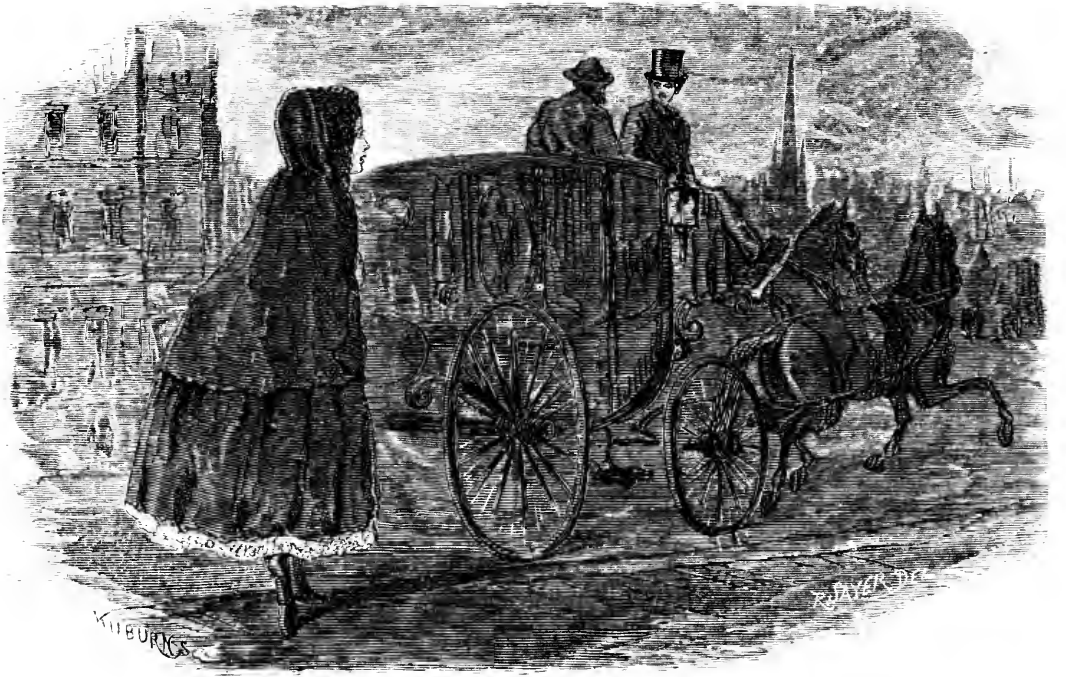

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THE

CHARLEY ROBERTS SERIES.

HOW EVA ROBERTS GAINED HER EDUCATION.

LEE & SHEPARD, BOSTON.

CHARLEY ROBERTS SERIES.

HOW EVA ROBERTS

GAINED HER EDUCATION.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "FORREST MILLS"—A PRIZE STORY.

ILLUSTRATED.

"*'TIS NOT THE WHOLE OF LIFE TO LIVE.*"

BOSTON:
LEE AND SHEPARD.
1870.

Electrotyped at the Boston Stereotype Foundry,
No. 19 Spring Lane.

TO

ANNIE H. SENTER

This Little Sketch of City Life

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

BY THE AUTHOR.

CHARLEY ROBERTS SERIES.

TO BE COMPLETED IN SIX VOLUMES.

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1. HOW CHARLEY ROBERTS BECAME A MAN.

2. HOW EVA ROBERTS GAINED HER EDUCATION.

3. HOME IN THE WEST.

(Others in preparation.)

PREFACE.

While so many are speaking and writing upon woman, her work, her sphere, and the position she ought to fill in life, I would go behind all these later questions, and send forth a story for the girls. I hope they will not find it uninteresting, and I trust to the womanly good sense which I have generally found in them, to receive and understand the true meaning of this little history.

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EVA ROBERTS' EDUCATION.

CHAPTER I.

ARRIVAL.

IT was four o'clock of a sultry July afternoon. Blazing sunshine burned down upon the hot and dusty walls of New York. Express wagons, coaches, drays, carriages, and the omnipresent 'bus thronged the streets. Slowly aunt Matilda's showy carriage wound its way among them, and from its window Eva Roberts saw, with careless eyes, the busy city sights that had once been so familiar. Everything seemed new and strange to her. For the first time she realized that she was to begin a life quite different from what she had ever known before, and that, too, among comparative strangers.

The carriage stood blocked before the steps of a handsome hotel. In and out, to and fro, a busy crowd was moving. A homesick feeling rose in Eva's heart

as she watched the unknown faces. Two young men came up, and, turning, stopped a moment on the steps. These were faces she had seen before. She could not remember when or where, but the surprise was just as pleasant, as she leaned forward to the window, with a glad smile lighting up her pale little face. The elder, and taller of the two observed her sudden interest. He lifted his hat with one delicately-gloved hand, and bowed with wonderful deference and grace. The carriage moved on just in season to intercept Eva's half-unconscious acknowledgment, and the two young men turned into the hotel.

"Who was that?" asked Dick Waters, as they passed through the long corridors.

"I'm sure I don't know," returned Mortimer Salsby, with an easy laugh. "She seemed unfeignedly glad to see me, and I endeavored to show my appreciation."

"Perhaps she would be glad to see you again. Why didn't you send a boy to follow the carriage?"

"Send boys yourself, if you want. That isn't my way. I believe in fate. If I am to meet her again, I suppose I shall; if not, there is a good deal else in the world, and I shall not suffer for amusement. Besides, I think I have seen the face somewhere before to-day."

"The turnout is bran new."

Mortimer did not trouble himself to mention that he

very well knew the equipage as belonging to Mr. Meredith, whose eldest daughter was to come out next winter, and whose son often accepted the hospitality of his rooms, as did Dick Waters. He only set out his wine and cigars, and, inviting Dick to freedom therewith, settled himself for a good lounge and smoke, after his forenoon ramble.

And Eva rode on, wondering, in a startled way, where she had ever seen that handsome face before, until, running over in her mind every one she could remember in New York, she came to identify the square-shoulders, black, curling hair, and glancing black eyes of the other one, as her brother Charley's jolly Dick Waters, of so many years ago.

The coach door was opened. Eva walked up a flight of well-known steps, and entered the wide hall of what had been her own mother's home. Aunt Matilda had reached what had been for years her ambition — she lived in the same grand house that had belonged to her brother Hermon's wife; she kept her carriage; she gave and attended the most elegant parties in all New York. Eva had no time to recover from her astonishment, when down the long, wide staircase sprang a girl of about her own age, calling, "Yes, here she is!" to some one above. "I'm so glad you've come, Evvy! And ma says you are to room with me. It is just as nice as having a new twin sister — isn't it?"

"Thank you, dear Nolly," replied Eva, choking back a strange rising in her throat. "How tall you are!" she added, looking up admiringly at the rather overgrown and awkward figure of her cousin Hortense.

"O, yes, I am tall enough, if I were only beautiful in proportion! Come up stairs now, and have some rest. I'll help you dress for dinner."

"Eva, my sweet child!" and aunt Matilda, whose rustling robes had swept down the stairs unobserved by the girls, clasped the little orphan in her arms with tragic tenderness.

"Come," said Hortense, standing on the first stair, and pulling Eva's sleeve before aunt Matilda had finished her greeting. Eva laid aside her travelling dress, and rested upon a sofa; and Hortense, or Noll, as she was always called at home, chattered briskly at her all the while.

"Ri and Sophy have the room next to this. They keep up an everlasting talk when I am not there; but if I come, it dies off very suddenly. I do wonder what they find to say so much. They never have anything to tell me that is interesting. Brother Jack has the front room next us. Do you remember him?"

"No. Was he at home when I used to come here?"

"Perhaps not. He has been away for years at college, and not half the time at home for vacations. He

is *my* boy! Such a splendid fellow, with brown eyes and blue hair, — I mean the other way, — and not an atom of nonsense about him! You must like him at once, just for my sake, Evvy; indeed, you can't help it."

Eva had seen but little of her cousins Meredith in former years. She remembered Hortense as a good-natured, noisy little girl, and Maria and Sophia as patronizing elder sisters; but it was all so long ago, and so many changes had intervened, that they seemed quite like new acquaintances when she met them at dinner. Maria was very pretty. There was a reddish tinge in her curling hair that distinguished it as the veritable auburn of poets and artists; her eyes, of soft brown, were shaded by long, dark lashes, that swept delicately down upon her fair cheeks, and set off her perfect complexion. Eva could scarcely keep her eyes from her beautiful cousin's face. Sophy called her own hair chestnut, as a companion color to her sister's auburn; and perhaps there was a suggestion of yellow in its heavy coils. Sophy's eyes might be called blue, gray, hazel, or green; they were no particular color, and resembled several, in different lights; they were not very agreeable eyes to look into. Her complexion had a provoking tendency to freckles, which were kept in only partial subjection by certain washes and cosmetics. Her full lips had acquired an habitual con-

temptuous expression beneath her large, round, and essentially plebeian nose. She made the very utmost of her rich and abundant hair, and her pretty little, plump, white hands. Beyond these she could boast no beauty. Eva's earnest eyes came back from a covert study of her cousin Sophy's face, with a sense of relief, to Noll's frank blue eyes, and not over-smooth brown hair. She liked Noll's good-natured smile and hearty ways. Eva had been kindly received by uncle Meredith, a grave, elderly man, of preoccupied manner. When they were half through dinner, the door was opened by Jack. Noll sprang from her chair to seize his hand, and exclaim, "This is Evvy, Jack!"

"How noisy you are, Noll!" murmured aunt Matilda, languidly.

"And I want you to be the best of friends, because she is to be my twin sister," continued Noll.

"A very rash assertion, I should say," coolly remarked Sophy.

"Eva may not wish to be twin sister to such a harum-scarum as you are," quietly suggested Mr. Meredith.

"O, yes, I shall," said Eva, having exchanged greeting with cousin Jack. "I like Nolly very much. I should be very lonely without her, now Charley is gone."

"Charley is older than you, I believe," said Maria.

"Yes; four years older."

"Gone out west, I hear," said Jack.

"Uncle Martyn thought he would do better there than in any place he could find for him here."

"The west is a grand place for a young man," replied Jack. "I am tempted to go there myself, sometimes."

Eva's heart warmed up at once with these words. They seemed to make Charley's absence more tolerable, and she liked Jack proportionally for saying them.

"O, Jack, don't whisper such a thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Meredith. "You know I couldn't live without you. Your father will never go into society, and how dreadful it would be for me to go without you!"

"You have only had me this one season. Probably you would find it as easy to go without me as before I came home."

"You know, Jack, we did not move in society then, as we do now. Society has more claims upon us since we have changed our style of living."

Something in all this grated very unpleasantly on Eva's remembrance of the time when her own father, mother, and Charley had sat around the table in this same room. Jack saw her pained little face bent steadily over her plate, and resolutely winking back an unusual mistiness in her eyes.

"When do you leave for Beryl Beach?" he asked, abruptly.

"One o'clock, to-morrow," replied Sophy. "We have waited over these two days, till Eva came, and now we mean to be off."

"I am sorry my coming has detained you," said Eva, quickly. "If I had known it, I would have tried to be ready sooner."

"It is not of the least consequence, dear child," sweetly responded aunt Matilda. "The delay has been very opportune to me for finishing some arrangements I wished to make before leaving. But the girls have been rather impatient."

"I didn't know you were keeping us at home for your own convenience," snapped Sophy. "You said it was on Eva's account."

"So it was, my dear; but, as I said, the delay did not disturb me as it seems it did you. The girls are very tired," she added, to Eva, "staying in the hot city so long. They seem to be really suffering for fresh air and freedom."

"Yes," interposed Noll, with comic face; "they never suffered so much in a whole summer, before, as they have in the last two days!"

"The warm weather does not affect you any," said Maria, laughing.

"I know I can't go; so where is the use in my 'suffering'?"

"The girls have never been to Beryl Beach, and

they are anticipating much pleasure," continued aunt Matilda.

"None of us have ever been out of the city in summer before," volunteered Noll. "That's what makes their sufferings so funny."

Mrs. Meredith gave her a reproving glance, that verged so near an angry blackness, that a faint suspicion of the fixity of aunt Matilda's sweet temper crossed Eva's mind.

"We thought," continued the interrupted lady, "that as you are just come from a long sojourn in the country, you would, perhaps, like as well to remain with Noll; for I really cannot take her with me. Two girls are as many as I can watch over."

"I should prefer to stay here," said Eva, absently smoothing the folds of crape upon her sleeve.

"Sure enough, dear child; how thoughtful of you! Gay company is no place for you now, certainly. I wonder if my girls would show as much proper and becoming respect for my memory, if I were taken away from them!" and aunt Matilda applied her delicate handkerchief to her face, to hide her feelings.

In Eva's mind there had been no connection between the simple words and unconscious motion. She looked up quickly, while her surprise rapidly changed to indignation and grief. It was cruel to misunderstand her so. The tears would come at this dreadful way of

reviving and treating her bereavement. She slipped from her chair, and hurried away. Mr. Meredith cast a sharp glance at his wife, who was still in eclipse behind her handkerchief.

"Quite a lachrymose scene!" sneered Sophy.

"Just like you, ma!" cried Noll, impatiently.

"Ah, my dears, you don't understand; how should you? I can sympathize with Eva's sorrow, for I, too, have lost a mother."

Jack remembered his decrepit and almost idiotic old grandmother Roberts, who died some ten years before, and doubted if the loss were quite the same as Eva's. Noll jogged his elbow, and whispered, "I'm going. Remember us when the dessert comes in." He nodded, and Noll ran out of the room, while her mother called, "Don't go near Eva, Noll; let the dear child have a few minutes alone. I am going up to soothe and comfort her, when I have finished my dinner."

But Noll went straight to her own room, and was a good deal surprised that Eva was not there. She looked into the parlors and library, and even Mrs. Meredith's boudoir, that had once been Eva's mother's. Where could she have gone? Of course Eva knew every door in the house, and had sought some old and favorite haunt. She remembered the old nursery in the upper story. The large, low room had been fitted

up by Mrs. Meredith as a study for the girls, where they pursued their lessons when not absent at the fashionable school which they attended. A tinkling, second-hand piano stood where had been Eva's comfortable lounge; a stand of shelves, for books, took the place of the old-fashioned easy-chair; an easel held a half-finished landscape in oils, and another sustained a blackboard; there was only a straw matting upon the floor; the table was littered with school books and papers; and the window-shades were closed. In the midst of these gloomy surroundings, on a cricket, with her head upon the seat of a stiff, wooden chair, was Eva, sobbing out the sadness that had oppressed her ever since she bade Charley good by at the station, and watched him as she was driven away.

"Now, don't cry, Evvy," said Noll, dropping herself plump upon the floor beside her. "What a guy you'll make of yourself, sobbing and stifling in this way! It's no use crying for things; we never do here. Ma indulges in a mild snivel behind her laces, sometimes; but that's all for effect, and we sympathize accordingly. But, dear me! such a terrible cry as this you're having the old house hasn't seen since — well, since you went out of it, I should judge." So Noll, in her effort at consolation, blundered right upon the worst suggestion she could make. Eva thought of the day after Mrs. True's party, when her mother came in upon

Charley's entertaining stories with her sad news, and then left Eva to sob out her frightened grief alone for the first time. It seemed as if she had ceased being a little girl on that day. "*Do* stop, Evvy, dear! You make me feel so queer and uncomfortable! and you'll be as red in the face as if you had been boiled. Jack hates to have folks round doing the mournful. *Can't* you stop, just for my sake, Evvy?"

Eva tried hard to quiet herself; but the sobs would break out occasionally, as well as the tears.

"That's a dear good girl! It's just like ma to get up a scene. There! don't cry again. Now I'll tell you something. Jack is going to bring our dessert up here;" and she caught the bell-rope with an energetic pull. "Jack is just the best fellow! He always remembers me when I am in disgrace."

"In disgrace?"

"O, I am always doing the improper thing, in one way or another. You see I wasn't born to such high life as we've got into lately, and it's very hard to have the family change come just when I am at my awkward age, neither a child nor a lady. Say to Mr. Jack, privately," — she broke off as a servant answered the bell — "that I am in the school-room. Jack says," she continued, "that he should have found it just as hard at my age, and he thanks his good fortune that he was allowed to grow up first."

"Found what just as hard? I don't quite understand."

"High life, of course. We have things very different here from what they were in our old house. Ma and the girls take to it and like it wonderfully, and Jack doesn't seem to mind it much; but pa finds it horribly tedious, and I do so wish I could have a good run with my skip-rope on the sidewalk! There were three nice boys lived next door to us, and we used to have capital times, playing together. But ma says it isn't becoming for me to skip rope on this sidewalk, and she sends us to school in the carriage half the time —"

"Here you are!" and Jack's pleasant face looked in, followed by his entire self. "What do you suppose we had for dessert?" and Jack, too, got down all his long length upon the floor, to be sociable with the girls.

"What did you have? Come, out with it!" said Noll.

"Guess."

"I can't. Guess, Evvy."

"Peaches?"

"Right! Here they are;" and Jack produced from his pocket a couple of beautiful peaches.

"Isn't this fine!" cried Noll, opening her pocket fruit-knife, and offering it to Eva.

"What made you seek these classic shades?" asked Jack, glancing about the uncomfortable room.

"Eva ran off here — to hide from affectionate solicitude, I suppose. I never come here in vacations. It makes my back ache and my tympanums throb just to look at that cracked old piano. I do hate fine arts of all kinds!"

"Eva! my poor, dear little Eva!" said aunt Matilda's sweet voice.

But what a scene for her sympathetic eyes, as she pushed open the door! Eva still sat on her cricket, with swollen eyes and reddened face; but a smile had come with Noll's last words, as she delayed a great, juicy piece of peach half way to her mouth, to look into Noll's strong, comic face, as she sat at her feet; and Jack lay stretched out beside them, watching the two girls, with an idle laugh upon his face.

"O, you are doing very well!" and aunt Matilda beat a retreat.

CHAPTER II.

AT SCHOOL.

EVA liked the long, quiet summer days, in the great empty house. Noll was always new and amusing. Mr. Meredith had a large library, where they spent many hours, reading all sorts of things in a whimsical fashion. Noll was an inveterate reader, if she might choose her own books; but she turned in disgust from anything not to her taste, and preferred sitting idle, and building air-castles, to reading what she did not like. Mr. Meredith was always at home to dinner, and sometimes Jack. Once, however, Mrs. Meredith visited Beryl Beach for a few days, and Jack was there several times during his mother's absence.

In September, just before the reopening of school, the family returned. Eva quickly fell into the routine of her school duties. She found Noll, though proverbially inattentive and careless, was yet considerably in advance of herself. She at once determined to equal Noll's proficiency in all their studies, and was soon

rapidly gaining on her. Her uncle Meredith and Jack had advised her regarding a course of study, and had recommended only history and mathematics for the first term; afterwards, languages; and later, the sciences, in place of mathematics; music, to extend throughout her schooling; and drawing and painting, to be undertaken whenever she might wish or find time for them. Eva liked the order, it agreed so well with what her uncle Martyn had enjoined concerning her mode of study. Maria was nearly eighteen, and had finished her education with the close of the previous term. Sophy was desolate without her, and vainly strove to solace her loneliness with the companionship of Anna Marston, the beauty of the school. At home Maria spent her time in alternately reviewing her music, French, and wardrobe, looking eagerly forward to the first of December, when she was to make her *début* at her mother's grand party, given in honor of her coming out.

"Isn't this nice!" cried Noll, as the three girls stepped from the door, on a clear, cool morning in October.

"It's awfully cold!" grumbled Sophy, while Eva looked up and smiled in the bright sunshine.

"It just wakes me right up," exclaimed Noll, walking briskly on.

"Don't go hurrying along so, like a servant girl going to market," replied Sophy.

"No; I'll hurry just like a school-girl going to her cemetery," laughed Noll, and turning herself sidewise, she skipped along with her arms folded tightly over her books and lunch-box, and her jaunty little hat nodding in tune to the motions of her rosy little pug nose and dancing eyes and feet.

"I do wish you wouldn't act so, Noll," said Sophy, drawing her veil a little closer, to avoid any such damaging color as Noll's face portrayed. "You always make me ashamed of you."

"So do you," hummed Noll, as she skipped on.

"I don't see why you can't walk quietly along, like Eva, in a lady-like manner."

Noll waited till they came up with her, and then wheeled suddenly into rank by Eva's side, saying, "How do you manage it, Evvy?"

"Manage what?"

"Being always lady-like."

"I'm sure I don't know. I certainly never try to be lady-like."

"I suppose you were born to it."

"It's a great pity *you* weren't," retorted Sophy, "for I'm afraid you will never be able to acquire it."

"Yes, she will," said Eva, quickly, "because she is generous and good-natured; and mother always said that the root of politeness is kindness."

"There! I'll remember that of you, Evvy!" exclaimed Noll, with a grateful look.

"Of course you'll remember a compliment," was Sophy's sneering observation.

"Any one would who found them as scarce as I do," angrily returned Noll. "And that's why *your* memory is so much better for them than for geometry."

They had reached their school. The door was opened to them, and they entered and separated with no further talk. But Sophy's fault-finding rankled unusually in Noll's heart — perhaps because Eva's defence had made her feel more thoroughly its injustice. A large room on the second floor was fitted with desks for the whole school, and this room was presided over by Miss Haliburton, the youngest and most popular of the teachers. In other parts of the building were recitation-rooms, occupied by Madame Vanrie, the principal, the teacher of languages, the little Swedish music-master, and the artist who taught drawing, and painting in oils, and in all the various fancy styles of achieving passable pictures without much labor or taste.

"Look out for yourself to-day," said Kate Corning, as Noll was following Eva out of the cloak-room.

"What now?" asked Noll, turning back.

"La Pompadour is out; that's all."

"Dear me, what's that?" exclaimed Eva, half way up the stairs, as her foot struck a soft substance that went rolling over and over to the bottom. There it

picked itself up into the form of a white, woolly poodle, and gave voice in a low whine, increasing to an enraged bark at the end.

"There's music a brewing," said Noll.

"That's the opening chord," replied Kate.

"It's too bad, Pompadour; it was all an accident," Sophy was saying, as she tried to caress the snappish canine. Miss Haliburton came quickly from the school-room above. La Pompadour was Madame Vanrie's weak point, and just there she was very weak.

"I'll take care of her," said Miss Haliburton, quietly. But La Pompadour declined being taken up in her careful hands. She gently pushed the poodle along the floor toward a little private room. La Pompadour had an unmistakable limp. Eva had murmured "I'm sorry," and hurried on to look out some references in the library, before the stroke of the bell.

"Somebody's disgraced," remarked a tall, sandy-faced girl in black.

"Thank your stars it isn't you," said Noll, at her elbow.

"O, I suppose it is *you*, then; you are so quick to take it up."

Noll passed on toward the school-room; but a new idea was suggested to her mind by Susan Smith's last words. Madame Vanrie's pet had been alternately teased and caressed by the scholars until its temper

was completely spoiled, and also that of its mistress, on this subject. After an unusually stormy dog-difficulty of the previous term, Madame had announced that she should report to the parents, for unlady-like conduct, any one of her pupils who in any way meddled with her dog in future. She had also commenced, with this term, the far wiser tactics of keeping the dog out of the girls' way, and this was the first time of La Pompadour's appearance. No wonder Eva was startled at running over her on the stairs, and, knowing nothing of the animal's status in Madame Vanrie's affections, and the previous difficulties, no wonder she went on in her accustomed way, without heeding the looks of interest and commiseration showered upon her as she took her seat at the opening of the school session. But Noll was uneasy and anxious. Of course it was an accident, and Eva was not in the least to blame; but an accident was in itself unlady-like, *sui generis*, and an accident that brought woe to La Pompadour became thereby criminal in the code of Madame Vanrie's school. "Reported for unlady-like behavior," meant assigned to a seat next Miss Haliburton's desk, and facing the whole school, for as long a period as Madame Vanrie might deem appropriate; and how could Eva bear to be placed in disgrace before these fifty girls, nearly all of whom were still strangers to her? Noll could not allow it — yet how should she help it?

Just before the noonday intermission, Madame Vanrie entered the school-room, where the girls were assembled in their chairs.

"The young lady guilty of improper conduct this morning may rise," said the icily polished tones of the principal.

Many eyes turned toward Eva. She sat looking innocently into Madame's face, quite unconscious that she was the offender. Noll saw; yes, she could do it. And Noll rose.

Madame Vanrie bowed. "As I supposed," she said. "The rest may pass out."

One after another the girls filed out, and Noll stood alone before Madame and Miss Haliburton.

"I thought it was Miss Sophy who had accidentally vexed the dog," said Miss Haliburton.

"What was the nature of this difficulty, Miss Hortense?" asked Madame, with dignity.

"The dog was on the stairs, and I didn't know it."

"And what happened? I find she is quite lame."

"She rolled down to the foot."

"Am I to understand that you struck La Pompadour with your foot?" exclaimed Madame, aghast at such a possibility.

"Not intentionally, of course."

"It shows an extreme want of care and gentleness on your part. You may remove your books to this

vacant desk by the chair for the present. I shall take occasion to notify your parents that I consider your conduct quite extraordinary in rudeness and carelessness." Madame Vanrie swept away to her own rooms, and Noll dumped her books in a heap upon the appointed desk, and went to join the other girls.

If Eva had not been a stranger and so shy that she spent her noonings alone in the library, nibbling her lunch, while she pored over her books, she could not have failed to hear the cause of Noll's disgrace, and received the fate that belonged to herself. But in her shyness and strangerhood she felt little inclination to join the groups of girls that gathered in cliques at each recess and intermission, and paid no attention to the chatter in the halls and adjoining rooms.

"I didn't know you were in that scrape," said Sophy, as Noll entered the cloak-room, after receiving sentence. "I might have known you would be doing something dreadful to-day, you acted so on the way to school."

"Noll, you didn't touch that dog!" cried Kate Corning; "you were with me, and nowhere near her."

"You don't know anything about it; so just hold your tongue — can't you?" ungraciously replied Noll, over a big bite of Washington pie.

"Hope you are ill-natured enough. Madame's society seems to have soured your disposition."

"Eva Roberts kicked Pompadour down stairs. I saw her do it!" cried a little girl, proud of giving information to her elders.

"Shut up! Where's the use telling all you know?" said Noll, a little less savage, because it was a little girl.

"Why? Did you do it on purpose to save Eva?" inquired the little girl, confidentially, in a tone just loud enough for all the surrounding girls to hear.

"Have a bite of my pie, dear, and let it stop your mouth," said Noll, offering the wedge of rich pie, and laughing good-naturedly, at last.

"Noll Meredith, you're a trump!" said Kate Corning. "Your little cousin Eva would have been frightened to death, and grieved into purgatory, if she had to sit out there and take Madame's reprimand and lecture on manners."

"The lecture is yet to come. It will probably be a public one, when school begins again. I was in debt to Eva, and this will help square accounts."

"What is this, Noll?" exclaimed Sophy, excitedly, coming up — with the mate to Noll's piece of pie in process of absorption. "I'm not going to have you answering for Eva's sins. I'm sure you have enough of your own; and it's bad enough as it is, without your disgracing the family any further."

"What are you trying to say?" asked Noll, looking up with a blank face.

"If Eva kicked Pompadour down stairs, she may answer for it. I am not going to have you any more disgraced than you must be. And I'm going right off to find Eva, and ask her if she did it."

"No, you are not!" cried Noll, with flashing eyes. "If you stir a step, or say a word to Eva, I'll report you for eating peanuts when Mr. Finn lectured on harmony."

"Who says that ever I did such a thing?" angrily exclaimed Sophy, who had a most plebeian fondness for peanuts.

"Kate Corning and I saw you," retorted Noll.

"Well, report away; who cares?" said Sophy, contemptuously, moving toward the door.

Noll was boiling with rage and apprehension. It was so mean and ugly of Sophy! and she *couldn't* have her little scheme exposed. She sprang from her seat, flew across the cloak-room, caught Sophy by the shoulder, and whispered, "If you do, I'll expose your post office, every bit of it, to father."

Sophy paled. Her eyes turned green with jealous vexation. She had in her heart rather rejoiced to catch Eva in remissness; for Eva's scholarship and deportment ranked highest of the three girls. But the post office — the great joy of her life, and all that made it worth living — Sophy stopped short.

"Will you let my affairs alone?" asked Noll, triumphantly.

"Yes, if you'll let mine alone."

"Agreed," grimly replied Noll, and returned to her lunch.

Madame delivered a short, high-flown, and misty lecture on the highly immoral character of rudeness, carelessness, and bad manners in general, using Noll, in her seat of disgrace, as an example of all these. But the story had spread, and Noll saw more sympathy and admiration than aversion in the familiar faces of her schoolmates.

"What *had* you done this morning, Noll?" asked Eva, as they walked homeward.

"Don't expect me to rehearse my sins of behavior into your lady-like ears, Evvy, dear. I should hate to shock you."

"I shan't be shocked. But you needn't tell me if you don't want to. Where is Sophy?"

Sophy had slipped behind and disappeared down a by street, with a delicately written note in one hand and a tiny key in the other. She now rejoined them a little out of breath.

"I couldn't imagine where you had vanished," said Eva.

"I ran a few steps down that street to look at a pretty baby in the window," explained Sophy.

"O, I wish I had seen it, too!"

"Perhaps you will, some day," laughed Noll.

That evening Noll went straight into the library, where Mr. Meredith sat alone.

"Father, I've got something to tell you."

"Well, what is it?" he replied, kindly, laying aside his book. When Noll came to speak, he was sure she had something worth telling; and he did not feel that pleasant certainty about any other members of his family.

Noll informed him that Madame Vanrie's disgusting little poodle got kicked down stairs, to-day, by accident, and she was in the depth of disgrace on that account. Notice would be sent, to-morrow, to Mr. and Mrs. Meredith, of her general bad conduct; but she assured him there was no other cause for complaint against her; and would he please to hush the matter up with mother, and not let it be mentioned in the family; for she did not want her disgrace any wider spread than was necessary; and she particularly did not wish Eva to know of it.

"So Eva is really making you ashamed of yourself?" he said.

"O, yes, she often does."

"That's a hopeful sign. I hope you will some time learn to be lady-like, in the same way that Eva is, and not with sham politeness."

"I'll learn her kind of behavior, if I do any," said Noll, sadly; "but I am afraid I shall never be able

to learn any, but just act my own queer ways, forever."

Having made an ally of her father, Noll feared no further evil, and banished the dog troubles from her mind. But the reign of the dog-star was not yet over.

CHAPTER III.

AT HOME.

NEXT day Noll was speckled all over with measles, and could not go to school. Every one else in the house had entertained these visitors at some long previous era, and as she was not very sick, Noll's measles were regarded as a welcome, and, to Noll, very opportune joke. Madame Vanrie's report received little attention, Noll, at the time, suffering with severe headache. La Pompadour no more invaded the school precincts.

It was a cold, rainy, dismal evening. Mrs. Meredith had gone out with Jack. The girls were grouped before the cheerful open grate of coals in the dining-room. Ri was pricking dainty stitches in a delicate bit of muslin. Sophy glowered and grew sour over her geometry. Noll was idly stretched on a lounge, wheeled here for her special accommodation. Eva was tying wild knots in a thread with a shuttle, under Ri's guidance, in the bewildering effort to learn tatting.

"You must hold your thread in your thumb and finger so tight that it can't slip," said Ri, pinching together Eva's lax finger and thumb.

"What little fingers you have!" said Sophy, watching the tatting over her geometry.

"And what stupid ones!" added Eva.

"There, now draw the shuttle thread firmly, and then the other one makes the knot, you see," continued Ri.

"Yes; now, if I can only do it again!" sighed the patient scholar.

"This geometry is perfectly hateful!" exclaimed Sophy.

"Ain't I glad folks with measles can't use their eyes?" yawned Noll.

"I thought you were lamenting that very thing this morning," said Ri, "when I brought home St. Elmo, and you wanted to read it."

"O, yes; but 'it's an ill wind that blows *no* good;' and I'm just getting the good of this one. If it wasn't for my eyes, father would be advising my keeping along with the class in my studies at home; because I'm not sick enough to hinder."

"I didn't know you were so lazy, Noll," said Eva.

"Do you call it lazy? I thought it was just taking comfort."

"Do you think Madame will give you your old seat, when you go back?" asked Ri.

"That depends very much upon how she happens to feel, I suppose," replied Noll.

"Probably more on how grave the offence was," said Eva. "You know I don't know yet what it was."

"She only kicked Madame's poodle down stairs, by accident," said Ri.

Noll held her breath. Eva looked up in the wildest astonishment.

"No, she didn't! I did it myself," cried Eva, stoutly.

"You must be mistaken," laughed Ri.

"Noll, is that really what you were disgraced for?" asked Eva, anxiously.

"No," said Noll.

"Now, Noll, that's a lie!" broke out Sophy.

"Post office," said Noll.

"You know I didn't mean it," yielded Sophy.

"What does it all mean?" asked Eva, growing more and more puzzled and distressed.

"We were talking Meredith Greek, which you weren't born to, and haven't yet learned," replied Noll, good-humoredly.

"But, Noll, tell me one thing;" and Eva freed her little fingers from the tangled tatting, and laid it on the table, then went and knelt beside Noll's lounge. "What *were* you disgraced for?"

"For general bad behavior."

"But there was something special that morning, for Madame said as much in her lecture."

"What is it, Eva?" asked Mr. Meredith, who had come through the hall, from the library, and entered unobserved.

"O, uncle Meredith, Ri says Noll was disgraced for kicking Pompadour down stairs; and it was I who kicked Pompadour down stairs."

Mr. Meredith sat upon the edge of Noll's lounge, and took a hand of both girls, while a smile of hearty amusement lighted up his face.

"Well, then, what is to be done?" he said.

"Noll won't own it."

"I'm a complete pauper in such matters — wouldn't own even my name in them, if I could help it," said Noll.

"I shall go to Madame Vanrie to-morrow," said Eva, "and tell her that I —"

"No, you won't, if you love me!" pathetically interposed Noll.

"It's a mean kind of love that would let you be punished in my stead," valiantly retorted Eva.

"I see I must settle this matter," said Mr. Meredith. "You pushed the dog down stairs — did you, Eva? By accident, of course."

"Yes, sir. I ought to have spoken of it, and told Madame how sorry I was that it happened."

"And then what did you do, Noll?"

"I laughed, and called it a good joke, at first."

"And when Madame called upon the young lady guilty of improper conduct that morning to rise, it never entered my head she meant me," said Eva.

"I knew such a call always covered my case exactly, and so I rose," added Noll.

"And got punished for the dog accident," said her father, laughing.

"Yes. What harm? I really did resolve to be lady-like in future," said Noll, earnestly.

Sophy had grown studious over her geometry. Ri had dropped her work to listen.

"I will call on Madame Vanrie to-morrow, and have your sentence repealed," said the father.

"And I will go and confess," said Eva.

"Now, father," cried Noll, catching Mr. Meredith's sleeve, "if you want to make yourself *really* useful, and be a dear good father," she added, patting his hand, as he resumed his seat, "never mind Madame, but use your influence and authority in the far worthier employment of convincing this stark little piece of honor, that there's no occasion for her making a martyr of herself, by acquiring my unenviable position next Miss Haliburton's desk."

"Not even uncle Meredith could do that," said Eva. "Why, just think, Noll, what a miserable little coward

you have made me out! I shall be ashamed to look a girl in the face, till I expiate."

"No such thing! They all know that you were in blissful ignorance of the stringent Pompadour rules. And they know, too, that you were equally ignorant of the cause of my little change of position."

Jack and Mrs. Meredith at this moment returned from the opera. The lady sank languidly in the large easy-chair that Eva rolled before the grate for her, and said, as she slowly drew off her delicate lemon colored kids, and threw back her velvet mantle, —

"What disgusting weather! Ri, take my bonnet, and don't jam the flowers. Why didn't the other girls go to bed before this time? Sophy, don't worry any more over your lessons, if you don't have them."

"Was it very fine?" asked Ri, extemporizing a bonnet-rack by setting the duster upright against a chair, steadied by a cricket, on its feathers, and hanging the dainty and gay little bonnet on the tip of the handle.

"The acting was very good. Jack thought the music harsh, in some parts. Mr. Salsby said it was not well adapted throughout. You will meet Mr. Salsby, dear, when you come out."

"Who is he?"

"A very fine young man — wealthy, accomplished, travelled, handsome — he moves in the first circles."

"And sprang directly from original chaos, I suppose," said Mr. Meredith.

"What an idea, William! He seems to be entirely upon his own responsibility and resources. What do you know of him, Jack?"

"I think he is a good fellow. He has tip-top rooms at the K—— Hotel. Had a disagreement with his father, who, he says, lives somewhere in the state; and then a large fortune was left him, and he became independent. Mortimer is a fine fellow — honorable — and I think likely the father was in the wrong of it. But he keeps very whist about the affair."

"Ten to one the old man was only prudent and sensible, while the young one was wild and reckless," said Mr. Meredith.

"O, uncle, I *know* his father did wrong!" exclaimed Eva, quickly and earnestly.

"Whew!" said Jack, turning to face her.

Eva colored, and hid her face in her hands, while everybody laughed, except Jack, who was sorry for his rudeness.

"You saw this young hero to-night, I suppose," said Noll, as the laugh subsided.

"Yes, Jack had offered him a seat in our box," replied her mother.

"Jack will play the agreeable to him till Ri comes out and relieves him?" said Sophy, sagely.

"Come; it is time all you girls were in bed. Scatter!" said Mrs. Meredith, gayly shaking her gloves at them.

"Evvy, what made you break out so about that Mortimer Salsby?" asked Noll, when she and Eva were together in their own room. "Do you know him?"

"Yes — no — that is — I have only seen him pass in the street; but Charley knew him."

"Here in the city, or at Campfields?"

"I don't know whether I ought to tell what I know, if he wants to keep his family affairs a secret."

"Tell *me*, and we will know it together. They say it takes two to keep a secret, and I'll help you keep this. We won't tell the rest."

Eva was over-persuaded. The two girls nestled their heads comfortably in their pillows, while Eva related all that Charley had told her of the robbery at Campfields, and old Mr. Salsby's connection with it. But she said nothing about Mr. Salsby's transactions with her own father, and the trouble and sorrow he had caused the family. The clocks had struck twelve long before the tale was ended. When, at last, Eva finished, Noll poked up her head from the pillow, in a listening attitude.

"I declare, those girls are talking yet," she exclaimed. "Now I *will* know;" and she sprang out of bed, ran to the dividing wall, and was quiet.

"Noll, what are you doing?"

"Listening; hush!"

Eva meant to have remonstrated further; but she was very tired, and suddenly fell asleep, as she was thinking what was the best thing to say to Noll. There was a fine hole through the thick partition, in which was inserted a quill that reached from side to side of the wall. It was concealed on the other side, and had a movable stopper on this — all the work of the indefatigable Noll. The head of her sisters' bed came just under this acoustic tube. It grew cold, and Noll pulled on a warm dressing-gown, tucked her feet into slippers, moved up a chair, and made herself comfortable beside her Dionysius' ear. Noll didn't mean to be dishonorable. Her sisters had always indulged in a great many nice plans and private delights, from which she had been continually excluded. She thought it only her right to steal a march on their wonderful secrets, if she could. And this is what she heard.

"It's such a pity you couldn't manage it with the school hours," said Ri, sympathizingly.

"I've told you that I can't. He says it must be in the evening," Sophy replied, fractiously.

"I don't like that. I should be afraid."

"Afraid of what? You will only go as companion. I should think *I* was the one to be afraid."

Noll thought so, too.

"One of us might feel ill, and go to bed early, some night," suggested Ri, at last.

"And have ma popping in every half hour, to see if we are better."

"Take some evening when ma is out."

"But we can't both be sick, unless we have the measles," said Sophy, with a laugh.

"The other might come and be nurse, and so prevent any one else from interfering."

"I wonder if we *could* work it in that way," meditated Sophy.

"No, you *can't!*" whispered Noll, behind the wall, wagging her head emphatically. "I'll not have my sisters disgrace themselves in any such way."

"Somehow, I feel afraid about trusting him," said Ri, half sorry that she had suggested what seemed a possible way of accomplishing the purpose.

"Ho! I'd trust him, fast enough. Don't you know how horribly in love he is? and ma always says when a young man is in love, he will do anything a girl says."

Noll shut her teeth with a sharp click. "Ma didn't suppose any of her girls would be fools enough to believe it, literally," she thought.

"It's dreadfully late. We must go to sleep," said Ri. "I'll think about it some more, to-morrow."

"So will I," said Noll, as she threw aside her gown and crept back to her place beside Eva. But it was a long time before she could sleep. Her eyelids seemed to open with an obstinate spring. Little chills rippled over her, alternating with burning heats. Strange fancies danced through her head, of secret post offices, prisons, dark lanterns, robberies, criminals held by stout policemen, two girls, cloaked and veiled, creeping out at a side door, on a dark night, La Pompadour coming to meet them upon the sidewalk, and lifting an elegant hat to bow, when one of the girls kicked her into the gutter, and Madame Vanrie rushed up to defend her pet, and three policemen appeared, with clubs, but they suddenly turned into horses, and began to prance and trample on Noll; and she awoke with a scream that startled Eva to the other side of the room, and brought Jack and Ri to the door.

Noll was tossing, groaning, and talking incoherently. Eva stood shivering in the gown she had caught up, pale with fright. The scene recalled her father's terrible sufferings. Mrs. Meredith was roused, and the doctor called. "Miss Hortense had taken cold, and the measles had turned inward," he said. His prescription soon quieted her delirium. Eva dressed and passed the remaining hours till morning at Noll's bedside, where Mrs. Meredith was soon persuaded to give place to her, and return to finish out her own interrupted night's rest.

Mr. Meredith called upon Madame Vanrie, on his way to business, that day. Madame was ill, and unable to see any one. Miss Haliburton attended to all business calls to-day. Eva looked in vain for Madame Vanrie in the rooms she usually occupied, that morning, haunting them, with fluttering heart, to make her late confession. After devotions, Miss Haliburton stated to the school that the accident to La Pompadour, of a week past, had been explained more fully. Miss Hortense Meredith was not concerned in it, and only answered to the charge for private reasons of her own. The injury was inflicted by a scholar who had never seen La Pompadour before, knew nothing of the rules made for her protection, and therefore was quite ignorant of her own offence. Under these circumstances, Miss Haliburton, in lieu of Madame Vanrie, who was detained from school to-day by illness, pronounced the matter satisfactorily ended. Miss Hortense would resume her old seat on her return.

Of course the scholars talked it all over at recess, and of course Eva made her dreaded confession to Miss Haliburton, who already knew all about it, instead of to Madame Vanrie. And so the reign of the dog-star ended.

CHAPTER IV.

SOPHY'S POST OFFICE.

NOLL'S illness was a great inconvenience to Sophy in one respect. It interfered with her regular attendance upon her post office. During the first week she contrived little excuses for going out on a short and lonely walk after her return from school. Then the weather changed, and became so disagreeable that the pleasure of being out could no longer be urged to account for her absence. Much of the time it was so stormy that Mrs. Meredith ordered out the carriage for them to ride to school. All these things sadly disturbed Sophy's plans. She and the beautiful young man, who lived only a step off her route to and from school, and who had arranged a charming and romantic little post-box, half hid by an althea bush, and fitted with a lock to which he and Sophy had keys, at one time only exchanged letters *once* in a whole week! Such was the adversity of fate and the weather. This young man's acquaintance, too, had

been made in the most romantic manner. To be sure, it was with Ri, at first; but then it had afterwards fallen to Sophy, because Ri was afraid to continue it. This was the way of it: One fine sunny morning last spring, as the girls were on their way to school, Ri, who had lost one glove, and was dallying with her fingers, snapped off her handsomest ring, and it was nowhere to be found. They searched the sidewalk far and wide, and even the street, but the ring seemed to have vanished from the face of the earth. While they were hunting for it, and Ri could hardly keep from crying with grief, a stranger approached. He half stopped as he observed their search, cast a few admiring glances at Ri, and then, profoundly lifting his hat from his curling black hair, he respectfully inquired if she had met with a loss. Ri replied at once that she had lost her prettiest ring: it flew off and disappeared. The young man glanced at the smooth sidewalk, stepped to the curb-stone, and took a sharp look along the gutter with his keen black eyes, and at once brought up the missing ornament from the sweepings of the street. "O, thank you!" Ri exclaimed, while he carefully wiped it with his pocket handkerchief. "I am very happy that my good eyesight should have been of any service to you," he said, as with another profound bow he wished her good morning.

"O, Ri, wasn't that romantic!" Sophy exclaimed, as soon as he was out of hearing.

"I don't know — was it?" returned Ri. "I'm so glad my ring is found!"

The next morning the stranger met them again, covertly watching for notice, till Ri bestowed a pleasant smile of recognition, when again up went the hat, and light broke over his whole face, in a manner eminently complimentary. In this way he continued to meet them for many mornings. Indeed, it was only going down to business a half hour earlier than had been his previous habit. One morning he overtook and joined them, saying that he had started unusually early, but was obliged to go back for something he had forgotten, exemplifying the proverb that haste makes waste. Afterward he so often overtook them on their way home that it was clearly apparent he did not do it unintentionally. Sophy thought it charmingly romantic and exciting. But Ri did not quite like it, and Noll pronounced it awfully foolish. The stranger's attention was all paid to Ri, and Noll declared he made woe-begone eyes and looked dreadfully silly. Ri kept persistently beside Noll, instead of allowing him to draw her behind to walk with him, as he had once or twice done at first. The result was, that Sophy began to drop behind to walk with the handsome stranger. Ri felt that all these things were not quite right, but she did not know how to stop them, and did not wish to be rude to the gentleman who had

rendered her a service. The idea of telling her mother never presented itself to her, nor to either of her sisters. Sophy proved much more affable with the new acquaintance than Ri. She told him that this was Ri's last term at school; that Ri would be eighteen on the 20th of November, and was coming out as soon as the season opened; that Noll was dreadfully unladylike, and troubled her sisters very much thereby; and that she herself hated geometry, and Madame Vanrie's school altogether, and wished she might come out with Ri. In return the young man confided these thrilling items: His name was Richard Waters; he lived at the third door upon F. Street; he had business down town; his father was dead, and though he lived with his mother, he did as he pleased; he would fix a little post-box in the althea bush by the corner of his mother's fence, if she would correspond with him through it. So one day, soon afterward, he brought her the key, and took her down F. Street, to show her just where the post-box was placed, and how it was opened. Sophy grew rapturous about her lover, as she now called him. But though he maintained intimacy only with Sophy, he still kept his profound bows, brightened face, and wonderful eyes, only for Ri. All through the long summer vacation the correspondence had been sedulously carried on, and the secret acquaintance continued. Now, they no longer met on the way

to and from school, but by appointment. "Do not come alone to meet me," the wise Dick had advised, "but bring your older sister with you. I do not think it quite proper or safe for you to go out entirely alone." So Ri was dragged out to countenance many silly interviews that she did not see the least use or pleasure in, and that always made her half sick with fright, they were so improper. Ri was a quiet and matter-of-fact girl, with no idle romance or foolish love of adventure. She knew she was beautiful, and liked to be properly admired; but she did not want street admiration. She expected to experience both courtship and matrimony, and then settle down to live easily and pleasantly, as her mother did. She could see no possible advantage in flirting about with this youngster, barely nineteen, who could not afford to marry if he wished. She did not quite believe that he *wished* to marry Sophy. Yet the young man had seriously proposed an elopement, and was now urging that it should take place before the first of December. He was prepared to meet any objection to secrecy with a picture of the tedious delay of a long engagement, which her parents would undoubtedly decree on account of her youth. But Sophy never thought of objecting to secrecy; it would be such a grand thing to walk in upon her astonished parents all married; and that, too, before Ri had even come out! O, that would be a triumph

worth plotting and planning for, and even worth sacrificing the delights of an elegant trousseau! Ri's timidity was at a dead-lock between her fear of compromising her propriety, and her fear of Dick. Dick was quick, resolute, and had a masterful way with him that Sophy worshipped, and Ri dared not disobey. On the whole, Ri's fear of Dick held rather the stronger place, although she was always torn by conflicting terrors, when he had her hand drawn through one arm, and Sophy's through the other, as they paced the walks of a neighboring park; and a great, merry-faced policeman always stood or walked near them — Dick said to keep off intruders upon their little reunion. The officer was idly endeavoring to discover "which of those two girls that young spark was making love to;" but he never found out.

Thus matters stood while Noll had her inconvenient measles. Sophy's correspondence had become of the most weighty character. At home she made judicious selections from her own and Ri's wardrobes, for an extemporaneous trousseau, and packed it in two large trunks. She chose a light green summer silk for her wedding dress, which, although rather inappropriate for the season, was certainly the prettiest and most becoming one she had. In these arrangements she found much excitement and smothered delight.

"Where are you going?" cried Eva, as Sophy

dodged out from under the umbrella, and ran down F. Street, one rainy day.

"Don't wait. I've got an errand to do," returned Sophy, over her shoulder, through the driving rain.

Mrs. Meredith had been obliged to go out herself that day; therefore she could not send the carriage for the girls, and it had rained so that Sophy had not been to her post office for three days. Eva quietly waited, under her umbrella, at the street corner. Sophy turned as she reached the friendly althea.

"Run along!" she called.

"I can just as well wait," replied the considerate Eva.

There was no help for it. Sophy turned her back, and crouched upon the wet sidewalk, while she hastily unlocked the box and possessed herself of three notes. Crowding them into her pocket, she hurried back to Eva.

"You needn't have waited," she said, ungraciously.

Eva saw that she had unwittingly stumbled upon some of Sophy's privacy, and not wishing to be prying or inquisitive, she asked no questions about her queer errand down F. Street.

Sophy hurried to her own room, and went carefully over each of her letters in the order of their date. The first two contained nothing of importance; but the last, like the others in style, had a definiteness new and startling.

"My own dear girl: This confounded rain has kept you two days from the post-box; but I must get word to you to-day. I do not forget that to-morrow is your beautiful sister's birthday, — you know I never forget what you tell me, — and I want you to help me celebrate it by a certain wedding that we have hinted at as among the 'to bes.' I am *positively determined* that it shall take place to-morrow night. I shall be at the corner of the next street with a coach at eight o'clock. You must not fail to meet me. Do not come without Ri; you know a marriage is not valid without a witness. Drop me a line to-morrow morning to say that you understand and agree. Ever your devoted ——."

Dick never signed more than one initial to any of these letters, and often not even that. Sophy sat silent and busy-brained. Only till to-morrow night and she would be gone from this tedious house and her hateful school! Nobody had ever appreciated her but her own Richie! They would all think more of her when she was married, and they saw how Richie loved her. Ri came in while she sat in the dusk with the open letters in her hand, and interrupted these pleasant dreams.

"You contrived to get to the box, to-day," Ri said.

"Yes, and O, Ri, come here, and let me tell you what he says."

Ri drew a chair to her side.

"You know to-morrow is your birthday. I told him of it ever so long ago; but I didn't suppose he would remember it. I believe he remembers everything I tell him. So he has written that we really *must* be married to-morrow, in honor of your birthday. He won't take no, and says he will be at the corner, with a coach, at eight o'clock, and we *must* come!"

A sort of faintness came over Ri at the thought of herself creeping out, in the dark, to a strange coach, with a strange young man; and she could find no words or voice to reply to Sophy's exultant story.

"Won't it be splendid!" urged Sophy.

"Aren't you afraid?" returned Ri.

"You are a dreadfully chicken-hearted girl!" cried Sophy, in disgust. "I verily believe you'll be too frightened to ever get married at all! Why, what should I be afraid of?"

"Don't you think you ought to know more about him?"

"I *do* know about him. His family is just as respectable as ours. His father died when he was very young, and his mother is a permanent invalid. He has a sister who is coming out this very winter, under her aunt Cobden's care, and she will be at the same parties that you are."

"But has he any property? And where is he going to take you to live?" urged Ri.

"Do you suppose I ever asked him any such questions?" indignantly exclaimed Sophy.

"But seems to me he ought to tell you something of the sort," Ri replied, still unsatisfied.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what I know. He has a good position in his uncle Cobden's business, with prospect of being junior partner when he is twenty-one, and of ultimately succeeding to all the property, for his uncle has no children."

"Did he tell you that?"

"No; but I found it out."

It was some relief to Ri to have her prudence satisfied as to the worldly prospects of her sister's intended husband; still it did not overcome the faint sickness that attacked her whenever she looked forward to the following night.

Noll had taken an observation of this sisterly consultation through the key-hole, as Dionysius' ear gave no distinct report of it. Noll's room was well warmed now; so she took her seat, without fear of cold, at her tube, when she heard the girls talking, in bed, that night. But she only caught a few disconnected sentences.

"There will be no moon."

"How dark it will be!" shivered Ri.

"You must dress my hair."

"Yes, of course."

"You will be at home again by nine."

"Will it take a whole hour?"

"That is according to how far we go."

"Tell him not to go far. We shall be missed."

"Suppose we are — what of it?"

"O, dear, I dread it so!"

"You are real silly, Ri! There, go to sleep, and get rested for to-morrow."

"I wonder if it is to-morrow," mused Noll, "and what ever shall I do if it is?" She consulted her pocket diary. There was no moon just at this time. To-morrow night it would set at seven. "I'm afraid it *is* to-morrow; and what ever *shall* I do!" Even now Noll had no thought of seeking the aid of either of her parents.

Ri came down next morning with dull eyes and a heavy head. She had not slept at all, but she dared not say so. Sophy was cool and collected, Noll unusually observant. She was sorry to find that Jack had gone out early, and would not return till dinner. She would have liked to consult him on the impending elopement, that she felt almost sure was set for to-night. The rain had ceased. Sophy made an open trip to her post-box, on her way to school, with a hurried line, calculated to reassure her lover, and promising compliance with his wishes.

"All right," said Dick, coolly, as he read it on his

way to business half an hour later. "I was sure Ri wouldn't dare refuse. She is terribly afraid of me. I can calculate a good deal on her fear, if not on her affection;" and Dick smiled a wicked little smile, as he strode on with great internal glee.

"There is going to be a wedding in St. James' Chapel to-night," Dick carelessly announced to an old schoolmate, as he swung himself idly about in an office chair. Frank True was making him a friendly call, while home from college for the mid-term recess.

"Who is to be married?"

"O, it's a private affair — an elopement, in short. I only heard of it through a friend who is going."

"I don't approve of elopements."

"O, nor I! That's why I mean to be present," laughed Dick, with an attempt at wit. "It is an old friend of yours, Frank. I advise you to go. Take a back seat, of course, and not make yourself too prominent."

"Friend of mine?" repeated Frank, in astonishment.

"Yes; and I'll answer for it, he will be glad to see you there after the ceremony is over."

"You have made me curious. Haven't you liberty to name the parties?"

"No, I have not. That is a secret."

"At what hour would you advise me to look in at the chapel?"

"O, about eight, or a little after."

Later in the day, Dick could not refrain from giving the same invitation to Mortimer Salsby, who readily promised that he would not fail to be comfortably seated behind a pillar to see this runaway wedding. It would be better than the opera.

School was a mere dream to Sophy that day. She made such queer blunders that the girls thought her half crazy. But school was over at last, and Sophy and Eva at home. Anxious Noll had worried herself nearly into a fever. Ri was really sick with fright, and had gone to bed. Meanwhile Mrs. Meredith was idly planning her toilet for the evening, and called Eva into her boudoir to ask what made them so early home from school.

"I don't know, aunt, only we walked very fast. Sophy was in a hurry."

"Can you tell me, dear, whether the lavender or lemon-colored gloves harmonize best with this lilac silk?"

"I think these delicate rose-colored ones are far the prettiest, aunt," said Eva, decidedly.

"So they are! You have a very fine eye for color, Eva. I like your taste, it is so exquisitely delicate;" and aunt Matilda bestowed an approving pat on Eva's cheek.

Noll heard with dismay that her mother was going

out. What if Jack should go, too, as he probably would? Indeed, Jack had not yet come in — had not come when dinner was over. Mrs. Meredith was dressing for the evening, while Noll restlessly pervaded the halls, like an unlaid ghost. The programme she had heard proposed was in progress. Ri was sick in her room, and Sophy had benignly offered to sit by her through the evening. Noll did not know that Ri's sickness was more real than feigned.

"Ri, you *must* get up and make yourself ready," said Sophy, as she turned herself about before the mirror, arrayed in the light silk and her sister's best laces. Ri had carefully dressed her hair, and gone back upon the bed, in a tremor of faintness and fear.

"Ri, it's half past seven," said Sophy, a few minutes later.

"O, Sophy, I do really feel too sick to go!"

"It's only because you are frightened. Get up and stir 'round, and you'll be all over it."

Ri knew it was because she was frightened; so she rose, and began her toilet. Her fingers trembled so she could scarcely fasten her clothes, and Sophy came to her assistance.

"Come, hurry! It is ten minutes to eight," urged Sophy, just as Ri took up the golden-brown silk she intended to wear. Sophy could not have made a

more unwise suggestion. Ri's lips turned white and blue. She sank into the nearest chair.

"Sophy, I can't and *won't* stir a step;" and poor Ri burst into tears.

"O, don't, Ri! What *shall* we do? You know it will not be legal without a witness."

"I can't help it! Get whom you please, but *I* shan't go!" replied Ri, wiping her tears, and reviving with her resolve. "Perhaps Noll will go."

"She won't. She is just that disobliging to me always."

"Or Eva. Wouldn't Eva go?"

"Not if she knows where she is going. But she is such a little innocent, perhaps she would go without knowing. Put these things out of sight, and I'll go find her."

So saying, Sophy tossed various articles of prinking into the bureau drawer, turned up her sweeping silk skirt wrong side out, and threw on a large water-proof cloak. Ri hung up the brown silk, drew a wrapper about her, and again lay down upon the bed. Sophy listened cautiously in the hall, and peered down the stairs, where she saw Noll posted beside the front door, ready to pounce upon Jack the moment he entered. So she softly opened the door of Eva's room, and found her poring over her last letter from Charley.

"Eva, come into our room a moment," she almost whispered.

"Yes;" and Eva rose and followed her.

"Ma wants me to go on an errand for her before she goes out," said Sophy, boldly. "The carriage is just out here, but I don't want to go alone. Ri doesn't feel able to go; and would you be willing to go with me, just for company? You wouldn't be afraid of the dark?" Sophy's tone was so unusually sweet and coaxing that Eva almost laughed.

"I'm not afraid of the dark; but why doesn't aunt send a servant?"

"She wants to match a certain shade, and servants don't know colors."

"Well, I'll be ready in a moment," replied the unsuspecting little Eva.

"Here, take Ri's things," Sophy cried, eagerly, for the clock-hand pointed at eight. She tossed from the wardrobe Ri's jaunty black velvet hat, with its sweeping white feather, and then produced her cloak also. "Come;" and she led the way down a back staircase at the rear of the upper hall.

"Why do you go this way?" asked Eva.

"The carriage is this way," said Sophy, as she closed the basement door, and passed hastily on to the appointed corner. Eva wonderingly followed, but was reassured on seeing the carriage. It was very dark. The clouds had returned again, after yesterday's rain, and the wind blew gustily.

"Here we are, Richie," whispered Sophy, giving him her hand to enter the carriage. But Dick gently put her back, and, lifting his hat profoundly to the little black head with its sweeping white feather, put Eva first into the carriage.

"What etiquette!" thought Sophy, with a little inward laugh.

Bang went the door of the coach, and Dick sprang on the box.

"Why, Richie, *I'm* Sophy!"

"I know it," replied Dick, as the driver gathered up his reins. "I've got Ri, and *she* is the one I wanted."

"But, Richie, 'tisn't Ri! 'tisn't Ri!"

A jeering laugh was Dick's only answer, as the coach rattled off, and left Sophy standing alone on the damp sidewalk, in the dark November night.

CHAPTER V.

DENOUEMENTS.

IT was half past eight when Jack Meredith approached his father's house. Noll opened the door the instant his foot touched the steps.

"O, Jack, you are terribly late!" she exclaimed, in an excited half-whisper. "Come straight up to the school-room with me. I've an awful story to tell you!"

"What's up now? Anybody dead?" he gasped, as Noll led him on a breathless run up three long flights of stairs.

The school-room was unlighted; but Noll pushed him into a chair, and throned herself upon his lap, that he might not escape.

"There's been an immense flirtation going on, ever since last spring, with a dashing sort of fellow, whose name is Dick Waters; and now to-night —"

"Who flirted with him?" put in Jack.

"Why, the girls — Sophy particularly. I don't think Ri liked him much."

"Is Mr. Jack here?" inquired Mrs. Meredith's maid, putting her head into the dark school-room.

"Yes. What is it?" and Jack endeavored to slide Noll from his lap.

But Noll held her place, whispering, "You shan't go yet. I haven't told you!"

"Mrs. Meredith says, will you please hurry with your dinner, because it is getting late for Mrs. Marston's party?"

"I'll be ready in less than half an hour. And, Fanny, say that I have dined already."

Noll waited to hear the girl's feet upon the stairs, and then proceeded. "Sophy has gone off with him to-night, to be married. Perhaps they are married already."

"What! Those children! Are you sure, Noll?"

"Yes. It was to be all over, and Ri at home again by nine."

"You don't mean that Ri countenanced —"

"Well, these are pretty stories to be telling right before my face and eyes!" snarled Sophy, from a distant corner. She had crept into the house, and, wishing only to hide her rage and mortification, had sought the deserted school-room.

"Sophy!" exclaimed both, in the same breath. Jack quickly put Noll off his lap, and lighted the gas. It was unmistakably Sophy, but she was shrouded in her

heavy cloak, and wore a hat — certainly unnecessary garments for her present surroundings.

Jack laid a hand heavily on her shoulder. "Then we have caught you before you got off for your mad prank!" he said, sternly.

"I haven't any mad prank. I have been out, and come back. I came up here to be quiet a while, and this is what I hear of myself."

"Then is it over?" asked Noll, in trembling tones. "Are you married already?"

"No, and don't mean to be," snapped Sophy.

Jack turned to Noll, and laughed.

"Mrs. Meredith says," began Fanny again at the door.

"O, yes; I'm coming!" and Jack ran down stairs to dress for the evening.

"I'm much obliged to you, marm," Sophy proceeded; "but your suspicions have run so far wide of the truth that, I hope, in future, you will just mind your own business."

"But weren't you going to mary Dick Waters?"

"I *hate* Dick Waters! and don't you ever mention his name to me again!" and Sophy sailed out of the school-room, and went down to make the mortifying disclosure that must come, sooner or later, to Ri.

Eva was startled when the carriage door was so quickly shut upon her. She could not catch the words

of the hasty colloquy ouside, nor find any sense in Sophy's wild shout, that sounded like "'tisn't I." As the wheels rattled over the pavement, and she realized that she was being driven away by a stranger in the night, she knew not whither, a dumb sort of terror came over her, and her heart seemed to cease beating. The coach suddenly stopped, and the square figure, which she had thought very unlike her aunt's footman, sprang in, and took the seat beside her. Eva's very breath seemed to stop, and the wheels again rolled rapidly on.

"You are not afraid of me?" said Dick, in his kindest tone, as he bent to catch a glimpse of her face. But the long feather drooped between them, and it was very dark in the carriage. Dick only succeeded in convincing himself that his lady-love was not weeping. She did not answer, nor attempt to do so. She was weighing the propriety of trying to open the coach door at her side, and jump out between the whirling wheels, at the risk of her life and limbs; but she decided it would not be wise to attempt such a desperate measure at present.

"You know, dear, that I have loved you from the time we first met. I only made this plan with Sophy that she might bring *you* to me."

"And what do you want with me?" asked Eva, in what was meant to be a very brave tone, but which fell away on her lips to a mere whisper.

"Just what I told Sophy, — to celebrate our wedding to-night."

Eva wondered that Sophy had not had the consideration to just mention to her that such an arrangement was planned before taking her out in this unceremonious manner.

"Is that *really* what you want of me?" she asked; and the slight relief she felt at knowing the definite end of this dark journey was just perceptible in her faint voice.

"Truly it is, my darling," replied Dick, with great earnestness. "Will you go with me to the church?"

Eva did not see how she was to help going, at the rate they were then travelling; but she did not reply.

"I have it all arranged," urged Dick. "We are to go to St. James' chapel. The minister will be there, and one or two witnesses. We will be married at once, and then I will take you to my home."

Eva's fright was subsiding. She was hastily running over the programme in her own mind, and arranging her safest way of escape. If she refused, where would he take her? and what might he not do with her? At the chapel would be the minister and witnesses. They would sustain her if she made her objections there. Moreover, something in his tone and manner had seemed familiar, and the flash of friendly street lamps had assisted her to recognize the jolly Dick Waters.

"Say you will go, dearest, and make me perfectly happy, once and forever." Dick made an impressive pause. Eva did not have to feign the frightened little quiver with which she answered, "Yes, I will go," as she tried to draw away the hand he had taken. But the buoyant bridegroom suddenly caught her little figure in his arms, and aimed an ecstatic kiss under the drooping feather. Poor Eva didn't know what made her so ashamed, or why the dreadful color burned up over all her face, as she hid it upon the window-sill.

"There, don't feel badly," he said, kindly. "I'm sorry if you didn't like it." At the same moment he opened the window, and called out, "St. James'" to the driver. This patient individual, who had been driving around the square in which that edifice stood for the last ten minutes, lost no time in turning his vehicle about, and drawing it up before the door, which he had just passed for the third time.

The little chapel was dimly lighted, having evidently been opened for this ceremony alone. Eva did not know that she hung her head as Dick took her from the coach, but she knew she was cheating him, and felt almost ashamed of it, though it was in self-defence. She caught a glimpse of a man in the dark entry, as they passed through it. She saw Mortimer Salsby leaning idly against a pillar, as they walked up the aisle; but she did not hear him mutter, "Silly young-

sters!" behind them. Even Dick almost trembled when he had drawn her hand firmly through his arm, and was marching bravely toward the altar. He stared straight before him, sternly resolved to do the deed he had undertaken. He did not dare glance at the little figure beside him, but he was inwardly glorying in the admiration Salsby must experience for Ri's beautiful face. Eva longed to spring from his side to the minister, and explain her position; but a certain awe had fallen upon her in the dim, empty church, and Dick held fast her hand, as if he half feared to lose her yet. Mortimer Salsby and Frank True stepped softly near as the minister rose and began his prayer. How Eva trembled! And Dick was trembling, too, in truth; but his heart was very brave, and he looked as fearless as possible, with his two black beads of eyes fixed upon a tassel of the pulpit cushion, just above his head. He answered in clear tones, "I do," when asked if he took this woman to be his lawful wedded wife. Eva's head drooped lower. What a pity he had not looked to see who it was, before he made the promise! The similar question was repeated, in the solemn tones of the clergyman to Eva. She half raised her head. Accepting the motion as acquiescence, he was hastening on, when she broke forth, quickly, "No; O, no!"

Ah, the astonishment of that minister! The cold horror that settled over Dick! And the amusement of the two bystanders!

"Ri!" exclaimed Dick, with smothered severity, as he griped her hand tightly, ready even now to assume marital authority, having taken his part of the vow.

But Eva looked up into his face, and answered, "*No;* I never said I would marry you."

Dick dropped the hand he held. He grew white, and red, and purple, as he surveyed his awkward position.

"There has been a mistake, sir," he said, turning to the shocked minister.

"Should think there had," said the low voice of Mortimer Salsby.

"I must certainly *hope* there has," said the clergyman, gravely. Dick drew him aside for private explanation. Frank True approached Eva, who stood, with downcast eyes, leaning heavily on the front pew rail.

"Eva!"

"O, Frank!" she cried, as she caught his hand in both of hers, and burst into tears. All her bravery and wise strength seemed to melt in one moment, at sight of his kind, familiar face.

"Don't do that," said Frank, gently, but firmly. Eva recognized the good sense of the advice, and again stood silent and quiet.

"How did all this happen?" he asked.

"I don't understand it myself; but he must have

thought I was Ri. I happened to have put on her hat and cloak, and he called me 'Ri,' when I said no."

"But how did he get you here?"

"Sophy coaxed me out to go on an errand with her in the carriage. I thought it was aunt's carriage, and Sophy was going too. But no sooner was I inside than the door was shut, and I was driven off alone. Then Dick got in, and it didn't occur to me that he mistook me for Ri. So, when he insisted upon marrying me, I promised to go to the church with him, because I thought I could get away from him here, and I couldn't in the carriage."

"Then you knew Dick?"

"Only by sight. He used to go to school with you and Charley."

Dick had partially explained to the minister, and handsomely paid for the interrupted ceremony, as well as the promise of secrecy concerning the matters, which he had elicited. He now approached his friends, saying, with an uncomfortable smile and an attempt at gayety, "My little plan for a wedding to-night has miscarried, and you will have to defer the congratulations you, no doubt, intended to bestow upon me. I hope, however, they will keep. Miss Roberts, your feather led me to suppose you quite another person. I thank you for preventing the consummation of the

marriage, as it was not the one I wished to make. I will take you home, now."

"Miss Roberts need not trouble you to do that, unless she chooses. It would give me pleasure to see her safely home," said Frank.

"Thank you. I'd rather go with you," Eva replied, gratefully. Frank led her out, and gave the coachman his order. In the carriage Eva told him all she knew of the evening's strange events, and in his brotherly companionship recovered from her nervousness and fright before she reached her uncle's house.

"Well, Waters, I have you to thank for the most entertaining joke I have known this many a day," said the smooth, musical voice of Mortimer Salsby, as he fastened himself to Dick's side, when they reached the street.

"O, never mind! the game isn't over yet," said Dick, trying to keep up his spirits under a very heavy weight of mortification. How he wished he had not invited Salsby to the wedding!

"Have you tried this little farce many times before?" asked Mortimer, with gentle wickedness.

"What do you mean?" growled Dick.

"I thought you went through it like an old actor," he said, in conciliating tones.

Dick muttered an oath, and said no more.

"I wonder where Eva is." Noll had looked through

the drawing-rooms, dining-room, and halls, and popped her head into the library. She had searched her mother's boudoir, the school-room, and their own chamber. At last she knocked at Ri's door.

"What do you want?" cried Sophy, ungraciously.

Noll opened the door and entered before replying. "Where's Eva? I've looked through the house, from end to end, and from garret to cellar, and she is nowhere to be found. Isn't she here?"

Both girls were silent. Both were, in their hearts, frightened at the thought of Eva driven away alone with the untrusty Dick, though Sophy persisted that he would bring her back fast enough, when he found out who she was. Sophy answered first.

"No, she isn't here. Can't you see that for yourself?"

"Where can she be?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Can't she take care of herself for half an hour, without your following her round, as you always do?"

"Well, Sophy, you aren't a bit cross to-night — are you?" and Noll went unsatisfied away.

"Good night," said Frank, on the steps. "I shall call to-morrow, if you are willing; and I hope you can tell me all about this mysterious affair."

"Yes; come, and I will tell you all I can learn;" and Eva tripped lightly in, as the door was opened.

"Miss Eva, is it you!" exclaimed the servant, in astonishment.

"You needn't say I was out," said Eva, quietly, as she passed on up stairs.

"Naw, I won't!" was the wondering reply.

Eva went directly to Ri's room, to return her unfortunate borrowed plumage.

"O, Eva, tell us all about it!" cried Ri, sitting up in bed, and reviving rapidly at seeing her little cousin safe, and apparently not nearly so much frightened as herself.

"What did that wretch do and say?" asked Sophy, eagerly and indignantly.

"Now, I'll tell you how it is, girls;" and Eva sat down by the register, and put her little feet upon it. "You got me into a very hard place to-night, and it is my right to know all about it. So you must tell me."

"O, you have come back, Evvy!" said Noll, who had heard her voice through the Dionysius, and come into her sister's room at once, to know where she had been hiding.

"I wish you'd go away, Noll," said Sophy.

"You generally do," coolly replied Noll.

"We were going to talk with Eva," urged Ri, more gently.

"Well, Evvy and I tell each other everything; so it's all the same whether I am here or not."

"But Eva won't tell you this," said Ri, "because it is an affair of ours, and she has no right to tell it."

"O, if you mean about Sophy's eloping with Dick Waters, I know she meant to do it. I suppose he has changed his mind, she is so savage about him all at once," replied Noll, hazarding a bright guess at a problem she really did not understand.

"I'm *not* savage about him," cried Sophy. "But I wouldn't marry such a mean, saucy, impudent fellow for all the world!"

Noll laughed, and asked if she knew "why Jacky wouldn't eat his supper."

"Noll, *will* you go out of this room?" said Sophy, calm with the very fierceness of her rage.

"Yes; but if I do, I'll listen at the key-hole, or some other good place, and hear all you say. When folks propose getting married, the news is public property, and can't be monopolized," returned the imperturbable Noll, leaning easily against the mantel.

"It isn't of any use, Sophy," said Ri. "Noll knows so much already, we had better tell her the whole, or she will never believe that the affair is really ended."

"Tell it yourself, then; *I* won't!" and Sophy flounced out of the room.

Ri did tell all about it, smoothing over Sophy's absurd position as kindly as she could. Then Eva related her adventures; and all promised that, as the

matter was really ended, and neither Sophy nor Dick could wish to resume their clandestine acquaintance and correspondence, the affair should be kept among the four girls, and no one of them should divulge it to Mr. and Mrs. Meredith.

CHAPTER VI.

RI'S PROSPECTS.

FRANK called next day, and Eva related to him, under promise of secrecy, the story of the proposed elopement, as she had learned it from Ri.

"I always despised Dick Waters," he said, when he had heard it all.

"I used to think he was not thoroughly good and honorable, when I was a little girl, and he went to school with Charley," replied Eva.

Frank gave a queer look of mingled surprise and respect at the little figure sitting upright upon a low ottoman, and scarcely knew what to say to this wise reminiscence.

Perhaps Eva would not have been allowed to enjoy Frank's call alone, if her aunt had not happened to be out. Mrs. Meredith would have thought it far more proper that so young a lady should receive her gentleman friends in the presence of her elders. But she did not know beforehand that he was to come, and,

confidence not being a predominant trait in the members of her household, she never heard of it afterward. She was very busy, at this time, with her own anxious maternal plans and arrangements. The season had opened brilliantly, and every evening saw her, accompanied by Jack, gracing the parlors of some elegant mansion, or displaying her costly wardrobe and still handsome face at the opera. She had already commenced her campaign, in behalf of her oldest daughter, with great care and address. She had shown remarkable affability to "that elegant young Salsby," who, fully recognizing her object, received her attentions with politeness, and laughed at them in his heart. She had also patronized, though to a less degree, "a certain young Waters, who showed her great deference and politeness," and "an oldish Scotch gentleman, Donaldson by name, a bachelor, and very wealthy, who was passing the winter in New York, and was regarded as something of a lion." Mrs. Meredith had given the above description of the three gentlemen she had already selected as eligible parties for her daughter Ri. Ri heard and acquiesced with only the slight mental reservation of placing the Scotch gentleman before Dick Waters on the list, as she had acquired a disgust for that young man as strong as any feeling, except fear, that she had ever experienced.

It was just one week before the day set by Mrs.

Meredith for her entertainment, that Mrs. Cobden gave hers, and Clara Waters came upon the stage of fashionable life. Thus it followed that Miss Waters was, of course, included in Mrs. Meredith's invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Cobden; and Miss Waters was also privately instructed, by her brother Dick, to "strike up an intimacy with Miss Meredith as fast as possible."

O, that week before Ri's party, when the seamstress and dress-maker were finishing off such piles of elegant things for Ri! How Sophy sighed over them, and wished she, too, were coming out! Though she continually ignored the tenth commandment, it was not quite all envy that made this a particularly unhappy time for her. Thus far in their lives, Ri and Sophy had been always together. They had shared all their joys and sorrows. Now this bond was to be broken. Ri was to enter a new life, where Sophy was forbidden. Sophy could not follow until Ri should have stepped out of this fairy land of young ladyhood through the destined door of matrimony; for Mrs. Meredith would not think of allowing a younger daughter to come out until the older one was provided for, in a home of her own. The girls could never again be to each other what they had been.

Sophy, Noll, and Eva had all volunteered, as maids, for the pleasant task of dressing Ri on the important

night of her first appearance. Mrs. Meredith came with her own maid, having finished an early toilet for herself, in order to put the last touches to Ri's costume. Very beautiful was Ri, as she stood for inspection by the interested and admiring little group, under the full glare of the gas, draped in the rich folds of a delicate fawn-colored silk, edged with gauzy laces. Her fair round arms and neck were plump with the freshness of youth and health, her cheeks rosy, and her soft eyes shining with excitement.

"You are right out lovely!" cried Noll, with enthusiasm. "If I were only some nice young man, I'd fall in love with you forthwith — smash!"

"Fanny, bring the pearl powder from my boudoir," said Mrs. Meredith, who had been critically examining Ri. "Your neck, dear, is not so white as your shoulders. It must have been tanned a little at the sea-shore last summer."

"You are not going to paint her!" cried Eva.

"Don't be foolish, child! You would not have her looking as if her neck were dirty — would you?"

"Heigh-ho!" grimaced Noll. "I hope my character is above the suspicion of dirt, if my skin should shade a little darker in one place than another."

"It would never do to put pearl powder on you," retorted Sophy, "unless it were put all over you."

"Glad of it," said Noll.

As Mrs. Meredith, followed by Ri, swept down to the drawing-rooms, Eva looked half sadly after them, with a smile and a sigh together.

"Tired, Evvy?" asked Noll.

"No; I was thinking."

"It won't be your time for a long while to come," said Sophy, decisively.

"It wasn't that. I was wondering if it paid."

"I think it pays for Ri, because she is beautiful," replied Noll. "It is worth while to spend time on dress when you are a success in the end. It would pay for you Evvy. Wouldn't you make a beauty in pale blue silk, with white laces? But for Sophy and me, it would be just the height of folly."

Sophy looked wrathful, but held her peace.

"I am afraid it is hardly worth while for any one, there are so many things of more consequence," said Eva.

"What things?" snapped Sophy.

"O, I'd rather live with Charley, and help him work at something."

"I'm not so fond of work," replied Sophy. "I'd rather be rich, and enjoy myself. I shall be so glad when *I* can go into society, and see and hear all that is going on, and flirt, and be admired, and —"

"Now, Sophy," interrupted Noll, "I want to ask you one common-sense question, just there. What do you

expect to to be admired for? You aren't beautiful, and you certainly aren't amiable—"

"Noll Meredith, hold your tongue! I look as well as you do, and I'm a deal better mannered," retorted Sophy, angrily.

Noll ran off laughing to her own room, whither Eva soon followed. The younger girls spent a dull evening in their rooms, where they could not help hearing all the joyful sounds of the company down stairs. Sophy was looking forward to the treat of hearing all about it when Ri came to bed, and so went early to sleep, as Ri had promised to wake her and tell over all that had happened.

Midway the long drawing-rooms stood Mr. and Mrs. Meredith, receiving their guests and presenting their daughter. Group after group passed up, exchanged greetings, spoke a word of welcome to Ri, and moved on to make way for the next in order. Mr. and Mrs. Cobden made their stiff speeches, and Clara Waters, a roly-poly, dimpled little girl, seized Ri's hand to exclaim, "I'm so glad you have come out this winter with me! It will be so delightful to meet you everywhere! It seems as if I had known you for years." To all these cordial remarks Ri replied only with a polite "thank you," and what Noll called her "company smile." She could not say more, for there was Dick hurriedly murmuring, "I hope, Miss Meredith, we resume our acquaint-

ance under more favorable auspices." To this also she replied with the "company smile," and a faint "thank you," though feeling that it was not exactly the answer she would have wished to make. Mr. and Mrs. Dana came next. Ri's meaningless smile warmed a little under Mrs. Dana's pleasant words and sweet face. But it was only to grow too warm, and bring a flush upon her forehead, as Mr. Salsby followed them and was introduced. She could not help the shy admiration that peeped from her eyes, hiding under their long lashes, as she saw his handsome face, elegant dress and figure, and remembered that this was the man whom her mother had privately instructed her she should use all her efforts to secure for a husband. Mortimer did not fail to observe all this, nor to understand its meaning. He was quite used to this sort of thing, and only smiled a smile that had one meaning to himself and another to the gay company around him. New and strange faces followed, and Ri continued, with her polite "thank yous" and stereotyped smile, to answer them all alike, till her attention was arrested by hearing her mother pronounce distinctly at her ear, "Mr. Donaldson, my dear;" and her little gloved hand was imprisoned for a moment in that of a stout, ruddy-faced, elderly gentleman. Of course it was not at all elegant to shake hands, and it was none of Ri's intention to do so. But Mrs. Meredith smiled benign-

ly on the blunder, and Ri blushed uncomfortably, and again said, "Thank you," as the gentleman expressed his pleasure that she had emerged from seclusion before it was too late for him to have the gratification of meeting her. There were but few more arrivals. As Ri moved from her position of reception to mingle with the guests, Mr. Donaldson addressed her, to express his admiration of some Scottish scenes he had discovered in a book of engravings, and detained her to point out and explain hidden beauties in many views with which he was familiar. Ri listened with attention, and even well-feigned interest, though she privately regarded engravings as a polite nuisance. She wondered where he found the book, for she was sure she had never seen it in the drawing-room before. She caught an approving smile from her mother, and suddenly observed that the book was quite new. She bethought herself that engravings might be as good as anything else to make talk about. Perhaps Mr. Donaldson only used these for a peg to hang conversation upon; in fact, as she observed his labored remarks and evident pleasure in all her senseless replies, she concluded it must be so, and with a very natural and amiable desire to please, exerted herself more in her part of the conversation. Mr. Donaldson continued with renewed vigor to harp upon Scotch scenery, seeming quite unable to suggest a new subject. Ri was

secretly wondering why Mr. Salsby had not come to speak with her again, and hoping he was delaying in order to take her down to supper. Just as she was becoming unutterably bored with the old Scotch gentleman, and with all Scotland generally, Clara Waters interrupted them by dragging Ri away to ask the names of some flowers in one of the vases in the hall. Under the vase stood Dick, who entered with great apparent interest into the flower question. Then Clara's attention was caught by some one in the drawing-rooms, and she fluttered away and left them alone. This was just what Dick had wanted. He had devoted himself to Mrs. Meredith since the eventful night of the 20th of November, and had concluded from her manner toward him that she knew nothing of the insult he had given Sophy, and the daring impertinence he had planned for Ri. Yet it was not without some dread that he had accepted her invitation to make the acquaintance of her daughter upon regular conventional ground. He still cherished his former determination to marry Ri, and hoped she would soon be prevailed upon to overlook the past, and begin again as friends in new and honest standing.

"I am more glad than you know to be allowed to meet you again, Ri," he said, bending his head over the flowers. "I hope it was not without your kind consent that I received my invitation here."

"Ma sent invitations where she thought right. I did not know much about it."

"Then I may at least infer that your mother does not regard me with displeasure or disapproval?"

"She does not know what *I* know about you."

"*You* will forgive it, dear, because you know why I did it. A woman can be lenient to the impulsive errors of a man who loves her," returned this infatuated youth, who thought, because he was, or supposed himself to be, in love with one woman, every sort of impertinence to another was to be immediately forgiven him. He did not dream that Ri resented his treatment of Sophy as thoroughly as if the insult had been to herself; and Ri did not dare tell him so, it would have been so dreadfully impolite! So she only blushed up redly to the shining waves of her pretty auburn hair, cast down her eyes with their long lashes, and was silent, looking a hundred times prettier in her anger and confusion, but only making Dick more madly in love, and more fully convinced of her forgiveness and good will.

"I shall claim the honor of leading you down to supper, for 'auld acquaintance' sake,'" Dick resumed, in a lighter tone. "You will not refuse it?"

Ri's vexation here found polite vent. "Thank you; but I am to go to supper with brother Jack."

"Is that irrevocably so arranged?"

"O, yes; ma would not have it any other way," replied Ri, supporting her first polite fib with a second, finding, as is usually the case, that "one lie will not stand alone."

"Not if I were to beg the favor of her myself?"

"To attempt that would be to place altogether too great faith in your powers of persuasion;" and Ri moved toward the drawing-room, feeling that she had been guilty of a great indecorum by remaining so long in the hall. Dick offered her his arm, which she would have gladly declined, only it would be rude. They mingled with the guests in the bright and heated parlors; but Ri soon escaped from Dick, and went to find Jack.

"I want to go down to supper with you," she whispered, close to Jack's ear.

"Don't be in a hurry! You will have some gallant companion yet."

"But I'd rather go with you."

"Nonsense! That wouldn't do at all. I am to wait upon Miss Schneider, supposed to be the lioness of the evening, next to yourself. I'll draw you into the neighborhood of Salsby. Then, if you engage him in talk, he will take you down."

"But I don't want to do so, Jack," faltered Ri, growing flushed and anxious, and half ready to cry at the failure of her little ruse.

"There, don't get flustered. Here comes mother: she'll settle it all for you;" and Jack slid away to ensconce himself in the vicinity of the young lady upon whom he intended to bestow himself for the ceremony of supper. Mrs. Meredith approached, closely followed by Mr. Donaldson.

"Where have you been hiding yourself, my dear? I have been looking for you."

"I did not know I was hiding," said Ri, smiling naturally for once, and taking real comfort in looking into her mother's familiar face.

"Mrs. Meredith tells me," put in Mr. Donaldson, "that the company are already passing out for refreshments, and I have begged her to bring me to you, that I might have the pleasure of being your escort."

Poor Ri did not know how to answer. Jack had repudiated all her claims upon him. She was so anxious to decline the honor, she came near saying that "Mr. Waters had bespoken that position," but remembered that she had refused it to him. She saw her mother's glance of calm displeasure at her silence, and took despairing refuge in her polite "thank you," and "company smile." Slipping her little hand within the offered arm of the excellent gentleman, she allowed him to lead her away to the dining-rooms. As she took the plate of ice and cake he brought, her eyes met an angry and reproachful glance from Dick

Waters. He, in emulation of her sisterly devotion, had waited upon Clara, very much to the disgust of that young lady, who imagined that nothing but Dick's interference had prevented her from receiving the attendance of Mr. Salsby. Mr. Salsby, having just missed of the company of Miss Schneider, who seemed quite happy in Jack's attentive care, had cast away his very desirable society upon a little, pale, delicate woman, scarcely larger than a child; though, to judge by her face, her years must have reached the frightful sum of quarter of a century. Having made this sacrifice, Mr. Salsby followed it up bravely by exerting his fascinating conversational powers to their best, and found himself unexpectedly repaid for his trouble. Lucy Starr's modest and quiet little face lighted up; she forgot her shyness in the anecdotes of foreign life with which he at first entertained her, and was soon relating, eagerly, stories of her own more limited travels. Before their return to the drawing-room, she had mentally decided that he was the most delightful gentleman she had ever met; while he confessed to himself that Miss Starr was positively refreshing — a woman who seemed to have not the least intention of making an impression upon his masculine admiration. After supper dancing commenced. Jack good-humoredly, but rather officiously, contrived to present Mortimer Salsby for Ri's first partner; and Ri, who did not

know that Mr. Salsby had not begged the privilege, felt it quite a triumph, as she whirled through the dance at his side, listening to his easy chat, amid the music and motion, and giving her half shy, but very polite, little replies. Then Dick Waters claimed her; and Ri did not know that, over her vexation at his only half-concealed admiration and devotion, her quiet and polite demeanor appeared exactly the same that it was with her previous partner. Ri had not the gift of expressing fine shades of feeling. It is just possible, however, that if she had possessed feelings of a stronger and warmer nature, they would have made themselves more apparent. Mr. Dana begged a dance with her, while his wife was promised to Jack. Afterward he seated Ri beside her, and soon had wandered off and left them together.

"How glad I am to sit down!" said Ri.

"I should think you would be," replied Mrs. Dana, with one of her old, sweet smiles, though her eyes were gazing sadly down the vista of the bright drawing-rooms.

"You look very tired," said Ri, gently. "I hope you are not so."

"No, I am not tired," she replied. "I was remembering the last time I was in this house."

"Before we came here?"

"Yes; I came to see Mrs. Roberts, just before they moved away."

"Mr. Roberts was my uncle."

"I did not know that. Then can you tell me what has become of your cousins, Charley and Eva? Their uncle, Mr. Martyn, called upon me, but he had then formed no definite plan for them. I have heard nothing from them since they left Campfields."

"Why, Eva is here with us. She goes to school with Noll and Sophy, and is to stay here till she finishes her education."

"I am glad to hear that. When I call upon your mother and you, I hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing her again. I knew her mother very well, and also Charley and Eva, some years ago. Will you please give my love to Eva, and say that I hope she has not quite forgotten Mary True."

"I will tell her. You were going to speak of the last time you were here."

"No, there is nothing to tell about that. It was only a little errand that called me here, a day or two before Mrs. Roberts left."

Mr. Dana returned for his wife, and they took their leave. The crowd of guests had thinned perceptibly. Clara Waters again clutched Ri's hand to whisper, "Good night, you beautiful darling; I wish there weren't so many folks here, so I could kiss you;" and receive another of Ri's smiles and "thank yous." Mr. Donaldson bestowed upon her an impressive hand-

shake; Mortimer Salsby made his most graceful bow, and hoped the pleasure he had experienced to-night might find many repetitions in the future — leaving Ri a little doubtful whether it would be safe to ascribe to herself the origin of all his delight. Dick Waters whispered, "Good night, darling," just at her ear; and a dozen more adieus were made in varying fashion, and in every shade of cordiality. When the latest guest was gone, weary Ri crept up to her room. Sophy sprang up the moment she softly opened the door, and sleepily broke out, "Tell me all about it, and I'll help you undress," before she was well awake. Then rubbing open her heavy eyes, she set herself at work to disrobe Ri, while she half drowned her in questions about every imaginable thing her fertile brain could conceive. Ri finally dropped asleep amid the wordy shower, and refused to rouse with any of Sophy's nudgings. So the story of the great party had to be deferred till some future day.

CHAPTER VII.

CONSIDERATIONS.

THE winter passed swiftly, and for Noll and Eva very quietly. They shared their work and pleasure at school, and both were very happy in the new and delightful experience of a perfect sisterly companionship and affection. Eva felt that Noll could join her in many things where her brother Charley could not; and Noll rejoiced in finding, at last, a sister who was not continually reproving her manners, and who, moreover, as she tersely expressed it, "had sense." Sophy kept herself in an unamiable excitement and discontented fever by eagerly questioning Ri of all that happened in her gay life. To Noll and Eva, Ri seemed as far out of their world as Mrs. Meredith herself. Evening after evening, Mrs. Meredith, with Ri and Jack, was whirled away in her carriage, returning only in the early hours of the morning. Then Ri, who was always wakened by Sophy when she dressed for school, to rehearse the events of the evening, was glad

of a late extra nap, and seldom came down till long after the girls were away at their lessons. When school was done, and they returned, it was usually to find Mrs. Meredith and Ri out in the carriage, either shopping or calling among their fashionable acquaintances. It used to be the custom for the family to meet at dinner. But this winter it had fallen into disuse. Mr. Meredith was always punctually in his place at the table, as were also Noll and Eva; but beyond these the appearance of the members of the household was very uncertain. Jack, who devoted his business hours to the study of medicine, was often detained by some hospital case, or other important chance for instruction. Mrs. Meredith and Ri generally dined earlier, in order to give the dinner hour, with those following, to their elaborate toilets; while Sophy frequently dined with them, that she might be present and assist at those ceremonies. Poor Sophy was racked with trying to live two lives. Forced to continue at school, which had now no interest for her, she half learned her lessons in a mechanical and spiritless manner, while her heart was full of the bright scenes of Ri's gay life, of which she heard and saw just enough to whet her thirst for more. Ri's *début* was a great success. She was flattered and admired to her heart's content; and more, even to the content of her proud and ambitious mamma. When Mrs.

Dana called, after the party, she inquired also for Eva. Ri had forgotten to give her message; so the meeting was a delightful surprise to Eva. They had a very happy little talk about Eva's own dear mother. Mrs. Dana could tell her many little events of her mother's life that gave Eva pleasure to hear, while she, in return, recited quite a little history of their life at Campfields. Now the season of Lent was at hand. The festivities of the winter were almost over. Mrs. Meredith attended a fashionable Episcopal church, and in Lent never failed to go thither once a day, at least, arrayed in her most becoming and costly robes. Her piety saved her from a great deal of *ennui*, and attendance at church gave her, at this time, the one necessity of her life, viz., something to dress for.

It was about the middle of Lent that Mr. Donaldson asked Mr. Meredith's consent for his betrothal to Ri. He had not spoken to the young lady herself, but deemed, according to European fashion, that her father's approval was all that would be required. Mr. Meredith offered no objection if his daughter consented. Mr. Donaldson was an excellent man, and from a prudent point of view, altogether desirable; but having lived a bachelor to the age of forty, he did not find it easy to go courting a girl of eighteen. Seeing that something in this line was expected of him, he called upon Mrs. Meredith, and laid the matter before

her, asking her aid and assistance in his favor, with the little beauty whose company he wished to secure in his lonely old Scotch castle.

"O, but, Mr. Donaldson, I could not think of letting you carry off Ri to your dismal great castle, to stay forever!" exclaimed Mrs. Meredith, in well-feigned alarm. "You must positively promise to bring her to New York every winter."

"Perhaps, madam, you would prefer, sometimes, spending a season with her among the Scotch Highlands. There is a great deal to interest one there."

"I do not doubt it. But it would be too dreadful to me if I must think of Ri's going away where I could not see her for a whole year."

"I thought — that is, I hoped — to spend next winter in travelling through Europe, returning for the summer to my own home in the Grampian Hills, where, I am sure, from the pleasure your daughter has evinced in what little I have been able to tell her of Scotch scenery and customs, she will find much to interest and delight her. And I hoped that, before the novelty should be quite worn off, she would have found sufficient to fix her affections, and make my home also home to her."

It was a kind, fatherly speech. Mrs. Meredith felt that this man would be very good to Ri, and she resolved to use all efforts to forward his suit. She

promised him this, and Mr. Donaldson departed leaving his courtship entirely in the hands of this loving mamma, convinced that she would do for him better than he could for himself. And she did.

"Ri, dear, we have had a proposal of marriage for you," began Mrs. Meredith, as they sat together.

"I don't want to be married *yet*. I've only had one season out, you know," replied Ri, bracing herself against the announcement of Dick Waters' name; for she could think of no one else who had shown her sufficient favor to warrant such a move.

"Your marriage would make no difference about that. You could still appear in society in even better position than you do now. I have stipulated that you shall not be mewed up out of the world."

"O, ma, who can it be?" for Ri was sure no such stipulation would have been deemed necessary with Dick Waters.

"Why, don't you know? Mr. Donaldson, to be sure. Has he never, in any way, demonstrated his feelings to you?"

"No, indeed; nothing of that sort. He is dreadfully old," faltered Ri.

"Not so very old. And he is a very good, kind man. I consider it a very fortunate match for you."

"But I don't want to marry him," said Ri, decidedly.

"Do not speak too hastily, my dear. Let us have a

little talk about it. You shall tell me all the reasons you have against it, and I will tell you mine for it."

This seemed very fair, but Ri was silent.

"You say he is old; but I feel all the more willingness to intrust you to his care for that very reason; and twenty years' difference becomes narrower as you grow older."

"He doesn't live in New York," ventured Ri.

"No. That will be one of the delightful things in the connection. He proposes to spend next year in travelling through Europe with you; then the summer in his castle in the Highlands; and he will bring you here to New York the following winter. Don't you see? One season at the courts of Europe, and then one here among your old friends, who will lionize you half to death!" And Mrs. Meredith paused, out of breath, and beamed exultantly upon her daughter, as if to be lionized half to death were a particularly desirable fate.

Ri seemed to think it so, too. She looked up with brightened face, as she replied, half yielding, "Yes, that would be glorious."

"What's glorious?" asked Noll, dropping upon a chair, and looking curiously into Ri's glowing face.

"I think Ri has so nearly decided that we may tell you," said Mrs. Meredith, eager to announce a betrothal, and considering Noll a safe hearer, even if it should prove not quite a certainty.

"I've not decided — indeed I've not!" cried Ri, her face asssuming its troubled expression.

"What further objection can you urge?" said her mother, with some show of vexation.

"O, I don't want to — he isn't at all the sort of man — "

"What is it, Ri? An offer?" asked Noll, leaning forward with earnest face.

"Come, Noll, you are a sensible girl," began Mrs. Meredith. "Call up some of your good sense to influence your sister in favor of Mr. Donaldson. You saw him when he dined here some weeks ago, after his trip up the river with your father; and you liked him, I believe."

"Yes, I think he is a very good man, and I like him very much," replied Noll.

"So do I, continued Mrs. Meredith. "Now cure Ri of her foolish aversion to him."

"But I think just as Ri says, that he is not at all the sort of man."

"Nonsense! Why not, pray?"

"I should think she would want some one younger," bravely suggested Noll.

"That's just what I do," echoed Ri.

"It is a very natural feeling, I admit, my dear, at your age. You are not yet over the romantic period."

"Now, ma, don't say that," broke in Noll. "I'll

bear witness that there's not a particle of romance in Ri. She wants to do all things in a proper and rational way — don't you, Ri?"

"Certainly," replied Ri.

"I think it is the most proper and rational thing in the world for her to want to marry a younger man," boldly asseverated Noll.

"Well, Noll, I did suppose you had more practical sense!" returned her mother, testily. "Don't you see that Mr. Donaldson is a *certainty?* He has *proposed for her*, and a very good offer he makes, too. And where is the *probability*, not to say certainty, of her ever having so good a chance from a young man?"

"Where is that Mortimer Salsby?" suggested Noll, meditatively, while Ri colored, and bent her head over her work.

"He is not at all to be counted on," replied Mrs. Meredith; "he has always shown Ri proper politeness and attention, but I am sorry to say he has made not the slightest advance toward a nearer acquaintance with her or the rest of the family."

"Well, perhaps he will, by and by," said Noll, consolingly, seeing that she had hit upon Ri's chief difficulty.

"I do not think it at all likely," said Mrs. Meredith; "and then, if he does not, Mr. Donalson is gone, past recovery, and there is nothing so promising left."

Noll, not having any great experience in such matters, and not being of a romantic turn herself, was fast falling into her mother's exceedingly practical view of the subject, taking for granted her underlying premises that Ri must be married, and, of course, as well and wealthily married as possible.

"You see how it is, Ri," pursued Mrs. Meredith. "I know that Mr. Salsby would be personally, on some accounts, more desirable; but it so happens that you must accept Mr. Donalson *now*, or he is off to Europe, and you may never see him again. As there seems really no prospect of Mr. Salsby's — Am I right, dear?" she broke off. "Perhaps you know more of his sentiments and intentions than I do. Have you any intimations of success in that quarter?"

Poor Ri tried to hide her blushing face. "I only thought," she faltered, "it would be so much pleasanter."

"I know; but what signs has he given you?"

"O, not any, that I know of," she hurriedly replied; "and I don't care particularly about him, any more than Mr. Donaldson."

"That is as I supposed, my dear; and so, since you cannot have just what you might choose, it is best to accept cheerfully the good fortune that Providence has laid at your feet," concluded Mrs. Meredith, with a pious air.

"And, I suppose, beggars cannot be choosers," added Noll, with a grave doubt in her usually merry face.

"What a disgusting remark, Noll!" exclaimed her mother.

Noll rose, and slowly walked away, to repeat to Eva the conversation, and get her opinion of it. Mrs. Meredith, meanwhile, rapidly put down and overcame all Ri's remaining feeble resistance to the proposed alliance.

"What do you think of it, Evvy? Would *you* marry an old man?" asked Noll, emphasizing her question by sundry taps upon the open page of Eva's book, with the heel of a rather slipshod slipper, that had come off as she ran up stairs to the school-room.

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied Eva, staring straight through the window at the patch of cold, blue sky, broken only by a queer chimney-pot on a neighboring roof.

"*I* wouldn't marry any one I didn't want to — not if I was an old maid!" and Noll twitched on her slipper, sat down on the hearth-rug, and began gently punching the coals in the grate with the poker. "Come, sit down here by me, Evvy. I want to talk a bit." Eva laid aside her book, and took a humble seat upon the rug at Noll's side. "Truth is, I'm all in a snarl," confessed Noll.

"About what?"

"Why, this getting married. Ma set it all out so sensibly, I couldn't help agreeing with her; and yet — I don't feel as though she had the right of it."

"I don't think I shall want to be married at all, if I can only live with Charley, and help him."

"That's just what I used to think about Jack; but you know we can't, for the boys will be getting married themselves, and will not want us. Jack told me so once, when I said I would live with him;" and Noll sighed a forsaken little sigh.

"Then you and I will go and live somewhere together, Nolly, dear," said Eva, trying to smile with a great lump in her throat, at the thought of Charley's being married, and not wanting her to live with him.

"So we will, you darling sister Evvy!" replied Noll, catching Eva in her arms, and rolling her over upon the rug.

This frolic had grown rather noisy, when Jack pushed open the school-room door.

"Here's a pretty scene!" he exclaimed, as they gathered themselves up, and he drew a chair before the grate between them.

"Glad you've come," gasped Noll.

"What were you up to?"

"Only having a little roll, for fun," explained Eva.

"Evvy and I have agreed to live together always,

after you and Charley are all married, so you don't want us to live with you. We were celebrating the contract — our betrothal," laughed Noll.

"Some nice young men may object to that arrangement," said Jack, drawing one arm about Eva's shoulders, and reaching around Noll's neck, to pinch her farther ear with the other hand.

"Don't care if they do!" returned Noll, shaking her head to free the captured ear.

"Noll and I don't want to be married," Eva said.

"Ah, you'll sing a different song a few years hence," said Jack.

"Now, Jack, you seem to know all about it," began Noll; "do tell us what the reason is that there's always such a fuss to get girls married off? Why can't they marry or not, just as they choose, the same as men do? Nobody thinks it so terribly necessary for men to be married."

"Why, my dear little innocent, if a woman isn't married, who is going to foot all her bills for millinery and dry goods? Who keeps a carriage for her? Who supports a grand establishment, with its retinue of servants, for her to live, receive calls, and give parties in? Don't you begin to see that a husband is a very necessary article, as he is supposed to be the very spring, the tap-root, of all these desirables?"

Noll regarded Jack in dubious askance; Eva with sorrowful, astonished blue eyes.

"Is that all he is good for?" asked Noll.

"Bless you! isn't that enough? Sometimes he is good for a trip to Europe, or elsewhere; sometimes he isn't. It depends upon how valuable a specimen of the genus happens to fall into your net."

"I shouldn't think *you* would ever want to be married, then," said Eva.

Jack laughed uneasily. "O, you see, we men are a hopeful race. We are forever flattering ourselves that our one particular case is going to be a happy exception, and that our one particular fair lady is going to marry from pure love of ourself, and not at all with a view to the convenience of our bank account."

"Why don't you pretend to be poor, and then see who would marry you?" was Noll's brilliant plan.

"That isn't always convenient, by a great deal. But I came up here to tell you a little bit of news, Noll; and Eva must hear it, too."

"That's a dear Jack!" and Noll climbed upon his knee. "You do always tell me things before any one else, and you always will, till you are married,—won't you, Jack?"

"Yes; you are a sensible sort of girl to talk with. Come, Eva, you are another, and here is my other knee for you;" and Jack drew Eva up beside Noll.

"Now, what is it?"

"I've been having a long talk with the doctor,

to-day, about what I had better do with myself and my profession. My course of study with him closes in September. I've about concluded to go west, and start there. If I do, I shall go first to see your uncle Martyn, Eva, and Charley."

Eva tightened her arm about his neck, but dropped her head upon his shoulder. It was so long since last July, and Charley's farewell! Not one year had yet passed, and how could she get through the whole five?

"What is it, little girl? Not homesick — are you?"

"O, I do want to see Charley!" she moaned.

"I know; of course you do. I thought I'd tell you of it in good season, and perhaps you would have something ready that you would like to send out to him by me."

"I'll tell you, Evvy. Make him a pair of slippers. We'll go out and find the very loveliest pattern, and you must work every stitch yourself, and have them all made up for Jack to carry out to him," suggested Noll.

"I'm afraid I don't know how," said Eva, a little brightened by the plan.

"I do, and I'll show you. I'll make something to send him, too. What shall it be? And then we can sit down, whenever we have spare hours, and work together for him. Won't it be nice?"

Eva was smiling through her tears.

"That's a capital idea, Noll!" said Jack, slapping the folded hands in her lap. "You would be a real comfort, if a body ever got into sorrowful times."

"O, yes, she is that already," cried Eva, encircling Noll's neck with her other arm, and kissing her. "I don't know how I should live if it wasn't for Noll. She always has something kind to say when I am sad."

"So you get sad here sometimes?"

"Everybody is very good to me; but sometimes I do want to see Charley."

"Poor little heart!" said Jack, as the dinner-bell sounded, and the girls slid to their feet. He bent his kind face over Eva's little figure, and kissed her in half brotherly, half fatherly fashion, then took her hand in his, and led her down to dinner.

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRIP TO CAMPFIELDS.

EVA came running up stairs to the school-room, one night, with joyous face and eager air.

"What now?" asked Noll.

"Mrs. Dana has been here, and she has invited me to ride out to Campfields for a Fourth of July holiday with her." It was the first bright spot that had fallen in her way since she came to her aunt Meredith's. No one had thought, in the busy whirl of each selfish life, to devise anything to cheer the monotonous days of little Eva; and truly it often seemed, as she had said to Jack, that she could not have lived but for Noll's cheerful friendship and sisterly tenderness.

"That's a pretty arrangement for me!" exclaimed Noll. "What am I going to do without you?"

"Why — I thought — Nolly dear — I *didn't* think you would miss me. Aunt Matilda is going to have company that day, you know. But I'll ask Mrs. Dana

to take you, too. There will be plenty of room in the carriage, and I know she will be very willing to do it."

"No, indeed! Bless you, *I* don't want to go riding off to a little strange country town, where I don't know anybody. I've got a plan worth two of that. I'll just announce to my excellent mamma that, whereas you are going away to leave me in a widowed condition, I shall claim the privilege of presence in the drawing-rooms among her guests. Sophy is to go down, and why shouldn't I? You see it is to be a perfectly informal — sort of family affair. Mr. Donaldson will be here *of course*, Dick and Clara Waters, and Jack is going to try to rope in Mortimer Salsby, as a friend of his, you know;" and Noll laughed gayly at the programme.

"Would you really enjoy that better?"

"Yes; I want to see this Mortimer Salsby, that I have heard so much about. I wonder if he is as delightful as everybody seems to think."

Eva rode off with Mrs. Dana in a very happy mood, aunt Matilda, far from objecting, having exhibited the utmost indifference to the whole arrangement. The morning was still fresh and comfortable, as they rolled off the pavements and out upon the broad country roads. The birds sang sweetly. The beautiful green of the trees and meadows, newly washed by a recent

shower, refreshed their eyes, weary with the dust and walls of the city. It was nearly twelve o'clock when they reached the little village, and Mrs. Dana ordered the coachman to drive directly to the hotel, that they might have a noonday meal, and rest themselves before going out to visit Eva's old friends. A table was spread for them in a private parlor, and the long ride had furnished them with excellent appetites. The dishes were cleared away. Mrs. Dana was reclining upon the stiff, hard sofa, softened by the heavy shawl she had brought for the evening ride home. Eva was curled up in an old-fashioned rocking-chair. A knock was heard upon their door.

"It is Ferber, the footman," said Mrs. Dana. "I told him to be ready to accompany us in our walk this afternoon. Say we shall not want him till two o'clock;" for Eva had sprung up to open the door.

But it was not Ferber. A gray-haired old man stood bowing, and flashing his long, gleaming, white teeth, with sorry efforts at smiling, while he gently rubbed his hands together. "I hope I do not disturb the ladies. I only knocked to say that, if you wish to see the beauties of Campfields, I will send a boy with your servants, who knows all the places of interest hereabouts."

Eva had shrank away at sight of the familiar though changed old face. Turning to Mrs. Dana,

"It is —" she was about to say Mr. Salsby; but remembering Mortimer's secret, she quickly added, "the landlord."

"At your service, madam," he said, bowing politely on the threshold, as Mrs. Dana raised herself.

"I thank you for your suggestion, but we are not entire strangers here, and know perfectly well the places we wish to visit," she said.

"O, ah! yes; I beg pardon" — bowing himself gradually off the threshold, with a sharp glance of scrutiny from Mrs. Dana to Eva.

"Not at all."

"Ah, dear me! — is it possible?" His keen, sly eyes, suddenly recognizing Eva's unchanged face, "Miss Roberts, I am most happy!" — extending his hand — "to see you again in this —" house, he meant to say, but substituted "place" instead.

"I came with Mrs. Dana," said Eva, bowing distantly, and pretending not to see his offered hand.

A weary look, as if accustomed to such rebuffs, passed over the face of the bland old man, as he withdrew his unaccepted hand, and, with another of his galvanic smiles, continued, "And where is your brother now, Miss Roberts?"

"In Chicago," replied Eva, edging away toward her chair, and looking annoyed.

"I am sorry I have disturbed you," apologized old

Mr. Salsby. "If I can be of any service, pray command me."

Mrs. Dana bowed, and murmured thanks; and, with another flourishing obeisance and gentle rub of his hands, he disappeared.

Eva crept into her rocking-chair in silence. Mrs. Dana knew too much of the transactions between the landlord of the hotel and the Roberts family to care to allude to him, and for nearly an hour not a word passed between them.

When Ferber, the footman, knocked, Mrs. Dana and Eva quickly tied on their little summery hats, and passed down the pleasant, and, to Eva, very familiar, village street. But a stranger opened the door of the beloved little cottage. Mr. and Mrs. Craig had moved to rooms attached to the barber's shop. Mr. Dana had not told his wife of this. It was the first and only disappointment in Eva's happy holiday. She had looked forward to finding James and Hannah just as she had left them; to seeing all the dear old household furniture as it had been when the cottage was her own loved home, and the presence of her mother and Charley had made it the dearest spot on earth to her. She began to realize how fast changes creep over everything we have known. Back through the long, shaded street they went, and rang the bell at the side door of a building, the front half of whose lower story

was decorated with a fine new barber's pole. Hannah herself opened the door.

"O, it's little Eva, my own darlint child!" she cried, bestowing a hearty kiss upon Eva's happy face.

"And this is Mrs. Dana," said Eva.

"How de do, ma'am?" said Hannah, courtesying bashfully.

"I remember Hannah very well," said Mrs. Dana, smiling. "You often brought Eva over to play with my sister Minnie, and came for her again."

"Walk in; come right in here," said Hannah, briskly, opening the door into her darkened best parlor, and loosening a blind. "I'm just as glad to see you as can be! There's my baby! She's waked up, and I'll bring her right in here, so I can talk with you whilst;" and Hannah disappeared in the direction of certain faint wails, from some remote corner of the building.

"I didn't know Hannah had a baby," said Eva, feeling that this pleasant change quite compensated for others not so desirable.

"Here's the little queen," said Hannah, proudly, as she returned with a white, dimpled baby, in suspiciously clean bib, and seated herself in a low rocker.

Eva was quickly kneeling at her side, exclaiming, "What a little darling!" and administering various taps upon the baby's plump cheeks, to instigate an

infantile smile; while Mrs. Dana went through the regular course of questions for such cases, beginning with, "How old is she?" When she had politely elicited the facts that baby was six months old, was about ready to cut her first teeth, had always been of a very amiable disposition, showed a passionate admiration for everything red, and was not yet blessed with a name, Eva suddenly became conscious that she was making her call entirely upon baby, and had scarcely spoken to Hannah.

"You have not told us why you moved from the cottage," she said, stepping reluctantly back to her chair, and bravely ignoring all baby's crowing and smiling attractions.

"Well, now, Miss Eva, we were right sorry to do that; and I'll tell you just how it would be coming about," replied Hannah, sobering her joyful face, and settling her baby on her lap. "It was last fall that James got a bad cut in his right hand with a razor. He had sharpened it to use, and had laid it up for a moment, open, upon a little shelf over his table. Some one came in, and slammed the door; so down comes the razor, and struck his hand a dreadful gash. He couldn't use it again for a'most three months, and had to hire a man to shave all his customers. Then, what with all sorts of things we had to be buying, and baby coming along, James hadn't paid the last quarter's rent,

and the lease was up. We hadn't anything laid by, and so James thought we had better live in cheaper lodgings, if we weren't so genteel. The cottage was very elegant for such as us to live in. We thought we'd better be laying up something against a rainy day, if we could do it, and only live comfortable, and not think of bein' stylish, you know."

"You seem very comfortable here," said Eva. "I see you have the same old furniture. It must be easier for James, too, living so near his shop."

"We couldn't afford to be buyin' new furniture, and we didn't want to, either, savin' a few things we came to need. Baby's got a fine rocking-crib and a little carriage. We had to put a new shavin'-chair into the shop; and the old cook-stove wore out, so we had to get another, and that was an awful sum! I'll see if James can't leave to come and see ye. Men will want to be shaved all sorts of days."

James was found quite idle in his little shop, notwithstanding Hannah's complacent words, implying a rush of custom. He hastened toward the parlor, throwing off his apron by the way, and took Eva's hand with cordial grasp and shining face.

"It does my 'eart good to see the face of a Roberts again!" he exclaimed; "and 'ow 'as the world treated you, in that great hugly city of New York?"

"Very fairly, I suppose. It is not so pleasant as Campfields, nor so happy as my own home was."

"What news from Mr. Charley?"

"Only good news;" and Eva explained Charley's business position. Many little events of interest were recalled and related by each, and an hour had passed away before they were aware.

As they rose to go, James slid shyly up to Eva, saying, "Miss Heva, would you 'elp us to find a name for that child? 'Annah and me 'ave been trying hall these six months, and can't hagree on one."

"O, may I name her?" cried Eva, joyfully.

"We'd be so glad if you would!" said Hannah; "and then we could think of you every time we called her."

"I've been thinking, ever since you said she was not named, that you ought to call her Nora, because she has such bright, dark eyes, and such roguish dimples in her cheeks."

"That's a very pretty name," said James.

"So I think. But shouldn't she have another to go with it?" rejoined Hannah.

"I didn't know there was any need of it," replied Eva. "*I* haven't any middle name."

"When she gets married, she can keep Craig for her middle name," said Mrs. Dana.

"That she shall," returned James.

Out upon the street again, Ferber stalking solemnly behind them, Mrs. Dana asked, "Whither next?"

"I must go to see Mrs. Gree; and then, I think, perhaps, Mr. Beeler would like to hear from Charley."

"We certainly must not fail to see Mr. Beeler," replied Mrs. Dana, to whom Frank had given a graphic description of the old grocery.

"And Mrs. Gree was very kind to us when mamma died," said Eva, softly.

"Ah, Miss Eva, is it you?" exclaimed Mrs. Gree, as she stepped to her open door, to meet the callers she had seen approaching.

Eva introduced her friend in the cool little parlor; and Lester Gree appeared in the kitchen doorway, his hands not yet out of his pockets, his familiar giggle agreeably quenched by his surprise.

"How do you do, Lester?" said Eva, recognizing him in spite of the straggling array of whiskers that he was cultivating into an adornment of his large face, and offering her hand.

The giggle had to come, and a blush with it, as he drew his hand forth to take hers, and ejaculated heartily, "How do? Glad to see you."

"This is Mrs. Dana, Mr. Gree —"

"How do?" he repeated.

"She is Frank True's sister," Eva continued. "Do you remember Frank True, who came out to see Charley two years ago?"

"O, yes, think I do. His father came with him, and

had a talk with the old man, I remember. The old man didn't want to let Roberts go. He had found out his worth by that time."

"Lay off your bonnets, now *do*, ladies," Mrs. Gree was exclaiming, meanwhile, in a gush of happy hospitality. "You will be so much cooler! Why, who is that at the door? Lester, go and see."

"It is my footman. He will stop in the hall," explained Mrs. Dana. "I wished him to accompany us because Eva is going to take me to all sorts of woody haunts that she and Charley used to visit, and I thought we should be more comfortable with some one in attendance."

"O, yes; ah, yes," replied the little lady, while Lester graciously placed a chair in the small and vacant entry, and Ferber haughtily declined it, keeping his stand in the doorway, hat in hand, and gazing idly out upon the road.

Then followed the eager interchange of question and reply whenever old friends meet. Mrs. Gree had been very sick in the winter, and Lester had proved himself, as his mother took pride in declaring, greatly to his confusion, the very best of nurses, as well as of sons. Lester hastened off upon another subject, to tell Eva that Mr. Beeler had got on finely in the past year, — no more thieving, — and he had chanced upon a fortunate investment that had more than made good

his former losses. Moreover, he had offered to take Lester into partnership at the opening of the new year, if the young man could produce one thousand dollars to put into the business; and Lester proudly informed her that he knew where he could borrow that amount with no security other than his note; then his delighted giggle, aimed directly at his mother, showed that she was to be his considerate banker for the necessary amount. Lester had bravely persisted in paying his own way ever since his father died, and left Mrs. Gree and her boy alone, and penniless, when he was only fifteen. From his first meagre earnings at Mr. Beeler's grocery he had paid to his mother a regular weekly sum for his board, and limited all his other expenses within the remainder of his wages. Thus, though he had been able to save nothing himself, his prudent mother, who had scrupulously laid by every cent he paid her, brought forward, at this desirable moment, all his hoarded board money for six years past, amounting to a little over the requisite sum. He would not receive it of her as his own, when she wished him to do so, but took it as a loan, giving his note, and insisting that he should pay interest on his borrowed capital.

Eva was much interested in this little history, which Lester told her in a low tone, interspersed with a wag of his head, and his own inimitable giggle at all

emphatic or desirable points. As he concluded, Mrs. Gree, who seemed to have had one ear pointed that way all the time, while she talked with Mrs. Dana on Campfield scenery and society, continued the subject.

"Lester will always have everything done up in a thoroughly business fashion. He can't bear to have money matters lying round loose, with no legal certainty as to the real owner. I say the money is his; but he won't own it, and is only willing to use it if I will acknowledge it mine by holding his note and receiving interest. I don't like to, when he is my own son; for, dear me, it doesn't make any difference. It all goes to him, any way, when I die; and what do I care if he has it a few years sooner?"

"I think your son has the right of it," said Mrs. Dana.

"Thank you, ma'am," interrupted Lester, gratefully. It was evidently a much vexed question between them.

"It is an honorable and just arrangement," continued Mrs. Dana. "A great many sorrowful things happen for lack of exactly such strict adjustments of money matters between members of a family."

"There couldn't anything happen to us," said Mrs. Gree, uneasily, "for he is all I've got."

We cannot tell what may befall us," returned Mrs. Dana, gently and sadly. "I think Mr. Gree's method

is a good one for both of you. It supplies you with an independent sum for the time when you may no longer feel like working for your own support — "

"Just what I thought — just what I thought!" murmured Lester.

"O, I don't care for that. I shall never feel dependent as long as I live with Lester," said Mrs. Gree, with a smile full of all possible maternal love and pride at her boy.

"You might, years hence, if he should marry and have a large family of his own to provide for," suggested Mrs. Dana; whereat Lester blushed furiously, and Mrs. Gree looked very mournful. "And besides the support and aid this may be to *you*, it is forming a habit of business punctiliousness and thrifty prudence for your son."

Mrs. Gree sighed.

"You see I cannot give you any sympathy," Mrs. Dana continued, with a cheerful smile, "for I cannot help thinking that you are very fortunate in your financial affairs."

"O, I know that, I know that; only sometimes I can't bear to have Lester so dreadfully grown up that I can't do anything for him now;" and the little woman went and laid her hand upon the shoulder of her big boy, and looked up into his face so yearningly, that Lester put his arm about her still trim little figure, and

said, "Why, mother, you wouldn't have me a baby again — would you?"

"Why, yes, sometimes."

"Of course you can't be tending a grown man as you would a little fellow. It's always a blessed comfort to have you here at home. There, don't make a baby of me before the ladies," he pleaded, blushing uncomfortably; for his mother had got her arms about his neck to kiss him, with two big tears in her eyes.

"Shall we have to go to Mr. Beeler's house to find him to-day?" asked Eva. "I suppose the store is closed."

"Yes, the store is closed; but I guess the old man is in his office. I'll — if — that is — might I walk with you to the store and see if he is there? You aren't, perhaps, much acquainted with Mrs. Beeler."

"Thank you," replied Eva; "if you will take so much trouble — "

"It will be very acceptable," said Mrs. Dana, finishing Eva's incomplete sentence.

Lester entered the darkened grocery with his own key, leaving the ladies at the door, and found Mr. Beeler busily posting his books and making out bills for the morrow. Mr. Beeler came gladly out to meet them, and conducted them through the store to his little office. Lester sat down and had a pleasant chat with Mrs. Dana, while Eva related to Mr. Beeler

all that Charley had told her of his business prospects and experiences in Chicago. Eva was glad to observe that Mr. Beeler had a contented and restful look in his kind but resolute face; and he seemed much gratified that she had come to see him, and that Charley had not forgotten to send him a message in one of his last letters.

Lester Gree bade them good by as he locked the store door; and they started on to visit the little wildwood bower, where Charley and Eva had held two Fourth of July picnics. This they found quite unaltered. Eva joyfully exhibited the very place where uncle Martyn had pushed his head through the barberry bushes, upon their grave discussion one year ago. She gayly repeated the story to Mrs. Dana, who was an interested listener to all Eva's happy reminiscences throughout this pleasant holiday. Here Ferber brought forward a basket he had been gravely lugging about all this time, and Mrs. Dana took from it a delicate little lunch she had brought, saying she had intended to make a picnic somewhere, during the day, but had not expected to find such a desirable place as this, and one already dedicated to the use, as was this lovely retreat. Ferber silently swallowed his portion of the repast just beyond uncle Martyn's bush, and amused himself with slaughtering mosquitos meanwhile. Perhaps he did not fancy the duties allotted

to him to-day, but would have preferred loafing about the bar-room with Rush, the coachman. At any rate, he seemed to have something of a grave nature weighing upon his mind. Mrs. Dana and Eva took a short ramble through the pleasant green woods after their lunch, grimly followed by Ferber. Then, as the afternoon sun declined, they wandered idly back to the hotel for an hour's rest and a cup of tea, before starting on their drive home.

"One more glass, I reckon," said Rush at the hotel bar.

"See here!" said Sam Sloper; "you are the lady's coachman — ain't you?"

"What's the hodds? I'll coachman you!" angrily returned the other, already rather unsteady with liquor.

"Reckon you will!" replied Sam, with a titter. "But we don't want no more deaths laid to our door, specially ladies'."

"What's that, Sam? What's that?" said Mr. Salsby, in the querulous tone now grown habitual, as he entered the bar-room. "Don't be talking about that to customers. It isn't a pleasant subject to them — it never is."

"This is the lady's coachman, sir, and I should say he has got as much as he can carry, and drive safely," said Sam, respectfully.

"Ah, I see! I see! Now, my good fellow," and Mr. Salsby laid a patronizing hand on the man's shoulder, "suppose we put you up, for future consumption, a quart or two of this very nice whiskey — "

"Bah! I take brandy," coolly suggested the coachman.

"Yes; well, brandy, then, for you to use as you may seem to require it, instead of this one glass more to-night. Wouldn't *that* be a more desirable arrangement?"

"Don't care if you do. 'Twouldn't come amiss 'most hany time!" growled Rush.

A quart bottle was filled with excellent brandy, and the half drunk coachman seemed utterly oblivious of the difference in price between this and the single glass he had ordered. He threw down a wad of dirty scrip, and pocketed the change in a state of glorious ignorance as to the amount of it. Ferber dragged him away, in the midst of his vociferous objections, to order the horses and see that they were ready. Ferber himself took a final survey of the harness, before he went to announce to the ladies that the carriage was at the door.

CHAPTER IX.

RETURN.

"YOU must drive a little faster than when we came. I want to get home at nine," Mrs. Dana said to the coachman, sitting unsteadily upon his high perch, as Ferber closed the low door of the barouche and lowered the sheltering top, which was quite unnecessary now that the sun was no longer oppressive. Ferber climbed to his seat, and braced one firm shoulder against the coachman. Rush shook the reins with undecided motion, and the horses sped away right merrily toward home. The sun was still above the horizon, and the village clock was striking seven as they rolled out of Campfields. They watched the soft green country fields, listened to the chirp of the crickets and katydids, and saw with delight the brilliant hues of the summer sunset go fading into the evening's dusky shadows, till the sparkling stars came out. When they could no longer distinguish the objects around them, they leaned restfully back in the cush-

ioned carriage, and talked of many things. Eva found a pleasure she had not known since her mother's death in telling all the difficulties of her daily life to some one who could bring the sympathizing wisdom of greater years to aid her. And so it came about, without any mention of Ri's betrothal as its cause, that she repeated to her, as well as she could recall it, the conversation she and Noll had held about marriage, and Jack's rather unsatisfactory explanation.

"Do you think it is so?" asked Eva, with a troubled face. "Must girls get married just to have some one to pay their bills?"

Mrs. Dana almost laughed, but checked herself. "I suppose, if girls run large bills, they must find some way to settle them," she replied.

"But isn't there some other way?"

"I think a much better way would be not to require so much. It will be better times when girls learn to expect no more than they can provide for themselves. That is what young men have to learn."

"And is that why nobody is in a hurry to marry off boys?"

"Not exactly — though perhaps it is partly the reason. Boys are expected to be self-supporting and independent — more than self-supporting, as they must also support their families when they become men. I think it is rather a pity society does not also require self-support and independence of girls."

"You think girls ought to go to work and earn money, as boys do?"

"Yes; it would be better for all of us."

"I used to earn money to help Charley, when we lived at Campfields. I always felt so happy when my money came, and I could buy something we needed with it! But now uncle Martyn sends me a hundred dollars every quarter, besides paying my school bills; so I really have more than I need."

"What do you do with your surplus wealth?"

"O, it is in a box in my trunk; and I have lent some of it to Sophy."

"You are saving it against some time when you will need it more."

"No; I only put it there because I have nothing else to do with it. Aunt Matilda does not think school-girls need to dress much; so Noll and I don't trouble our heads with buying handsome things. But please tell me, how can I be self-supporting and independent?"

"You cannot; and it is not right that you should be so now. While you are yet a child, and in school, it is very proper and kind of your uncle to supply your needs. But when your school days are over, and you are fitted to take a place in the world as a young woman, then will be the time for you to endeavor to earn your own support. Be independent, and then you will

never feel obliged to marry for some one to pay your bills. Do you understand it, Eva?"

"I think so. Charley was independent at Campfields, for he earned all he had, and some for us, too. He is independent now; but mamma and I never were independent."

"Your mamma was in too feeble health for any continued exertion. Besides, she was left, when a little girl, with great wealth, by her grandfather, and so never felt the need of any effort to supply her own wants."

"I think I would rather earn my own money than even to ask Charley for it."

"That is a good and self-reliant spirit. I am sure you will be a brave little girl, Eva, when there is need of it. We will talk more about this some time. I want you to come and spend part of your vacation with me. I am not going out of the city this summer, and Minnie is to stay with me while mother visits some relatives in the mountains. I should very much like to have you both together, and I think it would not be dull for you. Can you come?"

"O, yes, I think so." But then Eva's bright looks faded. "No; I don't know."

"What is it?"

"Aunt Matilda is going to the Springs with cousin Jack, Mr. Donaldson, Ri, and Sophy. They start day

after to-morrow. If I went away, Noll would have to stay all alone."

"Cannot Noll come too? I am not acquainted with her, but I am sure, from what you say of her, she would be a pleasant addition to the little party I am planning."

"I don't know," said Eva, slowly. After Noll's uncomplimentary refusal of the ride to Campfields, Eva was by no means sure that she would like the proposed visit any better.

The horses' feet were clattering briskly over the pavements now. Under cover of the darkness, Rush had several times consulted the flask he had in his pocket. Ferber had once or twice tried to take the reins from him, as he rocked insecurely in his seat. But Rush only swore at him, and, with drunken lurch, gathered the lines into his hands again. Ferber did not wish to alarm the ladies, and would not strive with him. Rush leaned more and more heavily against the footman's bracing shoulder. Ferber made one more attempt to secure the reins, as the wheels grazed a lamp-post; but the drunken man was still sensitive about his driving, and growled out an oath so loud and so gruff that Ferber shook in his shoes lest it should reach Mrs. Dana's ears. It did, and caused her to break off her conversation with Eva, that she might watch her coachman more closely. Ferber observed

the silence between them with anxiety. Whiz came a carriage with which their wheels must certainly lock. Ferber reached over and drew the off rein just in time to turn aside and graze by the flying vehicle.

"I say, who's a-drivin' this here team?" growled Rush, with an oath.

Ferber replied only by catching both reins to hold back the horses from a coach that came dashing round a corner near them. Rush resented this interference with his province, though under his management there must have been a dangerous collision, and commenced a shower of blows and oaths upon Ferber's broad shoulders and devoted head. Mrs. Dana sprang up to stop this disgraceful scene upon the box, but receiving one of Rush's rather promiscuous strokes full upon the top of her bonnet, she sank back for a moment to her seat.

"Shall I push him off, ma'am?" said Ferber over his shoulder, as he sat unmoved and carefully guided the horses, in spite of the pommelling he received.

"No; I don't know," she replied.

"If it wasn't for the driving I could handle him, and take him home quietly," said the man. "You couldn't — drive?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"No;" she replied.

"I can," cried Eva. "Charley taught me."

"You aren't strong enough. Though the horses aren't very gay now," replied Ferber.

"I'll try it;" and Eva stood upon the front seat of the barouche, and took the reins that Ferber slipped around by his left side to her, after bringing the horses to a walk. Then, with one sudden and dexterous motion, he caught both of Rush's arms, pinioned them at his side, and laid him down upon the foot-board of the driver's seat.

"Turn to the right," he said, as Eva now stood bravely up, and held the reins with firm hands across the heads of the two men. To the right she turned, and the horses broke into their accustomed trot again.

"Careful," cautioned Ferber; "hold steady."

Eva did her best, and followed all Ferber's directions. He crouched upon the foot-board, held down the drunken Rush, who still had spasmodic attacks of fighting, or trying to do so. Ten minutes more brought them to Mrs. Dana's house, where the coachman was walked off to the barn by a stable boy. Bidding Mrs. Dana an affectionate good night, with thanks for the pleasure she had given her, Eva sat down in the carriage, to be driven to aunt Matilda's by Ferber.

A footman stood guard at the front door, which was left open that the cooler air of evening might freshen the sultry drawing-rooms and stifled parlors. From one of these rooms Eva heard the sound of merry voices, and a low murmur hummed through the open door of the library. As her light feet sped up the

stairs, Noll ran from the parlor, and followed to their room.

"Off with your things, Evvy! I'll help you prink a bit, and then you must come down. Such fun as it is to see them manœuvre! Clara Waters and Sophy have been beaming all their choicest prettinesses upon the young Salsby. I declare I wouldn't have believed Sophy could be so sweet and amiable! Dick has hung about Ri and Mr. Donaldson till that long-suffering pair have withdrawn to the library in self-defence — ostensibly to study out routes of travel in Europe; and now I've had him on my hands for half an hour, and tossed him over to ma, while I came up to you. Let me tie this watered blue ribbon round your curls; it will be lovely! Jack has managed to draw off Clara, and leave Salsby to Sophy. I'm dying to see what will be the next shift of the kaleidoscope, when I bring you in among them."

"I don't think I want to go down. Ought I to go?" broke off Eva, dropping the sleeves of the delicate muslin that Noll had just thrown airily over her head, without disarranging one of the glossy light curls.

"O, yes, indeed, you must! Haven't I told Dick that you are coming?"

"Dick can't be very desirous of seeing me."

"And I told Mr. Salsby so, too."

"I don't want to see Mr. Salsby, Noll. I saw his father to-day."

"Did you? Well, how is the old gentleman?" inquired Noll, with mocking interest.

"He looks old and miserable, Noll. I can't help pitying him, though I dislike him more than I can tell."

"Well, never mind about him, then, if you don't like him. Where's the use of spoiling your countenance for the evening by dwelling upon unpleasant subjects?"

"Why, Noll! you don't talk like yourself to-night."

"It's my gay life of to-day, dear — dissipation and seeing society. It will wear off by to-morrow. Come, now you are ready."

Eva was very pretty in the soft, cloud-like muslin, tinged with blue, and her little face, yet paler with her recent fright, set in its halo-like shower of golden curls. Aunt Matilda half frowned as she saw her.

"This is my niece, Eva Roberts," she said; then added, "Come here, darling, and tell me of your day's excursion." Eva took the low seat near her aunt's chair, and never dreamed of the tact that used a semblance of affectionate interest in her day's pleasure to draw her away from the notice of the guests. But nothing could have more effectually roused the curiosity of the listless and ennuied Mortimer, who understood the manœuvre at once. Where had he heard the name of *Roberts* before? He could not recollect.

And that little figure with light curls — O, yes, that he had seen at the interrupted wedding in St. James' Chapel last fall, — and again, surely it was the same face that had smiled at him from Mr. Meredith's carriage one year ago. He must have known a Roberts at some former time, since this young Roberts girl knew him; but where? and how much about him did she know? And while these questions busied his brain, he still sat by Sophy, and talked glibly of the last new novel and Saratoga.

"We've got some capital new pictures of Jack, Mr. Salsby;" and Noll planted herself, album in hand, directly under the chandelier. "At least, I think them good, and he, vain boy, says they are libels. Come and see this one that I have smuggled into this book, and say what you think of it. Come, Evvy. I don't believe you have ever seen them."

"Yes, I have; Jack gave me one this morning," replied Eva, immovably.

So Noll's invitation, instead of drawing Eva and Mr. Salsby together, as she had planned, brought Sophy, Dick, and Mrs. Meredith to inspect the interesting photograph, which Jack had never shown to any one but Noll and Eva.

Mortimer resigned the book to Mrs. Meredith, carelessly remarking, over her shoulder, that "Jack's phiz had a much better *tout ensemble* than that represented;"

and then, Noll's project coinciding with his own inclinations, he carried it out by slipping away to Dick's vacant chair, near Eva.

"You said you had seen your cousin's picture. Do you think it good?" asked Mortimer.

"It is correct as he sometimes looks. I think it does not give his best expression."

"No. I hardly knew how to find fault with it; but you have said it exactly. It is very difficult to be always in our best mood."

Eva did not know how to answer this psychological statement, and so wisely held her peace.

"You have been on an excursion to-day. Into the country?" he resumed.

"Yes, to Campfields." Eva gave this definite answer, because it seemed the plainest and simplest, forgetting at the moment that her companion might not be pleasantly reminded of Campfields. She was sorry as she saw the color flush suddenly over his handsome face.

"Are you acquainted there?" he continued, in a tone of studied indifference.

"Yes, a little."

"I have some connections there — of the same name. Do you know them?" He was determined to learn how much she knew of himself.

Eva read his intent, and replied to it in her clear, direct tone. "I saw your father to-day."

Mortimer was silent so many minutes, sitting, turned towards her, upon his chair, with his elbow on its back, and his face half hidden in his hand, that Eva, regretting she had touched this sore spot in his history, longed to slip away and leave him alone till the pain should have passed. At length he spoke hurriedly.

"Yes; and how is he — the old man?"

"Mr. Salsby didn't seem in feeble health, but he looked very miserable."

"Ah, yes; I suppose so. But it wasn't my fault. I did not know what practices the old man was up to. I remember all about you, now, Miss Roberts. Your brother was in business in Campfields."

"He worked for Mr. Beeler."

"I met him in the grocery, and liked him. He is a real man, every inch, and will get on. I remember a discussion I had with him on the efficacy of aspiration versus natural status. I do not recall the exact drift of the argument now, only I am dimly conscious that I found myself beaten."

Eva was wondering if Charley talked on such metaphysical subjects in Mr. Beeler's old grocery, and she had no reply ready.

"Where is your brother now?"

"In Chicago."

"In business there?"

"Yes; in a publishing house."

"I am glad to hear he is doing well. Your stars have taken a lucky turn lately."

"I do not understand."

"You are both in much happier surroundings than in Campfields."

"O, no," she cried, a piteous grief springing into every feature of her sensitive little face.

"Forgive me," he said, gently. "I thought it must be a pleasanter state of affairs to live in this beautiful house in the city, and to know that your brother is in a good position, than to live in that cramped little cottage in the country, and submit to the various inconveniences that would accompany that mode of life;" and Mortimer thought he had made a very delicate hint at poverty.

"I used to be very happy here when I was a little girl. This was my mamma's house, and we were all together. I know now that it is better for us as it is, and am very thankful for the advantages we both are receiving. Of course we don't have to work so hard as at Campfields; but there mother and Charley and I were together. How can it be happier now that mother is gone, and Charley and I are so far apart?" and a little sob would come at the end, spite of all Eva's efforts at a steady face and voice.

Mortimer's "best mood" came uppermost as he listened to Eva's sad little story. The usual glib smooth-

ness died out of his voice, and it was deep, manly, and tender, as he said, "At least, Miss Eva, there is no shame spot in your family for you to look back upon."

Eva remembered her father's weakness for appropriating all the hard earnings of her mother and herself, and replied, gently and sadly, "There are some things not pleasant to remember for every one, I suppose."

Mortimer colored, recalling too late the rumors he had nearly forgotten of Mr. Roberts' disgraceful death. "I need not surely ask you to help me keep the unhappy secret of my family!" he murmured amid his long unused confusion.

"Only Noll and I know it. We have kept it for you so far. You must trust us to do right by you in the future," was Eva's grave reply.

Mrs. Meredith brought a chair and sat down before them. This *tête à tête* must be broken up. She could not imagine what they had found so deeply interesting to talk about.

"I want to ask of you, Mr. Salsby, a great favor. Jack and I were speaking of some little preparations for my dear girl's wedding. It is to take place in September, as soon as practicable after our return from the Springs. Mr. Donaldson has no intimate friends in this city, and he has asked us to secure the services of some of ours for groomsmen. I hope it is not presum-

ing too much upon your good nature to count you as one of them."

"Ah, I — thank you," stammered Mortimer — "for the honor."

"The honor is ours. Then we may depend upon you?"

"I know of nothing now to prevent," replied he, with his most winning smile; but he thought, "I'll *find* something to prevent if I am expected to play gallant to that next daughter."

"Are you to be among the bridesmaids?" he asked, turning again to Eva.

Mrs. Meredith walked away, in despair of separating them, to request the same favor of Dick Waters.

"Yes; Sophy, Noll, and I, and Jack is to be one of the groomsmen."

"Beyond my duties to the bridegroom, may I hope to be allowed the pleasure of attending you?" he asked in his most airy and elegant fashion.

"I'm to be with Jack," replied Eva, half frightened at the mere thought of being apportioned as the companion of Mr. Salsby. Jack had won her consent to be bridesmaid, that very morning, only by the promise of his own exclusive attention.

"What's that about Jack?" asked Noll, drawing near.

"Only that he has promised to stand with me at Ri's wedding.

"That leaves Mr. Salsby to you," said Dick to Noll; "for I shall stand with Sophy."

"Who told you so?" snapped Sophy.

"I knew you couldn't refuse," returned Dick, with a covert sneer.

"I accept the position with pleasure," said Mortimer.

"But I don't!" exclaimed Noll. "I wonder what Jack means by leaving me to shift for myself in this way. Jack belongs to me."

"You certainly need not shift for yourself. I will do all in my power to make your position a pleasant one," replied Mortimer, feeling, perhaps for the first time in his life, the chagrin of not finding himself the most desirable person in the world.

"O, you are very good," Noll said, her good nature quickly rallying. "I'm sure I couldn't wish for better company, except Jack."

Meanwhile, a little apart, Sophy hissed out, in reply to Dick's impudence, "I *can* refuse, and I'll be sick the day of the wedding before I'll stand up with you."

"No, you won't," muttered Dick, staring boldly into Sophy's angry face with his wicked black eyes. Then he added, yet lower, "I never told Salsby yet that you were the little fool who thought I was going to risk breaking my neck to marry you." Dick took a confidential attitude beside Sophy, and looked across the

room before he brought his eyes back to her white face. "Are you going to stand with me?" he asked.

"I suppose I shall have to," gasped Sophy, choking with fear, shame, and rage.

"Yes, you will have to," Dick coolly agreed. "Your place will be next Ri; and that is where I want to be. Therefore we stand together." And Dick, having carefully explained his position, walked away to tell Mrs. Meredith that her daughter Sophy had done him the honor to allow him the place at her side for the wedding.

Mrs. Meredith had fully intended that for Mr. Salsby but as Jack had promised to stand with Eva, she was sure of Mr. Salsby for Noll, and therewith rested content.

The Meredith party went forth from the dusty city on its tour of summer pleasures two days later, as had been planned. Only Noll and Eva were left in the great house.

CHAPTER X.

MINNIE TRUE.

NOT many days after the departure of the Meredith family, Noll and Eva were driven away to spend a few weeks at Mrs. Dana's house. Minnie True met them at the door, with her bright face all smiles and dimples. Noll thought her enterprising little pug nose seemed lifted on purpose for kisses, and she acted upon the fancy by quickly bestowing a salute upon its very tip. Minnie drew back, surprised at this novel greeting, and looked up eagerly into Noll's merry face. Then, satisfied with her investigations, she kissed Noll heartily, saying, "I like you." She then led them to the room that had been prepared for them, assisted in laying aside their hats, and rearranging their toilets before going down to Mrs. Dana. Eva could not help feeling, as her eyes glanced about the chamber, and along the hall, and again in the pleasant, cool little parlor, where Mrs. Dana sat busy with some fine sewing, a something in the general air and fashion of

the house that reminded her of her own mother's home — a something that had never touched her in all aunt Matilda's grand and elegant furnishings. Perhaps the lack of it was the very reason why she could never make the house where her early childhood had been spent seem like home to her again.

Minnie had caught up from a basket a long strip of delicate lace-like texture, and her small fingers were giving magical impulses to an obedient little black shuttle, that flew in and out among loose, intricate threads, in a sagacious manner, quite confusing to Eva's slight acquaintance with tatting. Mrs. Dana was asking all manner of kindly questions about every subject likely to interest them. But Eva could not keep her eyes from watching, and her heart from envying, Minnie's deft fingers and wise shuttle, that went always just right, and never tripped; while she was also distantly admiring the beautiful result of all this swift precision. She moved to a seat beside Minnie, and took up the end of the long strip of lace, saying, with a sigh, "O I wish I could make tatting like this!"

"Don't look at that end!" cried Minnie, offering the work under her hands. "That is where I began, and it is uneven and dirty now."

"This is more beautiful yet!" said Eva, lost in hopeless admiration at the fine, even rounds, snow-white, and laced together with firm bars of the same work.

"I never could do it. I had such a fearfully hard time learning the mere stitch! I nearly wore out Ri's patience, and she has a great deal."

"O, if you have learned the stitch, the rest is easy enough," said Minnie. "It's the first stitch that costs. I can show you how all this pattern is worked up any day while you are here. Then, after a little practice, you will do it as well as I, or better."

"I am afraid it would take me a long time."

"I think I should like to do that sort of work," said Noll, who had drawn near to look at the lace, and watch the flying fingers and shuttle. "It must be very easy."

"Why, don't you remember, Noll, how you used to say, last winter, that nothing would tempt you to learn anything that was as hard as I found tatting?"

"Yes; but Minnie does it so easily, that I am inclined to think, my dear Evvy, that you must have been unusually stupid."

"Come and prove it then," cried Minnie, eagerly. "There is no time like now. I will be your teacher, and let us see if you will learn any easier than Eva did."

Minnie produced a little white shuttle from her work-basket, and was rapidly filling it from a spool.

"I suppose it isn't any harder with white shuttles than with black ones?" Noll suggested. "I remember that Eva had a white one."

Minnie laughed. "White ones are prettier, and generally either very thin and frail, or very thick and clumsy. The black ones have service in them. This is a cunning little thing that Frank brought home to me. It is too pretty to spoil, as I certainly should if I carried it about in my pocket with my work."

"Carry work in your pocket!" cried Noll. "Pray, what for?"

"To have it handy, to be sure. I accomplish a good deal by using my odd minutes."

"What an industrious little puss you are!" said Noll, arranging the thread on her long, awkward fingers, as Minnie taught. "I used to think Eva was a tiresome bee. She mends all her own clothes, and often makes some of them, just to have something to do, she says."

"Why shouldn't she?" put in Mrs. Dana.

Noll looked up in surprise. "I thought, why *should* she, rather, when she has a larger allowance than she spends, and there is not the least need of it."

"It is better to do even unnecessary work than to be idle," replied Mrs. Dana. "Work completed is always a satisfaction."

"I'm afraid I'd rather be idle," replied truthful Noll, with a blush, feeling, for the first time in her life, ashamed of her lazy habits, delicious day-dreams, and wasted hours. "My thread won't slip, like yours," she added to Minnie.

"Ah, you have been tying knots with the wrong thread! I told you to make all the knots with the upper thread, then the other will slip through them. There! begin again;" and Minnie snapped off the abortive round, and gave the fresh end into Noll's fingers.

"But don't you think, Mary —" and Eva stopped, frightened; for the home-feeling, and the presence of Minnie and Mary True, had made her forget for the moment, and brought the old girlish name to her lips again.

"Never mind," said Mrs. Dana; "call me Mary, if it still seems natural to you, as it must while you are here with Minnie and me. And, at any rate, let me hear what you were going to say."

"Don't you think necessary work is a great deal more satisfactory and pleasant than what is unnecessary?"

"We should hardly feel like working at what we considered unnecessary. In one sense, all work is necessary — needful to the gratification of some desire. There is work unavoidable in order to sustain life itself, that earns for the poor their daily bread. And there is work that seems equally necessary to those whose life is not so hard and barren of pleasure, and who recognize other wants springing from the refinements of civilization. To us it is a necessity that our food be

temptingly prepared, our clothing clean and neat, and there is a great deal of needful work accordingly. But the savage, who recognizes no such absurd necessities, saves a deal of labor by his less cultured tastes."

"I cannot quite think that *all* labor is needful," said Eva, while Noll snapped off her third failure, and began again. "What is the use of having one's night-gowns ruffled all around, and from top to bottom? It is a great deal of work." Eva was recalling some of the needle wonders of Ri's trousseau, over which she knew Mrs. Meredith's seamstress was bending, through all these hot summer days.

"I am glad you do not quite yield to my statement. And now I must show you another side of the matter. I said every kind of work is created by a demand for it, in order to gratify some human desire. But there is a great difference in the importance, purity, and nobleness of our desires. It should be our endeavor to choose such work as will gratify and stimulate our holier feelings and inclinations."

"And isn't all this time, thought, and money spent upon dress an awful waste?" asked Noll.

"It often is, though it may not be always so. A portion of every one's time, thought, and money *must* be devoted to dress. It is for each to judge for herself how much she is justified in giving to this part of life."

Eva had pushed a cricket to Mrs. Dana's feet, and dropped her shower of curls over her lap. "What is it, Eva dear?" and Mary Dana's gentle face bent over her.

"Only that you, and everything here, remind me so of mother and home. You always seemed to me like my mother."

Mary kissed her fair forehead, and said, kindly, "I hope it is pleasant for you here."

"O, yes, indeed! It is just like heaven."

"Heaven, Eva! What do you mean?" she asked.

Noll spitefully bit off her sixth blunder, and muttered, "Pshaw!" Minnie came to her assistance with renewed directions.

Eva whispered softly, "Only that since mother and Charley are gone, everything seems strange and cold to me, as if I were in a foreign country, and didn't know the language. Sometimes I am afraid I'll never find home again, till I go to mamma in heaven. No one understands me, nor I any one else. Not even Jack and Noll, though they are very good and kind to me. I feel so lonesome with everybody!" and Eva's eyes had a far-away look, as she sat with her arms across Mrs. Dana's lap.

"I think we all get a little lost among our friends sometimes," she replied.

The dinner bell rang before Eva left her place, or

Noll made a successful round. They had not heard the hall door open, and a quick step strike the stair. So, when they had reached the dining-room, it was a grand surprise to hear Frank's voice, and find him there before them. Noll made a stately bow on being presented. She had obtained a very high opinion of Frank True from Eva's fragmentary remarks concerning him. Eva blushed as she remembered their meeting in St. James' Chapel, but greeted him with a genuine welcome, that did not think of objecting to the brotherly kiss he had given her, as well as Minnie, from her earliest remembrance. Frank, grown older with his eighteen years, but yet not quite so wise as he might have been, marked the flitting blush, misunderstood it, and thought, with a tugging at his heart, "She is growing up, and by and by she will be coming out and looking for a husband, as other girls do. I suppose I must not kiss her any more."

Frank had given up his intended summer trip, and returned to the city to remain until his college term reopened. The reason for his sudden change of programme he did not give till alone with his sister Mary — scarcity of funds. He had found his mother setting out upon her country visit with far too slim a purse for her comfort and pleasure. He had forced her to use what had been set apart for himself; and now he was quite compensated, he gayly announced, by finding

that his good fates had made him one of this very select and *récherché* party of fair ladies, than whom he could not have chosen more desirable ones from his entire circle of acquaintances, which, by the way, was anything but extensive.

"What will you do to-day?" asked Mrs. Dana, as the girls rose from the breakfast table next morning.

"I suppose we shall hardly want to go out in this heat, unless we have something very well worth going for," said Minnie, looking interrogatively at her guests.

Both the girls concurred in this opinion.

"Then how shall we amuse ourselves?" said Minnie. "There is a croquet-table in the upper hall. Do you like croquet?"

Noll was silent, and Eva replied, politely, "Pretty well."

"Truth is," Noll broke out, "we got dreadfully tired of knocking those little balls at school. Madame Vanrie set up a table, because it was a fashionable game, and used to keep a full set of us girls at play there, in all our leisure hours, to put us in practice."

"O, dear!" laughed Minnie; "I don't wonder you were tired of it."

"I'd rather play 'home' than anything else," said Eva. "What should you do if we were not here? Can't we do it with you? Then it will be just like being 'at home.'"

The words did not have the same significance to Noll that Eva assigned to them. Noll waited to learn what magic interpretation should transform them into something to be so particularly desired.

Minnie understood Eva, but she also observed Noll's blank face. "I am afraid you would not find much enjoyment in my way of being at home," she replied. "It does very well when one really *is* at home, and is eager to get on with work and study; but it isn't so good for entertainment when one is away on a visit."

"But tell us what it is," said Noll, tucking up one foot upon an ottoman before sitting down, in the pleasant and cool western-looking library, whither Minnie had led them. Mrs. Dana was busy superintending her household, and Frank had vanished from the breakfast-room as soon as the meal was ended. So the three girls disposed themselves easily and comfortably for a lazy chat. "I should like to know how you live at home," continued Noll, "because everything seems somehow different from what it does at our house, and yet I can't tell exactly how or why;" and Noll's puckered forehead and puzzled face would have been a study for a physiognomist.

"But you know this is sister Mary's home, and not mine."

"So it is; I forgot. But isn't it very like yours?"

"Yes, somewhat, because Mary is like mother. When I am at home," Minnie slowly continued, after a pause, "I have my work before me, and I just keep right along with it."

"You mean, by work, your school work?"

"Yes, and a good many things beside."

"I know; you are a bee, like Eva."

Minnie laughed. "I never was so classified among entomological specimens before, and don't lay claim to the honor now."

"Dear me!" and Noll got off her ottoman, and went peering about the book-cases.

"What are you looking for?" asked Minnie.

"Webster's Unabridged. I'm an ignoramus, I know, but I never did hear that word before."

Minnie blushed that she should have brought her guest to confusion, and said, meekly, "I am sorry I used it, then; but there really isn't any other one that has the same meaning;" as she laid the great volume upon a desk before Noll.

"I'm glad you used it. You have become the unconscious means of enlarging my vocabulary to the extent of six syllables, and I am grateful just in proportion to the length of the word. I revel in long words, only I like to be sure I am fully acquainted with their various shades of meaning."

"There are no shades of meaning to this one," said

Minnie. "It is as solid and sharp as steel; made for use, and not for beauty, like all technical terms."

"Here it is! 'Pertaining to the science of insects.' No two meanings to that;" and Noll replaced the dictionary, and resumed her seat. "You were going to tell me what you work at, besides your school-books."

"Well, there is my music."

"I count that among my school studies. Of course we all take turns at hammering the piano — poor tortured temple of tones! I am glad pianos have no ears to hear the sounds learners draw from them, nor hearts to feel the jar of discords."

"I'm sure you never torture yours. You speak so feelingly of it, as if you loved it," said Minnie, her face lighting up with the interest of a real musician.

"You are greatly mistaken there. I am the very worst hand at the piano in the whole family."

"How can that be when you love it?"

"Can't you love poetry without being a poet, and music without being a musician? O, I can dream such beautiful music in my head! but when I try to make it alive and real — such bungling! Whatever spirit of music there is in me was born hopelessly dumb. Still, I practise, because ma says it is necessary to my education. But everything I try to play is terribly unsatisfactory, and leaves me — well, hungry!"

"They tell me music is my forte," said Minnie, modestly; "so I am studying that as a specialty, with my school lessons, that I may make myself useful by it some time."

"I should think," said Noll, after a little reflection, "it would be very *invigorating* to have a specialty."

"It is," replied Minnie. "It makes you feel that you have a plan of work, perhaps for your whole life, before you. Of course it will be subject to all sorts of modifications as you go on. I only know that music is my specialty; whether I shall teach it, compose it, or express it, I neither know nor care. That will decide itself at the right time. Meanwhile I can study with a fixed purpose, and perfect myself in that one branch of art. When something points to one of those three branches of my study, as most fit or useful, I suppose I shall follow in that direction."

"What do you mean by expressing it?"

"As an artist — a musical artist; but I do not flatter myself that I have any great talent in that direction."

"Like Patti or Parepa?"

"Like Gottschalk, Ole Bull, or Camilla Urso," said Minnie, laughing and flushing.

"Did you ever learn the violin?"

"I am studying it now. I like it better than the piano."

Eva came down from a chair, on which she had mounted to examine some books on a high shelf, and joined the conversation. "Noll has asked questions enough for a while. It is my turn now. I wish, Minnie, you would tell us just how you pass a day when you are at home."

"It is very little to tell," said Minnie. "I generally take two hours for the piano before school. My school hours are only from nine till one; so I get two more hours, from two till four, for the violin. Then, if I have any school lessons to prepare at home, I do that next; and when all my study is over for the day, I go to mother. Sometimes I read to her, and sometimes we only chat; but then I have my sewing or tatting. She always has her work. After dinner, I have an evening till nine; and now that I am fifteen, I shall sit up till ten, when we are at home again. Evenings I do just what I choose — play and sing to mother, read, or sew. That is all."

"I wish we could do so," said Noll, who was beginning to appreciate Eva's enthusiasm for home.

"We don't accomplish much," sighed Eva.

"What school is it where you have such hours?" Noll asked, suddenly.

Minnie gave the name and street. It was a small, private place, of no note.

"I'll tell you what we can do, Evvy," Noll con-

tinued; "I'll persuade father to let us begin the new year there, instead of at Madame Vanrie's, and we can try if we can't accomplish something, too. I don't think much of Madame Vanrie, and I don't believe father does, though he never says much, because Sophy is always scolding about her."

"I should like to change schools, if Minnie's is a good one," said Eva; "and it would be delightful to meet her every day."

"Yes, and we will do it," Noll announced, decisively.

"Well, girls," said Mrs. Dana, coming into the room, "you have chatted busily enough to make up for having no other entertainment, I suppose."

"We have held a great discussion, and come to a grand decision," said Eva.

"Let me hear results," Mrs. Dana replied, seating herself among them.

"Evvy and I are going to leave Madame Vanrie's school, and go to the same one that Minnie does."

"I should think it would require the sanction of some one in authority, before you could finally decide any such question."

"I influence the authorities," said Noll, with droll gravity. "I know, if I explain matters to father, he will approve; and, when he is won over, he will bring ma along, too, perforce."

"Very sagacious," laughed Mrs. Dana.

"But," said Eva, "the trouble is, we haven't any specialties to be at work upon in all our spare time, as Minnie has."

"I had not thought of that," said Noll.

"Why don't you each choose one?" asked Minnie.

"So we will! Let me see," began Noll.

"Don't be in a hurry about so important a matter," said Mrs. Dana. "If your choice is to be of any service, it is a weighty question. I propose that you leave the subject now, and think about it at your leisure. If you come to any decision, we will hear it on the last evening of your visit."

"I shall want all that time to find out what I am good for," said Eva.

"Seems to me I shall never be able to choose one thing and *stick to it*," said Noll.

"But you must," cried Minnie. "If you keep changing your business, you will never be very good at anything."

"I am afraid I never shall," acquiesced Noll, humbly.

"Business?" queried Eva.

Noll unconsciously straightened herself upon her ottoman, as Frank's step came along the hall, and Frank's face appeared inside the library door.

"What are you all doing here?" he asked, in some surprise at the solemn little conclave.

"Holding a Yankee town meeting," said Minnie.

"Waiting for you," replied Mrs. Dana. "Is everything ready?"

"No; *you* are not," returned Frank, as he tossed his hat upon a table, and took a chair among them. "Who is moderator?"

"Mary," said Minnie.

"Mrs. Moderator, I move that this meeting be adjourned *sine die*, that the members may make ready for a trip to Staten Island."

"Second the motion!" Minnie joyfully exclaimed.

"And I!" "And I!" cried Noll and Eva.

"As the entire meeting seconds the motion, there is hardly need of putting it to vote," said Mrs. Dana. "Frank's impatience shows that all is ready but ourselves, so I recommend hasty toilets."

"My impatience!" demurred Frank. "I thought I had exhibited anything but that, in going through the tedious parliamentary formula to start you to get ready."

"O, you behaved beautifully!" Mary rejoined; "but you *were* impatient, or the parliamentary formula would not have been tedious." And Mrs. Dana followed the girls up stairs, to heed her own recommendation of a hasty toilet.

CHAPTER XI.

NOLL AND EVA.

A SHORT drive brought them to a small wharf upon the river, in the upper part of the city. A pretty sail-boat lay here, and a skipper was stretched full length upon her deck, as if to dry in the sunshine. The man rolled lazily to his feet, while they alighted from the carriage, and, with Frank, assisted the ladies to step aboard. While they settled themselves and a large hamper in the stern of the boat, and spread umbrellas, the skipper pushed off and spread his sail. Soon they were gliding smoothly and rapidly down the river. Frank had brought a huge light gingham umbrella, which he arranged so as to comfortably protect himself and Eva, while he kept one hand free to manage the helm according to the skipper's order. A few hours' sail brought them to a pleasant cove in Staten Island, where a cool and shady grove reached to the water's edge, and a boat-house stood half hid behind a jutting rock. Before their boat was fairly

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secured beside the little wharf, a man appeared from a well-kept terraced garden higher up the island; but upon recognizing Mrs. Dana, he changed his first intention of ordering the party off with the information that these were private grounds, and no picnics received, to a cordial welcome, and all the assistance he could render about landing. The owner of these beautiful grounds, a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Dana, was travelling in the mountains with his family. Mrs. Dana had often visited here, and now brought her young friends to picnic in the grove, by invitation of the lady herself. The sail and the cool breeze of the sea had so sharpened their appetites that they were glad to first attack the hamper they had brought. Afterwards they wandered through the grove, gathering green leaves and little wild flowers. Then they drew around a mossy old rock, on the edge, to see the sun set.

"I am going to make a wreath, for Mary, of my leaves and flowers," said Eva. "We will crown her our queen."

"And I will make one for Noll," Minnie rejoined.

"Then I will try and gobble mine together as well as I can for Evvy," said Noll. "I'm no sort of a hand at making pretty things."

"I must see that Minnie is properly adorned out of my lapful of treasures," said Mrs. Dana.

"Seems to me you have made a very pretty ring of yourselves, and left me out in the cold," Frank said.

"Never mind, Frank," said Eva; "I was going to make you one as soon as I had finished Mary's."

"All right, then," he replied, throwing himself down beside her. "Shall I pull off the leaves for you?"

"Yes; only don't leave little tails to them. Take your knife and cut each stem. I've been biting them till my teeth ache."

"Frank!" exclaimed Noll, suddenly, "I wish you'd tell me what I'm good for."

Frank raised his eyebrows, and would have enjoyed laughing if Noll had not seemed so fearfully in earnest. As it was, he could not help replying, "Good for asking surprising questions. Capital for that, I should say."

"I suppose that is one of the many things I am bad for," Noll gravely and sadly answered.

"What did you mean by asking me that?" inquired Frank, seriously.

"I really wanted to know."

"Noll and I are going to choose a profession while we are with Mary. She is to approve our choice, and then we shall study for that special object," explained Eva.

"A profession!" grimaced Frank.

"Of course I don't mean minister, doctor, or lawyer; but just as Minnie has taken music."

"And did you wish me to give my opinion of what you had better choose?" asked Frank of Noll.

"Yes."

"Then I must beg you to wait a while, till I have had time to form one. I am not competent, on so short acquaintance, to give an opinion on such a serious question."

"I know what Noll could do splendidly," said Minnie.

"What?" cried Noll, eagerly.

"O, I'm not going to say till we hold our final meeting. I hope you will think of it yourself. If you do not, I shall offer my opinion for your consideration, then."

"O, dear, I shall never know. Hold up your head, Evvy;" and a wreath was laid gently on Eva's forehead.

"May I come to your final meeting?"

"Ask Mary. She is chairman," said Minnie.

Frank looked up at his sister.

"I think that ought to be decided by the parties most interested. How is it, girls?" said Mrs. Dana, appealing to Noll and Eva.

"I'm willing he should come," said Eva.

"So am I, if he will only have an opinion about me," said Noll.

Thus Frank became a member of the occupation

meeting, as Minnie called it. The wreaths were all completed and placed upon their heads. The sun was just disappearing in a sultry red haze, across the Jersey flats, as they came down upon the little curving beach, whose two horns reached far out into the water. They were quickly in the boat, and the skipper soon had it skimming along up the lazy river. It was far into the evening when they again moored beside the little wharf whence they had started in the morning. The carriage had been waiting two hours. They were all rather weary with the long sail, and were glad to be jolted over the streets toward home.

Noll wanted to give up tatting after her fruitless attempts of the first evening. But Minnie would not allow it. She declared she wanted to see just how much duller Noll would prove herself than Eva. As Eva had learned, certainly Noll could, if she only persevered. So she persistently brought forward, every day, the same little white shuttle, from which, already, half the thread had disappeared with no apparent progress. At last Noll grew determined, saying that she "wouldn't be such an idiot. She could and she *would* learn." After that she very soon did learn, and before their visit was over she had made nearly a yard of plain rounds, and several inches of Minnie's own beautiful and intricate lace pattern. Minnie felt that the rousing of Noll's own interest and perseverance,

which had made her final success in the work, was her share in the triumph. Noll might be proud of her tatting — Minnie was proud of Noll. Their choice of business interested the girls greatly, and many were the talks they had about it. But Minnie persistently refused to suggest any new course to either of them, though she did not hesitate to advance many considerations for or against any one they might be discussing. Frank and Mrs. Dana frequently had some pleasure trip planned for them, and Noll declared she had seen more of her native city in her visit at Mrs. Dana's than in all the rest of her life together. But the pleasant four weeks drew to a close at length. Eva could not help a feeling of sadness at leaving the happy home-like house, where she had met old friends, and seemed to be once more a little girl. Poor little Eva! only fourteen, and yet feeling her childhood to be a time long past. Even Noll, a year older, a foot taller, and a long way wiser in many things, seemed younger than Eva. For truly it is sorrow that ages us, and Eva had felt that in her young heart. It was a serious and earnest thing to her, this fixing upon some one branch of industry as her special work. It meant something by which she could provide for herself, and perhaps for others, if she should ever again see such hard times as she had known in that year at Campfields; something by which she might, at least, never again be compelled to live upon

Charley's earnings and self-sacrifice. For Noll, however, it was only something to interest — to keep her busy and out of mischief. No wonder Noll thought of various delightful methods of accomplishing such ends; and no wonder Eva found it hard to select any one thing, upon which she dared risk the securing of such important objects. Thus it was with very undecided minds that the girls gathered in Mrs. Dana's library, on the last evening of their visit.

"It isn't the least bit of use, Mrs. Dana," said Noll, "for me to try to choose a profession. I shall never be able to stick to it six months, if I have one, much less ever do any good with it."

"But you *must* stick to it; and then I'll take the risk of your not doing any good with it," replied Mrs. Dana..

"You say I must; but how can I, when it isn't in me?"

"I admit that there is not in you much natural perseverance. You must balance that defect by calling in the aid of some other quality that *is* in you."

"What other quality?"

"Sign a pledge with yourself that you will keep steadily to the pursuit you have chosen. Then your honor steps in, and your self-respect. I am sure you will not fail when those qualities come to your aid."

"O, Mrs. Dana, I believe I *should* succeed in that

way. But how do you know I shall certainly do good with my profession, — accomplish anything in this big world, — even if I do persevere?"

"Because that really is in you. You have a true and earnest desire to become a woman who shall be good for something in the world. Nothing will hinder you from achieving this except your unsteadiness to any one purpose. You have excellent talents, but you play with them, instead of using them. I know many people persevere forever, and never seem to amount to much; but it is because they persevere in a work for which they are not, either by nature or by education, fitted."

"Well, I wonder what *I* am fitted for, either by nature or education," sighed Noll.

"Now is the time to find out your natural bent, and then you can adapt your educational course to it."

Noll sat silent and thoughtful. Leaving her to study out her problem for herself, Mrs. Dana turned to Eva.

"What have you found to be your strongest inclination?"

"I really don't know, dear Mary," Eva replied, in a sad and just a little mortified tone. "It seems such an important matter; and I don't think I have any natural bent."

"It is an important matter. If I thought your uncle

Martyn was enough acquainted with you to aid you, I should have advised your consulting him; but—"

"O, he knows very little about me," replied Eva. "He just loves and cares for me because I am his sister's child; but he has only seen me in those few weeks before I came to aunt Matilda's, since I was a very little girl."

"And Charley?" suggested Minnie.

"I wrote to him all about it."

"And what did he say?" asked Minnie, eagerly.

"He could not help me any," replied Eva, dropping her head over her work, while a pink color crept slowly out to the very tips of her little ears; for Charley had thought this choosing a profession very comical business for girls, and he told Eva that she would be most successful, and do most good in the world, as some good man's wife. It was not at all the sort of answer she had hoped for, and somehow it had grieved her sadly. It might be all very well to be a good man's wife; but supposing she never had a chance to marry any one she liked. How dreadful it would be to marry old Mr. Donaldson, like Ri, and consider him always as just a tolerable sort of bore! Would Charley ever want her to be such a "good man's wife"?

"Didn't he offer you a single suggestion?" asked Mrs. Dana, feeling that it was not exactly like Charley to have nothing at all to say upon such a question.

"Nothing that was good for anything."

"What did he say?" Mrs. Dana was busy with a pattern in colored wools, or she would have seen Eva's distressed little face, and refrained from questioning.

Frank noticed the pink deepen to an uncomfortable red, and guessed what Charley's advice had been. "Made fun of you — didn't he, Eva? Ought to have been ashamed of himself — only I suppose he didn't know how much in earnest you are."

"No; I'm sure he didn't know, or he wouldn't have laughed at it," replied Eva, quickly, with a feeling of great relief, for which she shot a look of gratitude to Frank.

"Seems to me you are both at a dead stand-still," said Minnie. "What is the result of these later cogitations, Noll?"

"I think I could be a good actress," said Noll, slowly and decidedly.

"Holy horrors!" muttered Frank.

Noll colored, and dropped her head again. Frank repented his exclamation, and said, heartily, "I think you could, too, Noll; but, if I were you, I wouldn't."

"Why not?"

"It would be a wicked waste. You can do so much better — so much more good, I mean — by turning your abilities in some other direction."

"Just tell me in *what* direction."

"Well, in society. A woman of your character and powers, with the additional circumstances of wealth and position in which you happen to be placed, must wield an immense influence over other women with whom she is associated. Fashionable women, and those in the higher circles of society, need just such elevating and enlarging of their characters as you could teach them. There isn't one atom that is petty or selfish in you." Frank spoke so earnestly that Noll's face glowed with a pleasure which forgot to blush at his last assertion. She felt that he spoke the truth. She knew she could influence others. Yet she was not satisfied, and could not tell why.

"I think," said Mrs. Dana, "Frank has brought out some very broad and good ideas; and yet it seems to me they do not quite give the solution to Noll's problem."

"I don't see how I am to study for such a work," said Noll.

"No doubt," Mrs. Dana continued, "Noll will exercise great influence with those among whom she may live and associate. But influence comes more from what one *is*, than from what one *does*. All that Frank says of Noll may become true, — I think it probably will, — but that is, after all, only the passive and unconscious part of her life. She wants now some active purpose — something for which to fit herself, and which

shall become a positive labor towards the achievement of an object."

"So you see I don't get ahead one bit!" Noll was getting so much in earnest about this matter, and so discouraged at the difficulty of finding any pursuit adapted to her, that her voice was gaining an accent of bitter disappointment.

"I shall have to tell you my plan," said Minnie, cheerfully.

"O, do, if you have one."

"Perhaps it will not suit you. I thought of it because you have such odd ways of saying things, and of going to the bottom of matters at once."

"Should think I had!" murmured Noll.

"Seeing through people, I mean, and understanding them better than I could;" and Minnie paused, uncertain whether to finish or not.

"Go on; but have it something I must study for and work for."

"Well, you would need to keep on studying out characters of people. Eva can help you at that, I think. And you must read — read a great deal — old standard authors, and the very best new books — read and study them."

"That's fine!" said Noll. "I've always done that sort of work, for play. What else?"

"I don't know what else; but perhaps you will.

Then some time when you are quite grown up, — say twenty-five or thirty, — O, you must practise a great deal."

"Practise what?"

"Writing out your thoughts. And then write a wonderful book, that shall do a great deal of good in the world — go everywhere, and be translated into all the languages of Europe!"

"O!" cried Eva, who had followed Minnie up to the climax of her proposition with the utmost eagerness, and now felt quite rewarded.

Noll was silent and thoughtful. "Perhaps I could do something at writing," she said, at last. "At any rate, it is better than anything else I have thought of. And it would not hinder me from carrying out Frank's suggestions, too."

"What had you thought of? You have only mentioned one thing," said Mrs. Dana.

"O, I thought of the stage and the pulpit. I *should* like to be a minister, if I only wasn't a girl."

"Stage and pulpit! Quite a juxtaposition!" laughed Frank.

"And then I'd like to be a hospital nurse, or a professor in a girls' college, only I don't know what I should want to be professor of."

"Belles-lettres, of course," put in Minnie. "That and authorship would run nicely together."

"So they would! I'll remember that," said Noll. "Among you all, you have given me quite a start on my career, and I shall be everlastingly grateful to you. I shall certainly turn my attention to belles-lettres, and as for specialties therein, I can work them out for myself, and decide by and by, as Minnie intends to do about her music. I want to hear Evvy's plans talked out, now."

"I'm afraid I haven't any," said Eva, gently. Noll's prospects looked so brilliant, and her own so very blank!

"We'll soon find you have," said Mrs. Dana, kindly. "Tell me what you like to study best at school."

"I like Latin best; but *I* couldn't be a Latin professor in a girls' college."

Mrs. Dana laughed at her dismayed little face as she made this statement. "No; professorships are not in your line. You do not care much for your music?"

"Not very much."

"Drawing and painting?"

"I've not done much at them."

"Evvy can copy pictures very nicely," Noll suggested.

"But I don't enjoy it. I should not like to do it for a living."

"What had you thought of for yourself?" asked Mrs. Dana.

"I can sew nicely. I used to earn something in that way at Campfields; but it was very little."

Frank made an impatient gesture, and Mrs. Dana replied, "Manual labor is always necessary; but it seems to me only fair to leave that kind of work, as it is the simplest, to those who have had no advantages, or no abilities for doing what will call into use, not only hands, but careful, earnest thought, and long, often expensive culture. Women have been too long occupied with only the manual labor of the world. It is time they remembered that the work of their brains may be made as valuable as the brain-work of man."

"Perhaps, if I attended thoroughly to my drawing and painting, music and the languages, I might be able to teach them to beginners, as a governess. But I can't be a genius at anything."

"Very few of us can," replied Mrs. Dana. "But you have set yourself a very hard task, Eva dear, to learn, thoroughly, drawing, painting, music, and the languages. You would scatter your energies too much. Since you do not care for music and drawing, and do enjoy your Latin, I think you would make a better use of your time to give your special attention to languages. Very likely you will find you have a taste for German and French, as well as Latin."

"I should like that better. But I don't see what good I can do with it."

"Never mind; you will see in time. If your taste is for language, follow it, and trust to time and experience to show you how to turn your talent to good account."

"But the music and drawing must have some attention, I suppose. Aunt Matilda is very particular that we do not slight any of our accomplishments."

"Do not entirely neglect them, of course. Only give them less attention that you do your languages."

"I shall have to brush up on French and German, if you are to become a great linguist," said Frank. "I've no notion of letting you get ahead of me with your wonderful educational plans."

"There's an example of woman's unconscious influence," laughed Mary Dana. "I had no idea, when I advised Eva to what seemed her best course of study, that I was inciting my brother to atone for his past remissness in the study of modern languages."

Noll's first words, when she woke next morning, were, "I'm so glad it is settled!"

"Our studies? So am I," returned Eva, with a contented little yawn.

"Are you perfectly satisfied with yours?"

"I should like to know how I am to use my languages, but —"

"O, we shall find that out by the time we want to be of use. I think mine is a lovely programme — just what I like best to do — read and write!"

"I suppose you ought to read with a sort of critic's eye — observing the style of the authors, and seeing how it is formed."

"Certainly; and I must take up a course of composition and rhetoric."

At the breakfast table Mr. Dana appeared. He had just come into the city on the night boat. Perhaps he was tired; certainly he was cross. He brought a shadow with him. The girls felt that Mary Dana's sweet face had lost a little of its usual sunshine. Mr. Dana found the coffee weak, and the steak not to his liking. He inquired for his horses, and showed decided vexation on learning that one of them had been accidentally lamed. He hoped he saw the young ladies well, and that they had not found it dull, shut up in the city for the summer. Then he apparently forgot all about them, and devoted himself unreservedly to his breakfast. There was a saddened look on Minnie's happy face; Frank's was growing black. Noll felt disgusted, and exerted herself bravely to counteract a downward tendency in the corners of her mouth. Eva commenced a pleasant and lively conversation with Mrs. Dana, which the others finally joined, and which was carefully kept from flagging until after Mr. Dana had swallowed his coffee and steak, and left the table to visit the stable and his injured horse.

Much as the girls had regretted the close of their

visit, they could not help feeling that, even if it were prolonged, its delight must end with the return of Mr. Dana. So they went quietly and resignedly about their preparations for departure. At dinner time they met Mr. Meredith at his own table again. Afterwards they followed him to his library, which he was very glad to have once more invaded by the life and brightness of their presence. There he asked them many questions of their visit, and how they had employed themselves.

They told of Noll's success in tattling, of their various pleasure parties and sight-seeings, and lastly Noll told him of their educational plan. Mr. Meredith listened with approving face, and told them he not only thought it a good one, but he was more pleased than he could tell them to see his girls — for so he considered them both — taking an earnest, workful view of life and its duties.

Then Noll broached the further project of leaving Madame Vanrie's school, to attend the one where Minnie True went. She extolled the advantages of a shorter session, greater freedom of choice in branches pursued, less punctiliousness about etiquette and accomplishments, and more attention paid to solid studies. Her father heard her arguments and reasons through, and then promised to inquire into the advantages of this new school, and decide when he

had informed himself enough to make up his mind. Then the girls went to bed in their own familiar room once more. But Noll declared the day was won; she was sure her father would agree with her. And so, in time, it proved.

CHAPTER XII.

RI AND SOPHY.

THERE was a great deal of stir and bustle in the house when Mrs. Meredith and her daughters returned from the Springs, and were busy unpacking and settling their extensive wardrobes at home again. Mr. Meredith astonished the whole family — not even excepting Noll and Eva — by announcing at dinner, one day, that he had been inquiring into the manner of conducting schools, and he had concluded that it would be advisable to transfer the girls, with the opening of this new year, from Madame Vanrie's to Mrs. Hoffman's instruction.

"What fault can you find with Madame Vanrie? What will she say?" expostulated Mrs. Meredith.

"I find no fault. The explanation should simply be, that Mrs. Hoffman's school seems preferable."

"But Madame Vanrie's is so fashionable, and every way *comme il faut!*"

Mr. Meredith looked disgusted, and remained silent.

"And, Mrs. Hoffman is such a low name!"

Mr. Meredith finished his dinner, and retired to his library.

Sophy broke the spell his grave presence had enforced. "Noll and Eva can do as they please, but *I* shan't stir a step to the new school. I shall be eighteen next spring, and you always said we needn't go to school after that."

"It *will* be hard for you to change for just these six months," said her mother, sympathizingly.

"I *shan't do it!*" repeated Sophy, growing more determined with her mother's connivance.

"What do you say to it?" said Mrs. Meredith, turning to Noll and Eva.

"I don't like Madame Vanrie's, and I think I should like to change," replied Noll, gravely.

"Neither do I like Madame Vanrie," cried Sophy, savagely; "but a new school would probably be worse, particularly if pa has selected it for some stringent excellence."

"Hush, dear; don't speak so!" murmured Mrs. Meredith. "Eva, of course, can follow her own choice."

"I shall certainly make the change, if uncle approves it," said Eva.

"Then I shall stay at home till my six months are up —"

"And then you'll keep on staying at home," suggested Noll.

"What's all this about staying at home?" asked Jack, who had caught the last two remarks as he entered. "Sophy never had any such domestic tendency before;" and he prepared his soup, and began to eat it with the eager appetite of a hungry man.

Mrs. Meredith explained what had passed, and added, "I think it would be rather hard to break up all Sophy's school connections for so short a time."

"Yes, so it would. Why doesn't she keep on at Madame Vanrie's, and let the other girls change, if they like?"

"Because I don't choose to make myself the target of all the school's questions, about why the other girls left. No; I've made up my mind not to go to school another day."

"Then I don't see but you will have to stop at home," said Jack, shoving aside his soup plate, and wiping his mustache.

"I should think, ma," said Ri, "you would like to have her at home, after I am gone. Sophy would be so much company for you!"

"A daughter can't be much company till she comes out. I am so much occupied myself in society!" said Mrs. Meredith, thoughtfully.

"Yes, but now, ma, dear," began Sophy, "I should

be *so* happy, if you only would let me come out this winter! Since Ri is to be married off, there really isn't any reason why I shouldn't. Of course I wouldn't think of such a thing, if Ri wasn't fairly off your hands. But I am as near eighteen now as I shall be next winter."

"I'll think about it," said Mrs. Meredith, rising. "Come, Ri, you have two dresses to try on this evening."

Noll and Eva went to Mrs. Hoffinan's school, and there renewed with pleasure their acquaintance with Minnie True. In their spare hours, they planned and began a course of earnest study in the direction they had determined upon. Sophy remained at home, and made herself useful by assisting Ri upon the final business of her trousseau. Mr. Donaldson made his daily call, and Ri received him with her usual amiable decorum; but the excellent man could not help feeling a shadow of disappointment that she never once tripped into exhibiting any hearty affection for him. Yet she was always so sweet and lovely, he could not believe that she did not feel for him all that her promise of marriage gave him reason to expect. Thus the September days flew swiftly by, and Ri's wedding was close at hand.

"Jack," said Sophy, coming suddenly upon him in the hall, as he was entering his own room, "you and Eva are to be first couple, next to Ri, you know."

"No, that is your place. Dick Waters is with you — isn't he?"

"I don't want that place, but you needn't say I said so. You are the oldest. You can claim it; and Ri prefers you should have it."

"Does she? She hasn't said anything to me about it."

"But she will tell you so, if you ask her. Dick wants the first place, and I am determined he shall not have it, and so is Ri; and I'm sure Ri ought to have her own say."

"Of course."

"Then you will claim the first place on your own responsibility, and cut out Dick — will you?"

"Yes, if that's your game," replied Jack, laughing. Then, on the other side of his closed door, he said to himself, "Sophy has a spite against Waters. I wonder what there really was about an elopement with him? I've a good mind to try and find out, if only I had the time."

Ri was not a bride that the sun shone upon, nor the moon, either. Some said it was a late equinoctial storm, that spent its accumulated fury on the last few days of September. At any rate, there was nearly a week of almost ceaseless rain and drizzle, with cold, searching winds from the north-east. But people in well-lined houses, who never venture out save in

equally well-lined carriages, think little of the accidents of weather. Sophy did gloomily remark that "it was a horrid bad sign," but she was hastily silenced by her mother. The gay bustle of preparation proceeded, and Ri was whirled along with it, and found never a moment for doubt or foreboding. All her wishes were gratified; every beautiful thing she desired was quickly supplied; till to Sophy this getting married seemed a sort of talisman to open the doors of fairy-land, and shower its gifts about her. It was a grand wedding, quite too grand for little Eva, who stood trembling in her place as first bridesmaid. Sophy was doubly triumphant in foiling Dick Waters' scheme for standing next Ri, and in looking better than ever before in her life.

"Ri is beautiful as a picture!" she said to Dick, with real sisterly pride and delight, when, the long hours of reception over, she took his arm, as the bridal party passed out to refreshment. A table was set for them in a small breakfast-parlor, opening from the dining-room. The guests had departed, save a few flitting forms, disfigured with wraps, that haunted the front hall, awaiting belated carriages. The house wore the forlorn appearance that always follows in the footsteps of a retreating crowd: littered carpets, disarranged furniture, here and there a glove or lace handkerchief, dropped and forgotten by its owner. But the

little breakfast-parlor had been kept comparatively fresh in appearance. The newly-laid table looked cheerful and inviting to the weary couples who had formed the statue-like centre of all this moving pageant. Their faces came out of the stereotyped phase they had donned for the evening, and brightened with a sense of relief, as they found themselves no longer "the observed of all observers."

"Yes, Ri is beautiful," replied Dick, shortly, to Sophy's remark; then added, quoting from an old song, "But,—

'If she be not fair to me,
What care I how fair she be?'"

"'The ruling passion strong in death,' I see," replied Sophy, as she sank wearily into her chair at the table.

"What passion?" Dick's black eyes flashed in her face.

"Selfishness!" she coolly replied, adjusting the flounces of her feathery-white robe.

"Will you have oysters?"

"Yes; thank you."

Noll and Mortimer had both accepted with satisfaction their position in the background. Noll did not show her usual ready communicativeness. Mortimer would have liked to draw her into conversation; but having supplied her plate according to her desire, remarked upon the beauty of the bride, and regretted

the unfavorable weather, he found himself quite at a loss what he should say next, with a dim feeling that perhaps silence would be the most agreeable thing he could offer. He knew she could talk, but inferred from her brief replies that just at present she would not.

"Aren't you dreadfully tired, Evvy, dear?" she leaned across him to ask of Eva, who sat between him and Jack, and had an unusual flush upon her little face.

"Yes, rather." Eva smiled faintly, and down went the glass of water she was about to raise to her lips. Jack caught it in time to save the contents from being dashed into her neck and bosom.

"What is it, little girl?" he whispered, bending over her kindly.

"I don't know. I'm tired. I guess that's all," and she leaned an elbow heavily on the table.

"Do you want to go up stairs?"

"No; not yet. It isn't time."

"No matter for that."

"I don't want to go."

Noll was listening and holding her breath.

"She is a brave little girl," said Mortimer to Noll, in a low voice.

"Let's hurry up and get through supper, so she can go to bed," was the brusque rejoinder. "I know she is tired almost to death;" and Noll suited the action to

the word by applying herself to her heaped plate with such unction and address that its contents rapidly disappeared.

It required all Mortimer Salsby's good breeding to suppress a smile at the odd suggestion and its abrupt carrying out. When Noll ejaculated between her hasty mouthfuls of cake, "Evvy is a little angel! You don't begin to know her, first time seeing her!" he fell gradually into her enthusiastic spirit enough to expedite slightly his own fastidious manner of feasting. But Ri, who sat smiling between Mr. Donalson and Sophy, did not notice the weary little face opposite. Sophy was eagerly detailing to her the various costumes of the guests present, with an accuracy that seemed to have made special note of each one. It was still a long time before they rose from their repast. Jack detained Eva till they had all passed through the hall and stood in the great empty drawing-room again. Then he took her gently up, like a tired child, in his arms, and carried her to her own room.

"You are just as good to me as Charley could be," Eva said, with a sad little effort at laughter, that died into tears before it was quite born.

"There, don't move. I'm a doctor, you know," he said, as he placed her upon her bed. He brought a towel from the rack, and a bottle of cologne from the toilet, and bathed her aching head and hot face as gen-

tly as a mother. And Eva just lay and cried because she couldn't help it, and didn't know why.

"Have you got those slippers done that you were making for me to take out to Charley?" he asked.

"Yes. That is, they were to be done last week; but we've been so busy I have not been to the shoemaker's for them yet."

"I'm glad they are ready. Do you know when I am going?"

"This fall, you said."

"I have been waiting for the wedding. I shall start to-morrow night."

Eva opened wide her blue eyes, forgetting her tears. "O, Jack, I shall be so sorry to have you go!"

"Will you?" said Jack, with a little laugh. "I didn't expect that of any one but Noll."

"Does Noll know you are going so soon?"

"Not yet. I thought she had better lose us one at a time."

"We shall miss you dreadfully — more than Ri, even."

"Well, I am going straight to Charley; so what shall I take him from you?" and Jack called his eyes back from a sorrowful stare at the opposite wall, and played with the perfumed towel in his hands.

"Tell him — O, I've nothing much to tell him! I write him everything. Only I wish I had him here to

give him one good hug! Tell him five years are an awfully long time!"

"Yes," said Jack, absently.

"No; O, no! I forgot. You musn't tell him that, either."

"Why not?"

"Because uncle Martyn is so good to me, and I promised him I would be just as happy as a bird here. It would grieve Charley if he thought I was not."

"But you are not. And I am not to tell him that you are as much out of place in this house as a lamb in a lock-up; that you are as much at a loss what to make of your aunt and cousins, as if they had been born in India, and spoke Hindostanee; that you will manage to make something out of Noll, but all the rest of us were past help when you came; and that finally you will come out of your experience here, 'a sadder and a wiser woman.'"

"Don't talk so, Jack."

"Isn't it all true?"

"Some of it sounded a little so; but you said it bitterly, dear Jack, and that's not right. I know I don't understand you all as well as I ought, but that is as much in me as in you. It is only that we are different. One can't expect to understand everything and everybody, you know."

"But seems to me I understand you, Eva. Seems to me I can understand how terribly hollow and heartless everything here must seem to you, and what would be your way of living if you were in your own home."

"Very likely you can. It would not be anything very hard to understand, I think."

"I am going to see if your brother Charley is like you. I don't ever mean to come back to the east. I hope I shall find some one out there, like you, who will help me make a home, something after your fashion."

"I hope you will, too, dear Jack."

"You'll come and see me — won't you?"

"Yes, indeed I will."

"Have the slippers ready to-morrow."

"I'll get them on my way to school."

"Good night. I'll send Noll up to put you to bed."

Ri slipped in to bid Eva good by, as she came up to exchange her bridal robes for a travelling suit. Then she was driven away to Mr. Donaldson's elegant rooms. Mr. and Mrs. Meredith met her for a final parting on board the steamer next day. Jack said a few careless farewells at dinner. Eva had sealed up in the slippers a note to Charley, with latest accounts of Jack's hopes and intentions, asking for special kindness and love to be shown him, as he had shown such

to her. And Jack found a welcome in that western home warmer than he had ever met in his own.

The house was scarcely straightened after Ri's departure, when there occurred what Noll styled "another disastrous invasion of the *élite;*" for Sophy was to take Ri's place in society. But Noll and Eva had seen once the wonderful preparations for "coming out;" and partly for this reason, partly because they were now more interested than formerly in affairs of their own at school and at home, they took little notice of the dressy miracles that filled Sophy's heart with vain delight.

October was the lull, after the wedding preparations and expectations had culminated and come to an end. November saw Sophy launched upon the sea of society, for which she had so long felt the fascination and longing of a sailor boy for a less fickle sea — the broad blue ocean itself. She became as completely Mrs. Meredith's companion in all things as Ri had been for the past year. Noll and Eva were left very much to themselves. Sophy had been a connecting link, uniting the interests of school and Mrs. Meredith's social world. Now she left all school affairs out of her life, and lost all interest in Noll's and Eva's pursuits. Their new school, in which all their associates were strangers to her, added to this indifference. But the

two younger girls only settled the firmer into their chosen studies. The whirl, excitement, and unsatisfactoriness of Sophy's life they only guessed from afar. It did not reach or affect their little, earnest, studious, happy world.

CHAPTER XIII.

RÉSUMÉ.

THE next three years of Eva's education passed quietly by, with nothing to mark with special interest any single day. But each and every one brought its own earnest work, and its own pleasures, in ever-increasing ratio. Noll found all the diversity she required in following out her own choice of study. Mrs. Hoffman had been made acquainted with the course the girls wished to pursue, and entered heartily into it, directing, encouraging, and instructing. Eva and Noll came to be more than ever friends and companions. At last Eva ceased to feel the thin wall of strangerhood that had for so long seemed to surround her heart and keep it forever lonely. All unlikeness was forgotten in the interest of their similar yet distinct studies; the old homesick feeling was gone; and Eva was heartily happy and contented in uncle Meredith's home, with Noll for her constant companion and sister.

Ri did not return to New York at the end of the first year of her married life. Mr. Donaldson was not well, and did not like to leave his Highland home to spend the winter in another country. So, as soon as spring opened, Mrs. Meredith and Sophy sailed for Scotland, to visit Ri. They were scarcely missed by Noll and Eva. Minnie True and several other sensible and pleasant girls, whom they came to know in their new school, formed a different and far more delightful circle of acquaintances. Often they spent their evenings in the library with Mr. Meredith, who always welcomed them and enjoyed their chat. If he had writing or reading that must be done, the girls took their books or work, and refrained from disturbing him; but in order to do this, utter silence was not enjoined. Mrs. Meredith spent some months in European travel. Her return gave the quiet life of the girls one of those pleasant days of change and excitement that act as freshener upon many that both precede and follow. Mrs. Meredith had found Ri homesick and discontented, but she brightened with the visit and the trip through Europe, on which she accompanied them, and at last remained in her old Scotch home, to gratify her doting husband, instead of returning to New York for the winter, as her mother rather urged she should. Jack still tarried in the west, and gave good accounts of a flourishing practice he was securing in Chicago. He

wrote occasional generalizing sort of letters to his parents. To Noll he wrote regularly, and, as he declared, whether he had anything to say or not. Jack and Charley were much together, and their letters were equally interesting to both girls. So it came to be a fashion for each to read the other's letters. It was another bond of sympathy and union between them.

"Letter from Jack," said Noll, returning from the letter-box, whither she had hastened on hearing the carrier's ring.

Eva looked up with a smile of interest; then returned to the volume of Schiller she was reading, to wait patiently for her turn at the letter. Noll was a long time reading it. There was only one sheet. Jack did not write such long letters as Charley. At last Noll handed it to Eva, and said, with serious face, "There's real news in this." Eva, too, read it through in silence. On the first page he blurted forth, man-fashion, his news; and then, without further words upon the important item, he went rambling away about minor matters of small interest after his first announcement.

"Now, Evvy, tell me about Phœbe," said Noll, when Eva laid aside the letter and looked up. "You've only mentioned her once or twice. Jack has been very mum about her heretofore, — I might have guessed something from his very silence, — and Charley only

occasionally alludes to her. Now I must know all about her."

"The most I know of her is what I saw when she was east with uncle Martyn, just before I came here. She is three years older than I."

"Twenty. And Jack is twenty-five. That will do very well;" and Noll nodded approval so far.

"She is sensible — as sensible as you are."

"Pshaw!"

"And practical and — helpful. She seemed to me one of the thoroughly helpful kind of people."

"They are the best kind."

"I am sure you will like Phœbe. And I think — I truly think," Eva added, slowly and sagely, "she is good enough for your Jack; and that is saying a great deal, you know."

"I suppose I must take your word for it," returned Noll. "Jack used to have such a way of taking it for granted that women were, by nature, irredeemably foolish, that I always hoped I should be able to have a little care over him about choosing his wife. *I* believe there are a few — a very few — sensible women. Pity there aren't more."

"There'll be one more when you get along to woman's estate."

"And I wanted Jack should be sure to get one of them. Because I think he deserves to."

"So he does. But, Noll, I think Jack would have died an old bachelor, before he could have *married* one of the foolish kind of women; notwithstanding he was always so good-natured and amiable to them."

"I know it was his way to be considerate — charitable to hysterics and all sorts of vagaries and weaknesses. And it is a very good trait in a doctor."

"So I thought when he took care of me after Ri's wedding."

"Have you finished translating that poem?"

"Not quite. When it is done I will read it to you."

"It's fine to have somebody to 'coach' me, as college boys say, on German literature. I should have precious little time for English authors, if I had to dig out all the best foreign ones myself."

"And it's fine for me to read over my translations to some one who has an ear for the rhetoric and composition of them," replied Eva; and the girls returned to their books.

Eva was shocked at her aunt Matilda's eager inquiries concerning Mr. Martyn's wealth, the number of his children, &c., while her single question concerning Phœbe herself was the rather minor one of her beauty. But Noll only said, philosophically, "That's ma's way, you know. She can't be expected to ask about what she doesn't know or care anything about. I believe if pa had been a dragon, and had had more money than

any of her other suitors, she would have married him all the same, and been just as well satisfied as she is now."

"How can you speak so, Noll?"

"Because it's true, dear."

"But your own mother!"

"I don't know about that," said Noll, with a comical face, and her head turned quizzically on one side. "Jack and I are father's children. Ri and Sophy are ma's. Somehow they never shared us equally, but just divided up the family in that way. It's lucky there happened to be an even number of us. I should pity the odd one."

Eva could not help laughing; and yet these half comic, half bitter sayings of Noll always grieved her.

"Waters!" and old Mr. Cobden's round pink head, with its fringe of grayish-white hair, was popped from his little sanctum into the busy counting-room. The young man quickly answered the summons, and drew a chair to the table, opposite his uncle.

"Dick, my boy," said the old gentleman, pleasantly, "I want to have a little talk with you about some matters that pertain to business, and — some that don't, exactly."

"Yes, sir." Dick bowed and leaned his elbow comfortably upon the table, while he looked steadily and unwinkingly into his uncle's face.

Mr. Cobden fidgeted in his chair, and began in argumentative manner. "Since Bragg's very sad and untimely end — a melancholy affair, that — I've pensioned his widow. Did I tell you?"

"I'm glad you have, sir. Mr. Bragg was shrewd in business; and, if only he had not forgotten the proper respect to be paid to the *meum* and *tuum* of transactions, he would have been invaluable. It will be difficult to make good his place in the firm."

"*I* can't fill it. *I* can't undertake his work. I am getting too old — too — well, I don't want to drive myself, now that there is no need of it."

"Certainly not."

"But, as you say, it would be difficult and undesirable — I should say every way undesirable — to attempt to take in another partner in his place. He would probably be a stranger — perhaps unacquainted with the business — certainly unacquainted with *our* business. I *don't like it.*"

Mr. Cobden was silent; and Dick, perceiving the drift of his talk, gave him a gentle jog. "Of course you do not think of entering more into the business yourself."

"No; but I was thinking of — that is, it had occurred to me to draft young Saunders into the firm. His place could easily be supplied. In that case you would be at liberty to attend to Bragg's share of the

business; young Saunders, of course, to take your present position, as junior partner. How does that look to you?" and Mr. Cobden leaned back in his arm-chair, and regarded Dick complacently over the tips of his fingers.

"Very good. Saunders is the best man in the employ."

"You agree?"

"Yes, certainly. It secures Saunders, and gives me a much better position."

"That's what I wish to do. In a few years the whole concern must devolve upon you. I want to give you a clear knowledge of every part of its management. You have shown good judgment, good business abilities, and have been every way a reliable man. Now I want to see you under full sail in life, before I leave you." The old man thoughtfully tapped on the table with his gold bowed eye-glass, and gazed out the cramped window upon a cheerful brick wall, opposite.

It was all true. Whatever he might be in some respects, Dick Waters was a reliable business man. His good uncle's confidence had never been slighted or dishonored. In old Mr. Cobden's eyes he was a most worthy and estimable young man.

"I want you to get married, Dick, my boy," the old man recommenced rather abruptly. "I know you are

not very old yet; but young marriages are usually the happiest, and you are twenty-four — isn't it?"

"Not quite," returned Dick, with an uncomfortable movement in his chair. "Whom do you wish me to marry?"

"I didn't intend to settle that question for you. Of course you have your preferences already among the young ladies you meet. I could name some of them, but I would rather — I would decidedly prefer you should choose for yourself — choose for yourself, my boy."

Dick made good use of the plenteous time allowed him by the old gentleman's moderate speech. He had no objections to being married, if it helped him on in the world. He was ambitious. He knew his uncle would have no wish to see him begin life in any humbler style than the old man himself would leave it. He would like to be the owner of an elegant house, and maintain a correspondingly elegant establishment throughout. He knew that he was to be chief heir to all his uncle's wealth. It only remained to choose his wife. Was it strange that among the many prettier and lovelier girls of his acquaintance his first thought should be of Sophy Meredith? He felt quite sure that he could bring to bear upon her such reasoning as would secure him from failure in his suit; and perhaps this was the secret of his selection. He had met her often and everywhere in the past three winters. She

had not avoided him, but had improved every opportunity to express her dislike for him. Perhaps it was only a touch of contrariness that made him instantly imagine what fun it would be to marry Sophy Meredith in spite of herself. "I wasn't ready to marry her," he thought, "when she wanted to elope with me. Now I am ready, and she shall be;" and his black eyes had a merry sparkle, as he further remembered that the connection must appear every way desirable to the elders of both parties.

"I have very little hope of success," he said, modestly, "if I were to follow out my own preference."

"How so? how so?" cried Mr. Cobden, eagerly.

"I think Sophy Meredith does not exactly favor me," he said, hesitatingly.

Ah! if the old gentleman had seen the wicked snap in Dick Waters' sharp eyes as he made this confession!

"Sophy Meredith, is it? Ah, ha! Well, at least she hasn't favored any other young man, I believe."

"No."

"Ah, well! I'll just open the way for you a bit, by hinting the matter to her father. He is a fine man, Mr. Meredith; it is a fine family all through. This daughter isn't quite so handsome as the other one was, but I suppose she is all the better, on acquaintance, eh, Dick!" and the old gentleman reached for his walking-stick to punch Dick in the leg, by way of a little pleasant raillery.

"Wouldn't it be better for *me* to call upon Mr. Meredith?" said Dick, drawing himself away from the jocose walking-stick, and wearing an unusually sober face. He realized that he was "in for it," now.

"Certainly, certainly. I shall only give him a friendly call, and let him know, by the way, that you are coming. No harm in that, I suppose."

"Not the least," gravely replied Dick. He entertained a very wholesome respect for Mr. Meredith, and rather dreaded to walk in and ask him for his daughter. So his uncle's proffer was very welcome.

All this had happened at the close of Sophy's third winter in society. To tell the unvarnished truth, Sophy's appearance had been much less of a success than Ri's. Her face had no beauty to hold admirers by the eyelids, though she looked well when handsomely dressed and animated with the excitement of the evening. She had none of Ri's sweetness to delight those who always applaud "good temper in a woman." But she had what Ri never did have, a ready tongue, that was quick at repartee, and sometimes also sharp. For this reason she was shunned by many who feared the weapon. But it had been no terror to Dick Waters. He enjoyed calling out this gift, and hearing Sophy wield it; but he took care to warn her, by a few sharp hits in her own kind of warfare, that it was not wise for her to assail him. Thus Sophy had passed

through three seasons without having a single offer, or even, to her own knowledge, a single lover. Her failure to win the admiration she craved had made these years one long series of disappointments, and her temper had not improved under the ordeal. There was a chaotic conflict of surprise, delight, wonder, and dread, in Sophy's heart, when her mother told her that her father had received proposals for her hand, and had given his consent that the young man should address her. She only sat silent, and tried to look indifferent.

"Haven't you the slightest interest in the matter?" asked her mother, with some pique at her reception of what she considered a very happy event.

"It certainly isn't Mr. Salsby. I know he doesn't care anything about me. So what is there to be interested in?"

"Pshaw! Mr. Salsby isn't the only young man in the world. I think this match fully as desirable as Ri's was."

"That might easily be. But after Ri gave up Mortimer Salsby, I just set my heart on getting him. He is the very best match there is to be made; and it's a pity if we can't have him in the family, between us all."

"There's Noll to come yet."

"A pretty piece she'll be in society! A regular bookworm, with leanings toward strong-mindedness! No,

the game is over if I give it up. I don't envy you your next attempt at bringing out a daughter!"

Mrs. Meredith had a vague feeling that perhaps Noll could make herself more agreeable than Sophy ever did. But she refrained from saying so.

"Well, who is this young suitor?" Sophy asked at length.

"O, you want to know, after all! It is young Mr. Waters — a very likely young man, too."

"Dick Waters!"

"I wouldn't call him Dick, it is such a low, rough name!"

Sophy's head drooped over her embroidery. "Richie Waters" was the name that came into her mind as a substitute, and recalled the last time she had ever used it, on the night of the projected elopement. A blush of real shame came over her cheeks and forehead; but there was a brightness in her eyes that had not been there before.

"What makes you so much surprised at it?" asked her mother. "I thought of him as soon as your father began to tell me. He has been your most devoted attendant ever since you came out. I used to think he wanted Ri, though."

"I hadn't thought of him," said Sophy, quietly rising and laying down her work; "and now that I do think of him, I don't like him, and shall not marry him."

Then she beat a hasty retreat from her mother's expostulation and advice to her own room. There she could and did have a good cry. Then she bathed her face, and smiled to herself in the glass, as she rearranged her hair. It was a proud thing to Sophy, that Dick had asked for her. She felt it a triumph to refuse him. But under all this she was wondering if he had really come to love her. For Sophy, with all her spiteful protestations, with all her ostentatious dislike, did, in the lowest depths of her heart, care for Dick Waters. She always had cared for him. She admired his sharp, keen face, even while she hated herself for doing so. She gloried in his smartness and his business advantages. She respected him because she feared him, and could not frighten him with any of her sharp words or ways. Now was her time to be revenged by refusing to marry him. It was very provoking that he was called from the city, by business in the west, that kept him absent six weeks, just at this interesting juncture. The weeks came round at last. But six weeks of steady drain upon Sophy's patience, fortitude, and spite were anything but strengthing to these feelings. On Dick's return he called at once, and sent up his card for Sophy. What passed between them in the silence and privacy of Mrs. Meredith's darkened parlor was never known. But Sophy came forth with a dazzling diamond on her finger, Dick Waters' affianced bride.

In September there was again a grand wedding at Mr. Meredith's house. Again, at Dick Waters' urgent invitation, Mortimer Salsby took his place, with Noll, in the bridal party, while Eva was made comfortably retired by a less prominent position than at Ri's wedding, with Frank True as her companion. Sophy passed to a handsome house not far from her former home. Everything that money could buy for her seemed to surround her. Many a young lady of her acquaintance thought her greatly to be envied. But Noll said to Eva, in their own busy, happy room, "I wonder what ever induced Sophy to marry Dick Waters."

"I suppose Sophy likes him," was Eva's simple solution of the mystery.

"But how *could* she, after all that elopement affair?"

"How could she before it, is the mystery to me," said Eva. "If she could love such a man once, I suppose she can love him right through all the developments of his character. And really, Noll, I think Dick is coming out better, as a man, than he seemed to promise. Perhaps we didn't see the best of him, and Sophy did."

"I hope we saw the worst of him, and that there is no more like it to come after."

"So do I!" and the girls turned back from the wedding interruption to their books and studies again.

CHAPTER XIV.

NOLL'S WINTER.

"WHAT do you suppose is the next movement in the Meredith programme?" said Noll, in a vexed tone, coming from her mother's boudoir, and throwing herself heavily into her accustomed chair in the airy school-room.

The old school-room had been rearranged, with Mr. Meredith's assistance, according to the needs and desires of the two girls, and had become a favorite resort for study, reading, and writing. Two commodious writing-desks were placed in the best light at two of the four large windows. A handsome book-case had two shelves filled with Eva's Latin, French, and German grammars and lexicons, treatises on general language, the ancient languages, and her chosen two modern languages, and many foreign works, whose translation had been the labor of these past years; another shelf held Noll's books on rhetoric and composition, by different authors, reviews and criticisms,

dissertations upon criticism, and a few model volumes by the most perfect writers. Other shelves were devoted indiscriminately to works in English, French, and German, that the girls had seen fit to read for profit or amusement; and one forlorn-looking section, at the very bottom, showed pairs of unhappy-looking algebras, geometries, histories, grammars, astronomies, geologies, chemistries, botanies, philosophies, physiologies, and a pile of dejected old music books. The girls had studied through limited treatises on each and all these varied subjects, under the head of what Mrs. Hoffman called desirable general education, taking, each term, one study not particularly related to their chosen course, till they had attained some acquaintance with the various sciences and simpler mathematics. A piano, an improvement on the rattling old affair Eva had found there when she first came to aunt Matilda's, stood in the room, and each still gave one hour a day of her precious time to practice. The general educational course, which they had often regarded as a great bore, they began to perceive had really been a desirable variety of study. It was now completed to Mrs. Hoffman's entire satisfaction. All their time, save the one hour of practising, was given unreservedly to their favorite studies.

Eva did not at first reply to Noll's impatient exclamation. She sat busily writing out the paragraph

of translation that was just then engaging her attention. Finishing it with a swift scratch of her pen, she looked up. "What is the next movement? Is aunt Matilda going to visit Ri again?"

"No, indeed! Would that Europe had been the untroubled direction of her desires. Then I could have wished her good speed, and gone on with my business. No, it's a deal worse than that, Evvy, and you'll feel as bad as I do, I'm afraid."

"Do tell me what it is."

"You know it was my misfortune to be eighteen last summer. I had a good mind to deny it, and declare I was only seventeen. But I suppose it wouldn't have done any good, for ma would have the family Bible to back her in her assertion."

"You are not going to come out — are you?" Eva asked, in disappointed tones.

"I suppose I have got to do just that," replied Noll, savagely. "The fact is, Evvy, I never thought much about my coming out, because, between ourselves, I did think Sophy would be an old maid. I expected to live in delicious retirement to the ripe age of twenty-five, before I saw the nuptials of my sister Sophy, and very likely not see them then. Perhaps, by that time, ma would begin to give her up, and might bring me out; but that would be a cheerless venture, for she never had any hope of my being anything in society, I am so shockingly odd!"

"I don't see as it is going to be a very dreadful thing for you, Noll. It will be lonesome for me, of course; but you will not quite forget me, if you are 'in society.' If you choose, you can still get time for some reading. You will have to give up writing, of course."

"Why?"

"Because, when you make long evenings and late hours, you will not have nice, fresh, bright mornings any longer. But I think, Noll, — you know there's a sweet kernel to every nut, if you only know how to crack it, — perhaps you will learn as much by the experience you will have as you would to pore over your books any more just at this time."

"What shall I learn?"

"Human nature. Think what a chance you will have to see people! And really, Noll, seeing people is just what you need now to make your long course of book-study practical and useful. I am sure you will not give yourself all up to the dress and vanity of society. You will have your eyes open to see manifestations of character all around you. So you can consider your coming out as promotion into a higher class — from theoretical to practical instruction. You will be carrying on your course of study, only in a little different manner."

Noll's face had been slowly losing its vexation,

lighting and brightening as Eva proceeded. "I believe you are right, Evvy. And I will continue my studies, too, by coming up here an hour or so every day, before dinner, and writing a little sketch of somebody or some event, to teach me delineation of the characters I observe. That will be practical study, if I am to write the book Minnie predicts, and it will not do any harm to the professorship, you know."

Their professorships were standing jokes among the two girls; so both laughed at Noll's consideration for the prospects of hers. It was a sad trial to them to be separated. It had been a thing tacitly understood among them that they should continue on together at school till Eva's five years were ended. Now, Eva must have a full school-year alone. But Noll, receiving the change in the new light of an excellent opportunity for pursuing her favorite studies under a new phase, entered into the preparations for her *début* with cheerfulness and interest that quite astonished and delighted Mrs. Meredith, after her first stormy expostulations. She insisted upon planning her own costumes, and did it in such odd and fantastic styles as quite frightened her mother. Yet the singular robes she ordered came from the hands of the astonished *modiste* wonders of originality and beauty, and were profusely admired by the fashion-loving mother and fashionable mantua-maker. They were even copied by less gifted girls, as models of taste and style.

If Mrs. Meredith had been proud of the admiration bestowed upon Ri's beauty, and satisfied with the attention paid her less attractive daughter Sophy, she was fated to be utterly surprised and delighted at the decided sensation everywhere created by Noll. She had rather dreaded Noll's coming out, but found herself most agreeably disappointed by her complete and inexplicable success. She could not understand it. Noll was not handsome — not to be compared with Ri. Yet she was infinitely more admired by gentlemen, copied and envied by ladies. Noll's own philosophical explanation of the social phenomenon was, that she "supposed they cared for her just because she did not care a fig for them." But Eva said, in the undisturbed quiet of the old school-room, where she now spent so many lonely, busy, but not unhappy hours, "It is because Noll has her true life outside and above fashionable follies; because she does not care for petty vanities and jealousies, but is a true, noble woman, with an earnest purpose in her life." The hours that Noll spent in the school-room were now those of Eva's keenest enjoyment. It was so pleasant to see her there again, for Eva missed her sadly! so pleasant to hear the merry scraps she had to tell of people she met, and her shrewd conjectures concerning them! But not every day could she escape from the continual demands of society, the dress-maker, and her mother.

Noll was social by instinct, merry and good-humored by natural disposition. Since she no longer felt it a waste of time, she threw herself joyfully into the gayety and excitement of her new position, taking the pleasure as it came, and avoiding all unpleasant things by her amiability and great-heartedness. Mrs. Meredith wondered and smiled at her; but after the certainty that Noll was to be a success, she almost ceased to advise, guard, or warn her. She felt that Noll's method was of a kind not within her province, and she could only let her follow it out after her own fashion, trusting to its promising commencement for an equally satisfactory conclusion. Indeed, she felt justified in giving rein to her wildest hopes; for was not Mr. Salsby Noll's most constant companion? Did he ever once let an evening pass without a dance with Noll, and a long talk after it in some convenient seclusion? Did he not continually linger at her side, even when she was busied in conversation with others, listening with attentive ear, but feigned abstraction, to all her merry speeches, light talk, and occasional earnest words? What did all these things mean, if not that Mortimer Salsby would yet, as Sophy had said, "come into the family"? Meanwhile Mr. Salsby no longer lavished his former attentions upon Mrs. Meredith, nor did he appear eager to call upon Mr. Meredith. The season passed on, and in due time closed.

The last party had been given. The warm spring air was getting sultry. Even the opera and theatre boxes were deserted. There was no further hope, in Mrs. Meredith's heart, of anything from Mr. Salsby this year. A little confidential chat in the school-room, a few weeks earlier, would have revealed a state of affairs, had Mrs. Meredith's ears been within hearing distance, that would probably have driven that lady nearly frantic.

"Put away your book, and talk with me, Evvy," said Noll, as she came wearily in, with unusually heavy eyes, after one of the last gay evenings of the season.

Eva came to the sofa beside her, took her head in her cool, soft little hands, and soothed her hot temples.

"I've been doing something — taking matters into my own hands; and I want you to tell me if I did right, you are such a true and sure little conscience for me."

"Some things belong in our own hands, and some do not. Which have you been meddling with?"

"That's what I hardly know myself. *I* think it is my own affair; but I suppose ma would have preferred to superintend the matter for me, particularly as she would probably have altered the whole, and had it come out quite differently."

"But you are sure your way was right?"

"Yes; so sure that I followed it. Last night I was in the conservatory, after the German, with Mr. Salsby. He almost always takes me off somewhere for a rest and talk after dancing. I had rather have a good talk with him than a dance; so I don't mind if I miss a few sets."

"What do you talk about?"

"O, all sorts of interesting and sensible things. He has a gift for making every subject amusing. Then he has travelled, and read everything. Do you remember those beautiful little German tales, that I persisted in wading through in the original, instead of using your translation? I suppose he sent them to me, though he never acknowledged it. I was ashamed not to read them for myself in the German. All that little cluster of new books upon the second shelf, that you so admired my taste and sagacity in selecting, are from him, I suppose; also the beautiful Easter bouquet, that made you exclaim at my extravagance. He never sends any clew with his gifts, nor ever acknowledges that he is the donor, save by a little gleam of pleasure in his eyes when I express my enjoyment of them, and a sudden dive into another subject of conversation."

Noll was silent so long, with her head lying in Eva's lap, luxuriating in the pleasant movements of the little fingers over her temples and through her heavy, wavy

hair, her eyes half shut, and a vague smile on her parted lips, that Eva said, at length, "You like him, Nolly dear — don't you?"

"O, yes; of course I do. If I hadn't, I couldn't have enjoyed his gifts and his companionship so much," returned Noll, in a commonplace tone, resuming the thread of her story. "But last night, I was going to tell you, he took up a very different strain."

Another silence, till Eva said, "Well?"

"You know what it was, Evvy. He told me he didn't care for anybody else in the world but me; and he wanted me to marry him."

"And what did you say?"

"I'll tell you what I *thought*, Evvy. If he didn't care for any one but me, he *ought* to! It's a dreadful poor plan to be all bound up in one person. But I didn't say just that. He asked me if I didn't care for him, because he certainly had thought I did. I said, 'yes, I thought him one of the finest men I had ever known;' whereupon he was going to receive me in both arms, only I didn't go, which very much surprised him. Then I went on to say that there were a good many people and things that I cared for besides him. I hoped there always would be. He said he should not be jealous, and that set me laughing, and made him very sober. Well, it all ended by my telling him

just why I should never marry him, nor probably any one else, for that matter."

"Why is it?" asked Eva, somewhat astonished at this avowal.

"Partly because he doesn't care for anything but me; because he has no earnest purpose, no good object before him in life. He dawdles, Evvy, forever dawdles his whole life long! You know he has studied, travelled, read, and thought — he has really thought a great deal; but he has never *done* any single thing in his whole life."

"It has not been a very long life yet, you know," suggested Eva.

"How long?"

"Twenty-six, I believe. He was only twenty-one when he came home to Campfields from Europe."

"Is it possible! I thought he must be over thirty."

"He doesn't look as old as that."

"No; but I supposed him to be in a remarkable state of preservation, as they say of old beauties."

"He may start up, and be good for something yet."

"I sincerely hope he may," said Noll, with a little sigh. "It has always seemed such a pity to see him, an utter waste of so much good material and good culture, doing not an atom of good in the world, and apparently having no aim beyond being the coveted son-in-law of all the mammas of his extensive acquaintance."

"I think he will go to work now, on the strength of your advice and example."

"Nonsense, Evvy! Don't be foolish! Are you going to have him come triumphantly round, at the end of the next semi-decade, a miracle of benevolent exertions, and marry me, after all? That's cheap novel trash! Real-moral-little-story-like! Men don't do so, in real life, outside of books. He suggested reformation to buy off my decision; but I wouldn't hear of it. I told him he might reform or not, as his own inclination and good sense should dictate, but he needn't do it on my account. I remembered what you said of Dick and Sophy; and I told him, as he had made his first unbiased choice of mere pleasure in life, so I decided against him. Whatever he might do henceforth would have its effect upon his own future happiness and usefulness; but it could not alter the fact he had fully established by the past years of his life, that his natural predilections are for idleness rather than effort, for admiration rather than usefulness."

"I think you were rather hard," said Eva, gently and hesitatingly, as Noll ceased.

"Was I, Evvy?" cried Noll, in a mournful tone. "Well, I thought it was right. I am sure I was right in my decision. I am sorry if I was too severe in my way of giving it."

"Perhaps not too severe. You could better judge

what to say, at the time, than I can, without the attending circumstances, and with very little acquaintance with Mr. Salsby."

Noll drew herself up, and went away to her own room, where she locked the door, and cried. Not that she repented her choice; not that she even remembered the enviable position of Mortimer Salsby's wife; but because he was cultivated, refined, lovable, a man not to be found in every thousand; she might have loved him so thoroughly, and it was such a pity! "Yet," she whispered, as she checked her grief, and set herself busily to work, "It is the only right way."

CHAPTER XV.

CHARLEY'S VISIT.

THE long, bright days of June slipped by, bringing Eva's last term of school life rapidly toward a close. Mrs. Meredith was planning a gay summer season, but had not decided what watering-place should be illumined by her presence with her admired daughter Noll. But daughter Noll was quietly frustrating all her expectations. On one of these pleasant June evenings, she crept into the library, and stood by her father's chair.

"What is it, my girl?" asked Mr. Meredith, as he drew her upon his knee, feeling that she had come freighted with something to say.

"I've had a letter from Jack."

"Well, what does he say?"

"He is quite settled now in his new home, and it is only a few doors from Eva's uncle Martyn."

"That's convenient and comfortable. I suppose he is as happy as he ought to be."

"O, yes. He says he shall be beyond wishing for anything, if only —" Noll hesitated.

"There's always something wanting to complete human happiness. What does he think he wants?"

"He writes that I really must come out there, when Charley goes back with Eva. And I should so like to go, father!" said Noll, eagerly.

"That would upset your mother's proposed summer campaign — wouldn't it?"

"Yes, and I want to upset it, for I don't want to go with her. I've been rushing about all winter, and now I am tired of it. Going out there with Eva and Charley, to visit Jack and Phœbe, will be such a happy, home-sort of time!"

Mr. Meredith sighed, and Noll wished she had not said the last words.

"I suppose you can go, my girl. And perhaps it will be the best thing for you to do."

Noll caressed her father's white temples, and remembered how lonely the house must seem to him when all the younger ones were gone. But she could not tell him so. She discussed all plans, told all her affairs of real consequence to him; but sentiment was a kind of conversational dish she never offered her father, from an instinctive feeling that it would not be agreeable.

One rainy July day, up the familiar steps came a manly tread; and while the footman arranged a drip-

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ping umbrella in the rack, and the visitor passed through the open parlor door, Noll sprang along the hall. She glanced at the card in the footman's hand, and whispered, "Don't carry that up just now." Then she stood in the parlor, looking up, with mingled surprise and doubt, into the bearded face, until she suddenly recognized the unchanged blue eyes.

"Charley Roberts!" she cried. "How you are bewhiskered! Evvy is up in the school-room. Come with me. I want to see if she will recognize you any quicker than I did. I know she does not expect you till next week."

Noll tripped up the stairs, eagerly followed by Charley. Eva sat bending over her desk, busy with her last letter to him, as her commencement announced. She scarcely looked up as Noll entered. But when a pair of strong arms folded themselves around her, lifting her out of her chair, and a dear, though rather gruffly-unfamiliar voice, said, "Terribly busy, Evalina Fairykin?" close by her ear, she twisted herself about in the welcome embrace, with a joyful, "O!" clasped her own arms upon the shoulders she could but just reach, and kissed Charley's dear, kindly face till the tears came dripping over her own, and she had to stop for a little weep upon his bosom. She never thought to mention the reddish-brown mustache and beard that had first caught Noll's attention. Noll had

slipped out of the room, but she returned half an hour later to find Eva hugged into Charley's lap, with both arms still about his neck, and wearing the happiest face she had ever seen.

"You are going back with us, I hope, Noll," said Charley. "Jack told me he wrote for you to come, and you have not objected."

"I expect to go with you, though ma is dreadfully cut up about it, and quite refuses to be comforted."

"Leaving Noll was the one sad thing to me about going," said Eva. "Now I shall be perfectly happy and contented at the west."

"You were quite sorry to leave school," suggested Noll.

"I was sorry, just as I am sorry at leaving my pleasant work. Yet I am glad, because it is completed; and there is always satisfaction in reaching the end that one has been toiling toward for a long time. Besides, Noll left a year ago, and Minnie leaves with me; so it would be lonely work to keep on at school."

"What is Minnie going to do next? I suppose she has some busy plan on foot," said Charley.

"She will continue giving music lessons at Mrs. Hoffman's school, as she has for a year past. She has composed airs for several pretty ballads, which have sold well. But she is not satisfied with her own compositions. She says they are fearfully tame beside the

glorious works of the masters, and she prefers learning to express real music, to helping flood the world with weak tunes of no real value."

"She is a regular devotee to her chosen art," said Noll.

"I think she is mistaken," continued Eva, "in feeling that her pretty little airs are worthless, because they do not bear comparison with the great masters. They give pleasure and delight to many people who never hear the grander music, and who would not appreciate it if they did."

"So I think," said Charley, gravely, letting Eva slide gently to her feet, while he crossed one knee over the other, and stared straight into the empty grate.

"Why don't you inquire after our professions?" asked Noll.

"Sure enough! Tell me all about them," replied Charley, still a little abstracted.

"Eva is looking for a position as professor of modern languages in some great western college, as yet unfounded; while I am to flourish in the same institution in the department of belles-lettres."

"O, Noll, you know I'm not," said Eva.

"We shall want Fay Featherly at home, to keep house for uncle Martyn and me, now Phœbe is gone," said Charley.

"That may be a good place for her, just at present, until the college is founded; but then you'll be getting married, or perhaps your uncle Martyn will, and you'll not want her after that."

Charley blushed, and grew uncomfortable; but Noll proceeded, shaking her head, "I know all about it, for I used to want to keep house for my brother Jack; but he always told me flatly that he was going to be married, and should not need my services. I hope you have been equally sincere with Eva, and not stimulated in her any false hopes in that direction." Though Noll tried to say it all in comic strain, there did so strong a thread of earnestness run through her words as to make Charley turn a conscience-smitten face toward Eva. But Eva was looking straight at Noll, and did not see it.

"You and Jack have not grown up and grown together, as Charley and I did," she said. "Of course Charley will get married some time, I hope. But he will not want to be rid of me on that account. And then, you know, besides —" Eva hesitated, and the pink slowly deepened in her cheeks.

"Exactly," laughed Charley; "Eva Earnest will be married herself some day."

"Well, to be sure, that makes a difference," returned Noll, gravely; and somehow there came such a hurt and heartsick look in the corners of Noll's pleasant

month, that Charley, too, grew sober, and wondered what he could have said to grieve her. But Eva interrupted by sending him off to dress for dinner, telling him his coat was very damp, his linen quite disreputable, and his hands really dingy.

Charley spent many days in visiting his old schoolmates and acquaintances. He and Eva made a trip to Campfields, where they found place and people very much as we last saw them. Little Nora Craig was grown into a pretty four-year-old child, and a fat, rolling boy of two rejoiced in the inheritance of his father's name, seemingly the only endowment he had received from that worthy man. James had been sick, but was now considered convalescent. The day spent at Campfields was one of the pleasantest of Charley's eastern visit. His old friends, the Trues, and Eva, received about an equal share of his time. Frank's studies were just completed, and he was about entering upon the practice of law. Mrs. True still lived in the handsome house where Charley had first known them, but it hardly seemed the same place to him. The parlors were closed, and seldom or never used. The library had become a study for Frank and Minnie. Mrs. True's boudoir was her usual sitting-room; a little breakfast-room the habitual dining-room. More than half the large house was unoccupied. Frank was absent much of the time, and two servants were amply

sufficient for the little remnant of the family. It touched Charley deeply to see the changed life of his dear old friends. In one of the long, rambling walks through the artful wildernesses of Central Park, which he and Frank often took together, he spoke of Mrs. True's altered life.

"Mother has never cared for society since father died. And besides," said Frank, with characteristic candor, "we are poor now, and that makes a world of difference, as far as society is concerned."

"Comparatively poor, you mean. Not poor as we were when you came to see us at Campfields."

"Do you know, Charley, I didn't half understand you then? I thought you were putting on haughty airs, for fear I should patronize you."

"I didn't see how to explain my position to you. I knew you did not know what to think of me."

"Now," said Frank, after a pause, "I am going to set my folks out of penury, just as you did yours."

"I hope you will succeed a great deal better than I did."

"I ought to, as I have let them wait for me to grow up, and prepare myself for the bar. I hope to achieve more in the abstract amount of money, but not more in comparison with my age and advantages."

"And what do you mean to do with your wealth? Your mother and Minnie will hardly wish to enter fashionable society. What will you do for them?"

"First, prevail upon mother to give up that odious fine sewing, that she takes in to provide herself with pocket money."

"Does she!" exclaimed Charley. "That's just what my mother used to do," he added, as an offset to his surprise.

"I shall see that her purse is well filled all the time, and then, with Minnie to back me, commence a systematic course of teasing her to give up the sewing. Minnie does not yet know that mother does it."

"I thought she didn't;" then, looking very much aghast at the words that had escaped him, Charley hurriedly asked, "What next?"

"I want a better piano for Minnie — a real Steinway Parlor Grand."

"Why don't you — " Charley's mouth suddenly shut with a snap over his half-formed question.

"Why don't I what?"

"Nothing. On second thought, I'd rather you wouldn't, so I'll not suggest it to you."

"I mean to give Minnie a chance for better musical instruction than she has ever had yet," continued Frank. "She has got her best lessons with what she earned teaching beginners, and that's drudgery for her. I shouldn't wonder if she came out a genius at music; but I wouldn't say so to any one but you, of course. Come, I've all but walked my legs off. Let's sit

down," he added, perching himself upon an uncommonly high bench.

"You haven't told me what you will do next, after you have your mother and sister provided for." Frank colored, began to whistle, broke off, and discovered a sudden interest in a bit of landscape. "I want to hear what schemes you have for being a great man some day," Charley persisted.

"O," came from Frank in so relieved a tone as to make Charley look up, and detect the traces of his recent confusion. "Those plans are dim yet. Of course I shall work along at my best, and hope to be tolerably successful. If I am not, it shall not be for want of trying. I can, at least, make a comfortable living for myself and my own folks. I am sure I am equal to that."

"Look here, Frank!—" and there Charley broke off, and sat pitching his knife into the seat between them.

"Well?" interrogated Frank.

"Did you know, when I was a boy, I was in love with your sister Mary?"

"I inferred that you were."

Charley shut his knife with a sharp click, and rising, returned it to his pocket. "Well, I like Minnie best now," he said, standing with face a little averted. "I shall come east again in about three years, perhaps

less if she will go back with me. Maybe you'll have nobody but your mother to take care of after that."

Frank listened with a wonderfully eager and delighted face, and then gave a long, low whistle. "I haven't the least objection to the arrangement, my dear fellow, only — you — "

"What?" asked Charley, turning sharply, as he hesitated.

Frank's face had grown uncomfortably red. "You don't think half so much of Minnie as I do of your Eva," he blurted out, suddenly.

"Pshaw! How do you know?" and Charley grasped Frank's hand. "Then it is an even exchange."

"I don't know what Eva thinks," stammered Frank.

"Well, I know that, years ago, when we were children, she used to be holding you up as a pattern boy, and the best of all my schoolmates. She hasn't said much about you of late years, except how relieved and thankful she felt to find you in St. James' Chapel, and have your company home."

Frank's modest face brightened at this information. "I am going in for being a great man, after all, Charley. I want to put Eva back in the same position her mother used to hold."

"I am afraid she will not want that," returned Charley; and the two boys went into detailed accounts of

business prospects, as they rambled slowly homeward.

On the day that Charley started for the west, with Noll and Eva, a long, odd package was left by express at Mrs. True's door for Minnie. Reposing within its velvet-lined case was a beautiful little violin. Minnie was in ecstasy with every inch of it — the dark, richly-polished surface, the delicate strings, with their dainty, pearl-handled screws, its graceful shape, and convenient size. When Frank came home, she ran to tell him her joy and gratitude. He looked at the beautiful gift, in its handsome case, and then at Minnie's glowing, happy face.

"I am glad you are so pleased; but don't thank me for it."

"Well, then, I'll not thank you; but I want you to know how delighted I am, and how perfectly happy you have made me."

"Don't credit me with your happiness, either," he replied, with an uncomfortable laugh.

"O, I never run an account with you in such matters. I should only be keeping a record of my own indebtedness."

"But I didn't send you the violin, Minnie."

"Why, Frank, you don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do. I never saw it before, and didn't know you were to have it."

"Is it possible there's a mistake?" said Minnie, her cheek paling at the thought, as she hastily turned over the wrappers. But no; there it was, plainly enough, her own name, with street and number, all correct. And Minnie lifted a blank face of wonder and astonishment to Frank. "Who could have sent it?"

"I think, my dear little sister, that on this particular occasion you are unusually and remarkably stupid." And Frank went laughing away, looking very wise in his own mind. He knew now what Charley was on the point of advising him to do for Minnie, and then refused to suggest. But he forgot, while he laughed at Minnie's bewilderment, that he would have been no wiser than she, if he had been told no more.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOME IN THE WEST.

IT was early in the morning that Charley, Eva, and Noll reached Chicago. They went directly to Mr. Martyn's house. A solemn-looking, elderly woman, whom Charley introduced as Mrs. Dole, received them, and after they had refreshed themselves with a bath and change of clothing, ushered them to a pleasant dining-room, where an appetizing breakfast awaited them. Charley slipped away to look in upon business, after his six weeks' absence, bidding the girls go to bed and have a good rest; for Jack and Phœbe would be round to dinner, and want to make an evening of it. Noll and Eva didn't need any urging, as their two nights upon the cars had been but little blessed with sleep, and before twelve o'clock were both lost in a dreamless oblivion. Charley returned in a few hours, threw himself upon a sofa, and followed the girls' excellent example. A huge bell, solemnly tolled in the front hall for the space of thirty seconds, roused the

half-awake travellers, and in a few minutes they were assembled in the parlor, where they found Mr. Martyn waiting to welcome them, and also Jack and Phœbe.

"This seems like home at last," said Mr. Martyn, after dinner, as he settled himself comfortably in his own great chair, and drew Eva to another beside him. "Are you ready to throw up your books now, little bird, and keep house for Charley and me?"

"Not ready to throw up the books, but quite ready, and very glad, to keep house for you, and make a beautiful real home for us all," replied Eva, a happy smile lighting up her sweet face, as she remembered how her mother had always made home for her and Charley, and she had seemed to have none since that mother left them.

Charley watched her, wondering why he had never noticed before how much Eva looked like their mother.

"Not ready to give up books? How's that? I thought that was in the agreement."

"You know that I have left school. I hope to do something besides study books now. But you surely do not wish me to give up reading, or even studying, if I like to do so."

"O, no; but girls do not generally care much for books after they are grown up and have a house to look after, or go out into society. Society very soon spoils the studious vein out of girls."

"Not always, uncle Martyn. It has not spoiled it out of Noll," Eva asserted in a tone of proud triumph, "and I don't mean it shall spoil it out of me."

"I want to know if Noll has kept up her studying through the past winter," said Jack, from the window. He was half hidden in the curtain, whence he watched, with curious, scrutinizing eyes, the two girls he had left, as he mockingly said, "at the commencement of their professional education," four years ago.

"Yes, Jack, I have," replied Noll, with a touch of honest pride. "Of course I couldn't be as regular and systematic as before; but I have never missed my hours in the school-room more than two days in the week."

"And once she gave up having a new dress, and wore an old one to a grand party, to get her hours for study," added Eva, while Noll blushed and muttered, "That was nothing."

"Noll, I honor you!" said Jack, heartily. "Phœbe has often told me how sorry she was to give up her studies when she was obliged to do so in order to be housekeeper and nurse at home. I always thought that evinced a wonderful devotion to literature. But that any girl should stick to her books amid all the whirl and gayety of a winter in the thickest of fashionable life in New York, was an idea too preposterous to be credited for a single instant. I don't understand how it could be, now," he added, doubtfully.

"It was because I studied with an aim at being useful, and not merely as a penance to be undergone until I should be chastened into fit shape for coming out," replied Noll.

"You have always persisted in thinking me an unusual sort of woman," said Phœbe; "but you will certainly have to learn, now that Noll and Eva are come, that there are others who entertain similar views, and who recognize usefulness as one of the greatest blessings of life."

"I hope I shall," said Jack. "My opinion of women has so changed since I knew Phœbe, that I have become twice as much of a man as I should ever have been without her. So I hail a further awakening, and shall be glad to learn more of the same sort."

"What has my little girl learned in all these five long years?" asked Mr. Martyn of Eva.

"Do you want me to run through a list of all the books I have studied?"

"I want to hear what you have learned," he replied.

"We studied — Noll and I — the books that I suppose every one does to get a general idea of — well, almost everything — mathematics, and little synoptical surveys of the sciences; but we don't know any of them very thoroughly."

"That's bad," said Mr. Martyn, looking grave.

"We didn't think so. We couldn't learn all of everything. Nobody can do that. So we took just enough of everything not to be absurdly ignorant of every-day matters. Then we each worked hard and thoroughly at our own forte."

"That's better. What is your forte?"

"Language. I studied its history and composition, its derivation and construction; then I attended especially to Latin, French, and German, in connection with English. I understand them very well, and can teach or translate them satisfactorily, I think."

Mr. Martyn looked dissatisfied. "Which of the four do you understand best?" he asked.

"English, of course."

"I am glad of that. What good will the rest do you, child?" he said.

Eva's face was shaded over at once. Her blue eyes deepened with disappointment and grief. "They are my tools to work with, uncle, if I should ever again need to work as I did at Campfields," she said, earnestly.

Mr. Martyn smiled incredulously, but he only said, "Perhaps so, perhaps so." He did not mean that she should ever have to work like that again; but he thought if it was any comfort to her to think she could be more efficient in such a time of need, he would not object to the fancy.

"We cannot tell what may happen to any of us," Jack said, seriously.

"Indeed," spoke up Noll, "what is the use of spending valuable time and money in cultivating feminine brains, if they are presumed to be worthless ever after? I mean to turn mine to proper account."

"Hope you will!" cried Jack.

"Is that all you have learned?" resumed Mr. Martyn.

Eva was silent and perplexed.

"I'll tell you one thing more, father," said Jack. "She has learned to be a little woman. She was something of that when she first came to us; but she has grown a good deal larger — in her soul I mean — she is always a mite of a body; she is stronger and braver. She thinks deeper and sees farther. Isn't it so, Evvy?"

"I hope so. I suppose most people learn those things as they grow up."

"Well, they don't," replied Jack. "And Noll, here, has grown more steady and earnest. She is more thoughtful and more gentle than when I left her, four years ago."

"O, wait till I find my handkerchief, to hide my blushes!" cried Noll. "I'm not used to being praised."

"Noll has talents in all sorts of ways," said Eva, in a tone of affectionate admiration. "She was good at

books, but that did not prevent her from outshining both Ri and Sophy in society. Aunt Matilda is very proud of her, now that she has discovered her social talents. How did you contrive to keep them hid so long, Nolly dear?"

"I never kept anything hid in my life, except Dionysius' ear. I think the non-discovery of my social talents was due solely to the obtuseness of my friends."

"Mother wrote me you were a great success," said Jack.

"Tell me what else you have learned," persisted Mr. Martyn, holding one of Eva's hands caressingly in his own.

"Something in the common-sense line, Evvy, is what he wants," suggested Jack.

"O!" But still Eva was unable to rehearse the additions she had made to her real wisdom. Is is always easier to recite off book-knowledge than to give the results of our thought and experience. So Eva sat puzzled and distressed, and could not answer.

"What do you think is the best way to live?" Mr. Martyn asked.

But still Eva could frame no words to reply. The color rushed over her face, which she hid in her hands, as she realized her failure, and thought how he must suppose all the time and money he had so kindly

devoted to her education unwisely bestowed, since she had not learned what he expected and wished she should. This was more than Noll could sit calmly by and see.

"It is too bad of you, Mr. Martyn!" she cried, more earnestly than respectfully. "Evvy knows just as well as anybody, only she can't say it. Wait, and you'll see, as time passes and occasions arise, she will go right on, and *live* a noble, true life, though she may not be quite up to the metaphysics of defining it."

Noll's well-meant but aggressive defence of her was Eva's final and greatest distress. It was dreadful to hear her speak out so to this dear, good uncle Martyn, who had done so much for her! Would he think she had not always spoken lovingly and respectfully of him, that Noll dared address him so? She lifted quickly her blushing face, and kissed the hands that covered and held hers. "I think I have learned some common sense about life, uncle," she said, "but I really don't know how to tell it off at your bidding. I am afraid you will have to wait, and find out what I have learned by my every-day life here."

"You've learned that it's not the end and aim of life to come out in society, and catch a husband," said Charley. "I know that by your letters."

"Indeed, I have," replied Eva, "and I cannot remember any time when I supposed it was."

"That's well," said Mr. Martyn. "I shall find out your virtues and wisdom in time, little girl, and perhaps all the more pleasantly that you could not tell me them."

"Speaking of husbands," said Jack, "has no one captured that desirable Salsby yet?"

The girls were silent.

"I believe not," answered Charley. "I saw and spoke with him, and he is still untrammelled with matrimony. I think he improves, however. He seems to have grown more manly in spite of his disadvantages in the shape of flattery and idleness."

"It's too bad!" said Jack, with comically feigned regret. "It is mortifying, too, when all my sisters wanted him so badly!"

"Nonsense!" said Eva.

"They did," persisted Jack; "either one of them would have cut off a heel or a toe, like Cinderella's sisters, to marry Mortimer Salsby."

"But don't libel Cinderella, for she didn't mutilate her feet for the prince," returned Eva, eager to protect Noll's honor.

"No; because she could get him without, in the story. I suppose Noll gave up in the outset, and spared her toes."

"Noll didn't want him; so she had no need to give up."

"Sour grapes!" laughed Jack, incredulously.

"It *wasn't* sour grapes!" cried Eva, impetuously, and then stopped short, fearing she was guilty of a breach of confidence, and grieved at Noll's flushed and averted face.

Jack looked up at her earnest disclaimer, and saw her frightened glance at Noll. His eyes followed hers, and read Noll's confused and displeased face. He rose and walked to her side. Charley and Phœbe were holding an independent conversation, in which Mr. Martyn took part. Bending over her, he asked, in a low tone, "Is that so, Noll? Wouldn't you marry Mortimer Salsby?"

"No, Jack."

"Why not?"

"Because he leads an aimless, useless life. We were very good friends all winter. He is delightful for amusement and recreation; but he doesn't know how to work, nor care for it. I mean to work, and be good for something."

"Noll" — and Jack lifted her face in his two hands — "Noll, I am proud of you! I glory in you! If other women were like you, and Phœbe, and Eva, there would be better men, too. God bless you, my grand girl, and send you, one of these days, a better husband than Mortimer Salsby."

Noll smiled gladly at the praise from him whose

approbation she most valued, and then dropped her face upon the window at the final wish, thinking, "Ah! no; God will never do that!"

"Uncle," said Eva, as she bade Mr. Martyn good night, "I have been thinking of your question, 'What have I learned?' and I am sure that the best and greatest part of my education was in my daily life, at aunt Matilda's, and not at school." Mr. Martyn's kind, keen eyes were on her face, but she was not now confused by them. "Because there I saw and learned the unsatisfactoriness of frivolous life. I shall never want to 'come out' as Ri and Sophy did. Noll contrived to enjoy it, but it was because she did not give herself up to it, heart and soul, as the other girls did. She had something else better in her mind. So I have learned that we can only enjoy our pleasures when we have our earnest work forever underlying and behind them."

"That will do, my little girl. You have learned a great lesson. And now I will tell you that I wanted you to go to your aunt Matilda's for the very reason that I thought the experience would do you good. You were brought up so shielded in the arms of your mother and Charley, that you had had no occasion to think or act for yourself. In your aunt's family I found two equal and opposite tendencies — one to-

ward an earnest and useful life, in Mr. Meredith, Jack, and Noll; the other, toward fashion and idleness. I was sure you had enough of your dear, good mother in your character to make you gravitate to the right side; but I wanted, for your own strengthening and benefit, that you should be placed there alone, — no Charley to aid you, — that you might learn to decide and follow your own course, and thereby gain self-reliance and confidence. I think my little experiment has succeeded well."

"Thank you, uncle; I feared I had disappointed you."

"No, indeed! Never think that again. You are come home now to be my own little girl. Since Jack has carried off my Phœbe, — and I find you sent him here, — I must have you to make good her place in my house. It has been empty enough with only Mrs. Dole for enlivenment. Will you come, and be my little daughter?"

"Yes, uncle, I will, gladly."

Eva and Noll found a new and strange life in their western home; but in it was ample room and opportunity to be "good for something." Their liberal education, the habits of industry and systematic labor they had formed, and their knowledge of people and ways, were all useful in the life that opened before them.

They entered heartily and gladly upon the various work that came to their hands, and, happy in their continued companionship and love, passed some of the pleasantest years of their lives in their busy home in the west.

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