

Alcott Louisa May

**Silver Pitchers: and
Independence, a Centennial
Love Story**



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a Centennial Love Story**

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SILVER PITCHERS

CHAPTER I. *HOW IT BEGAN*

"We can do nothing about it except show our displeasure in some proper manner," said Portia, in her most dignified tone.

"I should like to cut them all dead for a year to come; and I'm not sure that I won't!" cried Pauline, fiercely.

"We *ought* to make it impossible for such a thing to happen again, and I think we *might*," added Priscilla, so decidedly that the others looked at her in surprise.

The three friends sat by the fire "talking things over," as girls love to do. Pretty creatures, all of them, as they nestled together on the lounge in dressing-gowns and slippers, with unbound hair, eyes still bright with excitement, and tongues that still wagged briskly.

Usually the chat was of dresses, compliments, and all the little adventures that befall gay girls at a merry-making. But to-night something of uncommon interest absorbed the three, and kept them talking earnestly long after they should have been asleep.

Handsome Portia looked out from her blonde locks with a disgusted expression, as she sipped the chocolate thoughtful mamma had left inside the fender. Rosy-faced Pauline sat staring indignantly at the fire; while in gentle Priscilla's soft eyes the shadow of a real sorrow seemed to mingle with the light of a strong determination.

Yes, something had happened at this Thanksgiving festival which much offended the three friends, and demanded grave consideration on their part; for the "Sweet P's," as Portia, Pris, and Polly were called, were the belles of the town. One ruled by right of beauty and position, one by the power of a character so sweet and strong that its influence was widely felt, and one by the wit and winsomeness of a high yet generous spirit.

It had been an unusually pleasant evening, for after the quilting bee in the afternoon good Squire Allen had given a bountiful supper, and all the young folks of the town had joined in the old-fashioned games, which made the roof ring with hearty merriment.

All would have gone well if some one had not privately introduced something stronger than the cider provided by the Squire, – a mysterious and potent something, which caused several of the young men to betray that they were decidedly the worse for their libations.

That was serious enough; but the crowning iniquity was the putting of brandy into the coffee, which it was considered decorous for the young girls to prefer instead of cider.

Who the reprobates were remained a dead secret, for the young men laughed off the dreadful deed as a joke, and the Squire apologized in the handsomest manner.

But the girls felt much aggrieved and would not be appeased, though the elders indulgently said, "Young men will be young men," even while they shook their heads over the pranks played and the nonsense spoken under the influence of the wine that had been so slyly drunk.

Now what should be done about it? The "Sweet P's" knew that their mates would look to them for guidance at this crisis, for they were the leaders in all things. So they must decide on some line of conduct for all to adopt, as the best way of showing their disapproval of such practical jokes.

When Pris spoke, the others looked at her with surprise; for there was a new expression in her face, and both asked wonderingly, "How?"

"There are several ways, and we must decide which is the best. One is to refuse invitations to the sociable next week."

"But I've just got a lovely new dress expressly for it!" cried Portia, tragically.

"Then we might decline providing any supper," began Pris.

"That wouldn't prevent the boys from providing it, and I never could get through the night without a morsel of something!" exclaimed Polly, who loved to see devoted beings bending before her, with offerings of ice, or struggling manfully to steer a glass of lemonade through a tumultuous sea of silk and broadcloth, feeling well repaid by a word or smile from her when they landed safely.

"True, and it *would* be rather rude and resentful; for I am sure they will be models of deportment next time," and gentle Pris showed signs of relenting, though that foolish joke had cost her more than either of the others.

For a moment all sat gazing thoughtfully at the fire, trying to devise some awful retribution for the sinners, no part of which should fall upon themselves. Suddenly Polly clapped her hands, crying with a triumphant air, —

"I've got it, girls! I've got it!"

"What? How? Tell us quick!"

"We *will* refuse to go to the first sociable, and that will make a tremendous impression, for half the nice girls will follow our lead, and the boys will be in despair. Every one will ask why we are not there; and what can those poor wretches say but the truth? Won't that be a bitter pill for my lords and gentlemen?"

"It will certainly be one to us," said Portia, thinking of the "heavenly blue dress" with a pang.

"Wait a bit; our turn will come at the next sociable. To this we can go with escorts of our own choosing, or none at all, for they are free and easy affairs, you know. So we need be under no obligation to any of those sinners, and can trample upon them as much as we please."

"But how about the games, the walks home, and all the pleasant little services the young men of our set like to offer and we to receive?" asked Portia, who had grown up with these "boys," as Polly called them, and found it hard to turn her back on the playmates who had now become friends or lovers.

"Bless me! I forgot that the feud might last more than one evening. Give me an idea, Pris," and Polly's triumph ended suddenly.

"I will," answered Pris, soberly; "for at this informal sociable we can institute a new order of things. It will make a talk, but I think we have a right to do it, and I'm sure it will have a good effect, if we only hold out, and don't mind being laughed at. Let us refuse to associate with the young men whom we know to be what is called 'gay,' and accept as friends those of whose good habits we are sure. If they complain, as of course they will, we can say their own misconduct made it necessary, and there we have them."

"But, Pris, who ever heard of such an idea? People will say all sorts of things about us!" said Portia, rather startled at the proposition.

"Let them! I say it's a grand plan, and I'll stand by you, Pris, through thick and thin!" cried Polly, who enjoyed the revolutionary spirit of the thing.

"We can but try it, and give the young men a lesson; for, girls, matters are coming to a pass, when it is our *duty* to do something. I cannot think it is right for us to sit silent and see these fine fellows getting into bad habits because no one dares or cares to speak out, though we gossip and complain in private."

"Do you want us to begin a crusade?" asked Portia, uneasily.

"Yes, in the only way we girls can do it. We can't preach and pray in streets and bar-rooms, but we may at home, and in our own little world show that we want to use our influence for good. I know that you two can do any thing you choose with the young people in this town, and it is just that set who most need the sort of help you can give, if you will."

"You have more influence than both of us put together; so don't be modest, Pris, but tell us what to do, and I'll do it, even if I'm hooted at," cried warm-hearted Polly, won at once.

"You must do as you think right; but *I* have made up my mind to protest against wine-drinking in every way I can. I know it will cost me much, for I have nothing to depend upon but the good opinion of my friends; nevertheless, I shall do what seems my duty, and I may be able to save some other girl from the heart-aches I have known."

"You won't lose our good opinion, you dear little saint! Just tell us how to begin and we will follow our leader," cried both Portia and Polly, fired with emulation by their friend's quiet resolution.

Pris looked from one to the other, and, seeing real love and confidence in their faces, was moved to deepen the impression she had made, by telling them the sad secret of her life. Pressing her hands tightly together, and drooping her head, she answered in words that were the more pathetic for their brevity, —

"Dear girls, don't think me rash or sentimental, for I *know* what I am trying to do, and you will understand my earnestness better when I tell you that a terrible experience taught me to dread this appetite more than death. It killed my father, broke mother's heart, and left me all alone."

As she paused, poor Pris hid her face and shrank away, as if by this confession she had forfeited her place in the respect of her mates. But the girlish hearts only clung the closer to her, and proved the sincerity of their affection by sympathetic tears and tender words, as Portia and Polly held her fast, making a prettier group than the marble nymphs on the mantelpiece; for the Christian graces quite outdid the heathen ones.

Polly spoke first, and spoke cheerfully, feeling, with the instinct of a fine nature, that Priscilla's grief was too sacred to be talked about, and that they could best show their appreciation of her confidence by proving themselves ready to save others from a sorrow like hers.

"Let us be a little society of three, and do what we can. I shall begin at home, and watch over brother Ned; for lately he has been growing away from me somehow, and I'm afraid he is beginning to be 'gay.' I shall get teased unmercifully; but I won't mind if I keep him safe."

"I have no one at home to watch over but papa, and he is in no danger, of course; so I shall show Charley Lord that I am not pleased with him," said Portia, little dreaming where her work was to be done.

"And you will set about reforming that delightful scapegrace, Phil Butler?" added Polly, peeping archly into the still drooping face of Pris.

"I have lost my right to do it, for I told him to-night that love and respect must go together in my heart," and Pris wiped her wet eyes with a hand that no longer wore a ring.

Portia and Polly looked at one another in dismay, for by this act Pris proved how thoroughly in earnest she was.

Neither had any words of comfort for so great a trouble, and sat silently caressing her, till Pris looked up, with her own serene smile again, and said, as if to change the current of their thoughts, —

"We must have a badge for the members of our new society, so let us each wear one of these tiny silver pitchers. I've lost the mate to mine, but Portia has a pair just like them. You can divide, then we are all provided for."

Portia ran to her jewel-case, caught up a pair of delicate filigree ear-rings, hastily divided a narrow velvet ribbon into three parts, attached to each a silver pitcher, and, as the friends smilingly put on these badges, they pledged their loyalty to the new league by a silent good-night kiss.

CHAPTER II.

A DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE

Great was the astonishment of their "set" when it was known that the "Sweet P's" had refused all invitations to the opening sociable.

The young men were in despair, the gossips talked themselves hoarse discussing the affair, and the girls exulted; for, as Polly predicted, the effect of their first step was "tremendous."

When the evening came, however, by one accord they met in Portia's room, to support each other through that trying period. They affected to be quite firm and cheerful; but one after the other broke down, and sadly confessed that the sacrifice to principle was harder than they expected. What added to their anguish was the fact that the Judge's house stood just opposite the town-hall, and every attempt to keep away from certain windows proved a dead failure.

"It is *so* trying to see those girls go in with their dresses bundled up, and not even know what they wear," mourned Portia, watching shrouded figures trip up the steps that led to the paradise from which she had exiled herself.

"They must be having a capital time, for every one seems to have gone. I wonder who Phil took," sighed Pris, when at length the carriages ceased to roll.

"Girls! I wish to be true to my vow, but if you don't hold me I shall certainly rush over there and join in the fun, for that music is too much for me," cried Polly, desperately, as the singing began.

It was an endless evening to the three pretty pioneers, though they went early to bed, and heroically tried to sleep with that distracting music in their ears. Slumber came at last, but as the clocks were striking twelve a little ghost emerged from Portia's room, and gliding to the hall window vanished among the heavy damask curtains.

Presently another little ghost appeared from the same quarter, and stealing softly to the same window was about to vanish in the same capacious draperies, when a stifled cry was heard, and Portia, the second sprite, exclaimed in an astonished whisper, —

"Why, Pris, are you here, too? I saw Polly creep away from me, and came to take her back. How dare you go wandering about and startling me out of my wits in this way?"

"I was only looking to see if it was all over," quavered Pris, meekly, emerging from the right-hand curtain.

"So was I!" laughed Polly, bouncing out from the left-hand one.

There was a sound of soft merriment in that shadowy hall for a moment, and then the spirits took a look at the world outside, for the moon was shining brightly. Yes, the fun was evidently over, for the lamps were being extinguished, and several young men stood on the steps exchanging last words. One wore a cloak theatrically thrown over the shoulder, and Polly knew him at once.

"That's Ned! I *must* hear what they are saying. Keep quiet and I'll listen," she whispered, rolling herself in the dark folds of the curtain and opening the window a crack, so that a frosty breeze could blow freely into her left ear.

"You'll get your death," murmured Portia, shivering in her quilted wrapper.

"O, never mind!" cried Pris, who recognized the tallest man in the group, and was wild to catch a word from "poor Phil."

"They think they've done a fine thing; but, bless their little hearts, we'll show that we can do without them by not asking them to the next sociable, or taking notice of them if they go. That will bring them round without fail," said one masculine voice, with a jolly laugh.

"Many thanks for letting us know your plots, Mr. Lord. Now we can arrange a nice little surprise for *you*," and Portia made a scornful courtesy in the dark.

"Faith! I don't blame the girls much, for that was a confoundedly ungentlemanly trick of yours, and I'll thank you not to lay any of the blame of it on me; I've got as much as I can carry without that," said the tall figure, stalking away alone.

"I'm *so* glad to know that Phil had nothing to do with it!" breathed Pris, gratefully.

"Come on, Charley! I must get home as soon as possible, or Polly will be down on me, for she has taken a new tack lately, and holds forth on the error of my ways like a granny."

"Won't I give Ned an extra lecture for that speech, the rascal!" and Polly shook a small fist at him as her brother passed under the window, blissfully unconscious of the avenging angels up aloft.

"'Tis well; let us away and take sweet counsel how we may annihilate them," added Polly, melodramatically, as the three ghosts vanished from the glimpses of the moon.

Every one turned out to the sociables, for they were town affairs, and early hours, simple suppers, and games of all sorts, made it possible for old and young to enjoy them together.

On the night of the second one there was a goodly gathering, for the public rebuke administered to the young men had made a stir, and everybody was curious to see what the consequences would be when the parties met.

There was a sensation, therefore, when a whisper went round that the "Sweet P's" had come, and a general smile of wonder and amusement appeared when the girls entered, Portia on the arm of her father, Polly gallantly escorted by her twelve-year-old brother Will, and Pris beside Belinda Chamberlain, whose five feet seven made her a capital cavalier.

"Outwitted!" laughed Charley Lord, taking the joke at once as he saw Portia's gray-headed squire.

"I *knew* Polly was plotting mischief, she has been so quiet lately," muttered Ned, eying his little brother with lofty scorn.

Phil said nothing, but he gave a sigh of relief on seeing that Pris had chosen an escort of whom it was impossible to be jealous.

The Judge seldom honored these gatherings, but Portia ruled papa, and when she explained the peculiar state of things, he had heroically left his easy chair to cast himself into the breach.

Master Will was in high feather at his sudden promotion, and bore himself gallantly, though almost as much absorbed by his wristbands as Mr. Toots; for Polly had got him up regardless of expense, with a gay tie, new gloves, and, O, crowning splendor! a red carnation in his button-hole.

Buxom Belinda was delighted with the chance to play cavalier, and so get her fair share of all the fun going, for usually she stood in a corner smiling at an unappreciative world, like a patient sunflower.

The faces of the young men were a study as the games began, and the three girls joined in them with the partners they had chosen.

"The Judge is evidently on his mettle, but he can't stand that sort of thing long, even to please Portia; and then her Majesty will have to give in, or condescend to some one out of our set," thought Charley Lord, longing already to be taken into favor again.

"Polly will have to come and ask me to lead, if she wants to sing her favorite songs; for I'll be hanged if I do it till she has humbled herself by asking," said Ned, feeling sure that his sister would soon relent.

"If it was any one but Belinda, I don't think I could stand it," exclaimed Phil, as he watched his lost sweetheart with wistful eyes; for, though he submitted to the sentence which he knew he deserved, he could not relinquish so much excellence without deep regret.

But the young men underrated the spirit of the girls, and overrated their own strength. The "Sweet P's" went on enjoying themselves, apparently quite indifferent to the neglect of their once devoted friends. But to the outcasts it was perfectly maddening to see stately Portia promenading with stout Major Quackenboss, who put his best foot foremost with the air of a conquering hero; also to behold sweet Pris playing games with her little pupils in a way that filled their small souls with

rapture. But the most aggravating spectacle of all was captivating Polly, chatting gayly with young Farmer Brown, who was evidently losing both head and heart in the light of her smiles.

"It's no use, boys; I *must* have one turn with Portia, and you may hang me for a traitor immediately afterward," cried Charley at last, recklessly casting both pride and promise to the winds.

"O, very well; if you are going to give in, we may as well all eat humble pie 'together,'" and Ned imitated his weak-minded friend, glad of an excuse to claim the leadership of the little choir who led off the weekly "sing."

Phil dared not follow their example as far as Pris was concerned, but made his most elegant bow to Belinda, and begged to have the honor of seeing her home. His chagrin may be imagined when the lofty wall-flower replied, with a significant emphasis that made his face burn, —

"No, thank you. I need a very *steady* escort, for I shouldn't take a fall into a snow-bank as lightly as Pris did not long ago."

Charley met with a like fate at Portia's hands, for she outraged established etiquette by coldly declining his meek invitation to promenade, and two minutes later graciously accepting that of an unfashionable young man, who was known to belong to a temperance lodge.

But Ned's repulse was the most crushing of all, for in reply to his condescending hint, —

"I suppose people won't be satisfied unless we give them our favorites, hey, Polly?" he received a verbal box on the ear in the sharp answer, —

"We don't want *you*, for I intend to lead myself, and introduce a new set of songs which won't be at all to your taste."

Then, to his utter amazement and confusion, Miss Polly began to sing one of the good old temperance songs, the burden whereof was, —

"O, that will be joyful, joyful, joyful,
O, that will be joyful,
When young men drink no more!"

It was taken up all over the hall, and the chorus rang out with an energy that caused sundry young men to turn red and dodge behind any capacious back they could find, for every one understood Polly's motive, and looked approvingly upon her as she stood singing, with an occasional quiver in the voice that usually was as clear and sweet as a blackbird's.

This unexpected manoeuvre on the part of the fair enemy produced direful perplexity and dismay in the opposing camp, whither the discomfited trio fled with tidings of their defeat. None of them dared try again in that quarter, but endeavored to console themselves by flirting wildly with such girls as still remained available, for, sad to relate, many of the most eligible took courage and followed the example of the "Sweet P's." This fact cast added gloom over the hapless gentlemen of the offending set, and caused them to fear that a social revolution would follow what they had considered merely a girlish freak.

"Shouldn't wonder if they got up a praying-band after this," groaned Ned, preparing himself for the strongest measures.

"Portia had better lead off, then, for the first time I indulged too freely in the 'rosy' was at her father's house," added Charley, laying all the blame of his expulsion from Eden upon Eve, like a true Adam.

"Look here, boys, we ought to thank, not blame them, for they want to help us, I'm sure, and some of us need help, God knows!" sighed Phil, with a look and tone that made his comrades forget their pique in sudden self-reproach; for not one of them could deny his words, or help feeling that the prayers of such innocent souls would avail much.

CHAPTER III. *WHAT PORTIA DID*

"I know your head aches, mamma, so lie here and rest while I sit in my little chair and amuse you till papa comes in."

As Portia bent to arrange the sofa-cushions comfortably, the tiny silver pitcher hanging at her neck swung forward and caught her mother's eye.

"Is it the latest fashion to wear odd ear-rings instead of locketts?" she asked, touching the delicate trinket with an amused smile.

"No, mamma, it is something better than a fashion; it is the badge of a temperance league that Priss, Polly, and I have lately made," answered Portia, wondering how her mother would take it.

"Dear little girls! God bless and help you in your good work!" was the quick reply, that both surprised and touched her by its fervency.

"Then you don't mind, or think us silly to try and do even a very little towards curing this great evil?" she asked, with a sweet seriousness that was new and most becoming to her.

"My child, I feel as if it was a special providence," began her mother, then checked herself and added more quietly, "Tell me all about this league, dear, unless it is a secret."

"I have no secrets from you, mother," and nestling into her low chair Portia told her story, ending with an earnestness that showed how much she had the new plan at heart.

"So you see Polly is trying to keep Ned safe, and Priss prays for Phil; not in vain, I think, for he has been very good lately, they tell me. But *I* have neither brother nor lover to help, and I cannot go out to find any one, because I am only a girl. Now what *can* I do, mamma, for I truly want to do my share?"

The mother lay silent for a moment, then, as if yielding to an irresistible impulse, drew her daughter nearer, and whispered with lips that trembled as they spoke, —

"You can help your father, dear."

"Mamma, what can you mean?" cried Portia, in a tone of indignant surprise.

"Listen patiently, child, or I shall regret that your confidence inspired me with courage to give you mine. Never think for one moment that I accuse my husband of any thing like drunkenness. He has always taken his wine like a gentleman, and never more than was good for him till of late. For this there are many excuses; he is growing old, his life is less active than it was, many of the pleasures he once enjoyed fail now, and he has fallen into ways that harm his health."

"I know, mamma; he doesn't care for company as he used to, or business, either, but seems quite contented to sit among his papers half the morning, and doze over the fire half the evening. I've wondered at it, for he is not really old, and looks as hale and handsome as ever," said Portia, feeling that something hovered on her mother's lips which she found it hard to utter.

"You are right; it is *not* age alone that makes him so unlike his once cheerful, active self; it is — bend lower, dear, and never breathe to any one what I tell you now, only that you may help me save your father's life, perhaps."

Startled by the almost solemn earnestness of these words, Portia laid her head upon the pillow, and twilight wrapt the room in its soft gloom, as if to shut out all the world, while the mother told the daughter the danger that threatened him whom they both so loved and honored.

"Papa has fallen into the way of taking more wine after dinner than is good for him. He does not know how the habit is growing upon him, and is hurt if I hint at such a thing. But Dr. Hall warned me of the danger after papa's last ill turn, saying that at his age and with his temperament apoplexy would be sure to follow over-indulgence of this sort."

"O mamma, what can I do?" whispered Portia, with a thrill, as the words of Priss returned to her with sudden force, "It killed my father, broke mother's heart, and left me all alone."

"Watch over him, dear, amuse him as you only can, and wean him from this unsuspected harm by all the innocent arts your daughterly love can devise. I have kept this to myself, because it is hard for a wife to see any fault in her husband; still harder for her to speak of it even to so good a child as mine. But my anxiety unfits me to do all I might, so I need help; and of whom can I ask it but of you? My darling, make a little league with mother, and let us watch and pray in secret for this dear man who is all in all to us."

What Portia answered, what comfort she gave, and what further confidences she received, may not be told, for this household covenant was too sacred for report. No visible badge was assumed, no audible vow taken, but in the wife's face, as it smiled on her husband that night, there was a tenderer light than ever, and the kiss that welcomed papa was the seal upon a purpose as strong as the daughter's love.

Usually the ladies left the Judge to read his paper and take his wine in the old-fashioned way, while they had coffee in the drawing-room. As they rose, Portia saw the shadow fall upon her mother's face, which she had often seen before, but never understood till now; for *this* was the dangerous hour, this the moment when the child must stand between temptation and her father, if she could.

That evening, very soon after the servant had cleared the table of all but the decanters, a fresh young voice singing blithely in the parlor made the Judge put down his glass to listen in pleased surprise.

Presently he stepped across the hall to set both doors open, saying, in a half reproachful tone, — "Sing away, my lark, and let papa hear you, for he seldom gets a chance nowadays."

"Then he must stay and applaud me, else I shall think that speech only an empty compliment," answered Portia, as she beckoned with her most winsome smile.

The Judge never dreamed that his good angel spoke; but he saw his handsome girl beaming at him from the music stool, and strolled in, meaning to go back when the song ended.

But the blue charmer in the parlor proved more potent than the red one in the dining-room, and he sat on, placidly sipping the excellent coffee, artfully supplied by his wife, quite unconscious of the little plot to rob him of the harmful indulgence which too often made his evenings a blank, and his mornings a vain attempt to revive the spirits that once kept increasing years from seeming burdensome.

That was the beginning of Portia's home mission; and from that hour she devoted herself to it, thinking of no reward, for such "secret service" could receive neither public sympathy nor praise.

It was not an easy task, as she soon found, in spite of the stanch and skilful ally who planned the attacks she dutifully made upon the enemy threatening their domestic peace.

When music ceased to have charms, and the Judge declared he *must* get his "forty winks" after dinner, Portia boldly declared that she would stay and see that he had them comfortably. So papa laughed and submitted, took a brief nap, and woke in such good-humor that he made no complaint on finding the daughter replacing the decanter.

This answered for a while; and when its effacacy seemed about to fail, unexpected help appeared; for mamma's eyes began to trouble her, and Portia proposed that her father should entertain the invalid in the evening, while she served her through the day.

This plan worked capitally, for the Judge loved his good wife almost as much as she deserved, and devoted himself to her so faithfully that the effort proved a better stimulant than any his well-stocked cellar could supply.

Dr. Hall prescribed exercise and cheerful society for his new patient, and in seeing that these instructions were obeyed the Judge got the benefit of them, and found no time for solitary wine-bibbing.

"I do believe I'm growing young again, for the old dulness is quite gone, and all this work and play does not seem to tire me a bit," he said, after an unusually lively evening with the congenial guests Portia took care to bring about him.

"But it must be very stupid for you, my dear, as we old folks have all the fun. Why don't you invite the young people here oftener?" he added, as his eye fell on Portia, gazing thoughtfully into the fire.

"I wish I dared tell you why," she answered wistfully.

"Afraid of your old papa?" and he looked both surprised and grieved.

"I won't be, for you are the kindest father that ever a girl had, and I know you'll help me, as you always do, papa. I don't dare ask my young friends here because I'm not willing to expose some of them to temptation," began Portia, bravely.

"What temptation? This?" asked her father, turning her half-averted face to the light, with a smile full of paternal pride.

"No, sir; a far more dangerous one than ever I can be."

"Then I should like to see it!" and the old gentleman looked about him for this rival of his lovely daughter.

"It is these," she said, pointing to the bottles and glasses on the side-board.

The Judge understood her then, and knit his brows but before he could reply Portia went steadily on, though her cheeks burned, and her eyes were bent upon the fire again.

"Father, I belong to a society of three, and we have promised to do all we can for temperance. As yet I can only show bravely the faith that is in me; therefore I can never offer any friend of mine a drop of wine, and so I do not ask them here, where it would seem most uncourteous to refuse."

"I trust no gentleman ever had cause to reproach me for the hospitality I was taught to show my guests," began the Judge, in his most stately manner.

But he got no further, for a soft hand touched his lips, and Portia answered sorrowfully, —

"One man has, sir; Charley Lord says the first time he took too much was in this house, and it has grieved me to the heart, for it is true. O papa, never let any one have the right to say that again of us! Forgive me if I seem undutiful, but I *must* speak out, for I want my dear father to stand on my side, and set an example which will make me even fonder and prouder of him than I am now."

As Portia paused, half frightened at her own frankness, she put her arms about his neck, and hid her face on his breast, still pleading her cause with the silent eloquence so hard to resist.

The Judge made no reply for several minutes, and in that pause many thoughts passed through his mind, and a vague suspicion that had haunted him of late became a firm conviction. For suddenly he seemed to see his own weakness in its true light, to understand the meaning of the watchful love, the patient care that had so silently and helpfully surrounded him; and in Portia's appeal for younger men, he read a tender warning to himself.

He was a proud man, but a very just one; and though a flush of anger swept across his face at first, he acknowledged the truth of the words that were so hard to speak.

With his hand laid fondly on the head that was half-hidden, lest a look should seem to reproach him, this brave old gentleman proved that he loved his neighbor better than himself, and honestly confessed his own shortcomings.

"No man shall ever say again that *I* tempted him."

Then as Portia lifted up a happy face, he looked straight into the grateful eyes that dimmed with sudden tears, and added tenderly, —

"My daughter, I am not too proud to own a fault, nor, please God, too old to mend it."

CHAPTER IV. WHAT POLLY DID

Since their mother's death, Polly had tried to fill her place, and take good care of the boys. But the poor little damsel had a hard time of it sometimes; for Ned, being a year or two older, thought it his duty to emancipate himself from petticoat government as rapidly as possible, and do as he pleased, regardless of her warnings or advice.

Yet at heart he was very fond of his pretty sister. At times he felt strongly tempted to confide his troubles and perplexities to her, for since the loss of his mother he often longed for a tender, helpful creature to cheer and strengthen him.

Unfortunately he had reached the age when boys consider it "the thing" to repress every sign of regard for their own women-folk, sisters especially; so Ned barricaded himself behind the manly superiority of his twenty years, and snubbed Polly.

Will had not yet developed this unpleasant trait, but his sister expected it, and often exclaimed, despairingly, to her bosom friends, —

"When *he* follows Ned's example, and begins to rampage, what *will* become of me?"

The father — a learned and busy man — was so occupied by the duties of his large parish, or so absorbed in the abstruse studies to which his brief leisure was devoted, that he had no time left for his children. Polly took good care of him and the house, and the boys seemed to be doing well, so he went his way in peace, quite unconscious that his eldest son needed all a father's care to keep him from the temptations to which a social nature, not evil propensities, exposed him.

Polly saw the danger, and spoke of it; but Mr. Snow only answered absently, —

"Tut, tut, my dear; you are over-anxious, and forget that young men all have a few wild oats to sow."

While Ned silenced her with that other familiar and harmful phrase, "I'm only seeing life a bit, so don't you fret, child," little dreaming that such "seeing life" too often ends in seeing death.

So Polly labored in vain, till something happened which taught them all a lesson. Ned went on a sleighing frolic with the comrades whom of all others his sister dreaded most.

"Do be careful and not come home as you did last time, for father will be in, and it would shock him dreadfully if I shouldn't be able to keep you quiet," she said anxiously.

"You little granny, I wasn't tipsy, only cheerful, and that scared you out of your wits. I've got my key, so don't sit up. I hate to have a woman glowering at me when I come in," was Ned's ungracious reply; for the memory of that occasion was not a pleasant one.

"If a woman had not been sitting up, you'd have frozen on the door-mat, you ungrateful boy," cried Polly, angrily.

Ned began to whistle, and was going off without a word, when Polly's loving heart got the better of her quick temper, and, catching up a splendid tippet she had made for him, she ran after her brother. She caught him just as he opened the front door, and, throwing both her arms and her gift about his neck, said, with a kiss that produced a sensation in the sleigh-full of gentlemen at the gate, —

"Ah, do be friends, for I can't bear to part so."

Now if no one had been by, Ned would have found that pleasant mingling of soft arms and worsted a genuine comforter; but masculine pride would not permit him to relent before witnesses, and the fear of being laughed at by "those fellows" made him put both sister and gift roughly aside, with a stern, —

"I won't be molly-coddled! Let me alone and shut the door!"

Polly did let him alone, with a look that haunted him, and shut the door with a spirited bang, that much amused the gentlemen.

"I'll never try to do any thing for Ned again! It's no use, and he may go to the bad for all I care!" said Polly to herself, after a good cry.

But she bitterly repented that speech a few hours later, when her brother was brought back, apparently dead, by such of the "cheerful" party as escaped unhurt from a dangerous upset.

There was no concealing this sad home-coming from her father, though poor Ned was quiet enough now, being stunned by the fall, which had wounded his head and broken his right arm.

It *was* a shock, both to the man and the minister; and, when the worst was over, he left Polly to watch her brother, with eyes full of penitential tears, and went away, to reproach himself in private for devoting to ancient Fathers the time and thought he should have given to modern sons.

Ned was very ill, and when, at last, he began to mend, his helplessness taught him to see and love the sweetest side of Polly's character; for she was in truth his right hand, and waited on him with a zeal that touched his heart.

Not one reproach did she utter, not even by a look did she recall past warnings, or exult in the present humiliation, which proved how needful they had been. Every thing was forgotten except the fact that she had the happy privilege of caring for him almost as tenderly as a mother.

Not quite, though, and the memory of her whose place it was impossible to fill seemed to draw them closer together; as if the silent voice repeated its last injunctions to both son and daughter, "Take care of the boys, dear;" "Be good to your sister, Ned."

"I've been a regular brute to her, and the dear little soul is heaping coals of fire on my head by slaving over me like an angel," thought the remorseful invalid, one day, as he lay on the sofa, with a black patch adorning his brow, and his arm neatly done up in splints.

Polly thought he was asleep, and sat quietly rolling bandages till a head popped in at the door, and Will asked, in a sepulchral whisper, —

"I've got the book Ned wanted. Can I come and give it to you?"

Polly nodded, and he tiptoed in to her side, with a face so full of good-will and spirits that it was as refreshing as a breath of fresh air in that sick room.

"Nice boy! he never forgets to do a kindness and be a comfort to his Polly," she said, leaning her tired head on his buttony jacket, as he stood beside her.

Will wasn't ashamed to show affection for "his Polly," so he patted the pale cheeks with a hand as red as his mittens, and smiled down at her with his honest blue eyes full of the protecting affection it was so pleasant to receive.

"Yes, *I'm* going to be a tiptop boy, and never make you and father ashamed of me, as you were once of somebody we know. Now don't you laugh, and I'll show you something; it's the best I could do, and I wanted to prove that I mean what I say; truly, truly, wish I may die if I don't."

As he spoke, Will pulled out of his vest-pocket a little pewter cream-pot, tied to a shoe-string, and holding it up said, with a funny mixture of boyish dignity and defiance, —

"I bought it of Nelly Hunt, because her tea-set was half-smashed up. Folks may laugh at my badge, but I don't care; and if you won't have me in your society I'll set up all alone, for I'm going into the temperance business, any way!"

Polly hugged him on the spot, and made his youthful countenance glow with honest pride by saying solemnly, —

"William G. Snow, I consider our league honored by the addition of so valuable a member; for a boy who can bear to be laughed at, and yet stick to his principles, is a treasure."

"The fellows *do* laugh at me, and call me 'Little Pitcher;' but I'd rather be that than 'Champagne Charlie,' as Ned called Mr. Lord," said Will, stoutly.

"Bless the little pitchers!" cried Polly, enthusiastically surveying both the pewter pot and its wearer.

A great tear was lying on her cheek, checked in its fall by the dimple that came as she looked at her brother's droll badge. Will caught it dexterously in the tiny cup, saying, with a stifled laugh, —

"Now you've baptized it, Polly, and it's as good as silver; for your tear shines in there like a great big diamond. Wonder how many it would take to fill it?"

"You'll never make me cry enough to find out. Now go and get my little silver chain, for that dear pewter pot deserves a better one than an old shoe-string," said Polly, looking after him with a happy face, as the small youth gave one ecstatic skip and was off.

"I'm afraid we've waked you up," she added, as Ned stirred.

"I was only day-dreaming; but I mean this one shall come true," and Ned rose straight up, with an energy that surprised his sister.

"Come and have your lunch, for it's time. Which will you take, Mrs. Neal's wine-jelly or my custard?" asked Polly, settling him in his big chair.

To her astonishment, Ned pitched the little mould of amber jelly into the fire, and tried to eat the custard with his left hand.

"My dear boy, have you lost your senses?" she ejaculated.

"No; I've just found them," he answered, with a flash of the eye, that seemed to enlighten Polly without more words.

Taking her usual seat on the arm of the chair, she fed her big nursling in silence, till a sigh made her ask tenderly, —

"Isn't it right? I put in lots of sugar because you like it sweet."

"All the sugar in the world won't sweeten it to me, Polly; for there's a bitter drop at the bottom of all my cups. Will said your tear shone like a diamond in his little pitcher, and well it might. But you can't cry happy tears over me, though I've made you shed enough sad ones to fill the big punch-bowl."

Ned tried to laugh, but somehow the custard choked him; and Polly laid the poor, cropped head on her shoulder for a minute, saying softly, —

"Never mind, dear, I wouldn't think about the old troubles now."

She got no farther, for with a left-handed thump that made all the cups dance wildly on the table, Ned cried out, —

"But I *will* think about the old troubles, for I don't intend to have any new ones of that sort! Do you suppose I'll see that snip of a boy standing up for what is right, and not have the pluck to do the same? Do you suppose I'll make my own father ashamed of me more than once? Or let the dearest little girl in the world wear herself out over me, and I not try to thank her in the way she likes best? Polly, my dear, you can't be as proud of your elder brother as you are of the younger, but you shall never have cause to blush for him again; *never, sir, never!*"

Ned lifted his hand for another emphatic thump, but changed his mind, and embraced his sister as closely as one arm could do it.

"I ought to have a badge if I'm going to belong to your select society; but I don't know any lady who will give me an ear-ring or a cream-pot," said Ned, when the conversation got round again to the cheerful side of the question.

"I'll give you something better than either," answered Polly, as she transferred a plain locket from her watch-guard to the one lying on the table.

Ned knew that a beloved face and a lock of gray hair were inside; and when his sister added, with a look full of sweet significance, "For her sake, dear," he answered manfully, —

"I'll try, Polly!"

CHAPTER V. WHAT PRIS DID

Priscilla, meantime, was racking her brain to discover how she could help Philip; for since she had broken off her engagement no one spoke of him to her, and she could only judge of how things were going with him by what she saw and heard as she went about her daily task.

Pris kept school, and the road which she must take twice a day led directly by the office where Phil was studying medicine with old Dr. Buffum. Formerly she always smiled and nodded as she passed, or stopped to chat a moment with the student, who usually chanced to be taking a whiff of fresh air at that instant. Little notes flew in and out, and often her homeward walk was cheered by a companion, who taught the pretty teacher lessons she found it very easy to learn.

A happy time! But it was all over now, and brief glimpses of a brown head bent above a desk near that window was the only solace poor Pris had. The head never turned as she went by, but she felt sure that Phil knew her step, and found that moment, as she did, the hardest of the day.

She longed to relent, but dared not yet. He longed to show that he repented, but found it difficult without a sign of encouragement. So they went their separate ways, seldom meeting, for Phil stuck to his books with dogged resolution, and Pris had no heart for society.

Of course the affair was discussed with all the exasperating freedom of a country town, some blaming Pris for undue severity, some praising her spirit, and some, friends, – not gossips, – predicting that both would be the better for the trial, which would not separate them long. Of this latter class were Portia and Polly, who felt it their duty to lend a hand when matters reached a certain point.

"Pris, dear, may I tell you something that I think you'd be glad to know?" began Polly, joining her friend one afternoon, as she went home weary and alone.

"*You* may tell me any thing," and Pris took her arm as if she felt the need of sympathy.

"You know Dr. Buffum let Phil help with Ned, so we have seen a good deal of him, and that is how I found out what I've got to tell you."

"He spoke of me, then?" whispered Pris, eagerly.

"Not a word till Ned made him. My boy is fond of your boy, and they had confidences which seem to have done them both good. Of course Ned didn't tell me all about it, as *we* tell things (men never do, they are so proud and queer), but he said this, —

"Look here, Polly, you must be very kind to Phil, and stand by him all you can, or he will go down. He is doing his best, and will hold on as long as he can, but a fellow *must* have comfort and encouragement of some sort, and if he don't get the right kind he'll try the wrong."

"O Polly! you will stand by him?"

"I have; for I just took Phil in a weakish moment, and found out all I wanted to know. Ned is right and you are wrong, Pris, – not in giving back the ring, but in seeming to cast him off entirely. He does not deserve that, for he was not to blame half so much as you think. But he won't excuse himself, for he feels that you are unjust; yet he loves you dearly, and you could do any thing with him, if you chose."

"I do choose, Polly; but how *can* I marry a man whom I cannot trust?" began Pris, sadly.

"Now, my child, I'm going to talk to you like a mother, for I've had experience with boys, and I know how to manage them," interrupted Polly, with such a charmingly maternal air that Pris laughed in spite of her trouble. "Be quiet and listen to the words of wisdom," continued her friend, seriously.

"Since I've taken care of Ned, I've learned a great deal, for the poor lad was so sick and sorry he couldn't shut his heart against me any more. So now I understand how to help and comfort him, for hearts are very much alike, Pris, and all need lots of love and patience to keep them good and happy. Ned told me his troubles, and I made up my mind that as *we* don't have so many temptations as boys, we should do all we can to help them, and make them the sort of men we can both love and trust."

"You are right, Polly. I've often thought how wrong it is for us to sit safe and silent while we know things are going wrong, just because it isn't considered proper for us to speak out. Then when the harm is done we are expected to turn virtuously away from the poor soul we might perhaps have saved if we had dared. God does not do so to us, and we ought not to do so to those over whom we have so much power," said Pris, with a heart full of sad and tender memories.

"We won't!" cried Polly, firmly. "We began in play, but we will go on in earnest, and use our youth, our beauty, our influence for something nobler than merely pleasing men's eyes, or playing with their hearts. We'll help them to be good, and brave, and true, and in doing this we shall become better women, and worthier to be loved, I know."

"Why, Polly, you are quite inspired!" and Pris stopped in the snowy road to look at her.

"It isn't all *my* wisdom. I've talked with father as well as Ned and Phil, and they have done me good. I've discovered that confidence is better than compliments, and friendship much nicer than flirting; so I'm going to turn over a new leaf, and use my good gifts for higher ends."

"Dear thing, what a comfort you are!" said Pris, pressing Polly's hands, and looking into her bright face with grateful eyes. "You have given me courage to do my duty, and I'll follow your example as fast as I can. Don't come any farther, please: I'd better be alone when I pass Phil's window, for I'm going to nod and smile, as I used to in the happy time. Then he will see that I don't cast him off and leave him to 'go down' for want of help, but am still his friend until I dare be more."

"Now, Pris, that's just lovely of you, and I know it will work wonders. Smile and nod away, dear, and try to do your part, as I'm trying to do mine."

For an instant the little gray hat and the jaunty one with the scarlet feather were bent close together; but what went on under the brims, who can say? Then Polly trotted off as fast as she could go, and Pris turned into a certain street with a quicker step and a brighter color than she had known for weeks.

She was late, for she had lingered with Polly, and she feared that patient watcher at the window would be gone. No; the brown head was there, but it lay wearily on the arms folded over a big book, and the eyes that stared out at the wintry sky had something tragic in them.

Poor Phil did need encouragement, and was in the mood to take the worst sort if the best failed him, for life looked very dark just then, and solitude was growing unbearable.

Suddenly, between him and the ruddy sunset a face appeared, – the dearest and the loveliest in the world to him. Not half averted now, nor set straightforward, cold and quiet as a marble countenance, but bent towards him, with a smile on the lips, and a wistful look in the tender eyes that made his heart leap up with sudden hope. Then it vanished; and when he sprung to the window nothing could be seen but the last wave of a well-known cloak, fluttering round the corner.

But Priscilla's first effort was a great success; for the magic of a kind look glorified the dingy office, and every bottle on the shelves might have been filled with the elixir of life, so radiant did Phil's face become. The almost uncontrollable desire to rush away and recklessly forget his loneliness in the first companionship that offered was gone now, for a happy hope peopled his solitude with helpful thoughts and resolutions; the tragic look left the eyes, that still saw a good angel instead of a tempting demon between them and the evening sky; and when Phil shut up the big book he had been vainly trying to study, he felt that he had discovered a new cure for one of the sharpest pains the heart can suffer.

Next morning Pris unconsciously started for school too soon, so when she passed that window the room was empty. Resolved that Phil should not share her disappointment, she lifted the sash and dropped a white azalea on his desk. She smiled as she did it, and then whisked away as if she had taken instead of left a treasure. But the smile remained with the flower, I think, and Phil found it there when he hurried in to discover this sweet good-morning waiting for him.

He put it in the wine-glass which he had sworn never should be filled again with any thing but water, and sitting down before it listened to the little sermon the flower preached; for the delicate

white azalea was Priss to him, and the eloquence of a pure and tender heart flowed from it, working miracles. One of them was that when sunset came it shone on two faces at the window, and the little snow-birds heard two voices breaking a long silence.

"God bless you, Priss!"

"God help you, Phil!"

That was all, but from that hour the girl felt her power for good, and used it faithfully; and from that hour the young man worked bravely to earn the respect and confidence without which no love is safe and happy.

"We are friends now," they said, when they were seen together again; and friends they remained, in spite of shrugs and smiles, ill-natured speeches, and more than one attempt to sow discord between them, for people did not understand the new order of things.

"I trust him," was the only answer Priss gave to all warnings and criticisms.

"I *will* be worthy of her," the vow that kept Phil steady in spite of the ridicule that is so hard to bear, and gave him courage to flee from the temptation he was not yet strong enough to meet face to face.

Portia and Polly stood by them staunchly; for having made her father's house a safe refuge, Portia offered Phil all the helpful influences of a happy home. Polly, with Ned to lend a hand, gave his comrade many a friendly lift; and when it was understood that the Judge, the minister, and the "Sweet P's" indorsed the young M. D., no one dared cast a stone at him.

All this took time, of course, but Phil got his reward at last, for one night a little thing happened which showed him his own progress, and made Priss feel that she might venture to wear the ring again.

At a party Phil was graciously invited to take wine with a lady, and refused. It was a very hard thing to do, for the lady was his hostess, a handsome woman, and the mother of a flock of little children, who all preferred the young doctor to the old one; and, greatest trial of all, several of his most dreaded comrades stood by to laugh at him, if he dared to let principle outweigh courtesy.

But he did it, though he grew pale with the effort to say steadily, —

"Will Mrs. Ward pardon me if I decline the honor? I am" —

There he stopped and turned scarlet, for a lie was on his lips, — a lie so much easier to tell than the honest truth that many would have forgiven its utterance at that minute.

His hostess naturally thought ill health was his excuse, and, pitying his embarrassment, said, smiling, —

"Ah! you doctors don't prescribe wine for your own ailments as readily as for those of your patients."

But Phil, angry at his own weakness, spoke out frankly, with a look that said more than his words, —

"I cannot even accept the kind excuse you offer me, for I am not ill. It may be my duty to order wine sometimes for my patients, but it is also my duty to prescribe water for myself."

A dreadful little pause followed that speech; but Mrs. Ward understood now, and though she thought the scruple a foolish one, she accepted the apology like a well-bred woman, and, with a silent bow that ended the matter, turned to other guests, leaving poor Phil to his fate.

Not a pleasant one, but he bore it as well as he could, and when his mates left him stranded in a corner, he said, half aloud, with a long breath, as if the battle had been a hard one, —

"Yes, I suppose I *have* lost my best patient, but I've kept my own respect, and that ought to satisfy me."

"Let me add mine, and wish you health and happiness, dear Phil," said a voice behind him, and turning quickly he saw Priss standing there with two goblets of water, and a smile full of love and pride.

"You know what that toast means for me?" he whispered, with sudden sunshine in his face, as he took the offered glass.

"Yes; and I drink it with all my heart," she answered, with her hand in his.

CHAPTER VI. *HOW IT ENDED*

The leaven dropped by three girls in that little town worked so slowly that they hardly expected to do more than "raise their own patty-cakes," as Polly merrily expressed it. But no honest purpose is ever wasted, and by-and-by the fermentation began.

Several things helped it amazingly. The first of these was a temperance sermon, preached by Parson Snow, which produced a deep impression, because in doing this he had the courage, like Brutus, to condemn his own son. The brave sincerity, the tender earnestness of that sermon, touched the hearts of his people as no learned discourse had ever done, and bore fruit that well repaid him for the effort it cost.

It waked up the old people, set the young ones to thinking, and showed them all that they had a work to do. For those who were down felt that they might be lifted up again, those who were trifling ignorantly or recklessly with temptation saw their danger, and those who had longed to speak out now dared to do it because he led the way.

So, warned by the wolf in his own fold, this shepherd of souls tried to keep his flock from harm, and, in doing it, found that his Christianity was the stronger, wiser, and purer for his humanity.

Another thing was the fact that the Judge was the first to follow his pastor's example, and prove by deeds that he indorsed his words. It was hard for the hospitable old gentleman to banish wine from his table, and forego the pleasant customs which long usage and many associations endeared to him; but he made his sacrifice handsomely, and his daughter helped him.

She kept the side-board from looking bare by filling the silver tankards with flowers, offered water to his guests with a grace that made a cordial of it, and showed such love and honor for her father that he was a very proud and happy man.

What the Judge did was considered "all right" by his neighbors, for he was not only the best-born, but the richest man in town, and with a certain class these facts had great weight. Portia knew this, and counted on it when she said she wanted him on her side; so she exulted when others followed the new fashion, some from principle, but many simply because he set it.

At first the young reformers were disappointed that every one was not as enthusiastic as themselves, and as ready to dare and do for the cause they had espoused. But wiser heads than those on their pretty shoulders curbed their impetuosity, and suggested various ways of gently insinuating the new idea, and making it so attractive that others would find it impossible to resist; for sunshine often wins when bluster makes us wrap our prejudices closer around us, like the traveller in the fable.

Portia baited *her* trap with Roman parties, – for she had been abroad, – and made them so delightful that no one complained when only cake and tea was served (that being the style in the Eternal City), but went and did likewise.

Artful Polly set up a comic newspaper, to amuse Ned, who was an invalid nearly all winter, and in it freed her mind on many subjects in such a witty way that the "Pollyanthus," as her brother named it, circulated through their set, merrily sowing good seed; for young folks will remember a joke longer than a sermon, and this editor made all hers tell.

Pris was not behindhand in her efforts, but worked in a different way, and got up a branch society among her little pupils, called "The Water Babies." That captivated the mothers at once, and even the fathers found it difficult to enjoy their wine with blue eyes watching them wistfully over the rims of silver mugs; while the few toppers of the town hid themselves like night-birds flying from the sun, when, led by their gentle General, that little army of innocents marched through the streets with banners flying, blithe voices singing, rosy faces shining, and childish hearts full of the sweet delusion that *they* could save the world.

Of course the matrons discussed these events at the sewing-circle, and much talk went on of a more useful sort than the usual gossip about servants, sickness, dress, and scandal.

Mrs. Judge waxed eloquent upon the subject, and, being president, every one listened with due respect. Mrs. Ward seconded all her motions, for this lady had much surprised the town, not only by installing Phil as family physician, but by coming out strong for temperance. Somebody had told her all about the girls' labor of love, and she had felt ashamed to be outdone by them; so, like a conscientious woman, she decided to throw her influence into the right scale, take time by the forelock, and help to make the town a safer place for her five sons to grow up in than it was then.

These two leading ladies kept the ball rolling so briskly that others were soon converted and fell into rank, till a dozen or so were heartily in earnest. And then the job was half done; for in a great measure women make society what they choose to have it.

"We are told that home is our sphere, and advised to keep in it; so let us see that it is what it should be, and then we shall have proved our fitness for larger fields of labor, if we care to claim them," said Mrs. Judge, cutting out red flannel with charitable energy, on one occasion.

"Most of us will find that quite as much as we can accomplish, I fancy," answered Mrs. Ward, thinking of her own riotous lads, who were probably pulling the house about their ears, while she made hoods for Mrs. Flanagan's bare-headed lasses.

"'Pears to me we hain't no call to interfere in other folks's affairs. This never was a drinkin' town, and things is kep' in fustrate order, so *I* don't see the use of sech a talk about temperance," remarked Miss Simmons, an acid spinster, whose principal earthly wealth consisted of a choice collection of cats.

"If your tabbies took to drinking, you *would* see the use, I'm sure," laughed Polly, from the corner, which was a perfect posy-bed of girls.

"Thank goodness, *I've* no men folks to pester myself about," began Miss Simmons, with asperity.

"Ah, but you should; for if you refuse to make them happy, you ought at least to see that they console themselves in ways which can work them no further woe," continued Polly, gravely, though her black eyes danced with fun.

"Well, that wouldn't be no more than fair, I'm free to confess; but, sakes alive, I couldn't attend to 'em all!" said Miss Simmons, bridling with a simper that nearly upset the whole bevy of girls.

"Do make the effort, and help us poor things who haven't had your experience," added Pris, in her most persuasive voice.

"I declare I will! I'll have Hiram Stebbins in to tea; and when he's as good-natured as muffins and pie can make him, I'll set to and see if I can't talk him out of his attachment to that brandy bottle," cried Miss Simmons, with a sudden yearning towards the early sweetheart, who had won, but never claimed her virgin affections.

"I think you'll do it; and, if so, you will have accomplished what no one else could, and you shall have any prize you choose," cried Portia, smiling so hopefully that the faded old face grew almost young again, as Miss Simmons went home with something better to do than tend her tabbies.

"We've bagged that bird," said Polly, with real satisfaction.

"That's the way we set people to work," added Portia, smiling.

"She will do what we can't, for her heart is in it," said Pris, softly; and it was pleasant to see the blooming girls rejoice that poor old Hiram was in a fair way to be saved.

So the year went round, and Thanksgiving came again, with the home jollity that makes a festival throughout the land. The day would not be perfect if it did not finish with a frolic of some sort, and for reasons of their own the young gentlemen decided to have the first sociable of the year an unusually pleasant one.

"Everybody is going, and Ned says the supper is to be water-ice and ice-water," said Polly, taking a last look at herself in the long mirror, when the three friends were ready on that happy evening.

"I needn't sigh now over other girls' pretty dresses, as I did last year;" and Portia plumed herself like a swan, as she settled Charley's roses in her bosom.

"And I needn't wonder who Phil will take," added Pris, stopping, with her glove half on, to look at the little ring back again from its long banishment in somebody's waistcoat pocket.

Never had the hall looked so elegant and gay, for it was charmingly decorated; couches were provided for the elders, mirrors for the beauties, and music of the best sounded from behind a thicket of shrubs and flowers. Every one seemed in unusually good spirits; the girls looked their loveliest, and the young men were models of propriety; though a close observer might have detected a suspicious twinkle in the eyes of the most audacious, as if they plotted some new joke.

The girls saw it, were on the watch, and thought the secret was out when they discovered that the gentlemen of their set all wore tiny pitchers, hanging like orders from the knots of sweet-peas in their button-holes. But, bless their innocent hearts! that was only a ruse, and they were taken entirely by surprise when, just before supper, the band struck up,

"Drink to me only with thine eyes;"

and every one looked smilingly at the three girls who were standing together near the middle of the hall.

They looked about them in pretty confusion, but in a moment beheld a spectacle that made them forget themselves; for the Judge, in an impressive white waistcoat, marched into the circle gathered about them, made a splendid bow, and said, with a smile that put the gas to shame, —

"Young ladies! I am desired by the gentlemen now present to beg your acceptance of a slight token of their gratitude, respect, and penitence. As the first man who joined the society which has proved a blessing to our town, Mr. William Snow will now have the honor of presenting the gift."

Then appeared Mr. William Snow, looking as proud as a peacock; and well he might, for on the salver which he bore stood a stately silver pitcher. A graceful little Hebe danced upon the handle, three names shone along the fretted brim, and three white lilies rose from the slender vase, — fit emblems of the maiden founders of the league.

Arriving before them, Master Will nearly upset the equilibrium of his precious burden in attempting to make a bow equal to the Judge's; but recovered himself gallantly, and delivered the following remarkable poem, which the public was expected to believe an emanation of his own genius:

—
"Hebe poured the nectar forth
When gods of old were jolly,
But graces three *our* goblets fill,
Fair Portia, Pris and Polly.
Their draughts make every man who tastes
Happier, better, richer;
So here we vow ourselves henceforth
Knights of the Silver Pitcher."

ANNA'S WHIM

"Now just look at that!" cried a young lady, pausing suddenly in her restless march to and fro on one of the wide piazzas of a seaside hotel.

"At what?" asked her companion, lazily swinging in a hammock.

"The difference in those two greetings. It's perfectly disgraceful!" was the petulant reply.

"I didn't see any thing. Do tell me about it," said Clara, opening her drowsy eyes with sudden interest.

"Why, young Barlow was lounging up the walk, and met pretty Miss Ellery. Off went his hat; he gave her a fine bow, a gracious smile, a worn-out compliment, and then dawdled on again. The next minute Joe King came along. Instantly Barlow woke up, laughed out like a pleased boy, gave him a hearty grip of the hand, a cordial 'How are you, old fellow? I'm no end glad to see you!' and, linking arms, the two tramped off, quite beaming with satisfaction."

"But, child, King is Barlow's best friend; Kitty Ellery only an acquaintance. Besides, it wouldn't do to greet a woman like a man."

"Yes, it would, especially in this case; for Barlow adores Kate, and might, at least, treat her to something better than the nonsense he gives other girls. But, no, it's proper to simper and compliment; and he'll do it till his love gets the better of 'prunes and prisms,' and makes him sincere and earnest."

"This is a new whim of yours. You surely wouldn't like to have any man call out 'How are you, Anna?' slap you on the shoulder, and nearly shake your hand off, as Barlow did King's, just now," said Clara, laughing at her friend.

"Yes, I would," answered Anna, perversely, "if he really meant it to express affection or pleasure. A good grip of the hand and a plain, hearty word would please me infinitely better than all the servile bowing down and sweet nonsense I've had lately. I'm not a fool; then, why am I treated like one?" she continued, knitting her handsome brows and pacing to and fro like an angry leopardess. "Why don't men treat me like a reasonable being? – talk sense to me, give me their best ideas, tell me their plans and ambitions, let me enjoy the real man in them, and know what they honestly are? I don't want to be a goddess stuck up on a pedestal. I want to be a woman down among them, to help and be helped by our acquaintance."

"It wouldn't do, I fancy. They wouldn't like it, and would tell you to keep to your own sex."

"But my own sex don't interest or help me one bit. Women have no hope but to be married, and that is soon told; no ideas but dress and show, and I'm tired to death of both; no ambition but to outshine their neighbors, and I despise that."

"Thank you, love," blandly murmured Clara.

"It is true, and you know it. There *are* sensible women; but not in my set. And I don't seem to find them. I've tried the life set down for girls like me, and for three years I've lived and enjoyed it. Now I'm tired of it. I want something better, and I mean to have it. Men *will* follow, admire, flatter, and love me; for I please them and they enjoy my society. Very well. Then it's fair that I should enjoy theirs. And I should if they would let me. It's perfectly maddening to have flocks of brave, bright fellows round me, full of every thing that is attractive, strong, and helpful, yet not be able to get at it, because society ordains twaddle between us, instead of sensible conversation and sincere manners."

"What shall we do about it, love?" asked Clara, enjoying her friend's tirade.

"*You* will submit to it, and get a mental dyspepsia, like all the other fashionable girls. I won't submit, if I can help it; even if I shock Mrs. Grundy by my efforts to get plain bread and beef instead of confectionery."

Anna walked in silence for a moment, and then burst out again, more energetically than ever.

"Oh! I do wish I could find one sensible man, who would treat me as he treats his male friends, – even roughly, if he is honest and true; who would think me worthy of his confidence, ask my advice, let me give him whatever I have that is wise and excellent, and be my friend in all good faith."

"Ahem!" said Clara, with a significant laugh, that angered Anna.

"You need not try to abash me with your jeers. I know what I mean, and I stand by my guns, in spite of your 'hems.' I do *not* want lovers. I've had dozens, and am tired of them. I will not marry till I know the man thoroughly; and how *can* I know him with this veil between us? They don't guess what I really am; and I want to prove to them and to myself that I possess brains and a heart, as well as 'heavenly eyes,' a 'queenly figure,' and a 'mouth made for kissing.'"

The scorn with which Anna uttered the last words amused her friend immensely, for the petulant beauty had never looked handsomer than at that moment.

"If any man saw you now, he'd promise whatever you ask, no matter how absurd. But don't excite yourself, dear child; it is too warm for heroics."

Anna leaned on the wide baluster a moment, looking thoughtfully out upon the sea; and as she gazed a new expression stole over her charming face, changing its disdainful warmth to soft regret.

"This is not all a whim. I know what I covet, because I had it once," she said, with a sigh. "I had a boy friend when I was a girl, and for several years we were like brother and sister. Ah! what happy times we had together, Frank and I. We played and studied, quarrelled and made up, dreamed splendid dreams, and loved one another in our simple child fashion, never thinking of sex, rivalry, or any of the forms and follies that spoil maturer friendships."

"What became of him? Did he die angelically in his early bloom, or outgrow his Platonics with round jackets?" asked Clara.

"He went to college. I went abroad, to be 'finished off;' and when we met a year ago the old charm was all gone, for we were 'in society' and had our masks on."

"So the boy and girl friendship did not ripen into love and end the romance properly?"

"No, thank Heaven! no flirtation spoiled the pretty story. Frank was too wise, and I too busy. Yet I remember how glad I was to see him; though I hid it properly, and pretended to be quite unconscious that I was any thing but a belle. I got paid for my deceit, though; for, in spite of his admiration, I saw he was disappointed in me. I should not have cared if I had been disappointed in him; but I was quick to see that he was growing one of the strong, superior men who command respect. I wanted to keep his regard, at least; and I seemed to have nothing but beauty to give in return. I think I never was so hurt in my life as I was by his not coming to see me after a week or two, and hearing him say to a friend, one night, when I thought I was at my very best, 'She is spoilt, like all the rest.'"

"I do believe you loved him, and that is why you won't love any one else," cried Clara, who had seen her friend in her moods before; but never understood them, and thought she had found a clew now.

"No," said Anna, with a quiet shake of the head. "No, I only wanted my boy friend back, and could not find him. The fence between us was too high; and I could not climb over, as I used to do when I leaped the garden-wall to sit in a tree and help Frank with his lessons."

"Has the uncivil wretch never come back?" asked Clara, interested in the affair.

"Never. He is too busy shaping his life bravely and successfully to waste his time on a frivolous butterfly like Anna West."

An eloquent little gesture of humility made the words almost pathetic. Kind-hearted Clara was touched by the sight of tears in the "heavenly eyes," and tumbling out of the hammock she embraced the "queenly figure" and warmly pressed the "lips that were made for kissing," thereby driving several approaching gentlemen to the verge of distraction.

"Now don't be tragical, darling. You have nothing to cry for, I'm sure. Young, lovely, rich, and adored, what more *can* any girl want?" said Clara, gushingly.

"Something besides admiration to live for," answered Anna, adding, with a shrug, as she saw several hats fly off and several manly countenances beam upon her, "Never mind, my fit is over now; let us go and dress for tea."

Miss West usually took a brisk pull in her own boat before breakfast; a habit which lured many indolent young gentlemen out of their beds at unaccustomed hours, in the hope that they might have the honor of splashing their legs helping her off, the privilege of wishing her "*Bon voyage*," or the crowning rapture of accompanying her.

On the morning after her "fit," as she called the discontent of a really fine nature with the empty life she led, she was up and out unusually early; for she had kept her room with a headache all the evening, and now longed for fresh air and exercise.

As she prepared the "Gull" for a start, she was idly wondering what early bird would appear eager to secure the coveted worm, when a loud and cheerful voice was heard calling, —

"Hullo, Anna!" and a nautically attired gentleman hove in sight, waving his hat as he hailed her.

She started at the unceremonious salute and looked back. Then her whole face brightened beautifully as she sprang up the bank, saying, with a pretty mixture of hesitation and pleasure, —

"Why, Frank, is that you?"

"Do you doubt it?"

And the new-comer shook both her hands so vigorously that she winced a little as she said, laughing, —

"No, I don't. That is the old squeeze with extra power in it."

"How are you? Going for a pull? Take me along and show me the lions. There's a good soul."

"With pleasure. When did you come?" asked Anna, settling the black ribbon under the sailor collar which set off her white throat charmingly.

"Last night. I caught a glimpse of you at tea; but you were surrounded then and vanished immediately afterward. So when I saw you skipping over the rocks just now, I gave chase, and here I am. Shall I take an oar?" asked Frank, as she motioned him to get in.

"No, thank you. I prefer to row myself and don't need any help," she answered, with an imperious little wave of the hand; for she was glad to show him she could do something besides dance, dress, and flirt.

"All right. Then I'll do the luxurious and enjoy myself." And, without offering to help her in, Frank seated himself, folded his arms, stretched out his long legs, and placidly remarked, —

"Pull away, skipper."

Anna was pleased with his frank and friendly greeting, and, feeling as if old times had come again, sprang in, prepared to astonish him with her skill.

"Might I suggest that you" — began Frank, as she pushed off.

"No suggestions or advice allowed aboard this ship. I know what I'm about, though I *am* a woman," was the severe answer, as the boat glided from the wharf.

"Ay, ay, sir!" And Frank meekly subsided, with a twinkle of amusement in the eyes that rested approvingly on the slender figure in a blue boating suit and the charming face under the sailor hat.

Anna paddled her way dexterously out from among the fleet of boats riding at anchor in the little bay; then she seated herself, adjusted one oar, and looked about for the other rowlock. It was nowhere visible; and, after a silent search, she deigned to ask, —

"Have you seen the thing anywhere?"

"I saw it on the bank."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I began to, but was quenched; so I obeyed orders."

"You haven't forgotten how to tease," said Anna, petulantly.

"Nor you to be wilful."

She gave him a look that would have desolated most men; but only made Frank smile affably as she paddled laboriously back, recovered the rowlock and then her temper, as, with a fine display of muscle, she pulled out to sea.

Getting into the current, she let the boat drift, and soon forgot time and space in the bewildering conversation that followed.

"What have you been doing since I saw you last?" she asked, looking as rosy as a milkmaid, as she stopped rowing and tied up her wind-tossed hair.

"Working like a beaver. You see" – and then, to her utter amazement, Frank entered into an elaborate statement of his affairs, quite as if she understood all about it and her opinion was valuable. It was all Greek to Anna, but she was immensely gratified; for it was just the way the boy used to tell her his small concerns in the days when each had firm faith in the other's wisdom. She tried to look as if she understood all about "investments, percentage, and long credit;" but she was out of her depth in five minutes, and dared say nothing, lest she should betray her lamentable ignorance on all matters of business. She got out of the scrape by cleverly turning the conversation to old times, and youthful reminiscences soon absorbed them both.

The faint, far-off sound of a gong recalled her to the fact that breakfast was nearly ready; and, turning the boat, she was dismayed to see how far they had floated. She stopped talking and rowed her best; but wind and tide were against her, she was faint with hunger, and her stalwart passenger made her task doubly hard. He offered no help, however; but did the luxurious to the life, leaning back, with his hat off, and dabbling his hands in the way that most impedes the progress of a boat.

Pride kept Anna silent till her face was scarlet, her palms blistered, and her breath most gone. Then, and not till then, did she condescend to say, with a gasp, poorly concealed by an amiable smile,

—
"Do you care to row? I ought to have asked you before."

"I'm very comfortable, thank you," answered Frank. Then, as an expression of despair flitted over poor Anna's face, he added bluntly, "I'm getting desperately hungry, so I don't care if I do shorten the voyage a bit."

With a sigh of relief, she rose to change seats, and, expecting him to help her, she involuntarily put out her hands, as she passed. But Frank was busy turning back his cuffs, and never stirred a finger; so that she would have lost her balance and gone overboard if she had not caught his arm.

"What's the matter, skipper?" he asked, standing the sudden grip as steadily as a mast.

"Why didn't you help me? You have no more manners than a turtle!" cried Anna, dropping into the seat with the frown of a spoiled beauty, accustomed to be gallantly served and supported at every step.

Frank only added to his offence by laughing, as he said carelessly, —

"You seemed so independent, I didn't like to interfere."

"So, if I had gone overboard, you would not have fished me out, unless I asked you to do it, I suppose?"

"In that case, I'm afraid I shouldn't have waited for orders. We can't spare you to the mermen yet."

Something in the look he gave her appeased Anna's resentment; and she sat silently admiring the strong swift strokes that sent the "Gull" skimming over the water.

"Not too late for breakfast, after all," she said graciously, as they reached the wharf, where several early strollers stood watching their approach.

"Poor thing! You look as if you needed it," answered Frank. But he let her get out alone, to the horror of Messrs. Barlow, King, & Co.; and, while she fastened the boat, Frank stood settling his hatband, with the most exasperating unconsciousness of his duty.

"What are you going to do with yourself this morning?" she asked, as she walked up the rocky path, with no arm to lean upon.

"Fish. Will you come along?"

"No, thank you. One gets so burnt. I shall go to my hammock under the pine," was the graciously suggestive reply of the lady who liked a slave to fan or swing her, and seldom lacked several to choose from.

"See you at dinner, then. My room is in the Cottage. So by-by for the present." And, with a nod, Frank strolled away, leaving the lovely Miss West to mount the steps and cross the hall unescorted.

"The dear fellow's manners need polish. I must take him in hand, I see. And yet he is very nice, in spite of his brusque ways," thought Anna, indulgently. And more than once that morning she recalled his bluff "Hullo, Anna!" as she swung languidly in her hammock, with a devoted being softly reading Tennyson to her inattentive ears.

At dinner she appeared in unusual spirits, and kept her end of the table in a ripple of merriment by her witty and satirical sallies, privately hoping that her opposite neighbor would discover that she could talk well when she chose to do so. But Frank was deep in politics, discussing some new measure with such earnestness and eloquence that Anna, pausing to listen for a moment, forgot her lively gossip in one of the great questions of the hour.

She was listening with silent interest, when Frank suddenly appealed to her to confirm some statement he had just made; and she was ignominiously obliged to confess she knew too little about the matter to give any opinion. No compliment ever paid her was more flattering than his way of turning to her now and then, as if including her in the discussion as a matter of course; and never had she regretted any thing more keenly than she did her ignorance on a subject that every man and woman should understand and espouse.

She did her best to look intelligent; racked her brain to remember facts which she had heard discussed for weeks, without paying any attention to them; and, thanks to her quick wit and womanly sympathy, she managed to hold her own, saying little, but looking much.

The instant dinner was over, she sent a servant to the reading-room for a file of late papers, and, retiring to a secluded corner, read up with a diligence that not only left her with clearer ideas on one subject, but also a sense of despair at her own deficiencies in the knowledge of many others.

"I really must have a course of solid reading. I do believe that is what I need; and I'll ask Frank where to begin. He always was an intelligent boy; but I was surprised to hear how well he talked. I was actually proud of him. I wonder where he is, by the way. Clara wants to be introduced, and I want to see how he strikes her."

Leaving her hiding-place, Anna walked forth in search of her friends, looking unusually bright and beautiful, for her secret studies had waked her up and lent her face the higher charm it needed. Clara appeared first. The new-comer had already been presented to her, and she professed herself "perfectly fascinated." "Such a personable man! Quite distinguished, you know, and so elegant in his manners! Devoted, graceful, and altogether charming."

"You like his manners, do you?" and Anna smiled at Clara's enthusiasm.

"Of course I do; for they have all the polish of foreign travel, with the indescribable something which a really fine character lends to every little act and word."

"Frank has never been abroad, and if I judged his character by his manners I should say he was rather a rough customer," said Anna, finding fault because Clara praised.

"You are so fastidious, nothing ever suits you, dear. I didn't expect to like this old friend of yours. But I frankly confess I do immensely; so, if you are tired of him, I'll take him off your hands."

"Thank you, love. You are welcome to poor Frank, if you can win him. Men are apt to be more loyal to friendship than women; and I rather fancy, from what I saw this morning, that he is in no haste to change old friends for new."

Anna spoke sweetly, but at heart was ill pleased with Clara's admiration of her private property, as she considered "poor Frank," and inwardly resolved to have no poaching on her preserves.

Just then the gentleman in question came up, saying to Anna, in his abrupt way, —

"Every one is going to ride, so I cannot get the best horses; but I've secured two, and now I want a companion. Will you come for a good old-time gallop?"

Anna thought of her blistered hands, and hesitated, till a look at Clara's hopeful face decided her to accept. She did so, and rode like an Amazon for several hours, in spite of heat, dust, and a hard-mouthed horse, who nearly pulled her arms out of the sockets.

She hoped to find a chance to consult Frank about her course of useful reading; but he seemed intent on the "old-time gallop," and she kept up gallantly till the ride was over, when she retired to her room, quite exhausted, but protesting with heroic smiles that she had had a delightful time.

She did not appear at tea; but later in the evening, when an informal dance was well under way, she sailed in on the arm of a distinguished old gentleman, "evidently prepared to slay her thousands," as young Barlow said, observing the unusual brilliancy of her eyes and the elaborate toilette she had made.

"She means mischief to-night. Who is to be the victim, I wonder?" said another man, putting up his glass for a survey of the charmer.

"Not the party who came last evening. He is only an old friend," she says.

"He might be her brother or her husband, judging by the cavalier way in which he treats her. I could have punched his head this morning, when he let her pull up that boat alone," cried a youthful adorer, glaring irefully at the delinquent, lounging in a distant doorway.

"If she said he was an old friend, you may be sure he is an accepted lover. The dear creatures all fib in these matters; so I'll lay wagers to an enormous amount that all this splendor is for the lord and master, not for our destruction," answered Barlow, who was wise in the ways of women and wary as a moth should be who had burnt his wings more than once at the same candle.

Clara happened to overhear these pleasing remarks, and five minutes after they were uttered she breathed them tenderly into Anna's ear. A scornful smile was all the answer she received; but the beauty was both pleased and annoyed, and awaited with redoubled interest the approach of the old friend, who was regarded in the light of a successful lover. But he seemed in no haste to claim his privileges, and dance after dance went by, while he sat talking with the old general or absently watching the human teetotums that spun about before him.

"I can't stand this another moment!" said Anna to herself, at last, and beckoned the recreant knight to approach, with a commanding gesture.

"Why don't you dance, sir?"

"I've forgotten how, ma'am."

"After all the pains I took with you when we had lessons together, years ago?"

"I've been too busy to attend to trifles of that sort."

"Elegant accomplishments are not trifles, and no one should neglect them who cares to make himself agreeable."

"Well, I don't know that I do care, as a general thing."

"You ought to care; and, as a penance for that rude speech, you must dance this dance with me. I cannot let you forget all your accomplishments for the sake of business; so I shall do my duty as a friend and take you in hand," said Anna, severely.

"You are very kind; but is it worth the trouble?"

"Now, Frank, don't be provoking and ungrateful. You know you like to give pleasure, to be cared for, and to do credit to your friends; so just rub up your manners a bit, and be as well-bred as you are sensible and brave and good."

"Thank you, I'll try. May I have the honor, Miss West?" and he bowed low before her, with a smile on his lips that both pleased and puzzled Anna.

They danced the dance, and Frank acquitted himself respectably, but relapsed into his objectionable ways as soon as the trial ended; for the first thing he said, with a sigh of relief, was, —

"Come out and talk; for upon my life I can't stand this oven any longer."

Anna obediently followed, and, seating herself in a breezy corner, waited to be entertained. But Frank seemed to have forgotten that pleasing duty; for, perching himself on the wide baluster of the piazza, he not only proceeded to light a cigarette, without even saying, "By your leave," but coolly offered her one also.

"How dare you!" she said, much offended at this proceeding. "I am not one of the fast girls who do such things, and I dislike it exceedingly."

"You used to smoke sweet-fern in corn-cob pipes, you remember; and these are not much stronger," he said, placidly restoring the rejected offering to his pocket.

"I did many foolish things then which I desire to forget now."

"And some very sweet and sensible ones, also. Ah, well! it can't be helped, I suppose."

Anna sat silent a moment, wondering what he meant; and when she looked up, she found him pensively staring at her, through a fragrant cloud of smoke.

"What is it?" she asked, for his eyes seemed seeking something.

"I was trying to see some trace of the little Anna I used to know. I thought I'd found her again this morning in the girl in the round hat; but I don't find her anywhere to-night."

"Indeed, Frank, I'm not so much changed as I seem. At least, to you I am the same, as far as I can be. Do believe it, and be friends, for I want one very much?" cried Anna, forgetting every thing but the desire to reestablish herself in his good opinion. As she spoke, she turned her face toward the light and half extended her hand, as if to claim and hold the old regard that seemed about to be withdrawn from her.

Frank bent a little and scanned the upturned face with a keen glance. It flushed in the moonlight and the lips trembled like an anxious child's; but the eyes met his with a look both proud and wistful, candid and sweet, — a look few saw in those lovely eyes, or, once seeing, ever forgot. Frank gave a little nod, as if satisfied, and said, with that perplexing smile of his, —

"Most people would see only the beautiful Miss West, in a remarkably pretty gown; but I think I catch a glimpse of little Anna, and I am very glad of it. You want a friend? Very good. I'll do my best for you; but you must take me as I am, thorns and all."

"I will, and not mind if they wound sometimes. I've had roses till I'm tired of them, in spite of their sweetness."

As he spoke, Frank had taken the hand she offered, and, having gravely shaken it, held the "white wonder" for an instant, glancing from the little blisters on the delicate palm to the rings that shone on several fingers.

"Are you reading my fortune?" asked Anna, wondering if he was going to be sentimental and kiss it.

"After a fashion; for I am looking to see if there is a suspicious diamond anywhere about. Isn't it time there was one?"

"That is not a question for you to ask;" and Anna caught away her hand, as if one of the thorns he spoke of had suddenly pricked.

"Why not? We always used to tell each other every thing; and, if we are to go on in the old friendly way, we must be confidential and comfortable, you know."

"You can begin yourself then, and I'll see how I like it," said Anna, aroused and interested, in spite of her maidenly scruples about the new arrangement.

"I will, with all my heart. To own the truth, I've been longing to tell you something; but I wasn't sure that you'd take any interest in it," began Frank, eating rose-leaves with interesting embarrassment.

"I can imagine what it is," said Anna, quickly, while her heart began to flutter curiously, for these confidences were becoming exciting. "You have found your fate, and are dying to let everybody know how happy you are."

"I think I have. But I'm not happy yet. I'm desperately anxious, for I cannot decide whether it is a wise or foolish choice."

"Who is it?"

"Never mind the name. I haven't spoken yet, and perhaps never shall; so I may as well keep that to myself, – for the present, at least."

"Tell me what you like then, and I will ask no more questions," said Anna, coldly; for this masculine discretion annoyed her.

"Well, you see, this dear girl is pretty, rich, accomplished, and admired. A little spoilt, in fact; but very captivating, in spite of it. Now, the doubt in my mind is whether it is wise to woo a wife of this sort; for I know I shall want a companion in all things, not only a pretty sweetheart or a graceful mistress for my house."

"I should say it was *not* wise," began Anna, decidedly; then hastened to add, more quietly: "But perhaps you only see one side of this girl's character. She may have much strength and sweetness hidden away under her gay manner, waiting to be called out when the right mate comes."

"I often think so myself, and long to learn if I am the man; but some frivolous act, thoughtless word, or fashionable folly on her part dampens my ardor, and makes me feel as if I had better go elsewhere before it is too late."

"You are not madly in love, then?"

"Not yet; but I should be if I saw much of her, for when I do I rather lose my head, and am tempted to fall upon my knees, regardless of time, place, and consequences."

Frank spoke with sudden love and longing in his voice, and stretched out his arms so suggestively that Anna started. But he contented himself with gathering a rose from the clusters that hung all about, and Anna slapped an imaginary mosquito as energetically as if it had been the unknown lady, for whom she felt a sudden and inexplicable dislike.

"So you think I'd better not say to my love, like the mad gentleman to Mrs. Nickleby, 'Be mine, be mine'?" was Frank's next question, as he sat with his nose luxuriously buried in the fragrant heart of the rose.

"Decidedly not. I'm sure, from the way you speak of her, that she is not worthy of you; and your passion cannot be very deep if you can quote Dickens's nonsense at such a moment," said Anna, more cheerfully.

"It grows rapidly, I find; and I give you my word, if I should pass a week in the society of that lovely butterfly, it would be all over with me by Saturday night."

"Then don't do it."

"Ah! but I want to desperately. Do say that I may, just for a last nibble at temptation, before I take your advice and go back to my bachelor life again," he prayed beseechingly.

"Don't go back, love somebody else, and be happy. There are plenty of superior women in the world who would be just the thing for you. I am sure you are going to be a man of mark, and you *must* have a good wife, – not a silly little creature, who will be a clog upon you all your life. So *do* take my advice, and let me help you, if I can."

Anna spoke earnestly, and her face quite shone with friendly zeal; while her eyes were full of unspoken admiration and regard for this friend, who seemed tottering on the verge of a precipice. She expected a serious reply, – thanks, at least, for her interest; and great was her surprise to see Frank lean back against the vine-wreathed pillar behind him, and laugh till a shower of rose-leaves came fluttering down on both their heads.

"I don't see any cause for such unseemly merriment," was her dignified reproof of this new impropriety.

"I beg your pardon. I really couldn't help it, for the comical contrast between your sage counsels and your blooming face upset me. Your manner was quite maternal and most impressive, till I looked

at you in your French finery, and then it was all up with me," said Frank, penitently, though his eyes still danced with mirth.

The compliment appeased Anna's anger; and, folding her round white arms on the railing in front of her, she looked up at him with a laugh as blithe as his own.

"I dare say I was absurdly sober and important; but you see it is so long since I have had a really serious thought in my head or felt a really sincere interest in any one's affairs but my own that I overdid the matter. If you don't care for my advice, I'll take it all back; and you can go and marry your butterfly as soon as you like."

"I rather think I shall," said Frank, slowly. "For I fancy she *has* got a hidden self, as you suggested, and I'd rather like to find it out. One judges people so much by externals that it is not fair. Now, you, for instance, if you won't mind my saying it, don't show half your good points; and a casual observer would consider you merely a fashionable woman, – lovely, but shallow."

"As you did the last time we met," put in Anna, sharply.

If she expected him to deny it, she was mistaken for he answered, with provoking candor, —

"Exactly. And I quite grieved about it; for I used to be very fond of my little playmate and thought she'd make a fine woman. I'm glad I've seen you again; for I find I was unjust in my first judgment, and this discovery gives me hope that I may have been mistaken in the same way about my – well, we'll say sweetheart. It's a pretty old word and I like it."

"If he only *would* forget that creature a minute and talk about something more interesting!" sighed Anna to herself. But she answered, meekly enough: "I knew you were disappointed in me, and I did not wonder for I am not good for much, thanks to my foolish education and the life I have led these last few years. But I do sincerely wish to be more of a woman, only I have no one to tell me how. Everybody flatters me and" —

"I don't!" cried Frank, promptly.

"That's true." And Anna could not help laughing in the middle of her confessions at the tone of virtuous satisfaction with which he repelled the accusation. "No," she continued, "you are honest enough for any one; and I like it, though it startles me now and then, it is so new."

"I hope I'm not disrespectful," said Frank, busily removing the thorns from the stem of his flower.

"Oh, no! Not that exactly. But you treat me very much as if I was a sister or a – masculine friend." Anna meant to quote the expression Clara had reported; but somehow the word "wife" was hard to utter, and she finished the sentence differently.

"And you don't like it?" asked Frank, lifting the rose to hide the mischievous smile that lurked about his mouth.

"Yes, I do, – infinitely better than the sentimental homage other men pay me or the hackneyed rubbish they talk. It does me good to be a little neglected; and I don't mind it from you, because you more than atone for it by talking to me as if I could understand a man's mind and had one of my own."

"Then you don't quite detest me for my rough ways and egotistical confidences?" asked Frank, as if suddenly smitten with remorse for the small sins of the day.

"No, I rather fancy it, for it seems like old times, when you and I played together. Only then I could help you in many ways, as you helped me; but now I don't seem to know any thing, and can be of no use to you or any one else. I should like to be; and I think, if you would kindly tell me what books to read, what people to know, and what faculties to cultivate, I might become something besides 'a fashionable woman, lovely but shallow.'"

There was a little quiver of emotion in Anna's voice as she uttered the last words that did not escape her companion's quick ear. But he only smiled a look of heartfelt satisfaction to the rose, and answered soberly:

"Now that is a capital idea, and I'll do it with pleasure. I have often wondered how you bright girls *could* be contented with such an empty sort of life. We fellows are just as foolish for a time, I

know, – far worse in the crops of wild oats we sow; but we have to pull up and go to work, and that makes men of us. Marriage ought to do that for women, I suppose; but it doesn't seem to nowadays, and I do pity you poor little things from the bottom of my heart."

"I'm ready now to 'pull up and go to work.' Show me how, Frank, and I'll change your pity into respect," said Anna, casting off her lace shawl, as if preparing for immediate action; for his tone of masculine superiority rather nettled her.

"Come, I'll make a bargain with you. I'll give you something strong and solid to brace up your mind, and in return you shall polish my manners, see to my morals, and keep my heart from wasting itself on false idols. Shall we do this for one another, Anna?"

"Yes, Frank," she answered heartily. Then, as Clara was seen approaching, she added playfully, "All this is *sub rosa*, you understand."

He handed her the flower without a word, as if the emblem of silence was the best gage he could offer. Many flowers had been presented to the beauty; but none were kept so long and carefully as the thornless rose her old friend gave her, with a cordial smile that warmed her heart.

A great deal can happen in a week, and the seven days that followed that moonlight *tête-à-tête* seemed to Anna the fullest and the happiest she had ever known. She had never worked so hard in her life; for her new tutor gave her plenty to do, and she studied in secret to supply sundry deficiencies which she was too proud to confess. No more novels now; no more sentimental poetry, lounging in a hammock. She sat erect upon a hard rock and read Buckle, Mill, and Social Science Reports with a diligence that appalled the banished dawdlers who usually helped her kill time. There was early boating, vigorous horse exercise, and tramps over hill and dale, from which she returned dusty, brown, and tired, but as happy as if she had discovered something fairer and grander than wild flowers or the ocean in its changeful moods. There were afternoon concerts in the breezy drawing-rooms, when others were enjoying siestas, and Anna sang to her one listener as she had never sung before. But best of all were the moonlight *séances* among the roses; for there they interchanged interesting confidences and hovered about those dangerous but delightful topics that need the magic of a midsummer night to make the charm quite perfect.

Anna intended to do her part honorably; but soon forgot to correct her pupil's manners, she was so busy taking care of his heart. She presently discovered that he treated other women in the usual way; and at first it annoyed her that she was the only one whom he allowed to pick up her own fan, walk without an arm, row, ride, and take care of herself as if she was a man. But she also discovered that she was the only woman to whom he talked as to an equal, in whom he seemed to find sympathy, inspiration, and help, and for whom he frankly showed not admiration alone, but respect, confidence, and affection.

This made the loss of a little surface courtesy too trifling for complaint or reproof; this stimulated and delighted her; and, in striving to deserve and secure it, she forgot every thing else, prouder to be one man's true friend than the idol of a dozen lovers.

What the effect of this new league was upon the other party was less evident; for, being of the undemonstrative sex, he kept his observations, discoveries, and satisfaction to himself, with no sign of especial interest, except now and then a rapturous allusion to his sweetheart, as if absence was increasing his passion.

Anna tried to quench his ardor, feeling sure, she said that it was a mistake to lavish so much love upon a person who was so entirely unworthy of it. But Frank seemed blind on this one point; and Anna suffered many a pang, as day after day showed her some new virtue, grace, or talent in this perverse man, who seemed bent on throwing his valuable self away. She endeavored to forget it, avoided the subject as much as possible, and ignored the existence of this inconvenient being entirely. But as the week drew to an end a secret trouble looked out at her eyes, a secret unrest possessed her, and every moment seemed to grow more precious as it passed, each full of a bitter sweet delight never known before.

"I must be off to-morrow," said Frank, on the Saturday evening, as they strolled together on the beach, while the sun set gloriously and the great waves broke musically on the sands.

"Such a short holiday, after all those months of work!" answered Anna, looking away, lest he should see how wistful her tell-tale eyes were.

"I may take a longer holiday, the happiest a man can have, if somebody will go with me. Anna, I've made up my mind to try my fate," he added impetuously.

"I have warned you, I can do no more." Which was quite true, for the poor girl's heart sunk at his words, and for a moment all the golden sky was a blur before her eyes.

"I won't be warned, thank you; for I'm quite sure now that I love her. Nothing like absence to settle that point. I've tried it, and I can't get on without her; so I'm going to 'put my fortune to the touch and win or lose it all."

"If you truly love her, I hope you will win, and find her the wife you deserve. But think well before you put your happiness into any woman's hands," said Anna, bravely trying to forget herself.

"Bless you! I've hardly thought of any thing else this week! I've enjoyed myself, though; and am very grateful to you for making my visit so pleasant," Frank added warmly.

"Have I? I'm so glad!" said Anna, as simply as a pleased child; for real love had banished all her small coquetries, vanities, and affectations, as sunshine absorbs the mists that hide a lovely landscape.

"Indeed, you have. All the teaching has not been on my side, I assure you; and I'm not too proud to own my obligation to a woman! We lonely fellows, who have neither mother, sister, nor wife, need some gentle soul to keep us from getting selfish, hard, and worldly; and few are so fortunate as I in having a friend like little Anna."

"Oh, Frank! what have I done for you? I haven't dared to teach one so much wiser and stronger than myself. I've only wanted to, and grieved because I was so ignorant, so weak, and silly," cried Anna, glowing beautifully with surprise and pleasure at this unexpected revelation.

"Your humility blinded you; yet your unconsciousness was half the charm. I'll tell you what you did, dear. A man's moral sense gets blunted knocking about this rough-and-tumble world, where the favorite maxim is, 'Every man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost.' It is so with me; and in many of our conversations on various subjects, while I seemed to be teaching you, your innocent integrity was rebuking my worldly wisdom, your subtle instincts were pointing out the right which is above all policy, your womanly charity softening my hard judgments, and your simple faith in the good, the beautiful, the truly brave was waking up the high and happy beliefs that lay, not dead, but sleeping, in my soul. All this you did for me, Anna, and even more; for, in showing me the hidden side of your nature, I found it so sweet and deep and worshipful that it restores my faith in womankind, and shows me all the lovely possibilities that may lie folded up under the frivolous exterior of a fashionable woman."

Anna's heart was so full she could not speak for a moment; then like a dash of cold water came the thought, "And all this that I have done has only put him further from me, since it has given him courage to love and trust that woman." She tried to show only pleasure at his praise; but for the life of her she could not keep a tone of bitterness out of her voice as she answered gratefully, —

"You are too kind, Frank. I can hardly believe that I have so many virtues; but if I have, and they, like yours, have been asleep, remember you helped wake them up, and so you owe me nothing. Keep your sweet speeches for the lady you go to woo. I am contented with honest words that do not flatter."

"You shall have them;" and a quick smile passed over Frank's face, as if he knew what thorn pricked her just then, and was not ill pleased at the discovery. "Only, if I lose my sweetheart, I may be sure that my old friend won't desert me?" he asked, with a sincere anxiety that was a balm to Anna's sore heart.

She did not speak, but offered him her hand with a look which said much. He took it as silently, and, holding it in a firm, warm grasp, led her up to a cleft in the rocks, where they often sat to watch the great breakers thunder in. As she took her seat, he folded his plaid about her so tenderly that it

felt like a friendly arm shielding her from the fresh gale that blew up from the sea. It was an unusual attention on his part, and coming just then it affected her so curiously that, when he lounged down beside her, she felt a strong desire to lay her head on his shoulder and sob out, —

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