JESSIE GRAHAM

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OR,
LOVE AND PRIDE.

By MARY J. HOLMES

1878

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CHAPTER I.—THE INMATES OF THE FARM-HOUSE.

Old Deacon Marshall sat smoking beneath the maple tree which he had planted many years before, when he was scarcely older than the little girl sitting on the broad doorstep and watching the sun as it went down behind the western hills. The tree was a sapling then, and himself a mere boy. The sapling now was a mighty tree, and its huge branches swept the gable roof of the time-worn building, while the boy was a gray-haired man, sitting there in the glorious sunset of that bright October day, and thinking of all which had come to him since the morning long ago, when, from the woods near by, he brought the little twig, and with his mother's help secured it in its place, watching anxiously for the first indications of its future growth.

Across the fields and on a shady hillside, there were white headstones gleaming in the fading sunlight. He could count them all from where he sat,—could tell which was his mother's, which his father's, and which his fair-haired sister's. Then there came a blur before his eyes, and great tears rolled down his furrowed cheek, as he remembered that in that yard there were more graves of his loved ones than there were chairs around his fireside, even though he counted the one which for years had not been used, but stood in the dark corner of the kitchen, just where it had been left that dreadful night when his only son was taken from him. On the hillside there was no headstone for that boy, but there were two graves, which had been made just as many years as the arm-chair of oak had stood in the dark corner, and on the handsome monument which a stranger's hand had reared, was cut the name of the deacon's wife and the deacon's daughter-in-law.

Fourteen times the forest tree had cast its leaf since this last great sorrow came, and the old man had in a measure recovered from the stunning blow, for new joys, new cares, new loves had sprung into existence, and few who looked into his calm, unruffled face, ever dreamed of the anguish he had suffered. Time will soften the keenest grief, and in all the town there was not apparently a

happier man than the deacon; though as often as the autumn came, bringing the frosty nights and hazy October days, there stole a look of sadness over his face, and the pipe, his never-failing friend, was brought into requisition more frequently than ever.

"It drove the blues away," he said; but on the afternoon of which we write, *the blues* must have dipped their garments in a deeper dye than usual, for though the thick smoke curled in graceful wreaths about his head, it did not dissipate the gloom which weighed upon his spirits as he sat beneath the maple, counting the distant graves, and then casting his eye down the long lane, through which a herd of cows was wending its homeward way. They were the deacon's cows, and he watched them as they came slowly on, now stopping to crop the tufts of grass growing by the wayside, now thrusting their slender horns over the low fence in quest of the juicy cornstalk, and then quickening their movements as they heard the loud, clear whistle of their driver, a lad of fourteen, and the deacon's only grandson.

Walter Marshall was a handsome boy, and none ever looked into his frank, open face, and clear, honest eyes, without turning to look again, he seemed so manly, so mature for his years, while about his slightly compressed lips there was an expression as if he were constantly seeking to force back some unpleasant memory, which had embittered his young life and fostered in his bosom a feeling of jealousy or distrust of those about him, lest they, too, were thinking of what was always uppermost in his mind.

To the deacon, Walter was dear as the apple of his eye, both for his noble qualities and the cloud of sorrow which had overshadowed his babyhood. A dying mother's tears had mingled with the baptismal waters sprinkled on his face, and the first sound to which he ever seemed to listen was that of the village bell tolling, as a funeral train wound slowly through the lane and across the field to the hillside, where the dead of the Marshall family were sleeping. He had lain in his grandmother's arms that day, but before a week went by, a stranger held him in her lap, while the deacon went again to the hillside and stood by an open grave. Then the remaining inmates of the farm-house fell back to their accustomed ways, and the prattle of the orphan boy,—for so they called him,—was the only sunshine which for many a weary month visited the old homestead.

Since that time the deacon's daughter had married, had wept over her dead husband, and smiled upon a little pale-faced, blue-eyed girl, to whom she gave the name of Ellen, for the sake of Walter's mother.

Aunt Debby, the deacon's maiden sister, occupied a prominent position in the family, who prized her virtues and humored her whims in a way which spoke volumes in her praise. Although unmarried, Aunt Debby declared that it was not her fault, and insisted that her husband, who was to have been, was

killed in the war of 1812. Not that she ever saw him, but her fortune had been told for fifty cents by one who pretended to read the future, and as she placed implicit confidence in the words of the seer, she shed a few tears to the memory of the widower who marched bravely to his death, leaving to the world four little children, and to her a life of single-blessedness. For the sake of the four children whose step-mother she ought to have been, she professed a great affection for the entire race of little ones, and especially for Walter, whose father had been her pet.

"Walter was the very image of him," she said, and when, on the night of which we are writing, she heard his clear whistle in the distance, she drew her straight-backed chair nearer to the window, and watched for the first appearance of the boy. "That's Seth again all over," she thought, as she saw him make believe set the dog on Ellen, who had gone to meet him. "That's just the way Seth used to pester Mary," and she glanced at the meek-eyed woman, moulding biscuits on the pantry shelf. As was usual with Aunt Debby, when Seth was the burden of her thoughts, she finished her remarks with, "Seth allus was a good boy," and then, as she saw Walter take a letter from his pocket and pass it to his grandfather, she hastened to the door, while her pulses quickened with the hope that it might contain some tidings of the wanderer.

The letter bore the New York postmark, and glancing at the signature, the deacon said:

"It's from Richard Graham," while both Walter and Aunt Debby drew nearer to him, waiting patiently to know the nature of its contents.

"There's nothing about my boy," the old man said, when he had finished reading, and with a gesture of impatience Walter turned away, saying to himself, "I'd thank him not to write if he can't tell us something we want to hear," while Aunt Debby went back to her knitting, and the polished needles were wet as they resumed their accustomed click.

"Mary," called the deacon, to his daughter, "this letter concerns you more than it does me. Richard's wife is dead,—killed herself with fashion and fooleries."

Advancing toward her father, Mary said:

"When did she die, and what will he do with his little girl?"

"That's it," returned the father, "that's the very thing he wrote about," and opening the letter a second time, he read that the fashionable and frivolous Mrs. Graham, worn out by a life of folly and dissipation, had died long before her time, and that the husband, warned by her example, wished to remove his daughter, a little girl eight years of age, from the city, or rather from the care of her maternal grandmother, who was sure to ruin her.

It is true the letter was not exactly worded thus, but that was what it meant. Mr. Graham had once lived in Deerwood, and knew the old Marshall homestead

well,—knew how invigorating were the breezes from the mountains,—how sweet the breath of the newly mown hay, or soil freshly plowed,—knew how bracing were the winter winds which howled around the farm-house,—how healthful the influences within, and when he decided to shut up his grand house and go to Europe for an indefinite length of time, his thoughts turned toward rustic Deerwood as a safe asylum for his child. In the gentle Mary Howland she would find a mother's care, such as she had never known, and after a little hesitation, he wrote to know if at the deacon's fireside there was room for Jessie Graham.

"She is a wayward, high-spirited little thing," he wrote, "but warm-hearted, affectionate and truthful,—willing to confess her faults, though very apt to do the same thing again. If you take her, Mrs. Howland, treat her as if she were your own; punish her when she deserves it, and, in short, train her to be a healthy, useful woman."

The price offered in return for all this was exceedingly liberal, and would have tempted the deacon had there been no other inducement.

"That's an enormous sum to pay for one little girl," he said, when he finished reading the letter. "It will send Ellen through the seminary, and maybe, buy her a piano, if she's thinking she must have one to drum upon."

"Piano!" repeated Walter. "I'll earn one for her when she needs it. I don't like this Jessie with her city airs. Don't take her, Aunt Mary. We have suffered enough from the Grahams;" and Walter tossed his cap into the tree, with a low rejoinder, which sounded very much like "*darn 'em!*"

"Walter," said the deacon, "you do wrong to cherish such feelings toward Mr. Graham. He only did what he thought was right, and were your father here now, he'd say Richard was the best friend he ever had."

This was the place for Aunt Debby to put in her accustomed "Seth allus was a good boy," while Walter, not caring to discuss the matter, laughed good-humoredly, and said:

"But that's nothing to do with this minx of a Jessie. Why does he write her name s-i-e? Why don't he spell it s-y-sy, and be sensible? Of course she's as stuck up as she can be,—afraid of cows and snakes and everything," and Walter sneered at the idea of a girl who was afraid of snakes and everything.

"Yes," chimed in Ellen, who Aunt Debby said was born for no earthly use except to "take Walter down." "I shouldn't suppose you'd say anything, for don't you remember when you went to Boston with Mr. Smith to see the caravan, and stopped at the Tremont, and when they pounded that big thing for dinner you were scared almost to death, and hid behind the door screaming, 'The lion's out! the lion's out! Don't you hear him roar?'"

Walter colored crimson, and replied apologetically:

"Pshaw, Nell, I was a little shaver then, only ten years old. I'd never heard

a gong before, and why shouldn't I think the lion out?"

"And why shouldn't Jessie be afraid of snakes if she never saw one? She's only eight, and you were ten," was the reply of Ellen, whose heart bounded at the thoughts of a companion, and who had unwittingly avowed herself the champion of the unknown Jessie Graham.

"Hush, children," interrupted the deacon. "It isn't worth while to quarrel. Folks raised in the city are sometimes green as well as country people, and this Jessie may be one of 'em. But the question now is, shall she come to Deerwood or not?" and he turned inquiringly toward his daughter. "Mary, are you willing to be a mother to Richard Graham's child?"

Mrs. Howland started, and sweeping her hand across her face, answered: "I am willing," while Aunt Debby, in her straight-backed chair mumbled:

"To think it should come to that,—Mary taking care of his and another woman's child; but, law! it's no more than I should have done if he hadn't been killed," and with a sigh for the widower and his four motherless offspring, Aunt Debby also gave her assent, thinking how she would knit lamb's-wool stockings for the little girl, whose feet she guessed were about the size of Ellen's.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Ellen, when it was settled, "for now there'll be somebody to play with when my head aches too hard to go to school. I hope she'll bring a lot of dolls; and, Walter, you won't ink their faces and break their legs as you did that cob baby Aunt Debby made for me?"

When thus appealed to, Walter was reading for himself the letter which had fallen at his grandfather's feet, and his clear hazel eyes were moist with tears, as he read the postscript:

"I have as yet heard nothing from Seth, poor fellow! I hoped he would come back ere this. It may be I shall meet him in my travels."

"He isn't so bad a man after all," thought Walter, and with his feelings softened toward the father, he was more favorably disposed toward the daughter's dolls, and to Ellen's question he replied, "Of course I shan't bother her if she lets me alone and don't put on too many airs."

"I can't see to write as well as I used to," said the deacon, after everything had been arranged, "and Walter must answer the letter."

"Walter won't do any such thing," was the mental comment of the boy, whose animosity began to return toward one who he fancied had done his father a wrong.

After a little, however, he relented, and going to his room wasted several sheets of paper before he was at all satisfied with the few brief lines which were to tell Mr. Graham that his daughter Jessie would be welcome at Deerwood. Great pains he took to spell her name according to his views of orthography, making an extra flourish to the "y" with which he finished up the "Jessy."

"Now, that's sensible," he said. "I wonder Aunt Debby don't spell her name b-i-e-by. She would, I dare say, if she lived in New York."

Walter's ideas of city people were formed entirely from the occasional glimpses he had received of his proud Boston relatives, who had been highly indignant at his mother's marriage with a country youth, the most of them resenting it so far as to absent themselves from her funeral. His lady grandmother, they told him, had been present, and had held him for a moment upon her rich black mourning dress, but from that day she had not looked upon his face. These things had tended to embitter Walter toward his mother's family, and judging all city people by them, it was hardly natural that he should be very favorably disposed toward little Jessie. Still, as the time for her arrival drew near, none watched for her more vigilantly or evinced a greater interest in her coming than himself, and on the day when she was expected, it was observed by his cousin Ellen that he took more than usual pains with his toilet, and even exchanged his cowhide boots for a lighter pair, which would make less noise in walking; then as he heard the whistle in the distance, he stationed himself by the gate, where he waited until the gray horses which drew the village omnibus appeared over the hill. The omnibus itself next came in sight, and the head of a little girl was thrust from the window, a profusion of curls falling from beneath her brown straw hat, and herself evidently on the lookout for her new home.

"Curls, of course," said Walter. "See if I don't cut some of 'em off," and he involuntarily felt for his jack-knife.

By this time the carriage was so near that he vacated his post, lest the strangers should think he was waiting for them, and returning to the house, looked out of the west window, whistling indifferently, and was apparently quite oblivious of the people alighting at the gate, or of the chubby form tripping up the walk, and with sunny face and laughing round bright eyes, winning at once the hearts of the four who, unlike himself, had gone out to receive her.

CHAPTER II.—MR. GRAHAM AND JESSIE.

She was a little fat, black-eyed, black-haired girl, with waist and ankles of no

Lilliputian size, and when at last Walter dared to steal a look at her, she had already divested herself of her traveling habiliments, and with the household cat in her arms, was looking about for a chair which suited her. She evidently did not fancy the high, old-fashioned ones which had belonged to Deacon Marshall's wife, for, spying the one which was never used, and into which even Ellen dared not climb, she unhesitatingly wheeled it from its place, and seated herself in its capacious depths, quite as a matter of course.

A good deal shocked, and somewhat amused, Walter watched her proceedings, thinking to himself:

"By and by I'll tell her that is father's chair, and then she won't want to sit in it; but she's a stranger now, so I guess I'll let her alone."

By this time the cat, unaccustomed to quite so hard a squeeze as Jessie gave it, escaped from her lap, and jumping down, Jessie ran after it, exclaiming:

"Oh, boy, boy, stop her!"

A peculiar whistle from Walter sent the animal flying faster from her, and shaking back her curls, Jessie's black eyes flashed up into his face, as she said:

"You're the meanest boy, and I don't like you a bit."

"Jessie," said the stern voice of her father, and for the first time since his entrance, Walter turned to look at him, and as he looked he felt the bitterness gradually giving way, for the expression of Mr. Graham's face was not proud and overbearing as he had fancied it to be.

On the contrary, it was mild and gentle as a woman's, while there was something in his pleasant blue eyes which would prompt an entire stranger to trust him at once. He had seen much of the world, and of what is called best society, and his manners were polished and pleasing. Still there was nothing ostentatious about him, no consciousness of superiority, and when Deacon Marshall, pointing to Walter, said to him, "This is Seth's child," he took the boy's hand in his own, and for a moment, stood gazing down into the frank, open face, then pushing the brown hair from off the forehead, he said:

"You look as your father did, when we were boys together, and he was the dearest friend I knew."

"What made you turn against him then?" trembled on Walter's lips, but the words were not uttered, for Mr. Graham's manner had disarmed him of all animosity, and he said instead:

"I hope I may be as good and true a man as I believe him to have been."

For a moment longer Mr. Graham held the hand in his, while he looked admiringly at the boy, who had paid this tribute to one whom the world considered an outcast, then releasing it, he turned away, and Walter was sure that his eyes were moist with something which looked like tears.

"I like him for that," was his mental comment, as he watched Mr. Graham

talking with his aunt of little Jessie, who, when he bade her farewell,—for he went back that night,—clung sobbing to his neck, refusing to be comforted, until Walter whispered to her of a bright-eyed squirrel playing in its cage up in the maple tree.

Then her arms relaxed their grasp, and she went with Ellen to see the sight, while Walter accompanied Mr. Graham to the depot. There was a bond of sympathy between the man and boy, and they grew to liking each other very fast during the few moments they talked together upon the platform of the Deerwood station. Numerous were the charges Mr. Graham gave to Walter concerning his little girl, bidding him care for her as if she were his sister, and Walter felt a boyish pride in thinking how well he would fulfill his trust.

Mr. Graham could never tell what prompted him to say it, but as his mind went forward to the future, when Jessie would be grown, he said:

"She will make a beautiful woman, I think, and I hope she will be as good and pure as beautiful, so that her future husband, should she ever have one, will not look to her in vain for happiness."

It might have been that Mr. Graham was thinking of his own wife, and the little congeniality there had been between them. If so, he hastened to thrust such thoughts aside by adding, laughingly:

"Her grandmother is a remarkably scheming old lady, and has already set her heart on William Bellenger, or rather on his family; but I would rather see her buried than the wife of any of that race."

Unconsciously Mr. Graham had wounded Walter deeply, for in his veins the blood of the Bellengers was flowing, and he did not care to hear another speak thus disparagingly of a race from which his gentle mother sprung, though he had no love for it himself. William Bellenger was his cousin, and even now he felt his finger tips tingle as he recalled the only time they had met. It was on the occasion of that first visit to Boston, to which Ellen had alluded. His uncle's family were then boarding at the Tremont and William was making a constrained effort to entertain him in the public parlor, when he became so frightened with the gong, mistaking it for a roaring lion, and taking refuge behind the door as Ellen had said. With explosive shouts of laughter William repeated the story to all whose ear he could gain, and Walter had never forgotten the sneering tone of his voice as he called after him at parting:

"The lion's out! the lion's out!"

They had never seen each other since,—he hoped they never should see each other again,—and though sure that he disliked Jessie very much, he shrank even from the thought of associating her with William Bellenger, though he did not like to have Mr. Graham speak so slightingly of him. Something like this must have shown itself upon his face, for Mr. Graham saw the shadow resting

there and quickly divining the cause, hastened to say:

"Forgive me, Walter, for speaking thus thoughtlessly of your mother's family. I did not think of the relationship. You are not like them in the least, I am sure, for you remind me each moment of your father."

Around the curve the train appeared in view, but Walter must ask one question of his companion, and as the latter sprang upon the steps of the forward car, he held his arm, and said to him entreatingly, as it were:

"Do you think my father guilty?"

Oh, how Mr. Graham longed to say no to the impulsive boy, whose handsome face looked up to him so wistfully. But he could not, and he answered sadly:

"I did think so, years ago."

"Yes, yes; but now? Do you think so now?" and Walter held fast to the arm, even though the train was moving slowly on.

The ringing of the bell, the creaking of the machinery, and the puffing of the engine increased each moment; but above the din of them all Walter caught the reply:

"I have had no reason to change my mind," and releasing Mr. Graham, he sprang to the ground and walked slowly back to the farm-house, his bosom swelling with resentment, and his eyes filling with tears, for upon no subject was the high-spirited boy so sensitive as the subject of his father's honor.

"I'll never believe it till he himself tells me it is true," he said, and then, as he had often done before, he began to wonder if his father ever thought of the child he had never seen, and if in this world they would ever meet.

While thus meditating, he reached home, where he found the entire family assembled around little Jessie, who, with flushed cheeks and angry eyes, was stamping her fat feet furiously, and, by way of variety, occasionally bumping her hard head against the harder door.

"What is it?" he asked, pressing forward until he caught sight of the little tempest.

The matter was soon explained. Always accustomed to her own way with her indulgent grandmother, Jessie had insisted upon opening the cage and taking the squirrel in her hands, and when her request was refused she had flown into a most violent passion, screaming for her father to come and take her away from such dirty, ugly people. It was in vain that they tried by turns to soothe her. Her spirit was the ruling one as yet, and she raved on till Walter came and learned the cause of her wrath.

"I can make her mind, I'll bet," he thought, and advancing toward her, he said sternly: "Jessie!" but a more decided stamp of the foot was her only answer, and seizing her arm, he shook her violently, while he said more sternly than

before: "Stop, instantly!"

Like coals of fire the black eyes flashed up into his, meeting a look so firm and decided that they quailed beneath the glance. Jessie had met her master, and after a few hysterical sobs, she became as gentle as a lamb, nestling so close to Walter, who had seated himself upon the chintz-covered lounge, that he involuntarily wound his arm around her, as if to make amends for his recent harshness.

Jessie was as affectionate and warm-hearted as she was high-tempered and rebellious. Her tears were like April showers, and before Walter had been with her one half hour, all traces of the storm had disappeared, and in her own way she was cultivating his acquaintance, and occasionally inflicting upon him a pang by criticising some of his modes of speech. Particularly was she shocked at his favorite expression, "Darn it!" and looking wonderingly into his face, she said:

"You mustn't use such naughty words. Nobody but vulgar folks do that."

Walter colored painfully, and that night, in the little diary which he kept, he wrote:

"Resolved to break myself of using the word 'darn;' not because a pert city miss wishes it, but because—"

He didn't know quite what reason to assign, so he left the sentence to be finished at some future time.

In less than three weeks Jessie was the pet of the household, not even excepting Walter, whose prejudices gradually gave way, and who at last admitted that she would be "a niceish kind of a little girl, if she wasn't so awful spunky."

To no one of the family did Jessie take so kindly as to him. He had been the first to conquer her, and she clung to him with a childish, trusting love, whose influence he could not resist. Naturally full of life and fond of exercise, she was his constant companion in the fields and in the woods, where, fearless of complexion or dress, she gathered the rich butternuts, or sought among the yellow leaves for the brown chestnuts which the hoar frost had cast from their prickly covering. She liked the country, she said, and when her grandmother wrote, as she often did, begging her to come back, if only for a week, she absolutely refused to go, bidding Walter, who was her amanuensis, say that she liked staying where she was, and never meant to live in the city again. To Walter she was of inestimable advantage, for she cured him of more than one bad habit, both of word and manner, and though he, perhaps, would not have acknowledged it, he was very careful not to offend her ladyship by a repetition of the offense, until at last his schoolmates more than once called him stuck-up and proud, while even Ellen thought him greatly changed.

And thus the autumn passed away, and the breath of winter was cold and keen upon the New England hills, while the grim old mountain frowned gloomily down upon the pond, or tiny lake, whose surface was covered over with a coat of

polished glass, tempting the skaters far and near, and bringing to its banks one day Walter and Jessie Graham. It was in vain that Mrs. Howland and Aunt Debby both urged upon the latter the propriety of remaining at home and knitting on the deacon's socks, just as gentle, domestic Ellen did. Jessie was not to be persuaded, and, wrapped in her warm fur cape and mittens, she went with Walter to the pond, receiving many a heavy fall upon the ice, but always saying it was no matter, particularly if Walter were within hearing. The surest way to win his favor, she knew, was to be brave and fearless, and when, as the bright afternoon drew to its close, some boy, more mischievous than the rest, caught off Walter's cap and sent it flying toward the southern boundary of the pond, she darted after it, unmindful of the many voices raised to stay the rash adventure.

"Stop, Jessie! stop! The deep hole lies just there!" was shouted after her. But she did not hear; she thought only of Walter's commendation when she returned him his cap, and she kept on her way, while Walter, with blanched cheek, looked anxiously after her, involuntarily shutting his eyes as the dreadful cry rose upon the air:

"She's gone! she's gone!"

When he opened them again the space where he had seen her last, with her bright face turned toward him, was vacant, and the cold, black waters were breaking angrily over the spot where she had stood, Walter thought himself dying, and almost hoped he was, for the world would be very dreary with no little Jessie in it; then as he caught sight of the crimson lining to Jessie's cape fluttering above the ice, and thought of her father's trust in him, he cried, "I'll save her, or perish too!" and rushed on to the rescue.

There was a fierce struggle in the water, and the ice was broken up for many yards around, and then, just as those who stood upon the shore, breathlessly awaiting the result, were beginning to despair, the noble boy fell fainting in their midst, his arms clasped convulsively around Jessie, whose short black curls and dripping garments clung tightly to her face and form. Half an hour later and Deacon Marshall, smoking by his kitchen fire, looked from the western window, and, starting to his feet, exclaimed:

"Who are all those people coming this way, and what do they carry with them? It's Walter,—it's Walter!" he cried, as the setting sun shone on the white face, and hurrying out, he asked, huskily, "Is my boy dead?"

"No, not dead," answered one of the group, "his heart is beating yet, but she——" and he pointed to little Jessie, whom a strong man carried in his arms.

But Jessie was not dead, although for a long time they thought she was, and Walter, who had recovered from his fainting fit, was not ashamed to cry as he looked upon the still white face and wished he had never been harsh to the little girl, or shaken her so hard on that first day of her arrival at Deerwood. Slowly,

as one wakes from a heavy slumber, Jessie came back to life, and the first words she uttered were:

"Tell Walter I did get his cap, but somebody took it from me and hurt my hand so bad," and she held up the tiny thing on which was a deep cut made by the sharp-pointed ice.

"Yes, darling, I know it," Walter whispered, and when no one saw him he pressed his lips to the wounded hand.

This was a good deal for Walter to do. Never had he called any one darling before, never kissed even his blue-eyed cousin Ellen, but the first taste inspired him with a desire for more, and he wondered at himself for having refrained so long.

"Will she live?" he asked eagerly of the physician, who replied:

"There is now no reason why she should not," and Walter hastened away to his own room, where, unobserved, he could weep out his great joy.

Gradually, as the days went by, Jessie comprehended what Walter had done for her, and her first impulse was that some one should write to her father,—somebody who would say just what she told them to, and as Aunt Debby was the most likely to do this, the poor old lady was pressed into the service, groaning and sweating over the task.

"And now, pa," Aunt Debby wrote, after telling of the accident, "Walter must be paid, and I'll tell you how to pay him. I heard him one night talking with his grandpa about going to school and college, and his grandpa said he couldn't, they were not worth enough in the whole world for that. Then Walter said he should never know anything, and cried so hard that I was just going to cry too, when I fell asleep and forgot it. You are rich, I know, for one of ma's rings cost five hundred dollars, and her shawl a thousand, and I want you to send me money enough for Walter to go to college. It will take a lot, I guess, for I heard him say he'd only studied the things they learn in district schools; but you have got enough. Let me give it to him with my own hands, because he saved me with his, will you, father? Walter is the nicest kind of a boy."

The letter was sent, and in course of time there came a response with a draft for two thousand dollars, the whole to be used for the noble lad who had saved the life of the father's only child. Wild with delight Jessie listened while Aunt Debby, the only one in the secret, spelled out the words, then seizing the draft, she hastened out in quest of Walter, whom she found in the barn, milking the speckled cow. Running up to him she cried:

"It's come,—the money! You're going to school,—to college, and to be a great big man like father. Here it is," and thrusting the paper into his hand she crouched so near to him that the milk-pail was upset, and the white drops spattered her jet black hair.

At first Walter could not understand it, but Jessie managed to explain how she had asked her father for money to pay for his education.

"Because," she said, "if it hadn't been for you I should have been a little dead girl now, and the boys, next winter, would have skated right over me lying there on the bottom of the pond."

Walter's first emotion was one of joy in having within his reach what he had so greatly desired, but considered impossible. Then there arose a feeling of unwillingness to receive his education from Mr. Graham, to whom they were already indebted. It seemed too much like charity, and that he could not endure. Still he did not say so to Jessie,—he would wait, he thought, until he had talked with his grandfather. Greatly surprised, Deacon Marshall listened to the story, saying, when it was finished:

"You'll accept it, of course."

"No, I shan't," returned Walter. "We owe Mr. Graham now more than we can ever pay, and I would rather work all my life on the old homestead than be dependent on his bounty. You may send it back to your father," he added, giving the draft to Jessie. "Tell him I thank him, but I can't accept his favor."

"Oh, Walter!" and climbing into a chair, for Walter was standing up, Jessie wound her arms around his neck and poured forth a torrent of entreaties which led him finally to waver, and at last to decide upon accepting it, provided Mr. Graham would allow him to pay it back as soon as he was able.

To this Mr. Graham, who was immediately written to upon the subject, assented, for he readily understood the feeling of pride which had prompted the suggestion.

"I do not respect you less," he wrote to Walter in reply, "for wishing to take care of yourself, and the time may come when the money so cheerfully loaned to you now will be sorely needed by me and mine. Until then, give yourself no trouble about it, but devote all your energies to the acquirement of an education. Were my advice asked in reference to a college, I should tell you Yale, but you must do as you think best. I shall need a partner by-and-by, perhaps, and nothing could please me more than to see the names of Graham and Marshall associated together in business again. God bless your father, wherever he may be."

This letter touched the right chord, and often in his sleep Walter saw the sign whose yellow letters read "Graham & Marshall," and the junior partner of this firm sometimes was himself, but oftener a mild-faced man wearing the sad, weary look he always saw in dreams upon his father's face. The day would come, too, he said, when the honor of the Marshall name would be redeemed, and he looked eagerly forward to the time when he was to enter as a student the Wilbraham Academy, where it was decided that he should fit himself for college.

Very delightful was the bustle and confusion attendant upon the prepara-

tions in the deacon's household, the entire family entering into the excitement with a zest which told how much the boy was beloved. Every one wished to do something for him, even to little Jessie, who, having never been taught to do a really useful thing until she came to Deerwood, worked perseveringly, but with small hope of success, upon a pair of socks like those which Ellen had knit for the deacon the winter before. But alas for Jessie! knitting was not her forte, and Walter himself could not forbear a smile at the queer-looking thing which grew but slowly in her hands. At last, in despair, she gave it up, and one night, when no one was near, threw it into the fire.

"I must give him something for a keepsake," she thought, and remembering that he had sometimes smoothed her hair as if he liked it, she seized the shears, and cutting from her head the longest, handsomest curl, gave it to him with the explanation that "her father had taken a lock of her hair when he went away, and perhaps he would like one too."

Affecting an indifference he did not feel, Walter laughingly accepted a gift which in future years would be very dear to him, because of the fair donor.

The bright April morning came at last on which Walter left his home, and with tearful eyes the family watched him out of sight, and then, with saddened hearts, went back to their usual employments, feeling that the sunshine of the house had gone with the stirring, active boy, who, in one corner of the noisy car, was winking hard and counting the fence posts as they ran swiftly past, to keep himself from crying. Anon this feeling left him, and with the hopefulness of youth he looked eagerly into the far future, catching occasional glimpses of the day which would surely come to him when the names of Graham and Marshall would be associated together again.

CHAPTER III.—EIGHT YEARS LATER.

It is the pleasant summer time, and on the college green groups of people hurry to and fro, some seeking their own pleasure beneath the grateful shade of the majestic elms, others wending their way to the hotel, while others still are hastening to the Center Church to hear the valedictory, which rumor says will be

all the better received for the noble, manly beauty of the speaker chosen to this honor. Flushed with excitement, he stands before the people, his clear hazel eye wandering uneasily over the sea of upturned faces, as if in quest of one from whose presence he had hoped to catch his inspiration. But he looked in vain. Two figures alone met his view,—one a bent and gray-haired old man leaning on his staff, the other a mustached, stylish-looking youth of nearly his own age, who occupied a front seat, and with his glass coolly inspected the young orator.

With a calm, dignified mien, Walter returned the gaze, wondering where he had seen that face before. Suddenly it flashed upon him, and with a feeling of gratified pride that it was thus they met again, he glanced a second time at the calm, benignant expression of the old man, who had come many miles to hear the speech his boy was to make. In the looks of the latter there was that which kindled a thrill of enthusiasm in Walter's frame, and when at last he opened his lips, and the tide of eloquence burst forth, the audience hung upon his words with breathless interest, greeting him at the close with shouts of applause which shook the solid walls and brought the old man to his feet. Then the tumult ceased, and amid the throng the hero of the hour was seen piloting his aged grandfather across the green to the hotel.

"I wish your father was here to-day," the deacon said, as they reached the public parlor; but before Walter could reply he saw approaching them the stranger who had so leisurely inspected him with his quizzing-glass, and who now came forward, offering his hand and saying, laughingly:

"Allow me to congratulate you upon having become yourself a *lion*."

It did not need this speech to tell Walter that his visitor was William Bellenger, and he answered in the same light strain:

"Yes, I'm not afraid of the lion now;" "nor of the baboon, either," was his mental rejoinder, as he saw the wondrous amount of hair his cousin had brought back from Europe, where for the last two years he had been traveling.

William Bellenger could be very gracious when he tried, and as his object in introducing himself to Walter's notice was not so much to talk with him particularly, as to inquire after a certain young girl and heiress, whose bright, sparkling beauty was beginning to create something of a sensation, he assumed a friendliness he did not feel, and was soon conversing familiarly with Walter of the different people they both knew, mentioning incidentally Mr. Graham, the wealthy New York banker, whom he had met in Europe, for Mr. Graham had remained abroad six years. From him William had heard the warmest eulogies of Walter Marshall, and there had been kindled in his bosom a feeling of jealous enmity, which the events of the day had not in the least tended to diminish. Still if his cousin had not interfered with him in another matter of greater importance than the being praised by Mr. Graham and the people, he was satisfied, and it

was to ascertain this fact that he had followed young Marshall to the hotel.

Before going to New Haven William had called at the home of Jessie's grandmother in the city, to inquire for the young lady. The house was shut up and the family were in the country, the servant said, who answered William's ring, but the sharp eyes of the young man caught the outline of a figure listening in the upper hall, and readily divining who the figure was, he answered:

"Yes, but Mrs. Bartow is here. Carry her my card and say that I will wait."

The name of Bellenger brought down at once a bundle of satin and lace, which Jessie called her grandmother, and which was supposed to be showing off its diamonds at some fashionable hotel, instead of fanning itself in the back chamber of that brownstone front. From her William learned that Jessie was in Deerwood, and would probably attend the commencement exercises at Yale, as a boy of some kind, whom Mr. Graham had taken up, was to be graduated at that time. To New Haven, then, he went, examining the books at every hotel, and scanning the faces of those he met with an eager gaze, and at last, as he became convinced she was not there, he determined to seek an interview with his cousin, and question him of her whereabouts. After speaking of the father as a man whose acquaintance every one was proud to claim, he said, quite indifferently:

"By the way, Walter, his daughter Jessie is in Deerwood, is she not?"

"Yes," returned Walter; "she has been there for some weeks. She lived with us all the time her father was in Europe, except when she was away at school," and Walter felt his pulses quicken, for he remembered what Mr. Graham had said of Mrs. Bartow's having set her heart on William as her future grandson.

William knew as well as Walter that Jessie had lived at Deerwood, but he seemed to be surprised, and continued:

"I wonder, then, she is not here to-day. She must feel quite a sisterly interest in you," and the eyes, not wholly unlike Walter's, save that they had in them a sinister expression, were fixed inquiringly upon young Marshall, who replied:

"I did expect her, and my cousin too; but my grandfather says that Ellen was not able to come, and Jessie would not leave her."

"She must be greatly attached to her country friends," returned William, and the slight sneer which accompanied the words prompted Walter to reply:

"She is attached to some of us, I trust. At all events, I love her as a sister, for such she has been to me, while Mr. Graham has been a second father. I owe him everything——"

"Not your education, certainly. You don't mean that?" interrupted William, who had from the first suspected as much, for he knew that Deacon Marshall was comparatively poor.

Walter hesitated, for he had not yet outlived the pride which caused him to shrink from blazoning it abroad that a stranger's money had made him what he

was. Deacon Marshall, on the contrary, had no such sensitiveness, and observing Walter's embarrassment, he answered for him:

"Yes, Mr. Graham did pay for his education, and an old man's blessing on his head for that same deed of his'n."

"Mr. Graham is very liberal," returned William, with a supercilious bow, which brought the hot blood to Walter's cheek. "Do you go home immediately?" he continued, and Walter replied:

"My grandfather has a desire to visit Medway, in Massachusetts, where he married his wife, and as I promised to go with him in case he came to New Haven, I shall not return to Deerwood for a week."

Instantly the face of William Bellenger brightened, and Walter felt a strong desire to knock him down when he said:

"Allow me, then, to be the bearer of any message you may choose to send, for I am resolved upon seeing Miss Graham, and shall, accordingly, go to Deerwood. She will need a gallant in your absence, and trust me, I will do my best, though I cannot hope to fill the place of a *lion*."

Involuntarily Walter clenched his fist, while in the angry look of defiance he cast upon his cousin, the impudent William read all the withering scorn he felt for him. Ay, more, for he read, too, or thought he did, that the beautiful Jessie Graham, whose father was worth a million, had a warm place in the young plebeian's heart, and this it was which brought the wrathful scowl to his own face as he compelled himself to offer his hand at parting.

"What message did you bid me carry?" he asked, and taking his extended hand, Walter looked fiercely into his eyes as he replied:

"None; I can tell her myself all I have to say."

"Very well," said William, with another bow, and stroking the little forest about his mouth, he walked away.

"I don't put much faith in presentiments," said the deacon, when he was gone, "but all the time that chap was here I felt as if a snake were crawling at my feet. Believe me, he's got to cross my path or yourn, mebby both," and the deacon resumed his post by the window, watching the passers-by, while Walter hurriedly paced the floor with a vague, uneasy sensation, for though he knew of no way in which the unprincipled Bellenger could possibly cross his grandfather's path, he did know how he could seriously disturb himself.

Not that he had any confessed hope of winning Jessie Graham. She was far above him, he said. Yet she was the one particular star he worshiped, feeling that no other had a right to share the brightness with him, and when he remembered the shady, winding paths in the pleasant old woods at Deerwood, and the long afternoons when Ellen would be too languid to go out, and William and Jessie free to go alone, he longed for his grandfather to give up his favorite project and

go back with him to Deerwood. But when he saw how the old man was set upon the visit, wondering if he should know the place, and if the thorn-apple tree were growing still where he sat with Eunice and asked her to be his wife, he put aside all thoughts of self, and went cheerfully to Medway, while his cousin, with an eye also to the shadowy woods and the quiet mountain walks, was hurrying on to Deerwood.

CHAPTER IV.—JESSIE AND ELLEN.

It was a glorious afternoon, and not a single feathery cloud flecked the clear blue of the sky. The refreshing rain of the previous night had cooled the sultry August air, and all about the farm-house the grass had taken a brighter green and the flowers a brighter hue. Away to the westward, at the distance of nearly one-fourth of a mile, the woods were streaked with an avenue of pines, which grew so closely together that the scorching rays of the noontide sun seldom found entrance to the velvety plat where Walter had built a rustic bench, with Jessie looking on, and where Jessie and Ellen now were sitting, the one upon the seat and the other on the grass filling her straw hat with cones, and talking to her companion of the young graduate, wondering where he was, and if he didn't wish he were there with them beneath the sheltering pines.

Eight years had changed the little girls of nine and eight into grown-up, graceful maidens, and though of an entirely different style, each was beautiful in her own way, Jessie as a brunette, and Ellen as a blonde. Full of frolic, life and fun, Jessie carried it all upon her sparkling face, and in her laughing eyes of black. Now, as of old, her raven hair clustered in short, thick curls around her forehead and neck, giving her the look of a gypsy, her father said, as he fondly stroked the elfin locks, and thought how beautiful she was. Five years she had lived in Deerwood, and then, at her father's request, had gone to a fashionable boarding-school, for the only child of the millionaire must have accomplishments such as could not be obtained among the New England mountains. No process of polishing, however, or course of discipline had succeeded as yet in making her forget her country home, and when Mr. Graham, whose business called him

West, offered her the choice between Newport and Deerwood, she unhesitatingly chose the latter, greatly to the vexation of her grandmother, who delighted in society now even more than she did when young. If Jessie went to Deerwood she must remain at home, for she could not go to Newport alone, and what was worse, she must live secluded in the rear of the house for Mrs. Bartow would not for the world let her fashionable acquaintances know that she passed the entire summer in the city. She should lose *caste* at once, she thought, and she used every possible argument to persuade Jessie to give up her visit to Deerwood, and go with her instead. But Jessie would not listen. "Grandma could accompany old Mrs. Reeves," she said, "they'd have a splendid time quarreling over their respective granddaughters, herself and Charlotte, but as for her, she should go to Deerwood;" and she accordingly went there, and took with her a few city airs and numerous city fashions.

The former, however, were always laid aside when talking to Ellen, who was by some accounted the more beautiful of the two, with her wealth of golden hair, her soft eyes of violet blue, and her pale, transparent complexion. As gentle and quiet as she was lovely, she formed a striking contrast to the merry, frolicsome Jessie, with her darker, richer style of beauty, and neither ever appeared so well as when they were together. In all the world there was no one, except her father, whom Jessie loved as she did Ellen Howland, and though, amid the gay scenes of her city home, she frequently forgot her, and neglected to send the letters which were so precious to the simple country girl, her love returned the moment the city was left behind, and she breathed the exhilarating air of the Deerwood hills.

She called Walter her brother, and had watched him through his college course with all a sister's pride, looking eagerly forward to the time when he would be in her father's employ, for it was settled that he was to enter Mr. Graham's bank as soon as he was graduated. And as on that summer afternoon she sat upon the grassy ridge and talked with Ellen of him, she spoke of the coming winter when he would be with her in the city.

"It will be so nice," she said, "to have such a splendid beau, for I mean to get him introduced right away. I shall be seventeen in a month, and I'm coming out next season. I wish you could spend the winter with me, and see something of the world. I mean to ask your mother. Father will buy your dresses to wear to parties, and concerts, and the opera. Only think of having a box all to ourselves,—you and I and Walter, and maybe Charlotte Reeves once in a great while, or cousin Jennie. Wouldn't you love to go?"

"No, not for anything," answered Ellen, who liked early hours and quiet rooms, and always experienced a kind of suffocation in the presence of fashionable people, and who continued: "I don't believe Walter will like it either, unless

he changes greatly. He used to have a horror of city folks, and I do believe almost hated *you* before you came to Deerwood, just because you were born in New York."

"Hated *me*, Ellen!" repeated Jessie. "He shook me, I know, and I've been a little afraid of him ever since, but it did me good, for I deserved it, I was such a high-tempered piece; but I did not know he hated me. Do you suppose he hates me now?" and Jessie's manner evinced a deeper interest in Walter than she herself believed existed.

Ellen saw it at once, and so did the man who for the last ten minutes had been watching the young girls through the pine tree boughs. William Bellenger had reached Deerwood on the afternoon train, and gone at once to the farmhouse, whose gable roof, small window panes, and low walls had provoked a smile of derision, while he wondered what Jessie Graham could find to attract her there. Particularly was he amused with the quaint expressions of Aunt Debby, who, in her high-crowned cap, with black handkerchief smoothly crossed in front, and her wide check apron on, sat knitting by the door, stopping occasionally to take a pinch of snuff, or "shoo" the hens when they came too near.

"The gals was in the woods," she said, when he asked for Miss Graham, and she bade him "make Ellen get up if he should find her setting on the damp ground, as she presumed she was. Ellen was weakly," she said, "and wasn't an atom like Walter, who was as trim a chap as one could wish to see. Did the young man know Walter?"

"Oh, yes," returned William. "He is my cousin."

"Your cousin!" and the needles dropped from the old lady's hands. "Bless me!" and adjusting her glasses a little more firmly upon her nose she peered curiously at him. "I want to know if you are one of them Bellengers? Wall, I guess you do favor Walter, if a body could see your face. It's the fashion, I s'pose, to wear all that baird."

"Yes, all the fashion," returned William, who was certainly good-natured, even if he possessed no other virtue, and having asked again the road to the woods, he set off in that direction.

Following the path Aunt Debby pointed out, he soon came near enough to catch a view of the white dress Jessie wore, and wishing to see her first, himself unobserved, he crept cautiously to an opening among the pines, where he could see and hear all that was passing. Jessie's sparkling, animated face was turned toward him, but he scarcely heeded it in his surprise at another view which greeted his vision. A slender, willowy form was more in accordance with Will's taste than a fat chubby one, and in Ellen Howland his idea of a beautiful woman was, if possible, more than realized. She was leaning against a tree, her blue gingham morning gown,—for she was an invalid,—wrapped gracefully about

her her golden hair, slightly tinged with red, combed back from her forehead, her long eyelashes veiling her eyes of blue, and shading her colorless cheek, while her lily-white hands were folded together, and rested upon her lap.

"Jupiter!" thought William, "I did not suppose Deerwood capable of producing anything like that. Why, she's the realization of what I've often fancied my wife should be. Now, if she were only rich I'd yield the black-eyed witch of a Jessie to my milksop cousin. But, pshaw! it shan't be said of me that I fell in love at first sight with a vulgar country girl. What the deuce, they talk of Walter, do they! I'll try eavesdropping a little longer," and bending his head, he listened while their conversation proceeded.

He heard what Ellen said of Walter; he saw the startled look upon the face of Jessie as she exclaimed, "Does he hate me now?" and in that look he read what Jessie did not know herself.

"The wretch!" he muttered, between his teeth; "why couldn't he take the other one? I would, if the million were on her side," and in the glance he cast on Ellen there was more than a mere passing fancy.

She must have felt its influence, for as that look fell upon her she said:

"It's cold,—I shiver as with a chill. Let's go back to the house," and she arose to her feet, just as the pine boughs parted asunder, and William appeared before them.

"Mr. Bellenger!" Jessie exclaimed. "When did you come?"

"Half an hour since," he returned, "and not finding you in the house I came this way, little thinking I should stumble upon two wood nymphs instead of one," and again the peculiar glance rested upon Ellen, who had sunk back upon her seat, and whose soft eyes fell beneath his gaze.

The brief introduction was over, and then Ellen rose to go, complaining that she was cold and tired.

"We will go, too," said Jessie, putting on her hat, when Mr. Bellenger touched her arm, and said in a low voice of entreaty:

"Stay here with me."

"Yes, stay," rejoined Ellen, who caught the words. "It is pleasant here, and I can go alone."

So Jessie stayed, and when the slow footsteps had died away in the distance William sat down beside her, and after expressing his delight at meeting her again, said, indifferently as it were:

"By the way, I have just come from New Haven, where I had the pleasure of hearing the charity boy's valedictory. It is strange what assurance some people have."

"Charity boy!" repeated Jessie; "I thought Walter Marshall was to deliver the valedictory."

"And isn't he a charity scholar? Don't your father pay his bills?" asked William, in a tone which Jessie did not like.

"Well, yes," she answered, "but somehow I don't like to hear you call him that, because——" she hesitated, and William's face grew dark while waiting for her answer, which, when it came, was, "because he saved my life;" and then Jessie told her companion how, but for Walter Marshall, she would not have been sitting there that summer afternoon.

"Was Walter's speech a good one?" she asked, her manner indicating that she knew it was.

Not a change in her speaking face escaped the watchful eye of William, and knowing well that insinuations are often stronger and harder to refute than any open assertion, he replied, with seeming reluctance:

"Yes, very good; though some of it sounded strangely familiar, and I heard others hinting pretty strongly at plagiarism."

This last was in a measure true, for one of Walter's class, chagrined that the honor was not conferred upon himself, had taken pains to say that the valedictory was not all of it Walter's,—that an older and wiser head had helped him in its composition. William did not believe this, but it suited his purpose to repeat it, and he watched narrowly for the effect. Jessie Graham was the soul of truth, and no accusation could have been brought against Walter which would have pained her so much as the belief that he had been dishonorable in the least degree.

"Walter would never pass off what was not his own!" she exclaimed. "It isn't like him, or like any of the Marshall family."

"You forget his father," said the man beside her, carelessly thrusting aside a cone with his polished boot.

"What did his father do?" Jessie asked in some surprise, and her companion replied:

"You astonish me, Miss Graham, by professing ignorance of what Walter's father did. You know, of course."

"Indeed I do not," she returned. "I only know that there is something unpleasant connected with him,—something which annoys Walter terribly, but I never heard the story. I asked my father once and he seemed greatly agitated, saying he would rather not talk of it. Then I asked Ellen, but if she knew she would not tell, and she evaded all my questioning, so I gave it up, for I dare not ask Deacon Marshall or Walter either. What was it, Mr. Bellenger?"

William understood just how proud Jessie Graham was, and how she would be shocked at the very idea of public disgrace. Once convince her of the parent's guilt, and she will sicken of the son, he thought, so when she said again, "What was it? What did Mr. Marshall do?" he replied:

"If your father has kept it from you, I ought not to speak of it, perhaps; but

this I will say, if Seth Marshall had his just deserts, he would now be the inmate of a felon's cell."

"Walter's father a felon!" Jessie exclaimed, bounding to her feet. "I never thought of anything as bad as that. Is it true? Oh! is it true?" and in the maiden's heart there was a new-born feeling, which, had Walter been there then, would have prompted her to shrink from him as if he, too, had been a sharer of his father's sin.

"You seem greatly excited," said William. "It must be that you are more deeply interested in young Marshall than I supposed."

"I am interested," she replied. "I have liked him so much that I never dreamed of associating him with dishonor."

"Why need you now?" asked the wily Will. "Walter had nothing to do with it, though, to be sure, it is but natural to suppose that the child is somewhat like the father, particularly if it does not inherit any of its mother's virtues, as Walter, I suppose, does not. He is a Marshall through and through," and William smiled exultingly as he saw how well his insinuation was doing its work.

"Tell me more," Jessie whispered. "*What* did Mr. Marshall do?"

"I would rather not," returned William, at the same time hinting that it was something she ought not to hear. "If your father had good reason for keeping it from you, so have I. Suffice it to know that it killed his young wife, my father's sister, and that our family since have scarcely recognized Walter as belonging to us. It wasn't any fault of mine," he continued, as he saw the flash of Jessie's eyes, and readily divined that she did not wish to have Walter slighted. "I cannot help it. Our family are very proud, my grandmother particularly; and when my aunt married a poor ignorant country youth, it was natural that she should feel it, and when the disgrace came it was ten times worse. There is such a thing as marrying far beneath one's station, and you can imagine my grandmother's feelings by fancying what your own father's would be if you were to throw yourself away upon—well, upon this Waiter, who may be well enough himself, but who can never hope to wipe away the stain upon his name," and William looked at her sideways, to see the effect of what he had said.

Jessie Graham was easily influenced, and she attached far more importance to William's words than she would have done had she known his real design; so when he spoke of her marrying Walter as a preposterous and impossible event, she accepted it as such, and wondered why her heart should throb so painfully or why she should feel as if something had been wrested from her,—something which, all unknown to herself, had made her life so happy. She had taken her first lesson in distrust, and the poison was working well.

For a long time they sat there among the pines, not talking of Walter, but of the city and the wondrous sights which Will had seen in his foreign travels.

There was something very soothing to Jessie in William's manner, so different from that which Walter assumed toward her. Like most young girls she was fond of flattery, and Walter had more than once offended her by his straightforward way of telling her faults. William, on the contrary, sang her praises only; and, while listening to him, she wondered she had never thought before how very agreeable he was. He saw the impression he was making, and when at last, as the sun was nearing the western horizon, she arose to go, proposing that they should take the Marshall grave-yard in their route, he assented, for this, he knew, would keep him longer with her alone.

"Your aunt is buried here," Jessie said, as they drew near to the fence which surrounded the home of dead; "that is hers," and she pointed to the monument gleaming in the sunlight.

"Do you bury your bodies above the ground?" asked William, directing her attention to the flutter of a blue morning dress, plainly visible beyond the taller stone.

"Why, that is Ellen!" cried Jessie, hurrying on until she reached the gate, where she stopped suddenly, and beckoned her companion to approach as noiselessly as possible.

Ellen also had come that way, and seating herself by her grandmother's grave, had fallen asleep, and like some rare piece of sculpture, she lay among the tall, rank grass—so near to a rose tree that one of the fading blossoms had dropped its leaves upon her face.

"Isn't she beautiful?" Jessie said to her companion, who replied; "Yes, wonderfully beautiful," so loud that the fair sleeper awoke and started up.

"I was so tired," she said, "that I sat down and must have gone to sleep, for I dreamed that I was dead, and that the man who came to us in the pines dug my grave. Where is he, Jessie!"

"I am here," said William, coming forward, "and believe me, my dear Miss Howland, I would dig the grave of almost any one sooner than your own. Allow me to assist you," and he offered her his hand.

Ellen was really very weak, and when he saw how pale she was he made her lean upon him as they walked down the hillside to the house. And once, when Jessie was tripping on before, he slightly pressed the little blue-veined hand trembling on his arm, while in a very tender voice he asked if she felt better. Ellen Howland was wholly unaccustomed to the world, and had grown up to womanhood as ignorant of flattery or deceit as the veriest child. Pure and innocent herself, she did not dream of treachery in others. Walter to her was a fair type of all mankind, and she could not begin to fathom the heart of the man who walked beside her, touching her hand more than once before they reached the farm-house door.

They found the supper table neatly spread for five, and though William's intention was to spend the night at the village hotel, he accepted Mrs. Howland's invitation to stay to tea, making himself so much at home, and chatting with all so familiarly, that Aunt Debby pronounced him a clever chap, while Mrs. Howland wondered why people should say the Bellengers of Boston were proud and overbearing. It was late that night when William left them, for there was something very attractive in the blue of Ellen's eyes, and the shining black of Jessie's, and when at last he left them, and was alone with himself and the moonlight, he was conscious that there had come to him that day the first unselfish, manly impulse he had known for years. He had mingled much with fashionable ladies. None knew how artificial they were better than himself, and he had come at last to believe that there was not among them a single true, noble-hearted woman. Jessie Graham might be an exception, but even she was tainted with the city atmosphere. Her father's purse, however, would make amends for any faults she might possess, and he must win that purse at all hazards; but while doing that he did not think it wrong to pay the tribute of admiration to the golden-haired Ellen, whose modest, refined beauty had impressed him so much, and whose artless, childlike manner had affected him more than he supposed. "Little Snow-Drop" he called her to himself, and sitting alone in his chamber at the hotel, he blessed the happy chance which had thrown her in his way.

"It is like the refreshing shower to the parched earth," he said, and he thought what happiness it would be to study that pure girl, to see if, far down in the depths of her heart, there were not the germs of vanity and deceit, or better yet, if there were not something in her nature which would sometime respond to him. He did not think of the harm he might do her. He did not care, in fact, even though he won her love only to cast it from him as a useless thing. Country girls like her were only made for men like him to play with. No wonder then if in her dreams that night Ellen moaned with fear of the beautiful serpent which seemed winding itself, fold on fold, about her.

Jessie, too, had troubled dreams of felon's cells, of clanking chains, and even of a gallows, with Walter standing underneath beseeching her to come and share the shame with him. Truly the serpent had entered this Eden and left its poisonous trail.

For nearly a week William staid in town, and the village maidens often looked wistfully after him as he drove his fast horses, sometimes with Jessie at his side, and sometimes with Ellen, but never with them both, for the words he breathed into the ear of one were not intended for the other. Drop by drop was he infusing into Jessie's mind a distrust of one whom she had heretofore considered the soul of integrity and honor. Not openly, lest she should suspect his motive, but covertly, cautiously, always apparently seeking an excuse for any-

thing the young man might hereafter do, and succeeding at last in making Jessie thoroughly uncomfortable, though why she could not tell. She did not blame Walter for his father's sins, but she would much rather his name should have been without a blemish.

Gradually the brightness of Jessie's face gave way to a thoughtful, serious look, her merry laugh was seldom heard, and she would sit for hours so absorbed in her own thoughts as not to heed the change which the last few days had wrought in Ellen, too. Never before had the latter seemed so happy, so joyous, so full of life as now, and Aunt Debby said the rides with Mr. Bellenger upon the mountains had done her good. William had pursued his study faithfully, and, in doing so, had become so much interested himself that he would have asked Ellen to be his wife had she been rich as she was lovely. But his bride must be an heiress; and so, though knowing that he could never be to Ellen Howland other than a friend, he led her on step by step until at last she saw but what he saw, and heard but what he heard. He was not deceiving her, he said, sometimes when conscience reproached him for his cruelty. She knew how widely different their stations were; she could not expect that one whom half the belles of Boston and New York would willingly accept could think of making her his wife. He was only polite to her, only giving a little variety to her monotonous life. She would forget him when he was gone. And at this point he was conscious of an unwillingness to be forgotten.

"If we were only Mormons," he thought, the last night of his stay at Deerwood, when out under the cherry trees in the garden he talked with her alone, and saw the varying color on her cheek, as he said, "We may never meet again." "If we were only Mormons, I would have them both, Nellie and Jessie, the one for her gilded setting, the other because——"

He did not finish the sentence, for he was not willing then to acknowledge to himself the love which really and truly was growing in his heart for the fair girl beside him.

"But you'll surely come to us again," Nellie said. "Jessie will be here. You'll want to visit her," and a tear trembled on her long eyelashes.

"I can see Jessie in the city, and if I come to Deerwood it will be you who brings me. Do you wish me to come and see you, Nellie?" and the dark, handsome face bent so low that the rich brown hair rested on the golden locks of the artless, innocent girl, who answered, in a whisper,

"Yes, I wish you to come."

"Then you must give me a kiss," he said, "as a surety of my welcome, and when the trees on the mountain where we have been so happy together are casting their dense leaves in the autumn, I will surely be with you again."

The kiss was given—not one—not two—but many, for William Bellenger

was greedy, and his lips had never touched aught so pure and sweet before.

"I wouldn't tell Walter that I'm coming," he said, "for he does not like me, I fancy, and I cannot bear to have him prejudice you against me. I wouldn't tell my mother either, or any one——"

"Not Jessie?" Ellen asked, for she had a kind of natural pride in wishing her friend to know that she, who never aspired to notice of any kind, had succeeded in pleasing the fastidious William Bellenger.

"No, not Jessie," he said, "because,—well, because you better not," and knowing well his power over the timid girl, he felt sure that his wishes would be regarded, and with another good-by, he left her.

He had hoped that Jessie would be induced to accompany him to New York, and as there was a secret understanding between himself and Mrs. Bartow, the old lady had written, entreating her granddaughter to return with William.

"You have stayed in the country long enough," she wrote, "and I dare say you are as sunburnt and freckled as you can be, so pray come home. Everybody is gone, I know, and New York is just like Sunday, while I stay like a guilty thing in the rear of the house, to make folks think I'm off to some watering place. I wouldn't for the world let old Mrs. Reeves know that I have been cooped up here the blessed summer. It's all owing to your obstinacy, too, and I think you ought to come back and entertain me. Mr. Bellenger will attend to you, and you couldn't ask for a more desirable companion. Old Mrs. Reeves says he is the most eligible match in the city, his family are so aristocratic. There isn't a single mechanic or working person in the whole line, for she spent an entire season in tracing back their ancestry, finding but one blot, and that an unfortunate marriage of a Miss Ellen Bellenger with some ignorant country loafer she met at boarding-school, and who she says was hung, or sent to State prison, I forgot which. I am sorry she discovered this last, as in case you cut out Charlotte, and of course you will, it will be like the spiteful old wretch to blazon it abroad, though William ain't to blame, of course."

"I wonder I never told grandma that Walter was connected with the Bellengers," Jessie thought, as she finished reading this letter, which came to her the night when William, beneath the cherry trees, was whispering words to Ellen which should never have been spoken. "It's probably because I've not been much with her of late, and she never seemed at all interested in him, except indeed, to say that pa ought to get him a situation in a grocery, or something to pay him for saving my life. I wish she wasn't so foolishly proud," and as Jessie read the letter again, she felt glad that her grandmother did not know how nearly Walter Marshall was connected with the man who "was hung, or sent to State prison."

Gradually, too, there arose before her mind the whole array of her city friends, with old Mrs. Reeves and Charlotte at their head, and the idea of having

Walter with her in the city the coming winter was not as pleasant as it once had been. Her grandmother might find out who he was; William would tell, perhaps, and she could not bear the thought of seeing him slighted, as he was sure to be if the tide, of which the old lady Reeves was the under-current, should set in against him.

"I've half a mind to go home," she thought, "before anything definite is arranged, and persuade father to secure Walter just as good a situation in some other place where he won't be slighted."

This allusion to her father was a fortunate one, for in her cool moments of reflection there was no one whose judgment Jessie regarded so highly as her father's. He knew Walter,—he respected him, too, and had often spoken with pleasure of the time when he would be with him.

"People dare not laugh if father takes him up," she thought, while something whispered to her that she, too, could, if she would, do much toward helping Walter to the position in society he was fitted to occupy. "I won't go," she said, at last. "I'll stay and see Walter again, at all events, though I do wish Will hadn't told me about his speech, and his father, too. I mean to ask him some time to tell me the exact truth." And having reached this resolution Jessie sat down and wrote to her grandmother that she could not come yet, she was so happy in the country.

This she intended taking to William in the morning, for she had promised to meet him at the depot and see him off. "I shall be rather lonely when he is gone," she thought, and walking to the window of her room, she wondered if Charlotte Reeves would succeed in winning William Bellenger.

"Her grandmother will strain every nerve," she thought, "but by just saying a word I can supplant her, I know, else why has he stayed here a whole week? Nell, is that you?" and Jessie started as the young girl glided into the room, her face unusually pale, and her whole appearance indicative of some secret agitation. "Where have you been?" asked Jessie, "and who was it that shut the gate?"

"Where? I didn't hear any gate," Ellen replied, trembling lest she should betray what she had been forbidden to divulge.

Had she confessed it then it would have saved her many a weary heartache, and her companion from many a thoughtless act, but she did not, and when Jessie, caressed her white cheek, and said laughingly, "Has my prudish Nell a secret love affair?" she made some incoherent answer, and, seeking her pillow, lived over again the scene in the garden, blushing to herself as she recalled the dark face which had bent so near to hers, and the tender voice which had whispered in her ear the name so recently given to her. "Little Snow-Drop," he called her when he bade her adieu, and the moon went down behind the mountain ere she fell asleep thinking of that name and the time when the forest tree would cast its leaf and

he be with her again.

CHAPTER V.—WALTER AND JESSIE.

"So you won't go with me," William said to Jessie, next morning, when she met him at the depot and gave him the note intended for her grandmother.

"No," she replied. "The city is dull as yet, and I'd rather remain here with Ellen."

"Oh, yes, Ellen," and William spoke quite indifferently. "Why didn't she come to bid me good-by?" and he looked curiously at Jessie to see how much she knew.

But Jessie suspected nothing, and replied at once:

"She has a headache this morning and was still in bed when I left her."

The heartless man was conscious of a pleasurable sensation,—a feeling of gratified vanity,—for he knew that headache was for him. But he merely said:

"Tell her that I'm sorry she's sick; she is a pleasant, quiet little girl, quite superior to country girls in general."

"There's the train," cried Jessie, and in a moment the cars rolled up before them.

"It will seem a young eternity until you come home," said William, clasping Jessie's hand. "Good-bye," he added, as "all aboard" was shouted in his ear, and as he turned away his place was taken by another, who had witnessed the parting between the two, and at whom Jessie looked wonderingly, exclaiming:

"Why, Walter, I didn't expect you to-day."

"And shall I infer that I am the less welcome from that?" the young man asked, for with his inborn jealousy, which no amount of discipline could quite subdue, he thought he detected in Jessie's tone and manner something cold and constrained.

Nor was he wholly mistaken, for Jessie did not feel toward him just as she had done before. Still she greeted him cordially,—thought how handsome he was, and came pretty near telling him so,—but told him instead, that she thought he resembled his cousin William. This brought the conversation to a point Walter

longed to reach, and as they walked slowly towards home he questioned her of William,—asking when he came, and if she had seen much of him previous to his visit there.

"I saw him almost every day before he went to Europe," she replied. "You know he lives in New York now, and grandma thinks there's nobody like him."

"Yes," returned Walter, "I remember your father told me once that she had set her heart upon your marrying him."

"People would think it a splendid match," returned Jessie, a little mischievously, for as she had known that William disliked Walter, so she now felt that Walter disliked William, and she continued: "Charlotte Reeves would give the world to have him spend a week in the country with her," and the saucy black eyes looked roguishly up at Walter, who frowned gloomily for an instant, and then rejoined:

"Shall I tell you what your father said about it?"

"Yes, do. I think everything of his opinion."

"He said, then, that he would rather see you buried than the wife of any of that race," and Walter laid a great stress upon the last two words.

For a time Jessie walked on in silence, then stopping short and looking up from under her straw hat, she said:

"Ain't *you* one of that race?"

"I suppose I am," answered Walter, smiling at a question which admitted of two or three significations.

Jessie thought of but one. Her father liked Walter very much, even though his mother was a Bellenger; consequently it must be something about William himself which prompted that remark, and as Jessie usually echoed her father's sentiments, she felt, the old disagreeable sensation giving way, and before they reached the farm-house she was chatting as gayly with Walter, as if nothing had ever come between them.

That night Walter and Jessie sat together in the little portico, which was securely shaded from the sun by Aunt Debby's thrifty hop vines. Walter was telling Jessie of his recent visit, and how his grandfather cried when he stood in the room where he was married nearly fifty years before.

"I supposed old people outlived all their romance," said Jessie, adding laughingly, as she plucked the broad green leaves growing near her head, "I don't think I could love any body but father fifty years,—could you?"

"It would depend a good deal upon the person I loved," returned Walter, and the look he gave Jessie seemed to say that it would not be a hard matter to love her through all time.

Jessie saw the look, and while it thrilled her with a sudden emotion of pleasure, it involuntarily reminded her of what William had said of the valedictory,

and abruptly changing the conversation she said:

"Mr. Bellenger told me your speech was very good. May I see it for myself?"

Walter was a fine orator, and knew that the favor with which his speech had been received was in a great measure owing to the manner in which it was delivered. He was willing for Jessie to have heard it, but he felt a natural reluctance in permitting her to read it. Jessie saw his hesitancy, and it strengthened the suspicion which before had hardly existed.

"Yes, let me see it," she said. "You are surely not afraid of me!" and she persisted in her entreaties until he gave it into her hands, and then joined his grandfather, while she returned to her room, and striking a light, abandoned herself to the reading of the valedictory; and as she read it seemed even to her that she had heard some portion of it before.

"Yes, I have!" she exclaimed, as she came upon a strikingly expressed and peculiar idea. "I have read that in print," and in Jessie's heart there was a sore spot, for the losing confidence in Walter was terrible to her. "He is not strictly honorable," she said, and laying her face upon the roll of paper, she cried to think how she had been deceived.

The next morning Walter was not long in observing her cold distant manner, and he accordingly became as cold and formal toward her, addressing her as Miss Graham, when he spoke to her at all, and after breakfast was over, going to the village, where he remained until long past the dinner hour, hearing that which made him in no hurry to return home and make his peace with the little dark-eyed beauty. Everybody was talking of Miss Graham's city beau, who had taken her to ride so often, and who, when joked by his familiar landlord, had partially admitted that an engagement actually existed between them.

"So you've lost her, sleek and clean," said the talkative Joslyn to Walter, who replied that "it was difficult losing what one never had," and said distinctly that "he did not aspire to the honor of Miss Graham's hand."

But whether he did or not, the story he had heard was not calculated to improve his state of mind, and his dejection was plainly visible upon his face when he at last reached home.

"Jessie was up among the pines," Aunt Debby said, advising him "to join her and cheer her up a bit, for she seemed desput low spirited since Mr. Bellenger went away."

Had Aunt Debby wished to keep Walter from Jessie, she could not have devised a better plan than this, for the high spirited young man had no intention of intruding upon a grief caused by William Bellenger's absence, and hour after hour Jessie sat alone among the pines, starting at every sound, and once, when sure a footstep was near, hiding behind a rock, "so as to make him think she wasn't there." Then, when the footstep proved to be a rabbit's tread, she crept

back to her seat upon the grass, and pouted because it was not Walter.

"He might know I'd be lonesome," she said, "after receiving so much attention, and he ought to entertain me a little, if only to pay for all father has done for him. If there is anything I dislike, it is ingratitude," and having reached this point, Jessie burst into tears, though why she should cry, she could not tell.

She only knew that she was very warm and very uncomfortable, and that it did her good to cry, so she lay with her face in the grass, while the rabbit came several times very near, and at last fled away as a heavier, firmer step approached.

It was not likely Jessie would stay in the pines all the afternoon, Walter thought, and as the sun drew near the western horizon, he said to his grandfather:

"I will go for the cows to-night just as I used to do," and though the pasture where they fed lay in the opposite direction from the pines, he bent his footsteps toward the latter place, and came suddenly upon Jessie, who was sobbing like a child.

"Jessie," he exclaimed, laying his hand gently upon her arm, "what *is* the matter."

"Nothing," she replied, "only I'm lonesome and homesick, and I wish I'd gone to New York with Mr. Bellenger."

"Why didn't you then?" was Walter's cool reply, and Jessie answered, angrily:

"I would, if I had known what I do now."

"And pray what do you know now?" Walter asked, in the same cold, calm, tone, which so exasperated Jessie that she replied:

"I know you hate me, and I know you didn't write all that valedictory, and everything."

"Jessie," Walter said, sternly, "what do you mean about that valedictory. Come, sit by me and tell me at once."

In Walter's voice there was a tone which, as a child, Jessie had been wont to obey, and now at his command she stole timidly to his side upon the rustic bench, and told him all her suspicions, and the source from which they originated.

There was a sudden flash of anger in Walter's eye at his cousin's meanness, and then, with a merry laugh, he said:

"And it sounded familiar to you, too, did it? Some parts of it might, I'll admit, for you had heard them before. Do you remember being at any examination in Wilbraham, when I took the prize in composition, or rather declamation? It was said then that my essay was far beyond my years, and I am inclined to think it was; for I have written nothing since which pleased me half so well. I was appointed valedictorian, as you know, and in preparing my oration I selected a few of those old ideas and embodied them in language to suit the occasion. I am hardly willing to call it plagiarism, stealing from myself, and I am sure you would

never have recognized it either if Mr. Bellenger had not roused your suspicions. Is my explanation satisfactory?"

It was perfectly so, for Jessie now remembered where she had heard something like Walter's valedictory, and with her doubts removed she became much like herself again, though she would not admit that William's insinuations were mere fabrications of his own. He never heard it before, she knew, but some of Walter's old Wilbraham associates might have been present and said in his hearing that it seemed familiar, and then it would be quite natural for him to think so too.

Walter did not dispute her, but said:

"What else did my amiable cousin say against me?"

Clasping her hands over her burning face, Jessie answered faintly:

"He told me that your father had done a horrible thing, though he didn't explain what it was. I knew before that there was something unpleasant, and once asked father about it, but he wouldn't tell, and I want so much to know. What was it, Walter?"

For a moment Walter hesitated, then drawing Jessie nearer to him, he replied:

"It will pain me greatly to tell you that sad story, but I would rather you should hear it from my lips than from any other," and then, unmindful of the cows, which, having waited long for their accustomed summons, were slowly wending their way homeward, he began the story as follows:

"You know that old stone building on the hill near the village, and you have heard also that it was a flourishing high school for girls. There one pleasant summer my mother came. She was spending several months with a family who occupied what is now that huge old ruin down by the river side. Mother was beautiful, they say, and so my father thought, for every leisure moment found him at her side."

"But wasn't she a great deal richer than he," Jessie asked, unconscious of the pang her question inflicted upon her companion, who replied:

"Yes, he was poor, while Ellen Bellenger was rich, but she had a soul above the foolish distinction the world will make between the wealthy and the working class. She loved my father, and he loved her. At last they were engaged, and then he proposed writing to her parents, as he would do nothing dishonorable; but she begged him not to do it, for she knew how proud they were, and that they would take her home at once. And so, in an unguarded moment, they went together over the line into New York, where they were married. The Bellengers, of course, were fearfully enraged, denouncing her at once, and bidding her never cross their threshold again. But this only drew her nearer to her husband, who fairly worshiped her, as did the entire family,—for she lived in the old gable-roofed

house,—and was happy in that little room which we call yours now. Father was anxious that she should have everything she wanted, and it is said was sometimes very extravagant, buying for her costly luxuries which he could not well afford."

"But *my* father," said Jessie. "What had he to do with it?"

"Everything," returned Walter, with bitterness. "Old Mr. Graham had a bank in Deerwood. Your father was cashier, while mine was teller, and in consideration of a large remuneration, performed a menial's part, such as sweeping the rooms, building the fires in winter, and of course he kept the keys. They were great friends, Richard Graham and Seth Marshall, and people likened them to David and Jonathan. At last one of the large bills my father had made came due, and on that very night the bank was robbed of more than a thousand dollars."

"Oh, Walter, how could he do it?" cried Jessie, and Walter replied:

"He didn't! He was as innocent as I, who was then unborn. Listen while I tell you. There was in town a dissipated, good-natured fellow, named Heyward, who had sometimes taught singing-school, and sometimes fiddled for country dances. No one knew how he managed to subsist, for he dressed well, traveled a great deal, and was very liberal with his money, when he had any. Still none suspected him of dishonesty; he did not know enough for that, they said. Everybody liked him, and when on that night he came to our house, apparently intoxicated, and asked for a shelter, grandfather bade him stay, and assigned him a back room in which was an outer door. In the morning he was, or seemed to be, still in a drunken sleep. Your father brought the news of the robbery, and while he talked he looked suspiciously at mine, especially when my mother said innocently:

"'The burglars must have tried this house, too, for I woke in the night, and finding my husband gone, called to him to know where he was. Presently he came in, saying he thought he heard a noise and got up to find what it was.'

"When she said this Mr. Graham changed color, and pointing to my father's shoes, which stood upon the hearth, he asked:

"'How came these so muddy? It was not raining at bedtime last night.'

"This was true. A heavy storm had arisen after ten and subsided before twelve, so that the shoes must have been worn since that hour, as there was fresh dirt still upon them. The robber had been tracked to our door, while there were corresponding marks from our door to the bank. My father's shoes just fitted in these tracks, for they measured them with the wretched man looking on in a kind of torpid apathy, as if utterly unable to comprehend the meaning of what he saw; but when Richard, his best friend, whispered to him softly, 'Confess it, Seth. Give up the money and it won't go so hard against you,' the truth burst upon him, and he dropped to the ground like one scathed with the lightning's stroke. For hours he lay in that death-like swoon, and when he came back to consciousness he was guarded by the officers of the law. They led him off in the care of a constable, he

all the time protesting his innocence, save at intervals when he refused to speak, but sat with a look upon his face as if bereft of reason.

"The examination came on, and the upper room, where the court was held, was crowded to overflowing, all anxious to gain a sight of my father, though they had known him from boyhood up. Grandpa was there, and close behind sat or rather crouched my wretched mother. She would not be kept back, and with a face as white as marble, and hands locked firmly together, she sat to hear the testimony. Once the counsel for my father thought to clear him by throwing suspicion upon Heyward, who with a most foolish expression upon his face had declared that he heard nothing during the night. People would rather it had been he than Seth Marshall, and the tide was turning in favor of the latter when Richard Graham was called to the stand. He was known to be my father's dearest friend, and the audience waited breathlessly to hear what he would say. He testified that, having been very restless, he got up about two o'clock in the morning, and as his window commanded a full view of the bank, he naturally looked in that direction. The moon was setting, but he could still discern objects with tolerable distinctness, and he saw a man come out of the bank, lock the door, put the key in his pocket, and hurry down the street. My father then wore a light gray coat and cap of the same color, so did this man, and thinking it must be he, Mr. Graham called him by name; but if he heard he did not stop. Mr. Graham then remembered that the day before my father had procured some medicine for my mother, and had forgotten to take it home. This threw some light upon the matter, and thinking that mother had probably been taken suddenly ill and my father had gone for the medicine, Mr. Graham retired again to rest, and gave it no further thought until the robbery was discovered.

"'Do you believe the man you saw leaving the bank to have been the prisoner?' asked the lawyer, and for an instant Mr. Graham hesitated, for with the white stony face of his early friend upturned to his and the supplicating eyes of the young wife fixed upon him, how could he answer yes? But he did, Jessie,—he did it at last. He said, 'I do,' and over the white face there passed a look of agony which wrung a groan even from your father's lips, while the pale young creature not far away rocked to and fro in her hopeless desolation."

"Oh, Walter, Walter!" cried Jessie, "don't tell me any more. I see now so plain that fair girl-wife crouching on the floor and my father testifying against her. How could he?"

Walter had asked himself that question many a time, and his bosom had swelled with resentment at the act; but now, when Jessie, too, questioned the justice of the proceeding, he answered:

"It was right I suppose,—all right. Mr. Graham believed that to which he testified, and when he left the stand he wound his arms around my father's neck

and said:

"'God forgive me, Seth, I couldn't help it.'"

"But he could," said Jessie; "he needn't have told all he knew."

Walter made no reply to this; he merely went on with his story:

"Then the decision came. There was proof sufficient for the case to be presented before the grand jury, and unless bail could be found to the amount of one thousand dollars, my father must go to jail, there to await his trial at the county court, which would hold its next session in three weeks. When the decision was made known, my father pressed his hands tightly over his heart for a moment, and then he clasped them to his ears as the deep stillness in the room was broken by the plaintive cry:

"'Save my husband, somebody. Oh, save my darling husband!'

"The next moment my mother fell at his feet, a crushed, lifeless thing, her hair falling down her face and a blue, pinched look about her lips, while my father bent over her, his tears falling like rain upon her face. Everybody cried, and when the question was asked, 'Who will go the prisoner's bail?' your father answered aloud:

"'I will.'"

"Oh, I am so glad!" gasped Jessie, while Walter continued:

"With Mr. Graham for security, they let my poor father go home; but a mighty blow had fallen upon him, benumbing all his faculties; he could neither think, nor talk, nor act, but would sit all day with mother's hands in his, gazing into her face and whispering sometimes:

"'What will my darling do when I am in State prison?'

"Such would be his fate, everybody said. It could not be avoided, and in a kind of feverish despair he waited the result. Your father was with him often, 'keeping watch,' the villagers said; but if so, he was not vigilant enough, for one dark, stormy night, the last before the dreadful sitting of the court, when the wind roared and howled about the old farm-house, and the heavy autumnal rain beat against the windows, my father drew his favorite chair, the one which always stands in that dark corner, and which none save you has ever used since then, he drew it, I say, to my mother's side, and winding his arms about her neck, he said:

"'Ellen, do you believe me guilty?'

"'No, never for a moment,' she replied, and he continued:

"'Heaven bless you, precious one, for that. Teach our child to think the same, and give it a father's blessing.'

"My mother was too much bewildered to answer, and with a kiss upon her lips, my father turned to his father and standing up before him, said:

"'I know what's in your heart; but, father, I swear to you that I am innocent. Bless me, father—bless your only boy once more.'

"Then grandpa put his trembling hand upon the brown locks of his son and said:

"'I would lay down my life to know that you are not guilty; but I bless you all the same, and may God bless you too, my boy!'

"In the bedroom grandmother lay sick, and kneeling by her side, my father said to her:

"'Do you believe I did it?'

"'No,' she answered faintly, and without his asking it, she gave him her blessing.

"He kissed his sister,—kissed Aunt Debby, and then he went away. They saw his face, white as a corpse, pressed against the window pane, while his eyes were riveted upon his beautiful young wife,—then the face was gone, and only the storm went sobbing past the place where he had stood. All that night the light burned on the table, and they waited his return, but from that hour to this he has not come back. He could not go to prison, and so he ran away. Mr. Graham paid the bail, and was heard to say that he was glad poor Seth escaped. I did not quite understand the matter when I was a boy, and I almost hated your father for testifying against him, but I know now he did what he thought was right. It is said he loved my Aunt Mary, Ellen's mother, and that she loved him in return, but after this sad affair there arose a coolness between them. He went to New York and married a more fashionable woman, while she, too, chose another."

"Did they ever find the money?" Jessie asked, and Walter replied:

"Never, though Aunt Debby says that Heyward indulged in a new suit of clothes soon after, and gave various other tokens of being abundantly supplied. No one knows where he is now, for he left Deerwood years ago."

"And your mother," interrupted Jessie, "tell me more of her."

The night shadows were falling, and she could not see the look of pain on Walter's face as he replied:

"For a few days she watched to see father coming back, for suspense was more terrible than reality, and those who were his friends before said his going off looked badly. From Boston her proud relatives sent her a double curse for bringing this disgrace upon them, and then she took her bed, never to rise again. The first October frosts had fallen when they laid me in her arms and bade her live for her baby's sake. But five days after I was born she lay dead beneath that western window where you so often sit. Then the proud mother relented and came to the funeral, but she has never been here since. Your father was present, too,—he bought the monument; he cried over me, and wished that he could fill my father's place."

"I wish he could, too," cried the impulsive Jessie, "I wish you were my brother," and she involuntarily laid her hand in his. "Have you never heard from

your father?" she asked, and Walter replied:

"Only once. Six months after mother died he wrote to Mr. Graham from Texas, and that is the very last. But, Jessie, I shall find him. I shall prove him innocent, and until then there will always be a load in my heart,—a something which makes me irritable, cross and jealous of those I love the best, lest they should despise me for what I cannot help."

"And is that why you speak so coldly to me sometimes when I don't deserve it?" Jessie asked, twining her snowy fingers about his own.

Oh, how Walter longed to fold her in his arms and tell her how dear she was to him, and that because he loved her so much he was oftenest harsh with her. But he dared not. She would not listen to such words, he knew. She thought of him as her brother, and he would not disturb the dream, so he answered her gently:

"Am I cross to you, Jessie? I do not mean to be, and now that you know all, I will be so no longer. You do not hate me, do you, because of my misfortune?"

"Hate you, Walter! Oh, no! I love,—I mean I like you so much better than I did when I came up here this afternoon and cried with my face in the grass. I pity you, Walter, for it seems terrible to live with that disgrace hanging over you."

Walter winced at these last words, and Jessie, as if speaking more to herself than him, continued:

"I hope Will won't tell grandma who you are, for she is so proud that she might make me feel very uncomfortable by fretting every time I spoke to you. Walter," and the tone of Jessie's voice led Walter to expect some unpleasant remark, "you know father has intended to have you live with us, but if William tells grandma, it will be better for you to board somewhere else,—grandma can be very disagreeable if she tries, and she would annoy us almost to death."

Jessie was perfectly innocent in all she said, but in spite of his recent promise Walter felt his old jealousy rising up, and whispering to him that Jessie spoke for herself rather than her grandmother. With a great effort, however, he mastered the emotion and replied:

"It will be better, I think, and I will write to your father at once."

Jessie little dreamed what it cost Walter thus deliberately to give up seeing her every day, and living with her beneath the same roof. It had been the goal to which he had looked forward through all his college course, for when he entered on his first year Mr. Graham had written:

"After you are graduated I shall take you into business, and into my own family, as if you were my son."

And Jessie herself had vetoed this,—had said it must not be.

For an instant Walter felt that he would not go to New York at all; but when he saw how closely Jessie nestled to his side, and heard her say, "You can come to

see me every day, and when I am going to concerts, or the opera, I shall always send word to you by father," he rejected his first suspicions as unjust.

She was not ashamed of him,—she only wished to screen him from her grandmother's ill nature, and, winding his arm around her, he said:

"You are a good girl, Jessie, and I'm glad you think of me as a brother."

But he was not glad. He did not wish her to be his sister, but he tried to make himself believe he did, and as in the pines where they sat it was already very dark, he proposed their returning home. Jessie was unusually silent during the walk, for she was thinking of Walter's young mother, and as they passed the grave-yard in the distance, she sighed:

"Poor dear lady! I don't wonder you are often sad with that memory haunting you."

"I should not be sad," he returned, "if I could bring the world to my opinion; but nearly all except Aunt Debby believe him guilty."

"Does my father?" asked Jessie, and as Walter replied, "Yes," she rejoined: "Then I'm afraid I think so too, for father knows; but," she hastily added, as she felt the gesture of impatience Walter made, "I like you just the same,—yes, a great deal better than before I heard the story. It isn't as bad as I supposed, and I am so glad you told it. Will Bellenger won't make me distrust you again."

By this time they had reached the house, where the deacon sat smoking his accustomed pipe, and saying to Walter as he entered:

"Where are the cows you went after more than three hours ago?"

Walter colored, and so did Jessie, while the matter-of-fact Aunt Debby rejoined:

"Why, Amos, the cows is milked and the cream is nigh about riz."

That night, after all had retired except the deacon and Walter, the former said to his grandson:

"What kept you and Jessie so late?"

"I was telling her of my father, and why he went away," returned Walter.

The deacon groaned as he always did when that subject was mentioned,—then after a moment he added:

"I am glad it was no worse,—that is, I'm glad you are not betraying Mr. Graham's trust by making love to his daughter."

Walter was very pale, but he did not speak, and his grandfather continued:

"I am old, Walter, but I have not forgotten the days when I was young; and remembering my disposition then, I can see why you should love Jessie Graham. God bless her! She's worthy of any man's best love, and she's wound herself round my old heart till the sound of her voice is sweet to me almost as Ellen's; but she isn't for you, Walter. I know Mr. Graham better than you do. He's noble and good, but very proud, and the daughter of a millionaire must never marry

the son of a poor——"

"Don't!" cried Walter, catching his grandfather's arm. "I understand it all,—I know that I am poor, know what the world says of my father, and I will suffer through all time sooner than ask the bright-faced Jessie to share one iota of our shame. But were my father innocent, I would never rest until I made myself a name which even Jessie Graham would not despise, for I love her, grandpa,—love her better than my life," and as after this confession he could not look his grandfather in the face, he stared hard at the candle dying in its socket, as if he would fain read there some token that what he so much desired would one day come to pass.

And he did read it too, for with a last great effort the expiring flame sent up a flash of light, which shone on Walter's face and that of the gray-haired man regarding him with a look of tender pity. Then it passed away, and the darkness fell between them just as the old man said, mournfully:

"There is no hope, my boy,—no hope for you."

CHAPTER VI.—OLD MRS. BARTOW.

The good lady sat in her chamber wiping the perspiration from her ruddy face, and occasionally peering out into the pleasant street, with a longing desire to escape from her self-imposed prison, and breathe the air again in her accustomed walks. But this she dared not do, lest it should be discovered that she was not away from home and enjoying some little pent-up room in the third story of a crowded hotel. Occasionally, too, she thought with a sigh of the clover fields, the fresh, green grass and shadowy woods, where Jessie was really enjoying herself, without the trouble of dressing three times a day, and then swelling with vexation because some one else out-did her.

"If she don't come with William, I mean to go down there and see what this family are like that she makes such a fuss about," she said. "Marshall? Marshall? The name sounds familiar, but it isn't likely I ever knew them. If I supposed I had, I wouldn't stir a step."

At this point in her soliloquy a servant appeared, saying "Mr. Bellenger

wished to see her," and putting in her teeth, for it tired her to wear them all the time, and adjusting her lace cap, the old lady went down to meet the young man, who had just returned from Deerwood. Numberless were the questions she asked concerning her granddaughter. Was she well? was she happy? was she sun-burned? were her hands scratched with briers? and what kind of people were these Marshalls?

To this last William hastened to reply:

"Clever country people, very kind to Jessie, and well they may be, for if I've the least discernment, they hope to have her in their family one of these days."

"What can you mean?" and the old lady's salts were brought into frequent use, while William, in his peculiar way, told her of Walter Marshall, who he said "was undoubtedly presuming enough to aspire to Jessie's hand."

"What, that boy that Richard educated?" Mrs. Bartow asked, growing very red and very warm withal.

"Yes," returned William; "but the fact of his being a charity student is not the worst feature in the case. It pains me greatly to talk upon the subject, but duty requires me to tell you just who Walter is," and assuming a half-reluctant, half-mortified tone, Will told Mrs. Bartow how Walter was connected with himself and the "terrible disgrace" of which she had written to Jessie in her last letter.

For a moment the old lady fancied herself choking to death, but she managed at last to scream:

"You don't say that he has dared to think of Jessie, the daughter of a millionaire, and the granddaughter of a——"

She was too much overcome to finish the sentence, and she sank back in her chair, while her cap-strings floated up and down with the rapid motion of her fan.

"I'll go for her at once," she said, when at last she found her voice. "I'll see this Mr. Impudence for myself. I'll teach him what is what. Oh, I hope Mrs. Reeves won't find it out. Don't tell her, Mr. Bellenger."

"I am as anxious to conceal the fact as you are," he replied, "for he, you know, is a relative of mine, although our family do not acknowledge him." And having done all he came to do, the nice young man departed, while the greatly disturbed lady began to pack her trunk preparatory to a start for Deerwood.

In the midst of her preparations she was surprised by the unexpected return of Mr. Graham, to whom she at once disclosed the cause of her distress, asking him "if he wished his daughter to marry Walter Marshall, whose father was a——"

She didn't quite know what, for William had not made that point very clear.

"I do not wish her to marry any one as yet," returned Mr. Graham, at the same time asking if Walter had proposed, or shown any signs of so doing.

"Of course he's shown signs," returned Mrs. Bartow, "but I trust Jessie has

enough of the Stanwood about her to keep him at a proper distance."

"Enough of the what?" asked Mr. Graham, with the least possible smile playing about his mouth.

"Well, enough of the Bartow," returned the lady. "The very idea of receiving into our family a person of his antecedents!"

In a few words Mr. Graham gave her his opinion of Walter Marshall, adding:

"I do not say that I would like him to marry Jessie,—very likely I should not,—and still, if I knew that she loved him and he loved her, I should not think it my duty to oppose them seriously, though I would rather, of course, that the unfortunate affair of his father's had never occurred."

This was all the satisfaction Mrs. Bartow could gain from him, and doubly strengthened in her determination to remove Jessie from Walter's society, she started the next morning for Deerwood, reaching there toward the close of the day succeeding Jessie's interview with Walter in the pines.

"Not this tumble-down shanty, surely?" she said to the omnibus driver when he stopped before the gate of the farm-house.

"Yes'm, this is Deacon Marshall's," he replied, and mounting his box again he drove off, while she went slowly up the walk, casting contemptuous glances at the well-sweep, the smoke-house, the bee-hives, the hollyhocks, poppies and pinks, which, in spite of herself, carried her back to a time, years and years and years ago, when she had lived in just such a place as this, save that it was not so cheerful or so neat.

Aunt Debby was the first to spy her, and she called to her niece:

"Why, Mary, just look-a-here! There's a lady all dressed up in her meetin' clothes, a-comin' in. I wish we had mopped the kitchen floor to-day. There, she's gone to the front door. I presume the gals has littered the front hall till it's a sight to behold."

Mrs. Bartow's loud knock was now distinctly heard, and as Mrs. Howland had not quite finished her afternoon toilet, Aunt Debby herself went to answer the summons. Holding fast to her knitting, with the ball rolling after her, and Jessie's kitten running after that, she presented herself before her visitor, courtesying very low, and asking if "she'd walk into the t'other room, or into the kitchen, where it was a great deal cooler."

Mrs. Bartow chose the "t'other room," and taking the Boston rocker, asked "if Miss Graham was staying here?"

"You mean Jessie," returned Aunt Debby. "It's so cool this afternoon that she's gone out ridin' hossback in the mountains with Walter and Ellen. Be you any of her kin?"

"I'm her grandmother, and have come to take her home," answered the lady,

frowning wrathfully at the idea of Jessie's riding with Walter Marshall.

"I want to know!" returned Aunt Debby. "We'll be desput sorry to lose her jest as Walter has come home, and he thinks so much of her, too."

Mrs. Bartow was too indignant to speak, but Aunt Debby, who was not at all suspicious, talked on just the same, praising first Walter, then Ellen, then Jessie, and then giving an outline history of her whole family, even including Seth, who she said "allus was a good boy."

If Aunt Debby expected a return of confidence she was mistaken, for Mrs. Bartow had nothing to say of her family, and after a little Aunt Debby began to question her. Was she city-born, and if not, where was she born?

"That red mark on your chin makes me think of a girl, Patty Loomis by name, that I used to know in Hopkinton," she said, and the mark upon the chin grew redder as she continued: "I did housework there once, in Squire Fielding's family, and this Patty that I was tellin' you about done chores in a family close by. She was some younger than me, but I remember her by that mark, similar to your'n, and because she was connected to them three Thayers that was hung in York State for killin' John Love. There was some han'some verses made about it, and I used to sing the whole of 'em, but my memory's failin' me now. I wonder what's become of Patty. I haven't thought of her before in an age. I heard that a rich old widder took her for her own child, and that's all I ever knew. She was smart as steel, and could milk seven cows while I was milkin' three. There they come, on the full canter of course. Ellen 'll get her neck broke some day," and greatly to the relief of Mrs. Bartow she changed the conversation from Patty Loomis and the three Thayers who were hung, to the three riders dashing up to the gate, Jessie a little in advance, with her black curls streaming out from under her riding hat, and her cheeks glowing with the exercise.

"Why, grandma!" she exclaimed, as holding up her long skirt, she bounded into the house, and nearly upset the old lady before she was aware of her presence. "Where in the world did you come from? Isn't it pleasant and nice out here?" and throwing off her hat, Jessie sat down by the window to cool herself after her rapid ride.

"Why, grandma, you are as cross as two sticks," she said, when Aunt Debby had left the room, and grandma replied:

"That's a very lady-like expression. Learned it of Mr. Marshall, I suppose."

"No, I didn't," returned Jessie. "I learned it of Will Bellenger when he was here. It's his favorite expression. Did he bring you my note?"

"Certainly; and I've come down to see what the attraction is which keeps you here so contentedly."

"Oh, it's so nice," returned Jessie, and Mrs. Bartow rejoined:

"I should think it was. Who ever heard of a bed in the parlor now-a-days?"

and she cast a rueful glance at the snowy mountain in the corner.

"That's a little out of date, I know," answered Jessie; "but the house is rather small, and they keep the spare bed in here for such visitors as you are. The sheets are all of Aunt Debby's make, she spun the linen on a wheel that treads so funny. Did you ever see a little wheel, grandma?"

The question reminded Mrs. Bartow of Patty Loomis and the three Thayers, and she did not reply directly to it, but said instead:

"What did you call that woman?"

"Aunt Debby Marshall, the deacon's sister," returned Jessie, and Mrs. Bartow relapsed into a thoughtful mood, from which she was finally aroused by hearing Walter's voice in the kitchen.

Instantly she glanced at Jessie, who involuntarily blushed; and then the old lady commenced the battle at once, telling Jessie plainly that "she had come down to take her home before she disgraced them all by suffering a boy of Walter Marshall's reputation to make love to her."

"Walter never thought of making love to me," returned the astonished and slightly indignant Jessie; "and if he had it wouldn't have been anybody's business but mine and father's. He isn't a boy, either. He's a splendid-looking man. Pa thinks the world of him; and he knows, too, about that old affair, which wasn't half as bad as Will and Mrs. Reeves seem to think. Walter told it to me last night up in the pines, and I'll tell it to you. It wasn't murder nor anything like it. Now, even I shouldn't wish it said that any of my friends were hung."

"Hung!" repeated the old lady. "Who said anybody's friends were hung? It's false!" and the red mark around the lip wore a scarlet hue.

"Of course it's false," answered Jessie. "That's what I said. Nobody knows for certain that he stole, either," and forgetting her own belief, founded on her father's, Jessie tried to prove that Seth Marshall was as innocent as Walter himself had declared him to be.

"Whether he's guilty or not," returned Mrs. Bartow, "you are going home, and you're to have nothing to say to Walter. It would sound pretty, wouldn't it, for Mrs. Reeves to be telling that Jessie Graham liked a poor charity boy?"

Jessie was proud, and the last words grated harshly, but she would stand by Walter, and she replied:

"Mrs. Reeves forever! I believe you'd stop breathing if she said it was fashionable. I wonder who she was in her young days. Somebody not half so good as Walter, I dare say. I mean to ask Aunt Debby. She has lived since the flood, and knows the history of everybody that ever was born in New England, or out of it either, for that matter."

Mrs. Bartow was not inclined to doubt this after her own experience, and as in case there was anything about Mrs. Reeves, she wished to know it, she

secretly hoped Jessie would carry her threat into execution. Just then they were summoned to supper, and following her granddaughter into the pleasant sitting-room, Mrs. Bartow frowned majestically upon Walter, bowed coldly to the other members of the family, and then took her seat, thinking to herself:

"The boy has a little of the Bellenger look, and, if anything, is handsomer than William."

The tea being passed, with the biscuit and butter and honey, and the cheese contemptuously refused by the city guest, Jessie said to Aunt Debby:

"Did you ever know anybody by the name of Gregory? That was Mrs. Reeves' maiden name, wasn't it, grandma?"

Mrs. Bartow nodded, and Aunt Debby, after withdrawing within herself for a moment, came out again and said:

"Yes, I knew Tim and Ben Gregory in Spencer. Ben was the best of the two, but he wa'n't none too likely. He had six boys, and Tim had six gals."

"What were their names?" asked Jessie, and Aunt Debby replied:

"There was Zeruah, and Lyddy, and Charlotty——"

"That'll do!" cried Jessie, her delight dancing in her eyes. "What was their father, and where are the girls now?"

"Their father was a tin peddler, and what he didn't get that way folks said he used to steal, though they never proved it ag'in him. Charlotty and I was 'bout of an age."

"I knew she was older than she pretended," thought Mrs. Bartow, and in her joy at having probably discovered her dear friend's genealogy, she took two biscuits instead of one.

"She worked in Lester factory a spell, and then, after she was quite along in years, say thirty or more, she married somebody who was a storekeeper, and went somewhere, and I believe I've heard that she finally moved to New York."

"Can't you think of her husband's name," persisted Jessie, and Aunt Debby replied:

"Twan't very far from Reed, but it's so long ago, and I've been through so much since, that I can't justly remember."

Neither was it necessary that she should, for Mrs. Bartow and Jessie were satisfied with what she could remember, and nothing doubting that Charlotte Gregory was now the exceedingly aristocratic and purse-proud Mrs. Reeves, whose granddaughter was a kind of rival to Jessie, they returned to the parlor, Mrs. Bartow repeating at intervals:

"A tin peddler and a factory girl, and she holding her head so high."

"She's none the worse for that, if she'd behave herself, and not put on such airs," said Jessie. "I wouldn't wonder if some of my ancestors were tinkers or chimney sweeps. I mean to ask Aunt Debby. Let's see. Your name wasn't really

Martha Stanwood, was it? Weren't you an adopted child?"

"Jessie!" and in the startled lady's voice there was such unmitigated alarm and distress that Jessie turned quickly to look at her. "Do let that old crone alone. If there's anything I hate it's a person that knows everybody's history, they are so disagreeable, and make one so uncomfortable, though I'm glad to be sure, that I've found out who Mrs. Reeves was. Just to think how she talks about high birth and all that,—born in a garret, I dare say."

"She don't put on a bit more than you do," said the saucy Jessie, thinking to herself that she would some time quiz Aunt Debby concerning her grandmother's past.

That night, after Jessie had retired, Mrs. Bartow asked for a few moments' conversation with Walter, to whom she had scarcely spoken the entire evening Quick to detect a slight, he assumed his haughtiest bearing, and rather overawed the old lady, who fidgetted in her chair, and pulled at her cap, and then began:

"It is very unpleasant for me to say to you what I must, but duty to Miss Graham, and justice to you, demands that I should speak. From things which I have heard and seen, I infer that you,—or rather I'm afraid that you,—in short, it's just possible you are thinking too much of Miss Graham," and having gotten thus far, the old lady gave a sigh of relief, while the young man, with a proud inclination of the head, said coolly:

"And what then?"

This roused her, and muttering to herself, "Such impudence!" she continued:

"I should suppose your own sense would tell you what then! Of course nothing can ever come of it, for even were you her equal in rank and wealth, you must know there is a stain upon your name which must never be imparted to the Grahams."

"Madam," said Walter, "you will please confine your remarks to me personally, and say nothing of my father."

"Well, then," returned the lady. "You, personally, are not a fit husband for Jessie."

"Have I ever asked to be her husband?" he said.

"Not in words, perhaps, but you show it in your manner both to me and others, and this is what brought me here. Jessie is young and easily influenced, and might possibly, in an unguarded moment, do as foolish a thing as your mother did."

There was a feeling of intense delight beaming in Walter's eyes, for the idea that Jessie could in any way be induced to marry him was a blissful one; but it quickly passed off as Mrs. Bartow continued:

"It would break her father's heart should she thus throw herself away, while

you would prove yourself most ungrateful for all he has done for you."

This was touching Walter in a tender point, and the pride of his nature flashed in his dark eyes as he replied:

"Let me know Mr. Graham's wishes, and they shall be obeyed."

"Well, then," returned the lady, "I asked him if he would like to have his daughter marry you, and he replied—" she hesitated before uttering the falsehood, while Walter bent forward eagerly to listen. "He said he certainly would not, and with his approbation I came down to remove her from temptation."

Walter was very white, and something like a groan escaped him, for he felt that Jessie was indeed wrested from him, and he began to see that he had always cherished a secret hope of winning her some day. But the dream was over now. She, he knew, would never disobey her father, while he himself would not return the many kindnesses received from his benefactor with ingratitude.

"Tell Mr. Graham from me," he said at last, almost in a whisper, "that he need have no fears, for I pledge you my word of honor that I will never ask Jessie Graham to be my wife, unless the time should come when I am by the world acknowledged her equal, and when I promise this, Mrs. Bartow, I tear out, as it were, the dearest, purest affection of my heart, for I do love Jessie Graham; I see it now as clearly as I see that I must kill that love. Not because you ask it of me, Madam," and he assumed a haughty tone, "but because it is the wish of the best friend I ever knew. He need not fear when I am with her in New York. I will keep my place, whatever that may be, and when I call on Jessie, as I shall sometimes do, it will be a brother's call, and nothing more. Will you be satisfied with this?"

"Yes, more than satisfied," and Mrs. Bartow offered him her hand.

He took it mechanically, and as he turned away the lady thought to herself:

"He is a noble fellow, and so handsome, too, but William looks almost as well. Didn't he give it up quick when I mentioned Mr. Graham. I wonder if that was a lie I told. I only left off a little, that was all," and framing excuses for her duplicity, the old lady retired for the night.

They were to leave in the morning, and Jessie seemed unusually sad when she came out to breakfast, for the inmates of the farm-house were very dear to her.

"You'll come to New York soon, won't you?" she said to Walter, when, after breakfast, she joined him under the maple tree.

At the sound of her voice he started, and looking down into her bright, sunny face, felt a thrill of pain. Involuntarily he took her hand in his, and said:

"I have been thinking that I may not come at all."

"Why, Walter, yes you will; father will be so disappointed. I believe he anticipates it even more than I."

"But your grandmother," he suggested, and Jessie rejoined:

"Don't mind grandma; she's always fidgetty if anybody looks at me, but when she sees that we really and truly are brother and sister, she'll get over it."

There was a tremulous tone in Jessie's voice, as she said this, and it fell very sweetly on Walter's ear, for it said to him that he might possibly be something more than a brother to the beautiful girl who stood before him with blushing cheeks and half-averted eyes.

"Jessie, Jessie!" called Mrs. Bartow from the house, and Jessie ran in to finish packing her trunks and don her traveling dress.

Once, as Aunt Debby slipped into her satchel a paper of "doughnuts and cheese, to save buying a dinner," Jessie could not forbear saying:

"Oh, Aunt Debby! I think I know that Charlotty Gregory, who used to live in Leicester. She's Mrs. Reeves now, and the greatest lady in New York; rides in her carriage with colored coachman and footman in livery, wears a host of diamonds, and lives in a brownstone house up town."

"Wall, if I ever," Aunt Debby exclaimed, sitting down in her surprise on Mrs. Bartow's bonnet. "Reeves was the name, come to think. Drives a nigger, did you say? She used to be as black as one herself, but a clever, lively gal for all of that. With her first earnin's in the factory she bought her mother a calico gown, and her sister Betsey a pair of shoes."

"Betsey," repeated Jessie, turning to her grandmother, "that must be Mrs. Reeves' invalid sister, whom Charlotte calls Aunt Lizzie. Very few people ever see her."

"Wa'n't over bright," whispered Aunt Debby, continuing aloud: "How I'd like to see Miss Reeves once more. Give her my regrets, and tell her if I should ever come to the city I shall call on her; but she mustn't feel hurt if I don't. I'm getting old fast."

Jessie laughed aloud as she fancied Mrs. Reeves' amazement at receiving Aunt Debby's regrets, and as the omnibus was by that time at the door, she hastened her preparations, and soon stood at the gate, bidding her friends good-by. For an instant Walter held her hand in his, but his manner was constrained, and Jessie bit her lip to keep back the tears which finally found a lodgment on Ellen's neck. The two young girls were tenderly attached, and both wept bitterly at parting, Jessie crying for Ellen and Walter, too, and Ellen for Jessie and the man whom she, ere long, would meet.

"What shall I tell Will for you?" Jessie asked, leaning from the omnibus and looking in Ellen's face, which had never been so white and thin before.

From the maple tree above her head a withered leaf came rustling down, and fell upon Ellen's hair. Brushing it away, she answered mournfully:

"Tell him the leaves are beginning to fade."

"That's a strange message for her to send, but she speaks the truth," Walter

thought, and after the omnibus had rolled away, and he walked slowly to the house, he felt that for him more than the leaves were fading,—that the blossoms of hope which he had nurtured in his heart were torn from their roots, and dying beneath the chilly breath of fashion and caste.

CHAPTER VII.—HUMAN NATURE.

It was the night of Charlotte Reeves' grand party, which had been talked about for weeks, and more than one passer-by paused in the keen February air to look at the brilliantly-lighted house, where the song, the flirtation, the dance, and the gossip went on, and to which, at a late hour, Mrs. Bartow came, and with her Jessie Graham. Walter accompanied them, for Mr. Graham had asked him to be their escort, and Walter never refused a request from one who, since his residence in the city, had been to him like a father rather than a friend.

Mr. Graham had evinced much surprise when told that Walter would rather some other house should be his home, but Jessie, too, had said that it was better so, and looking into her eyes, which told more tales than she supposed, Mr. Graham saw that Walter was not indifferent to his only child, nor was he displeased that it was so, and when Walter came to the city he found to his surprise that he was not to be the clerk, but the junior partner of his friend, who treated him with a respect and thoughtful kindness which puzzled him greatly. Especially was he astonished when Mr. Graham, as he often did, asked him to go with Jessie to the places where he could not accompany her.

"He wishes to show me," he thought, "that after what I said to Mrs. Bartow, he dare trust his daughter with me as if I were her brother," and Walter felt more determined than ever not to betray the trust, but to treat Jessie as a friend and nothing more.

So he called occasionally at the house, where he often found William Bellenger, and compelled himself to listen in silence to the flattering speeches his cousin made to Jessie, who, a good deal piqued at Walter's apparent coldness, received them far more complacently than she would otherwise have done, and so the gulf widened between them, while in the heart of each there was a restless

pain, which neither the gay world in which Jessie lived, nor yet the busy one where Walter passed his days, could dissipate. He had absented himself from Jessie's "come-out party," and for this offense the young lady had been sorely indignant.

"She wanted Charlotte Reeves and all the girls to see him, and then to be treated that way was perfectly horrid," and the beautiful belle pouted many a day over the young man's obstinacy.

But Charlotte Reeves did see him at last, and when she learned that he was Mr. Graham's partner, and much esteemed by that gentleman, she partially took him up as a card to be played whenever she wished to annoy William Bellenger, who kept an eye on her in case he should lose Jessie. The relationship between the two was not known, for Walter had no desire to speak of it, and as William vainly fancied it might reflect discredit on himself, he, too, kept silent on the subject, while Mrs. Bartow, having received instructions both from Jessie and her father, never hinted to her bosom friend and deadliest enemy, Mrs. Reeves, that the young Marshall whom Charlotte was patronizing, and who was noticed by all for his gentlemanly bearing and handsome face, was in any way connected with the Bellenger disgrace.

After her return from Saratoga, Mrs. Reeves had been sick for several months, and at the time of the party was still an invalid, and claimed the privilege of sitting during the evening. Consequently Mrs. Bartow had not yet found a favorable opportunity for wounding her as she intended doing, and when, on the evening of the party, she entered the crowded rooms, she made her way to the sofa, and greeting the lady with her blandest words, told her how delighted she was to see her in society again, how much she had been missed, and all the other compliments which meant worse than nothing. Then taking a mental inventory of the different articles which made up her dear friend's dress and comparing them with her own, she set her costly fan in motion and watched to see which received the more attention,—Charlotte Reeves or Jessie. The latter certainly looked the best, as, arm in arm with Walter, she walked through the parlor, oblivious to all else in her delight at seeing him appear so much like himself as he did to-night.

"It's such a pity he's poor," said Mrs. Reeves, as he was passing. "Do you know I think him by far the most distinguished looking man in the room, always excepting, of course, Mr. Bellenger," and she nodded apologetically to a little pale-faced lady sitting beside her on the sofa.

This lady she had not seen fit to introduce to her dear friend, who had scanned her a moment with her glass, and then pronounced her "somebody." Twice Walter and Jessie passed, stopping the second time, while the latter received from her grandmother the whispered injunction "not to walk with him

until everybody talked."

"Pshaw!" was Jessie's answer, while Mrs. Reeves slyly congratulated Mr. Marshall on his good luck in having the belle of the evening so much to himself, and as they stood there thus the face of the little silent lady flashed with a sudden light, and touching Mrs. Reeves when they were gone, she said:

"Who was that young man? You called him Marshall, didn't you?"

"Yes, Walter Marshall, and he is Mr. Graham's partner. You know of Mr. Graham,—people call him a millionaire, but my son says he don't believe it."

This last was lost upon the little lady, who cared nothing for Mr. Graham, and who continued:

"Where did he come from?"

"Really, I don't know. Perhaps Mrs. Bartow can enlighten you," and Mrs. Reeves went through with a form of introduction, speaking the stranger's name so low, that in the surrounding hum it was entirely lost on Mrs. Bartow, who bowed, and briefly stated that Walter was from Deerwood, Mass.

The lady's hands worked nervously together, and when Walter again drew near, the white, thin face looked wistfully after him, while the lips moved as if they would call him back. He was disengaged at last. Jessie had another gallant in the person of William Bellenger, Mrs. Bartow's fan moved faster than before, and Mrs. Reeves was about to make some remark to her companion, when the latter rose, and crossing over to where Walter stood, said to him in a low, pleasant voice:

"Excuse me, Mr. Marshall, but would you object to walking with me,—an old lady?"

Walter started, and looking earnestly into the dark eyes, which were full of tears, offered her his arm, and the two were soon lost amid the gay throng.

"Who is she? I didn't understand the name," Mrs. Bartow asked, her lip dropping suddenly, as Mrs. Reeves replied:

"Why, that's the honorable Mrs. Bellenger, returned from a ten years' residence abroad."

"Mrs. Bellenger," Mrs. Bartow repeated. "Is it possible? I have always had a great desire to make her acquaintance. How plain, and yet how elegantly she dresses."

"She is not the woman she used to be," returned Mrs. Reeves. "She is very much changed, and they say that during the last year of her sojourn in London she spent her time in distributing tracts among the poor, and all that sort of thing. I wonder what she wants of Mr. Marshall. Wasn't it queer the way she introduced herself to him?"

"Very," Mrs. Bartow said; but she thought, "not strange at all," and she was half tempted to tell her friend the relationship existing between the two.

This she would perhaps have done had not Mrs. Reeves at that moment directed her attention to William and Jessie, saying of the former that he seemed very unhappy.

"The fact is," she whispered, confidentially, "he never appears at ease unless he is somewhere near Charlotte. I think he monopolizes her altogether too much. I tell her so too. But she only laughs, and says he don't go with her any more than with Jessie Graham, though everybody knows he does. He likes Jessie, of course, but Charlotte is his first choice," and the old lady glanced complacently toward the spot where her sprightly granddaughter stood surrounded by a knot of admirers, each of whom had an eye to her father's coffers as well as to herself.

"The wretch!" thought Mrs. Bartow. "Just as though William preferred that great, long-necked thing to Jessie; but I'll be even with her yet. I'll be revenged when Mrs. Bellenger comes back," and the fan moved rapidly as Mrs. Bartow thought how crest-fallen her dear friend would be when she said what she meant to say to her.

Meantime Mrs. Bellenger had led Walter to a little ante-room where they would be comparatively free from observation, and sitting down upon an ottoman, she bade him, too, be seated. He complied with her request, and then waited for her to speak, wondering much who she was, and why she had sought this interview with him. As Mrs. Reeves had said, Mrs. Bellenger had for the last ten years resided in different parts of Europe. She had gone there with her husband and only surviving daughter, both of whom she had buried, one among the Grampian Hills, and the other upon the banks of the blue Rhine. Her youngest son, who was still unmarried, had joined her there, but he had become dissipated, and eighteen months before her return to America she had lain him in a drunkard's grave. With a breaking heart she returned to her lonely home in London, dating from that hour the commencement of another and better life, and now there was not in the whole world an humbler or more consistent Christian than the once haughty Mrs. Bellenger. Many and many a time, when away over the sea, had her thoughts gone back to her youngest born, the gentle brown-eyed Ellen, whom she had disowned because the man she chose was poor, and in bitterness of heart she had cried:

"Oh, that I had her with me now!"

Then, as she remembered the helpless infant which she had once held for a brief moment upon her lap, her heart yearned toward him with all a mother's love, and she said to herself:

"I will find the boy, and it may be he will comfort my old age."

On her return to Boston she went to the house of William's father, but everything there was cold and ostentatious. They greeted her warmly, it is true, and paid her marked attention, but she suspected they did it for the money she

had in her possession, for the family was extravagant and deeply involved in debt. Once she asked if they knew anything of Ellen's child, and her son replied that he believed he was a clerk of some kind in New York, but none of the family had ever seen him save Will, who had met him once or twice, and who spoke of him as having a little of the Bellenger look and bearing.

Then she came to New York and found her grandson Will, who was less her favorite than ever when she heard how sneeringly he spoke of Walter. From his remarks, she did not expect to meet the latter at the party, but she would find him next day, she said, and when he entered the room she was too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice him, but when he passed her with Jessie she started, for there was in his face a look like her dead daughter.

"Can it be that handsome young man is Ellen's child?" she said, and she waited anxiously till he appeared again.

He stopped before her then, and with a beating heart she listened to what they called him, and then asked who he was.

"It is my boy,—it is," she murmured between her quivering lips, and as soon as she saw that he was free she joined him, as we have seen, and led him to another room.

For a moment she hesitated, as if uncertain what to say, then, as they were left alone, she began:

"My conduct may seem strange to you, but I cannot help it. Twenty-five years ago a sweet girlish voice called me mother, and the face of her who called me thus was much like yours, young man. She left me one summer morning, and our house was like a tomb without her; but she never came back again, and when I saw her next she lay in her coffin. She was too young to be lying there, for she was scarcely twenty. She died with the shadow of my anger resting on her heart, for when I heard she had married one whom the world said was not her equal, I cast her off, I said she was not mine, and from that day to this the worm of remorse has been gnawing at my heart, for I hear continually the dying message they said she left for me: 'Tell mother to love my baby for the sake of the love she once bore me.' I didn't do it. I steeled my proud heart even against the little boy. But I'm yearning for him now,—yearning for that child to hold up my feeble hands,—to guide my trembling feet and smooth my pathway down into the valley which I must tread ere long."

She paused, and covering her face, wept aloud. Glancing hurriedly around, Walter saw that no one was very near, and going up to her, he wound his arm round her, and whispered in her ear:

"My mother's mother,—my grandmother,—I never expected this from you."

Before Mrs. Bellenger could reply, footsteps were heard approaching, and William appeared with Jessie. He had told her of his grandmother's unexpected

arrival that morning, and when she expressed a wish to see her, he started in quest of her at once. He knew that he was not a favorite with her, but she surely would like Jessie, and that might make her more lenient toward himself; so he had sought for her everywhere, learning at last from Mrs. Bartow that she had gone off with Walter.

"Upon my word," he thought, "he has commenced his operations soon," and a sudden fear came over him lest Walter should be preferred to himself by the rich old lady.

And this suspicion was not in the least diminished by the position of the parties when he came suddenly upon them.

"He is playing his cards well," he said, involuntarily, while Jessie was conscious of a feeling of pleasure at seeing Walter thus acknowledged by his grandmother.

With a tolerably good grace, Will introduced his companion, his spirits rising when he saw how pleasantly and kindly his grandmother received them both. Once, as they stood together talking, Mrs. Bellenger spoke of Deerwood, where her daughter was buried, and instantly over William's face there flitted the same uneasy look which Mrs. Reeves had seen and imputed to his desire to be with Charlotte.

"Have you heard from Miss Howland recently?" he asked Walter, who replied:

"I heard some three weeks since, and she was then about as usual. She is always feeble in the winter, though I believe they think her worse this season than she has ever been before."

William thought of a letter received a few days before, the contents of which had written the look upon his face which Mrs. Reeves had noticed, and had prompted him to ask the question he did.

"Poor Ellen!" sighed Jessie. "I fear she's not long for this world."

"What did you call her?" Mrs. Bellenger asked, and Walter replied:

"Ellen, my mother's namesake, and my cousin."

"I shall see her," returned the lady, "for I am going to Deerwood by-and-by."

William was going, too, but he would rather not meet his grandmother there, and he said to her, indifferently, as it were:

"When will you go?"

"In two or three weeks," she answered, and satisfied that she would not then interfere with him, he offered Jessie his arm a second time and walked away, hearing little of what was passing around him, and caring less, for the words "Oh, William, I am surely dying! Won't you come?" rang in his ears like a funeral knell.

For a long time Mrs. Bellenger talked with Walter, asking him at last of his father, and if any news had been heard of him.

"It does not matter," she said, when he replied in the negative. "I have outlived all that foolish pride, and love you just the same."

Her words were sweet and soothing to Walter, and he did not care much now even if William did keep Jessie continually at his side, walking frequently past the door where he could see them. Once, as they passed, Mrs. Bellenger remarked:

"Miss Graham is a beautiful young woman. Is she engaged to William?"

"No, no! oh, no!" and in the voice Mrs. Bellenger learned all she wished to know.

"Pardon me," she continued, taking Walter's hand, "pardon the liberty, but you love Jessie Graham," and her mild eyes look gently into his.

"Hopelessly," he answered, and his grandmother rejoined:

"Not hopelessly, my child; for as one woman can read another, so I saw upon her face that which told me she cared only for you. Be patient and wait," and with another pleasant smile she arose, saying to him, laughingly: "I am going to acknowledge you now. You say they do not know that my blood is flowing in your veins," and she passed again into the crowd, who fell back at her approach, for by this time every body knew who she was, and numerous were the surmises as to what kept her so long with young Marshall.

The matter was soon explained, for she only needed to say to those about her, "This is my grandson,—my daughter Ellen's child," for the news to spread rapidly, reaching at last to Mrs. Reeves, still seated on her throne. Greatly she wondered how it could be, and why William had not told her before; then, as she remembered her investigations with regard to the Bellengers, she added what was wanting to complete the tale, leaving out the robbery, and merely saying that Mr. Marshall's poverty had been the chief objection to his marriage with Miss Ellen Bellenger. This she did because she knew that, with his grandmother for a prop, Walter could not be trampled down, and she meant to be the first to hold him up.

In the midst of a group of ladies, to whom she was enumerating Jessie's many virtues, Mrs. Bartow heard the news, and answered very carelessly:

"Why, I knew that long ago. Mr. Marshall is a fine young man," and as she spoke, she wondered if he would share with William in his grandmother's property.

"Even if he does," she thought, "William will have the most, for his father is very wealthy,—then there is the name of Bellenger, which is something," and having thus balanced the two, and found the heavier weight in William's favor, she looked after him, as he led Jessie away to the dancing-room, with a most benignant expression, particularly as she saw that Mrs. Reeves was looking at him too.

"I wonder what she thinks now about his wishing to be with Charlotte?" she thought, and she longed for the moment when she could pay the lady for her ill-natured remarks.

By this time Mrs. Bellenger had returned to her seat by Mrs. Reeves, and thinking this a favorable opportunity, Mrs. Bartow took her stand near them and began:

"By the way, Mrs. Reeves, did you ever know any one in Leicester, Massachusetts, by the name of Marshall—Debby Marshall, I mean?"

Mrs. Reeves started, with a look upon her face as if that which she had long feared and greatly dreaded had come upon her at last. Then, resuming her composure, she repeated the name:

"Debby Marshall?—Debby Marshall? I certainly do not number her among my acquaintances."

"I knew it must be a mistake," returned Mrs. Bartow, "particularly as she was malicious enough to say that your father was a tin peddler."

"A tin peddler!" gasped Mrs. Reeves, making a furious attack upon her smelling salts. "I believe I'm going to faint. The idea! It's perfectly preposterous! Where is this mischief-maker?" and the black eyes flashed round the room, as if in search of the offending Aunt Debby.

"Pray don't distress yourself," said the delighted Mrs. Bartow. "Of course it isn't true, and if it were, it's safe with me. I met this woman last summer in Deerwood, when I went down for Jessie. I chanced to mention your name, as I frequently do when away from you, and this Debby, who is an old maid, seventy at least, said she used to know a factory girl,—Charlotty Ann Gregory, of about her age, who married a man by the name of Reeves, a storekeeper, she called him. It's a remarkable coincidence, isn't it, that there should be two Charlotte Ann Gregorys, with sister Lizzies, and that both should marry merchants of the same name and come to New York. But nothing is strange now-a-days, so don't let it worry you. This old Debby is famous for knowing everybody's history."

Like a drowning man, Mrs. Reeves caught at this last remark. If Debby Marshall knew everybody's history, she of course knew Mrs. Bartow's, and the disconcerted lady hastened to ask:

"Where did you say she lived?"

"In Deerwood, with her brother, Deacon Amos Marshall, about half a mile from the village," returned the unsuspecting Mrs. Bartow.

Silently Mrs. Reeves wrote the information upon the tablets of her memory, and then, in a low voice of entreaty, said to her friend:

"You know it is all false, as well as you know that there are, in this city, envious people who would delight in just such scandal, and I trust you will not repeat it."

"Certainly,—certainly," said Mrs. Bartow, but whether the certainly were affirmative or negative was doubtful.

Mrs. Reeves accepted the latter, and then turned to Mrs. Bellenger to remove from her mind any unpleasant impression she might have received. This, however, was wholly unnecessary, for Mrs. Bellenger was too much absorbed in her own reflections to hear what Mrs. Bartow had been saying, and to Mrs. Reeves' remark, "I trust you do not credit the ridiculous story," she answered:

"What story? I heard nothing."

Thus relieved in that quarter, Mrs. Reeves became rather more composed, and for the remainder of the evening addressed Mrs. Bartow as "my dear," complimenting her once or twice upon her youthful looks, and saying several flattering things of Jessie.

CHAPTER VIII.—A RETROSPECT.

The flowers in the garden and the leaves on the trees were withered and dead. The luxuriant hop-vine, which grew about the farm-house door, had yielded its bountiful store, and loosened from its summer fastening trailed upon the ground. The cows no longer fed among the hills, the winter stores had been gathered in, there was a thin coating of ice upon the pond, and a dark, cold mist upon the mountain. There was a pallid hue upon Ellen's cheek, and a look of strange unrest in her eyes as day after day, all through the autumn time, she watched for the coming of one who had said, "I will be with you when the forest casts its leaf."

The time appointed had come, and the brown leaves were "heaped in the hollow of the wood" or tossed by the autumn wind, and the pain in Ellen's heart grew heavier to bear, as morning after morning she said:

"He will come to-day," and night after night she wept at his delay.

But there came a day at last, a bright November day, when she saw him in the distance, and with a cry of joy she buried her face in the pillows of the lounge, saying to her mother:

"I am faint and sick."

She lay very white and still, while kind Aunt Debby chafed her clammy

hands, and when they said to her, "Mr. Bellenger is here," she simply answered, "Is he?" for she had never told them that she expected him.

He said he was passing through the town, and for old acquaintance sake had stopped over one train, and the unsuspecting family believed it all, and when he said that Ellen stayed too much indoors, that a ride would do her good, they offered no remonstrance, but wrapping her up in warm shawls sent her out with him upon the mountain, where he told her how, through all the dreary months of his absence, one face alone had shone on him, one voice had sounded in his ear, and that the voice which now said to him so mournfully:

"I almost feared you had forgotten me, and it seemed so dreadful after all were gone, Walter, Jessie, and everybody. Forgive me, William, but when I remembered Jessie's sparkling beauty and knew she was a belle, I feared you would not come."

William Bellenger was conscious of a pang, for he knew how terribly he was deceiving the trusting girl sitting there upon the rock beside him, the color coming and going upon her marble cheek, and a tear dimming the luster of her eyes. On his way thither he had resolved to rouse her from the dream, to tell her she must forget him, but when he looked upon her unearthly beauty, and saw how she clung to him, he could not do it. So when she spoke of Jessie as one who might rival her, he said:

"Yes, Miss Graham is charming, but believe me, Nellie, I can love but one, and that one you."

The bright round spot deepened on her cheek, and William felt for an instant that had he the means, he would bear the poor invalid away to a sunnier clime, and by his tender care nurse her back to health. But he had not. There were bills on bills which he could not pay. His father, too, was straitened, for old Mr. Bellenger had left his entire fortune by will to his wife, who had refused to sanction the reckless extravagance of her son's family. A rich bride, then, must cancel William's debts, and as Ellen was not rich, he dared not talk to her of marriage, but whispered only of the love he felt for her. And Ellen grew faint and chill listening to this idle mockery, for the November wind blew cold upon the bleak mountain side. It was in vain that William wrapped both shawl and arm about her, hugging her closer to him until her golden hair rested on his bosom. He could not make her warm, and at last he took her home, telling her by the way that he would come again ere long and stay with her a week.

"I will explain to your mother then," he said, "and until that time you'd better say nothing of the matter, lest it should reach the ears of my proud family. I would write to you, but that would create surprise. So you'll have to be content with knowing that I do most truly love you."

And Ellen tried to be content, though after he was gone she cried herself to

sleep, and for a time forgot her wretchedness. She had taken a severe cold upon the mountain, and for many weeks she stayed indoors, thinking through all the long winter evenings of William, and wishing he would come again, or send her some message.

At last, as her desire to see him grew stronger, she resolved to write and bid him come, for she was dying.

"I know that it is so," she wrote. "I see it in the faces of my friends, I hear it in my mother's voice, I feel it in my failing strength. Yes, I am surely dying, won't you come? It is but a little thing for you, and it will do me so much good. Do you really love me, William? I have sometimes feared you didn't as I loved you. I sometimes thought you might be glad when the grass was growing on my grave, because you then would have no dread lest your proud relatives should know how you paused a moment to look at the frail blossom fading by the wayside. If it is so, William, don't tell it to me now; let me die believing that you really do love me. Come and tell me so once more, let me hear your voice again; then when I am dead, and they go to lay me down in the very spot where you found me sleeping that summer afternoon, you needn't join the mourners, for the world might ask why you were there. But when I'm buried, William, and the candles are lighted in my dear old home, then go alone where Nellie lies. It will make you a better man to pray above my grave, and if you know in your secret heart that you have been deceiving me, God will forgive you then. I am growing tired, William, there's a blur before my eyes and I cannot see. Come quickly, William, do."

This letter Ellen carried to the office herself, for she sometimes rode as far as the village with her grandfather, and thus none of the family knew that it was sent, or guessed why, for many days, her face grew brighter with a joyous, expectant look, which Aunt Debby said "came straight from Heaven." The letter reached William just as he was dressing for Charlotte Reeves' party, and tearing open the envelope, he read it with dim eye and quivering lip, for the writer had a stronger hold on his affections than he had at first supposed.

"I will go and see her," he said to himself, "though I can carry her no comfort unless I fabricate some lie. Poor, darling Nellie! It will not be a falsehood to tell her that I love her best of all the world, even though I cannot make her my wife. Perhaps she don't expect me to do that," and crushing into his pocket the letter, stained with Nellie's tears and his, he went, as we have seen, to the house of festivity, mingling in the gay scene, and letting no opportunity pass for showing to those around that Jessie Graham was the chosen one, though all the while his thoughts were away in Deerwood, where the dying Nellie waited so anxiously his coming, and whither in a few days he went, taking care to say to Jessie that he was going into the country, and might possibly visit the farm-house before he

returned.

CHAPTER IX.—NELLIE.

The winter sun was setting, and its fading light fell upon the golden hair and white, beautiful face of Nellie, who lay upon the lounge in the room where Walter's mother died, and which Jessie now called hers. She was weaker than usual, and the hectic spot upon her cheek was larger and brighter, while her eyes shone like diamonds as she looked wistfully in the direction of the village, where the smoke of the New York train was slowly dying away.

"Mother," she said at last, "isn't the omnibus coming over the hill?"

"Yes," Mrs. Howland answered. "Possibly it is Walter, though I did not tell him in my last how weak you are, as you know you bade me not, lest he should be unnecessarily alarmed."

Ellen knew it was not Walter, and the spot on her cheek was almost a blood-red hue when she heard the dear familiar voice, and knew that William had come.

"Mother," she said faintly, "it's Mr. Bellenger, and you must let me see him alone,—all the evening alone;—will you? It's right," she continued, as she met her mother's look of inquiry. "I'll explain it, perhaps, when he's gone."

In an instant the truth flashed upon Mrs. Howland, bringing with it a feeling of gratified pride that the elegant William Bellenger had condescended to think of her child. She did not know the whole. She could not guess how thoroughly selfish was the man who was deliberately breaking her daughter's heart, or she would not have left them to themselves that long winter evening, saying to her father and Aunt Debby, when they questioned the propriety of the proceeding:

"He wants to tell her of Walter and Jessie, I suppose, and the fine times they have in the city."

This satisfied Aunt Debby, but the deacon was not quite at ease, and more than once after finishing his fourth pipe, he started to join them, but was as often kept back by some well-timed remark addressed to him by Mrs. Howland; and so William was left undisturbed while he poured again into Ellen's ear the story of his love, telling her how inexpressibly dear she was to him, and that but for circumstances which he could not control, he would prove his assertion true by

making her at once his wife. Then the long eyelashes drooped beneath their weight of tears, for there flitted across Ellen's mind a vague consciousness that if these circumstances existed when he first talked to her of love, he had done very wrong. Still she could not accuse him even in thought, and she hastened to say:

"I don't know as I really ever supposed that you wished me to be your wife; and if I did it don't matter now, for I am going to die; death has a prior claim, and I never can be yours."

He held her hot hand in his,—felt the rapid pulse,—saw the deep color on her cheek,—the unnatural luster of her eye,—and felt that she told him truly. And thinking that anything which he could say to comfort and please her would be right, he whispered:

"I hope there are many years in store for you. If I should take you to Florida as my wife, do you think you would get well?"

She had said to him that it could not be,—that death would claim her first, but now that he had asked her this, all the energies of life were roused within her, and her whole face said yes, even before the answer dropped from her pale lips.

"Oh, William, dear, are you in earnest? Can I go?" and raising herself up, she wound her arms around his neck so that her head rested on his bosom.

And William held it there, caressing the fair hair, while he battled with all his better nature, and tried to think of some excuse,—some good reason for retracting the proposition which had been received so differently from what he expected. He thought of it at last, and laying his burden gently back upon her pillow, he answered mournfully:

"Forgive me, darling. In my great love for you I spoke inadvertently. I wish I were free to do what my heart dictates, but I am not. Listen, Nellie, and then you shall decide. Perhaps you have never heard that Jessie and I were long ago intended for each other by our parents?"

William's voice trembled as he uttered this falsehood, but not one-half as much as did the young girl on the lounge.

"No," she answered faintly; "Jessie never told me."

"Some girls are not inclined to talk of those they love," said William, and fixing her clear blue eyes on him, Ellen asked:

"Does Jessie love you, William?"

"And suppose she does?" he replied; "suppose she had always been taught to look upon me as her future husband? Suppose that even when I first came here there was an understanding that, unless Jessie should prefer some one else, we were to be married when she was eighteen, and suppose that since we have been so much together as we have this winter, Jessie had learned to love me very much, and that my marrying another now would break her heart, what would

you have me do? I know you must think it wrong in me to talk of love to you, knowing what I did, but struggle as I would, I could not help it. You are my ideal of a wife. I love you better than I do Jessie,—better than I do any one, and you shall decide the matter. I will leave Jessie, offend her father, and incur the lasting displeasure of my own family, if you say so. Think a moment, darling, and then tell me what to do."

Had he held a knife at her heart, and a pistol at her head, bidding her take her choice between the two, he could scarcely have pained her more. Folding her hands together, she lay so still that it seemed almost like the stillness of death, and William once bent down to see if she were sleeping. But the large blue eyes turned toward him, and a faint whisper met his ear:

"Don't disturb me. I am thinking," and as she thought the cold perspiration stood in the palms of her hands and about her mouth, for it was like tearing out her very life, deciding to give William up, and bidding him marry another, even though she knew she could never be his wife.

Jessie Graham was very dear to the poor invalid, as the first and almost only girl friend she had ever known. Jessie had been kind to her, while Mr. Graham had been most kind to them all. Jessie would make William a far more suitable wife than she could. His proud relatives would scoff at her, and perhaps if she should live and marry him he might some day be sorry that he did not take the more brilliant Jessie. But was there any probability that she could live? She wished she knew, and she said to William:

"Do people always get well if they go to Florida?"

"Sometimes, darling, if the disease is not too far advanced," was the answer, and Ellen went back to her reflections.

Her disease was too far advanced, she feared, and if she could not live, why should she wish to trammel William for so short a time, even if there were no Jessie, and would it not be better to give him up at once? Yes, it would, she said, and just as William began a second time to think she had fallen away to sleep she beckoned him to come near, and in a voice which sounded like the wail of a broken heart, she whispered:

"I have decided, William. You must marry Jessie,—but not till I am dead. You'll love poor me till then, won't you?" and burying her face in his bosom, she sobbed bitterly. He kissed her tears away; he told her he would not marry Jessie, that she alone should be his wife; and when she answered that it must not be, that at the longest she could live but a short time, he felt in his villainous, selfish heart that he was glad she was so sensible. He had told her no lie, he thought. He had merely supposed a case, and she, taking it for granted, had deliberately given him up. He could not help himself, for had she not virtually refused him?

By such arguments as these did the wicked man seek to quiet his guilty

conscience, but when he saw how much it had cost the young girl to say what she had said, he was half tempted to undeceive her, to tell her it was all false, that story of himself and Jessie,—but gold was dearer to him than aught else on earth, and so he did not do it. He merely told her that so long as she lived he should love her the best, but advised her not to talk with Jessie on the subject, as it would only make them both unhappy.

"You may tell your mother that I love you, but I would say nothing of Jessie, who might not like to have the matter talked about, as it is not positively settled yet, at least not enough to proclaim it to the world."

Like a submissive child, Ellen promised compliance with all his wishes, and as the deacon by this time had declared "there was no sense in them two staying in there any longer," he appeared in the door, and thus put an end to the conversation.

All the next day William stayed, improving every opportunity to whisper to Ellen of his love, but the words were almost meaningless to her now. She knew that she loved him; she believed that he loved her, but there was a barrier between them, and when at night he left her, she was so strangely calm that he felt a pang lest he might have lost a little of her love, which, in spite of his selfishness, was very dear to him. After he was gone, Ellen told her mother of their mutual love, which never could be consummated, because she must die; but she said nothing of Jessie, and the deluded woman, gazing on her beautiful daughter, prayed that she might live, and so one day grace the halls of the proud Bellengers. After this there often came to the farm-house dainty luxuries for the invalid, and though there was no name, Ellen knew who sent them, and smiling into her mother's face would say:

"Isn't he good to me?"

At last the stormy March had come, and one night a lady stood at the farm-house door, asking if Deacon Marshall lived there.

"I have no claim upon your hospitality," she said, "but a mother has a right to visit her daughter's grave and the home where her daughter died."

It was Mrs. Bellenger, but so changed from the haughty woman who years ago had been there, that the family could scarcely believe it was the same. It is true they had heard from Walter of his grandmother's kindness, and how the effect of that kindness was already beginning to be apparent in the treatment he received from those who before had scarcely noticed him, but they could not understand it until they saw the lady in their midst, affable and friendly to them all, but especially to poor sick Nellie, to whom she attached herself at once. Very rapidly each grew to liking the other. Mrs. Bellenger, because the gentle invalid bore her daughter's name; and Nellie, because the lady was William's grandmother, and sometimes spoke of him. For many days Mrs. Bellenger lingered,

for there was something very soothing in the quiet of the farm-house, and very attractive about the sick girl, who once as they sat together alone, opened her whole heart and told the story of her love.

"It surely is not wrong for me to confide in you," she said, "and I must talk of it to somebody."

Mrs. Bellenger had heretofore distrusted William, but the fact that he had won the love of so pure a being as Ellen Howland changed her feelings toward him, and when the latter said, "He spoke of taking me to Florida," she thought at once that her money should pay the bills, and that she too would go and help her grandson nurse the beautiful young girl back to life and strength. This last she said to Ellen, who answered mournfully:

"It cannot be, for I have given him up to Jessie, whose claim was better than mine," and then she repeated all that William had said to her.

"It doesn't matter," she continued. "I can't live very long, and Jessie has been so kind to me that I want to give her something, and William is the most precious thing I have.

"It hurt me to give him up. But it is best, even if there were no Jessie Graham. His parents are not like you; they might teach him in time to despise me, and I'd rather die now."

Mrs. Bellenger turned away to hide her tears, and could William have seen what was in her heart,—could he have known how easily Ellen's wasted hand could unlock her coffers and give him the money he craved, the proud house of Bellenger would have mourned over a second *mesalliance*.

For nearly two weeks Mrs. Bellenger remained in Deerwood, and then, promising to come again ere long, returned to the city, where rumor was already busy with the marriage which the world said was soon to take place between William Bellenger and the beautiful Miss Graham.

CHAPTER X.—A DISCLOSURE.

Much surprise was expressed, and a good deal of interest manifested, when it was known that the handsome house up-town which had recently been bought by a stranger it was said, and elegantly furnished, was the property of Mrs. Bellenger,

who, not long after her return from Deerwood, took possession of it, and made it also the home of Walter Marshall. The latter was now courted and admired as a most "delightful young man," and probably the principal heir of the rich old lady, who did not hesitate to show how greatly she preferred him to her other grandson, William. Even Mrs. Reeves was especially gracious to him now, saying she believed him quite as good a match as Mr. Bellenger, who was welcome to Jessie Graham if he wanted her. And it would seem that he did, for almost every evening found him at her side, while Walter frequently met them in the street, or heard of them at various places of amusement.

Still Jessie was very kind to him whenever he called upon her, unless William chanced to be present, and then she seemed to take delight in annoying him, by devoting herself almost entirely to one whom he at last believed was really his rival. This opinion he expressed one day to his grandmother, who had come to the same conclusion, and who as gently as possible repeated to him all that Ellen had told her. It was the first intimation Walter had received that William Bellenger had pretended to care for his cousin, and it affected him deeply.

"The wretch!" he exclaimed. "He won Ellen's love only to cast it from him at his will, for he never thought of making her his wife."

Then, as his own gloomy future arose before him, he groaned aloud, for he never knew before how dear Jessie was to him.

"It may not be so," his grandmother said, laying her hand upon his head. "I cannot quite think Jessie would prefer him to you, and she has known you always, too. Suppose you talk with her upon the subject. It will not make the matter worse."

"Grandmother," said Walter, "I have promised never to speak of love to Jessie Graham until I am freed from the taint my father's misfortune has fastened upon my name, and as there is no hope that this will ever be, I must live on and see her given to another. Were my rival anybody but William, I could bear it better, for I want Jessie to be happy, and I believe him to be—a villain, and I would far rather that Jessie would die than be his bride."

Walter was very much excited, and as the atmosphere of the room seemed oppressive, he seized his hat and rushed out into the street, meeting by the way William and Jessie. They were walking very slowly, and apparently so absorbed with themselves, that neither observed him till just as he was passing, when Jessie looked up and called after him:

"Are you never coming to see me again?"

"I don't know,—perhaps not," was the cool answer, and Walter hastened on, while William, who never let an opportunity pass for a sly insinuation against his cousin, asked Jessie if she had not observed how consequential Walter had grown since his grandmother took him up and pushed him into society. "Everybody is

laughing about it," said he, "but that is the way with people of his class. They cannot bear prosperity."

"I think Walter has too much good sense," Jessie replied, "to be lifted up by the attentions of those who used to slight him, but who notice him now just because Mrs. Bellenger likes him. There's Mrs. Reeves, for instance,—it's perfectly sickening to hear her talk about 'dear Mr. Marshall,' when she used to speak of him as 'that poor young man in Mr. Graham's employ.' Charlotte always liked him."

This last was not very agreeable to Will, for in case he failed to secure Jessie, Charlotte was his next choice.

Money he must have, and soon too, for there was a heavy burden on his mind, and unless that burden was lifted disgrace was sure to follow. Twice recently he had written to his father for money and received the same answer:

"I have nothing for you; go to your grandmother, who has plenty."

Once he had asked Mrs. Bellenger for a hundred dollars; but she had said that "a young man in perfect health ought to have some occupation, and as he had none he had no right to live as expensively as he did."

Several times he had borrowed of Walter, making an excuse that he had forgotten his purse, or "that the old man's remittances had not come," but never remembering to pay or mention it again. In this state of affairs it was quite natural that he should be looking about for something to ease his mind and fill his pocket at the same time. A rich wife could do this, and as Jessie and Charlotte both were rich, one of them must come to the rescue. Jessie's remark about Charlotte disturbed him, and as he had not of late paid her much attention, he resolved to call upon her as soon as he had seen Jessie to her own door.

Meanwhile Walter had gone to his office, where he found upon the desk a letter in his grandfather's handwriting, and hastily breaking the seal, he read, that he must come quickly if he would see his cousin alive. The letter inclosed a note for Jessie, and Walter was requested to give it to her so that she might come with him.

"Poor Ellen talks of Jessie and Mrs. Bellenger all the time," the deacon wrote, "and perhaps your grandmother would not mind coming too. She seemed to take kindly to the child."

Not a word was said of William, for Ellen would not allow her mother to send for him.

"It would only make him feel badly," she said, "and I would save him from unnecessary pain." So she hushed her longing to see him again and asked only for Jessie.

"I will go to-morrow morning," Walter thought, and as Mr. Graham was absent for a day or two he was thinking of taking the note to Jessie himself,

when William came suddenly upon him.

"Well, old fellow," said he, "what's up now? Your face is long as a gravestone."

"Ellen is dying," returned Walter, "and they have sent for me."

"Ellen dying!" and the man, who a moment before had spoken so jeeringly, staggered into a chair as if smitten by a heavy blow.

"I did not suppose he cared so much for her," thought Walter, and in a kinder tone he told what he knew, and passing William the note intended for Jessie, he bade him take it to her that night, and tell her to meet him at the depot in the morning. "And William," said Walter, fixing his eye earnestly upon his cousin, "what message shall I take to Ellen for you? or will you go too?"

For a moment William hesitated, while his better nature battled with his worse, urging him to give up the game at which he was playing, and comfort the dying girl he had so cruelly deceived, and acknowledge to the world how dear she was to him; then, as another frightful thought intruded itself upon him, he murmured, "I can't, I can't," and with that resolution he sealed his future destiny. "No, I cannot go," he said, and thrusting the note into his pocket went out into the open air, a harder man, if possible, than he had been before. "Jessie must not go to Deerwood if I can prevent it," he thought to himself. "Nellie may tell her all, and that would be fatal to my plans."

So he resolved not to call at Mr. Graham's that night, and in case an explanation should afterward be necessary, he would say that he had sent the note by a boy, who, of course, had neglected to deliver it.

Accordingly the next morning Walter and his grandmother waited impatiently for Jessie at the depot, and then, when they found she was not coming, took their seats in the cars with heavy hearts, for both knew how terrible would be the disappointment to Ellen, who loved Jessie Graham better almost than herself.

————

"Where's Jessie? Didn't I hear her voice in the other room?" the sick girl asked, when, one after the other, Mrs. Bellenger and Walter bent over her pillow and kissed her wasted face.

"She isn't here," said Walter, and the color faded from Ellen's face as she replied:

"Isn't here? Where is she, Walter?"

He answered that he did not see her himself, but had sent the message by William, and at the mention of his name the blood came surging back to the pallid cheeks.

"William would carry the note, I know," she said, "and why does she stay away when I want so much to see her before I die?" And turning her face to the wall, she wept silently over her friend's apparent neglect.

"Walter," said Mrs. Bellenger, drawing him aside, "it may be possible there is some mistake, and Jessie does not know. Suppose you telegraph to her father and be sure."

Walter immediately acted upon this suggestion, and that evening as Jessie sat listlessly drumming her piano, wondering why Walter seemed so changed, and wishing somebody would come, she received the telegram, and with feverish impatience waited for the morning, when she set off for Deerwood, where she was hailed with rapture by Ellen, who could now only whisper her delight and press the hands of her early friend.

"Why didn't you come with Walter?" she asked, and Jessie replied:

"How could I, when I knew nothing of his coming?"

"Didn't William give you a note?" asked Walter, who was standing near, and upon Jessie's replying that she had neither seen nor heard from William, a sudden suspicion crossed his mind that the message had purposely been withheld.

No such thought, however, intruded itself upon Ellen; the neglect was not intentional, she was sure; and in her joy at having Jessie with her at last, she forgot her earlier disappointment. Earnestly and lovingly she looked up into Jessie's bright, glowing face, and, pushing back her short black curls, whispered:

"Darling Jessie, I am glad you are so beautiful, so good."

And Jessie, listening to these oft-repeated words did not dream of the pure, unselfish love which prompted them.

If Jessie were beautiful and good, she would make the life of William Bellenger happier than if she were otherwise; and this was all that Ellen asked or wished.

Hidden away in a little rosewood box, which Jessie had given her, was a blurred and blotted letter, which she had written at intervals, as her failing strength would permit. It was her farewell to William, and she would trust it to no messenger but Jessie.

"Tell them all to go out," she said, as the shadows stretched farther and farther across the floor, and she knew it was growing late. "Tell them to leave us together once more, just as we used to be."

Her request was granted, and then laying her hand upon her pillow, she said:

"Lie down beside me, Jessie, and put your arms around my neck while I tell you how I love you. It wasn't my way to talk much, Jessie, and when you used to say so often that I was very dear to you, I only kissed you back, and did not

tell you how full my heart was of love. Dear Jessie, don't cry. What makes you? Are you sorry I am going to die?"

A passionate hug was Jessie's answer, and Ellen continued:

"It's right, darling, that I should go, for neither of us could be quite happy in knowing that another shared the love we coveted for ourselves. Forgive me, Jessie, I never meant to interfere, and when I'm dead, you won't let it cast a shadow between you that he loved me a little, too."

"I do not understand you," said Jessie, "I love nobody but father,—no man, I mean.

"Oh, Jessie, don't profess to be ignorant of my meaning," said Ellen. "It may be wrong for me to speak of it, but at the very last, I cannot forbear telling you how willingly I gave William up to you."

"*William!*" Jessie exclaimed. "I never loved William Bellenger,—never *could* love him. What do you mean!"

There was no color in Ellen's face, and she trembled in every limb, as she answered, faintly:

"You wouldn't tell me a lie when I am dying?"

"No, darling, no," and passing her arm around the sick girl, Jessie raised her up, and continued, "explain to me, will you? for I do not comprehend."

Then as briefly as possible Nellie told the story of her love, and how William had said that Jessie stood between them.

"If it is not so," she gasped, "if he has deceived me, don't tell me. I could not endure losing faith in him. Don't, don't," she continued, entreatingly, as Jessie cried indignantly:

"It is false,—false as his own black heart! There is no understanding between our parents. I never thought of loving him. I hate him now, the monster. And you are dying for me, Nellie, but he killed you, the wretch!"

Jessie paused, for there was something in Nellie's face which awed her into silence. It was as white as ashes, and Jessie never forgot its grieved, heart-broken expression, or the spasmodic quivering of the lips, which uttered no complaint against the perfidious man, but whispered faintly:

"Bring me my little box, and bring the candle, too."

Both were brought, and taking out the letter so deeply freighted with her love, the sick girl held it in the blaze, watching it as it blackened and charred, and dropped upon the floor.

"With that I burned up my very heart," she said, and a cold smile curled her lips. "The pain is over now. I do not feel it any more."

Then, taking a pencil and a tiny sheet of note paper from the box, she wrote:

"Heaven forgive you, William. Pray for pardon at my grave. You have much need to pray."

Passing it to Jessie, she said:

"Give this to William when I am dead; and now draw the covering closer over me, for I am growing cold and sleepy."

Jessie folded the blanket about her shoulders and chest, and then sat down beside her, while the family, hearing no sound, stole softly across the threshold into the room where the May moonshine lay; where the candle burned dimly on the table, and where the light of a young life flickered and faded with each tick of the tall old clock, which in the kitchen without could be distinctly heard measuring off the time.

Fainter and fainter, dimmer and dimmer, grew the light, until at last, as the swinging pendulum beat the hour of midnight, it went out forever, and the moon-beams fell on the golden hair and white face of the beautiful dead.

CHAPTER XI.—THE NIGHT AFTER THE BURIAL.

Down the lane, over the rustic bridge beneath the shadow of the tasseled pines and up the grassy hillside, where the headstones of the dead gleamed in the warm sunlight, the long procession wended its way, and the fair May blossoms were upturned, and the moist earth thrown out to make room for the fair sleeper, thus early gone to rest.

Then back again, down the grassy hillside, under the tasseled pines, and up the winding lane the mourners came, and all the afternoon the villagers talked of the beautiful girl,—but in the home she had left so desolate, her name was not once mentioned. They could not speak of her yet, and so the mother sat in her lonely room, rocking to and fro, just as she used to do when there was pillowed on her breast the golden head, now lying across the fields, where the dim eyes of the deacon wandered often, as the old man whispered to himself.

"One grave more, and one chair less. Our store grows fast in Heaven."

For once Aunt Debby forgot to knit, and the kitten rolled the ball at pleasure, pausing sometimes in her play, and looking up in Jessie's face, as if to ask her the reason of its unwonted sadness, and why the hug and squeeze had been so long omitted.

To Walter, Ellen had been like a sister, and he went away to weep alone, while Mrs. Bellenger, not wishing to intrude on any one, withdrew to the quiet garden, and so the dreary afternoon went by, and when the sun was set and the moon was shining on the floor of the little portico the family assembled there, and drawing a little stool to the deacon's side Jessie laid her bright head on his knee.

The moonlight fell softly on her upturned face, heightening its dark, rich beauty, and Walter was gazing admiringly upon her, when a sound in the distance caught his ear, and arrested the attention of all.

It was the sound of horse's feet, and as the sharp hoofs struck the earth with a rapidity which told how swiftly the rider came, Jessie's heart beat faster with a feeling that she knew who the rider was. He passed them with averted face, and they heard the clatter of the iron shoes, as the steed dashed down the lane, over the rustic bridge, and up the grassy hillside.

Jessie had not told the family the story which broke poor Nellie's heart, for she would not inflict an unnecessary pang upon the mother, or the grandfather, but she wanted Walter to know it, and as the sound of the horse's feet died away in the distance, she said to him:

"Will you walk with me, Walter? It is so light and pleasant."

It seemed a strange request to him, but he complied with it, and as if by mutual consent, the two went together, toward the grave, whither another had preceded them.

In the city William had heard of the telegram sent to Jessie, and with a feeling of restless impatience, he at last took the cars, as far as the town adjoining Deerwood, where he stopped and heard of Ellen's death. He heard, too, that she was buried that very afternoon, and his pulses quickened with a painful throb, as as he heard the landlord's daughter, who had attended the funeral, telling her mother how beautiful the young girl was, all covered with flowers, and how Miss Graham from New York cried when she bent over the coffin.

He would see her grave, he said, he would kiss the earth which covered her, and so when the "candle was lighted in her dear old home," he came, a weary, wretched man, and stood by the little mound. He had almost felt that he should find her there, just as she was that August afternoon, when she lay sleeping with the withered roses drooping on her face.

She had told him of this hour, and bidden him pray when he stood so near to her, but he could not, and he only murmured through his tears:

"Poor Nellie. She deserved a better fate. I wish I had never crossed her path."

There were voices in the distance, and not caring to be found there, he knelt by the pile of earth, and burying his face in the dust, said aloud:

"I wish that I were dead and happy as you are, little Snow Drop," then leaving the inclosure, he mounted his horse, and rode rapidly off, just as Walter and Jessie came up on the opposite side.

"That was William Bellenger," Jessie cried. "I thought so when he passed the house, and I wanted so much to see him here by Ellen's grave."

"William Bellenger," Walter repeated. "Do you know why he was here?"

"Yes, I do," Jessie answered, "and I wanted to reproach him with it. Walter, William Bellenger is a villain!

"Sit down with me," she continued, "here, beside your mother's grave, and Nellie's, and listen while I repeat to you what Nellie told me just before she died."

He obeyed, and in a voice of mingled sorrow and resentment, Jessie told him of the falsehood which had been imposed upon the gentle girl lying there so near them.

It would be impossible to describe Walter's anger and disgust, as he listened to the story of Ellen's wrongs.

"The wretch! He killed her!" he exclaimed, "killed her through love for him, and her unselfish devotion to you."

"But he *did* love her," interposed Jessie, "or he had never been here to-night."

Walter could not comprehend a love like this. It was not what he felt for the dark-haired girl at his side, and in his joy at finding that she, too, thoroughly despised one whom he had feared might be his rival, he came near telling her so, but he remembered in time the promise made to Mrs. Bartow, and merely said:

"Forgive me, Jessie. I have fancied you loved this rascally fellow, and it made me very unhappy, for I knew he was unworthy."

"Are you not sometimes unreasonably suspicious of me?" Jessie asked, and Walter replied:

"If I am, it is because,—because,—I would have my sister happy, and now that Nellie is dead, you are all I have to love."

It surely was not wrong for him to say so much, he thought, and Jessie must have thought so too, for impulsively laying her hand in his, she looked up into his face and answered:

"There must never be another cloud between us."

For a long time they sat together among the graves, and then, as it was growing late, they retraced their steps toward the farm-house, where only Mrs. Bellenger was waiting for them, the others having retired to rest.

To her, with Jessie's consent, Walter told what he had heard, but not till Jessie had left them for the night. Covering her face with her hands, Mrs. Bellenger groaned aloud at this fresh proof of William's perfidy.

"There is one comfort, however," she said, at last, "Jessie is not bound to him," and she spoke hopefully to Walter of his future.

"It may be," he said, "but my father must first be proved innocent. I am going to find him, too," and then he told his grandmother that Mr. Graham had long contemplated sending him to California on business connected with the firm. "Next September is the time appointed for me to go, and something tells me that I shall find my father in my travels."

Then he told her that if he could arrange it, he should spend several weeks at home, as the family were now so lonely, and as Mrs. Bellenger was herself, ere long, going to Boston, she offered no remonstrance to the plan.

The moon by this time had reached a point high up in the heavens, and bidding him good night she left him sitting there alone, dreaming bright dreams of the future, when the little hand which not long ago had crept of its own accord into his own, should be his indeed. But what if it should never be proved that his father was innocent? Could he keep his promise forever? He dared not answer this, but there swept over him again, as it had done many times of late, the belief that ere a year had passed, Seth Marshall would stand before the world an honored and respected man. Until that time he was willing to wait, he said, and the moon had long since passed the zenith and was shining through the western window into the room where Jessie Graham lay sleeping ere he left his seat beneath the vines and sought his pillow to realize in dreamland the happiness in store for him.

CHAPTER XII.—A CRISIS.

The next morning, Mrs. Bellenger, Jessie and Walter returned to the city, the latter promising his family that he would if possible obtain leave of absence from his business for several weeks, and be with them in the first stages of their bereavement.

To this plan Mr. Graham made no objection, and without seeing William, who chanced to be out of the city, Walter went back to Deerwood, while his grandmother also started on her projected visit to Boston.

Lonely indeed was Walter's life at the farm-house, and not even the cheering letters of Mr. Graham, which always contained a pleasant message from Jessie, had the power to enliven his solitude. He had tasted of the busy world, and a life of inactivity could not satisfy him now. So he wrote at last to Mr. Gra-

ham, asking why he could not start at once for California, instead of waiting until September.

With a father's ready tact, Mr. Graham understood exactly the nature of Walter's feelings toward his daughter, and as Mrs. Bartow had told him of the young man's promise, he watched him narrowly to see how well it would be kept.

"He is a noble fellow," he thought, "and he shall not wait for what may never be. I am sure Jessie loves him quite as much as he does her, and I will bring them together in my own way, and when September comes he shall not go to California alone;" so in reply to Walter's letter, he wrote: "You can go at once if you like, though I have in mind a pleasant surprise if you will wait until autumn," and as he wrote his own heart grew young and warm again, with fancying Walter's joy when he should say to him, "I know your secret, and you need not wait. Jessie loves you. Take her and be happy."

And as thoughts of his own daughter's possible bridal suggested to him another, he dipped his pen a second time, and added as a postscript:

"There is a rumor of a marriage to take place before long, and Jessie, I dare say, will wish you to be present, so perhaps you'd better wait."

Over the postscript Walter lingered long and anxiously. Was Jessie to be the bride? It would seem so, and yet there was madness in the thought. Once he resolved to go and see, and this he would perhaps have done had not the next mail brought him a confirmation of his fears. It was from his cousin, and read as follows:

> "Dear Walt:—You will be greatly surprised, I dare say, to hear that I have caught the bird at last, and the tenth of July, at eleven A. M., will see us one. It is sudden, I know; but all the better for that. She wanted to wait until fall and have a grand smash-up, but I, with her grandmother to back me, insisted upon its taking place immediately, and in a quiet way. We shall be married in church, and then go off to some watering-place. Her father does the handsome thing, and comes down with a cool 50,000 on her bridal day, but that's nothing for a millionaire. I'm more obliged to you, Walt, than I can well express for not interfering. At one time I was deuced jealous, but you behaved like a gentleman, and left me an open field, for which I thank you, and cordially invite you to the wedding.
>
> "By the way, Jessie says you know about that unfortunate affair with poor Nellie. Believe me, Walt, I loved that girl, and even now the thought of her takes my breath away; but she was too poor. Isn't it lucky Jessie is rich? You ought to see how delighted my grandmother-elect is with the match. But time hastens, and I must finish. Remem-

ber, July 10th, hour 11, from —— Church. Adieu.

"Bill Bellenger."

For a time after reading the letter Walter sat powerless to act or think. Then the storm burst upon him with overwhelming fury, and he raved like one bereft of reason. Jessie was lost to him forever, and, what was worse than all, she had proved herself unworthy of esteem by her heartless treachery. How could she so soon forget the little grave on the hillside? How could she plight her faith to one whom, only a few weeks since, she had denounced so strongly? Was there no truth in woman? Were they all as false as fair? Yes, they were, he said; and he laughed bitterly as he thought how, hereafter, he should hate the entire sex. Walter was growing desperate, and, in his desperation, he resolved to put the width of the western hemisphere between himself and the fickle Jessie Graham. He could go to California now as well as later, and he determined to start for New York that night. So with a hurried good-by to his family he left them, and scarcely knowing whether he were dead or alive, he took the express for the city.

It was morning when he reached there, and the Wall street thunder had already commenced. His first business was to ascertain that a vessel would sail that day for California,—his next to call on Mr. Graham and make the necessary explanations.

Mr. Graham was not at the office,—he was sick, the clerk said, and as Walter had neither the time nor the inclination to go all the way up-town to find him, he sat down and wrote to him what he would have said.

He was going to California, and the reason why he went Mr. Graham could perhaps divine; if not, Walter would tell him frankly that he could not stay in New York and see a man of William Bellenger's character married to the girl he loved better than he loved his life.

"I understand the business on which I am going thoroughly, I believe," he added in conclusion; "but if there is anything more which you wish to say, you can write it by the next steamer, and your directions shall be attended to most strictly."

This letter he left for Mr. Graham, and when the night shadows fell again on Deerwood, where in the large old kitchen the family talked of him, he sat upon the upper deck, listening, with an aching heart, to the surging of the waves, as they dashed against his floating home.

CHAPTER XIII.—EXPLANATIONS.

After Jessie's return to the city, several days had elapsed ere she met with William; and when at last she did, he saw at once that there was a change in her demeanor,—that she was unusually reserved; but this he hoped might arise from the sad scene through which she had recently passed, and as he was fast nearing a point when something must be done, he resolved upon a decisive step.

His attentions to Jessie must have prepared her for a proposal, he thought, and as it would be better for him to know his fate at once, so that in case she refused him, he could look elsewhere for aid, he determined to improve the present opportunity, which, so far as outward circumstances were concerned, seemed propitious.

Mr. Graham was away, and Mrs. Bartow kindly absented herself from the room, as was her custom when William was present. The night was rainy, too, and they would not be liable to interruption. Accordingly when Jessie spoke to him of Nellie's death, and gave him the note which had been entrusted to her, he drew his chair to her side, and, after a few preliminary coughs, plunged at once into business, and made her a formal offer of himself, saying that he knew he was very faulty, but she could mould him as she pleased, and make him a good and useful man.

With a cold, haughty look upon her face, Jessie Graham listened to him until he finished, and then said:

"You astonish me more than I can express, for if you do not respect yourself, I hoped you had too much respect for me to offer me a hand reeking, as it were, with the blood of sweet Nellie Howland. I know it all,—know the lie you imposed upon the poor, weak girl, whose only fault was loving you too well. And now do you think I would marry you? I have never seen the hour when I would have done so,—much less will I do it now. I despise you, William Bellenger,—despise you more than I can tell."

She ceased speaking, but her eyes never for a moment left the white face,

which had grown whiter as she proceeded, and which was now almost livid with chagrin, disappointment and rage.

"I have nothing to offer which can extenuate my sin toward Nellie," he answered, at last, "though I did love her,—better than I love you,—but for certain reasons, I preferred that you should be my wife. You refuse me, and I know well to whom I am indebted for the good opinion you are pleased to entertain of me; but I warn you now, fair lady, that my precious cousin is no better than myself."

"Hush!" interrupted Jessie. "You are not to speak of Walter in that way. Shall I consider our interview at an end?"

She spoke with dignity, and motioned him toward the door.

"Jessie," he stammered, as he started to leave the room, "I'll admit that I'm a wretch, but I trust that you will not think it necessary to repeat this to everybody."

"I have no desire to injure you," she answered, and walking to the window she stood until she heard him leave the house; then her unwonted calmness gave way, and she burst into a flood of tears, sometimes wishing she had spoken more harshly to him, and again regretting that she had been harsh at all.

She might have spared herself this last feeling, for at that moment the man she had discarded was pouring into the ear of Charlotte Reeves words similar to those he had breathed to her not an hour before. And Charlotte, knowing nothing of Nellie,—nothing of Jessie, save that the latter had been a dreaded rival, said *yes* to him, on condition that her father's consent could be won.

This last was an easy matter; for Mr. Reeves, who scarcely had an identity save that connected with his business, answered that in this thing Charlotte would do as she pleased, just as she did in everything else, adding in a kind of absent way:

"I always intended giving her fifty thousand the day she was married, and after that my duty will be done."

William could scarcely refrain from hugging his prospective father-in-law, but he wisely withheld the hug for the daughter, who, while he was closeted with the father, ran with the news to the grandmother.

The next morning, as Jessie sat at her work, she was surprised at a call from Charlotte, who, seating herself upon the sofa began at once to unfold the object of her visit.

"She was engaged, and Jessie could not guess to whom if she guessed a year."

"William Bellenger," Jessie said at once, her lip curling with scorn, and her cheek growing slightly pale.

"You wicked creature," exclaimed Charlotte, jumping up and giving her a squeeze. "What made you think of him? I always supposed he would marry you, and used to be awful jealous. Yes, it's William. He came in last night and

as pa chanced to be home in his room, the whole thing was arranged at once. I wanted so badly to wait till fall, and have a grand affair, but William is in such a hurry, and says it will be so much nicer to be a bride and belle, too, at Newport or Nahant, that I gave it up, and we are to be married the 10th of July, and go right off. Won't it be fun? I'm going to employ every dressmaker in the city, that is, every fashionable one. Father gave me a thousand dollars this morning to begin my shopping with," and the thoughtless light-hearted Charlotte clapped her hands and danced around the room in childish delight.

"Shall I tell her? Ought I to tell her?" Jessie thought, looking into the bright face of the young girl.

Then as she remembered how really good-natured William was, and that after all he might make a kind husband, she resolved to throw no cloud over the happiness of her friend, and congratulated her as cordially as it was possible for her to do. But Charlotte detected the absence of something in her manner, and imputing it to a feeling of chagrin at having lost Mr. Bellenger, she soon brought her visit to a close, and hastened home, telling her grandmother that she believed Jessie Graham was terribly disappointed, for she was as white as a ghost, and could scarcely keep from crying.

Meantime William, in a most singular state of mind, tried to play the part of a devoted lover to Charlotte,—avoided an interview with Jessie,—received quite indifferently the congratulations of his friends, and spent the remainder of his time in hating Walter, who, he believed, stood between him and Jessie Graham, just as he was sure he stood between him and his rich grandmother.

"I'll torment him while I can," he thought. "I'll make him think for a time, at least, that Jessie is lost," and sitting down he wrote the carefully-worded letter which had sent Walter so suddenly from home. "There," said he, as he read it over, "he can infer what he pleases. I don't say it's Jessie I'm going to marry; but he can think so, if he likes, and I don't envy him his cogitations."

William could not have devised a way of wounding Walter more deeply than the letter had wounded him, or of affecting Jessie more sensibly than she was affected, when she heard that Walter had gone to California.

"Not gone!" she cried, when her father brought to her the news. "Not gone, without a word for me. Oh, father, it was cruel! Didn't he leave a message for you?"

"Yes, read it if you choose," and Mr. Graham passed to her the letter which had greatly puzzled him.

Was it possible he had been deceived? Was it Charlotte Reeves, and not his daughter, whom Walter Marshall loved? It would seem so, and yet he could not be so mistaken; Walter must have been misinformed as to the bride. Jessie, perhaps, could explain; and he stood watching her face as she read the letter.

At first it turned very red, then spotted, and then, as the horrible truth burst upon her, it became as white as marble, and stretching out her arms she moaned:

"Oh, father, I never thought that he loved Charlotte Reeves. I most wish I were dead;" and with another cry, Jessie lay sobbing in her father's arms. Very gently he tried to soothe her; and then, when she was better, laid her upon the sofa, and kneeling beside her, kissed away the tears which rolled down her cheeks so fast.

She had betrayed her secret, or rather it had been betrayed to herself, and winding her arms around her father's neck, she whispered:

"I didn't know that before I,—that I,—oh, father,—I guess I do love Walter better than I supposed; and I guess I thought that he loved me. You won't tell anybody, will you?" and she laid her burning cheek against his own.

"Jessie," he said, "I have known for a long time that you loved Walter Marshall. Once I believed that he loved you. I believe so still. There is surely some mistake. I will inquire of William."

Mr. Graham did not know why he should seek for an explanation from William Bellenger, but he could think of nothing else, and after Jessie was somewhat composed, he sought an interview with that young man, asking him if he knew of any reason why his cousin should start so suddenly for California, without a word from any one.

"I should suppose he might have waited until after your marriage with *Miss Reeves*?" and Mr. Graham fixed his eyes upon Will, who colored slightly as he replied:

"Oh, yes, I wrote to him about it, and invited him to be present."

Mr. Graham was puzzled. If William wrote as he said, Walter could not have been deceived, and he wended his way homeward, quite uncertain how to act. At last, he decided that as he must write to Walter by the next steamer, he would take particular pains to speak of Charlotte as having been the bride, and this might, perhaps, bring Walter back sooner than was expected. Still he would not tell this to Jessie, lest she should be disappointed, and day after day her face grew less merry than of old, until at last the kind-hearted Charlotte, who watched her narrowly, threw her arms around her neck, and said to her, entreatingly:

"What is it, Jessie? Did you love William, and does it make you so unhappy to have him marry me?"

"No, no," and Jessie recoiled from her in horror. "I never loved William Bellenger,—never saw the day when I would have married him,—never, as I live!" and she spoke so indignantly that Charlotte, a little piqued, replied:

"Don't scream so loud, if you didn't. I only asked you because I knew something had ailed you ever since I was engaged. Others notice it too; and, if I were you, I'd try to appear cheerful, even if I did not feel it."

Greatly as Jessie was annoyed, she resolved to act upon this advice, for she would not have people think that she cared for William Bellenger. So she roused herself from the state of listless indifference into which she had fallen, and Charlotte Reeves no longer had reason to complain of her dullness, or non-appreciation of the bridal finery, which was so ostentatiously displayed, and which greatly annoyed Mrs. Bartow.

This lady was secretly chagrined at what she considered Charlotte's good luck, and at Mrs. Reeves' evident exultation, and she took great pains to let the latter know that she did not care and on the whole was glad William was going to do so well. Jessie would never have accepted him, even if she had had a chance; and for the sake of dear Mrs. Bellenger she was pleased to think the Reeves family was so respectable. Of course she never did believe that ridiculous story about the tin-peddler, and she couldn't see who had reported it. She had been asked about it, two or three times, and had always told exactly how the story originated, and said it was not true.

This speech she made in substance several times to Mrs. Reeves, when that lady was congratulating herself upon her granddaughter's brilliant prospects, and insisting that "Jessie was a year the oldest; basing her assertion upon the fact that she bought her camel's hair shawl so many years ago, and Jessie was born that very day."

"And I," retorted Mrs. Bartow, "remember that my daughter Graham's silver tea-set was sent home the morning after Jessie was born, and that has the date on it, so I can't be wrong. And another thing which makes me sure, is that a raw country girl we had just hired insisted that it was tin, saying her father was a peddler, and she guessed she knew."

At the mention of tin of any kind, Mrs. Reeves always seemed uneasy; and as Mrs. Bartow frequently took occasion to name the offensive article in her hearing, she resolved at last to steal a day or so from the excitement at home, and see if she too, could not find a weapon with which to fight her friend.

Accordingly, one morning, when Mrs. Bartow called to tell her that "people said William Bellenger would drink and gamble too," she was informed that the lady was out of town, and so she contented herself with repeating the story to Charlotte, adding that she didn't believe it herself and she wondered why people would talk so.

Charlotte wondered too, and said that those who repeated such scandal were quite as bad as the originators, a remark in which Mrs. Bartow fully concurred, saying, "if there was anything she despised it was a talebearer."

The next day about one as she sat with Jessie in her little sewing-room, Mrs. Reeves was announced, and after a few preliminary remarks, began:

"By the way, my dear Mrs. Bartow, I have been to Springfield, and remem-

bering what you said about that woman in Deerwood, I thought I'd run over there and see her just to convince her that she was mistaken in thinking she ever knew me or my father."

"Yes, yes. It's pretty warm in here, isn't it? Jessie, hadn't you better go where it is cooler?" said Mrs. Bartow, and Jessie replied:

"I am not uncomfortable, and I want to hear about Deerwood. Isn't it a pleasant old town?" and she turned to Mrs. Reeves, who answered:

"Charming! and those Marshalls are such kind, worthy people. But what an odd specimen that Aunt Debby is; and what a wonderful memory she has, though, of course, she remembers some things which never could have been, for instance——"

"Jessie, will you bring me my salts, or will you go away, it's so close in here," came faintly from the distressed lady, who had dropped her work, and was nervously unbuttoning the top of her dress.

"Do you feel choked?" asked Mrs. Reeves, while Jessie answered:

"I'll get your salts, grandma; but I don't wish to go out, unless Mrs. Reeves has something to tell which I must not hear."

"Certainly not," returned Mrs. Reeves. "It's false, I'm sure, just as false as that ridiculous story about the tin peddler and factory girl. I convinced Aunt Debby that she was wrong. It was some other Charlotte Gregory she used to know."

"Of course it was; I always said so," and a violent sneeze followed the remark and a too strong inhalation of the salts.

"As I was saying," persisted Mrs. Reeves, "Aunt Debby knows everybody who has lived since the flood, and even pretended to have known you, after I told her your name was Lummis, before you were adopted by Mrs. Stanwood."

"Oh, delightful," cried Jessie. "Do pray give us the entire family tree, root and all. Was grandma's father a cobbler, or did he make the *tin things* yours used to *peddle*?" and the saucy black eyes looked archly at both the ladies.

"I don't know what her father was," said Mrs. Reeves, "but Aunt Debby pretends that Martha Lummis,—Patty, she called her——"

"That's the name in the old black book, grandma, that you said belonged to a friend," interrupted Jessie, and while grandma groaned, Mrs. Reeves continued:

"Said that Patty did housework in Hopkinton, and I believe could milk *seventeen* cows to her one!"

"Oh," said Jessie, "how I wish I could milk. It's such fun. I did try once, but got the tiniest stream, and Walter said I'd dry the cows all up. I wish you could hear *him* when he first begins. It sounds like hail stones rattling on the *tin pail.* Did yours sound so, grandma, and did you buy the pail of Mr. Gregory?"

Mrs. Reeves, by this time, began to think that Jessie might be making fun

of her, and smothering her wrath, she proceeded:

"I shouldn't care anything about the housework or the milking, but I'll confess I *was* shocked, when she spoke of——"

"I certainly am going to faint, Jessie, do go out," gasped the white figure in the rocking chair, while Jessie rejoined:

"I don't see how my going out can help you." Then crossing over to her grandmother, she whispered, "Brave it out. *Don't* let her see that you care."

Thus entreated Mrs. Bartow became somewhat composed, and her tormentor went on:

"This Patty Lummis, Aunt Debby said, was blood relation to *three Thayers*, who were hung some years ago for murdering *John Love*, or some such name. I remember hearing of it at the time, but did not suppose I knew any of their relatives."

"Horrid!" cried Jessie, and then, as she saw how white her grandmother was, she added quickly:

"And didn't she say too, that the Gregorys *ought* to have been hung if they weren't?"

"Such impertinence," muttered Mrs. Reeves, while Jessie rejoined:

"There are very few families, which, if traced to the fountain head, have not a halter, or a peddler's cart, or a smell of tallow, or shoemaker's wax——"

"Or a woollen factory, Jessie. Don't forget that," suggested Mrs. Bartow, and Jessie added, laughingly:

"Yes, a woollen factory, and as you and grandma do not belong to the few who are exempt from a stain of any kind, if honorable work can be called a stain, I advise you to drop old scores, and let the past be forgotten."

"I'm sure I'm willing," sobbed Mrs. Bartow. "I never did tell that ridiculous story to but one, and she promised not to breathe it as long as she lived."

"And will you take it back?" chimed in Mrs. Reeves.

"Ye-es. I'll do everything I can toward it," answered the distracted old lady. "I couldn't help those *Thayers*. I never saw them in my life, and they were only second cousins."

"*Fourth* to you, then," and Mrs. Reeves nodded to Jessie, who replied:

"I don't care if they were *first*. Everybody knows me, and my position in society does not depend upon what my family have been before me, but upon what I am myself. Isn't it so, father?" and she turned to Mr. Graham, who had just entered the room.

"I don't know the nature of your conversation," he replied, "but I overheard your last remarks, and fully concur with you, that persons are to be respected for themselves and not for their family; neither are they to be despised for what their family or any member of it may do."

There was a tremor in his voice, and looking at him closely, Jessie saw that he was very pale, and evidently much agitated.

"What is it, father?" she cried, forgetting the *three Thayers* and thinking only of Walter. "What has happened?"

Mr. Graham did not reply to her, but turning to Mrs. Reeves, he said:

"Excuse me, madam, but I think your duty calls you home, where poor Charlotte needs your sympathy."

"Why *poor* Charlotte?" replied Jessie, grasping his arm. "Is William sick or dead?"

"He has been arrested for forgery. I may as well tell it first as last," and the words dropped slowly from Mr. Graham's lips.

"*Forgery!* William arrested! It's false!" shrieked Mrs. Reeves, and the salts which Mrs. Bartow had used so vigorously a little time before changed hands, while Jessie passed her arm around the lady to keep her from falling to the floor. "It's false. He never forged. Why should he? Isn't he rich, and a Bellenger?" she kept repeating, until at last Mr. Graham answered:

"It is too true, my dear madam, that for some time past Mr. Bellenger has been engaged in a systematic course of forging, managing always to escape detection, until now, it has been clearly proved against him, and he is in the hands of the law."

There was no reason why Mrs. Reeves, at this point, should think of Walter, but she did, and fancying that her auditors might possibly be drawing comparisons between the two cousins she said:

"It's the *Marshall* blood with which he is tainted."

"Marshall blood!" repeated Jessie, indignantly. "I'd like to know by what chemical process you have mingled the Marshall blood with William Bellenger's."

Mrs. Reeves could not explain. She only knew that she was completely overwhelmed with surprise and mortification, and she seemed so bewildered and helpless that Mr. Graham ordered his carriage, and sent her to No.—, whither the sad news had preceded her, and where Charlotte lay fainting and moaning in the midst of her bridal finery, which would never be worn. She had noticed William's absence from the house for the last twenty-four hours, and was wondering at it, when her father, roused by the shock from his usual state of quiet passiveness, rushed in, telling her in thunder tones that her affianced husband had been guilty of forging Graham & Marshall's name, not once, not twice, but many times, until at last he was detected and under arrest.

"He'll go to State prison, girl—do you hear? To State prison! Why don't you speak, and not sit staring at me with that milky face?"

Poor Charlotte could not speak, but she fainted and fell at the feet of her father, who became himself at once, and bending kindly over her brought her

back to life. It was not that Charlotte loved William so very much. It was rather her pride which was wounded, and she moaned and wept until her grandmother came, and with her lamentations and reproaches, so wholly out-did all Charlotte had done, that the latter grew suddenly calm, and without a word or a tear, sat motionless, while the old lady raved on, one moment talking as if they were all going to prison together, and the next giving Charlotte most uncomfortable squeezes to think she was not the wife of a forger after all.

————

The *three Thayers* were for the time forgotten, and when at Charlotte's request Jessie came to see her, accompanied by her grandmother, Mrs. Reeves kissed the latter affectionately, whispering in her ear:

"We'll not mind the past, for the present has enough of trouble and disgrace."

Great was the excitement among William's friends, the majority of whom turned against him, saying "they expected it and knew all the time that something was wrong."

Mr. Graham stood by and pitied the cowed and wretched young man, and pitied him all the more that his father kept aloof, saying:

"He's made his bed and he may lie in it."

At the first intimation of the sad affair, Mrs. Bellenger hastened home, but neither her money nor her influence, and both were freely used, could disprove the guilt of the young man, who awaited his trial in a state of mind bordering on despair.

Only once did he speak of Charlotte, and that on the day which was to have seen her his bride. Then, with Mr. Graham, he talked of her freely, asking what effect it had on her, and appearing greatly agitated when told that she was very ill, and would see none of her friends but Jessie.

"God bless her,—Jessie, I mean," he said, "and bless poor Lottie, too. I am sorry I brought this trouble upon her. I thought to pay the notes with her money, and I resolved after that to be a better man. I am glad Nellie did not live to see this day. Do you think that up in Heaven she knows what I have done and prays for me still?"

Then, as talking of Nellie naturally brought Walter to his mind, he confessed to Mr. Graham how his letter had sent his cousin away.

"I thought once to win Jessie for myself," he said, "and so I broke poor Nellie's heart. I purposely withheld the note the deacon sent to Jessie, bidding her come ere Nellie died. And this I did, because I feared what the result might be of Jessie's going there. But my sin has found me out, and I shall never cross

Walter's path again; it's Jessie he loves; tell her so, and bring the light back to her eyes, which were heavy with tears when I saw her last."

Mr. Graham did tell her, and when next she went to the chamber where Charlotte lay sick of a slow fever, there was an increased bloom upon her cheek and a brighter flash in her dark eye, while from her own great happiness she strove to draw some comfort for her friend, who would suffer no other one of her acquaintance to approach her.

Jessie alone could comfort her, Jessie alone knew what to say, and the right time to say it, and when at last the trial came, and the verdict of "guilty" was pronounced, it was Jessie who broke the news as gently as possible to the pale invalid.

Locked in each others' arms they wept together; the one, tears of pity; the other, tears of regret and mortification over the misguided man whose home for the next five years would be a dreary prison.

There was no going to Saratoga that summer, no trip to Newport; and when the gay world congregated there asked for the sprightly girl who had been with them the season before, and for the old lady who carried her head so proudly and sported such superb diamonds, the answer was a mysterious whisper of some dire misfortune or disgrace which had befallen them, and then the dance and the song in which Charlotte had ever been the first to join, went on the same as before.

Gradually as Charlotte recovered her strength and her spirits, she began to wish for some quiet spot where no one knew her, and remembering dear old Deerwood, now a thousand times more dear since she knew of Walter's love, Jessie told her of its shadowy woods, its pleasant walks, its musical pines with the rustic seat beneath, and Charlotte, pleased with her rural picture, bade her write and ask if she could come.

So Jessie wrote, and in less than one week's time two girls walked again upon the mountain side, or paused by the little grave where Nellie was buried. Upon the bank close to the mound a single rose was growing,—the last of the sisterhood. It had been late in unfolding its delicate leaves, and when at last, it was full blown, Jessie picked it, and pressing it carefully, sent it with the message, "it grew near Nellie's grave," to the weary man whose life was now one of toil and loneliness.

CHAPTER XIV.—THE STRANGER NURSE.

The regular boarders at the —— Hotel were discussing their dinner with all the haste and greediness which characterizes their Eastern brethren. The first and second courses had been removed, and the merits of the dessert were about to be tested when for a moment the operation ceased, while the operators welcomed back to their midst a middle-aged man, who for a few weeks had been absent from the city.

That Captain Murdock was a general favorite, could readily be seen by the heartiness of his greeting from his friends, and that he was worthy of esteem, none knew better than the hundreds of poor and destitute who had often been relieved and comforted by his well-filled purse, and words of genuine sympathy. Possessed of unbounded wealth, he scattered it about him with no miserly hand, and many a child of poverty blessed him for the great good done to him.

"Well, captain," said one of the boarders, "glad to see you back. We've been mighty lonesome without you. Found your room occupied, didn't you?"

"Yes," returned the man addressed as captain, "the landlord tells me he took the liberty to put the young man in there because the house was so full. Of course, he couldn't know that he would be too sick to vacate the premises in the morning; but it's all right. I, who have slept so often on the ground, don't mind camping on the floor now and then."

Here a dozen voices interposed offering him a part or the whole of their rooms, but the good-natured captain declined them all, saying "he should do very well, and perhaps the young man would not be sick long. Did they know where he came from? Was he a stranger or a resident in California?"

A stranger, they replied, adding that he came from New York about two weeks before, and had almost immediately been taken sick, and that was all they knew about him.

Dinner being over, Captain Murdock went up to his room, not to see the sick man particularly, but because he wished to remove to another apartment a few articles which he would probably need.

Walter, for it was he, was sleeping, while near him, in an arm-chair, dozed the old crone who had been hired to nurse him. One glance at the former convinced the captain that he was poorly cared for and must necessarily be very uncomfortable. Still he might not have interfered, had not the sick man moaned uneasily in his sleep, and turning on his side, murmured the name of *father*.

Never had Captain Murdock been thus addressed,—no infant arms had ever twined themselves around his neck,—no sweet voice called him *father*,—and yet this one word thrilled him with an undefinable emotion, awakening at once within his bosom feelings of tender pity for the sick man, who seemed so young and helpless.

"Poor boy," he whispered, "he is dreaming of his home away in the East, and

of the loved ones who little know how much he needs their care," and advancing toward the bedside, he adjusted the tumbled pillows, smoothed the soiled spread, pushed back the tangled hair from the burning forehead, and was turning away when Walter awoke, and fixing his bright eyes upon him, said faintly, "Don't go."

Thus entreated the captain sat down beside him, while the old nurse roused up, exclaiming:

"Sakes alive, captain! is that you? Ain't you feared the fever's catching? He's got it mightily in his head, and keeps a goin' on about Jessy, his brother, I guess, or some chap he know'd at home."

At the mention of Jessie, Walter turned his eyes again upon the captain, and said.

"Jessie's married. Did you know it?"

"Yes, I know it," answered the captain, thinking it best to humor the whim. "Whom did she marry?"

"William," was the reply, "and I loved her so much."

At this point the nurse arose, saying:

"Bein' you're here, I'll go out a bit," and she left the room.

Walter looked uneasily after her, and when she was gone, said:

"Lock the door, and keep her out. Don't let her come back. She's one of Macbeth's witches, and makes one think of Jessie's grandmother, who won't let me talk of love to Jessie, until I am—well, no matter what. Do you know my father?"

"No," and the captain shook his head mournfully, while Walter continued:

"Are you anybody's father?"

"I don't know," and the voice was sadder than when it spoke before.

"I'm looking for my father," Walter said, "just as Telemachus looked for his. Do you know Ulysses?"

The captain had heard of Ulysses, and the mention of him carried him back to an old stone house on the hill, where he had read the wonderful adventures of the hero.

"Well," Walter continued, "I am hunting for my father, and Jessie cried up in the pines when I told her about him, and how her father testified against him. Do you know Mr. Graham?"

"Who?" screamed the captain, bounding to his feet, and bending so near to Walter that his hot breath stirred the thick brown hair. "Do I know whom?"

But Walter refused to answer, or even to speak; the captain's manner had startled him, or it may be there was something in the keen eye fixed so earnestly upon him, which held him speechless.

For a moment the two gazed fixedly at each other,—the old man and the young,—the latter with a bright, vacant stare, while the other sought for some

token to tell him that it was not without a reason his heart beat so fast with a hope of he scarcely knew what.

"I will inquire below," he said at last, as he failed to elicit any information from Walter, and going to the office, he turned the leaves of the register back to the day when he had left three weeks before.

Then with untiring patience he read on and on, read Jones and Smith, and Smith and Brown, some with wives and some without, some with daughters, some with sisters, and some alone, but none as yet were sent to No. 40. So he read on again and then at last he found the name he sought,—Walter Marshall.

"Thank God! thank God!" he uttered faintly, and those who heard only the last word thought to themselves:

"I never knew the captain *swore* before."

With great effort he compelled himself to be calm, and when at last he spoke none detected in his voice a trace of the shock that name had given him, bringing back at once the gable-roofed farm-house far away, the maple tree where his name was cut, the brown-haired wife, the stormy night when the wind rushed sobbing past the window where he stood and looked his last on her, the mother long since dead, and the father who believed him guilty.

All this passed in rapid review before his mind, and then his thoughts came back to the present time, and centered themselves upon the restless, tossing form which, up in No. 40, had said to him:

"Do you know my father?"

"What is it, captain?" the landlord asked. "Your face is white as paper."

"I am thinking," and the captain spoke naturally, "I am thinking that I will take care of that young man. I find I know his people, or used to know them, rather. Dismiss that imbecile old woman," and having said so much he left the room and fled up the stairs seeing nothing but that name as it looked upon the page,—Walter Marshall.

He repeated it again and again, and in the tone with which he did so there was a peculiar tenderness, such as mothers are only supposed to feel toward their children.

"Walter Marshall,—my boy,—Ellen's and mine," and over the boy, which was Ellen's and his, the man, old before his time, bent down and wept great teardrops, which fell upon the white handsome face, which grew each moment more and more like the young girl wife, whose grave the broken-hearted husband had never looked upon.

"Why do you cry?" asked Walter, and the captain replied:

"I had a son once like you, and it makes me cry to see you here so sick. I am going to take care of you, too, and send that woman off."

"Oh! will you?" was Walter's joyful cry, "and will you stay until I find my

father?"

"Yes, yes, I will stay with you always," and again Seth Marshall's lips touched those of his son.

"Isn't it funny for men to kiss men?" Walter asked, passing his hand over the spot. "I thought they only kissed women, girls like Jessie, and I don't kiss her now. I haven't since she was a little thing and gave me one of her curls. It's in my trunk, with a lock of mother's hair. Did you know *mother*, man?"

"Yes, yes, oh, Heaven, yes," and the man thus questioned fell upon his knees, and hiding his face in the bed-clothes, sobbed aloud.

His grief distressed Walter, who, without understanding it clearly, felt that he was himself in some way connected with it, and laying his hand upon the gray hair within his reach, he smoothed it caressingly, saying:

"Don't cry. It won't do any good. I used to cry when I was a boy and thought of poor, dear father."

"Say it again. Say, 'poor, dear father,' once more," and the white, haggard face lifted itself slowly up and crept on until it lay beside the feverish one upon the pillow.

Thus it was the father met his son, and all through the afternoon he sat by him, soothing him to sleep, and then bending fondly over him to watch him while he slept.

"He is some like Ellen," he whispered, "but more like me, as I was in my early manhood, and yet, as he lies sleeping, there is a look about him that I have often seen on Ellen's face when she was asleep. Darling wife, we little thought when we talked together of our child, that the first time I beheld him would be beneath the California skies, and he a bearded man."

Then, as he remembered what Walter had said of the hair, he opened the lid of the trunk, and hunted until he found Jessie's raven curl, and the longer, browner tress. He knew in a moment that it was Ellen's hair,—and kissing it reverently he twined it about his fingers just as he used to when the soft eyes it shaded looked lovingly into his.

"Walter's is like it," he said, stealing to the bedside, and laying it among the brown locks of his son. "Bless my boy,—bless my boy!" and going back again, he placed the lock of hair beside this jet black ringlet wondering who Jessie was, and why she had married another.

It was growing dark when Walter awoke, but between himself and the window he saw the outline of his friend, and knowing he was not alone, fell away again to sleep, resting better that night than he had done before since the commencement of his illness.

For many days Captain Murdock watched by him, and when at last the danger was passed, and Walter restored to consciousness, he was the first to know

it, and bending over him he breathed a prayer of thanksgiving for the restoration of his son.

"Who are you?" Walter asked after objects and events had assumed a rational form. "Who are you, and why have you been so kind to me, as I am sure you have?"

"I am called Captain Murdock," was the answer "This is my room; the one I have occupied for a long, long time. I left the city some weeks ago on business and during my absence you came. As the house was full the landlord put you in here for one night, but in the morning you were too ill to be moved. You have been very sick, and as your nurse was none of the best, I dismissed her and took care of you myself, because if I had a son in a strange land I should want some one to care for him, and I only did what your father would wish me to do. You have a father, young man?"

The question was put affirmatively, and without looking at the eyes fixed so intently upon him, Walter colored crimson as he replied:

"I hope I have, though I don't know. I never saw him except in dreams."

Captain Murdock turned toward the window for a moment, and then in a calm voice continued:

"I will not seek your confidence. You said some strange things in your delirium, but they are safe with me,—as safe as if I were the father you never saw. This came for you some days ago," and he held up Mr. Graham's letter, the sight of which had wrung a cry of pain from his own lips, for he knew whose hand had traced the name that letter bore.

"And has anybody written to the people at home?" Walter asked, and Captain Murdock replied:

"Yes, the landlord sent a few lines, saying that you were ill, but well cared for. He directed to 'Walter Marshall's Friends, Deerwood, Mass.,' for by looking over your papers, we found your family lived there. A grandfather, perhaps, if you have no father?" and Seth Marshall waited anxiously for the answer which would tell him if his aged sire were yet numbered among the living.

In his ravings Walter had never spoken of him, and the heart, not less a child's because its owner was a man, grew faint with fear lest his father should be dead. Walter's reply, however, dissipated all his doubt.

"Yes, my grandfather lives there, but this is not from him," and breaking open the envelope, Walter read what Mr. Graham had written, heeding little what was said of business, scarcely knowing, indeed, that business was mentioned at all, in his great joy at finding that Charlotte and not Jessie was William's chosen bride.

"He deceived me purposely," he thought, and then, as he realized more and more that Jessie was not married, he said aloud, "I am so glad, so glad."

"You must have good news," the captain suggested, and Walter answered:

"Yes, blessed news," then as there came over him a strong desire to talk of the good news with some one, he continued:

"Tell me, Captain Murdock, have I talked of Jessie Graham?"

The captain started, for he had not thought of Jessie as the daughter of Richard Graham.

"Yes," he answered, "you said that she was married."

"But she isn't," interrupted Walter. "It was a lie imposed upon me by that false-hearted William Bellenger."

"You spoke of him, too," said the captain, "and I fancied he might be your cousin. You see I am tolerably well posted in your affairs," and the pleasant smile which accompanied these words, disarmed Walter at once from all fear that his secrets would be betrayed.

"What else did you learn?" he asked, and the captain replied:

"There is some trouble about your father. He robbed a bank, didn't he?" and there was a strange look in the keen eyes which did not now rest on Walter's face, but sought the floor as if doubtful of the answer.

"Never, never!" Walter exclaimed, with an energy which brought the blood to his pale cheek, and tears to the eyes riveted upon the carpet. "He never did that."

"He has been proved innocent, then?" and in the voice which asked the question there was a trembling eagerness.

"Not proved so to the world, but I need no proof," returned Walter. "I never for a moment thought him guilty."

Then after a pause, he added. "I have, I see, unwittingly divulged much of my family history, and lest you should have received a wrong impression, I may as well confess the whole to you, but not now, I am too much excited, too tired to talk longer."

He was indeed exhausted, and for several hours he lay quite still, saying but little and thinking happy thoughts of home and *Jessie*, who Mr. Graham wrote, "mourned sadly over his absence."

Suddenly remembering the message he had left, and which would seem to say he loved Charlotte Reeves, he bade the captain bring to him pen and paper, and with a shaking hand he wrote to Mr. Graham:

"I am getting better fast, thanks to Captain Murdock, who, though a stranger, has been the best of friends, and kindest nurse. Forgive me, Mr. Graham. I thought the bride was Jessie. Don't hate me, I could not help it, and I had learned to love her before I heard from Mrs. Bartow that you would be displeased. I will overcome it if I can, for I promised the grandmother I would not talk of love to Jessie, until my father was proved innocent."

This was all he had strength to write, and when the letter was finished, he relapsed into a thoughtful, half dreamy state, from which he did not rouse for a day or two. Then, with strength renewed, he called the captain to him, and bidding him sit down beside him, told him the whole story of his life, even to his love for Jessie Graham,—which he must not tell until his father were proved innocent.

There was a smothered groan in the direction where Mr. Marshall sat, and inwardly the unfortunate man prayed:

"How long, dear Lord, oh, how long must thy servant wait?"

"Mr. Graham may release you from that promise," he said, "and then you surely would not hesitate."

"Perhaps not," Walter answered, for in spite of what Mrs. Bartow had said, he, too, entertained a secret hope that Mr. Graham would in some way interfere for him.

"What would be the result if your father should return to Deerwood?" Captain Murdock asked. "Would they proceed against him?"

"Oh, no! oh, no;" said Walter. "It was so long ago, and everybody who knew him speaks well of him now. I have often wished he would come home, and when I was a little boy, I used to watch by the window till it grew dark, and then cry myself to sleep. Did I tell you his arm-chair stands in the kitchen corner now just where he left it that night he went away! It was a fancy of grandpa's that no one should ever sit in it again, and no one has, but Jessie. She would make a playhouse of it, in spite of all we could say. I wish you could see Jessie and grandfather and all."

The captain wished so, too, and in his dreams that night, he was back again by the old hearth stone, sitting in the chair kept for him so long, and listening to his father's voice blessing his long-lost son.

All this might be again, he said, when he awoke but his young wife, whose face he saw, just as it looked on her bridal day, would not be there to meet him, and the strong man wept again as he had not done in many years, over the blight which had fallen so heavily upon him.

Rapidly the days and weeks went by, and then there came letters both from Mr. Graham and Mrs. Bellenger, telling how the wedding song had been changed into a wail of sorrow, and that the elegant William Bellenger was branded as a villain. Mr. Graham, too, spoke of Jessie, saying toward the close:

"You told me no news, dear Walter, when you said you loved my daughter. I knew it long ago and I have watched you narrowly, to see if you were worthy of her. That I think you are, I prove to you by saying, that to no young man of my acquaintance, would I entrust her happiness so willingly as to you, and had you talked to me freely upon the subject, you would not, perhaps, have been in

California now. Your remark concerning Mrs. Bartow reminded me of what she once told me, and when I questioned her again upon the subject, demanding to know the truth, she confessed the falsehood she imposed on you, by saying I did not wish you to marry Jessie. I can find nothing to excuse her save her foolish pride, which will probably never be subdued. Still she is your stanch friend now, just as she is poor William's bitter enemy. You have said you would not talk of love to Jessie until your father was proved innocent. This, my dear Walter, may never be, even if he is living, which is very doubtful. So why should you hesitate. You have my free consent to say to her whatever you think best to say. She is in Deerwood, now, with poor Lottie, who is sadly mortified at what she considers her disgrace. I am doing what I can for William, so is his grandmother; but his father refuses to see him or even hear his name spoken. Unfortunate Will, he seems penitent, and has acknowledged everything to me, even the wicked part he acted toward you, by deceiving you. I thank Heaven every day that Jessie's choice fell on you, and not on him."

This letter made Walter supremely happy, and to Captain Murdock, in whom he now confided everything, he told how, immediately on his return to New York, he should ask the young lady to be his wife.

"And would you like your father to come back even though his guilt could not be disproved?" the captain asked, and Walter answered:

"Yes, oh, yes; but I'm afraid he never will. Poor father, if I could once look upon his face."

"You shall—you do!" sprang to the lips of Captain Murdock, but he forced the wild words back, and going away alone, he prayed, as he often did, that the load he had borne so long might be lifted from his heart, and that the sun of domestic peace, which had early set in gloom, might shine upon his later life.

CHAPTER XV.—GLORIOUS NEWS.

There was a package for Walter, who had now been some months in California,—a package of letters and papers both,—and with a beating heart he sat down to read, taking Mr. Graham's letter first, for that might have a message from Jessie.

It was glorious news which the letter contained, and it wrung a cry of delight from Walter, which was heard by the captain, who turned to see what it was that thus affected his companion.

"Listen, Captain Murdock," Walter exclaimed, "listen to this. *My father is proved innocent. Heyward was the robber,—he came back and confessed it the night before he died*, and——"

He did not finish the sentence, for, like a wild beast startled from its lair by a sudden fright, Captain Murdock bounded to his side, and, snatching the letter from him, devoured its contents at a glance then striking his hands together, he fairly screamed:

"Thank God! the year of jubilee has come,—the day I've waited for so long!"

Earnestly and half fearfully Walter gazed up into the marble face, and into the eyes that burned like coals of fire, seeing in them now, for the first time, a look like his grandfather. Then a suspicion of truth burst upon him, and springing up he caught the gray-haired captain by the arm, demanding faintly:

"Who are you? Tell me, or I shall die."

"I am your father, boy," and, opening his arms, the father received to his embrace his fainting son.

The news and the surprise combined were too much for Walter, and for some little time he lay upon the bed, whither his father had borne him, unconscious of the caresses, the words of love, the whispered blessings showered on him by one who felt now that he trod a different earth, and breathed a different air from what he had done for twenty-four long years.

"*Father*,"—how like music that word sounded in his ear when Walter said it at last, and how it wrung tears from eyes which, until recently, were unused to weep.

"Say it again, my son. Call me father often. 'Tis the name I've thirsted for, but never expected to hear," and the strong man, weak now as a woman, kissed lovingly the face of the handsome boy.

"Read it aloud," Walter said, pointing to the crumpled letter lying on the floor.

Mr. Marshall complied, and read in tremulous tones how Ralph Heyward, after an absence of eighteen years, had again asked shelter at the farm-house, saying he was tired and sick. His request was granted, and when the morning came he was too ill to leave his bed, but lay there for many days, kindly cared for by the deacon, to whom he made a full confession of his guilt, saying that *he*, and not Seth Marshall, robbed the Deerwood Bank; that it was what he intended to do when he came there that night, feigning drunkenness the better to cover his design.

He knew that Seth kept the keys in his pocket, and when sure that the

household were asleep, he arose, and putting on his victim's coat, cap and shoes, left the house stealthily, committed the theft, hid the money, and then as cautiously returned to his room, and was settling himself a second time into an apparently drunken sleep, when he heard some one up, looking, as he supposed, for the cause of the disturbance he had made in accidentally upsetting a chair as he left Seth Marshall's room. Then he was still again until the morning came, and the arrest was made.

At the examination, when he saw the terrible anguish of the young wife, he was half tempted to confess, but dared not, for fear of what might follow; so he kept his own counsel, and for a few years remained in the vicinity of Deerwood, hoping to hear something of the man he had so wronged, and then he went away to the West, wandering up and down with that burden of guilt upon his soul, until at last, knowing that he must die, he returned to Deerwood, and seeking out the farm-house, asked permission to lay his head again beneath its hospitable roof. This done, he acknowledged to the father how he had sinned against the son, and after making an affidavit of his guilt, died a penitent and, it was to be hoped, a better man.

"And now," wrote Mr. Graham in conclusion, "I wish I could convey to you some little idea of the present excitement in Deerwood. Everybody is talking of the disclosure, and of your father, who, were he here, would be a greater lion even than Lafayette in his day. And I wish that he were here. Poor Seth! God forgive me that I testified against him. I verily believed him guilty up to the hour when Heyward proved him innocent. Oh, if he only could come back to me again, and to the home where your aged grandfather prays continually that his sun may not go down until he has seen once more the face of his boy. Poor old man, it is a touching sight to see his lips move continually, and hear the words he whispers: 'God send him back, God send him back.' You know Aunt Debby always said, 'Seth allus was a good boy;' she repeats it now with ten-fold earnestness, as if it were a fact in which everybody concurred. It may be that your father is dead, and if so he cannot return; but if still living, I am sure we shall see him again, for I shall take means to have the story inserted in the papers far and near, so that it will be sure to meet his eye.

"Meanwhile, Walter, come home as soon as you are able to bear the journey. We want you here to share in our great joy. Leave the business, if it is not arranged, and come. We are waiting anxiously for you, and none more anxiously than Jessie. She has been wild with delight ever since I told her your father was innocent. Mrs. Bellenger, too, shares the general joy, and were yourself and your father here our happiness would be complete."

"We will go, too," cried Walter, "you as Captain Murdock at first, to see if they will know you. Oh, I wish it were now that we were there," and Walter's

dark eyes danced as he anticipated the meeting between the deacon and his son.

"Yes, we will go," Mr. Marshall answered, and then, after looking over the papers which Mr. Graham had sent, and which contained Heyward's confession, he sat down by Walter and told of his wanderings since that dreadful night when he left his home, branded as a thief and robber. "But first," said he, "let me tell you how I chanced to run away. I should never have done it but for Mr. Graham, who begged and entreated me to go."

"Mr. Graham!" exclaimed Walter. "Why, he, I thought, was your bail."

"So he was," returned the father, "but he wished me to come away for all that. He would rather lose all his fortune, he said, than know I was in prison, and sent there on his testimony. So he urged me to leave, contriving a way for me to do so, and even carrying me himself, that stormy night, many miles from Deerwood. I dreaded the State prison. I believe I would rather have been hung, and I yielded to his importunities on one condition only. I knew his father would be very indignant, and that people would censure him severely, too, if it were known he was in my secret, and, as I would not have him blamed, I made him promise to me solemnly that he would never tell that he first suggested my going and then helped me away. He has kept his promise, and it is well. I have ample means, now, for paying him all I owe, and many a time I have thought to send it to him, but I have been dead to all my friends so long that I decided to remain so. I wrote to him from Texas, asking for you all, and learning from him of Ellen's death, and of your birth. You were a feeble child, he said, and probably would not live. I had never seen you, my son, and when I heard that my darling was gone,—my mother, too,—and that my father and best friend still believed me guilty, I felt a growing coldness toward you all. I would never write home again, I said. I would forget that I ever had a home, and for a time I kept this resolution, plunging into vices of every kind,—swearing, gambling, drinking——"

"Oh father,—father!" said Walter, with a shudder. "You do not tell me true."

"It's all true, my boy, and more," returned the father, "but I was overtaken at last, by a terrible sickness, the result of dissipation in New Orleans. A sister of charity saved my life, and opened my heart to better things. Her face was like Ellen's, and it carried me back to other days, until I wept like a little child over my past folly. From that sick bed, I arose a different man, and then for years I watched the Northern papers to see if they contained anything like what we have just read. But they did not, and I said I cannot go home yet. I sometimes saw Mr. Graham's name, and knew that he was living, but whether you were dead or alive I could not even guess. Here, in California, where I have been for the last ten years, I have never met a single person from the vicinity of Deerwood. At first I worked among the mines, amassing money so fast as even to astonish myself. At length, weary of the labor, I left the mines and came to the city, where

I am known as Captain Murdock, the title having been first given to me in sport by some of my mining friends. Latterly I have thought of going home, for it is so long since the robbery, that I had no fears of being arrested, and I was about making up my mind to do so, when chance threw you in my way, and it now remains for you to say when we both shall start."

"At once,—at once," said Walter, who had listened intently to the story, giving vent to an occasional exclamation of surprise. "We will go in the very next steamer. I shall not have a chance to write, but it will be just as well. I wish to see if grandpa or Mr. Graham will recognize you."

Mr. Marshall had no objections to testing the recollections of his father, and he readily consented to go, saying to his friends that as New England was his birthplace he intended accompanying his young friend home.

"I can write the truth back to them," he thought, "and save myself much annoyance."

Thus it was arranged, and the next steamer for New York which left the harbor of San Francisco, bore on its deck the father and his son, both eager and expectant and anxious to be at the end of the voyage.

CHAPTER XVI.—THANKSGIVING DAY AT DEERWOOD.

The dinner table was nicely arranged in the "best room" of the farm-house, and Jessie Graham, with a happy look on her bright face, flitted in and out, arranging the dishes a little more to her taste, smoothing the snowy cloth, pausing a moment before the fire blazing so cheerfully upon the hearth, and then glancing from the window, across the frozen fields to the hillside where a new grave had been made since the last Thanksgiving Day.

"Dear Ellen!" she sighed, "there is no plate for her now,—no chair." Then, as she remembered an absent one, dearer far than Ellen, she thought, "I'll make believe *he's* here," and seeking Mrs. Howland, who was busy with her turkey, she said: "May I put a plate for Walter? It will please him when he hears of it."

"Yes, child," was the ready answer, and Jessie was hastening off, when a

feeble voice from the kitchen corner where the deacon sat, called her back:

"Jessie," the old man said. "Put Seth's arm-chair next to mine. It is the last Thanksgiving I shall ever see, and I would fancy him with me once more," and as Jessie turned toward the place where the leathern chair stood, she heard the words:

"God send him back,—God send him back."

"It is the deacon's wish," she whispered to her father, who, with Mrs. Bellenger, was also spending Thanksgiving at the farm-house, and who looked up surprised, as Jessie dragged from its accustomed post, the ponderous arm-chair, and wheeling it into the other room, placed it to the deacon's right.

The dinner was ready at last, and Mrs. Howland was only waiting for the oysters to boil, before she served them up, when Jessie gave a scream of joy, and dropping the dish of cranberries she held, ran off into the pantry, where, as Aunt Debby affirmed, she hid herself in the closet, though from what she was hiding it were difficult to tell. There was surely nothing appalling in the sight of *Walter*, who, alighting from the village omnibus, now stood upon the threshold, with Captain Murdock.

They had stayed all night in the city, where Walter had learned that Mr. Graham, Jessie and his grandmother, had gone to Deerwood to spend Thanksgiving Day.

"We shall be there just in time," he said to his father, when at an early hour they took their seat in the cars; but his father paid little heed, so intent was he upon noting the changes which more than twenty years had wrought in the localities with which he was once familiar.

As the day wore on, and he drew near to Deerwood, he leaned back in his seat, faint and sick with the crowd of memories which came rushing over him.

"Deerwood!" shouted the conductor, and looking from the window, he could scarcely believe it possible that this flourishing village was the same he had known among the hills. When he went away *one* spire alone pointed heavenward, now he counted *four*, while in the faces of some who greeted Walter again he saw the looks of those who had been boys with him, but who were fathers now to these grown-up young men.

"I am old," he sighed, and mechanically entering the omnibus, he folded his arms in moody silence, as they rattled down the street. But when the brow of the hill was reached, and Walter said: "See, father, there's our orchard," he started, and looked, not at the orchard, nor at the gable roof now fully in view, nor at the maple tree, but down the lane, along the beaten path, to where a tall monument gleamed white and cold in the gray November light.

"That's her's,—that's mother's," Walter said, following the direction of his father's eyes; then fearing that his father, by his emotions, should betray himself

too soon, he arose and sat by him, taking his hand, and saying tenderly:

"Don't give way. You have me left, and grandpa, and Aunt Mary, and Jessie,—won't you try to be calm?"

"Yes, yes," whispered the agitated man, and with a tremendous effort he was calm, as, standing in the well-remembered kitchen, he waited till the noisy outburst had somewhat subsided, and Walter been welcomed home.

But not a single thing escaped the notice of his keen eyes, which wandered round the room taking in each familiar object, and noticing where there had been a change.

There was none in Aunt Debby, he said,—wrinkled, gray, slight and straight as her high-backed chair,—just as he remembered her years ago,—just so she was now—her kerchief crossed as she wore it then,—her spectacles on her forehead,—her apron long, and meeting almost behind, and on the chair-post her satin bag with the knitting visible therefrom. She was the same, but the comely matron Walter called Aunt Mary, was she the blooming maiden he had left so long ago, and the elegant-looking stranger, with the unmistakable city polish, was that his early friend? It took him but an instant to think all this, and then his eyes fell upon the old man by the fire,—the man with the furrowed cheek, the bowed form, the silvery hair and shaking limbs,—who, like some giant oak which has yielded to the storms of many a winter, sat there the battered wreck of a once noble man. That was his father, but he would not call him so just then, and when Walter, turning at last, said: "This is Captain Murdock, the kind friend who took care of me," he went forward, taking first Aunt Debby's hand, then his sister Mary's, then Mr. Graham's, and now there was a slight faltering of manner, while his eyes sought the floor, for they could not meet the gaze fixed so curiously upon him.

"Grandpa, this is Captain Murdock," said Walter, while Captain Murdock advanced a step or so and took the shriveled hand, which had so often rested fondly on his head.

Oh, how Seth longed to kiss that feeble hand; but he dared not, and he was glad that Walter, by his loud, rapid talking, attracted the entire attention, leaving him to sit down unobserved, when the meeting between himself and Mrs. Bellenger was over. At her he had looked rather inquisitively, for she was his Ellen's mother, and his heart yearned toward her for the sake of his gentle wife.

Meanwhile Walter, without seeming to do so, had been watching for somebody, who, behind the pantry door, was trying to gain courage to come out.

"I'll look at him, anyway," she said, and Walter glanced that way just in time to see a profusion of raven curls and a shining, round black eye.

"Jessie," called Mr. Graham, who saw them too, "Jessie, hadn't you bet-

ter come out and gather up the cranberries you dropped so suddenly when the omnibus drove up?"

"Father, how can you?" and the young lady immediately appeared, and greeted Walter quite naturally.

He evidently was embarrassed, for he hastened to present her to Captain Murdock, who, feeling, intuitively, that he beheld his future daughter-in-law, took both her soft chubby hands in his and held them there, while he said, a little mischievously:

"I have heard much of you, Miss Jessie, from my so—, my friend, I mean," he added, quickly, correcting himself, but not so quickly that Jessie did not detect what he meant to say.

One by one she scanned his features, then the deacon's, then Walter's, and then, with a flash of intelligence in her bright eyes, turned to the latter for a confirmation of her suspicions. Walter understood her meaning, and with an answering nod, said softly:

"By and by."

"The dinner will be cold," suggested Mrs. Howland, and then the deacon rose, and leaning on his cane, walked into the adjoining room, when he took his seat at the head of the table.

"There's a chair for you," Jessie said to Walter who, following the natural laws of attraction, kept close to her side. "There's one for *you* and him, too, my old playhouse," and she pointed to the leathern chair.

"Sit here, Captain Murdock,—here," said Walter, hurrying on as he saw Mrs. Howland giving the stranger another seat than that.

"Walter," and there was reproach in the deacon's voice, "not in your father's chair."

"Yes, grandpa," said Walter, "Captain Murdock has been a father to me,—let him sit there for once."

So Captain Murdock sat there, his heart throbbing so loudly that Jessie, who was next to him, could hear it beat, and see his chin quiver, when the voice nearly eighty years old, was asking God's blessing on their Thanksgiving Dinner; thanking God for returning their boy to them, and finishing the prayer with the touching petition: "Send the other back! oh, send the other back!"

Owing to the presence of the captain, who was considered a stranger, not a word was spoken of Seth, until they arose from the table, when Walter, unable longer to keep still, said:

"And so my father is free from all blame?"

Involuntarily Jessie went up to him and put her arm in his, waiting breathlessly for what would follow next.

"Yes, Walter," returned the deacon, "my Seth is innocent. Heaven bless him

wherever he may be, and send him to me before I die, so I can hear him say he didn't lay it up against me,—my hardening my heart and thinking he was guilty. Poor Seth, poor Seth! I'd give my life to blot out all the past and have him with me just as he was before he went away."

Captain Murdock was standing with his face to the window, but, as the deacon ceased speaking, he turned, and going up to him, placed his hand on either shoulder and looked into his eyes.

The movement was a most singular one, and to Mr. Graham, who knew that there must be a powerful motive for the action, there came a suspicion of the truth; but none to the old man, whose eyes fell beneath the burning gaze riveted upon him.

"Who are you?" he asked in a bewildered tone, "why do you look at me so hard? He scares me; Walter, take him away."

"Grandpa, don't you know him?" and Walter drew near to them, but not until the old man's ear had caught the whispered name of "*Father*."

Then, with a scream of joy, he wound his feeble arms round the stranger's neck.

"Seth, boy, darling, Walter, am I going mad, or is it true? *Is it Seth?* Is it my boy? Tell me, Walter," and releasing their grasp, the shaking hands were stretched supplicatingly toward Walter, who answered:

"Yes, grandpa. *It's Seth.* I found him, and I have brought him home."

"Oh, Seth, Seth," and the hoary head bowed itself upon the neck of the stranger, while the poor old man sobbed like a little child. "I didn't expect it, Seth, though I've prayed for it so hard. Bless you, bless you, boy, I didn't mean to go against you. I would have died at any time to know that you were innocent. Forgive me, Seth, because I am so old and weak."

"I do forgive you," answered Seth. "It's all forgotten now, and I've come home to stay with you always till you die."

There was a hand laid lightly on Seth's shoulder, and turning, he looked into the face of Mr. Graham, which quivered with emotion, as he said:

"I, too, have need of your forgiveness."

"None, Richard, none," and locked in each other's arms, the friends long parted cancelled the olden debt, and in the heart of neither was there a feeling save that of perfect love.

Long and passionately Mrs. Howland wept over her brother, for his return brought back the past, and all that she had suffered since the night he went away.

Aunt Debby, too, was much affected, but did not omit her accustomed "He allus was a good boy."

Then Mrs. Bellenger approached, and offering her hand, said to him very kindly:

"You are dear to me for Ellen's sake, and though I never saw you until today, my heart claims you for a child. Shall I be your mother, Mr. Marshall?"

He could only reply by pressing the hand she extended, for his heart was all too full for utterance.

"Let me go away alone," he said at last, "to weep out my great joy," and opening the door of what was once his room, he passed for a time from their midst.

The surprise had apparently disturbed the deacon's reason, for even after his son had left him he continued talking just the same: "Poor Seth,—poor child, to think your hair should be so gray, and you but a little boy."

Then, when Seth returned to them he made him sit down beside him, and holding both his hands, smiled up into his face a smile far more painful than tears would have been.

"Seth's come home. Did you know it?" he would say to those around him, as if it were to them a piece of news, and often as he said it, he would smoothe the gray hair which seemed to trouble him so much.

Gradually, however, his mind became clearer, and he was able to understand all that Seth was telling them of his experience since the night he went away.

At last, just as the sun was setting, Mr. Marshall arose, and without a word, passed into the open air. No one watched him to see whither he went, for all knew that before he returned to them he would go down the lane, along the beaten path, to where the moonlight fell upon a little grave.

It was long before he came back, and when he did, and entered the large kitchen, two figures stood by the western window, and he thought the arm of the taller was thrown about the waist of the shorter, while the face of the shorter was very near to that of the taller. Advancing toward them and stroking the dark curls, he said, half playfully, half earnestly:

"I believe that as Mr. Marshall I have not greeted Jessie yet, so I will do it now. Are you to be my daughter, little girl?"

"Yes, she is," answered Walter, while Jessie broke away from them, and was not visible again that night.

But when, at a late hour, Mrs. Bellenger left the happy group still assembled around the cheerful fire, and sought her room, from the depths of the snowy pillows, where Jessie lay nestled, there came a smothered voice, saying, half timidly:

"This is the nicest Thanksgiving I ever had, and I shall remember it forever."

CHAPTER XVII.—CONCLUSION.

Four years have passed away since that Thanksgiving dinner, and for the deacon, who, then, did not expect to see another, there seem to be many yet in store. Hale, hearty and happy, he sits in his arm-chair, smoking his accustomed pipe; and when the villagers, who come often to see him, tell him how the old farm-house is improved, and how they should scarcely know it, he always answers:

"Yes, Seth has good taste, and Seth is rich. He could buy Deerwood, if he tried. He built those new houses for the poor down there by the river; he built the factory, too, and gives them all employment. Seth is a blessed boy."

Others, too, there were, besides the deacon, who called Seth Marshall blessed, and never since his return had a voice been raised against him.

After becoming somewhat accustomed to his new position as a free and respected man, his first wish was to modernize the farm-house a little more according to his ideas of taste and comfort. Once he thought to build a splendid mansion near by, but to this suggestion the father said:

"No; I like the old place best. The new house might be handsomer, but it would not be the one where you and I, and all of us were born, and your mother died. Wait till I'm dead, and then do as you please."

And so Seth is waiting, and as he waits he sets out trees and shrubbery, and beautifies a plot of ground, on which he will sometime erect a dwelling as a summer residence for his son, who lives in the city, and calls Mrs. Bartow grandma.

When the first Christmas snows were falling after his father's return, Walter made Jessie his bride, and there now plays at his fireside a chubby, black-eyed boy, whom they call Graham Marshall, and who spends more time in Deerwood than he does in New York. Quite as old as the hoary man in the corner, who sometimes calls him Walter, but oftener Seth, he "rides to Boston" on the deacon's knee, pulls the deacon's beard, wears the deacon's glasses, smokes a stick of candy, and spits in imitation of the deacon, and then falls away to sleep in the deacon's lap,—the two forming a most beautiful picture of old age and infancy together.

At Mr. Graham's house, there is a beautiful six-months' baby, whose hair looks golden in the sunlight, and whose eyes of blue are much like those of Ellen Howland. They call her Nellie, and in all the world there is nothing one-half so precious as this child to the broken, melancholy man, who often comes to see her, and when no one can hear him, whispers sadly:

"Sweet Nellie,—darling Nellie,—little snow drop!" But whether he means the infant in the crib, or the Nellie dead long ago, is difficult to tell.

For eighteen months he toiled inside the prison walls, and then the powerful influence of Mr. Graham, Seth Marshall and Walter combined, procured him a pardon. An humbled and a better man, he would not leave the city. He would rather remain, he said, and live down his disgrace, than have it follow him as it was sure to do. So he stayed, accepting thankfully a situation which Walter procured for him, and Mrs. Bellenger, when she saw that he was really changed, gladly gave him a home with herself, for she was lonely now that Walter was gone.

Old Mrs. Reeves was very much astonished that the Grahams and Marshalls should make so much of one who had been in State prison, and said:

"She was glad that Charlotte had married a Southern planter and gone to Mississippi, as there was no knowing what notions might have entered her brain."

Every summer there is a family gathering of the Grahams and Marshalls with Mrs. Bellenger and Mrs. Bartow at Deerwood, where the deacon seems as young and happy as any of them. And now, where our story opened we will bring it to a close, at the farm-house where the old man sits smoking in the twilight with his son and grandson, and great-grandson around him,—representatives of four generations, with a difference of nearly eighty years between the first and fourth.

The End.

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