."

After a brief prelude Mabel sang an old ballad. Her voice was very flexible, and was not wanting in strength. It was very easy to see that it had been carefully cultivated.

Mr. Chester was more and more surprised and charmed. "That girl is quite out of place here," he said to himself. "Any commonplace girl would do for the Granville school mistress. She deserves a more brilliant position." He surveyed Mabel critically, but could find no fault with her appearance. She was beautiful, accomplished, and had a distinguished air. Even if she were related to the baker's family on Sixth Avenue, as he thought quite probable, she was fitted to adorn the "saloons of fashion," as he called them.

"I rather think I will marry her," he thought. "I don't believe I can do better. She is poor, to be sure, but I have enough for both, and can raise her to my own position in society."

Fortunately Mabel did not know what was passing through the mind of the antiquated beau, as, she regarded him, who amused her by his complacent consciousness of his superiority. When it was ten o'clock, she rose to go.

"It won't do to be dissipated, Mrs. Pratt," she said. "I must be going home."

"Permit me to escort you, Miss Frost," said Mr. Chester, rising with alacrity.

She hesitated, but could think of no reason for declining, and they walked together to Mrs. Kent's. The distance was short — too short, Mr. Chester thought, but there was no way of lengthening it.

"I hope to have the pleasure of meeting you again soon, Miss Frost," said the bachelor at parting.

Mabel responded in suitable terms, and Mr. Randolph Chester went back to the hotel in quite a flutter of excitement. The staid bachelor was as nearly in love as such a well regulated person could be.

The next evening Mabel spent in writing a letter to Mary Bridgman, part of which it may be well to quote.

"You," she said, "are the only person in my confidence, the only one who knows of my present whereabouts. You will, I feel sure, be glad to know that my experiment is proving to be a success. I believe I have inspired in my pupils a real and earnest interest in study. It gives me genuine pleasure to see their minds unfolding and expanding, day by day, and to feel that I am doing an important part in guiding them in this intellectual growth. I can assure you that I get more satisfaction and exhilaration from the life I am leading now than I found in my last summer's round of amusements at Newport.

"When will it end? How long will this fit of enthusiasm last? If you ask these questions, I cannot tell you. Let time decide.

"You have heard, I suppose, of Mr. Randolph Chester, the elderly bachelor who favors Granville with his presence every summer. I made his acquaintance yesterday, while calling upon Mrs. Pratt. His air of condescension on being introduced to the school teacher was very amusing. He was evidently disappointed by my indifference, and seemed piqued by it. When I was asked to play I determined to produce an impression upon him, and I did my best. Mr. Chester seemed surprised to find a country school mistress so accomplished. He

A Fancy of Hers

recommended me to become a music teacher and offered to assist me to obtain a position in the city, professing to regard me worthy of a larger field than Granville affords. He offered his escort home, and I accepted.

"Today Mr. Chester did me the great honor of visiting my school. He professed a great interest in the subject of education, but I learn, on inquiry, that he has never before visited the school. I suggested to him that Miss Bassett would be glad to receive a call; but he shrugged his shoulders and did not welcome the proposal. I felt a malicious satisfaction in introducing him publicly to my scholars as one who took a strong interest in them, and announced that he would address them. My visitor started, blushed, and looked embarrassed, but retreat was impossible. He made a halting speech, chiefly consisting of congratulations to the scholars upon having so accomplished and capable a teacher. On the whole he rather turned the tables upon me.

"It is quite in the line of possibility that I may have a chance to become Mrs. Randolph Chester before the season is over. If I accept him I shall insist on your being one of my bridesmaids."

Chapter 8

Granville was not on the great highway of travel. It was off the track of the ordinary tourist. Yet now and then a pilgrim in search of a quiet nook, where there was nothing to suggest the great Babel of fashion, came to anchor in its modest hostelry, and dreamed away tranquil hours under the shadow of its leafy elms. Occasionally, in her walks to and from school, Mabel noticed a face which seemed less at home in village lanes than in city streets, but none that she had seen before.

"I shall finish my summer experiment without recognition," she said to herself in a tone of gratulation. But she was mistaken.

Within a few rods from the school house, one afternoon, she met a young man armed with a fishing rod. He was of medium height, broad shouldered, wore a brown beard, and had a pleasant, manly face lighted up by clear and expressive eyes. To Mabel's casual glance his features looked strangely familiar, but she could not recall the circumstances under which they had met.

The stranger looked doubtfully in her face for an instant, then his countenance brightened up.

"If I am not mistaken," he said eagerly, "it is Miss Mabel Fairfax."

Mabel, at the sound of her real name, looked around uneasily, but luckily none of her scholars was within hearing,

"Mabel Frost," she said hurriedly.

"I beg pardon," replied the young man, puzzled; "but can I be mistaken?"

"No, you are right; but please forget the name you have called me by. Here I am Mabel Frost, and I teach the village school."

There was a look of wonder, mingled with sympathy, in the young man's face.

"I understand," he said gently. "You have been unfortunate; you have lost your fortune, and you have buried yourself in this out of the way village."

Mabel preferred that he should accept the explanation that he himself had suggested.

A Fancy of Hers

"Do not pity me," she said. "I have no cause to complain. I am happy here."

"How well you bear your reverses!" he replied admiringly.

Mabel felt like a humbug; but it was a necessary consequence of the false position in which she had placed herself.

"I do not deserve your praise," she said honestly. "I am sure I ought to know you," she added. "Your face is familiar, but I cannot recall where we have met."

"That is not surprising," he returned. "I am a painter, and you met me at the artists' reception. My name is Allan Thorpe."

"Allan Thorpe!" repeated Mabel with a glow of pleasure. "Yes, I remember, you painted that beautiful 'Sunset in Bethlehem.'"

"Do you remember it?" asked the artist in gratified surprise.

"It was one of the pictures I liked best. I remember you too, Mr. Thorpe."

"I am very glad to hear it, Miss —"

"Frost," prompted Mabel, holding up her finger.

"I will try to remember."

"Are you spending the summer in Granville, Mr. Thorpe?"

"Yes," replied Allan unhesitatingly. He had just made up his mind.

"Are you engaged upon any new work?"

"Not yet. I have been painting busily during the spring, and am idling for a time. You see how profitably I have been employed today," and he pointed to his fishing rod. "I hope to get at something by and by. May I ask where you are boarding?"

"At Mrs. Kent's."

"I congratulate you, for I know her. I am at the hotel and am sometimes solitary. May I venture to call upon you?"

"If you call upon your friend, Mrs. Kent, you will probably see me," said Mabel, smiling.

"Then I shall certainly call upon Mrs. Kent," said the young man, lifting his hat respectfully.

"Please bear in mind my change of name, Mr. Thorpe."

"You shall be obeyed."

"How much she is improved by adversity," thought the young man, as he sauntered towards the hotel. "I can hardly realize the change. The society belle has become a staid — no, not staid, but hard working country school mistress, and takes the change gayly and cheerfully. I thought her beautiful when I saw her in New York. Now

A Fancy of Hers

she is charming."

What were Mabel's reflections?

"He is certainly very handsome and very manly," she said to herself. "He has genius, too. I remember that painting of his. He thinks me poor, and I felt like a humbug when he was admiring me for my resignation to circumstances. If it were as he thinks, I think I might find a friend in him."

"I just met an old acquaintance, Mrs. Kent," she said on entering the house.

"Is he staying here?" asked the widow.

"Yes, for a time. He tells me he knows you."

"Who can it be?" asked Mrs. Kent with interest.

"A young artist — Allan Thorpe," replied Mabel.

"He is a fine young man," said Mrs. Kent warmly.

"His appearance is in his favor."

"You know, I suppose, that he is Mrs. Wilson's nephew?"

"No," said Mabel with surprise.

"His mother, who died last year, was Mrs. Wilson's sister. He was a good son to her. A year before her death a wealthy friend offered to defray his expenses for twelve months in Italy, but he refused for her sake, though it has always been his dearest wish to go."

"No wonder you praise him. He deserves it," said Mabel warmly.

Chapter 9

Three months before, a new minister had been appointed to take charge of the Methodist Society in Granville. The Rev. Adoniram Fry, in spite of an unprepossessing name, was a man of liberal mind and genial temper, who could neither originate nor keep up a quarrel. In consequence the relations between the two parishes became much more friendly. Mr. Fry took the initiative in calling upon Mr. Wilson.

"Brother Wilson," he said cordially, "we are both laborers in the Lord's vineyard. Is there any reason why we should stand apart?"

"None whatever, Brother Fry, said the other clergyman, his face lighting up with pleasure. "Let us be friends."

"Agreed. If we set the example we can draw our people together. How is it that they have been estranged in years past?"

"I can hardly tell you. Probably there has been fault on both sides."

The two pastors had a pleasant chat, and walked together down the village street, attracting considerable attention.

A Fancy of Hers

Some were pleased, others seemed undecided how to regard the new alliance, while Deacon Uriah Peabody openly disapproved.

"I don't believe in countenancin' error," said he, shaking his head. "We should be stern and uncompromisin' in upholding the right."

"Why shouldn't our minister be friendly with the Methodist parson, deacon?" questioned Squire Hadley, who was less bigoted than the deacon. "I've met Mr. Fry, and I think him a whole souled man."

"He may have a whole soul," retorted the deacon, with grim humor; "but it's a question whether he'll save it if he holds to his Methodist doctrines."

"Don't the Methodists and Congregationalists believe very much alike?" asked the Squire. "How can you ask such a question, Squire?" asked the deacon, scandalized.

"But how do they differ? I wish you'd tell me that."

"The Methodists have bishops."

"That isn't a matter of doctrine."

"Yes, it is; they say it's accordin' to Scripture to have bishops."

"Is that all the difference?"

"It's enough."

"Enough to prevent their being saved?"

"It's an error, and all error is dangerous."

"Then you disapprove of friendship between our people and the Methodists?"

"Yes," said the deacon emphatically.

"Wouldn't you sell a cow to a Methodist if you could get a good profit?"

"That's different," said Deacon Peabody, who was fond of a trade. "Tradin' is one thing and spiritual intercourse is another."

"I can't agree with you, deacon. I like what I've seen of Mr. Fry, and I hope he'll draw us together in friendly feeling without regard to our attendance at different churches."

When Fast Day came Mr. Wilson proposed that there should be a union service in the Methodist church, Mr. Fry to preach the sermon.

"In the two societies," he urged, there will not be enough people desirous of attending church to make more than a fair sized congregation. Nothing sectarian need be preached. There are doctrines enough in which we jointly believe to afford the preacher all the scope he needs."

A Fancy of Hers

Mr. Fry cordially accepted the suggestion, and the union service was held; but Deacon Uriah Peabody was conspicuous by his absence.

"I don't like to lose my gospel privileges," he said; "but I can't consort with Methodists or enter a Methodist church. It's agin' my principles."

Old Mrs. Slocum sympathized with the deacon; but curiosity got the better of principle, and she attended the service, listening with keen eared and vigilant attention for something with which she could disagree. In this she was disappointed; there was nothing to startle or shock the most exacting Congregationalist.

"What did you think of the sermon?" asked Squire Hadley, as he fell in with the old lady on the way home.

"It sounded well enough," she replied, shaking her head but appearances are deceitful."

"Would you have been satisfied if you had heard the same sermon from Mr. Wilson?"

"I would have known it was all right then," said Mrs. Slocum. "You can't never tell about these Methodists."

But Deacon Peabody and Mrs. Slocum were exceptions. Most of the people were satisfied, and the union service led to a more social and harmonious feeling. For the first time in three years Mrs. John Keith, Congregationalist, took tea at the house of Mrs. Henry Keith, Methodist. The two families, though the husbands were brothers, had been kept apart by sectarian differences, each being prominent in his church. The two ministers rejoiced in the more cordial feeling which had grown out of their own pleasant personal relations, and they frequently called upon each other.

One result of the restored harmony between the two religious societies was a union picnic of the Sunday schools connected with each. It became a general affair, and it was understood that not only the children, but the older people, would participate in it. The place selected was a grove on the summit of a little hill sloping down to Thurber's Pond, a sheet of water sometimes designated as a lake, though scarcely a mile in circumference.

From the first, Mr. Randolph Chester intended to invite Mabel to accompany him. The attention would look pointed, he admitted to himself; but he was quite prepared for that. So far as his heart was capable of being touched Mabel had touched it. He was not the man to entertain a grand passion, and never had been; but his admiration of the new school teacher was such that a refusal would have entailed upon him serious disappointment. Of rivalry — that is, of serious rivalry — Mr. Chester had no apprehension. One afternoon he encountered Allan Thorpe walking with Mabel, and he was not quite pleased, for he had mentally monopolized her. But he would have laughed at the idea of Mabel's preferring Mr. Thorpe. He was handsome, and younger by twenty five years; but he was, to use Mr. Chester's own term, "a beggarly artist."

If she should marry Thorpe she would have to live on romance and moonshine. Artists rave about the true and the beautiful, but they do not pay cash," Randolph said to himself, rather disdainfully.

Two days before the picnic Mr. Chester called at Mrs. Kent's and inquired, in a tone of some importance, for Miss Frost. Mabel made her appearance in the parlor without unnecessary delay.

"I hope I see you well, Miss Frost," said Mr. Chester, with a smile that was meant to be captivating.

"Thank you, Mr. Chester; I have seldom been better."

"I hope you are enjoying your summer in Granville."

A Fancy of Hers

"Indeed I am," answered Mabel heartily.

"Where were you last summer, Miss Frost?"

Mabel hesitated. She did not like to say that she spent the greater part of the season at Newport, since this would probably lead to further questions on the subject, and possibly expose her secret.

"I was in the city part of the time," she answered evasively.

"It must have been very uncomfortable," said Mr. Chester, adding complacently: "I have never passed the summer in New York. I should find it quite intolerable."

"A rich man can consult his own wishes," said Mabel. "If you were a poor school teacher it would be different."

Randolph Chester always enjoyed allusions to his wealth, It gratified him that Mabel seemed aware of his easy circumstances.

"Quite true, Miss Frost," he answered. "I often feel how fortunate I am in my worldly circumstances. You ought to be rich," he continued. "You have accomplishments which would grace a high social position."

"I am afraid you flatter me, Mr. Chester."

"Upon my word I do not," said the bachelor warmly. He was dangerously near declaring himself, but stopped upon the brink. He did not wish to be precipitate.

"Are you going to the picnic on Saturday, Miss Frost?"

"I believe so. Everybody will go, and I do not want to be out of fashion."

"Permit me to offer my escort," said Randolph Chester gallantly.

"You are too late, Mr. Chester," said Mabel, with a smile. "Some one has already invited me."

"Indeed!" said the bachelor stiffly, and looking offended. "May I inquire who that somebody is?"

"Certainly; it is no secret. I have promised to accompany Mr. Allan Thorpe."

"Oh! The artist!"

The words were few, but the tone spoke volumes. It expressed disdain, and implied that to be an artist was something exceedingly disreputable.

"Yes," said Mabel, not unwilling to tease her elderly admirer, "as you say, he is an artist. He paints very clever pictures. Have you ever seen any of them, Mr. Chester?"

"Can't say I have," answered Mr. Chester shortly.

"He promises to be eminent some day," continued Mabel.

"Does he? A good many promises are unfulfilled I don't think much of artists."

A Fancy of Hers

"How can you say that, Mr. Chester? I thought every man of culture admired the pictures of Titian and Raffaele."
"Of course," said Mr. Chester, suspecting that he had gone too far. "They are the old masters, you know. It's the modern daubers of canvas that I was speaking of."

"But are not some of the artists of the present day to become eminent?" asked Mabel.

"When they have become so I will admire them. I don't think Mr. Thorpe stands much chance of it if he wastes his time in Granville."

"Then you don't know that he is painting a picture here?"

"I know nothing of the young man's movements," said Mr. Randolph Chester loftily. "Then I shall not have the pleasure of escorting you, Miss Frost?"

"I fear not. I hope, however, to meet you there."

"I am not sure that I shall go," returned Mr. Chester discontentedly.

"I believe Miss Bassett is unprovided with an escort, Mr. Chester," suggested Mabel, still bent on teasing him.

"I don't care to escort a Maypole," said the bachelor quickly. "Miss Bassett is not to my taste."

"I am afraid you are very fastidious, Mr. Chester."

"I admit that I am so. I prefer to leave Miss Clarissa to some one who appreciates her more than I do."

Soon after Randolph Chester took his leave. He went from the presence of Mabel in a very uncomfortable frame of mind. His feelings toward the artist were far from cordial.

"Why couldn't he go somewhere else?" soliloquized Mr. Chester. "I am sure nobody wanted him here." But the idea would intrude itself that perhaps Miss Frost wanted him. He would not entertain it. "She is like all the girls," he reflected. "She is trying to bring me to the point. So she is playing off the beggarly artist against me. I wish I could retaliate. If I could find some other to take I might make her jealous."

This struck Mr. Chester as a happy thought. But whom could he select? There was Clarissa Bassett; but no girl in her sober senses would think of being jealous of her. Still undecided, Mr. Chester reached the hotel, when, to his satisfaction, he found the Raymonds, of Brooklyn, had arrived to spend a couple of weeks. there for recreation.

The Raymonds included Mrs. Raymond and her two daughters. The elder was a girl of twenty four, not pretty, but with plenty of pretension. The younger, ten years younger, was still a school girl. The family was supposed to occupy a very exalted social position. All that was known on the subject in Granville came from themselves, and surely they ought to know. They were constantly making references to their aristocratic acquaintances and connections, and evidently felt that in visiting Granville they were conferring a marked favor on that obscure place.

Randolph Chester had not a particle of admiration for Clementina Raymond, but he hailed her arrival with great satisfaction. She was quite a different person from Clarissa Bassett. He would invite her to the picnic and pay her marked attention. Thus, he did not doubt, he could arouse the jealousy of Mabel, and punish her for accepting the escort of Allan Thorpe.

"I am delighted to see you, Miss Raymond," he said.

A Fancy of Hers

Clementina received him very graciously. She understood that he was an eligible parti, and she had not found suitors plentiful. The Raymonds encouraged the idea that they were very rich, but it was a fiction. They were, in truth, considerably straitened, and this probably accounted for their selecting, as a summer home, the modest hotel at Granville, where for seven dollars a week they could live better than they allowed themselves to do at home, and keep up their social status by being "out of town." Clementina not only desired to marry, but to marry a man of means, and it was understood that Mr. Randolph Chester was rich. He must be nearly fifty, to be sure, while she was only twenty four; but this would not prove an insuperable objection to the match.

"How long have you been here, Mr. Chester?" asked Miss Raymond languidly.

"Two weeks or more, Miss Raymond. I began to fear you would overlook Granville this summer."

"We had half a mind to go to Newport," said Clementina. "So many of our set there, you know. But mamma likes quiet, and preferred to come here. The rest of the year, I am so gay — I am sure you know what a tyrant society is — that with balls, parties, and receptions, I was really quite run down, and our physician strongly advised some quiet place like this. I was afraid of being bored, but since you are here, Mr. Chester, I feel quite encouraged."

Mr. Chester cared nothing for Miss Raymond, but he did like flattery, and he was pleased with this compliment.

"I am quite at your service, Miss Raymond," he responded cheerfully. "You won't find in Granville the gayety of Brooklyn or New York, but we have our amusements. For instance, day after tomorrow there is to be a union picnic at Thurber's Pond."

"How charming! I shall certainly go; that is, if ladies can go unattended."

"That will be quite en regle, but if you will accept my escort, Miss Raymond — —"

"I shall be delighted, Mr. Chester, I am sure. May mamma go too?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Chester, but he did not look delighted.

"My dear," said the thoughtful mother, "I hardly feel equal to remaining there all the afternoon. You go with Mr. Chester, since he is so kind as to invite you. I may appear there in the course of the afternoon."

"Since you prefer it, I will, mamma," said Clementina softly. No daughter was more filial and considerate than she — in public.

Mabel was with Allan Thorpe, watching the amusements of the children, when she recognized Mr. Randolph Chester approaching. By his side walked Miss Clementina, a stately figure, overtopping her escort.

"Who is that lady with Mr. Chester?" she asked, in some curiosity.

"Miss Raymond, of Brooklyn," replied Thorpe. "The Raymonds are at the hotel."

"She seems to be a young lady of some pretension," remarked Mabel, rather amused by Clementina's airs.

"Quite so," said Mr. Thorpe. "She is a person of very considerable importance — in her own eyes."

"You may be in danger, Mr. Thorpe; I believe you are fellow boarders."

A Fancy of Hers

"The danger is slight; Miss Clementina regards me as a poor artist, quite unworthy of her attentions. Occasionally she condescends to notice me; but in her eyes, I am an inferior being."

"I fancy I shall be classed in the same category when she learns that I am the village school mistress."

"I suspect you are right. Will it materially detract from your enjoyment, Miss Frost, if this proves to be so?"

Mabel laughed merrily.

"I have considerable fortitude," she replied, "and I hope to bear up under it. See, they are coming this way." .

Randolph Chester had not failed to notice Mabel, and it caused him a pang of jealousy to see her under the escort of another. He meant that she should see him, and, with Miss Raymond by his side, advanced to where they were standing.

"Oh, this is Miss Frost, the new teacher," he said. "Let me introduce you."

"I believe you are a teacher, Miss Frost," said Clementina, when this formality had been accomplished.

"I teach the grammar school in this village, Miss Raymond," replied Mabel demurely.

"A very useful vocation," remarked Miss Raymond patronizingly. "I really feel ashamed of myself when I compare myself with you. I am afraid we fashionable girls are very useless."

"Not necessarily so. Your means of usefulness are greater," replied Mabel.

"To be sure. We contribute to charities, and all that, but it isn't like taking part in the work."

It would probably be extremely difficult to discover any charities that were materially assisted by Miss Raymond, but it suited her to convey the impression that she gave liberally.

"I agree with you, Miss Raymond," said Allan Thorpe, speaking for the first time. "It is not enough to give money."

"I plead guilty, Mr. Thorpe," said Clementina, ready to charge herself with any sin that was fashionable; "but really, if you only knew how hard society girls find it to give their time — there are so many claims upon us — parties, receptions, the opera. Oh, I know what you will say. We should sacrifice our inclinations, and steal time to do good. I dare say you think so, Miss Frost."

"It seems to me that it would become a pleasure as well as a duty to do something for others."

"Excuse me, Miss Frost, but you cannot tell till you are placed as I am.

"Possibly not."

All this was very amusing to Mabel. She strongly suspected that Miss Raymond's claims to high social position would not bear examination. It was a novel sensation to be treated as one who had no knowledge of the great world from which she had voluntarily exiled herself, and she had no desire to disturb Miss Raymond in her delusion. Mr. Thorpe also enjoyed the scene. Though he believed her to be in reduced circumstances, he had seen her playing a brilliant part in New York society, and he was equally confident that Miss Raymond was a social humbug.

A Fancy of Hers

"Shall we promenade, Mr. Chester?" asked Clementina.

"If you desire it," said her escort, with a show of devotion intended to create uneasiness in Mabel.

"May I come to your school some day, Miss Frost?" asked Miss Raymond. "I should like to visit a country school."

"I shall be glad to see you," said Mabel politely.

"Thank you so much. I will come if I can induce Mr. Randolph Chester to accompany me."

Mr. Chester has already favored me with a visit," said Mabel, smiling.

Clementina glanced suspiciously at her escort. Was it possible that he felt an interest in the school teacher?

"You will let him come again? she asked, smiling sweetly.

"Most certainly."

"What do you think of her? asked Mr. Chester with peculiar interest, after the two couples had separated.

"I rather like her appearance," drawled Clementina slightly, "but you know there is always something plebeian about people of her class, however they may dress."

"I can't quite agree with you, Miss Raymond," said the bachelor, who did not like to hear the future Mrs. Randolph Chester spoken of in such contemptuous terms. "Miss Mabel Frost is from the city of New York, and is a highly accomplished girl. I suspect she has seen better days, though at present reduced to school teaching."

Clementina was quick witted, and saw how the land lay. Having resolved to capture the gentleman at her side, she determined to check his evident admiration for Mabel.

"Mr. Chester," she said, "I don't wonder you are deceived. The girl has a superficial polish, which a gentleman is not likely to see through. I have been a great deal in society, and can at once distinguish the counterfeit from the genuine. This school teacher has probably received more than ordinary advantages; but blood will tell. Rely upon it, she is a plebeian."

Mr. Chester did not think any the better of his companion for this speech. He was too deeply interested in Mabel, and as strong as ever in the determination to make her Mrs. Chester. "I fancy that this Mr. Thorpe is very devoted to her," continued Clementina.

"I didn't notice it," replied Mr. Chester shortly.

"But the devotion was very marked, and I am quite disposed to think it was mutual. Did you ever think, Mr. Chester, how interesting it is to study love making between people of their class? And really, when you come to think of it," she rattled on, much to the disgust of her escort, "it would be a capital match. He is a poor artist, you know, and they would have to live in a very modest style, but she is used to that. I do not suppose she would object to doing her own work, and of course she would be obliged to do so at first. I hope they will invite us to the wedding."

"I don't believe there will be any wedding," said Mr. Chester uncomfortably. "He is only paying her a little ordinary attention. She wouldn't accept him, I am confident."

A Fancy of Hers

"Why wouldn't she? She can't expect a husband in your position, for instance, Mr. Chester. She probably has low relations, and it wouldn't be suitable or pleasant."

Mr. Chester thought of the baker on Sixth Avenue; but the time had passed when even that could deter him. In spite of all that Miss Raymond could suggest his mind was made up.

Chapter 10

Thurber's pond was of moderate size, probably covering thirty or forty acres. Near the edge it was shallow, but toward the middle the water was of considerable depth. There were two boats moored at the little pier built out at the foot of the picnic grounds, one a sail boat and the other a row boat.

Toward the middle of the afternoon it was proposed to press these boats into the service of some of the older visitors. The children were scattered through the neighboring fields, playing games that interested them. The sail boat proved the more attractive, and was already full before Mabel, Clementina, and their escorts became aware of the plan proposed.

Clementina was very much annoyed.

"It's so provoking," she complained. "I dote on the water. Isn't there room for me?"

But the sail boat was, if anything, too full already, and nobody offered to get out. Allan Thorpe and Mabel were standing by, both a little disappointed. The artist's eye fell upon the row boat.

"Do you row, Mr. Chester?" he asked,

"A little," was the answer.

"Then suppose, since we are unable to go in the sail boat, we give the ladies a row. Would you like it, Miss Frost?"

"Thank you," said Mabel. "I should enjoy it very much."

"And you, Miss Raymond?"

"It will be better than moping here."

So the four seated themselves in the boat, and the gentlemen took up the oars. Mr. Chester proved to be very awkward, and Allan Thorpe offered to row alone. The bachelor accepted with alacrity, and seated himself next to Mabel, leaving Miss Raymond at the other end of the boat. This did not suit Clementina, who straightway lost her interest in the excursion. She felt herself ill used at this act of desertion on the part of her escort. Mabel read her discontent, and wanted to suggest to Mr. Chester that she could dispense with his company, but this was difficult to do. His face beamed with satisfaction, and Miss Raymond saw it, and was provoked. She even deigned to be jealous of the school mistress.

"You are not very considerate, Mr. Chester," she said sharply, "in leaving Mr. Thorpe to do all the work."

"He likes it," replied Randolph lazily. "Don't you, Mr. Thorpe?"

"I always enjoy rowing," said Allan, who understood very well that Mr. Chester could not manage both oars. "I

A Fancy of Hers

would rather look on," continued Chester contentedly. "How are you getting on with your school, Miss Frost?"

"Very well, thank you."

"I wish I was young enough to enroll myself among your scholars," said the bachelor gallantly.

"You would find me very strict, Mr. Chester."

"I should take care not to give you any trouble."

Miss Raymond did not enjoy this badinage, and mentally pronounced Mabel an artful girl, who had designs upon Mr. Chester's affections. She could not resist the temptation to revenge herself on her escort.

"I suppose you can hardly remember your school days, Mr. Chester?" said she.

"Really, Miss Raymond, I am not quite an antediluvian," exclaimed Randolph Chester, somewhat provoked.

"Excuse me, Mr. Chester. I didn't suppose you were sensitive about your age. I really hope you'll excuse me."

"I do not know that I have any reason to be sensitive as yet," said Mr. Chester stiffly. "It will be time enough for that when I reach fifty."

He was that already; but this was a secret between himself and the old Bible, which neither of his hearers was likely to have a chance of seeing.

Clementina's purpose was achieved. She had made Mr. Chester uncomfortable, and interrupted his tete-a-tete with Mabel. She followed up her advantage by becoming very sociable with Allan Thorpe.

"Are you at work upon another charming picture, Mr. Thorpe?" she asked graciously.

"You are very kind, Miss Raymond; I am painting another picture. I hope it may deserve the adjective you use."

"I like your paintings so much. Have you ever been to Italy?" "No," said Mr. Thorpe regretfully. "I wish I could go."

"You really ought to do so. I adore art myself. I should like nothing better than to see the grand Italian galleries, with some one to point out the best pictures — some one like yourself, who understands the subject."

"Have you ever been abroad, Miss Raymond?" asked Mabel.

"No," said Clementina. "Mamma has such a horror of the sea; she is so liable to be seasick. It is such a pity, when one has the means, that there should be a drawback."

This was another of Clementina's little fictions. In plain truth, want of means was the only objection to a European trip on the part of the Raymonds.

"When you are married, Miss Raymond, you will not be dependent on your mother as a companion; then you can gratify your taste."

"So I can," said Clementina with naive simplicity, as if the idea had just occurred to her. "If I can't go in any other way, I shall be willing to pay the expenses of the tour myself. So you're really at work upon a new picture, Mr.

A Fancy of Hers

Thorpe?"

"I have not made much progress yet, but I have made a beginning."

"I should like to see it. I couldn't, of course, hope to offer any suggestion, but I can tell whether I like it."

"Thank you. When it is more advanced I shall be glad to ask your opinion of it."

"Do you ever give lessons in painting, Mr. Thorpe?"

"I did at one time, but I found that it interfered with my work."

"Then I cannot hope to secure you as a teacher. It would be so nice to go out in the fields, and take lessons from so competent an instructor."

"You flatter me, Miss Raymond."

"You only say so because of your modesty, Mr. Thorpe. I have a high opinion of your talent, and I shall take every opportunity of mentioning you in my set."

"Thank you."

Allan Thorpe was clear sighted enough to estimate Miss Raymond's sudden interest in him at its right value. He also had a suspicion that her set was not one likely to care much for arts or artists. But it amused him to watch Clementina's jealousy, and to penetrate her motives in turning her attention to him.

"If I can help her to secure a husband," he thought, "she is quite welcome to make use of me."

It did not seem, however, that she had accomplished much. Mr. Chester was chatting contentedly with Mabel, glad that Clementina was otherwise occupied than in teasing him.

"Then you are not sure that you will remain in Granville after the summer, Miss Frost?" he inquired.

"My plans are quite undecided," answered Mabel.

"I suppose you will continue to teach?"

"Even that is not certain. Perhaps I might obtain a situation as companion to an elderly lady. Do you know of any likely to want my services, Mr. Chester?"

Mr. Chester would have liked to suggest that the position of companion to a gentleman was open to her acceptance; but the occasion was too public.

"I may hear of such a position, Miss Frost," he said; "and if you will leave me your address, in case you do not remain in Granville, I will, certainly let you know."

"Thank you, Mr. Chester."

At this point there was a startling interruption. Miss Raymond had been sitting for five minutes silent and incensed. Her little flirtation with Mr. Thorpe had not ruffled Mr. Chester's serenity nor interrupted his devotion to the school mistress. She rose from her seat, lost her balance, and fell against the side of the boat, upsetting it,

A Fancy of Hers

and precipitating the four who occupied it into the water.

Fortunately they were not far from shore. Still, the water was six feet deep, and of course there was danger. Mr. Chester could swim a little, and, without a thought of his companions, he struck out for the shore. Allan Thorpe could swim also. Fortunately he was cool in the moment of peril. His first thought was for Mabel.

"Cling to me, Mabel," he said, forgetting ceremony at this moment. "I will help you."

Clementina, wild with terror, had grasped him by the coat, and this hampered his movements; but with a great effort, he succeeded in conveying both girls to more shallow water. Had the distance been greater, it is doubtful if he would have succeeded.

"You are out of danger," he said. "The water is not deep here. We can walk ashore."

Randolph Chester, still a little pale, was dripping on the bank when Allan and the two girls joined him.

"I am so glad you are safe, ladies," he said a little sheepishly, for he was conscious that he had not played a heroic part.

"Small thanks to you, Mr. Chester!" retorted Clementina sharply. "We might have drowned, so far as you were concerned."

"I cannot swim much," said Mr. Chester uneasily. "I never regretted it so much as now."

"You could swim well enough to save yourself. Mr. Thorpe, you are my preserver!" exclaimed Clementina gushingly.

"Do not magnify my service, Miss Raymond. We were very near shoal water."

"But you saved my life," persisted Clementina. "I shall never forget it."

Mabel said nothing, but she impulsively extended, her hand. Allan Thorpe was better pleased than with Miss Raymond's demonstrative expressions of gratitude.

"Now, young ladies," said the artist, "though I am no physician, you must allow me to prescribe an immediate return home. Otherwise you'll run a great risk of catching cold. Mr. Chester, if you will take charge of Miss Raymond, I will accompany Miss Frost. For your own sake, you will find it best to go at once."

Miss Raymond was rather sulky, but, though irritated with her escort, policy prevailed, and she forced herself into a good humor. She had made up her mind to marry Mr. Chester, and he required delicate management. So she accepted the lame apology he offered for leaving her to her fate, and by the time they reached the hotel they were outwardly on good terms.

On the day after the picnic, Allan Thorpe wrote the following letter to his friend and fellow artist John Fleming, who was spending the summer at Bethlehem

DEAR JACK — You wonder why I prefer to spend the summer at Granville, and refuse to join you at Bethlehem. Your surprise is natural. I admit that between Granville and Bethlehem there is no comparison. The latter is certainly far more attractive to an artist who has only his art in view. But, Jack, there is another reason. You were always my father confessor — at least you have been since the happy day when our friendship began — and I am willing to confess to you that I have lost my heart. There is a charming school mistress in Granville, to whom I

A Fancy of Hers

have transferred it wholly and unconditionally.

Not an ordinary school mistress, mind you; Miss Frost is not only charming in person, but thoroughly accomplished. I know you will be incredulous; but when I explain the mystery which environs her you will lose your skepticism. Let me tell you, then, in confidence, that last winter, at an artists' reception in New York, I was introduced to a girl whose name I knew as that of an acknowledged queen of society. A little conversation convinced me that she was more than that; that she had a genuine and discriminating love of art; that she despised the frivolous nothings which are dignified as conversations by the butterflies of fashion, and that she regarded life as something more than a succession of parties and receptions. I was strongly attracted; but I learned that she was the possessor of a large fortune, and this precluded the thought of any intimate friendship with her on the part of a penniless artist.

Well, Jack, on the second day after my arrival in Granville, I met this same girl again. Imagine my astonishment at discovering that she was teaching the grammar school in the village, on the splendid stipend of seven dollars a week. Of course she has lost her fortune — how, I have been unable to learn. She is reticent on this subject; but the loss does not seem to affect her spirits. She is devoting herself earnestly to the work she has chosen, and is succeeding admirably. I declare to you that I yield Miss Frost higher respect now that she is a plain country school teacher than when she was a social leader. That she should give up, uncomplainingly, the gay delights her fortune has procured for her and devote herself to a useful but contracted and perhaps monotonous routine of work, indicates; a nobility of nature of which previously I had no assurance.

You will ask to what all this tends. It means, Jack, that I have made up my mind to win her if possible. Between the struggling artist and the wealthy heiress there was a distance too great to be spanned even by love, but now that her estate is on a level with my own I need not hesitate. The same spirit that has enabled her to meet and conquer adversity will sustain her in the self denial and self sacrifice to which she may be called as the wife of a poor man. I have resolved to put my fortune to the test before the close of her school term calls her from Granville. I have some reason to believe that she esteems me, at least. If I am not too precipitate, I hope that esteem may pave the way for a deeper and warmer sentiment. I hope the time may come when I can ask you to congratulate me, as I am sure you will do most heartily, my dear Jack. Ever yours, ALLAN THORPE.

P.S. — Lest you should waste your valuable time in exploring back numbers of the newspapers for some mention of Miss Frost in their society gossip, I may as well tell you that this is not her real name. In giving up her fashionable career she has, for a time at least, left behind the name which was associated with it, and taken a new one with the new vocation she has adopted. This might lead to embarrassment; but that will be obviated if she will only consent to accept my name, which has never had any fashionable associations.

P.S. — There is another girl spending the summer here, a Miss Clementina Raymond, of Brooklyn, who assumes airs and graces, enough for two. Perhaps it is well that you are not here for you might be smitten, and she is after higher game. She has "set her cap" for Mr. Randolph Chester, a wealthy bachelor of fifty or more, also a summer resident; but I suspect that he prefers Miss Frost. I do not give myself any trouble on that score. Miss Frost may reject me, but she certainly will not accept Mr. Chester.

Chapter 11

"Theophilus," said Mrs. Wilson, "the flour is out, and we have but half a pound of sugar left."

The minister looked grave.

"My dear," he answered, "it seems to me that something is always out."

A Fancy of Hers

"Then," said his wife, smiling faintly, "I suppose you are out of money also."

I have a dollar and thirty seven cents in my pocket book, and I do not know when I shall get any more." "Doesn't the parish owe you something?"

"Yes, but the treasurer told me yesterday, when I spoke to him on the subject, that we must give them time to pay it; that it would create dissatisfaction if I pressed the matter."

"How do they expect us to live?" demanded Mrs. Wilson, as nearly indignant as so meek a woman could be.

"They think we can get along somehow. Besides, the donation party takes place tomorrow. Mr. Stiles told me that I couldn't expect to collect anything till that was over."

"I wish it were over."

"So do I."

"I suppose it will amount to about as much as the others did. People will bring provisions, most of which they will eat themselves. When it is over we'll be the richer by a dozen pincushions, half a dozen pies, a bushel of potatoes, and a few knick-knacks for which we have no earthly use."

"I am afraid, my dear, you are getting satirical."

There is more truth than satire in it, Theophilus, as you know very well. The worst of it is that we are expected to be grateful for what is only an additional burden."

"Well, my dear, you are certainly right; but perhaps we may be more fortunate tomorrow."

At this point Ralph Wilson, the minister's oldest son, came into the room to recite a lesson in the Iliad, and the conversation took a turn.

"I am afraid Ralph will never be able to go to college after all," said his mother.

"I don't see any way at present," said the minister; "but I hope it may be arranged. I wrote last week to my classmate, Professor Ames, of Dartmouth, to inquire what aid Ralph could depend upon from the beneficiary funds."

"Have you had an answer?"

"I received a letter this morning. From what he writes me, I judge that his necessary expenses will be at least four hundred dollars a year — —"

"Nearly the amount of your salary."

"And that he can probably procure aid to the amount of two hundred from the beneficiary funds."

"Then it is hopeless. You cannot make up the balance."

"I'm afraid you're right. I think, though, that Ralph should continue his preparation, since, even if he is only prepared to enter, that insures him a good education."

A Fancy of Hers

"I might defray a part of my expenses by teaching school in winter," suggested Ralph, who had listened intently to a conversation that so nearly concerned his future.

"You could teach during the junior and senior years," said his father. "I did so myself. During the first two years you would be too young, and it would, besides, be a disadvantage."

Since the donation visit had been decided upon at the sewing circle, it had been a prominent topic of conversation in the village. Though designed to give substantial assistance to the minister's family, it was also to be a festive occasion — a sort of ministerial party — and thus was regarded as a social event.

Fair fingers had been busily at work in the minister's service, and it is safe to say that at least ten pincushions were in process of manufacture. Chief among the fair workers was Clarissa Bassett, who had a just pride in the superior size and more elaborate workmanship of her pincushions, of which four or five were already on exhibition in the Wilson household.

"I suppose you are going to the donation party, Miss Frost," said Miss Bassett complacently, for she had that morning set the last stitch in what she regarded as the handsomest pincushion she had ever made.

"Yes, I intend to go."

"Have You got your gift ready?" asked Miss Bassett, with natural curiosity.

"I hope to have it ready in time," said Mabel.

"I wish you could see my pincushion," said Clarissa, with subdued enthusiasm. "I think it is the best I ever made."

"Is Mr. Wilson's family in particular need of pincushions?" asked Mabel.

Miss Bassett did not deign to notice the question suggested by Mabel, considering it quite irrelevant.

"I always give pincushions," she said. "People say I have a talent for making them."

Mabel smiled.

"I have no talent at all for that kind of work," she returned. "I should not venture to compete with you. But probably yours will be all that will be required."

"Oh, there are several others who are making them," said Miss Bassett; "but," she added complacently, "I am not afraid to compare mine with any that'll be brought. Old Mrs. Pulsifer showed me hers yesterday — such a looking thing! Made up of odds and ends from her scrap bag. It isn't fit for the kitchen."

"So Mrs. Pulsifer is going to give a pincushion, also?"

"She always does; but if I didn't know how to make one better than she I'd give up altogether."

"Does Mrs. Wilson use a great many pins?" asked Mabel.

Miss Bassett stared.

"I don't know as she uses any more than anybody else," she answered.

A Fancy of Hers

"How, then, can she use so many pincushions? Wouldn't some other gift be more acceptable?" Mabel inquired.

"Oh, they'll have other things — cake and pies and such things. It wouldn't be appropriate for me to give anything of that kind."

The next was the eventful day. At four o'clock in the afternoon people began to arrive. The parsonage had just been put in order, and the minister and his wife awaited their visitors.

"Is it necessary for me to be here?" asked Ralph.

"It would hardly look well for you to be away, my son."

I will stay if you wish it, of course, father; but it always humiliates me. It looks as if we were receiving charity."

"I confess I can't quite rid myself of the same impression," said his father; "but it may be a feeling of worldly pride. We must try to look upon it differently."

"Why can't they give you the value of their presents in money, or by adding to your salary, father?" suggested Ralph.

"They would not be willing. We must accept what they choose to give, and in the form in which they choose to give it."

"I hope, father, I shall some time be able to relieve you from such dependence."

"I wish, for your own sake, you might have the ability, my son, even if I did not require it."

The first to arrive was old Mrs. Pulsifer. She carried in her hand a hideous pincushion, answering the description which Miss Bassett had given of it.

"I made it with my own hands, Mrs. Wilson," she said complacently. "As the apostle says, `Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I unto thee.'"

"Thank you, Mrs. Pulsifer," said the minister's wife, trying to look pleased, and failing.

The next visitor was Mrs. Slocum, who brought a couple of dyspeptic looking pies and a loaf of bread.

"I thought you might need 'em for the company" she said.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Slocum," said Mrs. Wilson. She was quite resigned to the immediate use of Mrs. Slocum's gift.

Next came Mrs. Breck. She, too, contributed some pies and cake, but of a better quality than her predecessor. Close upon her followed Clarissa Bassett, bearing aloft the gorgeous pincushion, which she presented with a complacent flourish to Mrs. Wilson.

"It'll do for your best room, Mrs. Wilson," she said. "I see you've got one pincushion already," eying Mrs. Pulsifer's offering disdainfully.

"I expect several more," said Mrs. Wilson, smiling faintly. "We are generally well remembered in that way."

A Fancy of Hers

Next Mrs. and Miss Raymond sailed into the room and made their way to where the minister was.

"Mr. Wilson," said Clementina, with a charming air of patronage, "we do not belong to your flock, but we crave the privilege of participating in this pleasant visit and showing our appreciation of your ministrations. I hope you will accept this small testimonial from my mother and myself."

She left in the minister's hands a bottle of cologne, which she had purchased at the village store that morning for fifty cents.

"Thank you, Miss Raymond," said Mr. Wilson gravely, "quite as much for your words as for your gift."

Was there conscious satire in this speech? If so, neither Miss Raymond nor her mother understood it. They made way for Mr. Randolph Chester, who, indeed, had escorted them to the parsonage.

"Reverend sir," said Mr. Chester with elaborate formality, "I hardly knew what to bring you, but I am sure that books are always welcome to literary men. May I hope that you will give this volume a place in your library?"

As he spoke he handed the minister a small edition of Scott's poems, complete in one volume, and in such fine print as to make it perilous for a person of any except the strongest eyesight to undertake its perusal. Mr. Chester admitted that he was in independent circumstances, and Mr. Wilson had hoped for a present of some real value, but he felt compelled to accept this paltry gift with an appearance of gratitude.

The next half dozen arrivals were laden down with provisions. A committee of ladies took charge of these, and spread a large table, on which all the articles that were cooked were at once placed.

While this was going on, Mrs. Squire Hadley arrived with a dress pattern for Mrs. Wilson. It was a cheap calico of large figure, very repugnant to the taste of the minister's wife, whose heart sank within her as she accepted it, for she knew that Mrs. Hadley would never forgive her if she did not have it made up. Mrs. Hadley had got it at a bargain at the store, where it had lain on the shelves for several seasons without finding a purchaser.

"Dress goods are always acceptable, Mrs. Wilson," she said with the air of one conferring a favor. "I hope you may find this of service."

And Mrs. Wilson was obliged to thank her.

"Brother Wilson," said the Rev. Adoniram Fry in a cheery voice, "I hope I do not intrude. The fact is, I couldn't keep away. I hope you will not be too proud to accept a small gift from your Methodist brother;" and he placed in the minister's hand a five dollar bill.

"Thank you, Brother Fry," said Mr. Wilson, grasping his hand cordially. "I see you understand what I most need;" this last remark being in a lower voice.

"I ought to, Brother Wilson. I never yet knew a minister who couldn't find a use for a five dollar bill."

Deacon Uriah Peabody entered next.

"I've brought you a bushel of apples, parson," he said. "My boy'll carry 'em round to the kitchen. This is a joyful day for you. Your house will overflow with the bounties of Providence."

Such speeches as these the minister, in spite of his meekness, found it hard to listen to without impatience.

A Fancy of Hers

"I hope it may," he said gravely. "I shall be glad to have my daily anxieties lightened."

"They will be," said the deacon. "I calc'late you won't to have to buy much for a month to come."

The Rev. Theophilus was better informed. He knew that all but a small remnant of the provisions brought in would be consumed before the company dispersed, and that two days more would suffice to dispose of the last of the donations. But he did not venture to say this. It would have given serious offense to the visitors, who felt that the minister's family could not be grateful enough for their very liberal gifts.

Mrs. Kent and Mabel were late. The former handed Mr. Wilson an envelope containing a ten dollar bill.

"A joint gift from Miss Frost and myself," she said. "Properly it is not a gift, but a small part of what we owe you."

The minister brightened up, not only because he suspected that the envelope contained money, which was the most acceptable form in which a donation could come, but because the words indicated appreciation, and a proper estimate of his relation to the donation visit. They helped him to bear the patronizing manner of Mrs. Bennett, the butcher's wife, who followed with two cheap collars for Mrs. Wilson.

"Things is brightenin' up for you, Mr. Wilson," said she. "Times is hard, but we're doin' what we can to help you along. I'd like to do more myself, but my husband has so many bad bills, and so much trouble in collectin' his money, that we're straitened when we shouldn't be."

The minister was painfully aware that he was one of the debtors who found it hard to pay his bills, and he knew that Mrs. Bennett's speech was meant for a hint.

Supper was by this time ready, and the ladies and gentlemen filed out to the supper table with alacrity. It was, doubtless, the consciousness that they were engaged in a philanthropic action that increased the appetites of the good people. At any rate, there was very little left on the table when the repast was over. All present seemed in excellent spirits. Congratulations poured in upon the minister and his wife, who, it appeared to be thought, were in great luck.

"Guess this'll put you on your feet, parson," said Deacon Peabody, a little huskily, for he had stuffed half of a large doughnut into his mouth. "The people have come for'ard very liberal today."

"Yes," said the minister unenthusiastically.

"Reminds me of the land flowin' with milk an' honey," resumed the deacon.

"If it could only last," thought Mr. Wilson. On ordinary days there was small appearance of plenty on the minister's frugal board, and, as his guests were consuming about all they brought, there seemed small chance of an improvement.

There was a turn in the tide, however. A parcel was brought from the express office, containing a neat cashmere dress, entirely made up, for Mrs. Wilson. This was accompanied by a note from Mary Bridgman, the donor, to this effect:

DEAR MRS. WILSON: — As I still retain your measure, I have, made up this dress for you, and trust it may prove a good fit. I hope you will receive it in the same spirit in which it was sent. Your true friend, MARY BRIDGMAN.

A Fancy of Hers

It was long since the minister's wife had had a new dress, and the prospect of another had seemed remote enough. Nothing, therefore, could be more timely and acceptable, and the little woman, for the first time during the afternoon, seemed actually cheerful.

"I had no idee Mary was doin' so well," said old Mrs. Slocum. "That cashmere dress must have cost a good deal."

"Mary Bridgman was always extravagant," said Mrs. Hadley disapprovingly. "I don't believe she saves a cent."

Mrs. Hadley may perhaps have felt that the dressmaker's handsome gift was a tacit rebuke for her shabby offering.

Thus far the only gifts of any value had been the dress just mentioned and fifteen dollars in money. It spoke poorly for the liberality of an entire parish, especially when it is considered that three out of the four donors — Mr. Fry, Mary Bridgman and Mabel Frost — were outsiders. Mr. Wilson was not much disappointed. If anything, the visit had been more remunerative than he expected. To one of his scanty income fifteen dollars in cash would be a considerable help. He felt that, on the whole, the donation visit had "paid."

But there was unexpected good fortune in store for him. Ralph came in with a letter from the post-office, postmarked New York.

"I wonder who it can be from, father," he said. "Do you know any one in New York?"

"Only Miss Bridgman, and we have heard from her."

"Better open the letter, parson," said Mrs. Pulsifer, whose curiosity was excited. "We'll all excuse you."

Thus adjured, the minister did so. As he read, his face became luminous with joy, and he fervently ejaculated, "Thank God for all His goodness!"

"What is it, parson?" inquired Deacon Peabody.

"My friends," said the minister, clearing his throat, "I want you all to be partakers of my joy. I will read the letter. It is dated New York.

"REV. MR. WILSON — DEAR SIR: — I have this day deposited the sum of five hundred dollars in the Gotham Trust Company of New York city, in your name, and subject to your draft. Pardon me for not communicating my name. Rest assured that it comes from one who appreciates your services, and hopes to be considered your sincere friend and well wisher."

The reading of the letter produced a sensation. Deacon Peabody asked to see it. He put on his spectacles and examined it intently.

"I guess it's genooine," he said cautiously. "Really, Parson Wilson, it makes you a rich man."

"I congratulate you, Mr. Wilson," said Squire Hadley, cordially shaking the minister's hand. "We ain't so liberal as we might be, but I'm glad to find there's somebody that's open handed. Here's ten dollars to add to your five hundred."

"You overwhelm me, Squire Hadley," said the good man. "I feel rebuked for my want of faith in Providence. This morning I awoke with a heavy heart. Little did I dream that the burden was this day to be rolled away. Now I can start fresh, and henceforth I hope to pay my way."

A Fancy of Hers

It seemed odd what a sudden accession of respect there was for the minister now that he had money in the bank.

"Oh, Mr. Wilson, don't you be in a hurry about my husband's little account," said Mrs. Bennett. "He'll know you're good for it, and that'll ease his mind."

"Mrs. Bennett," said the minister gravely, "I am obliged for your offer, but I shall attend to your husband's claim at once. I have always wished to pay my debts promptly. Nothing but lack of ability has prevented."

It was quite in order that conjectures should be hazarded as to the unknown donor of this munificent gift. Who was there in New York likely to feel interested in the minister of Granville? Some one suggested that Mr. Randolph Chester lived in New York, and straightway he was questioned on the subject. He smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear madam," said he to old Mrs. Pulsifer, "if I am the person I certainly shall not own it. I prefer to remain silent."

This led to the inference that Mr. Chester really gave the money, though no one had suspected him previously of any tendency to liberality. But there were rival claimant's. The Raymonds were from Brooklyn, and generally supposed to be wealthy. Could they be Mr. Wilson's unknown friends? When it was suggested to them they replied evasively, neither admitting nor denying it. So opinion was divided, but it was generally thought that it lay between Mr. Chester and the Raymonds. Of course it was not Mary Bridgman, because she sent the handsome dress for Mrs. Wilson.

The minister, however, did not share in the belief. He was quite baffled in his conjecture; but he felt confident that the deposit was not made by the gentleman who had presented him with Scott's poems nor by the giver of the bottle of cheap cologne.

His good fortune was a nine days' wonder, but the mystery remained unsolved. Mr. Wilson went out among his people with a new hope and cheerfulness, and several remarked that he looked ten years younger than before the visit. Life looked brighter to all the little family at the parsonage, and Ralph began to hope that a way might be provided for him to go to college, after all. It is a little odd, too, that now, when the minister was comparatively at ease in pecuniary matters, the treasurer of the parish bestirred himself to collect the arrears of his salary, and with such good success that within a week he was able to make Mr. Wilson a payment of seventy five dollars. So true is it that "Unto him that hath shall be given." So the Rev. Theophilus, who had meditated a journey to New York, to draw upon his newly gained wealth, was able to defer the expedition.

It was a pleasant circumstance that no one appeared to rejoice more sincerely than Adoniram Fry, the Methodist minister, at the good luck of his ministerial brother. Indeed, his hearty friendliness drew the two parishes into more cordial relations, such as surely should exist between Christian people working together for a common purpose.

Meanwhile the summer was passing rapidly, and Mabel's school approached the end of its term. The Granville school closed unusually late in the season. Three years before, an elderly man, who had all his life lived as a bachelor, and, not without reason, had been regarded as a miser, astonished everybody by leaving, in his will, the sum of ten thousand dollars to the town as a fund, the interest to be devoted to lengthening the summer schools. The reason assigned was that in the long summer holidays he had been annoyed by the village children entering his orchard and robbing his fruit, which led him to believe that they would be better off if the vacation were abridged and the school prolonged.

It was near the middle of August, therefore, when Mabel's labors closed. Before the day of examination her experience was marked by two events which call for notice.

A Fancy of Hers

Randolph Chester had fully made up his mind to sacrifice his bachelor independence, and wear the fetters of a married man, if Mabel would accept his hand and fortune. That she would do so he did not seriously doubt. He was annoyed by the frequency with which he met Allan Thorpe, but not greatly alarmed.

"A poor artist, like Thorpe, can't marry," he reflected. "Probably he only earns a few hundred dollars a year, and Miss Frost has nothing. Even if he ventured to offer himself she could not seriously hesitate between him and me. I can make her life easy, and, though I am not so young as I once was, I am well preserved."

Mr. Chester surveyed himself in the mirror and mentally decided that in spite of certain telltale wrinkles about the eyes most persons would not take him for over forty, whereas in reality he would never see fifty again. Do not smile at his delusion. It is a sufficiently common one among people of his age. Indeed, it is natural enough to cling to the semblance of youth. Even philosophers have been known to sigh over the fast coming wrinkles, and express a willingness to resign some of their time earned wisdom for the ruddy bloom of early manhood.

Three days before the school examination Mr. Chester found his opportunity. He called at Mrs. Kent's and found Mabel alone. He felt that the opportunity must be improved.

"I shall attend your examination exercises, Miss Frost," he commenced.

"I shall be glad to see you, Mr. Chester. May I call upon you for a speech?" she added mischievously.

"By no means," said the bachelor hastily. "I am not accustomed to speak on such occasions. Do you intend to leave Granville immediately afterwards?"

"I shall probably remain in the village till the first of September."

Probably she expects an application to keep the fall term of school," thought Mr. Chester. "I am glad to hear you say so, Miss Frost," he added aloud. "We could hardly spare you."

"Thank you, Mr. Chester. I am afraid you have learned to flatter."

"Indeed I have not, Miss Frost," said Mr. Chester, earnestly. "I may add that I, perhaps, should miss you most of all."

Mabel looked at his face quickly. She suspected what was coming.

"I am certainly obliged to you for your appreciation, Mr. Chester," she returned, without betraying any maidenly confusion.

"It is something more than that," said the bachelor quickly, feeling that the moment had come. "Miss Frost — Mabel — I have learned to love you. I place my hand and fortune at your feet."

"You are very kind, Mr. Chester, and I am deeply indebted to you for the compliment you have paid me; but I cannot marry without love, and I do not love you."

"It will come in time," urged Mr. Chester. "All I ask is that you marry me, and I will take the risk of that."

"But I cannot," said Mabel. "We should find too late that we had made a mistake."

In spite of his love, Randolph Chester felt a little irritated at Mabel's indifference to her own interests.

A Fancy of Hers

"I am afraid, Miss Frost," he said, you don't understand how much I offer you. I possess independent means. I can release you from the slavery of the schoolroom, and provide for you a life of ease. We will live in the city during the greater part of the year, and in the summer come to Granville, or any other place you would prefer. It is not an unpleasant life I offer you."

"I don't think we take the same view of marriage, Mr. Chester," said Mabel. "I should not be willing to marry in order to live at ease, or to escape the `slavery of the schoolroom,' which I have found pleasant. I thank you for the compliment you have paid me, but it is impossible."

She spoke decisively, and Mr. Chester could not escape the conviction that his answer was final. He was not overwhelmed with grief, but he was bitterly angry.

"Of course you can do as you please, Miss Frost," he said sharply. "I hope you won't find out your mistake when it is too late. If you think of marrying that artist fellow, Thorpe, I may as well tell you that he can hardly support himself, much less a wife."

This was more than Mabel could bear. She rose to her feet, and her eyes flashed fire.

"You have no right to say this," she exclaimed. "Mr. Thorpe has never spoken to me of love. As for his circumstances, I have never considered them. I only know that he is a gentleman."

She swept out of the room indignantly, leaving Mr. Chester rather bewildered. He took his hat and left the house, sorely disappointed, and still more angry. His vanity had received a severe wound, which would take a longer time to heal than his heart, which had not been so seriously affected.

As he walked towards the hotel he felt very bitter towards Mabel, and scowled fiercely at Allan Thorpe, whom he happened to meet on the way, though, as it was dark, the artist was happily unconscious of it. He thirsted for revenge. He wished to show Mabel that he was not inconsolable. Unhappily for the bachelor, he was in this mood when he reached the hotel and met Miss Clementina Raymond. He did not care a particle for her, but spite against Miss Frost hurried him on to the avowal of a passion that he did not feel. His offer was rather a cool, business-like proposal than an impulsive declaration of affection. But Clementina made up for his lack of sentiment by a bashful confusion, which was very well assumed.

"I am so surprised, and so embarrassed, Mr. Chester," she said. "How could I dream that you were kind enough to regard me with such sentiments? I ought, perhaps, to consult mamma."

"If you have any doubt about your answer," said Mr. Chester abruptly, already half regretting his precipitancy, "say so without hesitation."

Evidently the delay would be dangerous, and Clementina decided to settle the matter at once.

"No," she said, "I will not consult mamma. I know her high opinion of you, dear Mr. Chester — let me say Randolph. If you care for this little hand, it is yours," and she timidly laid a large and well developed palm in his. She was rather disappointed that he did not press it to his lips. In all the novels she had taken from the Brooklyn Mercantile Library, that was what enraptured lovers always did when accepted. Mr. Chester just pressed the hand slightly, and, rising, said in a business-like way; "Very well, Miss Raymond, we will consider the matter settled. I will leave you now, as you will probably wish to tell your mother."

This was the way in which Clementina told her mother the news: "Mamma, that old goose has proposed, and I have accepted him."

A Fancy of Hers

"What old goose?"

"Randolph Chester, of course. He's as old as the hills, but he's got money."

"And you are nearly twenty five, my love."

"Oh, bother, mamma! What's the use of mentioning my age? Somebody might be within hearing. Remember, if he asks how old I am, you are not to answer so impertinent a question."

"Very well, Clementina. Of course, my child, our interests are the same. I am really glad you will have a husband of means. It has been very hard to keep up a genteel appearance on our limited income, and it will be a relief to have some one to provide."

"You are right, mother. Of course I wouldn't think of marrying the old mummy if he hadn't plenty of money. He thinks we are rich; so you must be careful not to drop any hint of our real situation until after we are married. I wonder if I can't induce him to take me to Europe for our wedding tour."

"That would be a very pleasant arrangement, Clementina. I always wanted to go to Europe."

"Of course you couldn't go, mamma," said the selfish daughter. "I am sure Mr. Chester wouldn't agree to it. I may find it very hard to induce him to take me."

"I should be very lonely if you left me at home," said the disappointed mother.

"I should write you often. That would do almost, as well."

Mrs. Raymond did not think so, but she knew her daughter's hard, ingrained selfishness too well to press the matter. She received Mr. Chester on the footing of a son-in-law most graciously, though it did occur to her that it would have been better if she could have secured him as a husband instead of Clementina; then she could have made the European tour.

It may be as well, however, to say here that neither to mother nor daughter were revealed the scenic charms of Europe. When Randolph Chester discovered that he had married a genteel pauper he was deeply incensed, and was in no mood to grant favors to the wife who had deceived him. He married in haste, to repent at leisure.

Chapter 12

The day of examination came, and the small schoolroom was thronged with visitors. The exercises passed off in the most satisfactory manner. Squire Hadley, as chairman of the School Committee, made the first speech. It was not a model of eloquence, but he made it clear that he considered the school a success and took credit to himself for engaging so competent a teacher. Mr. Wilson followed. He too, expressed hearty approval of the exercises, and tendered his cordial congratulations to Miss Frost for remarkable success in inspiring the scholars with a love of learning.

He hoped the town would be able to retain the services of so accomplished an instructress. To him succeeded Adoniram Fry, who, in a jocular way, lamented that as a boy it had not been in his power to be a scholar under Miss Frost's instruction. All were complimentary, and Mabel's cheeks were flushed with pleasure.

Randolph Chester was not present at the closing exercises. Neither were the Raymonds. The engagement had leaked out, and therefore their absence did not excite surprise. It was ascertained that they had driven to a

A Fancy of Hers

neighboring town. It was not discovered, however, till later, what their errand was. They drove at once to the residence of a clergyman, and when they returned Clementina was Mrs. Randolph Chester. Clementina herself had artfully hinted how romantic it would be, and how people would be taken by surprise. Mr. Chester cared nothing for this; but it occurred to him that Mabel would be mortified on learning how quickly he had been consoled for her loss. Poor Mr. Chester! In after years he looked upon this as the most idiotic act of his life.

In the evening Allan Thorpe called and invited Mabel to go out for a walk. It was a beautiful moonlight night. They walked slowly to the pond, which was not far away, and sat down on a rustic seat beneath a wide spreading oak. They had been talking on various things for some time, when a sudden silence came upon both. It was at length broken by the young artist.

"I hope you will forgive me for bringing you here," he said.

"Why should you want forgiveness?" she asked, very much surprised.

"Because I brought you here with a special object in view. Rebuke me if you will, but — Mabel, I love you."

She did not seem much surprised.

"How long has it been so?" she asked in a low voice.

"I began to love you," he answered, "when I first saw you at the artists' reception. But you were so far removed from me that I did not dare to avow it, even to myself. You were a rich social queen, and I was a poor man. I should never have dared to tell you all this if you had not lost your wealth."

"Does this make me any more worthy?" asked Mabel smiling.

"It has brought you nearer to me. When I saw how bravely you met adverse fortune; when I saw a girl brought up to every luxury, as you were, quietly devoting herself to teaching a village school, I rejoiced. I admired you more than ever, and I resolved to win you if possible. Can you give me a hope, Mabel?"

He bent over her with a look of tender affection in his manly face.

"I won't keep you in suspense, Allan," she said with an answering look. "I have not known you long but long enough to trust my future in your hands."

After a while Allan Thorpe began to discuss his plans and hopes for the future.

"I am beginning to be successful," he said. "I can, even now, support you in a modest way, and with health I feel assured of a larger — I hope a much larger — income in time. I can relieve you from teaching at once."

Mabel smiled.

"But suppose I do not consider it a burden. Suppose I like it."

"Then you can teach me."

"It might become monotonous to have only one pupil."

"I hope not," said Allan earnestly.

A Fancy of Hers

When he pressed her to name an early day for their marriage, Mabel said: "Before we go any further, I have a confession to make. I hope it won't be disagreeable to you."

He silently inclined his head to listen.

"Who told you I had lost my property?" she asked.

"No one. I inferred it from finding you here, teaching a village school for seven dollars a week," replied Allan.

"What! Have you inquired my income so exactly? I fear you are mercenary."

"I can remember the time — not so long since, either — when I earned less than that by my art. But, Mabel, what do you mean by your questions? Of course you have lost your property."

"Then my banker has failed to inform me of it. No, Allan, I am no poorer than I ever was."

"Why, then, did you become a teacher?" asked Allan Thorpe, bewildered.

"Because I wished to be of some service to my kind; because I was tired of the hollow frivolity of the fashionable world. I don't regret my experiment. I never expected to be so richly rewarded."

"And you, as rich as ever, bestow your hand on a poor artist?" he exclaimed almost incredulously.

"Unless the poor artist withdraws his offer," she answered with a smile.

Of the conversation that followed it is needful only to report that it was mutually decided that Mabel's secret was to be kept for the present. She was still to be the poor school teacher in the eyes of Granville. The marriage was to take place in October, Mabel being reconciled to the briefness of the engagement by the representation that October would be a favorable month for a voyage to Europe. They had already decided to spend two years in Italy. Mabel had always longed to see Italy, and it would no doubt be full of delightful opportunities of improvement in his art for Allan Thorpe.

Mabel's engagement made a second sensation, Mr. Chester's elopement being the first. Many were the congratulations offered, though these were mingled with regret that so good a teacher should be lost to the village. Mr. Chester heard the news in gloomy silence. His wife remarked patronizingly that it was a very suitable match, for "both are as poor as poverty, goodness knows!"

The wedding took place quietly in October, and in Granville. No one as yet knew that Mabel was other than she seemed, though Mr. Wilson had been informed of her real name. When, however, a check for five hundred dollars was handed to him as his fee for celebrating the marriage, he faltered in amazement, as he inquired, "What does this mean, Allan?"

"It means, my dear uncle, that Mabel is not only rich in every virtue and every accomplishment, but she is also burdened with a large portion of this world's goods. This is my first opportunity for saying what she authorized me to say, that we will gladly defray Ralph's expenses through college whenever you are ready to send him."

"God is indeed good to me and mine!" said the minister, his face beaming with happiness. "My dear child" — this was to Mabel — "may you always be as happy as you have made us."

"You have made us all happy, dear Mabel," said her husband. "It was indeed a blessed day when you came to Granville to teach."