Homespun Tales

Kate Douglas Wiggin

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This etext was prepared by A Elizabeth Warren MD, Sacramento,
CA; aewarren2@aol.com

Introduction

These three stories are now brought together under one cover because they have not quite outworn their welcome; but in their first estate two of them appeared as gift−books, with decorative borders and wide margins, a style not compatible with the stringent economies of the present moment. Luckily they belong together by reason of their background, which is an imaginary village, any village you choose, within the confines, or on the borders of York County, in the State of Maine.

In the first tale the river, not "Rose," is the principal character; no one realizes this better than I. If an author spends her summers on the banks of Saco Water it fills the landscape. It flows from the White Mountains to the Atlantic in a tempestuous torrent, breaking here and there into glorious falls of amber glimpsed through snowy foam; its rapids dash through rocky cliffs crowned with pine trees, under which blue harebells and rosy columbines blossom in gay profusion. There is the glint of the mirror−like lake above the falls, and the sound of the surging floods below; the witchery of feathery elms reflected in its clear surfaces, and the enchantment of the full moon on its golden torrents, never twice alike and always beautiful! How is one to forget, evade, scorn, belittle it, by leaving its charms untold; and who could keep such a river out of a book? It has flowed through many of mine and the last sound I expect to hear in life will be the faint, far−away murmur of Saco Water!

The old Tory Hill Meeting House bulks its way into the foreground of the next story, and the old Peabody Pew (which never existed) has somehow assumed a quasi−historical aspect never intended by its author. There is a Dorcas Society, and there is a meeting house; my dedication assures the reader of these indubitable facts; and the Dorcas Society, in a season of temporary bankruptcy, succeeding a too ample generosity, did scrub the pews when there was no money for paint. Rumors of our strenuous, and somewhat unique, activities spread through our parish to many others, traveling so far (even over seas) that we became embarrassed at our easily won fame. The book was read and people occasionally came to church to see the old Peabody Pew, rather resenting the information that there had never been any Peabodys in the parish and, therefore, there could be no Peabody Pew. Matters became worse when I made, very reverently, what I suppose must be called a dramatic version of the book, which we have played for several summers in the old meeting house to audiences far exceeding our seating capacity. Inasmuch as the imaginary love−tale of my so−called Nancy Wentworth and Justin Peabody had begun under the shadow of the church steeple, and after the ten years of parting the happy reunion had come to them in the selfsame place, it was possible to present their story simply and directly, without offense, in a church building. There was no curtain, no stage, no scenery, no theatricalism. The pulpit was moved back, and four young pine trees were placed in front of it for supposed Christmas decoration. The pulpit platform, and the "wing pews" left vacant for the village players, took the place of a stage; the two aisles served for exits and entrances; and the sexton with three rings of the church bell, announced the scenes. The Carpet Committee of the Dorcas Society furnished the exposition of the first act, while sewing the last breadths of the new, hardly−bought ingrain carpet. The scrubbing of the pews ends the act, with dialogue concerning men, women, ministers, church−members and their ways, including the utter failure of Justin Peabody, Nancy's hero, to make a living anywhere, even in the West. The Dorcas members leave the church for their Saturday night suppers of beans and brown bread, but Nancy returns with her lantern at nightfall to tack down the carpet in the old Peabody pew and iron out the tattered, dog's eared leaves of the hymn−book from which she has so often sung "By cool Siloam's shady rill" with her lover in days gone by. He, still a failure, having waited for years for his luck to turn, has come back to spend Christmas in the home of his boyhood; and seeing a dim light in the church, he enters quietly and surprises Nancy at her task of carpeting the Peabody Pew, so that it shall look as well as the others at next day's services. The rest is easy to imagine. One can deny the reality of a book, but when two or three thousand people have beheld Justin Peabody and Nancy Wentworth in the flesh, and have seen the paint of the old Peabody Pew wiped

with a damp cloth, its cushion darned and its carpet tacked in place, it is useless to argue; any more than it would be to deny the validity of the egg of Columbus or the apple of William Tell.

As for "Susanna and Sue" the story would never have been written had I not as a child and girl been driven once a year to the Shaker meeting at the little village of Alfred, sixteen miles distant. The services were then open to the public, but eventually permission to attend them was withdrawn, because of the careless and sometimes irreverent behavior of young people who regarded the Shaker costumes, the solemn dances or marches, the rhythmic movements of the hands, the almost hypnotic crescendo of the singing, as a sort of humorous spectacle. I learned to know the brethren and sisters, and the Elder, as years went by, and often went to the main house to spend a day or two as the guest of Eldress Harriet, a saint, if ever there was one, or, later, with dear Sister Lucinda.

The shining cleanliness and order, the frugality and industry, the serenity and peace of these people, who had resigned the world and "life on the plane of Adam," vowing themselves to celibacy, to public confession of sins, and the holding of goods in common,−−all this has always had a certain exquisite and helpful influence upon my thought, and Mr. W. D. Howells paid a far more beautiful tribute to them in "The Undiscovered Country."

It is needless to say that I read every word of the book to my Shaker friends before it was published. They took a deep interest in it, evincing keen delight in my rather facetious but wholly imaginary portrait of "Brother Ansel," a "born Shaker," and sadly confessing that my two young lovers, "Hetty" and "Nathan," who could not endure the rigors of the Shaker faith and fled together in the night to marry and join the world's people,−−that this tragedy had often occurred in their community.

Here, then, are the three simple homespun tales. I believe they are true to life as I see it. I only wish my readers might hear the ripple of the Maine river running through them; breathe the fragrance of New England for−ests, and though never for a moment getting, through my poor pen, the atmosphere of Maine's rugged cliffs and the tang of her salt sea air, they might at least believe for an instant that they had found a modest Mayflower in her pine woods.

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN. July, 1920.

THE OLD PEABODY PEW

SUSANNA AND SUE

I. Mother Ann's Children II. A Son of Adam III. Divers Doctrines IV. Louisa's Mind V. the Little Quail Bird VI. Susanna Speaks in Meeting VII. "The Lower Plane" VIII. Concerning Backsliders IX. Love Manifold X. Brother and Sister XI. "The Open Door" XII. The Hills of Home

ROSE O' THE RIVER

I. The Pine And the Rose

It was not long after sunrise, and Stephen Waterman, fresh from his dip in the river, had scrambled up the hillside from the hut in the alder−bushes where he had made his morning toilet.

An early ablution of this sort was not the custom of the farmers along the banks of the Saco, but the Waterman house was hardly a stone's throw from the water, and there was a clear, deep swimming−hole in the Willow Cove that would have tempted the busiest man, or the least cleanly, in York County. Then, too, Stephen was a child of the river, born, reared, schooled on its very brink, never happy unless he were on it, or in it, or beside it, or at least within sight or sound of it.

The immensity of the sea had always silenced and overawed him, left him cold in feeling. The river wooed him, caressed him, won his heart. It was just big enough to love. It was full of charms and changes, of varying moods and sudden surprises. Its voice stole in upon his ear with a melody far sweeter and more subtle than the boom of the ocean. Yet it was not without strength, and when it was swollen with the freshets of the spring and brimming with the bounty of its sister streams, it could dash and roar, boom and crash, with the best of them.

Stephen stood on the side porch, drinking in the glory of the sunrise, with the Saco winding like a silver ribbon through the sweet loveliness of the summer landscape.

And the river rolled on toward the sea, singing its morning song, creating and nourishing beauty at every step of its onward path. Cradled in the heart of a great mountain−range, it pursued its gleaming way, here lying silent in glassy lakes, there rushing into tinkling little falls, foaming great falls, and thundering cataracts. Scores of bridges spanned its width, but no steamers flurried its crystal depths. Here and there a rough little rowboat, tethered to a willow, rocked to and fro in some quiet bend of the shore. Here the silver gleam of a rising perch, chub, or trout caught the eye; there a pickerel lay rigid in the clear water, a fish carved in stone: here eels coiled in the muddy bottom of some pool; and there, under the deep shadows of the rocks, lay fat, sleepy bass, old, and incredibly wise, quite untempted by, and wholly superior to, the rural fisherman's worm.

The river lapped the shores of peaceful meadows; it flowed along banks green with maple, beech, sycamore, and birch; it fell tempestuously over dams and fought its way between rocky cliffs crowned with stately firs. It rolled past forests of pine and hemlock and spruce, now gentle, now terrible; for there is said to be an Indian curse upon the Saco, whereby, with every great sun, the child of a paleface shall be drawn into its cruel depths. Lashed into fury by the stony reefs that impeded its progress, the river looked now sapphire, now gold, now white, now leaden gray; but always it was hurrying, hurrying on its appointed way to the sea.

After feasting his eyes and filling his heart with a morning draught of beauty, Stephen went in from the porch and, pausing at the stairway, called in stentorian tones: "Get up and eat your breakfast, Rufus! The boys will be picking the side jams today, and I'm going down to work on the logs. If you come along, bring your own pick−pole and peavey." Then, going to the kitchen pantry, he collected, from the various shelves, a pitcher of milk, a loaf of bread, half an apple pie, and a bowl of blueberries, and, with the easy methods of a household unswayed by feminine rule, moved toward a seat under an apple tree and took his morning meal in great apparent content. Having finished, and washed his dishes with much more thoroughness than is common to unsuperintended man, and having given Rufus the second call to breakfast with the vigor and acrimony that usually mark that unpleasant performance, he strode to a high point on the riverbank and, shading his eyes with his hand, gazed steadily downstream.

Patches of green fodder and blossoming potatoes melted into soft fields that had been lately mown, and there were glimpses of tasseling corn rising high to catch the sun. Far, far down on the opposite bank of the river was the hint of a brown roof, and the tip of a chimney that sent a slender wisp of smoke into the clear air. Beyond this, and farther back from the water, the trees apparently hid a cluster of other chimneys, for thin spirals of smoke ascended here and there. The little brown roof could never have revealed itself to any but a lover's eye; and that discerned something even smaller, something like a pinkish speck, that moved hither and thither on a piece of greensward that sloped to the waterside.

"She's up!" Stephen exclaimed under his breath, his eyes shining, his lips smiling. His voice had a note of hushed exaltation about it, as if "she," whoever she might be, had, in condescending to rise, conferred a priceless boon upon a waiting universe. If she were indeed "up" (so his tone implied), then the day, somewhat falsely heralded by the sunrise, had really begun, and the human race might pursue its appointed tasks, inspired and uplifted by the consciousness of her existence. It might properly be grateful for the fact of her birth; that she had grown to woman's estate; and, above all, that, in common with the sun, the lark, the morning−glory, and other beautiful things of the early day, she was up and about her lovely, cheery, heart−warming business.

The handful of chimneys and the smoke−spirals rising here and there among the trees on the river−bank belonged to what was known as the Brier Neighborhood. There were only a few houses in all, scattered along a side road leading from the river up to Liberty Center. There were no great signs of thrift or prosperity, but the Wiley cottage, the only one near the water, was neat and well cared for, and Nature had done her best to conceal man's indolence, poverty, or neglect.

Bushes of sweetbrier grew in fragrant little forests as tall as the fences. Clumps of wild roses sprang up at every turn, and over all the stone walls, as well as on every heap of rocks by the wayside, prickly blackberry vines ran and clambered and clung, yielding fruit and thorns impartially to the neighborhood children.

The pinkish speck that Stephen Waterman had spied from his side of the river was Rose Wiley of the Brier Neighborhood on the Edgewood side. As there was another of her name on Brigadier Hill, the Edgewood minister called one of them the climbing Rose and the other the brier Rose, or sometimes Rose of the river. She was well named, the pinkish speck. She had not only some of the sweetest attributes of the wild rose, but the parallel might have been extended as far as the thorns, for she had wounded her scores,−−hearts, be it understood, not hands. The wounding was, on the whole, very innocently done; and if fault could be imputed anywhere, it might rightly have been laid at the door of the kind powers who had made her what she was, since the smile that blesses a single heart is always destined to break many more.

She had not a single silk gown, but she had what is far better, a figure to show off a cotton one. Not a brooch nor a pair of earrings was numbered among her possessions, but any ordinary gems would have looked rather dull and trivial when compelled to undergo comparison with her bright eyes. As to her hair, the local milliner declared it impossible for Rose Wiley to get an unbecoming hat; that on one occasion, being in a frolicsome mood, Rose had tried on all the headgear in the village emporium,−−children's gingham "Shakers," mourning bonnets for aged dames, men's haying hats and visored caps,−−and she proved superior to every test, looking as pretty as a pink in the best ones and simply ravishing in the worst. In fact, she had been so fashioned and finished by Nature that, had she been set on a revolving pedestal in a show−window, the bystanders would have exclaimed, as each new charm came into view: "Look at her waist! See her shoulders! And her neck and chin! And her hair!" While the children, gazing with raptured admiration, would have shrieked, in unison, "I choose her for mine."

All this is as much as to say that Rose of the river was a beauty, yet it quite fails to explain, nevertheless, the secret of her power. When she looked her worst the spell was as potent as when she looked her best. Hidden away somewhere was a vital spark which warmed every one who came in contact with it. Her lovely little person was a trifle below medium height, and it might as well be confessed that her soul, on the morning when Stephen Waterman saw her hanging out the clothes on the river−bank, was not large enough to be at all out of proportion; but when eyes and dimples, lips and cheeks, enslave the onlooker, the soul is seldom subjected to a close or critical scrutiny. Besides, Rose Wiley was a nice girl, neat as wax, energetic, merry, amiable, economical. She was a dutiful granddaughter to two of the most irritating old people in the county; she never patronized her pug−nosed, pasty−faced girl friends; she made wonderful pies and doughnuts; and besides, small souls, if they are of the right sort, sometimes have a way of growing, to the discomfiture of cynics and the gratification of the angels.

So, on one bank of the river grew the brier rose, a fragile thing, swaying on a slender stalk and looking at its pretty reflection in the water; and on the other a sturdy pine tree, well rooted against wind and storm. And the sturdy pine yearned for the wild rose; and the rose, so far as it knew, yearned for nothing at all, certainly not for rugged pine trees standing tall and grim in rocky soil. If, in its present stage of development, it gravitated toward anything in particular, it would have been a well−dressed white birch growing on an irreproachable lawn.

And the river, now deep, now shallow, now smooth, now tumultuous, now sparkling in sunshine, now gloomy under clouds, rolled on to the engulfing sea. It could not stop to concern itself with the petty comedies and tragedies that were being enacted along its shores, else it would never have reached its destination. Only last

night, under a full moon, there had been pairs of lovers leaning over the rails of all the bridges along its course; but that was a common sight, like that of the ardent couples sitting on its shady banks these summer days, looking only into each other's eyes, but exclaiming about the beauty of the water. Lovers would come and go, sometimes reappearing with successive installments of loves in a way wholly mysterious to the river. Meantime it had its own work to do and must be about it, for the side jams were to be broken and the boom "let out" at the Edgewood bridge.

II. "Old Kennebec"

It was just seven o'clock that same morning when Rose Wiley smoothed the last wrinkle from her dimity counterpane, picked up a shred of corn−husk from the spotless floor under the bed, slapped a mosquito on the window−sill, removed all signs of murder with a moist towel, and before running down to breakfast cast a frowning look at her pincushion. Almira, otherwise "Mite," Shapley had been in her room the afternoon before and disturbed with her careless hand the pattern of Rose's pins. They were kept religiously in the form of a Maltese cross; and if, while she was extricating one from her clothing, there had been an alarm of fire, Rose would have stuck the pin in its appointed place in the design, at the risk of losing her life.

Entering the kitchen with her light step, she brought the morning sunshine with her. The old people had already engaged in differences of opinion, but they commonly suspended open warfare in her presence. There were the usual last things to be done for breakfast, offices that belonged to her as her grandmother's assistant. She took yesterday's soda biscuits out of the steamer where they were warming and softening; brought an apple pie and a plate of seed cakes from the pantry; settled the coffee with a piece of dried fish skin and an egg shell; and transferred some fried potatoes from the spider to a covered dish.

"Did you remember the meat, grandpa? We're all out," she said, as she began buttoning a stiff collar around his reluctant neck.

"Remember? Land, yes! I wish't I ever could forgit anything! The butcher says he's 'bout tired o' travelin' over the country lookin' for critters to kill, but if he finds anything he'll be up along in the course of a week. He ain't a real smart butcher, Cyse Higgins ain't.−−Land, Rose, don't button that dickey clean through my epperdummis! I have to sport starched collars in this life on account o' you and your gran'mother bein' so chock full o' style; but I hope to the Lord I shan't have to wear 'em in another world!"

"You won't," his wife responded with the snap of a dish towel, "or if you do, they'll wilt with the heat."

Rose smiled, but the soft hand with which she tied the neckcloth about the old man's withered neck pacified his spirit, and he smiled knowingly back at her as she took her seat at the breakfast table spread near the open kitchen door. She was a dazzling Rose, and, it is to be feared, a wasted one, for there was no one present to observe her clean pink calico and the still more subtle note struck in the green ribbon which was tied round her throat,−−the ribbon that formed a sort of calyx, out of which sprang the flower of her face, as fresh and radiant as if it had bloomed that morning.

"Give me my coffee turrible quick," said Mr. Wiley; "I must be down to the bridge 'fore they start dog−warpin' the side jam."

"I notice you're always due at the bridge on churnin' days," remarked his spouse, testily.

"'T ain't me as app'ints drivin' dates at Edgewood," replied the old man. "The boys'll hev a turrible job this year. The logs air ricked up jest like Rose's jack−straws; I never see 'em so turrible ricked up in all my exper'ence; an' Lije Dennett don' know no more 'bout pickin' a jam than Cooper's cow. Turrible sot in his ways, too; can't take a

mite of advice. I was tellin' him how to go to work on that bung that's formed between the gre't gray rock an' the shore, −−the awfullest place to bung that there is between this an' Biddeford,− and says he: 'Look here, I've be'n boss on this river for twelve year, an' I'll be doggoned if I'm goin' to be taught my business by any man!' 'This ain't no river,' says I, 'as you'd know,' says I, 'if you'd ever lived on the Kennebec.' 'Pity you hed n't stayed on it,' says he. 'I wish to the land I hed,' says I. An' then I come away, for my tongue's so turrible spry an' sarcustic that I knew if I stopped any longer I should stir up strife. There's some folks that'll set on addled aigs year in an' year out, as if there wa'n't good fresh ones bein' laid every day; an' Lije Dennett's one of 'em, when it comes to river−drivin'."

"There's lots o' folks as have made a good livin' by mindin' their own business," observed the still sententious Mrs. Wiley, as she speared a soda biscuit with her fork.

"Mindin' your own business is a turrible selfish trade," responded her husband loftily. "If your neighbor is more ignorant than what you are,−−partic'larly if he's as ignorant as Cooper's cow,−−you'd ought, as a Kennebec man an' a Christian, to set him on the right track, though it's always a turrible risky thing to do." Rose's grandfather was called, by the irreverent younger generation, sometimes "Turrible Wiley" and sometimes "Old Kennebec," because of the frequency with which these words appeared in his conversation. There were not wanting those of late who dubbed him Uncle Ananias, for reasons too obvious to mention. After a long, indolent, tolerably truthful, and useless life, he had, at seventy−five, lost sight of the dividing line between fact and fancy, and drew on his imagination to such an extent that he almost staggered himself when he began to indulge in reminiscence. He was a feature of the Edgewood "drive," being always present during the five or six days that it was in progress, sometimes sitting on the river−bank, sometimes leaning over the bridge, sometimes reclining against the butt−end of a huge log, but always chewing tobacco and expectorating to incredible distances as he criticized and damned impartially all the expedients in use at the particular moment.

"I want to stay down by the river this afternoon," said Rose. "Ever so many of the girls will be there, and all my sewing is done up. If grandpa will leave the horse for me, I'll take the drivers' lunch to them at noon, and bring the dishes back in time to wash them before supper."

"I suppose you can go, if the rest do," said her grandmother, "though it's an awful lazy way of spendin' an afternoon. When I was a girl there was no such dawdlin' goin' on, I can tell you. Nobody thought o' lookin' at the river in them days; there was n't time."

"But it's such fun to watch the logs!" Rose exclaimed. "Next to dancing, the greatest fun in the world."

"'Specially as all the young men in town will be there, watchin', too," was the grandmother's reply. "Eben Brooks an' Richard Bean got home yesterday with their doctors' diplomas in their pockets. Mrs. Brooks says Eben stood forty−nine in a class o' fifty−five, an' seemed consid'able proud of him; an' I guess it is the first time he ever stood anywheres but at the foot. I tell you when these fifty−five new doctors git scattered over the country there'll be consid'able many folks keepin' house under ground. Dick Bean's goin' to stop a spell with Rufe an' Steve Waterman. That'll make one more to play in the river."

"Rufus ain't hardly got his workin' legs on yit," allowed Mr. Wiley, "but Steve's all right. He's a turrible smart driver, an' turrible reckless, too. He'll take all the chances there is, though to a man that's lived on the Kennebec there ain't what can rightly be called any turrible chances on the Saco."

"He'd better be 'tendin' to his farm," objected Mrs. Wiley.

"His hay is all in," Rose spoke up quickly, "and he only helps on the river when the farm work is n't pressing. Besides, though it's all play to him, he earns his two dollars and a half a day."

"He don't keer about the two and a half," said her grandfather. "He jest can't keep away from the logs. There's some that can't. When I first moved here from Gard'ner, where the climate never suited me−−"

"The climate of any place where you hev regular work never did an' never will suit you," remarked the old man's wife; but the interruption received no comment: such mistaken views of his character were too frequent to make any impression.

"As I was sayin', Rose," he continued, "when we first moved here from Gard'ner, we lived neighbor to the Watermans. Steve an' Rufus was little boys then, always playin' with a couple o' wild cousins o' theirn, consid'able older. Steve would scare his mother pretty nigh to death stealin' away to the mill to ride on the 'carriage,' 'side o' the log that was bein' sawed, hitchin' clean out over the river an' then jerkin' back 'most into the jaws o' the machinery."

"He never hed any common sense to spare, even when he was a young one," remarked Mrs. Wiley; "and I don't see as all the 'cademy education his father throwed away on him has changed him much." And with this observation she rose from the table and went to the sink.

"Steve ain't nobody's fool," dissented the old man; "but he's kind o' daft about the river. When he was little he was allers buildin' dams in the brook, an' sailin' chips, an' runnin' on the logs; allers choppin' up stickins an' raftin' 'em together in the pond. I cai'late Mis' Waterman died consid'able afore her time, jest from fright, lookin' out the winders and seein' her boys slippin' between the logs an' gittin' their daily dousin'. She could n't understand it, an' there's a heap o' things women−folks never do an' never can understand,−−jest because they _air_ women−folks."

"One o' the things is men, I s'pose," interrupted Mrs. Wiley.

"Men in general, but more partic'larly husbands," assented Old Kennebec; "howsomever, there's another thing they don't an' can't never take in, an' that's sport. Steve does river−drivin' as he would horse−racin' or tiger−shootin' or tight−rope dancin'; an' he always did from a boy. When he was about twelve to fifteen, he used to help the river−drivers spring and fall, reg'lar. He could n't do nothin' but shin up an' down the rocks after hammers an' hatchets an' ropes, but he was turrible pleased with his job. 'Stepanfetchit,' they used to call him them days,−−Stepanfetchit Waterman."

"Good name for him yet," came in acid tones from the sink. "He's still steppin' an' fetchin', only it's Rose that's doin' the drivin' now."

"I'm not driving anybody, that I know of," answered Rose, with heightened color, but with no loss of her habitual self−command.

"Then, when he graduated from errants," went on the crafty old man, who knew that when breakfast ceased, churning must begin, "Steve used to get seventy−five cents a day helpin' clear up the river−−if you can call this here silv'ry streamlet a river. He'd pick off a log here an' there an' send it afloat, an' dig out them that hed got ketched in the rocks, and tidy up the banks jest like spring house−cleanin'. If he'd hed any kind of a boss, an' hed be'n trained on the Kennebec, he'd 'a' made a turrible smart driver, Steve would."

"He'll be drownded, that's what'll become o' him, prophesied Mrs. Wiley; "specially if Rose encourages him in such silly foolishness as ridin' logs from his house down to ourn, dark nights."

"Seein' as how Steve built ye a nice pigpen last month, 'pears to me you might have a good word for him now an' then, mother," remarked Old Kennebec, reaching for his second piece of pie.

"I wa'n't a mite deceived by that pigpen, no more'n I was by Jed Towle's hencoop, nor Ivory Dunn's well−curb, nor Pitt Packard's shed−steps. If you hed ever kep' up your buildin's yourself, Rose's beaux would n't hev to do their courtin' with carpenters' tools."

"It's the pigpen an' the hencoop you want to keep your eye on, mother, not the motives of them as made 'em. It's turrible onsettlin' to inspeck folks' motives too turrible close."

"Riding a log is no more to Steve than riding a horse, so he says," interposed Rose, to change the subject; "but I tell him that a horse does n't revolve under you, and go sideways at the same time that it is going forwards."

"Log−ridin' ain't no trick at all to a man of sperit," said Mr. Wiley. "There's a few places in the Kennebec where the water's too shaller to let the logs float, so we used to build a flume, an' the logs would whiz down like arrers shot from a bow. The boys used to collect by the side o' that there flume to see me ride a log down, an' I've watched 'em drop in a dead faint when I spun by the crowd; but land! you can't drownd some folks, not without you tie nail−kags to their head an' feet an' drop 'em in the falls; I've rid logs down the b'ilin'est rapids o' the Kennebec an' never lost my head. I remember well the year o' the gre't freshet, I rid a log from−−"

"There, there, father, that'll do," said Mrs. Wiley, decisively. "I'll put the cream in the churn, an' you jest work off' some o' your steam by bringin' the butter for us afore you start for the bridge. It don't do no good to brag afore your own women−folks; work goes consid'able better'n stories at every place 'cept the loafers' bench at the tavern."

And the baffled raconteur, who had never done a piece of work cheerfully in his life, dragged himself reluctantly to the shed, where, before long, one could hear him moving the dasher up and down sedately to his favorite "churning tune" of

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Broad is the road that leads to death,
  And thousands walk together there;
But Wisdom shows a narrow path,
  With here and there a traveler.
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III. The Edgewood "Drive"

Just where the bridge knits together the two little villages of Pleasant River and Edgewood, the glassy mirror of the Saco broadens suddenly, sweeping over the dam in a luminous torrent. Gushes of pure amber mark the middle of the dam, with crystal and silver at the sides, and from the seething vortex beneath the golden cascade the white spray dashes up in fountains. In the crevices and hollows of the rocks the mad water churns itself into snowy froth, while the foam−flecked torrent, deep, strong, and troubled to its heart, sweeps majestically under the bridge, then dashes between wooded shores piled high with steep masses of rock, or torn and riven by great gorges.

There had been much rain during the summer, and the Saco was very high, so on the third day of the Edgewood drive there was considerable excitement at the bridge, and a goodly audience of villagers from both sides of the river. There were some who never came, some who had no fancy for the sight, some to whom it was an old story, some who were too busy, but there were many to whom it was the event of events, a never−ending source of interest.

Above the fall, covering the placid surface of the river, thousands of logs lay quietly "in boom" until the "turning out" process, on the last day of the drive, should release them and give them their chance of display, their brief moment of notoriety, their opportunity of interesting, amusing, exciting, and exasperating the onlookers by their antics.

Heaps of logs had been cast up on the rocks below the dam, where they lay in hopeless confusion, adding nothing, however, to the problem of the moment, for they too bided their time. If they had possessed wisdom, discretion, and caution, they might have slipped gracefully over the falls and, steering clear of the hidden ledges (about which it would seem they must have heard whispers from the old pine trees along the river), have kept a straight course and reached their destination without costing the Edgewood Lumber Company a small fortune. Or, if they had inclined toward a jolly and adventurous career, they could have joined one of the various jams or "bungs," stimulated by the thought that any one of them might be a key−log, holding for a time the entire mass in its despotic power. But they had been stranded early in the game, and, after lying high and dry for weeks, would be picked off one by one and sent downstream.

In the tumultuous boil, the foaming hubbub and flurry at the foot of the falls, one enormous peeled log wallowed up and clown like a huge rhinoceros, greatly pleasing the children by its clumsy cavortings. Some conflict of opposing forces kept it ever in motion, yet never set it free. Below the bridge were always the real battle−grounds, the scenes of the first and the fiercest conflicts. A ragged ledge of rock, standing well above the yeasty torrent, marked the middle of the river. Stephen had been stranded there once, just at dusk, on a stormy afternoon in spring. A jam had broken under the men, and Stephen, having taken too great risks, had been caught on the moving mass, and, leaping from log to log, his only chance for life had been to find a footing on Gray Rock, which was nearer than the shore.

Rufus was ill at the time, and Mrs. Waterman so anxious and nervous that processions of boys had to be sent up to the River Farm, giving the frightened mother the latest bulletins of her son's welfare. Luckily, the river was narrow just at the Gray Rock, and it was a quite possible task, though no easy one, to lash two ladders together and make a narrow bridge on which the drenched and shivering man could reach the shore. There were loud cheers when Stephen ran lightly across the slender pathway that led to safety−−ran so fast that the ladders had scarce time to bend beneath his weight. He had certainly "taken chances," but when did he not do that? The logger's life is one of "moving accidents by flood and field," and Stephen welcomed with wild exhilaration every hazard that came in his path. To him there was never a dull hour from the moment that the first notch was cut in the tree (for he sometimes joined the boys in the lumber camp just for a frolic) till the later one when the hewn log reached its final destination. He knew nothing of "tooling" a four−in−hand through narrow lanes or crowded thoroughfares, −−nothing of guiding a horse over the hedges and through the pitfalls of a stiff bit of hunting country; his steed was the rearing, plunging, kicking log, and he rode it like a river god.

The crowd loves daring, and so it welcomed Stephen with bravos, but it knew, as he knew, that he was only doing his duty by the Company, only showing the Saco that man was master, only keeping the old Waterman name in good repute. "Ye can't drownd some folks," Old Kennebec had said, as he stood in a group on the shore; "not without you tie sand−bags to 'em an' drop 'em in the Great Eddy. I'm the same kind; I remember when I was stranded on jest sech a rock in the Kennebec, only they left me there all night for dead, an' I had to swim the rapids when it come daylight."

"We're well acquainted with that rock and them rapids," exclaimed one of the river−drivers, to the delight of the company.

Rose had reason to remember Stephen's adventure, for he had clambered up the bank, smiling and blushing under the hurrahs of the boys, and, coming to the wagon where she sat waiting for her grandfather, had seized a moment to whisper: "Did you care whether I came across safe, Rose? Say you did!"

Stephen recalled that question, too, on this August morning; perhaps because this was to be a red−letter day, and some time, when he had a free moment,−− some time before supper, when he and Rose were sitting apart from the others, watching the logs,−−he intended again to ask her to marry him. This thought trembled in him, stirring the deeps of his heart like a great wave, almost sweeping him off his feet when he held it too close and let it have full sway. It would be the fourth time that he had asked Rose this question of all questions, but there was no

úperceptible difference in his excitement, for there was always the possible chance that she might change her mind and say yes, if only for variety. Wanting a thing continuously, unchangingly, unceasingly, year after year, he thought,−−longing to reach it as the river longed to reach the sea,−−such wanting might, in course of time, mean having.

Rose drove up to the bridge with the men's luncheon, and the under boss came up to take the baskets and boxes from the back of the wagon.

"We've had a reg'lar tussle this mornin', Rose," he said. "The logs are determined not to move. Ike Billings, that's the han'somest and fluentest all−round swearer on the Saco, has tried his best on the side jam. He's all out o' cuss−words and there hain't a log budged. Now, stid o' dog−warpin' this afternoon, an' lettin' the oxen haul off all them stubborn logs by main force, we're goin' to ask you to set up on the bank and smile at the jam. 'Land! she can do it!' says Ike a minute ago. 'When Rose starts smilin',' he says, 'there ain't a jam nor a bung in _me_ that don't melt like wax and jest float right off same as the logs do when they get into quiet, sunny water.'"

Rose blushed and laughed, and drove up the hill to Mite Shapley's, where she put up the horse and waited till the men had eaten their luncheon. The drivers slept and had breakfast and supper at the Billings house, a mile down−river, but for several years Mrs. Wiley had furnished the noon meal, sending it down piping hot on the stroke of twelve. The boys always said that up or down the whole length of the Saco there was no such cooking as the Wileys', and much of this praise was earned by Rose's serving. It was the old grandmother who burnished the tin plates and dippers till they looked like silver; for−−crotchety and sharp−tongued as she was−−she never allowed Rose to spoil her hands with soft soap and sand: but it was Rose who planned and packed, Rose who hemmed squares of old white table−cloths and sheets to line the baskets and keep things daintily separate, Rose, also, whose tarts and cakes were the pride and admiration of church sociables and sewing societies.

Where could such smoking pots of beans be found? A murmur of ecstatic approval ran through the crowd when the covers were removed. Pieces of sweet home−fed pork glistened like varnished mahogany on the top of the beans, and underneath were such deeps of fragrant juice as come only from slow fires and long, quiet hours in brick ovens. Who else could steam and bake such mealy loaves of brown bread, brown as plum−pudding, yet with no suspicion of sogginess? Who such soda biscuits, big, feathery, tasting of cream, and hardly needing butter? And green−apple pies! Could such candied lower crusts be found elsewhere, or more delectable filling? Or such rich, nutty doughnuts?−−doughnuts that had spurned the hot fat which is the ruin of so many, and risen from its waves like golden−brown Venuses.

"By the great seleckmen!" ejaculated Jed Towle, as he swallowed his fourth, "I'd like to hev a wife, two daughters, and four sisters like them Wileys, and jest set still on the river−bank an' hev 'em cook victuals for me. I'd hev nothin' to wish for then but a mouth as big as the Saco's."

"And I wish this custard pie was the size o' Bonnie Eagle Pond," said Ike Billings. "I'd like to fall into the middle of it and eat my way out!"

"Look at that bunch o' Chiny asters tied on t' the bail o' that biscuit−pail!" said Ivory Dunn. "That's the girl's doin's, you bet; women−folks don't seem to make no bo'quets after they git married. Let's divide 'em up an' wear 'em drivin' this afternoon; mebbe they'll ketch the eye so 't our rags won't show so bad. Land! it's lucky my hundred days is about up! If I don't git home soon, I shall be arrested for goin' without clo'es. I set up 'bout all night puttin' these blue patches in my pants an' tryin' to piece together a couple of old red−flannel shirts to make one whole one. That's the worst o' drivin' in these places where the pretty girls make a habit of comin' down to the bridge to see the fun. You hev to keep rigged up jest so stylish; you can't git no chance at the rum bottle, an' you even hev to go a leetle mite light on swearin'."

IV. "Blasphemious Swearin'"

"Steve Waterman's an awful nice feller," exclaimed Ivory Dunn just then. Stephen had been looking intently across the river, watching the Shapleys' side door, from which Rose might issue at any moment; and at this point in the discussion he had lounged away from the group, and, moving toward the bridge, began to throw pebbles idly into the water.

"He's an awful smart driver for one that don't foller drivin' the year round," continued Ivory; "and he's the awfullest clean−spoken, soft−spoken feller I ever see."

"There's be'n two black sheep in his family a'ready, an' Steve kind o' feels as if he'd ought to be extry white," remarked Jed Towle. "You fellers that belonged to the old drive remember Pretty Quick Waterman well enough? Steve's mother brought him up."

Yes; most of them remembered the Waterman twins, Stephen's cousins, now both dead,−−Slow Waterman, so moderate in his steps and actions that you had to fix a landmark somewhere near him to see if he moved; and Pretty Quick, who shone by comparison with his twin. "I'd kind o' forgot that Pretty Quick Waterman was cousin to Steve," said the under boss; "he never worked with me much, but he wa'n't cut off the same piece o' goods as the other Watermans. Great hemlock! but he kep' a cussin' dictionary, Pretty Quick did! Whenever he heard any new words he must 'a' writ 'em down, an' then studied 'em all up in the winter−time, to use in the spring drive."

"Swearin' 's a habit that hed ought to be practiced with turrible caution," observed old Mr. Wiley, when the drivers had finished luncheon and taken out their pipes. "There's three kinds o' swearin',−−plain swearin', profane swearin', an' blasphemious swearin'. Logs air jest like mules: there's times when a man can't seem to rip up a jam in good style 'thout a few words that's too strong for the infant classes in Sunday−schools; but a man hed n't ought to tempt Providence.When he's ridin' a log near the falls at high water, or cuttin' the key−log in a jam, he ain't in no place for blasphemious swearin'; jest a little easy, perlite 'damn' is 'bout all he can resk, if he don't want to git drownded an' hev his ghost walkin' the river−banks till kingdom come.

"You an' I, Long, was the only ones that seen Pretty Quick go, wa'n't we?" continued Old Kennebec, glancing at Long Abe Dennett (cousin to Short Abe), who lay on his back in the grass, the smoke−wreaths rising from his pipe, and the steel spikes in his heavy, calked−sole boots shining in the sun.

"There was folks on the bridge," Long answered, "but we was the only ones near enough to see an' hear. It was so onexpected, an' so soon over, that them as was watchin' upstream, where the men was to work on the falls, would n't 'a' hed time to see him go down. But I did, an' nobody ain't heard me swear sence, though it's ten years ago. I allers said it was rum an' bravadder that killed Pretty Quick Waterman that day. The boys hed n't give him a 'dare' that he hed n't took up. He seemed like he was possessed, an' the logs was the same way; they was fairly wild, leapin' around in the maddest kind o' water you ever see. The river was b'ilin' high that spring; it was an awful stubborn jam, an' Pretty Quick, he'd be'n workin' on it sence dinner."

"He clumb up the bank more'n once to have a pull at the bottle that was hid in the bushes," interpolated Mr. Wiley. "Like as not; that was his failin'. Well, most o' the boys were on the other side o' the river, workin' above the bridge, an' the boss hed called Pretty Quick to come off an' leave the jam till mornin', when they'd get horses an' dog−warp it off, log by log. But when the boss got out o' sight, Pretty Quick jest stood right still, swingin' his axe, an' blasphemin' so it would freeze your blood, vowin' he would n't move till the logs did, if he stayed there till the crack o' doom. Jest then a great, ponderous log, that hed be'n churnin' up an' down in the falls for a week, got free an' come blunderin' an' thunderin' down−river. Land! it was chock full o' water, an' looked 'bout as big as a church! It come straight along, butt−end foremost, an' struck that jam, full force, so 't every log in it shivered. There was a crack,− the crack o' doom, sure enough, for Pretty Quick,− an' one o' the logs le'p' right out an' struck

him jest where he stood, with his axe in the air, blasphemin'. The jam kind o' melted an' crumbled up, an' in a second Pretty Quick was whirlin' in the white water. He never riz,− at least where we could see him,−−an' we did n't find him for a week. That's the whole story, an' I guess Steve takes it as a warnin'. Anyway, he ain't no friend to rum nor swearin', Steve ain't. He knows Pretty Quick's ways shortened his mother's life, an' you notice what a sharp lookout he keeps on Rufus."

"He needs it," Ike Billings commented tersely.

"Some men seem to lose their wits when they're workin' on logs," observed Mr. Wiley, who had deeply resented Long Dennett's telling of a story which he knew fully as well and could have told much better. "Now, nat'rally, I've seen things on the Kennebec−−"

"Three cheers for the Saco! Hats off, boys!" shouted Jed Towle, and his directions were followed with a will.

"As I was sayin'," continued the old man, peacefully, "I've seen things on the Kennebec that would n't happen on a small river, an' I've be'n in turrible places an' taken turrible resks resks that would 'a' turned a Saco River man's hair white; but them is the times when my wits work the quickest. I remember once I was smokin' my pipe when a jam broke under me. 'T was a small jam, or what we call a small jam on the Kennebec,−−only about three hundred thousand pine logs. The first thing I knowed, I was shootin' back an' forth in the b'ilin' foam, hangin' on t' the end of a log like a spider. My hands was clasped round the log, and I never lost control o' my pipe. They said I smoked right along, jest as cool an' placid as a pond−lily."

"Why 'd you quit drivin'?" inquired Ivory.

"My strength wa'n't ekal to it," Mr. Wiley responded sadly. "I was all skin, bones, an' nerve. The Comp'ny would n't part with me altogether, so they give me a place in the office down on the wharves."

"That wa'n't so bad," said Jed Towle; "why did n't you hang on to it, so's to keep in sight o' the Kennebec?"

"I found I could n't be confined under cover. My liver give all out, my appetite failed me, an' I wa'n't wuth a day's wages. I'd learned engineerin' when I was a boy, an' I thought I'd try runnin' on the road a spell, but it did n't suit my constitution. My kidneys ain't turrible strong, an' the doctors said I'd have Bright's disease if I did n't git some kind o' work where there wa'n't no vibrations."

"Hard to find, Mr. Wiley; hard to find!" said Jed Towle.

"You're right," responded the old man feelingly. "I've tried all kinds o' labor. Some of 'em don't suit my liver, some disagrees with my stomach, and the rest of 'em has vibrations; so here I set, high an' dry on the banks of life, you might say, like a stranded log."

As this well−known simile fell upon the ear, there was a general stir in the group, for Turrible Wiley, when rhetorical, sometimes grew tearful, and this was a mood not to be encouraged.

"All right, boss," called Ike Billings, winking to the boys; "we'll be there in a jiffy!" for the luncheon hour had flown, and the work of the afternoon was waiting for them. "You make a chalk−mark where you left off, Mr. Wiley, an' we'll hear the rest tomorrer; only don't you forgit nothin'! Remember 't was the Kennebec you was talkin' about."

"I will, indeed," responded the old man. "As I was sayin' when interrupted, I may be a stranded log, but I'm proud that the mark o' the Gard'ner Lumber Comp'ny is on me, so 't when I git to my journey's end they'll know where I belong and send me back to the Kennebec. Before I'm sawed up I'd like to forgit this triflin' brook in the sight of a

good−sized river, an' rest my eyes on some full−grown logs, 'stead o' these little damn pipestems you boys are playin' with!"

V. The Game of Jackstraws

There was a roar of laughter at the old man's boast, but in a moment all was activity. The men ran hither and thither like ants, gathering their tools. There were some old−fashioned pick−poles, straight, heavy levers without any "dog," and there were modern pick−poles and peaveys, for every river has its favorite equipment in these things. There was no dynamite in those days to make the stubborn jams yield, and the dog−warp was in general use. Horses or oxen, sometimes a line of men, stood on the river−bank. A long rope was attached by means of a steel spike to one log after another, and it was dragged from the tangled mass. Sometimes, after unloading the top logs, those at the bottom would rise and make the task easier; sometimes the work would go on for hours with no perceptible progress, and Mr. Wiley would have opportunity to tell the bystanders of a" turrible jam" on the Kennebec that had cost the Lumber Company ten thousand dollars to break.

There would be great arguments on shore, among the villagers as well as among the experts, as to the particular log which might be a key to the position. The boss would study the problem from various standpoints, and the drivers themselves would pass from heated discussion into long consultations.

"They're paid by the day," Old Kennebec would philosophize to the doctor; "an' when they're consultin' they don't hev to be doggin', which is a turrible sight harder work."

Rose had created a small sensation, on one occasion, by pointing out to the under boss the key−log in a jam. She was past mistress of the pretty game of jackstraws, much in vogue at that time. The delicate little lengths of polished wood or bone were shaken together and emptied on the table. Each jackstraw had one of its ends fashioned in the shape of some sort of implement,−−a rake, hoe, spade, fork, or mallet. All the pieces were intertwined by the shaking process, and they lay as they fell, in a hopeless tangle. The task consisted in taking a tiny pick−pole, scarcely bigger than a match, and with the bit of curved wire on the end lifting off the jackstraws one by one without stirring the pile or making it tremble. When this occurred, you gave place to your opponent, who relinquished his turn to you when ill fortune descended upon him, the game, which was a kind of river−driving and jam−picking in miniature, being decided by the number of pieces captured and their value. No wonder that the under boss asked Rose's advice as to the key−log. She had a fairy's hand, and her cunning at deciding the pieces to be moved, and her skill at extricating and lifting them from the heap, were looked upon in Edgewood as little less than supernatural. It was a favorite pastime; and although a man's hand is ill adapted to it, being over−large and heavy, the game has obvious advantages for a lover in bringing his head very close to that of his beloved adversary. The jackstraws have to be watched with a hawk's eagerness, since the "trembling" can be discerned only by a keen eye; but there were moments when Stephen was willing to risk the loss of a battle if he could watch Rose's drooping eyelashes, the delicate down on her pink cheek, and the feathery curls that broke away from her hair.

He was looking at her now from a distance, for she and Mite Shapley were assisting Jed Towle to pile up the tin plates and tie the tin dippers together. Next she peered into one of the bean−pots, and seemed pleased that there was still something in its depths; then she gathered the fragments neatly together in a basket, and, followed by her friend, clambered down the banks to a shady spot where the Boomshers, otherwise known as the Crambry family, were "lined up" expectantly.

It is not difficult to find a single fool in any community, however small; but a family of fools is fortunately somewhat rarer. Every county, however, can boast of one fool−family, and York County is always in the fashion, with fools as with everything else. The unique, much−quoted, and undesirable Boomshers could not be claimed as indigenous to the Saco valley, for this branch was an offshoot of a still larger tribe inhabiting a distant township.

Its beginnings were shrouded in mystery. There was a French−Canadian ancestor somewhere, and a Gypsy or Indian grandmother. They had always intermarried from time immemorial. When one of the selectmen of their native place had been asked why the Boomshers always married cousins, and why the habit was not discouraged, he replied that he really did n't know; he s'posed they felt it would be kind of odd to go right out and marry a stranger.

Lest "Boomsher" seem an unusual surname, it must be explained that the actual name was French and could not be coped with by Edgewood or Pleasant River, being something (luite as impossible to spell as to pronounce. As the family had lived for the last few years somewhere near the Killick Cranberry Meadows, they were called−−and completely described in the calling−−the Crambry fool−family. A talented and much traveled gentleman who once stayed over night at the Edgewood tavern, proclaimed it his opinion that Boomsher had been gradually corrupted from Beaumarchais. When he wrote the word on his visiting card and showed it to Mr. Wiley, Old Kennebec had replied, that in the judgment of a man who had lived in large places and seen a turrible lot o' life, such a name could never have been given either to a Christian or a heathen family, that the way in which the letters was thrown together into it, and the way in which they was sounded when read out loud, was entirely ag'in reason. It was true, he said, that Beaumarchais, bein' such a fool−name, might 'a' be'n invented a−purpose for a fool−family, but he would n't hold even with callin' 'em Boomsher; Crambry was well enough for 'em an' a sight easier to speak.

Stephen knew a good deal about the Crambrys, for he passed their so−called habitation in going to one of his wood−lots. It was only a month before that he had found them all sitting outside their broken−down fence, surrounded by decrepit chairs, sofas, tables, bedsteads, bits of carpet, and stoves.

"What's the matter?" he called out from his wagon.

"There ain't nothin' the matter," said Alcestis Crambry. "Father's (lead, an' we're dividin' up the furnerchure."

Alcestis was the pride of the Crambrys, and the list of his attainments used often to be on his proud father's lips. It was he who was the largest, "for his size," in the family; he who could tell his brothers Paul and Arcadus "by their looks"; he who knew a sour apple from a sweet one the minute he bit it; he who, at the early age of ten, was bright enough to point to the cupboard and say, "Puddin', dad!"

Alcestis had enjoyed, in consequence of his unusual intellectual powers, some educational privileges, and the Killick school−mistress well remembered his first day at the village seat of learning. Reports of what took place in this classic temple from day to day may have been wafted to the dull ears of the boy, who was not thought ready for school until he had attained the ripe age of twelve. It may even have been that specific rumors of the signs, symbols, and hieroglyphics used in educational institutions had reached him in the obscurity of his cranberry meadows. At all events, when confronted by the alphabet chart, whose huge black capitals were intended to capture the wandering eyes of the infant class, Alcestis exhibited unusual, almost unnatural, excitement. "That is 'A,' my boy," said the teacher genially, as she pointed to the first character on the chart. "Good God, is that 'A'!" cried Alcestis, sitting down heavily on the nearest bench. And neither teacher nor scholars could discover whether he was agreeably surprised or disappointed in the letter,− whether he had expected, if he ever encountered it, to find it writhing in coils on the floor of a cage, or whether it simply bore no resemblance to the ideal already established in his mind.

Mrs. Wiley had once tried to make something of Mercy, the oldest daughter of the family, but at the end of six weeks she announced that a girl who could n't tell whether the clock was going "forrards or backwards," and who rubbed a pocket−handkerchief as long as she did a sheet, would be no help in her household.

The Crambrys had daily walked the five or six miles from their home to the Edgewood bridge during the progress of the drive, not only for the social and intellectual advantages to be gained from the company present, but for the

more solid compensation of a good meal. They all adored Rose, partly because she gave them food, and partly because she was sparkling and pretty and wore pink dresses that caught their dull eyes.

The afternoon proved a lively one. In the first place, one of the younger men slipped into the water between two logs, part of a lot chained together waiting to be let out of the boom. The weight of the mass higher up and the force of the current wedged him in rather tightly, and when he had been "pried" out he declared that he felt like an apple after it had been squeezed in the cider−mill, so he drove home, and Rufus Waterman took his place.

Two hours' hard work followed this incident, and at the end of that time the "bung" that reached from the shore to Waterman's Ledge (the rock where Pretty Quick met his fate) was broken up, and the logs that composed it were started down−river. There remained now only the great side jam at Gray Rock. This had been allowed to grow, gathering logs as they drifted past, thus making higher water and a stronger current on the other side of the rock, and allowing an easier passage for the logs at that point.

All was excitement now, for, this particular piece of work accomplished, the boom above the falls would be "turned out," and the river would once more be clear and clean at the Edgewood bridge.

Small boys, perching on the rocks with their heels hanging, hands and mouths full of red Astrakhan apples, cheered their favorites to the echo, while the drivers shouted to one another and watched the signs and signals of the boss, who could communicate with them only in that way, so great was the roar of the water.

The jam refused to yield to ordinary measures. It was a difficult problem, for the rocky river−bed held many a snare and pitfall. There was a certain ledge under the water, so artfully placed that every log striking under its projecting edges would wedge itself firmly there, attracting others by its evil example.

"That galoot−boss ought to hev shoved his crew down to that jam this mornin'," grumbled Old Kennebec to Alcestis Crambry, who was always his most loyal and attentive listener. "But he would n't take no advice, not if Pharaoh nor Boaz nor Herod nor Nicodemus come right out o' the Bible an' give it to him. The logs air contrary today. Sometimes they'll go along as easy as an old shoe, an' other times they'll do nothin' but bung, bung, bung! There's a log nestlin' down in the middle o' that jam that I've be'n watchin' for a week. It's a cur'ous one, to begin with; an' then it has a mark on it that you can reco'nize it by. Did ye ever hear tell o' George the Third, King of England, Alcestis, or ain't he known over to the crambry medders? Well, once upon a time men used to go through the forests over here an' slash a mark on the trunks o' the biggest trees. That was the royal sign, as you might say, an' meant that the tree was to be taken over to England to make masts an' yard−arms for the King's ships. What made me think of it now is that the King's mark was an arrer, an' it's an arrer that's on that there log I'm showin' ye. Well, sir, I seen it fust at Milliken's Mills a Monday. It was in trouble then, an' it's be'n in trouble ever sence. That's allers the way; there'll be one pesky, crooked, contrary, consarne'd log that can't go anywheres without gittin' into difficulties. You can yank it out an' set it afloat, an' before you hardly git your doggin' iron off of it, it'll be snarled up agin in some new place. From the time it's chopped down to the day it gets to Saco, it costs the Comp'ny 'bout ten times its pesky valler as lumber. Now they've sent over to Benson's for a team of horses, an' I bate ye they can't git 'em. I wish i was the boss on this river, Alcestis."

"I wish I was," echoed the boy.

"Well, your head−fillin' ain't the right kind for a boss, Alcestis, an' you'd better stick to dry land. You set right down here while I go back a piece an' git the pipe out o' my coat pocket. I guess nothin' ain't goin' to happen for a few minutes."

The surmise about the horses, unlike most of Old Kennebec's, proved to be true. Benson's pair had gone to Portland with a load of hay; accordingly the tackle was brought, the rope was adjusted to a log, and five of the drivers, standing on the river−bank, attempted to drag it from its intrenched position. It refused to yield the

fraction of an inch. Rufus and Stephen joined the five men, and the augmented crew of seven were putting all their strength on the rope when a cry went up from the watchers on the bridge. The "dog" had loosened suddenly, and the men were flung violently to the ground. For a second they were stunned both by the surprise and by the shock of the blow, but in the same moment the cry of the crowd swelled louder. Alcestis Crambry had stolen, all unnoticed, to the rope, and had attempted to use his feeble powers for the common good. When the blow came he fell backward, and, making no effort to control the situation, slid over the bank and into the water.

The other Crambrys, not realizing the danger, laughed audibly, but there was no jeering from the bridge.

Stephen had seen Alcestis slip, and in the fraction of a moment had taken off his boots and was coasting down the slippery rocks behind him; in a twinkling he was in the water, almost as soon as the boy himself.

"Doggoned idjut!" exclaimed Old Kennebec, tearfully. "Wuth the hull fool−family! If I hed n't 'a' be'n so old, I'd 'a' jumped in myself, for you can't drownd a Wiley, not without you tie nail−kags to their head an' feet an' drop 'em in the falls."

Alcestis, who had neither brains, courage, nor experience, had, better still, the luck that follows the witless. He was carried swiftly down the current; but, only fifty feet away, a long, slender log, wedged between two low rocks on the shore, jutted out over the water, almost touching its surface. The boy's clothes were admirably adapted to the situation, being full of enormous rents. In some way the end of the log caught in the rags of Alcestis's coat and held him just seconds enough to enable Stephen to swim to him, to seize him by the nape of the neck, to lift him on the log, and thence to the shore. It was a particularly bad place for a landing, and there was nothing to do but to lower ropes and drag the drenched men to the high ground above.

Alcestis came to his senses in ten or fifteen minutes, and seemed as bright as usual, with a kind of added swagger at being the central figure in a dramatic situation.

"I wonder you hed n't stove your brains out, when you landed so turrible suddent on that rock at the foot of the bank," said Mr. Wiley to him.

"I should, but I took good care to light on my head," responded Alcestis; a cryptic remark which so puzzled Old Kennebec that he mused over it for some hours.

VI. Hearts And Other Hearts

Stephen had brought a change of clothes, as he had a habit of being ducked once at least during the day; and since there was a halt in the proceedings and no need of his services for an hour or two, he found Rose and walked with her to a secluded spot where they could watch the logs and not be seen by the people.

"You frightened everybody almost to death, jumping into the river," chided Rose.

Stephen laughed. "They thought I was a fool to save a fool, I suppose."

"Perhaps not as bad as that, but it did seem reckless."

"I know; and the boy, no doubt, would be better off dead; but so should I be, if I could have let him die."

Rose regarded this strange point of view for a moment, and then silently acquiesced in it. She was constantly doing this, and she often felt that her mental horizon broadened in the act; but she could not be sure that Stephen grew any dearer to her because of his moral altitudes.

"Besides," Stephen argued, "I happened to be nearest to the river, and it was my job."

"How do you always happen to be nearest to the people in trouble, and why is it always your 'job'?"

"If there are any rewards for good conduct being distributed, I'm right in line with my hand stretched out," Stephen replied, with meaning in his voice.

Rose blushed under her flowery hat as he led the way to a bench under a sycamore tree that overhung the water.

She had almost convinced herself that she was as much in love with Stephen Waterman as it was in her nature to be with anybody. He was handsome in his big way, kind, generous, temperate, well educated, and well−to−do. No fault could be found with his family, for his mother had been a teacher, and his father, though a farmer, a college graduate. Stephen himself had had one year at Bowdoin, but had been recalled, as the head of the house, when his father died. That was a severe blow; but his mother's death, three years after, was a grief never to be quite forgotten. Rose, too, was the child of a gently bred mother, and all her instincts were refined. Yes; Stephen in himself satisfied her in all the larger wants of her nature, but she had an unsatisfied hunger for the world,−−the world of Portland, where her cousins lived; or, better still, the world of Boston, of which she heard through Mrs. Wealthy Brooks, whose nephew Claude often came to visit her in Edgewood. Life on a farm a mile and a half distant from post−office and stores; life in the house with Rufus, who was rumored to be somewhat wild and unsteady,−−this prospect seemed a trifle dull and uneventful to the trivial part of her, though to the better part it was enough. The better part of her loved Stephen Waterman, dimly feeling the richness of his nature, the tenderness of his affection, the strength of his character. Rose was not destitute either of imagination or sentiment. She did not relish this constant weighing of Stephen in the balance: he was too good to be weighed and considered. She longed to be carried out of herself on a wave of rapturous assent, but something seemed to hold her back,−−some seed of discontent with the man's environment and circumstances, some germ of longing for a gayer, brighter, more varied life. No amount of self−searching or argument could change the situation. She always loved Stephen more or less: more when he was away from her, because she never approved his collars nor the set of his shirt bosom; and as he naturally wore these despised articles of apparel whenever he proposed to her, she was always lukewarm about marrying him and settling down on the River Farm. Still, today she discovered in herself, with positive gratitude, a warmer feeling for him than she had experienced before. He wore a new and becoming gray flannel shirt, with the soft turn−over collar that belonged to it, and a blue tie, the color of his kind eyes. She knew that he had shaved his beard at her request not long ago, and that when she did not like the effect as much as she had hoped, he had meekly grown a mustache for her sake; it did seem as if a man could hardly do more to please an exacting ladylove.

And she had admired him unreservedly when he pulled off his boots and jumped into the river to save Alcestis Crambry's life, without giving a single thought to his own.

And was there ever, after all, such a noble, devoted, unselfish fellow, or a better brother? And would she not despise herself for rejecting him simply because he was countrified, and because she longed to see the world of the fashion plates in the magazines?

"The logs are so like people!" she exclaimed as they sat down. "I could name nearly every one of them for somebody in the village. Look at Mite Shapley, that dancing little one, slipping over the falls and skimming along the top of the water, keeping out of all the deep places, and never once touching the rocks."

Stephen fell into her mood. "There's Squire Anderson coming down crosswise and bumping everything in reach. You know he's always buying lumber and logs without knowing what he is going to do with them. They just lie and rot by the roadside. The boys always say that a toadstool is the old Squire's 'mark' on a log."

"And that stout, clumsy one is Short Dennett.−−What are you doing, Stephen?"

"Only building a fence round this clump of harebells," Stephen replied. "They've just got well rooted, and if the boys come skidding down the bank with their spiked shoes, the poor things will never hold up their heads again. Now they're safe.−−Oh, look, Rose! There come the minister and his wife!"

A portly couple of peeled logs, exactly matched in size, came ponderously over the falls together, rose within a second of each other, joined again, and swept under the bridge side by side.

"And−−oh! oh!−−Dr. and Mrs. Cram just after them! Isn't that funny?" laughed Rose, as a very long, slender pair of pines swam down, as close to each other as if they had been glued in that position. Rose thought, as she watched them, who but Stephen would have cared what became of the clump of delicate harebells. How gentle such a man would be to a woman! How tender his touch would be if she were ill or in trouble!

Several single logs followed,−−crooked ones, stolid ones, adventurous ones, feeble swimmers, deep divers. Some of them tried to start a small jam on their own account; others stranded themselves for good and all, as Rose and Stephen sat there side by side, with little Dan Cupid for an invisible third on the bench.

"There never was anything so like people," Rose repeated, leaning forward excitedly. "And, upon my word, the minister and doctor couples are still together. I wonder if they'll get as far as the fails at Union? That would be an odd place to part, would n't it−−Union?"

Stephen saw his opportunity, and seized it.

"There's a reason, Rose, why two logs go downstream better than one, and get into less trouble. They make a wider path, create more force and a better current. It's the same way with men and women. Oh, Rose, there is n't a man in the world that's loved you as long, or knows how to love you any better than I do. You're just like a white birch sapling, and I'm a great, clumsy fir tree; but if you 'll only trust yourself to me, Rose, I'll take you safely down− river."

Stephen's big hand closed on Rose's little one; she returned its pressure softly and gave him the kiss that with her, as with him, meant a promise for all the years to come. The truth and passion in the man had broken the girl's bonds for the moment. Her vision was clearer, and, realizing the treasures of love and fidelity that were being offered her, she accepted them, half unconscious that she was not returning them in kind. How is the belle of two villages to learn that she should "thank Heaven, fasting, for a good man's love"?

And Stephen? He went home in the dusk, not knowing whether his feet were touching the solid earth or whether he was treading upon rainbows.

Rose's pink calico seemed to brush him as he walked in the path that was wide enough only for one. His solitude was peopled again when he fed the cattle, for Rose's face smiled at him from the haymow; and when he strained the milk, Rose held the pans.

His nightly tasks over, he went out and took his favorite seat under the apple tree. All was still, save for the crickets' ceaseless chirp, the soft thud of an August sweeting dropping in the grass, and the swish−swash of the water against his boat, tethered in the Willow Cove.

He remembered when he first saw Rose, for that must have been when he began to love her, though he was only fourteen and quite unconscious that the first seed had been dropped in the rich soil of his boyish heart.

He was seated on the kerosene barrel in the Edgewood post−office, which was also the general country store, where newspapers, letters, molasses, nails, salt codfish, hairpins, sugar, liver pills, canned goods, beans, and ginghams dwelt in genial proximity. When she entered, just a little pink−and−white slip of a thing with a tin pail

in her hand and a sunbonnet falling off her wavy hair, Stephen suddenly stopped swinging his feet. She gravely announced her wants, reading them from a bit of paper,−−1 quart molasses, 1 package ginger, 1 lb. cheese, 2 pairs shoe laces, 1 card shirt buttons.

While the storekeeper drew off the molasses she exchanged shy looks with Stephen, who, clean, well−dressed, and carefully mothered as he was, felt all at once uncouth and awkward, rather as if he were some clumsy lout pitch− forked into the presence of a fairy queen. He offered her the little bunch of bachelor's buttons he held in his hand, augury of the future, had he known it,−−and she accepted them with a smile. She dropped her memorandum; he picked it up, and she smiled again, doing still more fatal damage than in the first instance. No words were spoken, but Rose, even at ten, had less need of them than most of her sex, for her dimples, aided by dancing eyes, length of lashes, and curve of lips, quite took the place of conversation. The dimples tempted, assented, denied, corroborated, deplored, protested, sympathized, while the intoxicated beholder cudgeled his brain for words or deeds which should provoke and evoke more and more dimples.

The storekeeper hung the molasses pail over Rose's right arm and tucked the packages under her left, and as he opened the mosquito−netting door to let her pass out she looked back at Stephen, perched on the kerosene barrel, just a little girl, a little glance, a little dimple, and Stephen was never quite the same again. The years went on, and the boy became man, yet no other image had ever troubled the deep, placid waters of his heart. Now, after many denials, the hopes and longings of his nature had been answered, and Rose had promised to marry him. He would sacrifice his passion for logging and driving in the future, and become a staid farmer and man of affairs, only giving himself a river holiday now and then. How still and peaceful it was under the trees, and how glad his mother would be to think that the old farm would wake from its sleep, and a woman's light foot be heard in the sunny kitchen!

Heaven was full of silent stars, and there was a moonglade on the water that stretched almost from him to Rose. His heart embarked on that golden pathway and sailed on it to the farther shore. The river was free of logs, and under the light of the moon it shone like a silver mirror. The soft wind among the fir branches breathed Rose's name; the river, rippling against the shore, sang "Rose "; and as Stephen sat there dreaming of the future, his dreams, too, could have been voiced in one word, and that word "Rose."

VII. The Little House

The autumn days flew past like shuttles in a loom. The river reflected the yellow foliage of the white birch and the scarlet of the maples. The wayside was bright with goldenrod, with the red tassels of the sumac, with the purple frost−flower and feathery clematis.

If Rose was not as happy as Stephen, she was quietly content, and felt that she had more to be grateful for than most girls, for Stephen surprised her with first one evidence and then another of thoughtful generosity. In his heart of hearts he felt that Rose was not wholly his, that she reserved, withheld something; and it was the subjugation of this rebellious province that he sought. He and Rose had agreed to wait a year for their marriage, in which time Rose's cousin would finish school and be ready to live with the old people; meanwhile Stephen had learned that his maiden aunt would be glad to come and keep house for Rufus. The work at the River Farm was too hard for a girl, so he had persuaded himself of late, and the house was so far from the village that Rose was sure to be lonely. He owned a couple of acres between his place and the Edgewood bridge, and here, one afternoon only a month after their engagement, he took Rose to see the foundations of a little house he was building for her. It was to be only a story−and−a−half cottage of six small rooms, the two upper chambers to be finished off later on. Stephen had placed it well back from the road, leaving space in front for what was to be a most wonderful arrangement of flower−beds, yet keeping a strip at the back, on the river−brink, for a small vegetable garden. There had been a house there years before−so many years that the blackened ruins were entirely overgrown; but a few elms and an old apple−orchard remained to shade the new dwelling and give welcome to the coming inmates.

Stephen had fifteen hundred dollars in bank, he could turn his hand to almost anything, and his love was so deep that Rose's plumb−line had never sounded bottom; accordingly he was able, with the help of two steady workers, to have the roof on before the first of November. The weather was clear and fine, and by Thanksgiving clapboards, shingles, two coats of brown paint, and even the blinds had all been added. This exhibition of reckless energy on Stephen's part did not wholly commend itself to the neighborhood.

"Steve's too turrible spry," said Rose's grandfather; "he'll trip himself up some o' these times."

"_You_ never will," remarked his better half, sagely.

"The resks in life come along fast enough, without runnin' to meet 'em," continued the old man. "There's good dough in Rose, but it ain't more'n half riz. Let somebody come along an' drop in a little more yeast, or set the dish a little mite nearer the stove, an' you'll see what 'll happen."

"Steve's kept house for himself some time, an' I guess he knows more about bread−makin' than you do."

"There don't nobody know more'n I do about nothin', when my pipe's drawin' real good an' nobody's thornin' me to go to work," replied Mr. Wiley; "but nobody's willin' to take the advice of a man that's seen the world an' lived in large places, an' the risin' generation is in a turrible hurry. I don' know how 't is: young folks air allers settin' the clock forrard an' the old ones puttin' it back."

"Did you ketch anything for dinner when you was out this mornin'?" asked his wife.

"No, I fished an' fished, till I was about ready to drop, an' I did git a few shiners, but land, they wa'n't as big as the worms I was ketchin' 'em with, so i pitched 'em back in the water an' quit."

During the progress of these remarks Mr. Wiley opened the door under the sink, and from beneath a huge iron pot drew a round tray loaded with a glass pitcher and half a dozen tumblers, which he placed carefully on the kitchen table. "This is the last day's option I've got on this lemonade−set," he said, "an' if I'm goin' to Biddeford tomorrer I've got to make up my mind here an' now."

With this observation he took off his shoes, climbed in his stocking feet to the vantage ground of a kitchen chair, and lifted a stone china pitcher from a corner of the highest cup−board shelf where it had been hidden. "This lemonade's gittin' kind o' dusty," he complained. "I cal'lated to hev a kind of a spree on it when I got through choosin' Rose's weddin' present, but I guess the pig 'll hev to help me out." The old man filled one of the glasses from the pitcher, pulled up the kitchen shades to the top, put both hands in his pockets, and walked solemnly round the table, gazing at his offering from every possible point of view. There had been three lemonade−sets in the window of a Biddeford crockery store when Mr. Wiley chanced to pass by, and he had brought home the blue and green one on approval. To th': casual cyc it would have appeared as quite uniquely hideous until the red and yellow or the purple and orange ones had been seen; after that, no human being could have made a decision, where each was so unparalleled in its ugliness, and Old Kennebec's confusion of mind would have been perfectly understood by the connoisseur.

"How do you like it with the lemonade in, mother?" he inquired eagerly. "The thing that plagues me most is that the red an' yaller one I hed home last week lights up better'n this, an' I believe I'll settle on that; for as I was thinkin' last night in bed, lemonade is mostly an evenin' drink an' Rose won't be usin' the set much by daylight. Root beer looks the han'somest in this purple set, but Rose loves lemonade better'n beer, so I guess I'll pack up this one an' change it tomorrer. Mebbe when I get it out o' sight an' give the lemonade to the pig I'll be easier in my mind."

In the opinion of the community at large Stephen's forehandedness in the matter of preparations for his marriage was imprudence, and his desire for neatness and beauty flagrant extravagance. The house itself was a foolish idea, it was thought, but there were extenuating circumstances, for the maiden aunt really needed a home, and Rufus was likely to marry before long and take his wife to the River Farm. It was to be hoped in his case that he would avoid the snares of beauty and choose a good stout girl who would bring the dairy back to what it was in Mrs. Waterman's time.

All winter long Stephen labored on the inside of the cottage, mostly by himself. He learned all trades in succession, Love being his only master. He had many odd days to spare from his farm work, and if he had not found days he would have taken nights. Scarcely a nail was driven without Rose's advice; and when the plastering was hard and dry, the wallpapers were the result of weeks of consultation.

Among the quiet joys of life there is probably no other so deep, so sweet, so full of trembling hope and delight, as the building and making of a home,−−a home where two lives are to be merged in one and flow on together, a home full of mysterious and delicious possibilities, hidden in a future which is always rose−colored.

Rose's sweet little nature broadened under Stephen's influence; but she had her moments of discontent and unrest, always followed quickly by remorse.

At the Thanksgiving sociable some one had observed her turquoise engagement ring,−−some one who said that such a hand was worthy of a diamond, that turquoises were a pretty color, but that there was only one stone for an engagement ring, and that was a diamond. At the Christmas dance the same some one had said that her waltzing would make her "all the rage" in Boston. She wondered if it were true, and wondered whether, if she had not promised to marry Stephen, some splendid being from a city would have descended from his heights, bearing diamonds in his hand. Not that she would have accepted them; she only wondered. These disloyal thoughts came seldom, and she put them resolutely away, devoting herself with all the greater assiduity to her muslin curtains and ruffled pillow−shams. Stephen, too, had his momentary pangs. There were times when he could calm his doubts only by working on the little house. The mere sight of the beloved floors and walls and ceilings comforted his heart, and brought him good cheer.

The winter was a cold one, so bitterly cold that even the rapid water at the Gray Rock was a mass of curdled yellow ice, something that had only occurred once or twice before within the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

It was also a very gay season for Pleasant River and Edgewood. Never had there been so many card−parties, sleigh−rides, and tavern dances, and never such wonderful skating. The river was one gleaming, glittering thoroughfare of ice from Milliken's Mills to the dam at the Edgewood bridge. At sundown bonfires were built here and there on the mirror−like surface, and all the young people from the neighboring villages gathered on the ice; while detachments of merry, rosy−cheeked boys and girls, those who preferred coasting, met at the top of Brigadier Hill, from which one could get a longer and more perilous slide than from any other point in the township.

Claude Merrill, in his occasional visits from Boston, was very much in evidence at the Saturday evening ice parties. He was not an artist at the sport himself, but he was especially proficient in the art of strapping on a lady's skates, and murmuring,−−as he adjusted the last buckle,−−"The prettiest foot and ankle on the river!" It cannot be denied that this compliment gave secret pleasure to the fair village maidens who received it, but it was a pleasure accompanied by electric shocks of excitement. A girl's foot might perhaps be mentioned, if a fellow were daring enough, but the line was rigidly drawn at the ankle, which was not a part of the human frame ever alluded to in the polite society of Edgewood at that time.

Rose, in her red linsey−woolsey dress and her squirrel furs and cap, was the life of every gathering, and when Stephen took her hand and they glided upstream, alone together in the crowd, he used to wish that they might

skate on and on up the crystal ice−path of the river, to the moon itself, whither it seemed to lead them.

VIII. The Garden of Eden

But the Saco all this time was meditating one of its surprises. The snapping cold weather and the depth to which the water was frozen were aiding it in its preparation for the greatest event of the season. On a certain gray Saturday in March, after a week of mild temperature, it began to rain as if, after months of snowing, it really enjoyed a new form of entertainment. Sunday dawned with the very flood−gates of heaven opening, so it seemed. All day long the river was rising under its miles of unbroken ice, rising at the threatening rate of four inches an hour.

Edgewood went to bed as usual that night, for the bridge at that point was set too high to be carried away by freshets, but at other villages whose bridges were in less secure position there was little sleep and much anxiety.

At midnight a cry was heard from the men watching at Milliken's Mills. The great ice jam had parted from Rolfe's Island and was swinging out into the open, pushing everything before it. All the able−bodied men in the village turned out of bed, and with lanterns in hand began to clear the stores and mills, for it seemed that everything near the river−banks must go before that avalanche of ice.

Stephen and Rufus were there helping to save the property of their friends and neighbors; Rose and Mite Shapley had stayed the night with a friend, and all three girls were shivering with fear and excitement as they stood near the bridge, watching the never−to−be−forgotten sight. It is needless to say that the Crambry family was on hand, for whatever instincts they may have lacked, the instinct for being on the spot when anything was happening, was present in them to the most remarkable extent. The town was supporting them in modest winter quarters somewhat nearer than Killick to the center of civilization, and the first alarm brought them promptly to the scene, Mrs. Crambry remarking at intervals: "If I'd known there'd be so many out I'd ought to have worn my bunnit; but I ain't got no bunnit, an' if I had they say I ain't got no head to wear it on!"

By the time the jam neared the falls it had grown with its accumulations, until it was made up of tier after tier of huge ice cakes, piled side by side and one upon another, with heaps of trees and branches and drifting lumber holding them in place. Some of the blocks stood erect and towered like icebergs, and these, glittering in the lights of the twinkling lanterns, pushed solemnly forward, cracking, crushing, and cutting everything in their way. When the great mass neared the planing mill on the east shore the girls covered their eyes, expecting to hear the crash of the falling building; but, impelled by the force of some mysterious current, it shook itself ponderously, and then, with one magnificent movement, slid up the river−bank, tier following tier in grand confusion. This left a water way for the main drift; the ice broke in every direction, and down, down, down, from Bonnie Eagle and Moderation swept the harvest of the winter freezing. It came thundering over the dam, bringing boats, farming implements, posts, supports, and every sort of floating lumber with it; and cutting under the flour mill, tipped it cleverly over on its side and went crashing on its way down−river. At Edgewood it pushed colossal blocks of ice up the banks into the roadway, piling them end upon end ten feet in air. Then, tearing and rumbling and booming through the narrows, it covered the intervale at Pleasant Point and made a huge ice bridge below Union Falls, a bridge so solid that it stood there for days, a sight for all the neighboring villages.

This exciting event wonhi haxe forever set apart this winter from ail others in Stephen's memory, even had it not been also the winter when he was building a house for his future wife. But afterwards, in looking back on the wild night of the ice freshet, Stephen remembered that Rose's manner was strained and cold and evasive, and that when he had seen her talking with Claude Merrill, it had seemed to him that that whippersnapper had looked at her as no honorable man in Edgewood ever looked at an engaged girl. He recalled his throb of gratitude that Claude lived at a safe distance, and his subsequent pang of remorse at doubting, for an instant, Rose's fidelity.

So at length April came, the Saco was still high, turbid, and angry, and the boys were waiting at Limington Falls for the "Ossipee drive" to begin. Stephen joined them there, for he was restless, and the river called him, as it did every spring. Each stubborn log that he encountered gave him new courage and power of overcoming. The rush of the water, the noise and roar and dash, the exposure and danger, all made the blood run in his veins like new wine. When he came back to the farm, all the cobwebs had been blown from his brain, and his first interview with Rose was so intoxicating that he went immediately to Portland, and bought, in a kind of secret penitence for his former fears, a pale pink−flowered wall−paper for the bedroom in the new home. It had once been voted down by the entire advisory committee. Mrs. Wiley said that pink was foolish and was always sure to fade; and the border, being a mass of solid roses, was five cents a yard, virtually a prohibitive price. Mr. Wiley said he "should hate to hev a spell of sickness an' lay abed in a room where there was things growin' all over the place." He thought "rough−plastered walls, where you could lay an' count the spots where the roof leaked, was the most entertainin' in sickness." Rose had longed for the lovely pattern, but had sided dutifully with the prudent majority, so that it was with a feeling of unauthorized and illegitimate joy that Stephen papered the room at night, a few strips at a time.

On the third evening, when he had removed all signs of his work, he lighted two kerosene lamps and two candles, finding the effect, under this illumination, almost too brilliant and beautiful for belief. Rose should never see it now, he determined, until the furniture was in place. They had already chosen the kitchen and bedroom things, though they would not be needed for some months; but the rest was to wait until summer, when there would be the hay−money to spend.

Stephen did not go back to the River Farm till one o'clock that night; the pink bedroom held him in fetters too powerful to break. It looked like the garden of Eden, he thought. To be sure, it was only fifteen feet square; Eden might have been a little larger, possibly, but otherwise the pink bedroom had every advantage. The pattern of roses growing on a trellis was brighter than any flower−bed in June; and the border−−well, if the border had been five dollars a foot Stephen would not have grudged the money when he saw the twenty running yards of rosy bloom rioting under the white ceiling.

Before he blew out the last light he raised it high above his head and took one fond, final look. "It's the only place I ever saw," he thought, "that is pretty enough for her. She will look just as if she was growing here with all the other flowers, and I shall always think of it as the garden of Eden. I wonder, if I got the license and the ring and took her by surprise, whether she'd be married in June instead of August? I could be all ready if I could only persuade her."

At this moment Stephen touched the summit of happiness; and it is a curious coincidence that as he was dreaming in his garden of Eden, the serpent, having just arrived at Edgewood, was sleeping peacefully at the house of Mrs. Brooks.

It was the serpent's fourth visit that season, and he explained to inquiring friends that his former employer had sold the business, and that the new management, while reorganizing, had determined to enlarge the premises, the three clerks who had been retained having two weeks' vacation with half pay.

It is extraordinary how frequently "wise serpents" are retained by the management on half, or even full, salary, while the services of the "harmless doves" are dispensed with, and they are set free to flutter where they will.

IX. The Serpent

Rose Wiley had the brightest eyes in Edgewood. It was impossible to look at her without realizing that her physical sight was perfect. What mysterious species of blindness is it that descends, now and then, upon human creatures, and renders them incapable of judgment or discrimination?

Claude Merrill was a glove salesman in a Boston fancy−goods store. The calling itself is undoubtedly respectable, and it is quite conceivable that a man can sell gloves and still be a man; but Claude Merrill was a manikin. He inhabited a very narrow space behind a very short counter, but to him it seemed the earth and the fullness thereof.

When, irreproachably neat and even exquisite in dress, he gave a Napoleonic glance at his array of glove−boxes to see if the female assistant had put them in proper order for the day, when, with that wonderful eye for detail that had wafted him to his present height of power, he pounced upon the powder−sprinklers and found them, as he expected, empty; when, with masterly judgment, he had made up and ticketed a basket of misfits and odd sizes to attract the eyes of women who were their human counterparts, he felt himself bursting with the pride and pomp of circumstance. His cambric handkerchief adjusted in his coat with the monogram corner well displayed, a last touch to the carefully trained lock on his forehead, and he was ready for his customers.

"Six, did you say, miss? I should have thought five and three quarters−− Attend to that gentleman, Miss Dix, please; I am very busy."

"Six−and−a−half gray sue'de? Here they are, an exquisite shade. Shall I try them on? The right hand, if you will. Perhaps you'd better remove your elegant ring; I should n't like to have anything catch in the setting."

"Miss Dix! Six−and−a−half black glace'−−upper shelf, third box−−for this lady. She's in a hurry. We shall see you often after this, I hope, madam."

"No; we don't keep silk or lisle gloves. We have no call for them; our customers prefer kid."

Oh, but he was in his element, was Claude Merrill; though the glamour that surrounded him in the minds of the Edgewood girls did not emanate wholly from his finicky little person: something of it was the glamour that belonged to Boston,−−remote, fashionable, gay, rich, almost inaccessible Boston, which none could see without the expenditure of five or six dollars in railway fare, with the added extravagance of a night in a hotel, if one would explore it thoroughly and come home possessed of all its illimitable treasures of wisdom and experience.

When Claude came to Edgewood for a Sunday, or to spend a vacation with his aunt, he brought with him something of the magic of a metropolis. Suddenly, to Rose's eye, Stephen looked larger and clumsier, his shoes were not the proper sort, his clothes were ordinary, his neckties were years behind the fashion. Stephen's dancing, compared with Claude's, was as the deliberate motion of an ox to the hopping of a neat little robin. When Claude took a girl's hand in the "grand right−and−left," it was as if he were about to try on a delicate glove; the manner in which he "held his lady" in the polka or schottische made her seem a queen. Mite Shapley was so affected by it that when Rufus attempted to encircle her for the mazurka she exclaimed, "Don't act as if you were spearing logs, Rufus!"

Of the two men, Stephen had more to say, but Claude said more. He was thought brilliant in conversation; but what wonder, when one considered his advantages and his dazzling experiences! He had customers who were worth their thousands; ladies whose fingers never touched dish−water; ladies who would n't buy a glove of anybody else if they went bare−handed to the grave. He lived with his sister Maude Arthurlena in a house where there were twenty−two other boarders who could be seated at meals all at the same time, so immense was the dining−room. He ate his dinner at a restaurant daily, and expended twenty−five cents for it without blenching. He went to the theater once a week, and was often accompanied by "lady friends" who were "elegant dressers."

In a moment of wrath Stephen had called him a "counter−jumper," but it was a libel. So short and rough a means of exit from his place of power was wholly beneath Claude's dignity. It was with a" Pardon me, Miss Dix," that, the noon hour having arrived, he squeezed by that slave and victim, and raising the hinged board that separated his kingdom from that of the ribbon department, passed out of the store, hat in hand, serene in the consciousness that though other clerks might nibble luncheon from a brown paper bag, he would speedily be indulging in an

expensive repast; and Miss Dix knew it, and it was a part of his almost invincible attraction for her.

It seemed flying in the face of Providence to decline the attentions of such a gorgeous butterfly of fashion simply because one was engaged to marry another man at some distant day.

All Edgewood femininity united in saying that there never was such a perfect gentleman as Claude Merrill; and during the time when his popularity was at its height Rose lost sight of the fact that Stephen could have furnished the stuff for a dozen Claudes and have had enough left for an ordinary man besides.

April gave place to May, and a veil hung between the lovers,−−an intangible, gossamer−like thing, not to be seen with the naked eye, but, oh! so plainly to be felt. Rose hid herself thankfully behind it, while Stephen had not courage to lift a corner. She had twice been seen driving with Claude Merrill−−that Stephen knew; but she had explained that there were errands to be done, that her grandfather had taken the horse, and that Mr. Merrill's escort had been both opportune and convenient for these practical reasons. Claude was everywhere present, the center of attraction, the observed of all observers. He was irresistible, contagious, almost epidemic. Rose was now gay, now silent; now affectionate, now distant, now coquettish; in fine, everything that was capricious, mysterious, agitating, incomprehensible.

One morning Alcestis Crambry went to the post−office for Stephen and brought him back the newspapers and letters. He had hung about the River Farm so much that Stephen finally gave him bed and food in exchange for numberless small errands. Rufus was temporarily confined in a dark room with some strange pain and trouble in his eyes, and Alcestis proved of use in many ways. He had always been Rose's slave, and had often brought messages and notes from the Brier Neighborhood, so that when Stephen saw a folded note among the papers his heart gave a throb of anticipation.

The note was brief, and when he had glanced through it he said: "This is not mine, Alcestis; it belongs to Miss Rose. Go straight back and give it to her as you were told; and another time keep your wits about you, or I'll send you back to Killick."

Alcestis Crambry's ideas on all subjects were extremely vague. Claude Merrill had given him a letter for Rose, but his notion was that anything that belonged to her belonged to Stephen, and the Waterman place was much nearer than the Wileys', particularly at dinner−time!

When the boy had slouched away, Stephen sat under the apple tree, now a mass of roseate bloom, and buried his face in his hands.

It was not precisely a love−letter that he had read, nevertheless it blackened the light of the sun for him. Claude asked Rose to meet him anywhere on the road to the station and to take a little walk, as he was leaving that afternoon and could not bear to say good−bye to her in the presence of her grandmother. "_Under_the_circumstances_," he wrote, deeply underlining the words, "I cannot remain a moment longer in Edgewood, where I have been so happy and so miserable!" He did not refer to the fact that the time limit on his return−ticket expired that day, for his dramatic instinct told him that such sordid matters have no place in heroics.

Stephen sat motionless under the tree for an hour, deciding on some plan of action. He had work at the little house, but he did not dare go there lest he should see the face of dead Love looking from the windows of the pink bedroom; dead Love, cold, sad, merciless. His cheeks burned as he thought of the marriage license and the gold ring hidden away upstairs in the drawer of his shaving stand. What a romantic fool he had been, to think he could hasten the glad day by a single moment! What a piece of boyish folly it had been, and how it shamed him in his own eyes!

When train time drew near he took his boat and paddled downstream. If for the Finland lover's reindeer there was but one path in all the world, and that the one that led to Her, so it was for Stephen's canoe, which, had it been set free on the river by day or by night, might have floated straight to Rose.

He landed at the usual place, a bit of sandy shore near the Wiley house, and walked drearily up the bank through the woods. Under the shade of the pines the white stars of the hepatica glistened and the pale anemones were coming into bloom. Partridge−berries glowed red under their glossy leaves, and clumps of violets sweetened the air. Squirrels chattered, woodpeckers tapped, thrushes sang; but Stephen was blind and deaf to all the sweet harbingers of spring.

Just then he heard voices, realizing with a throb of delight that, at any rate, Rose had not left home to meet Claude, as he had asked her to do. Looking through the branches, he saw the two standing together, Mrs. Brooks's horse, with the offensive trunk in the back of the wagon, being hitched to a tree near by. There was nothing in the tableau to stir Stephen to fury, but he read between the lines and suffered as he read−−suffered and determined to sacrifice himself if he must, so that Rose could have what she wanted, this miserable apology for a man. He had never been the husband for Rose; she must take her place in a larger community, worthy of her beauty and charm.

Claude was talking and gesticulating ardently. Rose's head was bent and the tears were rolling down her cheeks. Suddenly Claude raised his hat, and with a passionate gesture of renunciation walked swiftly to the wagon, and looking back once, drove off with the utmost speed of which the Brooks's horse was capable,−−Rose waving him a farewell with one hand and wiping her eyes with the other.

X. The Turquoise Ring

Stephen stood absolutely still in front of the opening in the trees, and as Rose turned she met him face to face. She had never dreamed his eyes could be so stern, his mouth so hard, and she gave a sob like a child.

"You seem to be in trouble," Stephen said in a voice so cold she thought it could not be his.

"I am not in trouble, exactly," Rose stammered, concealing her discomfiture as well as possible. "I am a little unhappy because I have made some one else unhappy; and now that you know it, you will be unhappy too, and angry besides, I suppose, though you've seen everything there was to see."

"There is no occasion for sorrow," Stephen said. "I did n't mean to break in on any interview; I came over to give you back your freedom. If you ever cared enough for me to marry me, the time has gone by. I am willing to own that I over−persuaded you, but I am not the man to take a girl against her inclinations, so we will say good−bye and end the thing here and now. I can only wish"−−here his smothered rage at fate almost choked him− "that, when you were selecting another husband, you had chosen a whole man!"

Rose quivered with the scorn of his tone. "Size is n't everything!" she blazed.

"Not in bodies, perhaps; but it counts for something in hearts and brains, and it is convenient to have a sense of honor that's at least as big as a grain of mustard−seed."

"Claude Merrill is not dishonorable," Rose exclaimed impetuously; "or at least he is n't as bad as you think: he has never asked me to marry him."

"Then he probably was not quite ready to speak, or perhaps you were not quite ready to hear," retorted Stephen, bitterly; "but don't let us have words,− there'll be enough to regret without adding those. I have seen, ever since New Year's, that you were not really happy or contented; only I would n't allow it to myself; I kept hoping against

hope that I was mistaken. There have been times when I would have married you, willing or unwilling, but I did n't love you so well then; and now that there's another man in the case, it's different, and I'm strong enough to do the right thing. Follow your heart and be happy; in a year or two I shall be glad I had the grit to tell you so. Good−bye, Rose!"

Rose, pale with amazement, summoned all her pride, and drawing the turquoise engagement ring from her finger, handed it silently to Stephen, hiding her face as he flung it vehemently down the river−bank. His dull eyes followed it and half uncomprehendingly saw it settle and glisten in a nest of brown pine−needles. Then he put out his hand for a last clasp and strode away without a word.

Presently Rose heard first the scrape of his boat on the sand, then the soft sound of his paddles against the water, then nothing but the squirrels and the woodpeckers and the thrushes, then not even these,−−nothing but the beating of her own heart.

She sat down heavily, feeling as if she were wide awake for the first time in many weeks. How had things come to this pass with her?

Claude Merrill had flattered her vanity and given her some moments of restlessness and dissatisfaction with her lot; but he had not until today really touched her heart or tempted her, even momentarily, from her allegiance to Stephen. His eyes had always looked unspeakable things; his voice had seemed to breathe feelings that he had never dared put in words; but today he had really stirred her, for although he had still been vague, it was easy to see that his love for her had passed all bounds of discretion. She remembered his impassioned farewells, his despair, his doubt as to whether he could forget her by plunging into the vortex of business, or whether he had better end it all in the river, as so many other broken−hearted fellows had done. She had been touched by his misery, even against her better judgment; and she had intended to confess it all to Stephen sometime, telling him that she should never again accept attentions from a stranger, lest a tragedy like this should happen twice in a lifetime.

She had imagined that Stephen would be his large−minded, great−hearted, magnanimous self, and beg her to forget this fascinating will−o'−the−wisp by resting in his deeper, serener love. She had meant to be contrite and faithful, praying nightly that poor Claude might live down his present anguish, of which she had been the innocent cause.

Instead, what had happened? She had been put altogether in the wrong. Stephen had almost cast her off, and that, too, without argument. He had given her her liberty before she had asked for it, taking it for granted, without question, that she desired to be rid of him. Instead of comforting her in her remorse, or sympathizing with her for so nobly refusing to shine in Claude's larger world of Boston, Stephen had assumed that she was disloyal in every particular.

And pray how was she to cope with such a disagreeable and complicated situation?

It would not be long before the gossips rolled under their tongues the delicious morsel of a broken engagement, and sooner or later she must brave the displeasure of her grandmother.

And the little house−−that was worse than anything. Her tears flowed faster as she thought of Stephen's joy in it, of his faithful labor, of the savings he had invested in it. She hated and despised herself when she thought of the house, and for the first time in her life she realized the limitations of her nature, the poverty of her ideals.

What should she do? She had lost Stephen and ruined his life. Now, in order that she need not blight a second career, must she contrive to return Claude's love? To be sure, she thought, it seemed indecent to marry any other man than Stephen, when they had built a house together, and chosen wallpapers, and a kitchen stove, and

dining−room chairs; but was it not the only way to evade the difficulties?

Suppose that Stephen, in a fit of pique, should ask somebody else to share the new cottage?

As this dreadful possibility came into view, Rose's sobs actually frightened the birds and the squirrels. She paced back and forth under the trees, wondering how she could have been engaged to a man for eight months and know so little about him as she seemed to know about Stephen Waterman today. Who would have believed he could be so autocratic, so severe, SS so unapproachable? Who could have foreseen that she, Rose Wiley, would ever be given up to another man,−−handed over as coolly as if she had been a bale of cotton? She wanted to return Claude Merrill's love because it was the only way out of the tangle; but at the moment she almost hated him for making so much trouble, for hurting Stephen, for abasing her in her own eyes, and, above all, for giving her rustic lover the chance of impersonating an injured emperor.

It did not simplify the situation to have Mite Shapley come in during the evening and run upstairs, uninvited, to sit on the foot of her bed and chatter.

Rose had closed her blinds and lay in the dark, pleading a headache. Mite was in high feather. She had met Claude Merrill going to the station that afternoon. He was much too early for the train, which the station agent reported to be behind time, so he had asked her to take a drive. She did n't know how it happened, for he looked at his watch every now and then; but, anyway, they got to laughing and "carrying on," and when they came back to the station the train had gone. Was n't that the greatest joke of the season? What did Rose suppose they did next?

Rose did n't know and did n't care; her head ached too badly.

Well, they had driven to Wareham, and Claude had hired a livery team there, and had been taken into Portland with his trunk, and she had brought Mrs. Brooks's horse back to Edgewood. Was n't that ridiculous? And had n't she cut out Rose where she least expected?

Rose was distinctly apathetic, and Mite Shapley departed after a very brief call, leaving behind her an entirely new train of thought.

If Claude Merrill were so love−blighted that he could only by the greatest self−control keep from flinging himself into the river, how could he conceal his sufferings so completely from Mite Shapley,−−little shallow−pated, scheming coquette?

"So that pretty Merrill feller has gone, has he, mother?" inquired Old Kennebec that night, as he took off his wet shoes and warmed his feet at the kitchen oven. "Well, it ain't a mite too soon. I allers distrust that pink−an'−white, rosy−posy kind of a man. One of the most turrible things that ever happened in Gard'ner was brought about by jest sech a feller. Mothers hed n't hardly ought to name their boy babies Claude without they expect 'em to play the dickens with the girls. I don' know nothin' 'bout the fust Claude, there ain't none of 'em in the Bible, air they, but whoever he was, I bate ye he hed a deceivin' tongue. If it hed n't be'n for me, that Claude in Gard'ner would 'a' run away with my brother's fust wife; an' I'll tell ye jest how I contrived to put a spoke in his wheel."

But Mrs. Wiley, being already somewhat familiar with the circumstances, had taken her candle and retired to her virtuous couch.

XI. Rose Sees the World

Was this the world, after all? Rose asked herself; and, if so, what was amiss with it, and where was the charm, the bewilderment, the intoxication, the glamour?

She had been glad to come to Boston, for the last two weeks in Edgewood had proved intolerable. She had always been a favorite heretofore, from the days when the boys fought for the privilege of dragging her sled up the hills, and filling her tiny mitten with peppermints, down to the year when she came home from the Wareham Female Seminary, an acknowledged belle and beauty. Suddenly she had felt her popularity dwindling. There was no real change in the demeanor of her acquaintances, but there was a certain subtle difference of atmosphere. Everybody sympathized tacitly with Stephen, and she did not wonder, for there were times when she secretly took his part against herself. Only a few candid friends had referred to the rupture openly in conversation, but these had been blunt in their disapproval.

It seemed part of her ill fortune that just at this time Rufus should be threatened with partial blindness, and that Stephen's heart, already sore, should be torn with new anxieties. She could hardly bear to see the doctor's carriage drive by day after day, and hear night after night that Rufus was unresigned, melancholy, half mad; while Stephen, as the doctor said, was brother, mother, and father in one, as gentle as a woman, as firm as Gibraltar.

These foes to her peace of mind all came from within; but without was the hourly reproach of her grandmother, whose scorching tongue touched every sensitive spot in the girl's nature and burned it like fire.

Finally a way of escape opened. Mrs. Wealthy Brooks, who had always been rheumatic, grew suddenly worse. She had heard of a "magnetic" physician in Boston, also of one who used electricity with wonderful effect, and she announced her intention of taking both treatments impartially and alternately. The neighbors were quite willing that Wealthy Ann Brooks should spend the deceased Ezra's money in any way she pleased,−−she had earned it, goodness knows, by living with him for twenty−five years,−−but before the day for her departure arrived her right arm and knee became so much more painful that it was impossible for her to travel alone.

At this juncture Rose was called upon to act as nurse and companion in a friendly way. She seized the opportunity hungrily as a way out of her present trouble; but, knowing what Mrs. Brooks's temper was in time of health, she could see clearly what it was likely to prove when pain and anguish wrung the brow.

Rose had been in Boston now for some weeks, and she was sitting in the Joy Street boarding−house,−−Joy Street, forsooth! It was nearly bedtime, and she was looking out upon a huddle of roofs and back yards, upon a landscape filled with clothes−lines, ash−barrels, and ill−fed cats. There were no sleek country tabbies, with the memory in their eyes of tasted cream, nothing but city−born, city−bred, thin, despairing cats of the pavement, cats no more forlorn than Rose herself.

She had "seen Boston," for she had accompanied Mrs. Brooks in the horse−cars daily to the two different temples of healing where that lady worshiped and offered sacrifices. She had also gone with Maude Arthurlena to Claude Merrill's store to buy a pair of gloves, and had overheard Miss Dix (the fashionable "lady assistant" before mentioned) say to Miss Brackett of the ribbon department, that she thought Mr. Merrill must have worn his blinders that time he stayed so long in Edgewood. This bit of polished irony was unintelligible to Rose at first, but she mastered it after an hour's reflection. She was n't looking her best that day, she knew; the cotton dresses that seemed so pretty at home were common and countrified here, and her best black cashmere looked cheap and shapeless beside Miss Dix's brilliantine. Miss Dix's figure was her strong point, and her dressmaker was particularly skillful in the arts of suggestion, concealment, and revelation. Beauty has its chosen backgrounds. Rose in white dimity, standing knee deep in her blossoming brier bushes, the river running at her feet, dark pine trees behind her graceful head, sounded depths and touched heights of harmony forever beyond the reach of the modish Miss Dix, but she was out of her element and suffered accordingly.

Rose had gone to walk with Claude one evening when she first arrived. He had shown her the State House and the Park Street Church, and sat with her on one of the benches in the Common until nearly ten. She knew that Mrs. Brooks had told her nephew of the broken engagement, but he made no reference to the matter, save to congratulate her that she was rid of a man who was so clumsy, so dull and behind the times, as Stephen

Waterman, saying that he had always marveled she could engage herself to anybody who could insult her by offering her a turquoise ring.

Claude was very interesting that evening, Rose thought, but rather gloomy and unlike his former self. He referred to his grave responsibilities, to the frail health of Maude Arthurlena, and to the vicissitudes of business. He vaguely intimated that his daily life in the store was not so pleasant as it had been formerly; that there were "those" (he would speak no more plainly) who embarrassed him with undesired attentions, "those" who, without the smallest shadow of right, vexed him with petty jealousies.

Rose dared not ask questions on so delicate a topic, but she remembered in a flash Miss Dix's heavy eyebrows, snapping eyes, and high color. Claude seemed very happy that Rose had come to Boston, though he was surprised, knowing what a trial his aunt must be, now that she was so helpless. It was unfortunate, also, that Rose could not go on excursions without leaving his aunt alone, or he should have been glad to offer his escort. He pressed her hand when he left her at her door, telling her she could never realize what a comfort her friendship was to him; could never imagine how thankful he was that she had courageously freed herself from ties that in time would have made her wretched. His heart was full, he said, of feelings he dared not utter; but in the near future, when certain clouds had rolled by, he would unlock its treasures, and then−−but no more tonight: he could not trust himself.

Rose felt as if she were assuming one of the characters in a mysterious romance, such as unfolded itself only in books or in Boston; but thrilling as it was, it was nevertheless extremely unsatisfactory.

Convinced that Claude Merrill was passionately in love with her, one of her reasons for coming to Boston had been to fall more deeply in love with him, and thus heal some, at least, of the wounds she had inflicted. It may have been a foolish idea, but after three weeks it seemed still worse,−−a useless one; for after several interviews she felt herself drifting farther and farther from Claude; and if he felt any burning ambition to make her his own, he certainly concealed it with admirable art. Given up, with the most offensive magnanimity, by Stephen, and not greatly desired by Claude,−−that seemed the present status of proud Rose Wiley of the Brier Neighborhood.

It was June, she remembered, as she leaned out of the open window; at least it was June in Edgewood, and she supposed for convenience' sake they called it June in Boston. Not that it mattered much what the poor city prisoners called it. How beautiful the river would be at home, with the trees along the banks in full leaf! How she hungered and thirsted for the river,−−to see it sparkle in the sunlight; to watch the moonglade stretching from one bank to the other; to hear the soft lap of the water on the shore, and the distant murmur of the falls at the bridge! And the Brier Neighborhood would be at its loveliest, for the wild roses were in blossom by now. And the little house! How sweet it must look under the shade of the elms, with the Saco rippling at the back! Was poor Rufus still lying in a darkened room, and was Stephen nursing him, −−disappointed Stephen, dear, noble old Stephen?

XII. Gold and Pinchbeck

Just then Mrs. Brooks groaned in the next room and called Rose, who went in to minister to her real needs, or to condole with her fancied ones, whichever course of action appeared to be the more agreeable at the moment.

Mrs. Brooks desired conversation, it seemed, or at least she desired an audience for a monologue, for she recognized no antiphonal obligations on the part of her listeners. The doctors were not doing her a speck of good, and she was just squandering money in a miserable boarding−house, when she might be enjoying poor health in her own home; and she did n't believe her hens were receiving proper care, and she had forgotten to pull down the shades in the spare room, and the sun would fade the carpet out all white before she got back, and she did n't believe Dr. Smith's magnetism was any more use than a cat's foot, nor Dr. Robinson's electricity any better than a bumblebee's buzz, and she had a great mind to go home and try Dr. Lord from Bonnie Eagle; and there was a

letter for Rose on the bureau, which had come before supper, but the shiftless, lazy, worthless landlady had forgotten to send it up till just now.

The letter was from Mite Shapley, but Rose could read only half of it to Mrs. Brooks, little beside the news that the Waterman barn, the finest barn in the whole township, had been struck by lightning and burned to the ground. Stephen was away at the time, having taken Rufus to Portland, where an operation on his eyes would shortly be performed at the hospital, and one of the neighbors was sleeping at the River Farm and taking care of the cattle; still the house might not have been saved but for one of Alcestis Crambry's sudden bursts of common sense, which occurred now quite regularly. He succeeded not only in getting the horses out of the stalls, but gave the alarm so promptly that the whole neighborhood was soon on the scene of action. Stephen was the only man, Mite reminded Rose, who ever had any patience with, or took any pains to teach, Alcestis, but he never could have expected to be rewarded in this practical way. The barn was only partly insured; and when she had met Stephen at the station next day, and condoled with him on his loss, he had said: "Oh, well, Mite, a little more or less does n't make much difference just now."

"The rest would n't interest you, Mrs. Brooks," said Rose, precipitately preparing to leave the room.

"Something about Claude, I suppose," ventured that astute lady. "I think Mite kind of fancied him. I don't believe he ever gave her any real encouragement; but he'd make love to a pump, Claude Merrill would, and so would his father before him. How my sister Abby made out to land him we never knew, for they said he'd proposed to every woman in the town of Bingham, not excepting the wooden Indian girl in front of the cigar−store, and not one of 'em but our Abby ever got a chance to name the day. Abby was as set as the everlastin' hills, and if she'd made up her mind to have a man he could n't wriggle away from her nohow in the world. It beats all how girls do run after these slick−haired, sweet−tongued, Miss Nancy kind o' fellers, that ain't but little good as beaux an' worth less than nothing as husbands."

Rose scarcely noticed what Mrs. Brooks said, she was too anxious to read the rest of Mite Shapley's letter in the quiet of her own room.

> Stephen looks thin and pale [so it ran on], but he does not allow anybody to sympathize with him. I think you ought to know something that I have n't told before for fear of hurting your feelings; but if I were in your place I'd like to hear everything, and then you'll know how to act when you come home. Just after you left, Stephen ploughed up all the land in front of your new house,−−every inch of it, all up and down the road, between the fence and the front doorstep,−−and then he planted corn where you were going to have your flower−beds. He has closed all the blinds and hung a "To Let" sign on the large elm at the gate. Stephen never was spiteful in his life, but this looks a little like spite. Perhaps he only wanted to save his self−respect and let people know that everything between you was over forever. Perhaps he thought it would stop talk once and for all. But you won't mind, you lucky girl, staying nearly three months in Boston! [So Almira purled on in violet ink, with shaded letters.] How I wish it had come my way, though I'm not good at rubbing rheumatic patients, even when they are _his_ aunt. Is _he_ as devoted as ever? And when will _it_ be? How do you like the theater? Mother thinks you won't attend; but, by what he used to say, I am sure church members in Boston always go to amusements.
>
> Your loving friend,
> Almira Shapley.
>
> P.S. They say Rufus's doctor's bills here, and the operation and hospital expenses in Portland, will mount up to five hundred dollars. Of course Stephen will be dreadfully hampered by the toss of his barn, and maybe he wants to let your house that was to be, because he really needs money. In that case the dooryard won't be very attractive to tenants, with corn

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planted right up to the steps and no path left! It's two feet tall now, and
by August (just when you were intending to move in) it will hide the front
windows. Not that you'll care, with a diamond on your engagement finger!
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The letter was more than flesh and blood could stand, and Rose flung herself on her bed to think and regret and repent, and, if possible, to sob herself to sleep.

She knew now that she had never admired and respected Stephen so much as at the moment when, under the reproach of his eyes, she had given him back his ring. When she left Edgewood and parted with him forever she had really loved him better than when she had promised to marry him.

Claude Merrill, on his native Boston heath, did not appear the romantic, inspiring figure he had once been in her eyes. A week ago she distrusted him; tonight she despised him.

What had happened to Rose was the dilation of her vision. She saw things under a wider sky and in a clearer light. Above all, her heart was wrung with pity for Stephen−−Stephen, with no comforting woman's hand to help him in his sore trouble; Stephen, bearing his losses alone, his burdens and anxieties alone, his nursing and daily work alone. Oh, how she felt herself needed! Needed! that was the magic word that unlocked her better nature. "Darkness is the time for making roots and establishing plants, whether of the soil or of the soul," and all at once Rose had become a woman: a little one, perhaps, but a whole woman−−and a bit of an angel, too, with healing in her wings. When and how had this metamorphosis come about? Last summer the fragile brier−rose had hung over the river and looked at its pretty reflection in the placid surface of the water. Its few buds and blossoms were so lovely, it sighed for nothing more. The changes in the plant had been wrought secretly and silently. In some mysterious way, as common to soul as to plant life, the roots had gathered in more nourishment from the earth, they had stored up strength and force, and all at once there was a marvelous fructifying of the plant, hardiness of stalk, new shoots everywhere, vigorous leafage, and a shower of blossoms.

But everything was awry: Boston was a failure; Claude was a weakling and a flirt; her turquoise ring was lying on the river−bank; Stephen did not love her any longer; her flower−beds were ploughed up and planted in corn; and the cottage that Stephen had built and she had furnished, that beloved cottage, was to let.

She was in Boston; but what did that amount to, after all? What was the State House to a bleeding heart, or the Old South Church to a pride wounded like hers?

At last she fell asleep, but it was only by stopping her ears to the noises of the city streets and making herself imagine the sound of the river rippling under her bedroom windows at home. The backyards of Boston faded, and in their place came the banks of the Saco, strewn with pine−needles, fragrant with wild flowers. Then there was the bit of sunny beach, where Stephen moored his boat. She could hear the sound of his paddle. Boston lovers came a−courting in the horse−cars, but hers had floated downstream to her just at dusk in a birch− bark canoe, or sometimes, in the moonlight, on a couple of logs rafted together.

But it was all over now, and she could see only Stephen's stern face as he flung the despised turquoise ring down the river−bank.

XIII. A Country Chevalier

it was early in August when Mrs. Wealthy Brooks announced her speedy return from Boston to Edgewood.

"It's jest as well Rose is comin' back," said Mr. Wiley to his wife. "I never favored her goin' to Boston, where that rosy−posy Claude feller is. When he was down here he was kep' kind o' tied up in a box−stall, but there he's caperin' loose round the pastur'."

"I should think Rose would be ashamed to come back, after the way she's carried on," remarked Mrs. Wiley, "but if she needed punishment I guess she's got it bein' comp'ny−keeper to Wealthy Ann Brooks. Bein' a church member in good an' reg'lar standin', I s'pose Wealthy Ann'll go to heaven, but I can only say that it would be a sight pleasanter place for a good many if she did n't."

"Rose has be'n foolish an' flirty an' wrong−headed," allowed her grandfather; "but it won't do no good to treat her like a hardened criminile, same's you did afore she went away. She ain't hardly got her wisdom teeth cut, in love affairs! She ain't broke the laws of the State o' Maine, nor any o' the ten commandments; she ain't disgraced the family, an' there's a chance for her to reform, seein' as how she ain't twenty year old yet. I was turrible wild an' hot−headed myself afore you ketched me an' tamed me down."

"You ain't so tame now as I wish you was," Mrs. Wiley replied testily.

"If you could smoke a clay pipe 't would calm your nerves, mother, an' help you to git some philosophy inter you; you need a little philosophy turrible bad."

"I need patience consid'able more," was Mrs. Wiley's withering retort.

"That's the way with folks," said Old Kennebec reflectively, as he went on peacefully puffing. "If you try to indoose 'em to take an int'rest in a bran'−new virtue, they won't look at it; but they 'll run down a side street an' buy half a yard more o' some turrible old shop−worn trait o' character that they've kep' in stock all their lives, an' that everybody's sick to death of. There was a man in Gard'ner−−"

But alas! the experiences of the Gardiner man, though told in the same delightful fashion that had won Mrs. Wiley's heart many years before, now fell upon the empty air. In these years of Old Kennebec's "anecdotage," his pipe was his best listener and his truest confidant.

Mr. Wiley's constant intercessions with his wife made Rose's home−coming somewhat easier, and the sight of her own room and belongings soothed her troubled spirit, but the days went on, and nothing happened to change the situation. She had lost a lover, that was all, and there were plenty more to choose from, or there always had been; but the only one she wanted was the one who made no sign. She used to think that she could twist Stephen around her little finger; that she had only to beckon to him and he would follow her to the ends of the earth. Now fear had entered her heart. She no longer felt sure, because she no longer felt worthy, of him, and feeling both uncertainty and unworthiness, her lips were sealed and she was rendered incapable of making any bid for forgiveness.

So the little world of Pleasant River went on, to all outward seeming, as it had ever gone. On one side of the stream a girl's heart was longing, and pining, and sickening, with hope deferred, and growing, too, with such astonishing rapidity that the very angels marveled! And on the other, a man's whole vision of life and duty was widening and deepening under the fructifying influence of his sorrow.

The corn waved high and green in front of the vacant riverside cottage, but Stephen sent no word or message to Rose. He had seen her once, but only from a distance. She seemed paler and thinner, he thought,−−the result, probably, of her metropolitan gayeties. He heard no rumor of any engagement and he wondered if it were possible that her love for Claude Merrill had not, after all, been returned in kind. This seemed a wild impossibility. His mind refused to entertain the supposition that any man on earth could resist falling in love with Rose, or, having fallen in, that he could ever contrive to climb out. So he worked on at his farm harder than ever, and grew soberer and more careworn daily. Rufus had never seemed so near and dear to him as in these weeks when he had lived under the shadow of threatened blindness. The burning of the barn and the strain upon their slender property brought the brothers together shoulder to shoulder.

"If you lose your girl, Steve," said the boy, "and I lose my eyesight, and we both lose the barn, why, it'll be us two against the world, for a spell!"

The "To Let" sign on the little house was an arrant piece of hypocrisy. Nothing but the direst extremity could have caused him to allow an alien step on that sacred threshold. The ploughing up of the flower−beds and planting of the corn had served a double purpose. It showed the too curious public the finality of his break with Rose and her absolute freedom; it also prevented them from suspecting that he still entered the place. His visits were not many, but he could not bear to let the dust settle on the furniture that he and Rose had chosen together; and whenever he locked the door and went back to the River Farm, he thought of a verse in the Bible: "Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken."

It was now Friday of the last week in August.

The river was full of logs, thousands upon thousands of them covering the surface of the water from the bridge almost up to the Brier Neighborhood. The Edgewood drive was late, owing to a long drought and low water; but it was to begin on the following Monday, and Lije Dennett and his under boss were looking over the situation and planning the campaign. As they leaned over the bridge−rail they saw Mr. Wiley driving clown the river road. When he caught sight of them he hitched the old white horse at the corner and walked toward them, filling his pipe the while in his usual leisurely manner. "We're not busy this forenoon," said Lije Dennett. "S'pose we stand right here and let Old Kennebec have his say out for once. We've never heard the end of one of his stories, an' he's be'n talkin' for twenty years."

"All right," rejoined his companion, with a broad grin at the idea. "I'm willin', if you are; but who's goin' to tell our fam'lies the reason we've deserted 'em? I bate yer we shan't budge till the crack o' doom. The road commissioner'll come along once a year and mend the bridge under our feet, but Old Kennebec'll talk straight on till the day o' jedgment."

Mr. Wiley had one of the most enjoyable mornings of his life, and felt that after half a century of neglect his powers were at last appreciated by his fellow citizens.

He proposed numerous strategic movements to be made upon the logs, whereby they would move more swiftly than usual. He described several successful drives on the Kennebec, when the logs had melted down the river almost by magic, owing to his generalship; and he paid a tribute, in passing, to the docility of the boss, who on that occasion had never moved a single log without asking his advice.

From this topic he proceeded genially to narrate the life−histories of the boss, the under boss, and several Indians belonging to the crew,−−histories in which he himself played a gallant and conspicuous part. The conversation then drifted naturally to the exploits of river−drivers in general, and Mr. Wiley narrated the sorts of feats in log−riding, pick−pole−throwing, and the shooting of rapids that he had done in his youth. These stories were such as had seldom been heard by the ear of man; and, as they passed into circulation instantaneously, we are probably enjoying some of them to this day.

They were still being told when a Crambry child appeared on the bridge, bearing a note for the old man. Upon reading it he moved off rapidly in the direction of the store, ejaculating: "Bless my soul! I clean forgot that saleratus, and mother's settin' at the kitchen table with the bowl in her lap, waitin' for it! Got so int'rested in your list'nin' I never thought o' the time."

The connubial discussion that followed this breach of discipline began on the arrival of the saleratus, and lasted through supper; and Rose went to bed almost immediately afterward for very dullness and apathy. Her life stretched out before her in the most aimless and monotonous fashion. She saw nothing but heartache in the future; and that she richly deserved it made it none the easier to bear.

Feeling feverish and sleepless, she slipped on her gray Shaker cloak and stole quietly downstairs for a breath of air. Her grandfather and grandmother were talking on the piazza, and good humor seemed to have been restored. "I was over to the tavern tonight," she heard him say, as she sat down at a little distance. "I was over to the tavern tonight, an' a feller from Gorham got to talkin' an' braggin' 'bout what a stock o' goods they kep' in the store over there. 'An',' says I, 'I bate ye dollars to doughnuts that there hain't a darn thing ye can ask for at Bill Pike's store at Pleasant River that he can't go down cellar, or up attic, or out in the barn chamber an' git for ye.' Well, sir, he took me up, an' I borrered the money of Joe Dennett, who held the stakes, an' we went right over to Bill Pike's with all the boys follerin' on behind. An' the Gorham man never let on what he was going to ask for till the hull crowd of us got inside the store. Then says he, as p'lite as a basket o' chips, 'Mr. Pike, I'd like to buy a pulpit if you can oblige me with one.'

"Bill scratched his head an' I held my breath. Then says he, "Pears to me I'd ought to hev a pulpit or two, if I can jest remember where I keep 'em. I don't never cal'late to be out o' pulpits, but I'm so plagued for room I can't keep 'em in here with the groc'ries. Jim (that's his new store boy), you jest take a lantern an' run out in the far corner o' the shed, at the end o' the hickory woodpile, an' see how many pulpits we've got in stock!' Well, Jim run out, an' when he come back he says, 'We've got two, Mr. Pike. Shall I bring one of 'em in?'

"At that the boys all bust out laughin' an' hollerin' an' tauntin' the Gorham man, an' he paid up with a good will, I tell ye!"

"I don't approve of bettin'," said Mrs. Wiley grimly, "but I'll try to sanctify the money by usin' it for a new wash−boiler."

"The fact is," explained Old Kennebec, somewhat confused, "that the boys made me spend every cent of it then an' there."

Rose heard her grandmother's caustic reply, and then paid no further attention until her keen ear caught the sound of Stephen's name. It was a part of her unhappiness that since her broken engagement no one would ever allude to him, and she longed to hear him mentioned, so that perchance she could get some inkling of his movements.

"I met Stephen tonight for the first time in a week," said Mr. Wiley. "He kind o' keeps out o' my way lately. He's goin' to drive his span into Portland tomorrow mornin' and bring Rufus home from the hospital Sunday afternoon. The doctors think they've made a success of their job, but Rufus has got to be bandaged up a spell longer. Stephen is goin' to join the drive Monday mornin' at the bridge here, so I'll get the latest news o' the boy. Land! I'll be turrible glad if he gets out with his eyesight, if it's only for Steve's sake. He's a turrible good fellow, Steve is! He said something tonight that made me set more store by him than ever. I told you I hed n't heard an unkind word ag'in' Rose sence she come home from Boston, an' no more I hev till this evenin'. There was two or three fellers talkin' in the post−office, an' they did n't suspicion I was settin' on the steps outside the screen door. That Jim Jenkins, that Rose so everlastin'ly snubbed at the tavern dance, spoke up, an' says he: 'This time last year Rose Wiley could 'a' hed the choice of any man on the river, an' now I bet ye she can't get nary one.'

"Steve was there, jest goin' out the door, with some bags o' coffee an' sugar under his arm.

"'I guess you're mistaken about that,' he says, speakin' up jest like lightnin'; 'so long as Stephen Waterman's alive, Rose Wiley can have him, for one; and that everybody's welcome to know.'

"He spoke right out, loud an' plain, jest as if he was readin' the Declaration of Independence. I expected the boys would everlastin'ly poke fun at him, but they never said a word. I guess his eyes flashed, for he come out the screen door, slammin' it after him, and stalked by me as if he was too worked up to notice anything or anybody. I did n't foller him, for his long legs git over the ground too fast for me, but thinks I, 'Mebbe I'll hev some use for my lemonade−set after all.'"

"I hope to the land you will," responded Mrs. Wiley, "for I'm about sick o' movin' it round when I sweep under my bed. And I shall be glad if Rose an' Stephen do make it up, for Wealthy Ann Brooks's gossip is too much for a Christian woman to stand."

XIV. Housebreaking

Where was the pale Rose, the faded Rose, that crept noiselessly down from her room, wanting neither to speak nor to be spoken to? Nobody ever knew. She vanished forever, and in her place a thing of sparkles and dimples flashed up the stairway and closed the door softly. There was a streak of moon−shine lying across the bare floor, and a merry ghost, with dressing−gown held prettily away from bare feet, danced a gay fandango among the yellow moonbeams. There were breathless flights to the open window, and kisses thrown in the direction of the River Farm. There were impressive declamations at the looking−glass, where a radiant creature pointed to her reflection and whispered, "Worthless little pig, he loves you, after all!"

Then, when quiet joy had taken the place of mad delight, there was a swoop down upon the floor, an impetuous hiding of brimming eyes in the white counterpane, and a dozen impassioned promises to herself and to something higher than herself, to be a better girl.

The mood lasted, and deepened, and still Rose did not move. Her heart was on its knees before Stephen's faithful love, his chivalry, his strength. Her troubled spirit, like a frail boat tossed about in the rapids, seemed entering a quiet harbor, where there were protecting shores and a still, still evening star. Her sails were all torn and drooping, but the harbor was in sight, and the poor little weather−beaten craft could rest in peace.

A period of grave reflection now ensued, under the bedclothes, where one could think better. Suddenly an inspiration seized her, an inspiration so original, so delicious, and above all so humble and praiseworthy, that it brought her head from her pillow, and she sat bolt upright, clapping her hands like a child.

"The very thing!" she whispered to herself gleefully. "It will take courage, but I'm sure of my ground after what he said before them all, and I'll do it. Grandma in Biddeford buying church carpets, Stephen in Portland−−was ever such a chance?"

The same glowing Rose came downstairs, two steps at a time, next morning, bade her grandmother goodbye with suspicious pleasure, and sent her grandfather away on an errand which, with attendant conversation, would consume half the day. Then bundles after bundles and baskets after baskets were packed into the wagon,−−behind the seat, beneath the seat, and finally under the lap−robe. She gave a dramatic flourish to the whip, drove across the bridge, went through Pleasant River village, and up the leafy road to the little house, stared the "To Let" sign scornfully in the eye, alighted, and ran like a deer through the aisles of waving corn, past the kitchen windows, to the back door.

"If he has kept the big key in the old place under the stone, where we both used to find it, then he has n't forgotten me−−or anything," thought Rose.

The key was there, and Rose lifted it with a sob of gratitude. It was but five minutes' work to carry all the bundles from the wagon to the back steps, and another five to lead old Tom across the road into the woods and tie him to a tree quite out of the sight of any passer−by.

When, after running back, she turned the key in the lock, her heart gave a leap almost of terror, and she started at the sound of her own footfall. Through the open door the sunlight streamed into the dark room. She flew to tables and chairs, and gave a rapid sweep of the hand over their surfaces.

"He has been dusting here,−−and within a few days, too," she thought triumphantly.

The kitchen was perfection, as she always knew it would be, with one door opening to the shaded road and the other looking on the river; windows, too, framing the apple−orchard and the elms. She had chosen the furniture, but how differently it looked now that it was actually in place! The tiny shed had piles of split wood, with great boxes of kindlings and shavings, all in readiness for the bride, who would do her own cooking. Who but Stephen would have made the very wood ready for a woman's home−coming; and why had he done so much in May, when they were not to be married until August? Then the door of the bedroom was stealthily opened, and here Rose sat down and cried for joy and shame and hope and fear. The very flowered paper she had refused as too expensive! How lovely it looked with the white chamber set! She brought in her simple wedding outfit of blankets, bed−linen, and counterpanes, and folded them softly in the closet; and then for the rest of the morning she went from room to room, doing all that could remain undiscovered, even to laying a fire in the new kitchen stove.

This was the plan. Stephen must pass the house on his way from the River Farm to the bridge, where he was to join the river−drivers on Monday morning. She would be out of bed by the earliest peep of dawn, put on Stephen's favorite pink calico, leave a note for her grandmother, run like a hare down her side of the river and up Stephen's, steal into the house, open blinds and windows, light the fire, and set the kettle boiling. Then with a sharp knife she would cut down two rows of corn, and thus make a green pathway from the front kitchen steps to the road. Next, the false and insulting "To Let" sign would be forcibly tweaked from the tree and thrown into the grass. She would then lay the table in the kitchen, and make ready the nicest breakfast that two people ever sat down to. And oh, would two people sit down to it; or would one go off in a rage and the other die of grief and disappointment?

Then, having done all, she would wait and palpitate, and palpitate and wait, until Stephen came. Surely no property−owner in the universe could drive along a road, observe his corn leveled to the earth, his sign removed, his house open, and smoke issuing from his chimney, without going in to surprise the rogue and villain who could be guilty of such vandalism.

And when he came in?

Oh, she had all day Sunday in which to forecast, with mingled dread and gladness and suspense, that all−important, all−decisive first moment! All day Sunday to frame and unframe penitent speeches. All day Sunday! Would it ever be Monday? If so, what would Tuesday bring? Would the sun rise happy on Mrs. Stephen Waterman of Pleasant River, or miserable Miss Rose Wiley of the Brier Neighborhood?

XV. The Dream Room

Long ago, when Stephen was a boy of fourteen or fifteen, he had gone with his father to a distant town to spend the night. After an early breakfast next morning his father had driven off for a business interview, and left the boy to walk about during his absence. He wandered aimlessly along a quiet side street, and threw himself down on the grass outside a pretty garden to amuse himself as best he could.

After a few minutes he heard voices, and, turning, peeped through the bars of the gate in idle, boyish curiosity. It was a small brown house; the kitchen door was open, and a table spread with a white cloth was set in the middle of the room. There was a cradle in a far corner, and a man was seated at the table as though he might be waiting for his breakfast.

There is a kind of sentiment about the kitchen in New England, a kind of sentiment not provoked by other rooms. Here the farmer drops in to spend a few minutes when he comes back from the barn or field on an errand. Here, in the great, clean, sweet, comfortable place, the busy housewife lives, sometimes rocking the cradle, sometimes

opening and shutting the oven door, sometimes stirring the pot, darning stockings, paring vegetables, or mixing goodies in a yellow bowl. The children sit on the steps, stringing beans, shelling peas, or hulling berries; the cat sleeps on the floor near the wood−box; and the visitor feels exiled if he stays in sitting−room or parlor, for here, where the mother is always busy, is the heart of the farmhouse.

There was an open back door to this kitchen, a door framed in morning−glories, and the woman (or was she only girl?) standing at the stove was pretty,−−oh, so pretty in Stephen's eyes! His boyish heart went out to her on the instant. She poured a cup of coffee and walked with it to the table; then an unexpected, interesting thing happened−−something the boy ought not to have seen, and never forgot. The man, putting out his hand to take the cup, looked up at the pretty woman with a smile, and she stooped and kissed him.

Stephen was fifteen. As he looked, on the instant he became a man, with a man's hopes, desires, ambitions. He looked eagerly, hungrily, and the scene burned itself on the sensitive plate of his young heart, so that, as he grew older, he could take the picture out in the dark, from time to time, and look at it again. When he first met Rose, he did not know precisely what she was to mean to him; but before long, when he closed his eyes and the old familiar picture swam into his field of vision, behold, by some spiritual chemistry, the pretty woman's face had given place to that of Rose!

All such teasing visions had been sternly banished during this sorrowful summer, and it was a thoughtful, sober Stephen who drove along the road on this mellow August morning. The dust was deep; the goldenrod waved its imperial plumes, making the humble waysides gorgeous; the river chattered and sparkled till it met the logs at the Brier Neighborhood, and then, lapsing into silence, flowed steadily under them till it found a vent for its spirits in the dashing and splashing of the falls.

Haying was over; logging was to begin that day; then harvesting; then wood− cutting; then eternal successions of ploughing, sowing, reaping, haying, logging, harvesting, and so on, to the endless end of his days. Here and there a red or a yellow branch, painted only yesterday, caught his eye and made him shiver. He was not ready for winter; his heart still craved the summer it had missed.

Hello! What was that? Corn−stalks prone on the earth? Sign torn down and lying flat in the grass? Blinds open, fire in the chimney?

He leaped from the wagon, and, flinging the reins to Alcestis Crambry, said, "Stay right here out of sight, and don't you move till I call you!" And striding up the green pathway, he flung open the kitchen door.

A forest of corn waving in the doorway at the back, morning−glories clambering round and round the window−frames, the table with shining white cloth, the kettle humming and steaming, something bubbling in a pan on the stove, the fire throwing out sweet little gleams of welcome through the open damper. All this was taken in with one incredulous, rapturous twinkle of an eye; but something else, too: Rose of all roses, Rose of the river, Rose of the world, standing behind a chair, with her hand pressed against her heart, her lips parted, her breath coming and going! She was glowing like a jewel−−glowing with the extraordinary brilliancy that emotion gives to some women. She used to be happy in a gay, sparkling way, like the shallow part of the stream as it chatters over white pebbles and bright sands. Now it was a broad, steady, full happiness like the deeps of the river under the sun.

"Don't speak, Stephen, till you hear what I have to say. It takes a good deal of courage for a girl to do as I am doing; but I want to show how sorry I am, and it's the only way." She was trembling, and the words came faster and faster. "I've been very wrong and foolish, and made you very unhappy, but I have n't done what you would have hated most. I have n't been engaged to Claude Merrill; he has n't so much as asked me. I am here to beg you to forgive me, to eat breakfast with me, to drive me to the minister's and marry me quickly, quickly, before anything happens to prevent us, and then to bring me home here to live all the days of my life. Oh, Stephen dear,

honestly, honestly, you have n't lost anything in all this long, miserable summer. I've suffered, too, and I'm better worth loving than I was. Will you take me back?"

Rose had a tremendous power of provoking and holding love, and Stephen of loving. His was too generous a nature for revilings and complaints and reproaches.

The shores of his heart were strewn with the wreckage of the troubled summer, but if the tide of love is high enough, it washes such things out of remembrance. He just opened his arms and took Rose to his heart, faults and all, with joy and gratitude; and she was as happy as a child who has escaped the scolding it richly deserves, and who determines, for very thankfulness' sake, never to be naughty again.

"You don't know what you've done for me, Stephen," she whispered, with her face hidden on his shoulder. "I was just a common little prickly rosebush when you came along like a good gardener and 'grafted in' something better; the something better was your love, Stephen dear, and it's made everything different. The silly Rose you were engaged to long ago has disappeared somewhere; I hope you won't be able to find her under the new leaves."

"She was all I wanted," said Stephen.

"You thought she was," the girl answered, "because you did n't see the prickles, but you'd have felt them some time. The old Rose was a selfish thing, not good enough for you; the new Rose is going to be your wife, and Rufus's sister, and your mother's daughter, all in one."

Then such a breakfast was spread as Stephen, in his sorry years of bachelor existence, had forgotten could exist; but before he broke his fast he ran out to the wagon and served the astonished Alcestis with his wedding refreshments then and there, bidding him drive back to the River Farm and bring him a package that lay in the drawer of his shaving−stand,−−a package placed there when hot youth and love and longing had inspired him to hurry on the marriage day.

"There's an envelope, Alcestis," he cried, "a long envelope, way, way back in the corner, and a small box on top of it. Bring them both and my wallet too, and if you find them all and get them to me safely you shall be bridesmaid and groomsman and best man and usher and maid of honor at a wedding, in less than an hour! Off with you! Drive straight and use the whip on Dolly!"

When he re−entered the kitchen, flushed with joy and excitement, Rose put the various good things on the table and he almost tremblingly took his seat, fearing that contact with the solid wood might wake him from this entrancing vision.

"I'd like to put you in your chair like a queen and wait on you," he said with a soft boyish stammer; "but I am too dazed with happiness to be of any use."

"It's my turn to wait upon you, and I−−Oh! how I love to have you dazed," Rose answered. "I'll be at the table presently myself; but we have been housekeeping only three minutes, and we have nothing but the tin coffee−pot this morning, so I'll pour the coffee from the stove."

She filled a cup with housewifely care and brought it to Stephen's side. As she set it down and was turning, she caught his look,−−a look so full of longing that no loving woman, however busy, could have resisted it; then she stooped and kissed him fondly, fervently.

Stephen put his arm about her, and, drawing her down to his knee, rested his head against her soft shoulder with a sigh of comfort, like that of a tired child. He had waited for it ten years, and at last the dream room had come true.

THE OLD PEABODY PEW. A Christmas Romance of a Country Church

DEDICATION

To a certain handful of dear New England women of names unknown to the world, dwelling in a certain quiet village, alike unknown:−−

We have worked together to make our little corner of the great universe a pleasanter place in which to live, and so we know, not only one another's names, but something of one another's joys and sorrows, cares and burdens, economies, hopes, and anxieties.

We all remember the dusty uphill road that leads to the green church common. We remember the white spire pointing upward against a background of blue sky and feathery elms. We remember the sound of the bell that falls on the Sabbath morning stillness, calling us across the daisy−sprinkled meadows of June, the golden hayfields of July, or the dazzling whiteness and deep snowdrifts of December days. The little cabinet−organ that plays the Doxology, the hymn−books from which we sing "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," the sweet freshness of the old meeting−house, within and without,−−how we have toiled to secure and preserve these humble mercies for ourselves and our children!

There really is a Dorcas Society, as you and I well know, and one not unlike that in these pages; and you and I have lived through many discouraging, laughable, and beautiful experiences while we emulated the Bible Dorcas, that woman "full of good works and alms deeds."

There never was a Peabody Pew in the Tory Hill Meeting−House, and Nancy's love story and Justin's never happened within its century−old walls, but I have imagined only one of the many romances that have had their birth under the shadow of that steeple, did we but realize it.

As you have sat there on open−windowed Sundays, looking across purple clover−fields to blue distant mountains, watching the palm−leaf fans swaying to and fro in the warm stillness before sermon time, did not the place seem full of memories, for has not the life of two villages ebbed and flowed beneath that ancient roof? You heard the hum of droning bees and followed the airy wings of butterflies fluttering over the grave−stones in the old churchyard, and underneath almost every moss−grown tablet some humble romance lies buried aud all but forgotten.

If it had not been for you, I should never have written this story, so I give it back to you tied with a sprig from Ophelia's nosegay; a sprig of "rosemary, that's for remembrance."

K. D. W.

August, 1907

I

Edgewood, like all the other villages along the banks of the Saco, is full of sunny slopes and leafy hollows. There are little, rounded, green−clad hillocks that might, like their scriptural sisters, "skip with joy"; and there are grand, rocky hills tufted with gaunt pine trees−−these leading the eye to the splendid heights of a neighbor State, where snow−crowned peaks tower in the blue distance, sweeping the horizon in a long line of majesty.

Tory Hill holds its own among the others for peaceful beauty and fair prospect, and on its broad, level summit sits the white−painted Orthodox Meeting−House. This faces a grassy common where six roads meet, as if the early settlers had determined that no one should lack salvation because of a difficulty in reaching its visible source.

The old church has had a dignified and fruitful past, dating from that day in 1761 when young Paul Coffin received his call to preach at a stipend of fifty pounds sterling a year; answering "that never having heard of any Uneasiness among the people about his Doctrine or manner of life, he declared himself pleased to Settle as Soon as might be Judged Convenient."

But that was a hundred and fifty years ago, and much has happened since those simple, strenuous old days. The chastening hand of time has been laid somewhat heavily on the town as well as on the church. Some of her sons have marched to the wars and died on the field of honor; some, seeking better fortunes, have gone westward; others, wearying of village life, the rocky soil, and rigors of farm−work, have become entangled in the noise and competition, the rush and strife, of cities. When the sexton rings the bell nowadays, on a Sunday morning, it seems to have lost some of its old−time militant strength, something of its hope and courage; but it still rings, and although the Davids and Solomons, the Matthews, Marks, and Pauls of former congregations have left few descendants to perpetuate their labors, it will go on ringing as long as there is a Tabitha, a Dorcas, a Lois, or a Eunice left in the community.

This sentiment had been maintained for a quarter of a century, but it was now especially strong, as the old Tory Hill Meeting−House had been undergoing for several years more or less extensive repairs. In point of fact, the still stronger word, "improvements," might be used with impunity; though whenever the Dorcas Society, being female, and therefore possessed of notions regarding comfort and beauty, suggested any serious changes, the finance committees, which were inevitably male in their composition, generally disapproved of inaking any impious alterations in a tabernacle, chapel, temple, or any other building used for purposes of worship. The majority in these august bodies asserted that their ancestors had prayed and sung there for a century and a quarter, and what was good enough for their ancestors was entirely suitable for them. Besides, the community was becoming less and less prosperous, and church−going was growing more and more lamentably uncommon, so that even from a business standpoint, any sums expended upon decoration by a poor and struggling parish would be worse than wasted.

In the particular year under discussion in this story, the valiant and progressive Mrs. Jeremiah Burbank was the president of the Dorcas Society, and she remarked privately and publicly that if her ancestors liked a smoky church, they had a perfect right to the enjoyment of it, but that she did n't intend to sit through meeting on winter Sundays, with her white ostrich feather turning gray and her eyes smarting and watering, for the rest of her natural life.

Whereupon, this being in a business session, she then and there proposed to her already hypnotized constituents ways of earning enough money to build a new chimney on the other side of the church.

An awe−stricken community witnessed this beneficent act of vandalism, and, finding that no thunderbolts of retribution descended from the skies, greatly relished the change. If one or two aged persons complained that they could not sleep as sweetly during sermon−time in the now clear atmosphere of the church, and that the parson's eye was keener than before, why, that was a mere detail, and could not be avoided; what was the loss of a little sleep compared with the discoloration of Mrs. Jere Burbank's white ostrich feather and the smarting of Mrs. Jere Burbank's eyes?

A new furnace followed the new chimney, in due course, and as a sense of comfort grew, there was opportunity to notice the lack of beauty. Twice in sixty years had some well−to−do summer parishioner painted the interior of the church at his own expense; but although the roof had been many times reshingled, it had always persisted in leaking, so that the ceiling and walls were disfigured by unsightly spots and stains and streaks. The question of

shingling was tacitly felt to be outside the feminine domain, but as there were five women to one man in the church membership, the feminine domain was frequently obliged to extend its limits into the hitherto unknown. Matters of tarring and waterproofing were discussed in and out of season, and the very school−children imbibed knowledge concerning lapping, over−lapping, and cross−lapping, and first and second quality of cedar shingles. Miss Lobelia Brewster, who had a rooted distrust of anything done by mere man, created strife by remarking that she could have stopped the leak in the belfry tower with her red flannel petticoat better than the Milltown man with his new−fangled rubber sheeting, and that the last shingling could have been more thoroughly done by a "female infant babe"; whereupon the person criticized retorted that he wished Miss Lobelia Brewster had a few infant babes to "put on the job he'd like to see 'em try." Meantime several male members of the congregation, who at one time or another had sat on the roof during the hottest of the dog−days to see that shingling operations were conscientiously and skillfully performed, were very pessimistic as to any satisfactory result ever being achieved.

"The angle of the roof−−what they call the 'pitch'−−they say that that's always been wrong," announced the secretary of the Dorcas in a business session.

"Is it that kind of pitch that the Bible says you can't touch without being defiled? If not, I vote that we unshingle the roof and alter the pitch!" This proposal came from a sister named Maria Sharp, who had valiantly offered the year before to move the smoky chimney with her own hands, if the "menfolks" would n't.

But though the incendiary suggestion of altering the pitch was received with applause at the moment, subsequent study of the situation proved that such a proceeding was entirely beyond the modest means of the society. Then there arose an ingenious and militant carpenter in a neighboring village, who asserted that he would shingle the meeting−house roof for such and such a sum, and agree to drink every drop of water that would leak in afterward. This was felt by all parties to be a promise attended by extraordinary risks, but it was accepted nevertheless, Miss Lobelia Brewster remarking that the rash carpenter, being already married, could not marry a Dorcas anyway, and even if he died, he was not a resident of Edgewood, and therefore could be more easily spared, and that it would be rather exciting, just for a change, to see a man drink himself to death with rain−water. The expected tragedy never occurred, however, and the inspired shingler fulfilled his promise to the letter, so that before many months the Dorcas Society proceeded, with incredible exertion, to earn more money, and the interior of the church was neatly painted and made as fresh as a rose. With no smoke, no rain, no snow nor melting ice to defile it, the good old landmark that had been pointing its finger Heavenward for over a century would now be clean and fragrant for years to come, and the weary sisters leaned back in their respective rocking−chairs and drew deep breaths of satisfaction.

These breaths continued to be drawn throughout an unusually arduous haying season; until, in fact, a visitor from a neighboring city was heard to remark that the Tory Hill Meeting−House would be one of the best preserved and pleasantest churches in the whole State of Maine, if only it were suitably carpeted.

This thought had secretly occurred to many a Dorcas in her hours of pie−making, preserving, or cradle−rocking, but had been promptly extinguished as flagrantly extravagant and altogether impossible. Now that it had been openly mentioned, the contagion of the idea spread, and in a month every sort of honest machinery for the increase of funds had been set in motion: harvest suppers, pie sociables, old folks' concerts, apron sales, and, as a last resort, a subscription paper, for the church floor measured hundreds of square yards, and the carpet committee announced that a good ingrain could not be purchased, even with the church discount, for less than ninety−seven cents a yard.

The Dorcases took out their pencils, and when they multiplied the surface of the floor by the price of the carpet per yard, each Dorcas attaining a result entirely different from all the others, there was a shriek of dismay, especially from the secretary, who had included in her mathematical operation certain figures in her possession representing the cubical contents of the church and the offending pitch of the roof, thereby obtaining a product that would have dismayed a Croesus. Time sped and efforts increased, but the Dorcases were at length obliged to

clip the wings of their desire and content themselves with carpeting the pulpit and pulpit steps, the choir, and the two aisles, leaving the floor in the pews until some future year.

How the women cut and contrived and matched that hardly−bought red ingrain carpet, in the short December afternoons that ensued after its purchase; so that, having failed to be ready for Thanksgiving, it could be finished for the Christmas festivities!

They were sewing in the church, and as the last stitches were being taken, Maria Sharp suddenly ejaculated in her impulsive fashion :−−

"Would n't it have been just perfect if we could have had the pews repainted before we laid the new carpet!"

"It would, indeed," the president answered; "but it will take us all winter to pay for the present improvements, without any thought of fresh paint. If only we had a few more men−folks to help along!"

"Or else none at all!" was Lobelia Brewster's suggestion. "It's havin' so few that keeps us all stirred up. If there wa'n't any anywheres, we'd have women deacons and carpenters and painters, and get along first rate; for somehow the supply o' women always holds out, same as it does with caterpillars an' flies an' grasshoppers!"

Everybody laughed, although Maria Sharp asserted that she for one was not willing to be called a caterpillar simply because there were too many women in the universe.

"I never noticed before how shabby and scarred and dirty the pews are," said the minister's wife, as she looked at them reflectively.

"I've been thinking all the afternoon of the story about the poor old woman and the lily," and Nancy Wentworth's clear voice broke into the discussion. "Do you remember some one gave her a stalk of Easter lilies and she set them in a glass pitcher on the kitchen table? After looking at them for a few minutes, she got up from her chair and washed the pitcher until the glass shone. Sitting down again, she glanced at the little window. It would never do; she had forgotten how dusty and blurred it was, and she took her cloth and burnished the panes. Then she scoured the table, then the floor, then blackened the stove before she sat down to her knitting. And of course the lily had done it all, just by showing, in its whiteness, how grimy everything else was."

The minister's wife, who had been in Edgewood only a few months, looked admiringly at Nancy's bright face, wondering that five−and−thirty years of life, including ten of school−teaching, had done so little to mar its serenity.

"The lily story is as true as the gospel!" she exclaimed, "and I can see how one thing has led you to another in making the church comfortable. But my husband says that two coats of paint on the pews would cost a considerable sum."

"How about cleaning them? I don't believe they've had a good hard washing since the flood." The suggestion came from Deacon Miller's wife to the president.

"They can't even be scrubbed for less than fifteen or twenty dollars, for I thought of that and asked Mrs. Simpson yesterday, and she said twenty cents a pew was the cheapest she could do it for."

"We've done everything else," said Nancy Wentworth, with a twitch of her thread; "why don't we scrub the pews? There's nothing in the Orthodox creed to forbid, is there?"

"Speakin' o' creeds," and here old Mrs. Sargent paused in her work, "Elder Ransom from Acreville stopped with us last night, an' he tells me they recite the Euthanasian Creed every few Sundays in the Episcopal Church. I did n't want him to know how ignorant I was, but I looked up the word in the dictionary. It means easy death, and I can't see any sense in that, though it's a terrible long creed, the Elder says, an' if it's any longer 'n ourn, I should think anybody _might_ easy die learnin' it!"

"I think the word is Athanasian," ventured the minister's wife.

"Elder Ransom's always plumb full o' doctrine," asserted Miss Brewster, pursuing the subject. "For my part, I'm glad he preferred Acreville to our place. He was so busy bein' a minister, he never got round to bein' a human creeter. When he used to come to sociables and picnics, always lookin' kind o' like the potato blight, I used to think how complete he'd be if he had a foldin' pulpit under his coat−tails; they make foldin' beds nowadays, an' I s'pose they could make foldin' pulpits, if there was a call."

"Land sakes, I hope there won't be!" exclaimed Mrs. Sargent. "An' the Elder never said much of anything either, though he was always preachin'! Now your husband, Mis' Baxter, always has plenty to say after you think he's all through. There's water in his well when the others is all dry!"

"But how about the pews?" interrupted Mrs. Burbank. "I think Nancy's idea is splendid, and I want to see it carried out. We might make it a picnic, bring our luncheons, and work all together; let every woman in the congregation come and scrub her own pew."

"Some are too old, others live at too great a distance," and the minister's wife sighed a little; "indeed, most of those who once owned the pews or sat in them seem to be dead, or gone away to live in busier places."

"I've no patience with 'em, gallivantin' over the earth," and here Lobelia rose and shook the carpet threads from her lap. "I should n't want to live in a livelier place than Edgewood, seem's though! We wash and hang out Mondays, iron Tuesdays, cook Wednesdays, clean house and mend Thursdays and Fridays, bake Saturdays, and go to meetin' Sundays. I don't hardly see how they can do any more'n that in Chicago!"

"Never mind if we have lost members!" said the indomitable Mrs. Burbank. "The members we still have left must work all the harder. We'll each clean our own pew, then take a few of our neighbors', and then hire Mrs. Simpson to do the wainscoting and floor. Can we scrub Friday and lay the carpet Saturday? My husband and Deacon Miller can help us at the end of the week. All in favor manifest it by the usual sign. Contrary−minded? It is a vote."

There never were any contrary−minded when Mrs. Jere Burbank was in the chair. Public sentiment in Edgewood was swayed by the Dorcas Society, but Mrs. Burbank swayed the Dorcases themselves as the wind sways the wheat.

II

The old meeting−house wore an animated aspect when the eventful Friday came, a cold, brilliant, sparkling December day, with good sleighing, and with energy in every breath that swept over the dazzling snowfields. The sexton had built a fire in the furnace on the way to his morning work−−a fire so economically contrived that it would last exactly the four or five necessary hours, and not a second more. At eleven o'clock all the pillars of the society had assembled, having finished their own household work and laid out on their respective kitchen tables comfortable luncheons for the men of the family, if they were fortunate enough to number any among their luxuries. Water was heated upon oil−stoves set about here and there, and there was a brave array of scrubbing−brushes, cloths, soap, and even sand and soda, for it had been decided and

manifested−by−the−usual−sign−and−no−contrary−minded−and−it−was− −a−vote that the dirt was to come off, whether the paint came with it or not. Each of the fifteen women present selected a block of seats, preferably one in which her own was situated, and all fell busily to work.

"There is nobody here to clean the right−wing pews," said Nancy Wentworth, "so I will take those for my share."

"You're not making a very wise choice, Nancy," and the minister's wife smiled as she spoke. "The infant class of the Sunday−School sits there, you know, and I expect the paint has had extra wear and tear. Families don't seem to occupy those pews regularly nowadays."

"I can remember when every seat in the whole church was filled, wings an' all," mused Mrs. Sargent, wringing out her washcloth in a reminiscent mood. "The one in front o' you, Nancy, was always called the 'deef pew' in the old times, and all the folks that was hard o' hearin' used to congregate there."

"The next pew has n't been occupied since I came here," said the minister's wife.

"No," answered Mrs. Sargent, glad of any opportunity to retail neighborhood news. "'Squire Bean's folks have moved to Portland to be with the married daughter. Somebody has to stay with her, and her husband won't. The 'Squire ain't a strong man, and he's most too old to go to meetin' now. The youngest son just died in New York, so I hear."

"What ailed him?" inquired Maria Sharp.

"I guess he was completely wore out takin' care of his health," returned Mrs. Sargent. "He had a splendid constitution from a boy, but he was always afraid it would n't last him. The seat back o' 'Squire Bean's is the old Peabody pew−−ain't that the Peabody pew you're scrubbin', Nancy?"

"I believe so," Nancy answered, never pausing in her labors. "It's so long since anybody sat there, it's hard to remember."

"It is the Peabodys', I know it, because the aisle runs right up facin' it. I can see old Deacon Peabody settin' in this end same as if 't was yesterday."

"He had died before Jere and I came back here to live," said Mrs. Burbank. "The first I remember, Justin Peabody sat in the end seat; the sister that died, next, and in the corner, against the wall, Mrs. Peabody, with a crape shawl and a palmleaf fan. They were a handsome family. You used to sit with them sometimes, Nancy; Esther was great friends with you."

"Yes, she was," Nancy replied, lifting the tattered cushion from its place and brushing it; "and I with her. What is the use of scrubbing and carpeting, when there are only twenty pew−cushions and six hassocks in the whole church, and most of them ragged? How can I ever mend this?"

"I should n't trouble myself to darn other people's cushions!" This unchristian sentiment came in Mrs. Miller's ringing tones from the rear of the church.

"I don't know why," argued Maria Sharp. "I'm going to mend my Aunt Achsa's cushion, and we haven't spoken for years; but hers is the next pew to mine, and I'm going to have my part of the church look decent, even if she is too stingy to do her share. Besides, there are n't any Peabodys left to do their own darning, and Nancy was friends with Esther."

"Yes, it's nothing more than right," Nancy replied, with a note of relief in her voice, "considering Esther."

"Though he don't belong to the scrubbin' sex, there is one Peabody alive, as you know, if you stop to think, Maria; for Justin's alive, and livin' out West somewheres. At least, he's as much alive as ever he was; he was as good as dead when he was twenty−one, but his mother was always too soft−hearted to bury him."

There was considerable laughter over this sally of the outspoken Mrs. Sargent, whose keen wit was the delight of the neighborhood.

"I know he's alive and doing business in Detroit, for I got his address a week or ten days ago, and wrote, asking him if he'd like to give a couple of dollars toward repairing the old church."

Everybody looked at Mrs. Burbank with interest.

"Has n't he answered?" asked Maria Sharp. Nancy Wentworth held her breath, turned her face to the wall, and silently wiped the paint of the wainscoting. The blood that had rushed into her cheeks at Mrs. Sargent's jeering reference to Justin Peabody still lingered there for any one who ran to read, but fortunately nobody ran; they were too busy scrubbing.

"Not yet. Folks don't hurry about answering when you ask them for a contribution," replied the president, with a cynicism common to persons who collect funds for charitable purposes. "George Wickham sent me twenty−five cents from Denver. When I wrote him a receipt, I said thank you same as Aunt Polly did when the neighbors brought her a piece of beef: 'Ever so much obleeged, but don't forget me when you come to kill a pig.'−−Now, Mrs. Baxter, you shan't clean James Bruce's pew, or what was his before he turned Second Advent. I'll do that myself, for he used to be in my Sunday−School class."

"He's the backbone o' that congregation now," asserted Mrs. Sargent, "and they say he's goin' to marry Mrs. Sam Peters, who sings in their choir, as soon as his year is up. They make a perfect fool of him in that church."

"You can't make a fool of a man that nature ain't begun with," argued Miss Brewster. "Jim Bruce never was very strong−minded, but I declare it seems to me that when men lose their wives, they lose their wits! I was sure Jim would marry Hannah Thompson that keeps house for him. I suspected she was lookin' out for a life job when she hired out with him."

"Hannah Thompson may keep Jim's house, but she'll never keep Jim, that's certain!" affirmed the president; "and I can't see that Mrs. Peters will better herself much."

"I don't blame her, for one!" came in no uncertain tones from the left−wing pews, and the Widow Buzzell rose from her knees and approached the group by the pulpit. "If there's anything duller than cookin' three meals a day for yourself, and settin' down and eatin' 'em by yourself, and then gettin' up and clearin' 'em away after yourself, I'd like to know it! I should n't want any good−lookin', pleasant−spoken man to offer himself to me without he expected to be snapped up, that's all! But if you've made out to get one husband in York County, you can thank the Lord and not expect any more favors. I used to think Tom was poor comp'ny and complain I could n't have any conversation with him, but land, I could talk at him, and there's considerable comfort in that. And I could pick up after him! Now every room in my house is clean, and every closet and bureau drawer, too; I can't start drawin' in another rug, for I've got all the rugs I can step foot on. I dried so many apples last year I shan't need to cut up any this season. My jelly and preserves ain't out, and there I am; and there most of us are, in this village, without a man to take steps for and trot 'round after! There's just three husbands among the fifteen women scrubbin' here now, and the rest of us is all old maids and widders. No wonder the men−folks die, or move away, like Justin Peabody; a place with such a mess o' women−folks ain't healthy to live in, whatever Lobelia Brewster may say."

III

Justin Peabody had once faithfully struggled with the practical difficulties of life in Edgewood, or so he had thought, in those old days of which Nancy Wentworth was thinking when she wiped the paint of the Peabody pew. Work in the mills did not attract him; he had no capital to invest in a stock of goods for store−keeping; school−teaching offered him only a pittance; there remained then only the farm, if he were to stay at home and keep his mother company.

"Justin don't seem to take no holt of things," said the neighbors.

"Good Heavens!" It seemed to him that there were no things to take hold of! That was his first thought; later he grew to think that the trouble all lay in himself, and both thoughts bred weakness.

The farm had somehow supported the family in the old Deacon's time, but Justin seemed unable to coax a competence from the soil. He could, and did, rise early and work late; till the earth, sow crops; but he could not make the rain fall nor the sun shine at the times he needed them, and the elements, however much they might seem to favor his neighbors, seldom smiled on his enterprises. The crows liked Justin's corn better than any other in Edgewood. It had a richness peculiar to itself, a quality that appealed to the most jaded palate, so that it was really worth while to fly over a mile of intervening fields and pay it the delicate compliment of preference.

Justin could explain the attitude of caterpillars, worms, grasshoppers, and potato−bugs toward him only by assuming that he attracted them as the magnet in the toy boxes attracts the miniature fishes.

"Land o' liberty! look at 'em congregate!" ejaculated Jabe Slocum, when he was called in for consultation. "Now if you'd gone in for breedin' insecks, you could be as proud as Cuffy an' exhibit 'em at the County Fair! They'd give yer prizes for size an' numbers an' speed, I guess! Why, say, they're real crowded for room−−the plants ain't give 'em enough leaves to roost on! Have you tried 'Bug Death'?"

"It acts like a tonic on them," said Justin gloomily.

"Sho! you don't say so! Now mine can't abide the sight nor smell of it. What 'bout Paris green?"

"They thrive on it; it's as good as an appetizer."

"Well," said Jabe Slocum, revolving the quid of tobacco in his mouth reflectively, "the bug that ain't got no objection to p'ison is a bug that's got ways o' thinkin' an' feelin' an' reasonin' that I ain't able to cope with! P'r'aps it's all a leadin' o' Providence. Mebbe it shows you'd ought to quit farmin' crops an' take to raisin' live stock!"

Justin did just that, as a matter of fact, a year or two later; but stock that has within itself the power of being "live" has also rare qualification for being dead when occasion suits, and it generally did suit Justin's stock. It proved prone not only to all the general diseases that cattle−flesh is heir to, but was capable even of suicide. At least, it is true that two valuable Jersey calves, tied to stakes on the hillside, had flung themselves violently down the bank and strangled themselves with their own ropes in a manner which seemed to show that they found no pleasure in existence, at all events on the Peabody farm.

These were some of the little tragedies that had sickened young Justin Peabody with life in Edgewood, and Nancy Wentworth, even then, realized some of them and sympathized without speaking, in a girl's poor, helpless way.

Mrs. Simpson had washed the floor in the right wing of the church and Nancy had cleaned all the paint. Now she sat in the old Peabody pew darning the forlorn, faded cushion with gray carpet−thread; thread as gray as her own

life.

The scrubbing−party had moved to its labors in a far corner of the church, and two of the women were beginning preparations for the basket luncheons. Nancy's needle was no busier than her memory. Long years ago she had often sat in the Peabody pew, sometimes at first as a girl of sixteen when asked by Esther, and then, on coming home from school at eighteen, "finished," she had been invited now and again by Mrs. Peabody herself, on those Sundays when her own invalid mother had not attended service.

Those were wonderful Sundays−−Sundays of quiet, trembling peace and maiden joy.

Justin sat beside her, and she had been sure then, but had long since grown to doubt the evidence of her senses, that he, too, vibrated with pleasure at the nearness. Was there not a summer morning when his hand touched her white lace mitt as they held the hymn−book together, and the lines of the

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Rise, my soul, and stretch thy wings,
  Thy better portion trace,
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became blurred on the page and melted into something indistinguishable for a full minute or two afterward? Were there not looks, and looks, and looks? Or had she some misleading trick of vision in those days? Justin's dark, handsome profile rose before her: the level brows and fine lashes; the well−cut nose and lovable mouth−−the Peabody mouth and chin, somewhat too sweet and pliant for strength, perhaps. Then the eyes turned to hers in the old way, just for a fleeting glance, as they had so often done at prayer−meeting, or sociable, or Sunday service. Was it not a man's heart she had seen in them? And oh, if she could only be sure that her own woman's heart had not looked out from hers, drawn from its maiden shelter in spite of all her wish to keep it hidden!

Then followed two dreary years of indecision and suspense, when Justin's eyes met hers less freely; when his looks were always gloomy and anxious; when affairs at the Peabody farm grew worse and worse; when his mother followed her husband, the old Deacon, and her daughter Esther to the burying−ground in the churchyard. Then the end of all things came, the end of the world for Nancy: Justin's departure for the West in a very frenzy of discouragement over the narrowness and limitation and injustice of his lot; over the rockiness and barrenness and unkindness of the New England soil; over the general bitterness of fate and the "bludgeonings of chance."

He was a failure, born of a family of failures. If the world owed him a living, he had yet to find the method by which it could be earned. All this he thought and uttered, and much more of the same sort. In these days of humbled pride self was paramount, though it was a self he despised. There was no time for love. Who was he for a girl to lean upon?−−he who could not stand erect himself!

He bade a stiff goodbye to his neighbors, and to Nancy he vouchsafed little more. A handshake, with no thrill of love in it such as might have furnished her palm, at least, some memories to dwell upon; a few stilted words of leave−taking; a halting, meaningless sentence or two about his "botch" of life−−then he walked away from the Wentworth doorstep. But halfway down the garden path, where the shriveled hollyhocks stood like sentinels, did a wave of something different sweep over him−−a wave of the boyish, irresponsible past when his heart had wings and could fly without fear to its mate−−a wave of the past that was rushing through Nancy's mind, wellnigh burying her in its bitter−sweet waters. For he lifted his head, and suddenly retracing his steps, he came toward her, and, taking her hand again, said forlornly: "You 'll see me back when my luck turns, Nancy."

Nancy knew that the words might mean little or much, according to the manner in which they were uttered, but to her hurt pride and sore, shamed woman−instinct, they were a promise, simply because there was a choking sound in Justin's voice and tears in Justin's eyes. "You 'll see me back when my luck turns, Nancy"; this was the phrase upon which she had lived for more than ten years. Nancy had once heard the old parson say, ages ago, that the whole purpose of life was the growth of the soul; that we eat, sleep, clothe ourselves, work, love, all to give the

soul another day, month, year, in which to develop. She used to wonder if her soul could be growing in the monotonous round of her dull duties and her duller pleasures. She did not confess it even to herself; nevertheless she knew that she worked, ate, slept, to live until Justin's luck turned. Her love had lain in her heart a bird without a song, year after year. Her mother had dwelt by her side and never guessed; her father, too; and both were dead. The neighbors also, lynx−eyed and curious, had never suspected. If she had suffered, no one in Edgewood was any the wiser, for the maiden heart is not commonly worn on the sleeve in New England. If she had been openly pledged to Justin Peabody, she could have waited twice ten years with a decent show of self−respect, for long engagements were viewed rather as a matter of course in that neighborhood. The endless months had gone on since that gray November day when Justin had said goodbye. It had been just before Thanksgiving, and she went to church with an aching and ungrateful heart. The parson read from the eighth chapter of St. Matthew, a most unexpected selection for that holiday. "If you can't find anything else to be thankful for," he cried, "go home and be thankful you are not a leper!"

Nancy took the drastic counsel away from the church with her, and it was many a year before she could manage to add to this slender store anything to increase her gratitude for mercies given, though all the time she was outwardly busy, cheerful, and helpful.

Justin had once come back to Edgewood, and it was the bitterest drop in her cup of bitterness that she was spending that winter in Berwick (where, so the neighbors told him, she was a great favorite in society, and was receiving much attention from gentlemen), so that she had never heard of his visit until the spring had come again. Parted friends did not keep up with one another's affairs by means of epistolary communication, in those days, in Edgewood; it was not the custom. Spoken words were difficult enough to Justin Peabody, and written words were quite impossible, especially if they were to be used to define his half−conscious desires and his fluctuations of will, or to recount his disappointments and discouragements and mistakes.

IV

It was Saturday afternoon, the 24th of December, and the weary sisters of the Dorcas band rose from their bruised knees and removed their little stores of carpet−tacks from their mouths. This was a feminine custom of long standing, and as no village dressmaker had ever died of pins in the digestive organs, so were no symptoms of carpet−tacks ever discovered in any Dorcas, living or dead. Men wondered at the habit and reviled it, but stood confounded in the presence of its indubitable harmlessness.

The red ingrain carpet was indeed very warm, beautiful, and comforting to the eye, and the sisters were suitably grateful to Providence, and devoutly thankful to themselves, that they had been enabled to buy, sew, and lay so many yards of it. But as they stood looking at their completed task, it was cruelly true that there was much left to do.

The aisles had been painted dark brown on each side of the red strips leading from the doors to the pulpit, but the rest of the church floor was "a thing of shreds and patches." Each member of the carpet committee had paid (as a matter of pride, however ill she could afford it) three dollars and sixty−seven cents for sufficient carpet to lay in her own pew; but these brilliant spots of conscientious effort only made the stretches of bare, unpainted floor more evident. And that was not all. Traces of former spasmodic and individual efforts desecrated the present ideals. The doctor's pew had a pink−and−blue Brussels on it; the lawyer's, striped stair−carpeting; the Browns from Deerwander sported straw matting and were not abashed; while the Greens, the Whites, the Blacks, and the Grays displayed floor coverings as dissimilar as their names.

"I never noticed it before!" exclaimed Maria Sharp, "but it ain't Christian, that floor! it's heathenish and ungodly!"

"For mercy's sake, don't swear, Maria," said Mrs. Miller nervously. "We've done our best, and let's hope that folks

will look up and not down. It is n't as if they were going to set in the chandelier; they'll have something else to think about when Nancy gets her hemlock branches and white carnations in the pulpit vases. This morning my Abner picked off two pinks from a plant I've been nursing in my dining−room for weeks, trying to make it bloom for Christmas. I slapped his hands good, and it's been haunting me ever since to think I had to correct him the day before Christmas.−−Come, Lobelia, we must be hurrying!"

"One thing comforts me," exclaimed the Widow Buzzell, as she took her hammer and tacks preparatory to leaving; "and that is that the Methodist meetin'−house ain't got any carpet at all."

"Mrs. Buzzell, Mrs. Buzzell!" interrupted the minister's wife, with a smile that took the sting from her speech. "It will be like punishing little Abner Miller; if we think those thoughts on Christmas Eve, we shall surely be haunted afterward."

"And anyway," interjected Maria Sharp, who always saved the situation, "you just wait and see if the Methodists don't say they'd rather have no carpet at all than have one that don't go all over the floor. I know 'em!" and she put on her hood and blanket−shawl as she gave one last fond look at the improvements.

"I'm going home to get my supper, and come back afterward to lay the carpet in my pew; my beans and brown bread will be just right by now, and perhaps it will rest me a little; besides, I must feed 'Zekiel."

As Nancy Wentworth spoke, she sat in a corner of her own modest rear seat, looking a little pale and tired. Her waving dark hair had loosened and fallen over her cheeks, and her eyes gleamed from under it wistfully. Nowadays Nancy's eyes never had the sparkle of gazing into the future, but always the liquid softness that comes from looking backward.

"The church will be real cold by then, Nancy," objected Mrs. Burbank.−− "Good−night, Mrs. Baxter."

"Oh, no! I shall be back by half−past six, and I shall not work long. Do you know what I believe I'll do, Mrs. Burbank, just through the holidays? Christmas and New Year's both coming on Sunday this year, there'll be a great many out to church, not counting the strangers that'll come to the special service tomorrow. Instead of putting down my own pew carpet that'll never be noticed here in the back, I'll lay it in the old Peabody pew, for the red aisle−strip leads straight up to it; the ministers always go up that side, and it does look forlorn."

"That's so! And all the more because my pew, that's exactly opposite in the left wing, is new carpeted and cushioned," replied the president. "I think it's real generous of you, Nancy, because the Riverboro folks, knowing that you're a member of the carpet committee, will be sure to notice, and think it's queer you have n't made an effort to carpet your own pew."

"Never mind!" smiled Nancy wearily. "Riverboro folks never go to bed on Saturday nights without wondering what Edgewood is thinking about them!"

The minister's wife stood at her window watching Nancy as she passed the parsonage.

"How wasted! How wasted!" she sighed. "Going home to eat her lonely supper and feed 'Zekiel.... I can bear it for the others, but not for Nancy .... Now she has lighted her lamp,... now she has put fresh pine on the fire, for new smoke comes from the chimney. Why should I sit down and serve my dear husband, and Nancy feed 'Zekiel?"

There was some truth in Mrs. Baxter's feeling. Mrs. Buzzell, for instance, had three sons; Maria Sharp was absorbed in her lame father and her Sunday−School work; and Lobelia Brewster would not have considered matrimony a blessing, even under the most favorable conditions. But Nancy was framed and planned for other things, and 'Zekiel was an insufficient channel for her soft, womanly sympathy and her bright activity of mind and

body.

'Zekiel had lost his tail in a mowing−machine; 'Zekiel had the asthma, and the immersion of his nose in milk made him sneeze, so he was wont to slip his paw in and out of the dish and lick it patiently for five minutes together. Nancy often watched him pityingly, giving him kind and gentle words to sustain his fainting spirit, but tonight she paid no heed to him, although he sneezed violently to attract her attention.

She had put her supper on the lighted table by the kitchen window and was pouring out her cup of tea, when a boy rapped at the door. "Here's a paper and a letter, Miss Wentworth," he said. "It's the second this week, and they think over to the store that that Berwick widower must be settin' up and takin' notice!"

She had indeed received a letter the day before, an unsigned communication, consisting only of the words,−−

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   Second Epistle of John. Verse x2.
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She had taken her Bible to look out the reference and found it to be:−−

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  Having many tilings to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink:
but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be
full.
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The envelope was postmarked New York, and she smiled, thinking that Mrs. Emerson, a charming lady who had spent the summer in Edgewood, and had sung with her in the village choir, was coming back, as she had promised, to have a sleigh ride and see Edgewood in its winter dress. Nancy had almost forgotten the first letter in the excitements of her busy day, and now here was another, from Boston this time. She opened the envelope and found again only a sipgle sentence, printed, not written. (Lest she should guess the hand, she wondered?)

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  Second Epistle of John. Verse 5.−−
     And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment
 unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one
another.
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Was it Mrs. Emerson? Could it be−−any one else? Was it? No, it might have been, years ago; but not now; not now!−−And yet; he was always so different from other people; and once, in church, he had handed her the hymn−book with his finger pointing to a certain verse.

She always fancied that her secret fidelity of heart rose from the fact that Justin Peabody was "different." From the hour of their first acquaintance, she was ever comparing him with his companions, and always to his advantage. So long as a woman finds all men very much alike (as Lobelia Brewster did, save that she allowed some to be worse!), she is in no danger. But the moment in which she perceives and discriminates subtle differences, marveling that there can be two opinions about a man's superiority, that moment the miracle has happened.

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     And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment
 unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one
another.
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No, it could not be from Justin. She drank her tea, played with her beans abstractedly, and nibbled her slice of steaming brown bread.

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     Not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee.
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No, not a new one; twelve, fifteen years old, that commandment!

That we love one another.

Who was speaking? Who had written these words? The first letter sounded just like Mrs. Emerson, who had said she was a very poor correspondent, but that she should just "drop down" on Nancy one of these days; but this second letter never came from Mrs. Emerson.−−Well, there would be an explanation some time; a pleasant one; one to smile over, and tell 'Zekiel and repeat to the neighbors; but not an unexpected, sacred, beautiful explanation, such a one as the heart of a woman could imagine, if she were young enough and happy enough to hope. She washed her cup and plate; replaced the uneaten beans in the brown pot, and put them away with the round loaf, folded the cloth (Lobelia Brewster said Nancy always "set out her meals as if she was entertainin' company from Portland"), closed the stove dampers, carried the lighted lamp to a safe corner shelf, and lifted 'Zekiel to his cushion on the high−backed rocker, doing all with the nice precision of long habit. Then she wrapped herself warmly, and locking the lonely little house behind her, set out to finish her work in the church.

V

At this precise moment Justin Peabody was eating his own beans and brown bread (articles of diet of which his Detroit landlady was lamentably ignorant) at the new tavern, not far from the meeting−house.

It would not be fair to him to say that Mrs. Burbank's letter had brought him back to Edgewood, but it had certainly accelerated his steps.

For the first six years after Justin Peabody left home, he had drifted about from place to place, saving every possible dollar of his uncertain earnings in the conscious hope that he could go back to New England and ask Nancy Wentworth to marry him. The West was prosperous and progressive, but how he yearned, in idle moments, for the grimmer and more sterile soil that had given him birth!

Then came what seemed to him a brilliant chance for a lucky turn of his savings, and he invested them in an enterprise which, wonderfully as it promised, failed within six months and left him penniless. At that moment he definitely gave up all hope, and for the next few years he put Nancy as far as possible out of his mind, in the full belief that he was acting an honorable part in refusing to drag her into his tangled and fruitless way of life. If she ever did care for him,−−and he could not be sure, she was always so shy,−− she must have outgrown the feeling long since, and be living happily, or at least contentedly, in her own way. He was glad in spite of himself when he heard that she had never married; but at least he had n't it on his conscience that _he_ had kept her single!

On the 17th of December, Justin, his business day over, was walking toward the dreary house in which he ate and slept. As he turned the corner, he heard one woman say to another, as they watched a man stumbling sorrowfully down the street: "Going home will be the worst of all for him−−to find nobody there!" That was what going home had meant for him these ten years, but he afterward felt it strange that this thought should have struck him so forcibly on that particular day. Entering the boarding−house, he found Mrs. Burbank's letter with its Edgewood postmark on the hall table, and took it up to his room. He kindled a little fire in the air−tight stove, watching the flame creep from shavings to kindlings, from kindlings to small pine, and from small pine to the round, hardwood sticks; then when the result seemed certain, he closed the stove door and sat down to read the letter. Whereupon all manner of strange things happened in his head and heart and flesh and spirit as he sat there alone, his hands in his pockets, his feet braced against the legs of the stove.

It was a cold winter night, and the snow and sleet beat against the windows. He looked about the ugly room: at the washstand with its square of oilcloth in front and its detestable bowl and pitcher; at the rigors of his white iron bedstead, with the valley in the middle of the lumpy mattress and the darns in the rumpled pillowcases; at the dull photographs of the landlady's hideous husband and children enshrined on the mantelshelf; looked at the abomination of desolation surrounding him until his soul sickened and cried out like a child's for something more like home. It was as if a spring thaw had melted his ice−bound heart, and on the crest of a wave it was drifting out

into the milder waters of some unknown sea. He could have laid his head in the kind lap of a woman and cried: "Comfort me! Give me companionship or I die!"

The wind howled in the chimney and rattled the loose window−sashes; the snow, freezing as it fell, dashed against the glass with hard, cutting little blows; at least, that is the way in which the wind and snow flattered themselves they were making existence disagreeable to Justin Peabody when he read the letter; but never were elements more mistaken.

It was a June Sunday in the boarding−house bedroom; and for that matter it was not the boarding−house bedroom at all: it was the old Orthodox church on Tory Hill in Edgewood. The windows were wide open, and the smell of the purple clover and the humming of the bees were drifting into the sweet, wide spaces within. Justin was sitting in the end of the Peabody pew, and Nancy Wentworth was beside him; Nancy, cool and restful in her white dress; dark−haired Nancy under the shadow of her shirred muslin hat.

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Rise, my soul, and stretch thy wings,
 Thy better portion trace.
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The melodeon gave the tune, and Nancy and he stood to sing, taking the book between them. His hand touched hers, and as the music of the hymn rose and fell, the future unrolled itself before his eyes: a future in which Nancy was his wedded wife; and the happy years stretched on and on in front of them until there was a row of little heads in the old Peabody pew, and mother and father could look proudly along the line at the young things they were bringing into the house of the Lord.

The recalling of that vision worked like magic in Justin's blood. His soul rose and stretched its wings and "traced its better portion" vividly, as he sprang to his feet and walked up and down the bedroom floor. He would get a few days' leave and go back to Edgewood for Christmas, to join, with all the old neighbors, in the service at the meetinghouse; and in pursuance of this resolve, he shook his fist in the face of the landlady's husband on the mantelpiece and dared him to prevent.

He had a salary of fifty dollars a month, with some very slight prospect of an increase after January. He did not see how two persons could eat, and drink, and lodge, and dress on it in Detroit, but he proposed to give Nancy Wentworth the refusal of that magnificent future, that brilliant and tempting offer. He had exactly one hundred dollars in the bank, and sixty or seventy of them would be spent in the journeys, counting two happy, blessed fares back from Edgewood to Detroit; and if he paid only his own fare back, he would throw the price of the other into the pond behind the Wentworth house. He would drop another ten dollars into the plate on Christmas Day toward the repairs on the church; if he starved, he would do that. He was a failure. Everything his hand touched turned to naught. He looked himself full in the face, recognizing his weakness, and in this supremest moment of recognition he was a stronger man than he had been an hour before. His drooping shoulders had straightened; the restless look had gone from his eyes; his somber face had something of repose in it, the repose of a settled purpose. He was a failure, but perhaps if he took the risks (and if Nancy would take them−−but that was the trouble, women were so unselfish, they were always willing to take risks, and one ought not to let them!), perhaps he might do better in trying to make a living for two than he had in working for himself alone. He would go home, tell Nancy that he was an unlucky good−for−naught, and ask her if she would try her hand at making him over.

VI

These were the reasons that had brought Justin Peabody to Edgewood on the Saturday afternoon before Christmas, and had taken him to the new tavern on Tory Hill, near the meeting−house.

Nobody recognized him at the station or noticed him at the tavern, and after his supper he put on his overcoat and started out for a walk, aimlessly hoping that he might meet a friend, or failing that, intending to call on some of

his old neighbors, with the view of hearing the village news and securing some information which might help him to decide when he had better lay himself and his misfortunes at Nancy Wentworth's feet. They were pretty feet! He remembered that fact well enough under the magical influence of familiar sights and sounds and odors. He was restless, miserable, anxious, homesick−−not for Detroit, but for some heretofore unimagined good; yet, like Bunyan's shepherd boy in the Valley of humiliation, he carried "the herb called Heartsease in his bosom," for he was at last loving consciously.

How white the old church looked, and how green the blinds! It must have been painted very lately: that meant that the parish was fairly prosperous. There were new shutters in the belfry tower, too; he remembered the former open space and the rusty bell, and he liked the change. Did the chimney use to be in that corner? No; but his father had always said it would have drawn better if it had been put there in the beginning. New shingles within a year: that was evident to a practiced eye. He wondered if anything had been done to the inside of the building, but he must wait until the morrow to see, for, of course, the doors would be locked. No; the one at the right side was ajar. He opened it softly and stepped into the tiny square entry that he recalled so well−−the one through which the Sunday−School children ran out to the steps from their catechism, apparently enjoying the sunshine after a spell of orthodoxy; the little entry where the village girls congregated while waiting for the last bell to ring−−they made a soft blur of pink and blue and buff, a little flutter of curls and braids and fans and sun−shades, in his mind's eye, as he closed the outer door behind him and gently opened the inner one. The church was flooded with moon−light and snowlight, and there was one lamp burning at the back of the pulpit; a candle, too, on the pulpit steps. There was the tip−tap−tip of a tack−hammer going on in a distant corner. Was somebody hanging Christmas garlands? The new red carpet attracted his notice, and as he grew accustomed to the dim light, it carried his eye along the aisle he had trod so many years of Sundays, to the old familiar pew. The sound of the hammer ceased, and a woman rose from her knees. A stranger was doing for the family honor what he ought himself to have done. The woman turned to shake her skirt, and it was Nancy Wentworth. He might have known it. Women were always faithful; they always remembered old land−marks, old days, old friends, old duties. His father and mother and Esther were all gone; who but dear Nancy would have made the old Peabody pew right and tidy for the Christmas festival? Bless her kind, womanly heart!

She looked just the same to him as when he last saw her. Mercifully he seemed to have held in remembrance all these years not so much her youthful bloom as her general qualities of mind and heart: her cheeriness, her spirit, her unflagging zeal, her bright womanliness. Her gray dress was turned up in front over a crimson moreen petticoat. She had on a cozy jacket, a fur turban of some sort with a red breast in it, and her cheeks were flushed from exertion. "Sweet records, and promises as sweet," had always met in Nancy's face, and either he had forgotten how pretty she was, or else she had absolutely grown prettier during his absence.

Nancy would have chosen the supreme moment of meeting very differently, but she might well have chosen worse. She unpinned her skirt and brushed the threads off, smoothed the pew cushions carefully, and took a last stitch in the ragged hassock. She then lifted the Bible and the hymn−book from the rack, and putting down a bit of flannel on the pulpit steps, took a flatiron from an oil−stove, and opening the ancient books, pressed out the well−thumbed leaves one by one with infinite care. After replacing the volumes in their accustomed place, she first extinguished the flame of her stove, which she tucked out of sight, and then blew out the lamp and the candle. The church was still light enough for objects to be seen in a shadowy way, like the objects in a dream, and Justin did not realize that he was a man in the flesh, looking at a woman; spying, it might be, upon her privacy. He was one part of a dream and she another, and he stood as if waiting, and fearing, to be awakened.

Nancy, having done all, came out of the pew, and standing in the aisle, looked back at the scene of her labors with pride and content. And as she looked, some desire to stay a little longer in the dear old place must have come over her, or some dread of going back to her lonely cottage, for she sat down in Justin's corner of the pew with folded hands, her eyes fixed dreamily on the pulpit and her ears hearing:−−

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Not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had
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from the beginning.

Justin's grasp on the latch tightened as he prepared to close the door and leave the place, but his instinct did not warn him quickly enough, after all, for, obeying some uncontrollable impulse, Nancy suddenly fell on her knees in the pew and buried her face in the cushions. The dream broke, and in an instant Justin was a man−−worse than that, he was an eavesdropper, ashamed of his unsuspected presence. He felt himself standing, with covered head and feet shod, in the holy temple of a woman's heart.

But his involuntary irreverence brought abundant grace with it. The glimpse and the revelation wrought their miracles silently and irresistibly, not by the slow processes of growth which Nature demands for her enterprises, but with the sudden swiftness of the spirit. In an instant changes had taken place in Justin's soul which his so−called "experiencing religion" twenty−five years back had been powerless to effect. He had indeed been baptized then, but the recording angel could have borne witness that this second baptism fructified the first, and became the real herald of the new birth and the new creature.

VII

Justin Peabody silently closed the inner door, and stood in the entry with his head bent and his heart in a whirl until he should hear Nancy rise to her feet. He must take this Heaven−sent chance of telling her all, but how do it without alarming her?

A moment, and her step sounded in the stillness of the empty church.

Obeying the first impulse, he passed through the outer door, and standing on the step, knocked once, twice, three times; then, opening it a little and speaking through the chink, he called, "Is Miss Nancy Wentworth here?"

"I'm here!" in a moment came Nancy's answer; and then, with a little wondering tremor in her voice, as if a hint of the truth had already dawned: "What's wanted?"

"You're wanted, Nancy, wanted badly, by Justin Peabody, come back from the West."

The door opened wide, and Justin faced Nancy standing halfway down the aisle, her eyes brilliant, her lips parted. A week ago Justin's apparition confronting her in the empty meeting−house after nightfall, even had she been prepared for it as now, by his voice, would have terrified her beyond measure. Now it seemed almost natural and inevitable. She had spent these last days in the church where both of them had been young and happy together; the two letters had brought him vividly to mind, and her labor in the old Peabody pew had been one long excursion into the past in which he was the most prominent and the best−loved figure.

"I said I'd come back to you when my luck turned, Nancy."

These were so precisely the words she expected him to say, should she ever see him again face to face, that for an additional moment they but heightened her sense of unreality.

"Well, the luck hasn't turned, after all, but I could n't wait any longer. Have you given a thought to me all these years, Nancy?"

"More than one, Justin." For the very look upon his face, the tenderness of his voice, the attitude of his body, outran his words and told her what he had come home to say, told her that her years of waiting were over at last.

"You ought to despise me for coming back again with only myself and my empty hands to offer you."

How easy it was to speak his heart out in this dim and quiet place! How tongue−tied he would have been, sitting on the black hair−cloth sofa in the Wentworth parlor and gazing at the open soapstone stove!

"Oh, men are such fools!" cried Nancy, smiles and tears struggling together in her speech, as she sat down suddenly in her own pew and put her hands over her face.

"They are," agreed Justin humbly; "but I've never stopped loving you, whenever I've had time for thinking or loving. And I was n't sure that you really cared anything about me; and how could I have asked you when I had n't a dollar in the world?"

"There are other things to give a woman besides dollars, Justin."

"Are there? Well, you shall have them all, every one of them, Nancy, if you can make up your mind to do without the dollars; for dollars seem to be just what I can't manage."

Her hand was in his by this time, and they were sitting side by side, in the cushionless, carpetless Wentworth pew. The door stood open; the winter moon shone in upon them. That it was beginning to grow cold in the church passed unnoticed. The grasp of the woman's hand seemed to give the man new hope and courage, and Justin's warm, confiding, pleading pressure brought balm to Nancy, balm and healing for the wounds her pride had suffered; joy, too, half−conscious still, that her life need not be lived to the end in unfruitful solitude. She had waited, "as some gray lake lies, full and smooth, awaiting the star below the twilight."

Justin Peabody might have been no other woman's star, but he was Nancy's! "Just you sitting beside me here makes me. feel as if I'd been asleep or dead all these years, and just born over again," said Justin. "I've led a respectable, hard−working, honest life, Nancy," he continued, "and I don't owe any man a cent; the trouble is that no man owes me one. I've got enough money to pay two fares back to Detroit on Monday, although I was terribly afraid you would n't let me do it. It'll need a good deal of thinking and planning, Nancy, for we shall be very poor."

Nancy had been storing up fidelity and affection deep, deep in the hive of her heart all these years, and now the honey of her helpfulness stood ready to be gathered.

"Could I keep hens in Detroit?" she asked. "I can always make them pay."

"Hens−−in three rooms, Nancy?"

Her face fell. "And no yard?"

"No yard."

A moment's pause, and then the smile came. "Oh, well, I've had yards and hens for thirty−five years. Doing without them will be a change. I can take in sewing."

"No, you can't, Nancy. I need your backbone and wits and pluck and ingenuity, but if I can't ask you to sit with your hands folded for the rest of your life, as I'd like to, you shan't use them for other people. You're marrying me to make a man of me, but I'm not marrying you to make you a drudge."

His voice rang clear and true in the silence, and Nancy's heart vibrated at the sound.

"O Justin, Justin! there's something wrong somewhere," she whispered, "but we'll find it out together, you and I, and make it right. You're not like a failure. You don't even look poor, Justin; there is n't a man in Edgewood to

compare with you, or I should be washing his dishes and darning his stockings this minute. And I am not a pauper! There'll be the rent of my little house and a carload of my furniture, so you can put the three−room idea out of your mind, and your firm will offer you a larger salary when you tell them you have a wife to take care of. Oh, I see it all, and it is as easy and bright and happy as can be!"

Justin put his arm around her and drew her close, with such a throb of gratitude for her belief and trust that it moved him almost to tears. There was a long pause; then he said:−−

"Now I shall call for you tomorrow morning after the last bell has stopped ringing, and we will walk up the aisle together and sit in the old Peabody pew. We shall be a nine days' wonder anyway, but this will be equal to an announcement, especially if you take my arm. We don't either of us like to be stared at, but this will show without a word what we think of each other and what we've promised to be to each other, and it's the only thing that will make me feel sure of you and settled in my mind after all these mistaken years. Have you got the courage, Nancy?"

"I should n't wonder! I guess if I've had courage enough to wait for you, I've got courage enough to walk up the aisle with you and marry you besides!" said Nancy.−−"Now it is too late for us to stay here any longer, and you must see me only as far as my gate, for perhaps you have n't forgotten yet how interested the Brewsters are in their neighbors."

They stood at the little Wentworth gate for a moment, hand close clasped in hand. The night was clear, the air was cold and sparkling, but with nothing of bitterness in it, the sky was steely blue, and the evening star glowed and burned like a tiny sun. Nancy remembered the shepherd's song she had taught the Sunday−School children, and repeated softly: −−

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For I my sheep was watching
 Beneath the silent skies,
When sudden, far to eastward,
 I saw a star arise;
Then all the peaceful heavens
 With sweetest music rang,
And glory, glory, glory!
 The happy angels sang.

So I this night am joyful,
 Though I can scarce tell why,
It seemeth me that glory
 Hath met us very nigh;
And we, though poor and humble,
 Have part in heavenly plan,
For, born tonight, the Prince of Peace
 Shall rule the heart of man.
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Justin's heart melted within him like wax to the woman's vision and the woman's touch.

"Oh, Nancy, Nancy!" he whispered. "If I had brought my bad luck to you long, long ago, would you have taken me then, and have I lost years of such happiness as this?"

"There are some things it is not best for a man to be certain about," said Nancy, with a wise smile and a last goodnight.

VIII

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Ring out, sweet bells,
O'er woods and dells
 Your lovely strains repeat,
While happy throngs
With joyous songs
 Each accent gladly greet.
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Christmas morning in the old Tory Hill Meeting−House was felt by all of the persons who were present in that particular year to be a most exciting and memorable occasion.

The old sexton quite outdid himself, for although he had rung the bell for more than thirty years, he had never felt greater pride or joy in his task. Was not his son John home for Christmas, and John's wife, and a grand−child newly named Nathaniel for himself? Were there not spareribs and turkeys and cranberries and mince pies on the pantry shelves, and barrels of rosy Baldwins in the cellar and bottles of mother's root beer just waiting to give a holiday pop? The bell itself forgot its age and the suspicion of a crack that dulled its voice on a damp day, and, inspired by the bright, frosty air, the sexton's inspiring pull, and the Christmas spirit, gave out nothing but joyous tones.

Ding−dong! _Ding−dong_! It fired the ambitions of star scholars about to recite hymns and sing solos. It thrilled little girls expecting dolls before night. It excited beyond bearing dozens of little boys being buttoned into refractory overcoats. _Ding−dong_! _Ding−dong_! Mothers' fingers trembled when they heard it, and mothers' voices cried: "If that is the second bell, the children will never be ready in time! Where are the overshoes? Where are the mittens? Hurry, Jack! Hurry, Jennie!" _Ding−dong_! _Ding−dong_! Where's Sally's muff? Where's father's fur cap? Is the sleigh at the door? Are the hot soapstones in? Have all of you your money for the contribution box?" _Ding−dong_! _Ding−dong_! It was a blithe bell, a sweet, true bell, a holy bell, and to Justin pacing his tavern room, as to Nancy trembling in her maiden chamber, it rang a Christmas message: −−

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Awake, glad heart! Arise and sing;
It is the birthday of thy King!
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The congregation filled every seat in the old meeting−house. As Maria Sharp had prophesied, there was one ill−natured spinster from a rival village who declared that the church floor looked like Joseph's coat laid out smooth; but in the general chorus of admiration, approval, and goodwill, this envious speech, though repeated from mouth to mouth, left no sting.

Another item of interest long recalled was the fact that on that august and unapproachable day the pulpit vases stood erect and empty, though Nancy Wentworth had filled them every Sunday since any one could remember. This instance, though felt at the time to be of mysterious significance if the cause were ever revealed, paled into nothingness when, after the ringing of the last bell, Nancy Wentworth walked up the aisle on Justin Peabody's arm, and they took their seats side by side in the old family pew.

("And consid'able close, too, though there was plenty o' room!")

("And no one that I ever heard of so much as suspicioned that they had ever kept company!")

("And do you s'pose she knew Justin was expected back when she scrubbed his pew a−Friday? ")

("And this explains the empty pulpit vases! ")

("And I always said that Nancy would make a real handsome couple if she ever got anybody to couple with!")

During the unexpected and solemn procession of the two up the aisle the soprano of the village choir stopped short in the middle of the Doxology, and the three other voices carried it to the end without any treble. Also, among those present there were some who could not remember afterward the precise petitions wafted upward in the opening prayer.

And could it be explained otherwise than by cheerfully acknowledging the bounty of an overruling Providence that Nancy Wentworth should have had a new winter dress for the first time in five years−−a winter dress of dark brown cloth to match her beaver muff and victorine? The existence of this toilette had been known and discussed in Edgewood for a month past, and it was thought to be nothing more than a proper token of respect from a member of the carpet committee to the general magnificence of the church on the occasion of its reopening after repairs. Indeed, you could have identified every member of the Dorcas Society that Sunday morning by the freshness of her apparel. The brown dress, then, was generally expected; but why the white cashmere waist with collar and cuffs of point lace, devised only and suitable only for the minister's wedding, where it first saw the light?

"The white waist can only be explained as showing distinct hope!" whispered the minister's wife during the reading of the church notices.

"To me it shows more than hope; I am very sure that Nancy would never take any wear out of that lace for hope; it means certainty!" answered Maria, who was always strong in the prophetic line.

Justin's identity had dawned upon most of the congregation by sermon time. A stranger to all but one or two at first, his presence in the Peabody pew brought his face and figure back, little by little, to the minds of the old parishioners.

When the contribution plate was passed, the sexton always began at the right−wing pews, as all the sextons before him had done for a hundred years. Every eye in the church was already turned upon Justin and Nancy, and it was with almost a gasp that those in the vicinity saw a ten−dollar bill fall in the plate. The sexton reeled, or, if that is too intemperate a word for a pillar of the church, the good man tottered, but caught hold of the pew rail with one hand, and, putting the thumb of his other over the bill, proceeded quickly to the next pew, lest the stranger should think better of his gift, or demand change, as had occasionally been done in the olden time.

Nancy never fluttered an eyelash, but sat quietly by Justin's side with her bosom rising and falling under the beaver fur and her cold hands clasped tight in the little brown muff. Far from grudging this appreciable part of their slender resources, she thrilled with pride to see Justin's offering fall in the plate.

Justin was too absorbed in his own thoughts to notice anything, but his munificent contribution had a most unexpected effect upon his reputation, after all; for on that day, and on many another later one, when his sudden marriage and departure with Nancy Wentworth were under discussion, the neighbors said to one another:−− "Justin must be making money fast out West! He put ten dollars in the contribution plate a−Sunday, and paid the minister ten more next day for marryin' him to Nancy; so the Peabody luck has turned at last!"−−which as a matter of fact, it had.

"And all the time," said the chairman of the carpet committee to the treasurer of the Dorcas Society−−"all the time, little as she realized it, Nancy was laying the carpet in her own pew. Now she's married to Justin, she'll be the makin' of him, or I miss my guess. You can't do a thing with men−folks without they're right alongside where you can keep your eye and hand on 'em. Justin's handsome and good and stiddy; all he needs is some nice woman to put starch into him. The Edgewood Peabodys never had a mite o' stiffenin' in 'em,−−limp as dishrags, every blessed one! Nancy Wentworth fairly rustles with starch. Justin had n't been engaged to her but a few hours when they walked up the aisle together, but did you notice the way he carried his head? I declare I thought 't would fall off behind! I should n't wonder a mite but they prospered and come back every summer to set in the Old Peabody

Pew."

SUSANNA AND SUE

I. Mother Ann's Children

It was the end of May, when "spring goeth all in white." The apple trees were scattering their delicate petals on the ground, dropping them over the stone walls to the roadsides, where in the moist places of the shadows they fell on beds of snowy innocence. Here and there a single tree was tinged with pink, but so faintly, it was as if the white were blushing. Now and then a tiny white butterfly danced in the sun and pearly clouds strayed across the sky in fleecy flocks.

Everywhere the grass was of ethereal greenness, a greenness drenched with the pale yellow of spring sunshine. Looking from earth to sky and from blossom to blossom, the little world of the apple orchards, shedding its falling petals like fair−weather snow, seemed made of alabaster and porcelain, ivory and mother−of−pearl, all shimmering on a background of tender green.

After you pass Albion village, with its streets shaded by elms and maples and its outskirts embowered in blossoming orchards, you wind along a hilly country road that runs between grassy fields. Here the whiteweed is already budding, and there are pleasant pastures dotted with rocks and fringed with spruce and fir; stretches of woodland, too, where the road is lined with giant pines and you lift your face gratefully to catch the cool balsam breath of the forest. Coming from out this splendid shade, this silence too deep to be disturbed by light breezes or vagrant winds, you find yourself on the brow of a descending hill. The first thing that strikes the eye is a lake that might be a great blue sapphire dropped into the verdant hollow where it lies. When the eye reluctantly leaves the lake on the left, it turns to rest upon the little Shaker Settlement on the right−−a dozen or so large comfortable white barns, sheds, and houses, standing in the wide orderly spaces of their own spreading acres of farm and timber land. There again the spring goeth all in white, for there is no spot to fleck the dazzling quality of Shaker paint, and their apple, plum, and pear trees are so well cared for that the snowy blossoms are fairly hiding the branches.

The place is very still, although there are signs of labor in all directions. From a window of the girls' building a quaint little gray−clad figure is beating a braided rug; a boy in homespun, with his hair slightly long in the back and cut in a straight line across the forehead, is carrying milk−cans from the dairy to one of the Sisters' Houses. Men in broad−brimmed hats, with clean−shaven, ascetic faces, are ploughing or harrowing here and there in the fields, while a group of Sisters is busy setting out plants and vines in some beds near a cluster of noble trees. That cluster of trees, did the eye of the stranger realize it, was the very starting−point of this Shaker Community, for in the year 1785, the valiant Father James Whittaker, one of Mother Ann Lee's earliest English converts, stopped near the village of Albion on his first visit to Maine. As he and his Elders alighted from their horses, they stuck into the ground the willow withes they had used as whips, and now, a hundred years later, the trees that had grown from these slender branches were nearly three feet in diameter.

From whatever angle you look upon the Settlement, the first and strongest impression is of quiet order, harmony, and a kind of austere plenty. Nowhere is the purity of the spring so apparent. Nothing is out of place; nowhere is any confusion, or appearance of loose ends, or neglected tasks. As you come nearer, you feel the more surely that here there has never been undue haste nor waste; no shirking, no putting off till the morrow what should have been done today. Whenever a shingle or a clapboard was needed it was put on, where paint was required it was used,−−that is evident; and a look at the great barns stored with hay shows how the fields have been conscientiously educated into giving a full crop.

To such a spot as this might any tired or sinful heart come for rest; hoping somehow, in the midst of such frugality

and thrift, such self−denying labor, such temperate use of God's good gifts, such shining cleanliness of outward things, to regain and wear "the white flower of a blameless life." The very air of the place breathed peace, so thought Susanna Hathaway; and little Sue, who skipped by her side, thought nothing at all save that she was with mother in the country; that it had been rather a sad journey, with mother so quiet and pale, and that she would be very glad to see supper, should it rise like a fairy banquet in the midst of these strange surroundings.

It was only a mile and a half from the railway station to the Shaker Settlement, and Susanna knew the road well, for she had driven over it more than once as child and girl. A boy would bring the little trunk that contained their simple necessities later on in the evening, so she and Sue would knock at the door of the house where visitors were admitted, and be undisturbed by any gossiping company while they were pleading their case.

"Are we most there, Mardie?" asked Sue for the twentieth time. "Look at me! I'm being a butterfly, or perhaps a white pigeon. No, I'd rather be a butterfly, and then I can skim along faster and move my wings!"

The airy little figure, all lightness and brightness, danced along the road, the white cotton dress rising and falling, the white−stockinged legs much in evidence, the arms outstretched as if in flight, straw hat falling off yellow hair, and a little wisp of swansdown scarf floating out behind like the drapery of a baby Mercury.

"We are almost there," her mother answered. "You can see the buildings now, if you will stop being a butterfly. Don't you like them?"

"Yes, I 'specially like them all so white. Is it a town, Mardie?"

"It is a village, but not quite like other villages. I have told you often about the Shaker Settlement, where your grandmother brought me once when I was just your age. There was a thunder−storm; they kept us all night, and were so kind that I never forgot them. Then your grandmother and I stopped off once when we were going to Boston. I was ten then, and I remember more about it. The same sweet Eldress was there both times."

"What is an El−der−ess, Mardie?"

"A kind of everybody's mother, she seemed to be," Susanna responded, with a catch in her breath.

"I'd 'specially like her; will she be there now, Mardie?"

"I'm hoping so, but it is eighteen years ago. I was ten and she was about forty, I should think."

"Then o' course she'll be dead," said Sue, cheerfully, "or either she'll have no teeth or hair."

"People don't always die before they are sixty, Sue."

"Do they die when they want to, or when they must?"

"Always when they must; never, never when they want to," answered Sue's mother.

"But o' course they would n't ever want to if they had any little girls to be togedder with, like you and me, Mardie?" And Sue looked up with eyes that were always like two interrogation points, eager by turns and by turns wistful, but never satisfied.

"No," Susanna replied brokenly, "of course they would n't, unless sometimes they were wicked for a minute or two and forgot."

"Do the Shakers shake all the time, Mardie, or just once in a while? And shall I see them do it?"

"Sue, dear, I can't explain everything in the world to you while you are so little; you really must wait until you're more grown up. The Shakers don't shake and the Quakers don't quake, and when you're older, I'll try to make you understand why they were called so and why they kept the name."

"Maybe the El−der−ess can make me understand right off now; I'd 'specially like it." And Sue ran breathlessly along to the gate where the North Family House stood in its stately, white−and−green austerity.

Susanna followed, and as she caught up with the impetuous Sue, the front door of the house opened and a figure appeared on the threshold. Mother and child quickened their pace and went up the steps, Susanna with a hopeless burden of fear and embarrassment clogging her tongue and dragging at her feet; Sue so expectant of new disclosures and fresh experiences that her face beamed like a full moon.

Eldress Abby (for it was Eldress Abby) had indeed survived the heavy weight of her fifty−five or sixty summers, and looked as if she might reach a yet greater age. She wore the simple Shaker afternoon dress of drab alpaca; an irreproachable muslin surplice encircled her straight, spare shoulders, while her hair was almost entirely concealed by the stiffly wired, transparent white−net cap that served as a frame to the tranquil face. The face itself was a network of delicate, fine wrinkles; but every wrinkle must have been as lovely in God's sight as it was in poor unhappy Susanna Hathaway's. Some of them were graven by self−denial and hard work; others perhaps meant the giving up of home, of parents and brothers or sisters; perhaps some worldly love, the love that Father Adam bequeathed to the human family, had been slain in Abby's youth, and the scars still remained to show the body's suffering and the spirit's triumph. At all events, whatever foes had menaced her purity or her tranquillity had been conquered, and she exhaled serenity as the rose sheds fragrance.

"Do you remember the little Nelson girl and her mother that stayed here all night, years ago?" asked Susanna, putting out her hand timidly.

"Why, seems to me I do," assented Eldress Abby, genially. "So many comes and goes it's hard to remember all. Did n't you come once in a thunder−storm?"

"Yes, one of your barns was struck by lightning and we sat up all night." "Yee, yee.(1) I remember well! Your mother was a beautiful spirit. I could n't forget her."

(1)"Yea" is always thus pronounced by the Shakers.

"And we came once again, mother and I, and spent the afternoon with you, and went strawberrying in the pasture."

"Yee, yee, so we did; I hope your mother continues in health."

"She died the very next year," Susanna answered in a trembling voice, for the time of explanation was near at hand and her heart failed her.

"Won't you come into the sittingroom and rest a while? You must be tired walking from the deepot."

"No, thank you, not just yet. I'll step into the front entry a minute.−−Sue, run and sit in that rocking−chair on the porch and watch the cows going into the big barn.−−Do you remember, Eldress Abby, the second time I came, how you sat me down in the kitchen with a bowl of wild strawberries to hull for supper? They were very small and ripe; I did my best, for I never meant to be careless, but the bowl slipped and fell, my legs were too short to reach the floor, and I could n't make a lap, so in trying to pick up the berries I spilled juice on nay dress, and on

the white apron you had tied on for me. Then my fingers were stained and wet and the hulls kept falling in with the soft berries, and when you came in and saw me you held up your hands and said, 'Dear, dear! you _have_ made a mess of your work!' Oh, Eldress Abby, they've come back to me all day, those words. I've tried hard to be good, but somehow I've made just such a mess of my life as I made of hulling the berries. The bowl is broken, I have n't much fruit to show, and I am all stained and draggled. I should n't have come to Albion on the five o'clock train−−that was an accident; I meant to come at noon, when you could turn me away if you wanted to."

"Nay, that is not the Shaker habit," remonstrated Abby. "You and the child can sleep in one of the spare chambers at the Office Building and be welcome."

"But I want much more than that," said Susanna, tearfully. "I want to come and live here, where there is no marrying nor giving in marriage. I am so tired with my disappointments and discouragements and failures that it is no use to try any longer. I am Mrs. Hathaway, and Sue is my child, but I have left my husband for good and all, and I only want to spend the rest of my days here in peace and bring up Sue to a more tranquil life than I have ever had. I have a little money, so that I shall not be a burden to you, and I will work from morning to night at any task you set me."

"I will talk to the Family," said Eldress Abby gravely; "but there are a good many things to settle before we can say yee to all you ask."

"Let me confess everything freely and fully," pleaded Susanna, "and if you think I'm to blame, I will go away at once."

"Nay, this is no time for that. It is our duty to receive all and try all; then if you should be gathered in, you would unburden your heart to God through the Sister appointed to receive your confession."

"Will Sue have to sleep in the children's building away from me?"

"Nay, not now; you are company, not a Shaker, and anyway you could keep the child with you till she is a little older; that's not forbidden at first, though there comes a time when the ties of the flesh must be broken! All you've got to do now's to be 'pure and peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, and without hypocrisy.' That's about all there is to the Shaker creed, and that's enough to keep us all busy."

Sue ran in from the porch excitedly and caught her mother's hand.

"The cows have all gone into the barn," she chattered; "and the Shaker gentlemen are milking them, and not one of them is shaking the least bit, for I 'specially noticed; and I looked in through the porch window, and there is nice supper on a table−−bread and butter and milk and dried apple sauce and gingerbread and cottage cheese. Is it for us, Mardie?"

Susanna's lip was trembling and her face was pale. She lifted her swimming eyes to the Sister's and asked, "Is it for us, Eldress Abby?"

"Yee, it's for you," she answered; "there's always a Shaker supper on the table for all who want to leave the husks and share the feast. Come right in and help yourselves. I will sit down with you."

Supper was over, and Susanna and Sue were lying in a little upper chamber under the stars. It was the very one that Susanna had slept in as a child, or that she had been put to bed in, for there was little sleep that night for any one. She had leaned on the windowsill with her mother and watched the pillar of flame and smoke ascend from the burning barn; and once in the early morning she had stolen out of bed, and, kneeling by the open window, had watched the two silent Shaker brothers who were guarding the smouldering ruins, fearful lest the wind should rise

and bear any spark to the roofs of the precious buildings they had labored so hard to save.

The chamber was spotless and devoid of ornament. The paint was robin's egg blue and of a satin gloss. The shining floor was of the same color, and neat braided rugs covered exposed places near the bureau, washstand, and bed. Various useful articles of Shaker manufacture interested Sue greatly: the exquisite straw−work that covered the whisk−broom; the mending−basket, pincushion, needle−book, spool− and watch−cases, hair−receivers, pin−trays, might all have been put together by fairy fingers.

Sue's prayers had been fervent, but a trifle disjointed, covering all subjects from Jack and Fardie, to Grandma in heaven and Aunt Louisa at the farm, with special references to El−der−ess Abby and the Shaker cows, and petitions that the next day be fair so that she could see them milked. Excitement at her strange, unaccustomed surroundings had put the child's mind in a very whirl, and she had astonished her mother with a very new and disturbing version of the Lord's Prayer, ending: "God give us our debts and help us to forget our debtors and theirs shall be the glory, Amen." Now she lay quietly on the wall side of the clean, narrow bed, while her mother listened to hear the regular breathing that would mean that she was off for the land of dreams. The child's sleep would leave the mother free to slip out of bed and look at the stars; free to pray and long and wonder and suffer and repent, not wholly, but in part, for she was really at peace in all but the innermost citadel of her conscience. She had left her husband, and for the moment, at all events, she was fiercely glad; but she had left her boy, and Jack was only ten. Jack was not the helpless, clinging sort; he was a little piece of his father, and his favorite. Aunt Louisa would surely take him, and Jack would scarcely feel the difference, for he had never shown any special affection for anybody. Still he was her child, nobody could possibly get around that fact, and it was a stumbling−block in the way of forgetfulness or ease of mind. Oh, but for that, what unspeakable content she could feel in this quiet haven, this self− respecting solitude! To have her thoughts, her emotions, her words, her self, to herself once more, as she had had them before she was married at seventeen. To go to sleep in peace, without listening for a step she had once heard with gladness, but that now sometimes stumbled unsteadily on the stair; or to dream as happy women dreamed, without being roused by the voice of the present John, a voice so different from that of the past John that it made the heart ache to listen to it.

Sue's voice broke the stillness: "How long are we going to stay here, Mardie?"

"I don't know, Sue; I think perhaps as long as they'll let us."

"Will Fardie come and see us?"

"I don't expect him."

"Who'll take care of Jack, Mardie?"

"Your Aunt Louisa."

"She'll scold him awfully, but he never cries; he just says, 'Pooh! what do I care?' Oh, I forgot to pray for that very nicest Shaker gentleman that said he'd let me help him feed the calves! Had n't I better get out of bed and do it? I'd 'specially like to."

"Very well, Sue; and then go to sleep."

Safely in bed again, there was a long pause, and then the eager little voice began, "Who'll take care of Fardie now?"

"He's a big man; he does n't need anybody."

"What if he's sick?"

"We must go back to him, I suppose."

" Tomorrow 's Sunday; what if he needs us tomorrow, Mardie?"

"I don't know, I don't know! Oh, Sue, Sue, don't ask your wretched mother any more questions, for she cannot bear them tonight. Cuddle up close to her; love her and forgive her and help her to know what's right."

II. A Son of Adam

When Susanna Nelson at seventeen married John Hathaway, she had the usual cogent reasons for so doing, with some rather more unusual ones added thereto. She was alone in the world, and her life with an uncle, her mother's only relative, was an unhappy one. No assistance in the household tasks that she had ever been able to render made her a welcome member of the family or kept her from feeling a burden, and she belonged no more to the little circle at seventeen than she did when she became a part of it at twelve. The hope of being independent and earning her own living had sustained her through the last year; but it was a very timid, self−distrustful, love−starved little heart that John Hathaway stormed and carried by assault. Her girl's life in a country school and her uncle's very rigid and orthodox home had been devoid of emotion or experience; still, her mother had early sown seeds in her mind and spirit that even in the most arid soil were certain to flower into beauty when the time for flowering came; and intellectually Susanna was the clever daughter of clever parents. She was very immature, because, after early childhood, her environment had not been favorable to her development. At seventeen she began to dream of a future as bright as the past had been dreary and uneventful. Visions of happiness, of goodness, and of service haunted her, and sometimes, gleaming through the mists of dawning womanhood, the figure, all luminous, of The Man!

When John Hathaway appeared on the horizon, she promptly clothed him in all the beautiful garments of her dreams; they were a grotesque misfit, but when we intimate that women have confused the dream and the reality before, and may even do so again, we make the only possible excuse for poor little Susanna Nelson.

John Hathaway was the very image of the outer world that lay beyond Susanna's village. He was a fairly prosperous, genial, handsome young merchant, who looked upon life as a place furnished by Providence in which to have "a good time." His parents had frequently told him that it was expedient for him to "settle down," and he supposed that he might finally do so, if he should ever find a girl who would tempt him to relinquish his liberty. (The line that divides liberty and license was a little vague to John Hathaway!) It is curious that he should not have chosen for his life−partner some thoughtless, rosy, romping young person, whose highest conception of connubial happiness would have been to drive twenty miles to the seashore on a Sunday, and having partaken of all the season's delicacies, solid and liquid, to come home hilarious by moonlight. That, however, is not the way the little love−imps do their work in the world; or is it possible that they are not imps at all who provoke and stimulate and arrange these strange marriages not imps, but honest, chastening little character−builders? In any event, the moment that John Hathaway first beheld Susanna Nelson was the moment of his surrender; yet the wooing was as incomprehensible as that of a fragile, dainty little hummingbird by a pompous, greedy, big−breasted robin.

Susanna was like a New England anemone. Her face was oval in shape and as smooth and pale as a pearl. Her hair was dark, not very heavy, and as soft as a child's. Her lips were delicate and sensitive, her eyes a cool gray,−−clear, steady, and shaded by darker lashes. When John Hathaway met her shy, maidenly glance and heard her pretty, dovelike voice, it is strange he did not see that there was a bit too much saint in her to make her a willing comrade of his gay, roistering life. But as a matter of fact, John Hathaway saw nothing at all; nothing but that Susanna Nelson was a lovely girl and he wanted her for his own. The type was one he had never met before,

one that allured him by its mysteries and piqued him by its shy aloofness.

John had "a way with him," a way that speedily won Susanna; and after all there was a best to him as well as a worst. He had a twinkling eye, an infectious laugh, a sweet disposition, and while he was over−susceptible to the charm of a pretty face, he had a chivalrous admiration for all women, coupled, it must be confessed, with a decided lack of discrimination in values. His boyish lightheartedness had a charm for everybody, including Susanna; a charm that lasted until she discovered that his heart was light not only when it ought to be light, but when it ought to be heavy. He was very much in love with her, but there was nothing particularly exclusive, unique, individual, or interesting about his passion at that time. It was of the everyday sort which carries a well−meaning man to the altar, and sometimes, in cases of exceptional fervor and duration, even a little farther. Stock sizes of this article are common and inexpensive, and John Hathaway's love when he married Susanna was, judged by the highest standards, about as trivial an affair as Cupid ever put upon the market or a man ever offered to a woman. Susanna on the same day offered John, or the wooden idol she was worshiping as John, her whole self−−mind, body, heart, and spirit. So the couple were united, and smilingly signed the marriage−register, a rite by which their love for each other was supposed to be made eternal.

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"Will you love me?" said he.
"Will you love me?" said she.
Then they answered together:
"Through foul and fair weather,
From sunrise to moonrise,
From moonrise to sunrise,
By heath and by harbour,
In orchard or arbour,
In the time of the rose,
In the time of the snows,
Through smoke and through smother
We'll love one another!"
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Cinderella, when the lover−prince discovers her and fits the crystal slipper to her foot, makes short work of flinging away her rags; and in some such pretty, airy, unthinking way did Susanna fling aside the dullness, inhospitality, and ugliness of her uncle's home and depart in a cloud of glory on her wedding journey. She had been lonely, now she would have companionship. She had been of no consequence, now she would be queen of her own small domain. She had been last with everybody, now she would be first with one, at least. She had worked hard and received neither compensation nor gratitude; henceforward her service would be gladly rendered at an altar where votive offerings would not be taken as a matter of course. She was only a slip of a girl now; marriage and housewifely cares would make her a woman. Some time perhaps the last great experience of life would come to her, and then what a crown of joys would be hers,−−love, husband, home, children! What a vision it was, and how soon the chief glory of it faded!

Never were two beings more hopelessly unlike than John Hathaway single and John Hathaway married, but the bliss lasted a few years, nevertheless: partly because Susanna's charm was deep and penetrating, the sort to hold a false man for a time and a true man forever; partly because she tried, as a girl or woman has seldom tried before, to do her duty and to keep her own ideal unshattered.

John had always been convivial, but Susanna at seventeen had been at once too innocent and too ignorant to judge a man's tendencies truly, or to rate his character at its real worth. As time went on, his earlier leanings grew more definite; he spent on pleasure far more than he could afford, and his conduct became a byword in the neighborhood. His boy he loved. He felt on a level with Jack, could understand him, play with him, punish him, and make friends with him; but little Sue was different. She always seemed to him the concentrated essence of her mother's soul, and when unhappy days came, he never looked in her radiant, searching eyes without a consciousness of inferiority. The little creature had loved her jolly, handsome, careless father at first, even though she feared him; but of late she had grown shy, silent, and timid, for his indifference chilled her and she flung

herself upon her mother's love with an almost unchildlike intensity. This unhappy relation between the child and the father gave Susanna's heart new pangs. She still loved her husband, not dearly, but a good deal; and over and above that remnant of the old love which still endured she gave him unstinted care and hopeful maternal tenderness.

The crash came in course of time. John transcended the bounds of his wife's patience more and more. She made her last protests; then she took one passionate day to make up her mind, a day when John and the boy were away together; a day of complete revolt against everything she was facing in the present, and, so far as she could see, everything that she had to face in the future. Prayer for light left her in darkness, and she had no human creature to advise her. Conscience was overthrown; she could see no duty save to her own outraged personality. Often and often during the year just past she had thought of the peace, the grateful solitude and shelter of that Shaker Settlement hidden among New England orchards; that quiet haven where there was neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Now her bruised heart longed for such a life of nunlike simplicity and consecration, where men and women met only as brothers and sisters, where they worked side by side with no thought of personal passion or personal gain, but only for the common good of the community.

Albion village was less than three hours distant by train. She hastily gathered her plainest clothes and Sue's, packed them in a small trunk, took her mother's watch, her own little store of money and the twenty−dollar gold piece John's senior partner had given Sue on her last birthday, wrote a letter of goodbye to John, and went out of her cottage gate in a storm of feeling so tumultuous that there was no room for reflection. Besides, she had reflected, and reflected, for months and months, so she would have said, and the time had come for action. Susanna was not unlettered, but she certainly had never read Meredith or she would have learned that "love is an affair of two, and only for two that can be as quick, as constant in intercommunication as are sun and earth, through the cloud, or face to face. They take their breath of life from each other in signs of affection, proofs of faithfulness, incentives to admiration. But a solitary soul dragging a log must make the log a God to rejoice in the burden." The demigod that poor, blind Susanna married had vanished, and she could drag the log no longer, but she made one mistake in judging her husband, in that she regarded him, at thirty−two, as a finished product, a man who was finally this and that, and behaved thus and so, and would never be any different.

The "age of discretion" is a movable feast of extraordinary uncertainty, and John Hathaway was a little behindhand in overtaking it. As a matter of fact, he had never for an instant looked life squarely in the face. He took a casual glance at it now and then, after he was married, but it presented no very distinguishable features, nothing to make him stop and think, nothing to arouse in him any special sense of responsibility. Boys have a way of "growing up," however, sooner or later, at least most of them have, and that possibility was not sufficiently in the foreground of Susanna's mind when she finished what she considered an exhaustive study of her husband's character.

I am leaving you, John [she wrote], to see if I can keep the little love I have left for you as the father of my children. I seem to have lost all the rest of it living with you. I am not perfectly sure that I am right in going, for everybody seems to think that women, mothers especially, should bear anything rather than desert the home. I could not take Jack away, for you love him and he will be a comfort to you. A comfort to you, yes, but what will you be to him now that he is growing older? That is the thought that troubles me, yet I dare not take him with me when he is half yours. You will not miss me, nor will the loss of Sue make any difference. Oh, John! how can you help loving that blessed little creature, so much better and so much more gifted than either of us that we can only wonder how we came to be her father and mother? Your sin against her is greater than that against me, for at least you are not responsible for bringing me into the world. I know Louisa will take care of Jack, and she lives so near that you can see him as often as you wish. I shall let her know my address, which I have asked her to keep to herself. She will write to me if you or Jack should be seriously ill, but not for any other reason.

As for you, there is nothing more that I can say except to confess freely that I was not the right wife for you and that mine was not the only mistake. I have tried my very best to meet you in everything that was not absolutely

wrong, and I have used all the arguments I could think of, but it only made matters worse. I thought I knew you, John, in the old days. How comes it that we have traveled so far apart, we who began together? It seems to me that some time you must come to your senses and take up your life seriously, for this is not life, the sorry thing you have lived lately, but I cannot wait any longer! I am tired, tired, tired of waiting and hoping, too tired to do anything but drag myself away from the sight of your folly. You have wasted our children's substance, indulged your appetites until you have lost the respect of your best friends, and you have made me−−who was your choice, your wife, the head of your house, the woman who brought your children into the world−−you have made me an object of pity; a poor, neglected thing who could not meet her neighbors' eyes without blushing.

When Jack and his father returned from their outing at eight o'clock in the evening, having had supper at a wayside hotel, the boy went to bed philosophically, lighting his lamp for himself, the conclusion being that the two other members of the household were a little late, but would be in presently.

The next morning was bright and fair. Jack waked at cockcrow, and after calling to his mother and Sue, jumped out of bed, ran into their rooms to find them empty, then bounced down the stairs two at a time, going through the sitting−room on his way to find Ellen in the kitchen. His father was sitting at the table with the still−lighted student lamp on it; the table where lessons had been learned, books read, stories told, mending done, checkers and dominoes played; the big, round walnut table that was the focus of the family life−−but mother's table, not father's.

John Hathaway had never left his chair nor taken off his hat. His cane leaned against his knee, his gloves were in his left hand, while the right held Susanna's letter.

He was asleep, although his lips twitched and he stirred uneasily. His face was haggard, and behind his closed lids, somewhere in the center of thought and memory, a train of fiery words burned in an ever−widening circle, round and round and round, ploughing, searing their way through some obscure part of him that had heretofore been without feeling, but was now all quick and alive with sensation.

You have made me−−who was your choice, your wife, the head of your house, the woman who brought your children into the world−−you have made me an object of pity; a poor, neglected thing who could not meet her neighbors' eyes without blushing.

Any one who wished to pierce John Hathaway's armor at that period of his life would have had to use a very sharp and pointed arrow, for he was well wadded with the belief that a man has a right to do what he likes. Susanna's shaft was tipped with truth and dipped in the blood of her outraged heart. The stored−up force of silent years went into the speeding of it. She had never shot an arrow before, and her skill was instinctive rather than scientific, but the powers were on her side and she aimed better than she knew−−those who took note of John Hathaway's behavior that summer would have testified willingly to that. It was the summer in which his boyish irresponsibility slipped away from him once and for all; a summer in which the face of life ceased to be an indistinguishable mass of meaningless events and disclosed an order, a reason, a purpose hitherto unseen and undefined. The boy "grew up," rather tardily it must be confessed. His soul had not added a cubit to its stature in sunshine, gayety, and prosperity; it took the shock of grief, hurt pride, solitude, and remorse to make a man of John Hathaway.

III. Divers Doctrines

It was a radiant July morning in Albion village, and when Sue first beheld it from the bedroom window at the Shaker Settlement, she had wished ardently that it might never, never grow dark, and that Jack and Fardie might be having the very same sunshine in Farnham. It was not noon yet, but experience had in some way tempered the completeness of her joy, for the marks of tears were on her pretty little face. She had neither been scolded nor

punished, but she had been dragged away from a delicious play without any adequate reason. She had disappeared after breakfast, while Susanna was helping Sister Tabitha with the beds and the dishes, but as she was the most docile of children, her mother never thought of anxiety. At nine o'clock Eldress Abby took Susanna to the laundry house, and there under a spreading maple were Sue and the two youngest little Shakeresses, children of seven and eight respectively. Sue was directing the plays: chattering, planning, ordering, and suggesting expedients to her slower−minded and less experienced companions. They had dragged a large box from one of the sheds and set it up under the tree. The interior had been quickly converted into a commodious residence, one not in the least of a Shaker type. Small bluing−boxes served for bedstead and dining−table, bits of broken china for the dishes, while tiny flat stones were the seats, and four clothes−pins, tastefully clad in handkerchiefs, surrounded the table.

"Do they kneel in prayer before they eat, as all Believers do?" asked Shaker Mary.

"I don't believe Adam and Eve was Believers, 'cause who would have taught them to be?" replied Sue; "still we might let them pray, anyway, though clothespins don't kneel nicely."

"I've got another one all dressed," said little Shaker Jane.

"We can't have any more; Adam and Eve did n't have only two children in my Sunday−School lesson, Cain and Abel," objected Sue.

"Can't this one be a company?" pleaded Mary, anxious not to waste the clothespin.

"But where could comp'ny come from?" queried Sue. "There was n't any more people anywheres but just Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel. Put the clothespin in your apron−pocket, Jane, and bimeby we'll let Eve have a little new baby, and I'll get Mardie to name it right out of the Bible. Now let's begin. Adam is awfully tired this morning; he says, 'Eve, I've been workin' all night and I can't eat my breakfuss.' Now, Mary, you be Cain, he's a little boy, and you must say, 'Fardie, play a little with me, please!' and Fardie will say, 'Child'en should n't talk at the−−'"

What subjects of conversation would have been aired at the Adamic family board before breakfast was finished will never be known, for Eldress Abby, with a firm but not unkind grasp, took Shaker Jane and Mary by their little hands and said, "Morning's not the time for play; run over to Sister Martha and help her shell the peas; then there'll be your seams to oversew."

Sue watched the disappearing children and saw the fabric of her dream fade into thin air; but she was a person of considerable individuality for her years. Her lip quivered, tears rushed to her eyes and flowed silently down her cheeks, but without a glance at Eldress Abby or a word of comment she walked slowly away from the laundry, her chin high.

"Sue meant all right, she was only playing the plays of the world," said Eldress Abby, "but you can well understand, Susanna, that we can't let our Shaker children play that way and get wrong ideas into their heads at the beginning. We don't condenm an honest, orderly marriage as a worldly institution, but we claim it has no place in Christ's kingdom; therefore we leave it to the world, where it belongs. The world's people live on the lower plane of Adam; the Shakers try to live on the Christ plane, in virgin purity, longsuffering, meekness, and patience."

"I see, I know," Susanna answered slowly, with a little glance at injured Sue walking toward the house, "but we need n't leave the children unhappy this morning, for I can think of a play that will comfort them and please you. Come back, Sue! Wait a minute, Mary and Jane, before you go to Sister Martha! We will play the story that Sister Tabitha told us last week. Do you remember about Mother Ann Lee in the English prison? The soapbox will be her cell, for it was so small she could not lie down in it. Take some of the shingles, Jane, and close up the open

side of the box. Do you see the large brown spot in one of them, Mary? Push that very hard with a clothespin and there 'll be a hole through the shingle; that's right! Now, Sister Tabitha said that Mother Ann was kept for days without food, for people thought she was a wicked, dangerous woman, and they would have been willing to let her die of starvation. But there was a great keyhole in the door, and James Whittaker, a boy of nineteen, who loved Mother Ann and believed in her, put the stem of a clay pipe in the hole and poured a mixture of wine and milk through it. He managed to do this day after day, so that when the jailer opened the cell door, expecting to find Mother Ann dying for lack of food, she walked out looking almost as strong and well as when she entered. You can play it all out, and afterwards you can make the ship that brought Mother Ann and the other Shakers from Liverpool to New York. The clothes−pins can be who will they be, Jane?"

"William Lee, Nancy Lee, James Whittaker, and I forget the others," recited Jane, like an obedient parrot.

"And it will be splendid to have James Whittaker, for he really came to Albion," said Mary.

"Perhaps he stood on this very spot more than once," mused Abby. "It was Mother Ann's vision that brought them to this land, a vision of a large tree with outstretching branches, every leaf of which shone with the brightness of a burning torch! Oh! if the vision would only come true! If Believers would only come to us as many as the leaves on the tree," she sighed, as she and Susanna moved away from the group of chattering children, all as eager to play the history of Shakerism as they had been to dramatize the family life of Adam and Eve.

"There must be so many men and women without ties, living useless lives, with no aim or object in them," Susanna said, "I wonder that more of them do not find their way here. The peace and goodness and helpfulness of the life sink straight into my heart. The Brothers and Sisters are so friendly and cheery with one another; there is neither gossip nor hard words; there is pleasant work, and your thoughts seem to be all so concentrated upon right living that it is like heaven below, only I feel that the cross is there, bravely as you all bear it."

"There are roses on my cross most beautiful to see, As I turn from all the dross from which it sets me free,"

quoted Eldress Abby, devoutly.

"It is easy enough for me," continued Susanna, "for it was no cross for me to give up my husband at the time; but oh, if a woman had a considerate, loving man to live with, one who would strengthen her and help her to be good, one who would protect and cherish her, one who would be an example to his children and bring them up in the fear of the Lord−−that would be heaven below, too; and how could she bear to give it all up when it seems so good, so true, so right? Might n't two people walk together to God if both chose the same path?"

"It's my belief that one can find the road better alone than when somebody else is going alongside to distract them. Not that the Lord is going to turn anybody away, not even when they bring Him a lot of burned−out trash for a gift," said Eldress Abby, bluntly. "But don't you believe He sees the difference between a person that comes to Him when there is nowhere else to turn−−a person that's tried all and found it wanting−−and one that gives up freely pleasure, and gain, and husband, and home, to follow the Christ life?"

"Yes, He must, He must," Susanna answered faintly. "But the children, Eldress Abby! If you had n't any, you could perhaps keep yourself from wanting them; but if you had, how could you give them up? Jesus was the great Saviour of mankind, but next to Him it seems as if the children had been the little saviours, from the time the first one was born until this very day!"

"Yee, I've no doubt they keep the worst of the world's people, those that are living in carnal marriage without a thought of godliness, I've no doubt children keep that sort from going to the lowest perdition," allowed Eldress Abby;" and those we bring up in the Community make the best converts; but to a Shaker, the greater the sacrifice, the greater the glory. I wish you was gathered in, Susanna, for your hands and feet are quick to serve, your face is

turned toward the truth, and your heart is all ready to receive the revelation."

"I wish I need n't turn my back on one set of duties to take up another," murmured Susanna, timidly.

"Yee; no doubt you do. Your business is to find out which are the higher duties, and then do those. Just make up your mind whether you'd rather replenish earth, as you've been doing, or replenish heaven, as we're trying to do. But I must go to my work; ten o'clock in the morning's a poor time to be discussing doctrine! You're for weeding, Susanna, I suppose?"

Brother Ansel was seated at a grindstone under the apple trees, teaching (intermittently) a couple of boys to grind a scythe, when Susanna came to her work in the herb−garden, Sue walking discreetly at her heels.

Ansel was a slow−moving, humorously−inclined, easygoing Brother, who was drifting into the kingdom of heaven without any special effort on his part.

"I'd 'bout as lives be a Shaker as anything else," had been his rather dubious statement of faith when he requested admittance into the band of Believers. "No more crosses, accordin' to my notion, an' consid'able more chance o' crowns!"

His experience of life "on the Adamic plane," the holy estate of matrimony, being the chief sin of this way of thought, had disposed him to regard woman as an apparently necessary, but not especially desirable, being. The theory of holding property in common had no terrors for him. He was generous, unambitious, frugal−minded, somewhat lacking in energy, and just as actively interested in his brother's welfare as in his own, which is perhaps not saying much. Shakerism was to him not a craving of the spirit, not a longing of the soul, but a simple, prudent theory of existence, lessening the various risks that man is exposed to in his journey through this vale of tears.

"Womenfolks makes splendid Shakers," he was wont to say. "They're all right as Sisters, 'cause their belief makes 'em safe. It kind o' shears 'em o' their strength; tames their sperits; takes the sting out of 'em an' keeps 'em from bein' sassy an' domineerin'. Jest as long as they think marriage is right, they'll marry ye spite of anything ye can do or say−−four of 'em married my father one after another, though he fit 'em off as hard as he knew how. But if ye can once get the faith o' Mother Ann into 'em, they're as good afterwards as they was wicked afore. There's no stoppin' women−folks once ye get 'em started; they don't keer whether it's heaven or the other place, so long as they get where they want to go!"

Elder Daniel Gray had heard Brother Ansel state his religious theories more than once when he was first "gathered in," and secretly lamented the lack of spirituality in the new convert. The Elder was an instrument more finely attuned; sober, humble, pure−minded, zealous, consecrated to the truth as he saw it, he labored in and out of season for the faith he held so dear; yet as the years went on, he noted that Ansel, notwithstanding his eccentric views, lived an honest, temperate, Godfearing life, talking no scandal, dwelling in unity with his brethren and sisters, and upholding the banner of Shakerism in his own peculiar way.

As Susanna approached him, Ansel called out, "The yairbs are all ready for ye, Susanna; the weeds have been on the rampage sence yesterday's rain. Seems like the more uselesser a thing is, the more it flourishes. The yairbs grow; oh, yes, they make out to _grow_; but you don't see 'em come leapin' an' tearin' out o' the airth like weeds. Then there's the birds! I've jest been stoppin' my grindin' to look at 'em carry on. Take 'em all in all, there ain't nothin' so lazy an' aimless an' busy'boutnothin' as birds. They go kitin' 'roun' from tree to tree, hoppin' an' chirpin', flyin' here an' there 'thout no airthly objeck 'ceptin' to fly back ag'in. There's a heap o' useless critters in the univarse, but I guess birds are 'bout the uselessest, 'less it's grasshoppers, mebbe."

"I don't care what you say about the grasshoppers, Ansel, but you shan't abuse the birds," said Susanna, stooping over the beds of tansy and sage, thyme and summer savory. "Weeds or no weeds, we're going to have a great crop

of herbs this year, Ansel!"

"Yee, so we be! We sowed more'n usual so's to keep the two jiners at work long's we could.−−Take that scythe over to the barn, Jacob, an' fetch me another, an' step spry."

"What's a 'jiner,' Ansel?"

"Winter Shakers, I call 'em. They're reg'lar constitooshanal dyed−in−the−wool jiners, jinin' most anything an' hookin' on most anywheres. They jine when it comes on too cold to sleep outdoors, an' they onjine when it comes on spring. Elder Gray's always hopin' to gather in new souls, so he gives the best of 'em a few months' trial. How are ye, Hannah?" he called to a Sister passing through the orchard to search for any possible green apples under the trees. "Make us a good old−fashioned deep−dish pandowdy an' we'll all do our best to eat it!"

"I suppose the 'jiners' get discouraged and fear they can't keep up to the standard. Not everybody is good enough to lead a self−denying Shaker life," said Susanna, pushing back the close sunbonnet from her warm face, which had grown younger, smoother, and sweeter in the last few weeks.

"Nay, I s'pose likely; 'less they're same as me, a born Shaker," Ansel replied. "I don't hanker after strong drink; don't like tobaccer (always could keep my temper 'thout smokin'), ain't partic'lar 'bout meat−eatin', don't keer 'bout heapin' up riches, can't 'stand the ways o' worldly women−folks, jest as lives confess my sins to the Elder as not, 'cause I hain't sinned any to amount to anything sence I made my first confession; there I be, a natural follerer o' Mother Ann Lee."

Susanna drew her Shaker bonnet forward over her eyes and turned her back to Brother Ansel under the pretense of reaching over to the rows of sweet marjoram. She had never supposed it possible that she could laugh again, and indeed she seldom felt like it, but Ansel's interpretations of Shaker doctrine were almost too much for her latent sense of humor.

"What are you smiling at, and me so sad, Mardie?" quavered Sue, piteously, from the little plot of easy weeding her mother had given her to do. "I keep remembering my game! It was such a _Christian_ game, too. Lots nicer than Mother Ann in prison; for Jane said her mother and father was both Believers, and nobody was good enough to pour milk through the keyhole but her. I wanted to give the clothes−pins story names, like Hilda and Percy, but I called them Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel just because I thought the Shakers would 'specially like a Bible play. I love Elderess Abby, but she does stop my happiness, Mardie. That's the second time today, for she took Moses away from me when I was kissing him because he pinched his thumb in the window."

"Why did you do that, Sue?" remonstrated her mother softly, remembering Ansel's proximity. "You never used to kiss strange little boys at home in Farnham."

"Moses is n't a boy; he's only six, and that's a baby; besides, I like him better than any little boys at home, and that's the reason I kissed him; there's no harm in boy−kissing, is there, Mardie?"

"You don't know anybody here very well yet; not well enough to kiss them," Susanna answered, rather hopeless as to the best way of inculcating the undesirability of the Adamic plane of thought at this early age. "While we stay here, Sue, we ought both to be very careful to do exactly as the Shakers do."

By this time mother and child had reached the orchard end of a row, and Brother Ansel was thirstily waiting to deliver a little more of the information with which his mind was always teeming.

"Them Boston people that come over to our public meetin' last Sunday," he began, "they was dretful scairt 'bout what would become o' the human race if it should all turn Shakers. 'I guess you need n't worry,' I says; 'it'll take

consid'able of a spell to convert all you city folks,' I says, 'an' after all, what if the world should come to an end?' I says. 'If half we hear is true 'bout the way folks carry on in New York and Chicago, it's 'bout time it stopped,' I says, 'an' I guess the Lord could do a consid'able better job on a second one,' I says, 'after findin' out the weak places in this.' They can't stand givin' up their possessions, the world's folks; that's the principal trouble with 'em! If you don't have nothin' to give up, like some o' the tramps that happen along here and convince the Elder they're jest bustin' with the fear o' God, why, o' course 't ain't no trick at all to be a Believer."

"Did you have much to give up, Brother Ansel?" Susanna asked. "'Bout's much as any sinner ever had that jined this Community," replied Ansel, complacently. "The list o' what I consecrated to this Society when I was gathered in was: One horse, one wagon, one two−year−old heifer, one axe, one saddle, one padlock, one bed and bedding, four turkeys, eleven hens, one pair o' plough− irons, two chains, and eleven dollars in cash. Can you beat that?"

"Oh, yes, things/" said Susanna, absent−mindedly. "I was thinking of family and friends, pleasures and memories and ambitions and hopes."

"I guess it don't pinch you any worse to give up a hope than it would a good two−year−old heifer," retorted Ansel; "but there, you can't never tell what folks'll hang on to the hardest! The man that drove them Boston folks over here last Sunday, did you notice him? the one that had the sister with a bright red dress an' hat on? −−Land! I could think just how hell must look whenever my eye lighted on that girl's gitup! −−Well, I done my best to exhort that driver, bein' as how we had a good chance to talk while we was hitchin' an' unhitchin' the team; an' Elder Gray always says I ain't earnest enough in preachin' the faith; −−but he did n't learn anything from the meetin'. Kep' his eye on the Shaker bunnits, an' took notice o' the marchin' an' dancin', but he did n't care nothin' 'bout doctrine.

"'I draw the line at bein' a cerebrate,' he says. 'I'm willin' to sell all my goods an' divide with the poor,' he says, 'but I ain't goin' to lie no cerebrate. If I don't have no other luxuries, I will have a wife,' he says. 'I've hed three, an' if this one don't last me out, I'll get another, if it's only to start the kitchen fire in the mornin' an' put the cat in the shed nights!'"

IV. Louisa's Mind

Louisa, otherwise Mrs. Adlai Banks, the elder sister of Susanna s husband, was a rock−ribbed widow of forty−five summers, −−forty−five winters would seem a better phrase in which to assert her age,−− who resided on a small farm twenty miles from the manufacturing town of Farnham.

When the Fates were bestowing qualities of mind and heart upon the Hathaway babies, they gave the more graceful, genial, likable ones to John, not realizing, perhaps, what bad use he would make of them, −−and endowed Louisa with great deposits of honesty, sincerity, energy, piety, and frugality, all so mysteriously compounded that they turned to granite in her hands. If she had been consulted, it would have been all the same. She would never have accepted John's charm of personality at the expense of being saddled with his weaknesses, and he would not have taken her cast−iron virtues at any price whatsoever.

She was sweeping her porch on that day in May when Susanna and Sue had wakened in the bare upper chamber at the Shaker Settlement−−Sue clear−eyed, jubilant, expectant, unafraid; Susanna pale from her fitful sleep, weary with the burden of her heart.

Looking down the road, Mrs. Banks espied the form of her brother John walking in her direction and leading Jack by the hand.

This was a most unusual sight, for John's calls had been uncommonly few of late years, since a man rarely visits a

lady relative for the mere purpose of hearing "a piece of her mind." This piece, large, solid, highly flavored with pepper, and as acid as mental vinegar could make it, was Louisa Banks's only contribution to conversation when she met her brother. She could not stop for any airy persiflage about weather, crops, or politics when her one desire was to tell him what she thought of him.

"Good−morning, Louisa. Shake hands with your aunt, Jack."

"He can't till I'm through sweeping. Good−morning, John; what brings you here?"

John sat down on the steps, and Jack flew to the barn, where there was generally an amiable hired man and a cheerful cow, both infinitely better company than his highly respected and wealthy aunt.

"I came because I had to bring the boy to the only relation I've got in the world," John answered tersely. "My wife's left me."

"Well, she's been a great while doing it," remarked Louisa, digging her broom into the cracks of the piazza floor and making no pause for reflection. "If she had n't had the patience of Job and the meekness of Moses, she'd have gone long before. Where'd she go?"

"I don't know; she did n't say."

"Did you take the trouble to look through the house for her? I ain't certain you fairly know her by sight nowadays, do you?"

John flushed crimson, but bit his lip in an attempt to keep his temper. "She left a letter," he said, "and she took Sue with her."

"That was all right; Sue's a nervous little thing and needs at least one parent; she has n't been used to more, so she won't miss anything. Jack's like most of the Hathaways; he'll grow up his own way, without anybody's help or hindrance. What are you going to do with him?"

"Leave him with you, of course. What else could I do?" "Very well, I'll take him, and while I'm about it I'd like to give you a piece of my mind."

John was fighting for selfcontrol, but he was too wretched and remorseful for rage to have any real sway over him.

"Is it the same old piece, or a different one?" he asked, setting his teeth grimly. "I should n't think you'd have any mind left, you've given so many pieces of it to me already."

"I have some left, and plenty, too," answered Louisa, dashing into the house, banging the broom into a corner, coming out again like a breeze, and slamming the door behind her. "You can leave the boy here and welcome; I'll take good care of him, and if you don't send me twenty dollars a month for his food and clothes, I'll turn him outdoors. The more responsibility other folks rid you of, the more you'll let 'em, and I won't take a feather's weight off you for fear you'll sink into everlasting perdition."

"I did n't expect any sympathy from you," said John, drearily, pulling himself up from the steps and leaning against the honeysuckle trellis. "Susanna's just the same. Women are all as hard as the nether millstone. They're hard if they're angels, and hard if they're devils; it docs n't make much difference."

"I guess you've found a few soft ones, if report says true," returned Louisa, bluntly. "You'd better go and get some of their sympathy, the kind you can buy and pay for. The way you've ruined your life turns me fairly sick. You had a good father and mother, good education and advantages, enough money to start you in business, the best of wives, and two children any man could be proud of, one of 'em especially. You've thrown 'em all away, and what for? Horses and cards and gay company, late suppers, with wine, and for aught I know, whiskey, you the son of a man who did n't know the taste of ginger beer! You've spent your days and nights with a pack of carousing men and women that would take your last cent and not leave you enough for honest burial."

"It's a pity we did n't make a traveling preacher of you!" exclaimed John, bitterly. "Lord Almighty, I wonder how such women as you can live in the world, you know so little about it, and so little about men."

"I know all I want to about 'em," retorted Louisa, "and precious little that's good. They 're a gluttonous, self−indulgent, extravagant, reckless, pleasure− loving lot! My husband was one of the best of 'em, and he would n't have amounted to a hill of beans if I had n't devoted fifteen years to disciplining, uplifting, and strengthening him!"

"You managed to strengthen him so that he died before he was fifty!"

"It don't matter when a man dies," said the remorseless Mrs. Banks, "if he's succeeded in living a decent, Godfearing life. As for you, John Hathaway, I'll tell you the truth if you are my brother, for Susanna's too much of a saint to speak out."

"Don't be afraid; Susanna's spoken out at last, plainly enough to please even you!"

"I'm glad of it, for I did n't suppose she had spunk enough to resent anything. I shall be sorry tomorrow, 's likely as not, for freeing my mind as much as I have, but my temper's up and I'm going to be the humble instrument of Providence and try to turn you from the error of your ways. You've defaced and degraded the temple the Lord built for you, and if He should come this minute and try to turn out the crowd of evildoers you've kept in it, I doubt if He could!"

"I hope He'll approve of the way you've used your 'temple,'" said John, with stinging emphasis. "I should n't want to live in such a noisy one myself; I'd rather be a bat in a belfry. Goodbye; I've had a pleasant call, as usual, and you've been a real sister to me in my trouble. You shall have the twenty dollars a month. Jack's clothes are in that valise, and there'll be a trunk tomorrow. Susanna said she'd write and let you know her whereabouts."

So saying, John Hathaway strode down the path, closed the gate behind him, and walked rapidly along the road that led to the station. It was a quiet road and he met few persons. He had neither dressed nor shaved since the day before; his face was haggard, his heart was like a lump of lead in his breast. Of what use to go to the empty house in Farnham when he could stifle his misery by a night with his friends?

No, he could not do that, either! The very thought of them brought a sense of satiety and disgust; the craving for what they would give him would come again in time, no doubt, but for the moment he was sick to the very soul of all they stood for. The feeling of complete helplessness, of desertion, of being alone in mid−ocean without a sail or a star in sight, mounted and swept over him. Susanna had been his sail, his star, although he had never fully realized it, and he had cut himself adrift from her pure, steadfast love, blinding himself with cheap and vulgar charms.

The next train to Farnham was not due for an hour. His steps faltered; he turned into a clump of trees by the wayside and flung himself on the ground to cry like a child, he who had not shed a tear since he was a boy of ten. If Susanna could have seen that often longed−for burst of despair and remorse, that sudden recognition of his sins against himself and her, that gush of penitent tears, her heart might have softened once again; a flicker of flame

might have lighted the ashes of her dying love; she might have taken his head on her shoulder, and said, "Never mind, John! Let's forget, and begin all over again!"

Matters did not look any brighter for John the next week, for his senior partner, Joel Atterbury, requested him to withdraw from the firm as soon as matters could be legally arranged. He was told that he had not been doing, nor earning, his share; that his way of living during the year just past had not been any credit to "the concern," and that he, Atterbury, sympathized too heartily with Mrs. John Hathaway to take any pleasure in doing business with Mr. John.

John's remnant of pride, completely humbled by this last withdrawal of confidence, would not suffer him to tell Atterbury that he had come to his senses and bidden farewell to the old life, or so he hoped and believed. To lose a wife and child in a way infinitely worse than death; to hear the unwelcome truth that as a husband you have grown so offensive as to be beyond endurance; to have your own sister tell you that you richly deserve such treatment; to be virtually dismissed from a valuable business connection, all this is enough to sober any man above the grade of a moral idiot, and John was not that; he was simply a self−indulgent, pleasure−loving, thoughtless, willful fellow, without any great amount of principle. He took his medicine, however, said nothing, and did his share of the business from day to day doggedly, keeping away from his partner as much as possible.

Ellen, the faithful maid of all work, stayed on with him at the old home; Jack wrote to him every week, and often came to spend Sunday with him.

"Aunt Louisa's real good to me," he told his father, "but she's not like mother. Seems to me mother's kind of selfish staying away from us so long. When do you expect her back?"

"I don't know; not before winter, I'm afraid; and don't call her selfish, I won't have it! Your mother never knew she had a self."

"If she'd only left Sue behind, we could have had more good times, we three together!"

"No, our family is four, Jack, and we can never have any good times, one, two, or three of us, because we're four! When one's away, whichever it is, it's wrong, but it's the worst when it's mother. Does your Aunt Louisa write to her?"

"Yes, sometimes, but she never lets me post the letters."

"Do you write to your mother? You ought to, you know, even if you don't have time for me. You could ask your aunt to enclose your letters in hers."

"Do you write to her, father?"

"Yes, I write twice a week," John answered, thinking drearily of the semi− weekly notes posted in Susanna's empty worktable upstairs. Would she ever read them? He doubted it, unless he died, and she came back to settle his affairs; but of course he would n't die, no such good luck. Would a man die who breakfasted at eight, dined at one, supped at six, and went to bed at ten? Would a man die who worked in the garden an hour every afternoon, with half a day Saturday; that being the task most disagreeable to him and most appropriate therefore for penance?

Susanna loved flowers and had always wanted a garden, but John had been too much occupied with his own concerns to give her the needed help or money so that she could carry out her plans. The last year she had lost heart in many ways, so that little or nothing had been accomplished of all she had dreamed. It would have been laughable, had it not been pathetic, to see John Hathaway dig, delve, grub, sow, water, weed, transplant, generally

at the wrong moment, in that dream−garden of Susanna's. He asked no advice and read no books. With feverish intensity, with complete ignorance of Nature's laws and small sympathy with their intricacies, he dug, hoed, raked, fertilized, and planted during that lonely summer. His absentmindedness caused some expensive failures, as when the wide expanse of Susanna's drying ground, which was to be velvety lawn, "came up" curly lettuce; but he rooted out his frequent mistakes and patiently planted seeds or roots or bulbs over and over and over and over, until something sprouted in his beds, whether it was what he intended or not. While he weeded the brilliant orange nasturtiums, growing beside the magenta portulacca in a friendly proximity that certainly would never have existed had the mistress of the house been the head−gardener, he thought of nothing but his wife. He knew her pride, her reserve, her sensitive spirit; he knew her love of truth and honor and purity, the standards of life and conduct she had tried to hold him to so valiantly, and which he had so dragged in the dust during the blindness and the insanity of the last two years.

He, John Hathaway, was a deserted husband; Susanna had crept away all wounded and resentful. Where was she living and how supporting herself and Sue, when she could not have had a hundred dollars in the world? Probably Louisa was the source of income; conscientious, infernally disagreeable Louisa!

Would yet the rumor of his changed habit o[life reach her by some means in her place of hiding, sooner or later? Would she not yearn for a sight of Jack? Would she not finally give him a chance to ask forgiveness, or had she lost every trace of affection for him, as her letter seemed to imply? He walked the garden paths, with these and other unanswerable questions, and when he went to his lonely room at night, he held the lamp up to a bit of poetry that he had cut from a magazine and pinned to the looking−glass. If John Hathaway could be brought to the reading of poetry, he might even glance at the Bible in course of time, Louisa would have said. It was in May that Susanna had gone, and the first line of verse held his attention.

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May comes, day comes,
One who was away comes;
All the earth is glad again,
Kind and fair to me.

May comes, day comes,
One who was away comes;
Set her place at hearth and board
As it used to be.

May comes, day comes,
One who was away comes;
Higher are the hills of home,
Bluer is the sea.
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The Hathaway house was in the suburbs, on a rise of ground, and as John turned to the window he saw the full moon hanging yellow in the sky. It shone on the verdant slopes and low wooded hills that surrounded the town, and cast a glittering pathway on the ocean that bathed the beaches of the nearby shore.

"How long shall I have to wait," he wondered, "before my hills of home look higher, and my sea bluer, because Susanna has come back to 'hearth and board'!"

V. The Little Quail Bird

Susanna had helped at various household tasks ever since her arrival at the Settlement, for there was no room for drones in the Shaker hive; but after a few weeks in the kitchen with Martha, the herb−garden had been assigned to her as her particular province, the Sisters thinking her better fitted for it than for the preserving and pickling of fruit, or the basket−weaving that needed special apprenticeship.

The Shakers were the first people to raise, put up, and sell garden seeds in our present−day fashion, and it was they, too, who began the preparation of botanical medicines, raising, gathering, drying, and preparing herbs and roots for market; and this industry, driven from the field by modern machinery, was still a valuable source of income in Susanna's day. Plants had always grown for Susanna, and she loved them like friends, humoring their weakness, nourishing their strength, stimulating, coaxing, disciplining them, until they could do no less than flourish under her kind and hopeful hand.

Oh, that sweet, honest, comforting little garden of herbs, with its wholesome fragrances! Healing lay in every root and stem, in every leaf and bud, and the strong aromatic odors stimulated her flagging spirit or her aching head, after the sleepless nights in which she tried to decide her future life and Sue's.

The plants were set out in neat rows and clumps, and she soon learned to know the strange ones−−chamomile, lobelia, bloodroot, wormwood, lovage, boneset, lemon and sweet balm, lavender and rue, as well as she knew the old acquaintances familiar to every country−bred child−−pennyroyal, peppermint or spearmint, yellow dock, and thoroughwort.

There was hoeing and weeding before the gathering and drying came; then Brother Calvin, who had charge of the great press, would moisten the dried herbs and press them into quarter− and half−pound cakes ready for Sister Martha, who would superintend the younger Shakeresses in papering and labeling them for the market. Last of all, when harvesting was over, Brother Ansel would mount the newly painted seed−cart and leave on his driving trip through the country. Ansel was a capital salesman, but Brother Issachar, who once took his place and sold almost nothing, brought home a lad on the seed−cart, who afterward became a shining light in the Community. (Thus, said Elder Gray, does God teach us the diversity of gifts, whereby all may be unashamed.")

If the Albion Shakers were honest and ardent in faith, Susanna thought that their "works" would indeed bear the strictest examination. The Brothers made brooms, floor and dish−mops, tubs, pails, and churns, and indeed almost every trade was represented in the various New England Communities. Physicians there were, a few, but no lawyers, sheriffs, policemen, constables, or soldiers, just as there were no courts or saloons or jails. Where there was perfect equality of possession and no private source of gain, it amazed Susanna to see the cheery labor, often continued late at night from the sheer joy of it, and the earnest desire to make the Settlement prosperous. While the Brothers were hammering, nailing, planing, sawing, ploughing, and seeding, the Sisters were carding and spinning cotton, wool, and flax, making kerchiefs of linen, straw Shaker bonnets, and dozens of other useful marketable things, not forgetting their famous Shaker apple sauce.

Was there ever such a busy summer, Susanna wondered; yet with all the early rising, constant labor, and simple fare, she was stronger and hardier than she had been for years. The Shaker palate was never tickled with delicacies, yet the food was well cooked and sufficiently varied. At first there had been the winter vegetables: squash, yellow turnips, beets, and parsnips, with once a week a special Shaker dinner of salt codfish, potatoes, onions, and milk gravy. Each Sister served her turn as cook, but all alike had a wonderful hand with flour, and the wholewheat bread, cookies, ginger cake, and milk puddings were marvels of lightness. Martha, in particular, could wean the novitiate Shaker from a too riotous devotion to meat−eating better than most people, for every dish she sent to the table was delicate, savory, and attractive.

Dear, patient, devoted Martha! How Susanna learned to love her as they worked together in the big sunny, shining kitchen, where the cooking−stove as well as every tin plate and pan and spoon might have served as a mirror! Martha had joined the Society in her mother's arms, being given up to the Lord and placed in "the children's order" before she was one year old.

"If you should unite with us, Susanna," she said one night after the early supper, when they were peeling apples together, "you'd be thankful you begun early with your little Sue, for she's got a natural attraction to the world, and for it. Not but that she's a tender, loving, obedient little soul; but when she's among the other young ones,

there's a flyaway look about her that makes her seem more like a fairy than a child."

"She's having rather a hard time learning Shaker ways, but she'll do better in time," sighed her mother. "She came to me of her own accord yesterday and asked: 'Bettent I have my curls cut off, Mardie?'"

"I never put that idea into her head," Martha interrupted. "She's a visitor and can wear her hair as she's been brought up to wear it."

"I know, but I fear Sue was moved by other than religious reasons. 'I get up so early, Mardie,' she said, 'and it takes so long to unsnarl and untangle me, and I get so hot when I'm helping in the hayfield, and then I have to be curled for dinner, and curled again for supper, and so it seems like wasting both our times!' Her hair would be all the stronger for cutting, I thought, as it's so long for her age; but I could n't put the shears to it when the time came, Martha. I had to take her to Eldress Abby. She sat up in front of the little looking−glass as still as a mouse, while the curls came off, but when the last one fell into Abby's apron, she suddenly put her hands over her face and cried: 'Oh, Mardie, we shall never be the same togedder, you and I, after this!' −−She seemed to see her 'little past,' her childhood, slipping away from her, all in an instant. I did n't let her know that I cried over the box of curls last night!"

"You did wrong," rebuked Martha. "You should n't make an idol of your child or your child's beauty."

"You don't think God might put beauty into the world just to give His children joy, Martha?"

Martha was no controversialist. She had taken her opinions, ready−made, from those she considered her superiors, and although she was willing to make any sacrifice for her religion, she did not wish to be confused by too many opposing theories of God's intentions.

"You know I never argue when I've got anything baking," she said; and taking the spill of a corn−broom from a table−drawer, she opened the oven door and delicately plunged it into the loaf. Then, gazing at the straw as she withdrew it, she said: "You must talk doctrine with Eldress Abby, Susanna, not with me; but I guess doctrine won't help you so much as thinking out your life for yourself.

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"No one can sing my psalm for me,
Reward must come from labor,
I'll sow for peace, and reap in truth
God's mercy and his favor!"
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Martha was the chief musician of the Community, and had composed many hymns and tunes−−some of them under circumstances that she believed might entitle them to be considered directly inspired. Her clear full voice filled the kitchen and floated out into the air after Susanna, as she called Sue and, darning−basket in hand, walked across the road to the great barn.

The herb−garden was one place where she could think out her life, although no decision had as yet been born of those thoughtful mornings.

Another spot for meditation was the great barn, relic of the wonderful earlier days, and pride of the present Settlement. A hundred and seventy−five feet long and three and a half stories high, it dominated the landscape. First, there was the cellar, where all the refuse fell, to do its duty later on in fertilizing the farm lands; then came the first floor, where the stalls for horses, oxen, and cows lined the walls on either side. Then came the second floor, where hay was kept, and to reach this a bridge forty feet long was built on stone piers ten feet in height, sloping up from the ground to the second story. Over the easy slope of this bridge the full haycarts were driven, to add their several burdens to the golden haymows. High at the top was an enormous grain room, where mounds of

yellow corn−ears reached from floor to ceiling; and at the back was a great window opening on Massabesic Pond and Knights' Hill, with the White Mountains towering blue or snow−capped in the distance. There was an old−fashioned, list−bottomed, straight−backed Shaker chair in front of the open window, a chair as uncomfortable as Shaker doctrines to the daughter of Eve, and there Susanna often sat with her sewing or mending, Sue at her feet building castles out of corncobs, plaiting the husks into little mats, or taking out basting threads from her mother's work.

"My head feels awfully undressed without my curls, Mardie," she said. "I'm most afraid Fardie won't like the looks of me; do you think we ought to have asked him before we shingled me? −−He does _despise_ unpretty things so!"

"I think if we had asked him he would have said, 'Do as you think best.'"

"He always says that when he does n't care what you do," observed Sue, with one of her startling bursts of intuition. "Sister Martha has a printed card on the wall in the children's diningroom, and I've got to learn all the poetry on it because I need it worse than any of the others:−−

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"What we deem good order, we're willing to state,
Eat hearty and decent, and clear out your plate;
Be thankful to heaven for what we receive,
And not make a mixture or compound to leave.

"We often find left on the same China dish,
Meat, apple sauce, pickle, brown bread and minced fish:
Another's replenished with butter and cheese,
With pie, cake, and toast, perhaps, added to these."
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"You say it very nicely," commended Susanna.

"There's more:−−

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"Now if any virtue in this can be shown,
By peasant, by lawyer, or king on the throne;
We freely will forfeit whatever we've said,
And call it a virtue to waste meat and bread.
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"There's a great deal to learn when you're being a Shaker," sighed Sue, as she finished her rhyme.

"There's a great deal to learn everywhere," her mother answered. "What verse did Eldress Abby give you today?"

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"For little tripping maids may follow God
Along the ways that saintly feet have trod,"
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quoted the child. "Am I a tripping maid, Mardie?" she continued.

"Yes, dear." "If I trip too much, might n't I fall?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Is tripping the same as skipping?"

"About the same."

"Is it polite to tripanskip when you're following God?"

"It could n't be impolite if you meant to be good. A tripping maid means just a young one."

"What is a maid?"

"A little girl."

"When a maid grows up, what is she?"

"Why she's a maiden, I suppose."

"When a maiden grows up, what is she?"

"Just a woman, Sue."

"What is saintly feet?"

"Feet like those of Eldress Abby or Elder Gray; feet of people who have always tried to do right."

"Are Brother Ansel's feet saintly?"

"He's a good, kind, hardworking man."

"Is good, kind, hardworking, same as saintly?"

"Well, it's not so very different, perhaps. Now, Sue, I've asked you before, don't let your mind grope, and your little tongue wag, every instant; it is n't good for you, and it certainly is n't good for me!"

"All right; but 'less I gropeanwag sometimes, I don't see how I'll ever learn the things I 'specially want to know?" sighed Sue the insatiable.

"Shall I tell you a Shaker story, one that Eldress Abby told me last evening?"

"Oh, do, Mardie!" cried Sue, crossing her feet, folding her hands, and looking up into her mother's face expectantly.

"Once there was a very good Shaker named Elder Calvin Green, and some one wrote him a letter asking him to come a long distance and found a Settlement in the western part of New York State. He and some other Elders and Eldresses traveled five days, and stopped at the house of a certain Joseph Pelham to spend Sunday and hold a meeting. On Monday morning, very tired, and wondering where to stay and begin his preaching, the Elder went out into the woods to pray for guidance. When he rose from his knees, feeling stronger and lighter− hearted, a young quail came up to him so close that he picked it up. It was not a bit afraid, neither did the old parent birds who were standing near by show any sign of fear, though they are very timid creatures. The Elder smoothed the young bird's feathers a little while and then let it go, but he thought an angel seemed to say to him, 'The quail is a sign; you will know before night what it means, and before tomorrow people will be coming to you to learn the way to God.'

"Soon after, a flock of these shy little birds alighted on Joseph Pelham's house, and the Elders were glad, and thought it signified the flock of Believers that would gather in that place; for the Shakers see more in signs than other people. Just at night a young girl of twelve or thirteen knocked at the door and told Elder Calvin that she

wanted to become a Shaker, and that her father and mother were willing.

"'Here is the little quail!' cried the Elder, and indeed she was the first who flocked to the meetings and joined the new Community.

"On their return to their old home across the state the Elders took the little quail girl with them. It was November then, and the canals through which they traveled were clogged with ice. One night, having been ferried across the Mohawk River, they took their baggage and walked for miles before they could find shelter. Finally, when they were within three miles of their home, Elder Calvin shortened the way by going across the open fields through the snow, up and down the hills and through the gullies and over fences, till they reached the house at midnight, safe and sound, the brave little quail girl having trudged beside them the whole distance, carrying her tin pail."

Sue was transported with interest, her lips parted, her eyes shining, her hands clasped. "Oh, I wish I could be a brave little quail girl, Mardie! What became of her?"

"Her name was Polly Reed, and when she grew up, she became a teacher of the Shaker school, then an Eldress, and even a preacher. I don't know what kind of a little quail girl you would make, Sue; do you think you could walk for miles through the ice and snow uncomplainingly?"

"I don' know's I could," sighed Sue; "but," she added hopefully, "perhaps I could teach or preach, and then I could gropeanwag as much as ever I liked." Then, after a lengthy pause, in which her mind worked feverishly, she said, "Mardie, I was just groping a little bit, but I won't do it any more tonight. If the old quail birds in the woods where Elder Calvin prayed, if those old birds had been Shaker birds, there would n't have been any little quail birds, would there, because Shakers don't have children, and then perhaps there would n't have been any little Polly Reed."

Susanna rose hurriedly from the list−bottomed chair and folded her work. "I'll go up and help you undress now," she said; "it's seven o'clock, and I must go to the family meeting."

VI. Susanna Speaks in Meeting

It was the Sabbath day and the Believers were gathered in the meetinghouse, Brethren and Sisters seated quietly on their separate benches, with the children by themselves in their own place. As the men entered the room they removed their hats and coats and hung them upon wooden pegs that lined the sides of the room, while the women took off their bonnets; then, after standing for a moment of perfect silence, they seated themselves.

In Susanna's time the Sunday costume for the men included trousers of deep blue cloth with a white line and a vest of darker blue, exposing a full− bosomed shirt that had a wide turned−down collar fastened with three buttons. The Sisters were in pure white dresses, with neck and shoulders covered with snowy kerchiefs, their heads crowned with their white net caps, and a large white pocket handkerchief hung over the left arm. Their feet were shod with curious pointed−toed cloth shoes of ultramarine blue−−a fashion long since gone by.

Susanna had now become accustomed to the curious solemn march or dance in which of course none but the Believers ever joined, and found in her present exalted mood the songs and the exhortations strangely interesting and not unprofitable.

Tabitha, the most aged of the group of Albion Sisters, confessed that she missed the old times when visions were common, when the Spirit manifested itself in extraordinary ways, and the gift of tongues descended. Sometimes, in the Western Settlement where she was gathered in, the whole North Family would march into the highway in the fresh morning hours, and while singing some sacred hymn, would pass on to the Center Family, and together

in solemn yet glad procession they would mount the hillside to "Jehovah's Chosen Square," there to sing and dance before the Lord.

"I wish we could do something like that now!" sighed Hetty Arnold, a pretty young creature who had moments of longing for the pomps and vanities. "If we have to give up all worldly pleasures, I think we might have more religious ones!"

"We were a younger church in those old times of which Sister Tabitha speaks," said Eldress Abby. "You must remember, Hetty, that we were children in faith, and needed signs and manifestations, pictures and object−lessons. We've been trained to think and reason now, and we've put away some of our picture−books. There have been revelations to tell us we needed movements and exercises to quicken our spiritual powers, and to give energy and unity to our worship, and there have been revelations telling us to give them up; revelations bidding us to sing more, revelations telling us to use wordless songs. Then anthems were given us, and so it has gone on, for we have been led of the Spirit."

"I'd like more picture−books," pouted Hetty under her breath.

Today the service began with a solemn song, followed by speaking and prayer from a visiting elder. Then, after a long and profound silence, the company rose and joined in a rhythmic dance which signified the onward travel of the soul to full redemption; the opening and closing of the hands meaning the scattering and gathering of blessing. There was no accompaniment, and both the music and the words were the artless expression of fervent devotion.

Susanna sat in her corner beside the aged Tabitha, who would never dance again before the Lord, though her quavering voice joined in the chorus. The spring floor rose and fell under the quick rhythmic tread of the worshipers, and with each revolution about the room the song gained in power and fervor.

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I am never weary bringing my life unto God,
I am never weary singing His way is good.
With the voice of an angel with power from above,
I would publish the blessing of soul−saving love.
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The steps grew slower and more sedate, the voices died away, the arms sank slowly by the sides, and the hands ceased their movement.

Susanna rose to her feet, she knew not how or why. Her cheeks were flushed, her head bent.

"Dear friends," she said, "I have now been among you for nearly three months, sharing your life, your work, and your worship. You may well wish to know whether I have made up my mind to join this Community, and I can only say that although I have prayed for light, I cannot yet see my way clearly. I am happy here with you, and although I have been a church member for years, I have never before longed so ardently to present my body and soul as a sacrifice unto the Lord. I have tried not to be a burden to you. The small weekly sum that I put into the treasury I will not speak of, lest I seem to think that the 'gift of God may be purchased with money,' as the Scriptures say; but I have endeavored to be loyal to your rules and customs, your aims and ideals, and to the confidence you have reposed in me. Oh, my dear Sisters and Brothers, pray for me that I be enabled to see my duty more plainly. It is not the fleshpots that will call me back to the world; if I go, it will be because the duties I have left behind take such shape that they draw me out of his shelter in spite of myself. I thank you for the help you have given me these last weeks; God knows my gratitude can never be spoken in words."

Elder Gray's voice broke the silence that followed Susanna's speech. "I only echo the sentiments of the Family when I say that our Sister Susanna shall have such time as she requires before deciding to unite with this body of Believers. No pressure shall be brought to bear upon her, and she will be, as she ever has been, a welcome guest

under our roof. She has been an inspiration to the children, a comfort and aid to the Sisters, an intelligent comrade to the Brethren, and a sincere and earnest student of the truth. May the Spirit draw her into the Virgin Church of the New Creation!"

"Yee and amen!" exclaimed Eldress Abby, devoutly: "'For thus saith the Lord of hosts: I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.'"

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"O Virgin Church, how great the light,
   What cloud can dim thy way?"
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sang Martha from her place at the end of a bench; and all the voices took up the hymn softly as the company sat with bowed heads.

Then Brother Issachar rose from his corner, saying: "Jesus called upon his disciples to give up everything: houses, lands, relationships, and even the selfishness of their own lives. They could not call their lives their own. 'Lo! we have left all and followed thee,' said Peter; 'fathers, mothers, wives, children, houses, lands, and even our own lives also.' It is a great price to pay, but we buy Heaven with it!"

"Yee, we do," said Brother Thomas Scattergood, devoutly. "To him that overcometh shall the great prize be given."

"God help the weaker brethren!" murmured young Brother Nathan, in so low a voice that few could hear him. Moved by the same impulse, Tabitha, Abby, and Martha burst into one of the most triumphant of the Shaker songs, one that was never sung save when the meeting was "full of the Spirit":−−

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"I draw no blank nor miss the prize,
I see the work, the sacrifice,
And I'll be loyal, I'll be wise, A faithful overcomer!"
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The company rose and began again to march in a circle around the center of the room, the Brethren two abreast leading the column, the Sisters following after. There was a waving movement of the hands by drawing inward as if gathering in spiritual good and storing it up for future need. In the marching and countermarching the worshipers frequently changed their positions, ultimately forming into four circles, symbolical of the four dispensations as expounded in Shakerism, the first from Adam to Abraham; the second from Abraham to Jesus; the third from Jesus to Mother Ann Lee; and the fourth the millennial era.

The marching grew livelier; the bodies of the singers swayed lightly with emotion, the faces glowed with feeling.

Over and over the hymn was sung, gathering strength and fullness as the Believers entered more and more into the spirit of their worship. Whenever the refrain came in with its militant fervor, crude, but sincere and effective, the singers seenled faithintoxicated; and Sister Martha in particular might have been treading the heavenly streets instead of the meetinghouse floor, so complete was her absorption. The voices at length grew softer, and the movement slower, and after a few moments' reverent silence the company filed out of the room solemnly and without speech.

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I am as sure that heav'n is mine
As though my vision could define
Or pencil draw the boundary line
Where love and truth shall con quer.
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"The Lord ain't shaken Susanna hard enough yet," thought Brother Ansel shrewdly from his place in the rear.

"She ain't altogether gathered in, not by no manner o' means, because of that unregenerate son of Adam she's left behind; but there's the makin's of a pow'ful good Shaker in Susanna, if she finally takes holt!"

"What manner of life is my husband living, now that I have deserted him? Who is being a mother to Jack?" These were the thoughts that troubled Susanna Hathaway's soul as she crossed the grass to her own building.

VII. "The Lower Plane"

Brother Nathan Bennett was twenty years old and Sister Hetty Arnold was eighteen. They had been left with the Shakers by their respective parents ten years before, and, growing up in the faith, they formally joined the Community when they reached the age of discretion. Thus they had known each other from early childhood, never in the familiar way common to the children of the world, but with the cool, cheerful, casual, wholly impersonal attitude of Shaker friendship, a relation seemingly outside of and superior to sex, a relation more like that of two astral bodies than the more intimate one of a budding Adam and Eve.

When and where had this relationship changed its color and meaning? Neither Nathan nor Hetty could have told. For years Nathan had sat at his end of the young men's bench at the family or the public meeting, with Hetty exactly opposite him at the end of the girls' row, and for years they had looked across the dividing space at each other with unstirred pulses. The rows of Sisters sat in serene dignity, one bench behind another, and each Sister was like unto every other in Nathan's vague, dreamy, boyishly indifferent eyes. Some of them were seventy and some seventeen, but each modest figure sat in its place with quiet folded hands. The stiff caps hid the hair, whether it was silver or gold; the white surplices covered the shoulders and concealed beautiful curves as well as angular outlines; the throats were scarcely visible, whether they were yellow and wrinkled or young and white. The Sisters were simply sisters to fair−haired Nathan, and the Brothers were but brothers to little black−eyed Hetty.

Once−−was it on a Sunday morning?−−Nathan glanced across the separating space that is the very essence and sign of Shakerism. The dance had just ceased, and there was a long, solemn stillness when God indeed seemed to be in one of His holy temples and the earth was keeping silence before Him. Suddenly Hetty grew to be something more than one of the figures in a long row: she chained Nathan's eye and held it.

"Through her garments the grace of her glowed." He saw that, in spite of the way her hair had been cut and stretched back from the forehead, a short dusky tendril, softened and coaxed by the summer heat, had made its way mutinously beyond the confines of her cap. Her eyes were cast down, but the lashes that swept her round young cheek were quite different from any other lashes in the Sisters' row. Her breath came and went softly after the exertion of the rhythmic movements, stirring the white muslin folds that wrapped her from throat to waist. He looked and looked, until his body seemed to be all eyes, absolutely unaware of any change in himself; quite oblivious of the fact that he was regarding the girl in any new and dangerous way.

The silence continued, long and profound, until suddenly Hetty raised her beautiful lashes and met Nathan's gaze, the gaze of a boy just turned to man: ardent, warm, compelling. There was a startled moment of recognition, a tremulous approach, almost an embrace, of regard; each sent an electric current across the protective separating space, the two pairs of eyes met and said, "I love you," in such clear tones that Nathan and Hetty marveled that the Elder did not hear them. Somebody says that love, like a scarlet spider, can spin a thread between two hearts almost in an instant, so fine as to be almost invisible, yet it will hold with the tenacity of an iron chain. The thread had been spun; it was so delicate that neither Nathan nor Hetty had seen the scarlet spider spinning it, but the strength of both would not avail to snap the bond that held them together.

The moments passed. Hetty's kerchief rose and fell, rose and fell tumultuously, while her face was suffused with color. Nathan's knees quivered under him, and when the Elder rose, and they began the sacred march, the lad

could hardly stand for trembling. He dreaded the moment when the lines of Believers would meet, and he and Hetty would walk the length of the long room almost beside each other. Could she hear his heart beating, Nathan wondered; while Hetty was palpitating with fear lest Nathan see her blushes and divine their meaning. Oh, the joy of it, the terror of it, the strange exhilaration and the sudden sensation of sin and remorse!

The meeting over, Nathan flung himself on the haymow in the great barn, while Hetty sat with her "Synopsis of Shaker Theology" at an open window of the girls' building, seeing nothing in the lines of print but visions that should not have been there. It was Nathan who felt most and suffered most and was most conscious of sin, for Hetty, at first, scarcely knew whither she was drifting.

She went into the herb−garden with Susanna one morning during the week that followed the fatal Sunday. Many of the plants to be used for seasoning−−sage, summer savory, sweet marjoram, and the like−−were quite ready for gathering. As the two women were busy at work, Susanna as full of her thoughts as Hetty of hers, the sound of a step was heard brushing the grass of the orchard. Hetty gave a nervous start; her cheeks grew so crimson and her breath so short that Susanna noticed the change.

"It will be Brother Ansel coming along to the grindstone," Hetty stammered, burying her head in the leaves.

"No," Susanna answered, "it is Nathan. He has a long pole with a saw on the end. He must be going to take the dead branches off the apple trees; I heard Ansel tell him yesterday to do it."

"Yee, that will be it," said Hetty, bending over the plants as if she were afraid to look elsewhere.

Nathan came nearer to the herb−garden. He was a tall, stalwart, handsome enough fellow, even in his quaint working garb. As the Sisters spun and wove the cloth as well as cut and made the men's garments, and as the Brothers themselves made the shoes, there was naturally no great air of fashion about the Shaker raiment; but Nathan carried it better than most. His skin was fair and rosy, the down on his upper lip showed dawning manhood, and when he took off his broad−brimmed straw hat and stretched to his full height to reach the upper branches of the apple trees, he made a picture of clean, wholesome, vigorous youth.

Suddenly Susanna raised her head and surprised Hetty looking at the lad with all her heart in her eyes. At the same moment Nathan turned, and before he could conceal the telltale ardor of his glance, it had sped to Hetty. With the instinct of self−preservation he stooped instantly as if to steady the saw on the pole, but it was too late to mend matters: his tale was told so far as Susanna was concerned; but it was better she should suspect than one of the Believers or Eldress Abby.

Susanna worked on in silent anxiety. The likelihood of such crises as this had sometimes crossed her mind, and knowing how frail human nature is, she often marveled that instances seemed so infrequent. Her instinct told her that in every Community the risk must exist, even though all were doubly warned and armed against the temptations that flesh is heir to; yet no hint of danger had showed itself during the months in which she had been a member of the Shaker family. She had heard the Elder's plea to the young converts to take up "a full cross against the flesh"; she had listened to Eldress Abby when she told them that the natural life, its thoughts, passions, feelings, and associations, must be turned against once and forever; but her heart melted in pity for the two poor young things struggling helplessly against instincts of which they hardly knew the meaning, so cloistered had been the life they lived. The kind, conscientious hands that had fed them would now seem hard and unrelenting; the place that had been home would turn to a prison; the life that Elder Gray preached, "the life of a purer godliness than can be attained by marriage," had seemed difficult, perhaps, but possible; and now how cold and hopeless it would appear to these two young, undisciplined, flaming hearts!

"Hetty dear, talk to me!" whispered Susanna, softly touching her shoulder, and wondering if she could somehow find a way to counsel the girl in her perplexity.

Hetty started rebelliously to her feet as Nathan moved away farther into the orchard. "If you say a single thing to me, or a word about me to Eldress Abby, I'll run away this very day. Nobody has any right to speak to me, and I just want to be let alone! It's all very well for you," she went on passionately. "What have you had to give up? Nothing but a husband you did n't love and a home you did n't want to stay in. Like as not you'll be a Shaker, and they'll take you for a saint; but anyway you'll have had your life."

"You are right, Hetty," said Susanna, quietly; "but oh! my dear, the world outside isn't such a Paradise for young girls like you, motherless and fatherless and penniless. You have a good home here; can't you learn to like it?"

"Out in the world people can do as they like and nobody thinks of calling them wicked!" sobbed Hetty, flinging herself down, and putting her head in Susanna's aproned lap. "Here you've got to live like an angel, and if you don't, you've got to confess every wrong thought you've had, when the time comes."

"Whatever you do, Hetty, be open and aboveboard; don't be hasty and foolish, or you may be sorry forever afterwards."

Hetty's mood changed again suddenly to one of mutiny, and she rose to her feet.

"You have n't got any right to interfere with me anyway, Susanna; and if you think it's your duty to tell tales, you'll only make matters worse"; and so saying she took her basket and fled across the fields like a hunted hare.

That evening, as Hetty left the infirmary, where she had been sent with a bottle of liniment for the nursing Sisters, she came upon Nathan standing gloomily under the spruce trees near the back of the building. It was eight o'clock and quite dark. It had been raining during the late afternoon and the trees were still dripping drearily. Hetty came upon Nathan so suddenly, that, although he had been in her thoughts, she gave a frightened little cry when he drew her peremptorily under the shadow of the branches. The rules that govern the Shaker Community are very strict, but in reality the true Believer never thinks of them as rules, nor is trammeled by them. They are fixed habits of the blood, as common, as natural, as sitting or standing, eating or drinking. No Brother is allowed to hold any lengthy interview with a Sister, nor to work, walk, or drive with her alone; but these protective customs, which all are bound in honor to keep, are too much a matter of everyday life to be strange or irksome.

"I must speak to you, Hetty," whispered Nathan. "I cannot bear it any longer alone. What shall we do?"

"Do?" echoed Hetty, trembling.

"Yes, _do_." There was no pretense of asking her if she loved or suffered, or lived in torture and suspense. They had not uttered a word to each other, but their eyes had "shed meanings."

"You know we can't go on like this," he continued rapidly. "We can't eat their food, stay alongside of them, pray their prayers and act a lie all the time, we can't!"

"Nay, we can't!" said Hetty. "Oh, Nathan, shall we confess all and see if they will help us to resist temptation? I know that's what Susanna would want me to do, but oh! I should dread it."

"Nay, it is too late," Nathan answered drearily. "They could not help us, and we should be held under suspicion forever after."

"I feel so wicked and miserable and unfaithful, I don't know what to do!" sobbed Hetty.

"Yee, so do I!" the lad answered. "And I feel bitter against my father, too. He brought me here to get rid of me, because he did n't dare leave me on somebody's doorstep. He ought to have come back when I was grown a man

and asked me if I felt inclined to be a Shaker, and if I was good enough to be one!"

"And my stepfather would n't have me in the house, so my mother had to give me away; but they're both dead, and I'm alone in the world, though I've never felt it, because the Sisters are so kind. Now they will hate me−−though they don't hate anybody."

"You've got me, Hetty! We must go away and be married. We'd better go tonight to the minister in Albion."

"What if he would n't do it?"

"Why should n't he? Shakers take no vows, though I feel bound, hand and foot, out of gratitude. If any other two young folks went to him, he would marry them; and if he refuses, there are two other ministers in Albion, besides two more in Buryfield, five miles farther. If they won't marry us tonight, I'll leave you in some safe home and we 'll walk to Portland tomorrow. I'm young and strong, and I know I can earn our living somehow."

"But we have n't the price of a lodging or a breakfast between us," Hetty said tearfully. "Would it be sinful to take some of my basketwork and send back the money next week?"

"Yee, it would be so," Nathan answered sternly. "The least we can do is to go away as empty−handed as we came. I can work for our breakfast."

"Oh, I can't bear to disappoint Eldress Abby," cried Hetty, breaking anew into tears. "She'll say we've run away to live on the lower plane after agreeing to crucify Nature and follow the angelic life!"

"I know; but there are five hundred people in Albion all living in marriage, and we shan't be the only sinners!" Nathan argued. "Oh, Sister Hetty, dear Hetty, keep up your spirits and trust to me!"

Nathan's hand stole out and met Hetty's in its warm clasp, the first hand touch that the two ignorant young creatures had ever felt. Nathan's knowledge of life had been a journey to the Canterbury Shakers in New Hampshire with Brother Issachar; Hetty's was limited to a few drives into Albion village, and half a dozen chats with the world's people who came to the Settlement to buy basketwork.

"I am not able to bear the Shaker life!" sighed Nathan. "Elder Gray allows there be such!"

"Nor I," murmured Hetty. "Eldress Harriet knows I am no saint!"

Hetty's head was now on Nathan's shoulder. The stiff Shaker cap had resisted bravely, but the girl's head had yielded to the sweet proximity. Youth called to youth triumphantly; the Spirit was unheard, and all the theories of celibacy and the angelic life that had been poured into their ears vanished into thin air. The thick shade of the spruce tree hid the kiss that would have been so innocent, had they not given themselves to the Virgin Church; the drip, drip, drip of the branches on their young heads passed unheeded.

Then, one following the other silently along the highroad, hurrying along in the shadows of the tall trees, stealing into the edge of the woods, or hiding behind a thicket of alders at the fancied sound of a footstep or the distant rumble of a wagon, Nathan and Hetty forsook the faith of Mother Ann and went out into the world as Adam and Eve left the garden, with the knowledge of good and evil implanted in their hearts. The voice of Eldress Abby pursued Hetty in her flight like the voice in a dream. She could hear its clear impassioned accents, saying, "The children of this world marry; but the children of the resurrection do not marry, for they are as the angels." The solemn tones grew fainter and fainter as Hetty's steps led her farther and farther away from the quiet Shaker village and its drab−clad Sisters, and at last they almost died into silence, because Nathan's voice was nearer and Nathan's voice was dearer.

VIII. Concerning Backsliders

There was no work in the herb−garden now, but there was never a moment from dawn till long after dusk when the busy fingers of the Shaker Sisters were still. When all else failed there was the knitting: socks for the Brothers and stockings for the Sisters and socks and stockings of every size for the children. One of the quaint sights of the Settlement to Susanna was the clump of young Sisters on the porch of the girls' building, knitting, knitting, in the afternoon sun. Even little Shaker Jane and Mary, Maria and Lucinda, had their socks in hand, and plied their short knitting−needles soberly and not unskillfully. The sight of their industry incited the impetuous Sue to effort, and under the patient tutelage of Sister Martha she mastered the gentle art. Susanna never forgot the hour when, coming from her work in the seed−room, she crossed the grass with a message to Martha, and saw the group of children and girls on the western porch, a place that caught every ray of afternoon sun, the last glint of twilight, and the first hint of sunset glow. Sister Martha had been reading the Sabbath−School lesson for the next day, and as Susanna neared the building, Martha's voice broke into a hymn. Falteringly the girls' voices followed the lead, uncertain at first of words or tune, but gaining courage and strength as they went on:−−

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"As the waves of the mighty ocean
 Gospel love we will circulate,
And as we give, in due proportion,
 We of the heavenly life partake.
Heavenly Life, Glorious Life,
 Resurrecting, Soul−Inspiring,
Regenerating Gospel Life,
 It leadeth away from all sin and strife."
```

The clear, innocent treble sounded sweetly in the virgin stillness and solitude of the Settlement, and as Susanna drew closer she stopped under a tree to catch the picture−−Sister Martha, grave, tall, discreet, singing with all her soul and marking time with her hands, so accustomed to the upward and downward movement of the daily service. The straight, plain dresses were as fresh and smooth as perfect washing could make them, and the round childlike faces looked quaint and sweet with the cropped hair tucked under the stiff little caps. Sue was seated with Mary and Jane on the steps, and Susanna saw with astonishment that her needles were moving to and fro and she was knitting as serenely and correctly as a mother in Israel; singing, too, in a delicate little treble that was like a skylark's morning note. Susanna could hear her distinctly as she delightedly flung out the long words so dear to her soul and so difficult to dull little Jane and Mary:−−

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"Resurrecting, Soul−Inspiring,
Regenerating Gospel Life,
 It leadeth away from all sin and strife."
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Jane's cap was slightly unsettled, causing its wearer to stop knitting now and then and pull it forward or push it back; and in one of these little feminine difficulties Susanna saw Sue reach forward and deftly transfer the cap to her own head. Jane was horrified, but rather slow to wrath and equally slow in ingenuity. Sue looked a delicious Shaker with her delicate face, her lovely eyes, and her yellow hair grown into soft rings; and quite intoxicated with her cap, her knitting, and the general air of holiness so unexpectedly emanating from her, she moved her little hands up and down, as the tune rose and fell, in a way that would have filled Eldress Abby with joy. Susanna's heart beat fast, and she wondered for a moment, as she went back to her room, whether she could ever give Sue a worldly childhood more free from danger than the life she was now living. She found letters from Aunt Louisa and Jack on reaching her room, and they lay in her lap under a pile of towels, to be read and reread while her busy needle flew over the coarse crash. Sue stole in quietly, kissed her mother's cheek, and sat down on her stool by the window, marveling, with every "under" of the needle and "over" of the yarn, that it was she, Sue Hathaway, who was making a real stocking.

Jack's pen was not that of an especially ready writer, but he had a practical way of conveying considerable news.

His present contributions, when freed from their phonetic errors and spelled in Christian fashion, read somewhat as follows:

```
Father says I must write to you every week, even if I make him do without, so
I will. I am well, and so is Aunt Louisa, and any boy that lives with her has
to toe the mark, I tell you; but she is good and has fine things to eat every
meal. What did Sue get for her birthday? I got a book from father and one from
Aunt Louisa and the one from you that you told her to buy. It is queer that
people will give a boy books when he has only one knife, and that a broken
one. There's a book prize to be given at the school, and I am pretty afraid I
will get that, too; it would be just my luck. Teachers think about nothing but
books and what good they do, but I heard of a boy that had a grand knife with
five sharp blades and a corkscrew, and in a shipwreck he cut all the ropes, so
the sail came down that was carrying them on to the rocks, and then by boring
a hole with his corkscrew all the water leaked out of the ship that had been
threatening to sink the sailors. I could use a little pocket money, as Aunt
Louisa keeps me short.
... I have been spending Sunday with father, and had a pretty good time, not
so very. Father will take me about more when he stops going to the store,
which will be next week for good. The kitchen floor is new painted, and Ellen
says it sticks, and Aunt Louisa is going to make Ellen clean house in case you
come home. Do you like where you are? Our teacher told the girls' teacher it
seemed a long stay for any one who had a family, and the boys at school call
me a half orphan and say my mother has left me and so my father has to board
me in the country. My money is run out again. I sat down in a puddle this
afternoon, but it dried up pretty quick and did n't hurt my clothes, so no
more from your son
                          JACK.
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This was the sort of message that had been coming to Susanna of late, bringing up little pictures of home duties and responsibilities, homely tasks and trials. "John giving up the store for good"; what did that mean? Had he gone from bad to worse in the solitude that she had hoped might show him the gravity of his offenses, the error of his ways? In case she should die, what then would become of the children? Would Louisa accept the burden of Jack, for whom she had never cared? Would the Shakers take Sue? She would be safe; perhaps she would always be happy; but brother and sister would be divided and brought up as strangers. Would little Sue, grown to big Sue, say some time or other, "My mother renounced the world for herself, but what right had she to renounce it for me? Why did she rob me of the dreams of girlhood and the natural hopes of women, when I was too young to give consent?" These and other unanswerable questions continually drifted through Susanna's mind, disturbing its balance and leaving her like a shuttlecock bandied to and fro between conflicting blows.

"Mardie," came a soft little voice from across the room; "Mardie, what is a backslider?"

"Where did you hear that long word, Sue?" asked Susanna, rousing herself from her dream.

"'T is n't so long as 'regenerating' and more easier."

"Regenerating means 'making over,' you know."

"There'd ought to be children's words and grownup words,−−that's what I think," said Sue, decisively; "but what does 'backslider' mean?"

"A backslider is one who has been climbing up a hill and suddenly begins to slip back."

"Does n't his feet take hold right, or why does he slip?"

"Perhaps he can't manage his feet;−−perhaps they just won't climb." 295

"Yes, or p'raps he just does n't want to climb any more; but it must be frightensome, sliding backwards."

"I suppose it is."

"Is it wicked?"

"Why, yes, it is, generally; perhaps always."

"Brother Nathan and Sister Hetty were backsliders; Sister Tabitha said so. She told Jane never to speak their names again any more than if they was dead."

"Then you had better not speak of them, either."

"There's so many things better not to speak of in the world, sometimes I think 't would be nicer to be an angel."

"Nicer, perhaps, but one has to be very good to be an angel."

"Backsliders could n't be angels, I s'pose?"

"Not while they were backsliders; but perhaps they'd begin to climb again, and then in time they might grow to be angels."

"I should n't think likely," remarked Sue, decisively, clicking her needles as one who could settle most spiritual problems in a jiffy. "I think the sliding kind is diff'rent from the climbing kind, and they don't make easy angels."

A long pause followed this expression of opinion, this simple division of the human race, at the start, into sheep and goats. Then presently the untiring voice broke the stillness again.

"Nathan and Hetty slid back when they went away from here. Did we backslide when we left Fardie and Jack?"

"I'm not sure but that we did," said poor Susanna.

"There's children−Shakers, and brother−and−sister Shakers, but no father−and− mother Shakers?"

"No; they think they can do just as much good in the world without being mothers and fathers."

"Do you think so?"

"Ye−es, I believe I do."

"Well, are you a truly Shaker, or can't you be till you wear a cap?"

"I'm not a Shaker yet, Sue."

"You're just only a mother?"

"Yes, that's about all."

"Maybe we'd better go back to where there's not so many Sisters and more mothers, so you 'll have somebody to climb togedder with?"

"I could climb here, Sue, and so could you."

"Yes, but who'll Fardie and Jack climb with? I wish they'd come and see us. Brother Ansel would make Fardie laugh, and Jack would love farmwork, and we'd all be so happy. I miss Fardie awfully! He did n't speak to me much, but I liked to look at his curly hair and think how lovely it would be if he did take notice of me and play with me."

A sob from Susanna brought Sue, startled, to her side.

"You break my heart, Sue! You break it every day with the things you say. Don't you love me, Sue?"

"More'n tongue can tell!" cried Sue, throwing herself into her mother's arms. "Don't cry, darling Mardie! I won't talk any more, not for days and days! Let me wipe your poor eyes. Don't let Elder Gray see you crying, or he'll think I've been naughty. He's just going in downstairs to see Eldress Abby. Was it wrong what I said about backsliding, or what, Mardie? We'll help each udder climb, an' then we'll go home an' help poor lonesome Fardie; shall we?"

"Abby!" called Elder Gray, stepping into the entry of the Office Building.

"Yee, I'm coming," Eldress Abby answered from the stairway. "Go right out and sit down on the bench by the door, where I can catch a few minutes' more light for my darning; the days seem to be growing short all to once. Did Lemuel have a good sale of basket−work at the mountains? Rosetta has n't done so well for years at Old Orchard. We seem to be prospering in every material direction, Daniel, but my heart is heavy somehow, and I have to be instant in prayer to keep from discouragement."

"It has n't been an altogether good year with us spiritually," confessed Daniel; "perhaps we needed chastening."

"If we needed it, we've received it," Abby ejaculated, as she pushed her darning−ball into the foot of a stocking. "Nothing has happened since I came here thirty years ago that has troubled me like the running away of Nathan and Hetty. If they had been new converts, we should have thought the good seed had n't got fairly rooted, but those children were brought to us when Nathan was eleven and Hetty nine."

"I well remember, for the boy's father and the girl's mother came on the same train; a most unusual occurrence to receive two children in one day."

"I have cause to remember Hetty in her first month, for she was as wild as a young hawk. She laughed in meeting the first Sunclay, and when she came back, I told her to sit behind me in silence for half an hour while I was reading my Bible. 'Be still now, Hetty, and labor to repent,' I said. When the time was up, she said in a meek little mite of a voice, 'I think I'm least in the Kingdom now, Eldress Abby!' 'Then run outdoors,' I said. She kicked up her heels like a colt and was through the door in a second. Not long afterwards I put my hands behind me to tie my apron tighter, and if that child had n't taken my small scissors lying on the table and cut buttonholes all up and down my strings, hundreds of them, while she was 'laboring to repent.'"

Elder Gray smiled reminiscently, though he had often heard the story before. "Neither of the children came from godly families," he said, "but at least the parents never interfered with us nor came here putting false ideas into their children's heads."

"That's what I say," continued Abby; "and now, after ten years' training and discipline in the angelic life, Hetty being especially promising, to think of their going away together, and worse yet, being married in Albion village right at our very doors; I don't hardly dare to go to bed nights for fear of hearing in the morning that some of the other young folks have been led astray by this foolish performance of Hetty's; I know it was Hetty's fault; Nathan never had ingenuity enough to think and plan it all out."

"Nay, nay, Abby, don't be too hard on the girl; I've watched Nathan closely, and he has been in a dangerous and unstable state, even as long ago as his last confession; but this piece of backsliding, grievous as it is, does n't cause me as much sorrow as the fall of Brother Ephraim. To all appearance he had conquered his appetite, and for five years he has led a sober life. I had even great hopes of him for the ministry, and suddenly, like a great cloud in the blue sky, has come this terrible visitation, this reappearance of the old Adam. 'Ephraim has returned to his idols.'"

"How have you decided to deal with him, Daniel?"

"It is his first offense since he cast in his lot with us; we must rebuke, chastise, and forgive."

"Yee, yee, I agree to that; but how if he makes us the laughing−stock of the community and drags our sacred banner in the dust? We can't afford to have one of our order picked up in the streets by the world's people."

"Have the world's people found an infallible way to keep those of their order out of the gutters?" asked Elder Gray. "Ephraim seems repentant; if he is willing to try again, we must be willing to do as much."

"Yee, Daniel, you are right. Another matter that causes me anxiety is Susanna. I never yearned for a soul as I yearn for hers! She has had the advantage of more education and more reading than most of us have ever enjoyed; she's gifted in teaching and she wins the children. She's discreet and spiritually minded; her life in the world, even with the influence of her dissipated husband, has n't really stained, only humbled her; she would make such a Shaker, if she was once 'convinced,' as we have n't gathered in for years and years; but I fear she's slipping, slipping away, Daniel!"

"What makes you feel so now, particularly?"

"She's diff'rent as time goes on. She's had more letters from that place where her boy is; she cries nights, and though she does n't relax a mite with her work, she drags about sometimes like a bird with one wing."

Elder Daniel took off his broadbrimmed hat to cool his forehead and hair, lifting his eyes to the first pale stars that were trembling in the sky, hesitating in silver and then quietly deepening into gold.

Brother Ansel was a Believer because he had no particular love for the world and no great susceptibility to its temptations; but what had drawn Daniel Gray from the open sea into this quiet little backwater of a Shaker Settlement? After an adventurous early life, in which, as if youth−intoxicated, he had plunged from danger to danger, experience to experience, he suddenly found himself in a society of which he had never so much as heard, a company of celibate brothers and sisters holding all goods and possessions in common, and trying to live the "angelic life" on earth. Illness detained him for a month against his will, but at the end of that time he had joined the Community; and although it had been twenty−five years since his gathering in, he was still steadfast in the faith.

His character was of puritanical sternness; he was a strict disciplinarian, and insisted upon obedience to the rules of Shaker life, "the sacred laws of Zion," as he was wont to term them. He magnified his office, yet he was of a kindly disposition easily approached by children, and not without a quaint old−time humor.

There was a long pause while the two faithful leaders of the little flock were absorbed in thought; then the Elder said: "Susanna's all you say, and the child, well, if she could be purged of her dross, I never saw a creature better fitted to live the celestial life; but we must not harbor any divided hearts here. When the time comes, we must dismiss her with our blessing."

"Yee, I suppose so," said Eldress Abby, loyally, but it was with a sigh. Had she and Tabitha been left to their own instincts, they would have gone out into the highways and hedges, proselyting with the fervor of Mother Ann's day and generation.

"After all, Abby," said the Elder, rising to take his leave, still in a sort of mild trance,"after all, Abby, I suppose the Shakers don't own the whole of heaven. I'd like to think so, but I can't. It's a big place, and it belongs to God."

IX. Love Manifold

The woods on the shores of Massabesic Pond were stretches of tapestry, where every shade of green and gold, olive and brown, orange and scarlet, melted the one into the other. The somber pines made a deep−toned background; patches of sumach gave their flaming crimson; the goldenrod grew rank and tall in glorious profusion, and the maples outside the Office Building were balls of brilliant carmine. The air was like crystal, and the landscape might have been bathed in liquid amber, it was so saturated with October yellow.

Susanna caught her breath as she threw her chamber window wider open in the early morning; for the greater part of the picture had been painted during the frosty night.

"Throw your little cape round your shoulders and come quickly, Sue!" she exclaimed.

The child ran to her side. "Oh, what a goldy, goldy morning!" she cried.

One crimson leaf with a long heavy stem that acted as a sort of rudder, came down to the windowsill with a sidelong scooping flight, while two or three gayly painted ones, parted from the tree by the same breeze, floated airily along as if borne on unseen wings, finally alighting on Sue's head and shoulders like tropical birds.

"You cried in the night, Mardie!" said Sue. "I heard you snifferling and getting up for your hank'chief; but I did n't speak 'cause it's so dreadful to be _catched_ crying."

"Kneel down beside me and give me part of your cape," her mother answered. "I'm going to let my sad heart fly right out of the window into those beautiful trees."

"And maybe a glad heart will fly right in!" the child suggested.

"Maybe. Oh! we must cuddle close and be still; Elder Gray's going to sit down under the great maple; and do you see, all the Brothers seem to be up early this morning, just as we are?"

"More love, Elder Gray!" called Issachar, on his way to the toolhouse.

"More love, Brother Issachar!"

"More love, Brother Ansel!"

"More love, Brother Calvin!"

"More love! .... More love! .... More love!" So the quaint but not uncommon Shaker greeting passed from Brother to Brother; and as Tabitha and Martha and Rosetta met on their way to dairy and laundry and seed−house, they, too, hearing the salutation, took up the refrain, and Susanna and Sue heard again from the women's voices that beautiful morning wish, "More love! More love!" speeding from heart to heart and lip to lip.

Mother and child were very quiet.

"More love, Sue!" said Susanna, clasping her closely.

"More love, Mardie!" whispered the child, smiling and entering into the spirit of the salutation. "Let's turn our heads Farnham way! I'll take Jack and you take Fardie, and we'll say togedder, 'More love'; shall we?"

"More love, John."

"More love, Jack."

The words floated out over the trees in the woman's trembling voice and the child's treble.

"Elder Gray looks tired though he's just got up," Sue continued.

"He is not strong," replied her mother, remembering Brother Ansel's statement that the Elder "wa'n't diseased anywheres, but did n't have no durability."

"The Elder would have a lovely lap," Sue remarked presently.

"_What_?"

"A nice lap to sit in. Fardie has a nice lap, too, and Uncle Joel Atterbury, but not Aunt Louisa; she lets you slide right off; it's a bony, hard lap. I love Elder Gray, and I climbed on his lap one day. He put me right down, but I'm sure he likes children. I wish I could take right hold of his hand and walk all over the farm, but he would n't let me, I s'pose.−− _More_love_, _Elder_Gray_!" she cried suddenly, bobbing up above the windowsill and shaking her fairy hand at him.

The Elder looked up at the sound of the glad voice. No human creature could have failed to smile back into the roguish face or have treated churlishly the sweet, confident little greeting. The heart of a real man must have an occasional throb of the father, and when Daniel Gray rose from his seat under the maple and called, "More love, child!" there was something strange and touching in his tone. He moved away from the tree to his morning labors with the consciousness of something new to conquer. Long, long ago he had risen victorious above many of the temptations that flesh is heir to. Women were his good friends, his comrades, his sisters; they no longer troubled the waters of his soul; but here was a child who stirred the depths; who awakened the potential father in him so suddenly and so strongly that he longed for the sweetness of a human tie that could bind him to her. But the current of the Elder's being was set towards sacrifice and holiness, and the common joys of human life he felt could never and must never be his; so he went to the daily round, the common task, only a little paler, a little soberer than was his wont.

"More love, Martha!" said Susanna when she met Martha a little later in the day.

"More love, Susanna!" Martha replied cheerily. "You heard our Shaker greeting, I see! It was the beautiful weather, the fine air and glorious colors, that brought the inspiration this morning, I guess! It took us all out of doors, and then it seemed to get into the blood. Besides, tomorrow's the Day of Sacrifice, and that takes us all on to the mountaintops of feeling. There have been times when I had to own up to a lack of love."

"You, Martha, who have such wonderful influence over the children, such patience, such affection!"

"It was n't always so. When I was first put in charge of the children, I did n't like the work. They did n't respond to me somehow, and when they were out of my sight they were ugly and disobedient. My natural mother, Maria Holmes, took care of the girls' clothing. One day she said to me, 'Martha, do you love the girls?'

"'Some of them are very unlovely,' I replied.

"'I know that,' she said, 'but you can never help them unless you love them.'

"I thought mother very critical, for I strove scrupulously to do my duty. A few days after this the Elder said to me: 'Martha, do you love the girls?' I responded, 'Not very much.'

"'You cannot save them unless you love them,' he said. "Then I answered, 'I will labor for a gift of love.' "When the work of the day was over, and the girls were in bed, I would take off my shoes and spend several hours of the night walking the floor, kneeling in prayer that I might obtain the coveted gift. For five weeks I did this without avail, when suddenly one night when the moon was full and I was kneeling by the window, a glory seemed to overshadow the crest of a high mountain in the distance. I thought I heard a voice say: '_Martha, I baptize you into the spirit of love!_' I sat there trembling for more than an hour, and when I rose, I felt that I could love the meanest human being that ever walked the earth. I have never had any trouble with children since that night of the vision. They seem different to me, and I dare say I am different to them."

"I wish I could see visions!" exclaimed Susanna. "Oh, for a glory that would speak to me and teach me truth and duty! Life is all mist, whichever way I turn. I'd like to be lifted on to a high place where I could see clearly."

She leaned against the frame of the open kitchen door, her delicate face quivering with emotion and longing, her attitude simplicity and unconsciousness itself. The baldest of Shaker prose turned to purest poetry when Susanna dipped it in the alembic of her own imagination.

"Labor for the gift of sight!" said Martha, who believed implicitly in spirits and visions. "Labor this very night."

It must be said for Susanna that she had never ceased laboring in her own way for many days. The truth was that she felt herself turning from marriage. She had lived now so long in the society of men and women who regarded it as an institution not compatible with the highest spiritual development that unconsciously her point of view had changed; changed all the more because she had been so unhappy with the man she had chosen. Curiously enough, and unfortunately enough for Susanna Hathaway's peace of mind, the greater aversion she felt towards the burden of the old life, towards the irksomeness of guiding a weaker soul, towards the claims of husband on wife, the stronger those claims appeared. If they had never been assumed!−−Ah, but they had; there was the rub! One sight of little Sue sleeping tranquilly beside her; one memory of rebellious, faulty Jack; one vision of John, either as needing or missing her, the rightful woman, or falling deeper in the wiles of the wrong one for very helplessness;−−any of these changed Susanna the would−be saint, in an instant, into Susanna the wife and mother.

"_Speak to me for Thy Compassion's sake_," she prayed from the little book of Confessions that her mother had given her. "_I will follow after Thy Voice!_"

"Would you betray your trust?" asked conscience.

"No, not intentionally."

"Would you desert your post?"

"Never, willingly."

"You have divided the family; taken a little quail bird out of the home−nest and left sorrow behind you. Would God justify you in that?"

For the first time Susanna's "No" rang clearly enough for her to hear it plainly; for the first time it was followed by no vague misgivings, no bewilderment, no unrest or indecision. "_I turn hither and hither; Thy purposes are hid from me, but I commend my soul to Thee_!"

Then a sentence from the dear old book came into her memory: "_And thy dead things shall revive, and thy weak things shall be made whole_."

She listened, laying hold of every word, till the nervous clenching of her hands subsided, her face relaxed into peace. Then she lay down beside Sue, creeping close to her for the warmth and comfort and healing of her innocent touch, and, closing her eyes serenely, knew no more till the morning broke, the Sabbath morning of Confession Day.

X. Brother and Sister

If Susanna's path had grown more difficult, more filled with anxieties, so had John Hathaway's. The protracted absence of his wife made the gossips conclude that the break was a final one. Jack was only half contented with his aunt, and would be fairly mutinous in the winter, while Louisa's general attitude was such as to show clearly that she only kept the boy for Susanna's sake.

Now and then there was a terrifying hint of winter in the air, and the days of Susanna's absence seemed eternal to John Hathaway. Yet he was a man about whom there would have been but one opinion: that when deprived of a rather superior and high−minded wife and the steadying influence of home and children, he would go completely "to the dogs," whither he seemed to be hurrying when Susanna's wifely courage failed. That he had done precisely the opposite and the unexpected thing, shows us perhaps that men are not on the whole as capable of estimating the forces of their fellow men as is God the maker of men, who probably expects something of the worst of them up to the very last.

It was at the end of a hopeless Sunday when John took his boy back to his aunt's towards night. He wondered drearily how a woman dealt with a ten−year− old boy who from sunrise to sunset had done every mortal thing he ought not to have done, and had left undone everything that he had been told to do; and, as if to carry out the very words of the church service, neither was there any health in him; for he had an inflamed throat and a whining, irritable, discontented temper that could be borne only by a mother, a father being wholly inadequate and apparently never destined for the purpose.

It was a mild evening late in October, and Louisa sat on the porch with her pepper−and−salt shawl on and a black wool "rigolette" tied over her head. Jack, very sulky and unresigned, was dispatched to bed under the care of the one servant, who was provided with a cupful of vinegar, salt, and water, for a gargle. John had more than an hour to wait for a returning train to Farnham, and although ordinarily he would have preferred to spend the time in the silent and unreproachful cemetery rather than in the society of his sister Louisa, he was too tired and hopeless to do anything but sit on the steps and smoke fitfully in the semidarkness. Louisa was much as usual. She well knew−− who better?−−her brother's changed course of life, but neither encouragement nor compliment were in her line. Why should a man be praised for living a respectable life? That John had really turned a sort of moral somersault and come up a different creature, she did not realize in the least, nor the difficulties surmounted in such a feat; but she did give him credit secretly for turning about face and behaving far more decently than she could ever have believed possible. She had no conception of his mental torture at the time, but if he kept on doing

well, she privately intended to inform Susanna and at least give her a chance of trying him again, if absence had diminished her sense of injury. One thing that she did not know was that John was on the eve of losing his partnership. When Jack had said that his father was not going back to the store the next week, she thought it meant simply a vacation. Divided hearts, broken vows, ruined lives she could bear the sight of these with considerable philosophy, but a lost income was a very different, a very tangible thing. She almost lost her breath when her brother knocked the ashes from his meerschaum and curtly told her of the proposed change in his business relations.

"I don't know what I shall do yet," he said, "whether I shall set up for myself in a small way or take a position in another concern,−−that is, if I can get one−−my stock of popularity seems to be pretty low just now in Farnham. I'd move away tomorrow and cut the whole gossipy, deceitful, hypocritical lot of 'em if I was n't afraid of closing the house and so losing Susanna, if she should ever feel like coming back to us."

These words and the thought back of them were too much for John's self− control. The darkness helped him and his need of comfort was abject. Suddenly he burst out, "Oh, Louisa, for heaven's sake, give me a little crumb of comfort, if you have any! How can you stand like a stone all these months and see a man suffering as I have suffered, without giving him a word?"

"You brought it on yourself," said Louisa, in self−exculpation.

"Does that make it any easier to bear?" cried John. "Don't you suppose I remember it every hour, and curse myself the more? You know perfectly well that I'm a different man today. I don't know what made me change; it was as if something had been injected into my blood that turned me against everything I had liked best before. I hate the sight of the men and the women I used to go with, not because they are any worse, but because they remind me of what I have lost. I have reached the point now where I have got to have news of Susanna or go and shoot myself."

"That would be about the only piece of foolishness you have n't committed already!" replied Louisa, with a biting satire that would have made any man let go of the trigger in case he had gone so far as to begin pulling it.

"Where is she?" John went on, without anger at her sarcasm. "Where is she, how is she, what is she living on, is she well, is she just as bitter as she was at first, does she ever speak of coming back? Tell me something, tell me anything. I will know something. I say I _will_!"

Louisa's calm demeanor began to show a little agitation, for she was not used to the sight of emotion. "I can't tell you where Susanna is, for I made her a solemn promise I would n't unless you or Jack were in danger of some kind; but I don't mind telling you this much, that she's well and in the safest kind of a shelter, for she's been living from the first in a Shaker Settlement."

"Shaker Settlement!" cried John, starting up from his seat on the steps. "What's that? I know Shaker egg−beaters and garden−seeds and rocking−chairs and oh, yes, I remember their religion's against marriage. That's the worst thing you could have told me; that ends all hope; if they once get hold of a woman like Susanna, they'll never let go of her; if they don't believe in a woman's marrying a good man, they'd never let her go back to a bad one. Oh, if I had only known this before; if only you'd told me, Louisa, perhaps I could have done something. Maybe they take vows or sign contracts, and so I have lost her altogether."

"I don't know much about their beliefs, and Susanna never explained them," returned Louisa, nervously "but now that you've got something to offer her, why don't you write and ask her to come back to you? I'll send your letter to her."

"I don't dare, Louisa, I don't dare," groaned John, leaning his head against one of the pillars of the porch. "I can't tell you the fear I have of Susanna after the way I've neglected her this last year. If she should come in at the gate

this minute, I could n't meet her eyes; if you'd read the letter she left me, you'd feel the same way. I deserved it, to the last word, but oh, it was like so many separate strokes of lightning, and every one of them burned. It was nothing but the truth, but it was cut in with a sharp sword. Unless she should come back to me of her own accord, and she never will, I have n't got the courage to ask her; just have n't got the courage, that's all there is to say about it." And here John buried his head in his hands.

A very queer thing happened to Louisa Banks at this moment. A half−second before she would have murmured:

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"This rock shall fly From its firm base as soon as I!"
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when all at once, and without warning, a strange something occurred in the organ which she had always regarded and her opinion had never yet been questioned as a good, tough, love−tight heart. First there was a flutter and a tremor running all along her spine; then her eyes filled; then a lump rose in her throat and choked her; then words trembled on her tongue and refused to be uttered; then something like a bird−−could it have been the highly respectable good−as−new heart?−−throbbed under her black silk Sunday waist; then she grew like wax from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet; then in a twinkling, and so unconsciously as to be unashamed of it, she became a sister.

You have seen a gray November morning melt into an Indian summer noon? Louisa Banks was like that, when, at the sight of a man in sore trouble, sympathy was born in her to soften the rockiness of her original makeup.

"There, there, John, don't be so downhearted," she stammered, drawing her chair closer and putting her hand on his shoulder. "We'll bring it round right, you see if we don't. You've done the most yourself already, for I'm proud of the way you've acted, stiffening right up like an honest man and showing you've got some good sensible Hathaway stuff in you, after all, and ain't ashamed to turn your back on your evil ways. Susanna ain't one to refuse forgiveness."

"She forgave for a long time, but she refused at last. Why should she change now?" John asked.

"You remember she has n't heard a single word from you, nor about you, in that out−of−the−way place where she's been living," said Louisa, consolingly. "She thinks you're the same as you were, or worse, maybe. Perhaps she's waiting for you to make some sign through me, for she don't know that you care anything about her, or are pining to have her back."

"Such a woman as Susanna must know better than that!" cried John. "She ought to know that when a man got used to living with anybody like her, he could never endure any other kind."

"How should she know all that? Jack's been writing to her and telling her the news for the last few weeks, though I have n't said a word about you because I did n't know how long your reformation was going to hold out; but I won't let the grass grow under my feet now, till I tell her just how things stand!"

"You're a good woman, Louisa; I don't see why I never noticed it before."

"It's because I've been concealing my goodness too much. Stay here with me tonight and don't go back to brood in that dismal, forsaken house. We'll see how Jack is in the morning, and if he's all right, take him along with you, so's to be all there together if Susanna comes back this week, as I kind of hope she will. Make Ellen have the house all nice and cheerful from top to bottom, with a good supper ready to put on the table the night she comes. You'd better pick your asters and take 'em in for the parlor, then I'll cut the chrysanthemums for you in the middle of the week. The day she comes I'll happen in, and stay to dinner if you find it's going to be mortifying for you; but if everything is as I expect it will be, and the way Susanna always did have things, I'll make for home and leave you to yourselves. Susanna ain't one to nag and hector and triumph over a man when he's repented."

John hugged Louisa, pepper−and−salt shawl, black rigolctte, and all, when she finished this unprecedented speech; and when he went to sleep that night in the old north chamber, the one he and Louisa had been born in, the one his father and mother had died in, it was with a little smile of hope on his lips.

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Set her place at hearth and board
As it used to be!
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These were the last words that crossed his waking thoughts. Before Louisa went to her own bed, she wrote one of her brief and characteristic epistles to Susanna, but it did not reach her, for the "hills of home" had called John's wife so insistently on that Sunday, that the next day found her on her way back to Farnham.

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Dear Susanna [so the letter read], There's a new man in your house at Farnham.
His name is John Hathaway, but he's made all over and it was high time. I say
it's the hand of God! He won't own up that it is, but I'm letting him alone,
for I've done quarreling, though I don't like to see a man get religion and
deny it, for all the world like Peter in the New Testament. If you have n't
used up the last one of your seventy−times−sevens, I think you'd better come
back and forgive your husband. If you don't, you'd better send for your son.
I'm willing to bear the burdens the Lord intends specially for me, but Jack
belongs to you, and a good−sized heavy burden he is, too, for his age. I can't
deny that, if he is a Hathaway. I think he's the kind of a boy that ought to
be put in a barrel and fed through the bunghole till he grows up; but of
course I'm not used to children's ways.

Be as easy with John at first as you can. I know you 'll say _I_ never was
with my husband, but he was different, he got to like a bracing treatment,
Adlai did. Many's the time he said to me, "Louisa, when you make up our minds,
I'm always contented." But John is n't made that way. He's a changed man; now,
what we've got to do is to _keep_ him changed. He does n't bear you any grudge
for leaving him, so he won't reproach you.

Hoping to see you before long, I am,

                Yours as usual,
                            Louisa Banks.
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XI. "The Open Door"

On the Saturday evening before the yearly Day of Sacrifice the spiritual heads of each Shaker family called upon all the Believers to enter heartily next day into the humiliations and blessings of open confession.

The Sabbath dawns upon an awed and solemn household. Footfalls are hushed, the children's chatter is stilled, and all go to the morning meal in silence. There is a strange quiet, but it is not sadness; it is a hush, as when in Israel's camp the silver trumpets sounded and the people stayed in their tents. "Then," Elder Gray explained to Susanna, "a summons comes to each Believer, for all have been searching the heart and scanning the life of the months past. Softly the one called goes to the door of the one appointed by the Divine Spirit, the human representative who is to receive the gift of the burdened soul. Woman confesses to woman, man to man; it is the open door that leads to God."

Susanna lifted Eldress Abby's latch and stood in her strong, patient presence; then all at once she knelt impulsively and looked up into her serene eyes.

"Do you come as a Believer, Susanna?" tremblingly asked the Eldress.

"No, Eldress Abby. I come as a child of the world who wants to go back to her duty, and hopes to do it better than

she ever did before. She ought to be able to, because you have chastened her pride, taught her the lesson of patience, strengthened her will, purified her spirit, and cleansed her soul from bitterness and wrath. I waited till afternoon when all the confessions were over. May I speak now?"

Eldress Abby bowed, but she looked weak and stricken and old.

"I had something you would have called a vision last night, but I think of it as a dream, and I know just what led to it. You told me Polly Reed's story, and the little quail bird had such a charm for Sue that I've repeated it to her more than once. In my sleep I seemed to see a mother quail with a little one beside her. The two were always together, happily flying or hopping about under the trees; but every now and then I heard a sad little note, as of a deserted bird somewhere in the wood. I walked a short distance, and parting the branches, saw on the open ground another parent bird and a young one by its side darting hither and thither, as if lost; they seemed to be restlessly searching for something, and always they uttered the soft, sad note, as if the nest had disappeared and they had been parted from the little flock. Of course my brain had changed the very meaning of the Shaker story and translated it into different terms, but when I woke this morning, I could think of nothing but my husband and my boy. The two of them seemed to me to be needing me, searching for me in the dangerous open country, while I was hidden away in the safe shelter of the wood−−I and the other little quail bird I had taken out of the nest."

"Do you think you could persuade your husband to unite with us?" asked Abby, wiping her eyes.

The tension of the situation was too tightly drawn for mirth, or Susanna could have smiled, but she answered soberly, "No; if John could develop the best in himself, he could be a good husband and father, a good neighbor and citizen, and an upright business man, but never a Shaker."

"Did n't he insult your wifely honor and disgrace your home?" "Yes, in the last few weeks before I left him. All his earlier offenses were more against himself than me, in a sense. I forgave him many a time, but I am not certain it was the seventy times seven that the Bible bids us. I am not free from blame myself. I was hard the last year, for I had lost hope and my pride was trailing in the dust. I left him a bitter letter, one without any love or hope or faith in it, just because at the moment I believed I ought, once in my life, to let him know how I felt toward him."

"How can you go back and live under his roof with that feeling? It's degradation."

"It has changed. I was morbid then, and so wounded and weak that I could not fight any longer. I am rested now, and calm. My pluck has come back, and my strength. I've learned a good deal here about casting out my own devils; now I am going home and help him to cast out his. Perhaps he won't be there; perhaps he does n't want me, though when he was his very best self he loved me dearly; but that was long, long ago!" sighed Susanna, drearily.

"Oh, this thing the world's people call love!" groaned Abby.

"There is love and love, even in the world outside; for if it is Adam's world it is God's, too, Abby! The love I gave my husband was good, I think, but it failed somewhere, and I am going back to try again. I am not any too happy in leaving you and taking up, perhaps, heavier burdens than those from which I escaped."

"Night after night I've prayed to be the means of leading you to the celestial life," said the Eldress, "but my plaint was not worthy to be heard. Oh, that God would increase our numbers and so revive our drooping faith! We work, we struggle, we sacrifice, we pray, we defy the world and deny the flesh, yet we fail to gather in Believers."

"Don't say you 've failed, dear, dear Abby!" cried Susanna, pressing the Eldress's work−stained hands to her lips. "God speaks to you in one voice, to me in another. Does it matter so much as long as we both hear Him? Surely it's the hearing and the obeying that counts most! Wish me well, dear friend, and help me to say goodbye to the Elder."

The two women found Elder Gray in the office, and Abby, still unresigned, laid Susanna's case before him.

"The Great Architect has need of many kinds of workmen in His building," said the Elder. "There are those who are willing to put aside the ties of flesh for the kingdom of heaven's sake; 'he that is able to receive it, let him receive it!'"

"There may also he those who are willing to take up the ties of the flesh for the kingdom of heaven's sake," answered Susanna, gently, but with a certain courage.

Her face glowed with emotion, her eyes shone, her lips were parted. It was a new thought. Abby and Daniel gazed at her for a moment without speaking, then Daniel said: "It's a terrible cross to some of the Brethren and Sisters to live here outside of the world, but maybe it's more of a cross for such as you to live in it, under such conditions as have surrounded you of late years. To pursue good and resist evil, to bear your cross cheerfully and to grow in grace and knowledge of truth while you're bearing it that's the lesson of life, I suppose. If you find you can't learn it outside, come back to us, Susanna."

"I will," she promised, "and no words can speak my gratitude for what you have all done for me. Many a time it will come back to me and keep me from faltering."

She looked back at him from the open doorway, timidly.

"Don't forget us, Sue and me, altogether," she said, her eyes filling with tears. "Come to Farnham, if you will, and see if I am a credit to Shaker teaching! I shall never be here again, perhaps, and somehow it seems to me as if you, Elder Gray, with your education and your gifts, ought to be leading a larger life than this."

"I've hunted in the wild Maine forests, in my young days; I've speared salmon in her rivers and shot rapids ill a birchbark canoe," said the Elder, looking up from the pine table that served as a desk. "I've been before the mast and seen strange countries; I've fought Indians; I've faced perils on land and sea; but this Shaker life is the greatest adventure of all!"

"Adventure?" echoed Susanna, uncomprehendingly.

"Adventure!" repeated the Elder, smiling at his own thoughts. "Whether I fail, or whether I succeed, it's a splendid adventure in ethics."

Abby and Daniel looked at each other when Susanna passed out of the office door.

"'They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us,'" he quoted quietly.

Abby wiped her eyes with her apron. "It's a hard road to travel sometimes, Daniel!" she said.

"Yee; but think where it leads, Abby, think where it leads! You're not going to complain of dust when you're treading the King's Highway!"

Susanna left the office with a drooping head, knowing the sadness that she had left behind. Brother Ansel sat under the trees near by, and his shrewd eye perceived the drift of coming events.

"Well, Susanna," he drawled, "you're goin' to leave us, like most o' the other 'jiners.' I can see that with one eye shut."

"Yes," she replied with a half smile; "but you see, Ansel, I 'jined' John Hathaway before I knew anything about Shaker doctrines."

"Yee; but what's to prevent your onjinin' him? They used to tie up married folks in the old times so't they could n't move an inch. When they read the constitution and bylaws over 'em they used to put in 'till death do us part.' That's the way my father was hitched to his three wives, but death _did_ 'em part−−fortunately for him!"

"'Till death us do part' is still in the marriage service," Susanna said, "and I think of it very often."

"I want to know if that's there yit!" exclaimed Ansel, with apparent surprise; "I thought they must be leavin' it out, there's so much onjinin' nowadays! Well, accordin' to my notions, if there is anything wuss 'n marriage, it's hevin' it hold till death, for then menfolks don't git any chance of a speritual life till afterwards. They certainly don't when they're being dragged down by women−folks an' young ones."

"I think the lasting part of the bargain makes it all the more solemn," Susanna argued.

"Oh, yes, it's solemn enough, but so's a prayer meetin', an' consid'able more elevatin' "; and here Ansel regarded the surrounding scenery with frowning disapproval, as if it left much to be desired.

"Don't you think that there are any agreeable and pleasant women, Ansel?" ventured Susanna.

"Land, yes; heaps of 'em; but they all wear Shaker bunnits!"

"I suppose you know more about the women in the outside world than most of the Brothers, on account of traveling so much?"

"I guess anybody 't drives a seed−cart or peddles stuff along the road knows enough o' women to keep clear of 'em. They 'll come out the kitchen door, choose their papers o' seasonin' an' bottles o' flavorin', worry you 'bout the price an' take the aidge off every dime, make up an' then onmake their minds 'bout what they want, ask if it's pure, an' when by good luck you git your cart out o' the yard, they come runnin' along the road after ye to git ye to swap a bottle o' vanilla for some spruce gum an' give 'em back the change."

Susanna could not help smiling at Ansel's arraignment of her sex. "Do you think they follow you for the pleasure of shopping, or the pleasure of your conversation, Ansel?" she asked slyly.

"A little o' both, mebbe; though the pleasure's all on their side," returned the unchivalrous Ansel. "But take them same women, cut their hair close to their heads (there's a heap o' foolishness in hair, somehow), purge 'em o' their vanity, so they won't be lookin' in the glass all the time, make 'em depend on one another for sassiety, so they won't crave no conversation with menfolks, an' you git an article that's 'bout as good and 'bout as stiddy as a man!"

"You never seem to remember that men are just as dangerous to women's happiness and goodness as women are to men's," said Susanna, courageously.

"It don't seem so to me! Never see a man, hardly, that could stick to the straight an' narrer if a woman wanted him to go the other way. Weak an' unstable as water, menfolks are, an' women are pow'ful strong."

"Have your own way, Ansel! I'm going back to the world, but no man shall ever say I hindered him from being good. You'll see women clearer in another world."

"There'll be precious few of 'em to see!" retorted Ansel. "You're about the best o' the lot, but even you have a kind of a managin' way with ye, besides fillin' us all full o' false hopes that we'd gathered in a useful Believer, one cal'lated to spread the doctrines o' Mother Ann!"

"I know, I know, Ansel, and oh, how sorry I am! You would never believe how I long to stay and help you, never believe how much you have helped me! Goodbye, Ansel; you've made me smile when my heart was breaking. I shan't forget you!"

XII. The Hills of Home

Susanna had found Sue in the upper chamber at the Office Building, and began to make the simple preparations for her homeward journey. It was the very hour when John Hathaway was saying:−−

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"Set her place at hearth and board
 As it used to be."
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Sue interfered with the packing somewhat by darting to and fro, bringing her mother sacred souvenirs given her by the Shaker sisters and the children−− needle−books, pin−balls, thimble−cases, packets of flower−seeds, polished pebbles, bottles of flavoring extract.

"This is for Fardie," she would say, "and this for Jack and this for Ellen and this for Aunt Louisa−−the needle−book, 'cause she's so useful. Oh, I'm glad we're going home, Mardie, though I do love it here, and I was most ready to be a truly Shaker. It's kind of pityish to have your hair shingled and your stocking half−knitted and know how to say 'yee' and then have it all wasted."

Susanna dropped a tear on the dress she was folding. The child was going home, as she had come away from it, gay, irresponsible, and merry; it was only the mothers who hoped and feared and dreaded. the very universe was working toward Susanna's desire at that moment, but she was all unaware of the happiness that lay so near. She could not see the freshness of the house in Farnham, the new bits of furniture here and there; the autumn leaves in her own bedroom; her worktable full of the records of John's sorrowful summer; Jack handsomer and taller, and softer, also, in his welcoming mood; Ellen rosy and excited. She did not know that Joel Atterbury had said to John that day, "I take it all back, old man, and I hope you'll stay on in the firm!" nor that Aunt Louisa, who was putting stiff, short−stemmed chrysanthemums in cups and tumblers here and there through the house, was much more flexible and human than was natural to her; nor that John, alternating between hope and despair, was forever humming:

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"Set her place at hearth and board
As it used to be:
Higher are the hills of home,
Bluer is the sea!"
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It is often so. They who go weeping to look for the dead body of a sorrow, find a vision of angels where the body has lain.

"I hope Fardie'll be glad to see us and Ellen will have gingerbread," Sue chattered; then, pausing at the window, she added, "I'm sorry to leave the hills, 'cause I'specially like them, don't you, Mardie?"

"We are leaving the Shaker hills, but we are going to the hills of home," her mother answered cheerily. "Don't you remember the Farnham hills, dear?"

"Yes, I remember," and Sue looked thoughtful; "they were farther off and covered with woods; these are smooth and gentle. And we shall miss the lake, Mardie."

"Yes; but we can look at the blue sea from your bedroom window, Sue!"

"And we'll tell Fardie about Polly Reed and the little quail bird, won't we?"

"Yes; but he and Jack will have a great deal to say to us, and we must n't talk all the time about the dear, kind Shakers, you know!"

"You're all '_buts_,' Mardie!" at which Susanna smiled through her tears.

Twilight deepened into dusk, and dusk into dark, and then the moon rose over the poplar trees outside the window where Susanna and Sue were sleeping. The Shaker Brethren and Sisters were resting serenely after their day of confession. It was the aged Tabitha's last Sabbath on earth, but had she known, it would have made no difference; if ever a soul was ready for heaven, it was Tabitha's.

There was an Irish family at the foot of the long hill that lay between the Settlement and the village of Albion; father, mother, and children had prayed to the Virgin before they went to bed; and the gray−haired minister in the low−roofed parsonage was writing his communion sermon on a text sacred to the orthodox Christian world. The same moon shone over all, and over millions of others worshiping strange idols and holding strange beliefs in strange far lands, yet none of them owned the whole of heaven; for as Elder Gray said, "It is a big place and belongs to God."

Susanna Hathaway went back to John thinking it her plain duty, and to me it seems beautiful that she found waiting for her at the journey's end a new love that was better than the old; found a husband to whom she could say in that first sacred hour when they were alone together, "Never mind, John! Let's forget, and begin all over again."

When Susanna and Sue alighted at the little railway station at Farnham, and started to walk through the narrow streets that led to the suburbs, the mother's heart beat more and more tumultuously as she realized that the issues of four lives would be settled before nightfall.

Little did Sue reck of life issues, skipping like a young roe from one side of the road to the other. "There are the hills, not a bit changed, Mardie!" she cried; "and the sea is just where it was!... Here's the house with the parrot, do you remember? Now the place where the dog barks and snarls is coming next... P'raps he'll be dead.., or p'raps he'll be nicer... Keep close to me till we get past the gate... He did n't come out, so p'raps he is dead or gone a−visiting.... There's that 'specially lazy cow that's always lying down in the Buxtons' field.... I don't b'lieve she's moved since we came away.... Do you s'pose she stands up to be milked, Mardie? There's the old bridge over the brook, just the same, only the woodbine's red.... There's... There's... Oh, Mardie, look, look!... I do b'lieve it's our Jacky!"

Sue flew over the ground like a swallow, calling "Jack−y! Jack−y! It's me and Mardie come home!"

Jack extricated himself from his sister's strangling hug and settled his collar. "I'm awful glad to see you, Sukey," he said, "but I'm getting too big to be kissed. Besides, my pockets are full of angleworms and fishhooks."

"Are you too big to be kissed even by mother?" called Susanna, hurrying to her boy, who submitted to her embrace with better grace. "O Jack, Jack! say you're glad to see mother! Say it, say it; I can't wait, Jack!"

"'Course I'm glad! Why would n't I be? I tell you I'm tired of Aunt Louisa, though she's easier than she was. Time and again I've packed my lunch basket and started to run away, but I always made it a picnic and went back again, thinking they'd make such a row over me."

"Aunt Louisa is always kind when you're obedient," Susanna urgedú "She ain't so stiff as she was. Ellen is real worried about her and thinks she's losing her strength, she's so easy to get along with."

"How's... father...?"

"Better'n he was."

"Has n't he been well?"

"Not so very; always quiet and won't eat, nor play, nor anything. I'm home with him since Sunday."

"What is the matter with your clothes?" asked Susanna, casting a maternal eye over him while she pulled him down here and up there, with anxious disapproving glances. "You look so patched, and wrinkled, and grubby."

"Aunt Louisa and father make me keep my best to put on for you, if you should come. I clean up and dress every afternoon at train time, only I forgot today and came fishing."

"It's too cold to fish, sonny."

"It ain't too cold to fish, but it's too cold for 'em to bite," corrected Jack.

"Why were you expecting us just now?" asked Susanna. "I did n't write because .... because, I thought.., perhaps.., it would be better to surprise you."

"Father's expecting you every day, not just this one," said Jack.

Susanna sank down on a stone at the end of the bridge, and leaning her head against the railing, burst into tears. In that moment the worst of her fears rolled away from her heart like the stone from the mouth of a sepulcher. If her husband had looked for her return, he must have missed her, regretted her, needed her, just a little. His disposition was sweet, even if it were thoughtless, and he might not meet her with reproaches after all. There might not be the cold greeting she had often feared−− "_Well, you've concluded to come back, have you_? _It was about time_!" If only John were a little penitent, a little anxious to meet her on some common ground, she felt her task would be an easier one.

"Have you got a pain, Mardie?" cried Sue, anxiously bending over her mother.

"No, dear," she answered, smiling through her tears and stretching a hand to both children to help her to her feet. "No, dear, I've lost one!"

"I cry when anything aches, not when it stops," remarked Jack, as the three started again on their walk. "Say, Sukey, you look bigger and fatter than you did when you went away, and you've got short curls 'stead of long ones. Do you see how I've grown? Two inches!"

"I'm inches and inches bigger and taller," Sue boasted, standing on tiptoe and stretching herself proudly. "And I can knit, and pull maple candy, and say Yee, and sing 'O Virgin Church, how great thy light.'"

"Pooh," said Jack, "I can sing 'A sailor's life's the life for me, Yo ho, yo ho!' Step along faster, mummy dear; it's 'most supper time. Aunt Louisa won't scold if you're with me. There's the house, see? Father'll be working in the garden covering up the asters, so they won't freeze before you come."

"There is no garden, Jack. What do you mean?" "Wait till you see if there's no garden! Hurrah! there's father at the window, side of Aunt Louisa. Won't he be pleased I met you halfway and brought you home!"

Oh! it was beautiful, the autumn twilight, the smoke of her own hearth−side rising through the brick chimneys! She thought she had left the way of peace behind her, but no, the way of peace was here, where her duty was, and her husband and children.

The sea was deep blue; the home hills rolled softly along the horizon; the little gate that Susanna had closed behind her in anger and misery stood wide open; shrubs, borders, young hedgerows, beds of late autumn flowers greeted her eyes and touched her heart. A foot sounded on the threshold; the home door opened and smiled a greeting; and then a voice choked with feeling, glad with welcome, called her name.

Light−footed Sue ran with a cry of joy into her father's outstretched arms, and then leaping down darted to Ellen, chattering like a magpie. Husband and wife looked at each other for one quivering moment, and then clasped each other close.

"Forgive! O Susanna, forgive!"

John's eyes and lips and arms made mute appeals, and it was then Susanna said, "Never mind, John! Let's forget, and begin all over again!"