

Douglas Amanda M.

Hope Mills: or, Between Friend and Sweetheart



Amanda Douglas

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Douglas A.

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Douglas Amanda M. Hope Mills; Or, Between Friend and Sweetheart

*"Abou spake more low,
But cheerly still; and said, 'I pray thee, then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow-men.'"*

Leigh Hunt.

TO

Hon. Marcus L. Ward,

As a Tribute

TO ONE WHO HAS HELD LOYALLY TO GOD AND HIS FELLOW-MEN,

WHO HAS LABORED IN THE NOBLE CAUSE OF HUMANITY,

NOT DISHEARTENED WHEN RESULTS WERE INFREQUENT,

BUT CONTENT TO REAP THE REWARD

IN THE GREAT HEREAFTER

CHAPTER I

"There is Fred again with his arm around Jack Darcy's neck. I declare, they are worse than two romantic schoolgirls. I am so thankful Fred goes away to-morrow for a year! and I do hope by that time he will have outgrown that wretched, commonplace youth. Mother, it is very fortunate that Jack is the sole scion of the Darcy line; for, if there were a daughter, you would no doubt be called upon to receive her into the bosom of the family."

"Which I never should do," remarked quiet, aristocratic Mrs. Lawrence, not even raising her eyes from her book.

"Not for the sake of your only son?" continued Agatha, with an irritating laugh.

"Don't be silly, Agatha," returned the mother, with an indifference that took off the point of the query.

Her second sister glanced up from a bit of pencil-drawing, then lowered her eyes to the street where the boy friends stood, one with his arm over the other's shoulder.

"Think of a Harvard graduate arm-in-arm with – well, a mill-hand! No doubt Jack's father will put him in the mill. I cannot see any sense in a boy of that class taking two years at the academy."

On the opposite side of the room were two girls, hardly more than children, busily engaged in ornamenting a box with transfer-pictures. One had a rather haughty mien, as became a Lawrence; the other, pretty, piquant little Sylvie Barry, looked toward the elders, knit her brow, with both thought and indignation visible in its lines, and held her picture absently in her hand.

"Why do you listen to that?" asked Irene Lawrence disdainfully. "It is only Jack Darcy, and he's nobody. His father works in the mill."

"I know that!" was Sylvie's rather sharp retort, answering the latter part of the sentence merely. Child as she was, she experienced a strong desire to do battle, not only for Jack, but for some puzzling cause she could not quite comprehend. With the blood of a French duke in her veins, of soldiers and martyrs as well, she was a sturdy little democrat. It seemed cowardly not to take up arms.

"That butterfly is to go next," remarked Irene, reaching out for it; and Sylvie held her peace, though she felt the warm blood burning in her cheeks.

Jack Darcy did not need any champion within doors; for Fred stood up bravely against these three girls, and from them received his first impression that women were small of soul and narrow of mind. As they stood by the gate now, this last hour grudged to them, neither dreamed that this was the final canto in the poem of boyhood. They had been fast friends since the first day pale, puny Fred made his appearance in school, and was both laughed at and bullied by some boys larger in size, but younger in years.

"He will have to get the nonsense rubbed out of him some time," thought Jack; "and it can never be younger." But, when the contest degenerated into the force of the strong against the weak, one blow of Jack's fist sent Brown reeling and howling.

"Try a fellow of your own size next time," was Jack's pithy advice.

Fred came to him, and cried hysterically in his arms. Jack had experienced the same feeling for some poor rescued kitten. Fred, with his head full of King Arthur and his knights, mythology, and bits of children's histories, wherein figured heroes and soldiers, elected Jack to the highest niche in his regard.

Jack Darcy was a wonderful boy withal, a very prince of boys, who hated study and work, and loved play; who despised Sunday clothes and girls' parties; but who had not his equal for spinning a top, or raising a kite, and when it came to leap-frog, or short stop, he was simply immense. Then he always knew the best places to dig worms, and the little nooks where fish were sure to bite, the best chestnut and walnut trees; and, with years and experience, he excelled in baseball, skating, wrestling, leaping, and rowing. Jack Darcy was no dunce, either. Only one subject extinguished him entirely,

and that was composition. Under its malign influence he sank to the level of any other boy. And here Fred shone pre-eminently, kindly casting his mantle over his friend, – further, sometimes, than a conscientious charity would have admitted; but a boy's conscience is quite as susceptible of a bias as that of older and wiser people. On the other hand, Jack wrestled manfully with many a tough problem on which Fred would have been hopelessly stranded. Once rouse the belligerent impulse in Jack, and he would fight his way through.

These two were at different ends of the social plane. Fred's father was the great man of Yerbury, the present owner of Hope Mills; not only rich, but living in luxury. He had married Miss Agatha Hope, and by the death of her two brothers she had become sole heir to the Hope estate: though it was whispered that her brothers had left a heavy legacy of debts behind them. There was family on the Lawrence side as well, but not much money. David Lawrence had prospered beyond his wildest dreams. He had twice been mayor of Yerbury, gone to the State Legislature, and been spoken of as a possible senator; but he did not sigh for political distinction.

Agatha was their first-born; then Frederic De Woolfe, named for some Hope ancestor. Two girls afterward; but Fred remained the only son. He was a delicate boy, and, until he reached the age of ten, studied with his sisters' governess, when he rebelled, and insisted upon his boy's prerogative of going to school. Here he met and loved Jack Darcy.

Jack was a few months the elder, – a stout, hardy, robust boy, full of mischief, falling into scrapes, and slipping out easily. Not vicious or ugly; in fact, he had thrashed Ned Thomas for robbing birds' nests, been known to rescue a miserable kitten from its tormentors, and was always bringing home sore-eyed, mangy curs to be nursed and healed. If he had cared, he could have boasted as good a pedigree as the Hopes and the Lawrences. For his grandmother was of pure old French Jacobin descent, titled too. Many a wild romance and adventure had her family figured in, – now on the top round of prosperity, now in bitter poverty and exile. At the age of eighteen she was living on the western coast of Ireland with her old father, when she fell in love with handsome Jack Darcy, whose persuasive blue eyes were enough to melt the heart of the most obdurate woman; the merriest, wittiest, best-tempered lad for miles around, the owner of a small farm and numberless family traditions that counted back to the time when

"Malachi wore the collar of gold,
He won from the proud invader."

For a while they were prosperous and happy: then came bad seasons, famine, and finally typhus. Two bright, handsome sons and a little daughter were victims, leaving only baby Bernard. They came to the New World, and began life again, managing thriftily, and buying a house and garden in the quaint old town of Yerbury. Mr. Darcy died; and his son grew to man's estate, settled to the business of carpenter and builder (as he possessed a good deal of mechanical skill), married a pretty, delicate girl, but did not seem to make of life a signal success. Still it is possible that a life of happiness and content may have its use in this world, if it does not serve to point a prosperous moral.

He added a wing to the house, he raised fruit and flowers that were marvels. Grandmother preferred for several years to keep house by herself, raise chickens and geese, and keep putting by a little of her very own. They had a choice garden and a soft-eyed Alderney cow, but Bernard Darcy had surely missed his vocation. He should have been a scientific farmer.

Baby Jack came to them. He certainly had not inherited the beauty of the Darcys nor the Beaumanoirs, not even the delicacy of his mother. The eyes of Irish blue were tinged with gray, his hair inclined to the warmer tints of chestnut, and now he always kept the curls cropped short. However, his magnificently shaped head was not disfigured by the process. He did get terribly freckled and tanned as warm weather came on, and the hair turned almost red by much bathing and sunshine. A striking contrast indeed to the handsome, well-dressed Frederic.

When Fred went to the academy he pleaded for Jack to go, and Grandmother Darcy decided that he should. She had never taken kindly to her son's rather plebeian occupation. After several years of indifferent success, Mr. Darcy had accepted a position at the mill, in which, if there was not so much profit, there were no losses.

Jack was not a student in an intellectual point of view. He did not care to be a doctor, lawyer, or clergyman, and certainly not a professor. He would have liked to pack a satchel, and start westward, prospect for a railroad, gold or silver mine, and live the rugged, unconventional camp-life. Once he had ventured to suggest this noble ambition; but his timid mother was startled out of her wits, and his grandmother said with a sage shake of the head, —

"A rolling stone gathers no moss."

"Grandmother," began Jack argumentatively, "of what real value is the moss to the stone, except in the picturesque aspect? Do you know that a great many of these time revered and honored adages are the greatest humbugs in the world?" asked the audacious young iconoclast. "Who wants to be a stone or a clod, or even a bit of velvet moss? They go to make up the world, it is true; but is that narrow, torpid, insensate life any pattern for human souls and active bodies? I think a man's business in this world is to find out new channels, to build up, to broaden and deepen, and somehow to make the world feel that he has been in it. I can't just explain," — and his brows knit into a puzzled frown, — "but it seems to me there is something grander than plodding along and saving a little money."

"No doubt you would be glad enough to have the money, when you have gone off like the prodigal son, and wasted health and substance in foreign lands," said grandmother with some asperity.

Jack had been brought up to reverence the Bible and religion, and to respect his grandmother was the first article in his creed. He relapsed into silence, but the busy brain kept up a vigorous ferment. What was life all about, anyhow? Why did people come into the world, live thirty, sixty, or even eighty years, and then drop out of it. Was it merely to eat, drink, and sleep?

The wider lore at the academy had a peculiar effect upon Jack, tangled his brain, begat confusing mental processes. Greek he hated; Latin he barely endured; chemistry and mineralogy interested him, and in mathematics he excelled. Fred carried every thing before him, graduated with honors, and was to enter Harvard. The Lawrences went to Newport, and Jack missed his bosom friend sorely. He rambled through the woods, read every thing that came in his way, and thought a good deal in his crude, undisciplined fashion.

What was he to do with this tough problem of unknown quantities?

He ventured at last to broach the subject to his father.

Bernard Darcy studied his son gravely. Now, it must be considered that he had never been troubled with this hungry, perplexing view of life that urges one on to dip deep into the secrets of existence. To have a pretty house and garden, to watch his flowers, vegetables, and chickens grow, to dream over his books in his cosy sitting-room, not to be pinched for money, not to be anxious about employment, but to go on serenely day after day, — this was Mr. Darcy's idea of happiness; and, having this, he was perfectly content.

His mother secretly chafed at his lack of ambition; his neighbors said, "A good, honest fellow, but with no 'push' in him." Curiously enough, the virtues that are preached from pulpits Sunday after Sunday, that we are always recommending to our friends, are *not* the ones that gain any vast amount of credit in this life. "Be content! be content!" cries every one, from revelation downward; yet content, pure and simple, is rather despised and flouted by our fellow-men.

"I don't know, Jack," said the elder, gravely shaking his head with slow dubiousness. "What would you do if you were once away?"

"I'd go on until I found some place into which I just fitted;" and the boy glanced over westward with hungering eyes.

"But, Jack," said his father, after a pause, "I think people oftener fit themselves into a place. There are so few places ready made to one's hand. It's always something. Now, I'll venture to say that

David Lawrence, with all his money, doesn't see as much real happiness as I do. His is a slave's life, after all. It's day and night, bills to pay and stock to get, dissatisfied hands, poor hands spoiling work, losses here and there, little leisure, small peace of mind; and all for what? There was a time when I might have envied him: I don't now."

Jack had lost all but the first two sentences.

"That's the thing!" he cried, with boyish enthusiasm, – "fitting yourself; coming to something that takes hold of you like an inspiration; that you could work for, fight for, that rouses soul and body."

Bernard Darcy studied the youthful face, eager, alert, hopeful, and with something else in it that he could not understand.

"I never had any such dreams or desires," he said in an uncertain tone, as if fearful he might lose his way among his son's vagaries. "I wanted a pleasant home, and a loving wife and children. I wish there had been more of them, Jack, for your sake," and his voice took on a tender inflection. "Then, if one wanted to go away, there would have been others left. You see, Jack, mother's heart is bound up in you, and she's getting to be an old woman with but few ties. I might manage to comfort your own mother; but you are so young, Jack. There will be many years before you, doubtless; and if you could give a few to us," with a wistful, loving look. "Now, if you wanted to study" —

"But I don't," in a hasty, husky tone. "I believe I hate quiet. I want life, adventure! I've staid in school this last year just to please Larry."

"Have a little patience, Jack. Old people are not like young ones. They feel the changes keenly. And you are all we have. It would take the sunshine out of our lives. It would seem as if there had been a funeral."

"Yes," said Jack with meek hopelessness that one would hardly look for in a vigorous boy; and winking hard to keep back some tears. No logical argument, no stricture of duty, could have half the weight of this bit of love pleading. Father was right. God had made him a son first of all, given him a son's duties. Jack had never troubled his head much about religion in any theological sense; but his simple creed had some great if old-fashioned truths in it.

"If there's any thing you would like to do, I'd be glad to give you a chance. And there's no need to hurry. You may come to the right thing presently."

Jack swallowed over a great lump in his throat. The two kittens came scampering up the walk, and he caught one, lifting it to his shoulder. Then Sylvie Barry entered the gate with her dainty milk-kettle shining like silver.

They were in a manner neighbors, for Larch Avenue was the next street to Maple Place. Both streets were now given over to what is termed decayed gentility. The larches were old and ragged and brown with clustering cones, and the blue blood of the denizens had grown a little sluggish.

Miss Honoria Barry and her small niece lived together, with a tall and gaunt handmaiden Norman French, and a broad Yorkshire gardener. Miss Barry was the old cream of Yerbury. Here her family had lived since the Huguenot persecution, and dwindled finally to two. Louis Barry was a dissipated spendthrift. He married, and tormented his wife into an early grave, and might have worn out his sister, but Providence kindly removed him. Miss Honoria retrenched, paid off debts and mortgage by degrees, and brought up Sylvie in a quaint, refined, old-world fashion.

Old Mrs. Darcy and Miss Barry exchanged formal calls, and discussed la belle France. Sylvie took great delight in listening to grandmother's stories of brave heroes and handsome women who figured in old legends.

Oddly enough, one of the many points of agreement between Jack and Fred had been their aversion to girls in general. Fred judged them from his sisters, who were always nagging, always exhorting him to be a gentleman, and always holding up Jack Darcy to ridicule. Jack, on the other hand, had a bashful fear of girls, and fancied they were laughing at every little awkwardness; then they cried so easily, went off in a huff if they could not have their own way, were silly, vain, and tattling, ready enough to beg your assistance if there was a munching cow by the roadside, a worm swinging

from a tree, or a harmless mouse running across the floor. The great fascination to the Darcy house was, that the boys could sit in the large, clean kitchen, trying all sorts of crude experiments, with Ann to clear away the *débris* and find no fault. Jack never wanted to go to the great house. In true boy fashion he understood without any explanation. But they both liked little Sylvie. She was taught at home except in music and drawing, and she was as much interested in grandmother's heroes as the two boys.

On the other hand, the Hopes and the Barrys had always been great friends; and, from some odd freak of unlikeness, Sylvie and Irene Lawrence carried on the intimacy.

She stopped now, and talked about the kitten with Jack; and he carried her milk-pail home to the gate.

It was a long, wearisome vacation to poor Jack. Fishing lost its charm, even tramps in the woods became monotonous. He spent hours in his father's shop, inspecting machinery, though he seldom asked a question or ventured upon a remark. Indeed, some of the hands thought "Darcy's boy wasn't over-bright." Yet here he laid the foundation of the problem that was to vex and puzzle his soul in after-years. Here was the great, whirring machinery, belts, bands, spindles, looms, and oftentimes a stupid and stolid enough workman at one end, grinding out luxury and elegance for David Lawrence, Esq.; that his family might tread on Wilton and Axminster, dine from silver and crystal, dress in silks and velvets, drive about with high-stepping bays, and scorn all beneath them. Once as Jack was thinking it over he laughed aloud.

"You must feel very much amused," said a rather sour-looking man standing near by, with a peculiar touchiness as if he had been laughed at.

"No, I wasn't amused, I was only thinking" – But Jack stopped in the middle of his sentence. Could *this* man take any such position as that of Mr. Lawrence?

Then he came across a volume of self-made men, which he eagerly devoured. Every one seemed to have commenced life without a dollar, and almost without friends. Were those the important factors in the race, to be light-weighted? And he had a triple chain.

Fred returned, handsomer than ever, and doubly glad to get back to Jack. There was just four days grace. They revisited old haunts, talked endlessly and to little purpose, like so much of the talk of youth, and now they were parting at the gate for the last time. Unlike girls they exchanged no vows or kisses. It is not in boy-nature to be effusive.

"To think that I shall not be home until Christmas! If only you *were* going with me, Jack, what jolly times we would have!"

"I could have gone," answered Jack with some pride, "that is, if I had been prepared. Father was willing, and grandmother would have been proud enough;" and just then Jack wondered why going to seek his fortune appeared so much more terrible to them.

"Well, why not, Jack?" with impetuous eagerness. "It isn't too late."

"I don't want the years of study. I should come to hate the sight of a book. No, I'll find out where I belong, some day. Don't worry about me," with an abrupt laugh.

"But I am so sorry!" Then they looked into each other's eyes. All these years had been filled with such good, honest boy-love.

"Good-by, old chap!" cried Jack suddenly; for the wrench must come, and lingering over it was painful. "I shall miss you lots! it seems so queer to be without you! Of course you'll succeed: there's no use wishing about that."

"It's a good wish from you, Jack. Good-by. I hate awfully to say it: I hate to think that our jolly boyish frolics are over."

"But we'll have many a good row on the river, and tramps through the woods. We can't outgrow every thing. And there'll be summers and summers."

"Good-by."

The gate-latch clicked: Jack walked rapidly down the street, whistling "Kathleen Mavourneen" unconsciously. Did he dream the simple faith of boyhood had reached its culmination, and was henceforth to wane?

"Dear old Jack," thought Fred: "I don't know as he is quite Launcelot, though I used to think so at first. But there was Sir Gawain and Sir Bedevere and a host of worthies, and if he only *would* he could come up to the highest. What makes him so obstinate and unambitious, I wonder? Are there any King Arthurs and loyal knights nowadays, or only common men and women?"

His sisters opened upon him with the fatal persistency of narrow feminine natures.

"You may say what you like about Jack Darcy," he flung out angrily, "but you'll never make me give him up, – never, never!"

"Do hush, children," interposed Mrs. Lawrence. "Fred, I hope you will learn to modulate your voice, and not shriek so."

Sylvie put on her hat to go home. As she passed Fred she said just above her breath, —

"You are right and brave. I wouldn't give up my friend because he was poor; and Jack is so nice!"

"Much she knows about it," thought Fred, with a true boyish disdain. Yet her approval of Jack was a virtue in his eyes.

CHAPTER II

"Father!" exclaimed Jack a few days after this parting from his bosom friend, "I think I will go in the mill for a year or two, if there is any thing for me to do. Meanwhile my inspiration may come along."

"But what would you like best, Jack?"

"That's just the trouble," and the youthful brows knit in perplexity. "All things seem alike to me: I haven't any choice."

Mr. Darcy drew a long breath that was almost a sigh. If Jack only would evince some preference!

However, a place was found as under-bookkeeper. It was desperately tiresome to Jack to sit perched on a high stool all day; and after three months of it he begged to be put at something else.

At this period we had gone through our costly civil war; and, instead of being exhausted as friends and enemies predicted, the machinery of business appeared to have been set in motion with a new and overwhelming impetus. Every thing was wanted; everybody had work or money; and the most useless commodity found a purchaser: as if our anguish had crazed us, and we went into a delirium of mental opium, and dreamed wild, exhilarating dreams which we mistook for reality.

Yerbury had been a slow, solid, conservative town. Property was low, taxes light and easily paid, a balance on hand in the treasury to commence the new year, and very little pauperism in the town. Yerbury officials utilized their inefficient population, and their county jail was not made a palace of luxury. The old-fashioned element in the place held crime as the result of sin instead of occult disease, – a thing to be punished, rather than petted. It had good railroad connections, plenty of water, with one navigable stream, and a variety of industries. Iron, shoes, hats, paper, and clothing were manufactured to a considerable extent, to say nothing of many smaller branches. Hope Mills was the largest, the focus of the town, and had the prestige of being handed down through three generations, though never as extensive as now.

Toward the west there was a succession of pretty hills that lay in the broad sunshine, making you think somehow of Spanish slopes, covered with vineyards, olives, and luxuriant verdure. Over beyond, a wide, diversified country range, farms, woodland, hills and valleys, with a branch of the river winding through, called, rather unromantically, Little Creek.

On these slopes, the new part, dwelt the aristocracy. Streets wound around in picturesque fashion to make easy grades, and many old forest-trees were preserved by that means, giving the place an air of years, rather than yesterday and improvement. There were two pretty parks, – one devoted to Fourth-of-July orations from time immemorial; there were churches of every denomination; a boarding and day school for young ladies, the academy, some excellent district schools; a hall with library and reading-room; a bank; rows of attractive shops and stores; and, coming down in the scale of refinement, beer-saloons and concert-halls, kept generally up to a certain point of morality. There were so many laboring-men, and they must have something by way of entertainment.

It struck Jack with a curious wonder. These stolid faces and plodding steps were part of the human machines out of which wealth was being ground. They went to the beer-shops at night in their dirty clothes, smelling of grease and dye, drank beer, played a few games, and harangued each other, and went home maudlin or stupefied. Perhaps it was more comfortable than the slatternly wives and crying children. Did it need to be so? If you gave the workingman a helping hand, did he turn straightway into an unreasoning demagogue?

He was not likely to be tempted by such doings. His home had always been too clean and pleasant. He still kept up with the boys, and joined the lyceum club; but the intimate companionship of his life was gone.

Fred did not come home for Christmas. College-life was delightful, – would be just perfect if dear old Jack were there. The glowing letters kept alive his own secret dissatisfaction. But how

explain it to one who would be sure to say, "Get out of it all, Jack: no one has any right to keep you in such a distasteful round, and thwart your life-plans." To be sure, he had no life-plans.

One raw, cold March day, Mr. Darcy went out to repair a roof that had leaked in the previous storm. He rarely minded wind or weather.

"I declare," he said that evening, dropping into his capacious armchair, "I feel as if I should never get warmed through. I do believe we shall have a tremendous snowstorm to take this chill out of the air. Jack, read the paper aloud, won't you?"

Jack complied. Local items, bits of State news, and the general progress of the country; the starvation of a nation at the antipodes, the discovery of a wonderful silver-mine, plans for new railroads, – how busy the world was! It stirred Jack's youthful blood.

"I'd like to be a railroad-president," said Jack suddenly.

His father stared, then laughed at the absurdity. "Why, you're only a boy, Jack," he replied.

"I know it. But the boy who means to be a railroad-president must begin somewhere. Or if I could own a silver-mine," he went on, with the boundless audacity of youth.

"Could you find use for the silver?" asked his father humorously.

Jack flushed, and lapsed into dreams. Grandmother opposite was nodding in her chair, her knitting still in her fingers. Jack left his vision for a moment, to calculate if the old chest upstairs was not nearly full of stockings. His mother sat sewing some trifle, and just raised her eyes with that longing, beseeching glance mothers so often give to their sons.

"If women only did not care so much for one," thought Jack, "or if there had been a great family of us. And still I can't see the wonderful difference between going to college, and going to seek your fortune. Does two or three hundred miles more matter when you are once away?"

The snow came on through the night. There being nothing urgent on hand, Mr. Darcy remained within; but Jack buffeted the storm gallantly. It would be worse than this out in the new countries where he meant to go some time.

The next day Mr. Darcy was out. There was a dull pain in his breast, going through to his back, and he coughed a little. It went on thus for forty-eight hours, when the pain became intense, and fever set in. Dr. Kendrick was summoned; and, though the case was severe, it had no alarming symptoms at first. Jack went to and fro with his merry whistle; speculative he might be, but he was not introspective or morbid: wife and mother watched at home.

There came one of those sudden and inexplicable turns in the disease. Jack was stunned, incredulous. In his mother's eyes lay a look of helpless terror he was never to forget.

"You'll care for them always, Jack; you'll never leave them," said his father imploringly, in one lucid interval.

"Always," answered the young voice bravely.

"Thank you, my son, my dear boy;" and there was a fervent clasp of the hand.

A few days later Bernard Darcy lay coffined in the pretty parlor, while wife and mother were crushed with grief.

"Dust to dust, ashes to ashes;" and Jack dropped the first handful of earth in his father's open grave. The two women clung to him, – he was their all. Here lay his duty as long as God pleased.

It seemed for weeks after this as if Mrs. Darcy would follow her husband. She looked so white and wan, she was so feeble that some days she could not leave her bed. Grandmother rallied with that invincible determination not to be beaten down if her prop was wrenched away.

Jack was now a few months past eighteen, stout, and growing tall rapidly. There was about him a sturdy persistence and the good common sense that lends an adaptiveness or pliability of disposition, so to speak, that is often mistaken for content. Since he must stay here for some years to come, he would devote himself to learning the business of manufacturing woollen cloth. It entertained him more than keeping books. For the sake of these two bereaved women, he would take an actual interest in the work he had to do.

Looking back in after-years, he was glad he made the resolve, and stood by it manfully. It gave ballast to his character, shaped him to a definite purpose. A narrow life, to be sure; nay, more, a distasteful one: but he did his best, and waited, and that was all that could be asked of him.

Early in June there was a great commotion at the mansion on Hope Terrace. Miss Agatha Lawrence was married to Hamilton Minor, one of the great firm of brokers in Wall Street, 'Morgan, Minor, & Co.' For weeks it had been the talk of the town. The trousseau came from Paris, and was marvellous. The presents were on exhibition, and created a vast amount of envy and admiration, – silver, jewels, pictures, crystal, china, and laces. And last of all a sumptuous wedding, – every delicacy in season and out of season, costly wines, pyramids of cake, and a lavish profusion of flowers. Nothing so grand had ever occurred in Yerbury.

Fred and a stylish Miss Minor were to stand. He reached home just in time; and, as he was to be off again with the bridal party, he sent a note of regret to Jack.

Jack had too much good sense to feel hurt, though he was disappointed. A few weeks later he took his mother and grandmother up to the mountains for change of air, and enjoyed the vacation hugely himself. So it happened he did not see Fred at all.

The second year letters languished, indeed failed, I may as well admit. Jack was being rapidly inducted into the wisdom of the world, Fred into the wisdom of society. They would never meet on the old plane again. The mill-hand would be no companion for the son and heir of David Lawrence, Esq.

It was not in Jack Darcy's nature to be bitter or cynical. He just accepted the fact. Somewhere he and Fred had outgrown each other, and the boyish interests, once such a bond of union. Fred would be an educated and cultivated gentleman.

Why should he be left in the background? His ambition was suddenly roused again, and he more than half wished himself in college. He went back to his books; he joined a debating-society. There was no need of being a mere clod because he had to work. David Lawrence was a gentleman. And the next spring he took up a little botany and horticulture with his gardening. Old Mr. Rising down the street, who had been gardener to some great lord, – a peculiar, obstinate Englishman, with his head crammed full of odd bits of knowledge, – took a fancy to Jack. They discussed not only fruit and flowers, but trade in its various aspects, as Mr. Rising had relatives at Manchester who had soared to the ambitions of mills and factories.

Time sped on, and they came to the second summer. Miss Gertrude Lawrence was a belle now, and the great house was constantly filled with guests. The Lawrence equipages were seen in every direction. Mrs. Minor was up frequently, in grand state. The lawn was gay with croquet-parties, the evenings were brilliant with lights and music: they had two elegant garden-parties, when the grounds were illuminated with colored lanterns, and the teas were festivals in themselves. Fred had brought home two college chums, and for the first fortnight was deeply engrossed. Then, too, the girls no longer nagged at him. He was developing into an elegant young man, with due regard for the proprieties.

He did go to call on Jack one evening. It was a duty, a rather awkward and embarrassing one, and he took to himself great credit in the point of moral courage. He understood thoroughly now what Agatha had striven so sedulously to explain, the difference in social station. He was not likely in the future to make a blunder on that side, but it would not do to turn the cold shoulder to Jack all at once. "A boy's will's the wind's will," he repeated with much complacency, and it was but natural that it should veer in other directions. Jack was a good enough fellow, but no Sir Galahad or Sir any one now.

He was a little shocked at Mrs. Darcy in her mourning dress and widow's cap. She was pale, and with the extreme delicacy so often pronounced characteristic of American women. Grandmother sat in state and dignity, rather resentful of what she termed in her secret heart Fred's neglect, but a thing she would not have confessed openly if she had been put to torture. And Jack?

Frederic De Woolfe Lawrence studied him with a critical eye. A great, lumbering, inelegant fellow! Jack seemed to have grown out in every direction, without being finished up in any. He was

taken somewhat at a disadvantage, too: somehow he fancied, if he had met Fred alone in a stray walk, there would have been less formality.

They talked about college. Fred was doing well, for he was by nature a student. Society's arts and airs would never entirely uproot that love. He meant to distinguish himself, and have one of the prize essays. Jack was rather grave and quiet, hard to get on with, Fred thought; and he was relieved when the duty was ended, and he could go with a good grace.

Jack lingered on the porch, clinching his fingers, and listening to the jaunty retreating footstep. There was something different in Fred's walk even, a buoyancy as if he could override any little difficulties that fate might have in store for him. Jack smiled grimly. Fortune had showered every good gift upon him. He would go proudly, successfully, through life. He would be praised and honored – and for what?

For a moment Jack felt like wrestling with him, shoulder to shoulder, to distance him, to defeat him, to lower his complacent pride. His half-patronizing manner had stung keenly. Then the real nobility of his nature cropped out, and he laughed at his own sudden heat and passion.

"It would be folly," he said softly to himself. "I could not distinguish myself in any line he will be likely to follow. He must work his way: I must work mine. He knows what he means to do; and there he has gone ahead of me, for I really do not know my own mind. No, there's no further basis for a friendship: the boy-love has had its day, and died. After all, isn't that the history of every thing?" and Jack looked up to the stars, still with a little wordless pain at his heart.

He heard during the next week that Fred had gone West with one of his friends, who was nephew to a great railway magnate. It would be only a flying trip, to be sure, but here Jack was tempted to envy him. That boundless West, the land of his own dreams!

Grandmother grew a trifle less energetic, still it could not be said that her health began to fail. Mrs. Darcy remained about the same. Every day Jack realized how much he was to the two women. To leave them would be absolute cruelty.

At Christmas of this year Miss Gertrude Lawrence was married. The wedding was rather quieter, from the fact that it was winter, and the bride was to leave for Europe the next day. Irene was shooting up into a tall girl, and being educated at a fashionable and expensive boarding-school. Nothing happened to impair her friendship with Sylvie Barry, though the two girls were as dissimilar in many respects as Jack and Fred, but they both stood on the same social plane.

Meanwhile matters at Yerbury prospered mightily. The town was quite bright at night with the glow from factory-windows, and people seemed always hurrying to and fro. New shops and stores were started, new streets were laid out, rows of houses built in town, and out on the edge pretty and ugly suburban villas. Property began to increase everywhere.

Gertrude and her husband George Eastman came back to Yerbury in about five months. He had begun his career as clerk in a bank, and joined his brother afterward as an army-contractor. From thence they had branched into general speculating, and were both considered rich men. Mr. Minor owned a Fifth-avenue palace, and Mrs. Minor never came to Yerbury without her maid. Mrs. Eastman could not have the palace in town, so she decided to have a handsome summer residence at Yerbury, and spend her winters at different hotels. Mr. Eastman thought he saw a grand opening just in this pretty spot. Property was ridiculously low. Here were farms and farms that might as well be cut up into building-lots, and turned into cities. Here was the river-front, here were railroads: why not have twice or thrice as many shops? why not call in the people from far and wide, and make Yerbury a place of note? Time had been when our fathers were content to dream and doze, but now it behooved everybody to be up and stirring. In the new race the laggards would fall far behind.

Mr. Eastman set the example by purchasing one large tract, and laying out streets. Then uprose houses as if by magic. Modern improvements, water, gas, bath, butler's pantries, and dumb-waiters; and the houses offered so cheaply that the solid, slow-going, honest business-men wondered how it could be done. The places had a wonderfully seductive look, and were sought after eagerly.

There was a peculiar interest in all this to Jack. When one day somebody said, —

"Downer's property south of the bridge has gone for thirty thousand dollars. Five years ago he'd been glad to have taken ten for it. Crater and Harmon are going to build a big factory," — Jack's heart went up with a bound.

He still wanted to get away from Yerbury. He began to feel that he had made a mistake with his life, and was anxious to rectify it if possible. He did not see how he could do it here. He had gone into the groove, and it was hard getting out. But if some one came along, and offered them a fortune!

The chance drew near. A new street was prospected through Miss Barry's grounds, through the Lanier place farther back, and the southern end would touch the Darcy place, giving it some new fronts and available lots, and placing the house on the corner. There would be sufficient ground for the width of the street. A petition was forthwith circulated.

Alas that there could be people so blind to their own interests and the general welfare of the community! Miss Barry stoutly resisted. She even inspired some of her neighbors to that extent of opposition that they would not sell at any price. Destroy the beauty of Larch Avenue, that had been "Lovers' Walk" in the old days, and held so many tender reminiscences!

"When I am gone I don't care what is done with the place," said Miss Barry. "It will have but little sentiment for the next generation. A change to me now would be like tearing up an old tree by the roots. I could not endure it. They may have their elegant new houses; but give me my large airy rooms and my old-time flowers, my nectarines and apricots. Let me live my few years in peace and quiet."

"There is certainly enough to improve," returned Grandmother Darcy. "There are miles and miles that people are glad to sell. Let them take that. Let them build up the vacant lots. And where are all the people coming from to fill them?"

"The factories and mills will bring in the people," said Jack sturdily.

"There is plenty of room elsewhere," returned Miss Barry with some asperity. "There certainly is no need of turning people out of homes they like, and have made comfortable."

"I suppose you cannot look at it in a business light," said Jack. "Women rarely do" —

"There have been just such whirlwinds before, Mr. Darcy," said the shrewd little old lady. "I have lived through two of them myself. And it seems to me it is an epidemic of running in debt, rather than prosperity. If everything were paid for; but you see here are improvement-bonds, and our town runs in debt: here is everybody raising money on mortgages. How is it to be paid? Do wages and salaries double? History proves that it is a bad thing for a state when its rich men grow richer, and its poor poorer."

"I am sure they need not," said Jack valiantly. "There is a higher scale of wages paid than ever before."

"And no account made of thrift or economy. Enticements at every corner; women flaunting silks and laces as everyday gear, with no sacredness; old-fashioned neatness despised, industry ridiculed; men lounging in beer-shops; girls flirting on the public streets, having no duties beyond a day's work in a mill. What will the homes and the wives of the next generation be like?"

"But that was all so irrelevant," said Jack after she had gone. "Women mix up everything. Now, here: you are offered a big price for this property. You two could live at ease all the rest of your life, and I" —

"You would go away," said his mother sorrowfully.

"Well, perhaps not," trying to make the tone indifferent.

"Jack," began his grandmother, sitting very erect, and glancing straight before her into vacancy, "I am an old woman now; and, like Miss Barry, I could not take a change comfortably. No other place will ever be home to your mother or me. There is some money, — enough, I think, to take care of us both. So, if you cannot be content, if you must have the restless roving of youth out before your blood can cool, go and try the world. It is pretty much alike all over, — some one going up while

another goes down; chances here, and chances there. As for the few years left me" – And there was a slight tremble in her voice.

"Don't fret. I'm not going away," said Jack crossly, huskily, too much hurt to study his tone. "If I can't always see things as you do" —

There were tears in his mother's eyes. Jack rose suddenly, thrust his hands in his pockets, and walked out into the twilight. There was nothing to be done with so obstinate a problem as his life. He would learn the business thoroughly, getting on as fast as possible, and some time make a strike out for himself, become a manufacturer in turn. The thing was settled now. Maybe some one would want him for mayor or congressman. There was a time when David Lawrence, Esq., had been a comparatively poor man; and though Jack felt that he would hardly turn his hand over to have a million of dollars put in it for the mere money's worth, if he could not discover a silver-mine, or build a railroad over the Rocky Mountains, he might become a rich man. Wealth was a mighty lever, after all. He shut his lips grimly, and pushed his hat down over his eyes. In the early summer dusk, fragrant with rose and violet, he went over the old battle-ground. Did some enemy sow it continually with dragon's teeth? To stay here eight or ten years, mayhap, to make all the money he could. Not one year of her life did he mean to grudge grandmother.

It was quite late when he came in, but his mother was watching for him. She put her arms softly about his neck, and kissed him.

"Have a little patience, dear," she said, in tender, motherly tones; but he knew her sympathy was with him.

"Yes, I mean to. I don't care as much as I did an hour ago. I'm going to set myself steadily to business. You'll hear no more moans or groans out of me, mother."

"Jack – you know I would go to the end of the world with you."

"I believe you would – yes, I do. There, good-night!" for she was crying.

"This is the way we rule circumstances," said Jack dryly, sitting down in his own room, and taking up Carlyle. "What an amount of humbug is talked in this world, – yes, and written too!"

CHAPTER III

There was an influx of new blood in Yerbury, and it brought in fresh ideas. A new railroad touched it at one edge, and real-estate dealers left off fighting about Larch Avenue. The ancient stages were laid aside for the more modern horse-cars: there was bustle and rivalry on every hand. George Eastman began to be quoted, and his advice asked generally. Mrs. Eastman held her head loftily. Then there came on the arena of action a certain Horace Eastman, cousin to George, who had been abroad as agent for a large firm, and who slipped into the place of general manager of Hope Mills.

Plainly, F. De Woolfe Lawrence was not preparing to follow in his father's steps. He had graduated with honors, and taken a prize essay, and was now a fully-fledged modern young man. He was fond of discoursing on abstruse subjects, he dabbled a little into art, wrote some mystical poems, tied a cravat beyond criticism, and wore faultless gloves and boots. His mother and Mrs. Eastman were extremely proud of him. His father wondered a little what the young man's future would be.

"I have not decided upon a profession," he said, with a just perceptible but extremely stylish drawl. "The next thing is going abroad. I want at least two years of travel, and I should not wonder if I settled myself at some German or Parisian university. We, as a nation, are so sadly deficient in culture. Our country is crude, as I suppose all young countries must be."

David Lawrence nodded slowly, and asked, —

"When did you think of going?"

"I may as well go at once, and have it over," returned the young man, with the princely indifference he affected.

His father did not dissent. As well in Europe as here, or anywhere.

As for Jack, he was quite as much out of his reach as if the ocean already rolled between. They used to pass each other quietly, nodding if they came face to face, but often evading any kind of recognition. Was the old regard dead?

Fred smiled rather pityingly on the boy who had been so blinded in his first love.

"I used to think him such a hero, because he once thrashed a boy in my behalf," mused the young man. "And how I used to fly at the girls, who were always looking at the feet of clay my idol possessed! How I *did* coax him to go to college!" and Fred gave a little rippling laugh. "I must admit that he has good common sense, — he has found his place, and keeps it. There could be nothing between us now, of course. My lines lie in such different ways."

No moan for a lost ideal under all that self-complacency.

Jack Darcy took the defection in good part. He did see the utter incongruity of keeping up even the semblance of the old dream. But, where Fred had made dozens of new friends, Jack had admitted no one to his vacant shrine. He liked, even now, to recall those old hours, so bright and gay with childish whims and frolics. And he did envy Fred, just a little, that ramble over Europe. Would it be a ramble? It was Jack's turn to smile. Would it not be bits and pictures seen through coach-windows, rather than getting close to Nature's heart? No, that would not suit *him*.

And so glided by two more years. De Woolfe Lawrence — he had dropped the initial now — returned home in a still higher state of cultivation, and quite as undecided as to his future career. A life of leisure and *belles-lettres* looked the most tempting to him. He had read up a little in medicine, but the practice would not please his fastidious inclinations. Law had its objections. In fact, Mr. Lawrence had dropped into that dilettante state into which extreme cultivation, without genius or ambition, is apt to drift its possessor. He was nearing twenty-four now, — handsome, aristocratic, the pride of his family, and the distraction of young women in general. Invitations were showered upon him, and the delicate flattery society loves to use, ministered to his vanity.

Meanwhile what of Jack?

He had improved considerably through these years. The rough angularity of twenty had softened. Tall, but robust and compact, no stooping shoulders or slouching gait. The chestnut hair was no longer faded, but still cropped close; and the eyes were so deep that they seemed to have a blue-black tint, large, slow-moving, with that unutterable wistfulness which makes one sad. The face was good, strong, and earnest; and, if his manners were not those of a gentleman of leisure, they bore the impress of something quite as noble, honor, tenderness, and sincerity. The old restlessness had dropped out. Love, being larger than duty, hinted now at no sacrifice. Grandmother Darcy, now grown quite feeble, leaned on this strong arm, always outstretched, forgetting there had ever been any wild dreams of youth.

And, though Yerbury had changed so much, they and the old street remained unchanged. Mrs. Darcy was a little thinner and older, the light hair just touched with silver. The garden was the same: wherever his father's favorite flowers had died out, Jack had replaced them. Only the honeysuckle was like great twisted ropes, and the syringas and lilacs were trees instead of bushes.

Old neighbors had gone, and new ones come, but they were of the quiet, steady kind. Miss Barry seemed smaller and frailer, but she was as active as ever in her refined way. Sylvie no longer came to the gate for milk: indeed, the wide-eyed Alderney had long been given up, and Sylvie was a young woman. Irene Lawrence had been sent to a fashionable boarding-school; but Sylvie had been educated at home, under her aunt's eye, by a French governess who had proved something more than a mere teacher. The coming of Madame Trépier served to cement more closely the intimacy with the Darcy family. Indeed, Jack took a queer, half-shy liking for madame, and began to study French. He had a great fondness for music, and a fine, rich tenor-voice: so he and Sylvie sang duets together, and often walked in the twilight with madame. Indeed, Miss Barry would have kept her for friend and companion all the rest of her life; but there came a very persistent wooer, and madame succumbed a second time to the destiny of women.

Sylvie Barry was piquant rather than pretty: a soft peachy skin neither dark nor fair, with a creamy tint; deep lustrous hazel eyes, that seemed to change with her moods; hair that had barely shaken off the golden tint, and clustered in rings about the low broad forehead; a passable nose of no particular design, but a really beautiful mouth and chin, the latter dimpled, the former with a short curved upper lip, displaying the pearly teeth at the faintest smile; barely medium height, with a figure that was slim yet not thin, rounded, graceful, pliant, with some of the swift dazzling motions of a bird.

While Jack and Fred had drifted so apart, Sylvie and Irene still kept up a curious friendship. On Sylvie's part there was no election: indeed, Irene in her imperious fashion took Sylvie up as the mood seized her. Mrs. Lawrence, now quite an invalid, was fond of Sylvie's bright face and gay inspiring voice. In Irene's absence she was often sending for her. "Play me a little song before you go," she would say; or, "Read a chapter in my book for me, will you not? You always make people seem so real." Consequently Sylvie had never left off going to the great house. Mrs. Eastman would fain have patronized her, but in her spirited way she shook off the faintest attempt. But Irene flew to her, and insisted upon a croquet-party or a drive, or a musical soirée.

"I can't do without you, you obstinate little thing," she would exclaim. "I don't know why I take so much trouble about you; for I don't believe you like me at all, but just tolerate me for the sake of old times. There are twenty girls in Yerbury who would go wild with delight if I were to ask them."

"Why do you not, then?" inquired Sylvie with a tantalizing light in her eyes.

"Because I don't choose to, Miss Impertinence! Don't be cross now, and torment me to death with your perverse ways."

"You surely need not be tormented."

"Sylvie, you are exasperating."

"Why do you ask me, then, or tease me to do any of these things? I would rather stay at home to-day, and paint."

"But I shall not give you up. I'll stay here, and talk so that your wits will wander!"

And so at last Sylvie would consent to her friend's demands.

One evening she came over to discuss a costume for a fancy-dress garden-party. Mrs. Eastman had brought some fashion-plates up from New York, but they did not altogether suit her fancy: so the carriage was ordered, and in a few moments it rolled to Sylvie's door.

Sylvie and Jack were at the piano. There was a soft, drizzling, summer-night rain, that made all the air fragrant without any noisy patter. It was just the evening for an old Latin hymn; and Sylvie was playing the strong, rich chords that had in them mysterious hints of heavenly joy, coming up through waves of passionate suffering. Jack's voice seemed toned to these sympathetic vibrations, and the grand old words rolled out simply, with none of the vicious taste of the more modern fashionable school. So engrossed were they, that they did not hear the carriage stop; but Sylvie caught her aunt's voice.

They had reached the end of a verse. "Let me see what auntie wants," said Sylvie, running into the next room; and then it was, "Oh, Irene! oh, Sylvie!"

"Singing to yourself in the twilight!" laughed Irene. "How romantic! I'm going to interrupt you now, and put you in better business. I am just loaded down with the excellent fripperies of this world, and unable to make a choice. And the grand occasion is Mrs. Avery Langton's garden-party. Now, be good-natured, and help me decide."

Uttering this in a rapid breath, she had walked through the sitting-room to the parlor, and tumbled her parcel down on the great antique sofa, whose edges everywhere were studded with brass nails. And there stood Jack, thinking, if he had been quicker, he could have stepped out of the window into Miss Sylvie's pretty flower-bed, now purple with odorous heliotrope. But, as he had not, there was nothing to do but to stand his ground manfully.

He had often seen Irene Lawrence in the carriage and on horseback; but as she stepped into the room now, and stood there rather surprised, she might have been a daughter of Juno. Tall, slender, arrowy straight, but lithe and faultlessly rounded, her fleecy white shawl like a gossamer web falling off her shoulders, her haughty carriage, her wealth of purple-black hair coiled about her shapely head, a hundred times handsomer than any artifice of dressing, her brilliant complexion, her large eyes with their long sweeping lashes that veiled their depth, but seemed to add a certain imperiousness, her coral-red lips that shaped differently with every breath, her straight nose, with the nostrils thin as a bit of shell, and the softly rounded chin, made her a picture that Jack Darcy never forgot.

"Oh!" in a tone of surprise, "I thought you were alone: pardon me."

Sylvie was bringing in another lamp, and placed it on the great clawfoot centre-table. Then it occurred to her that Irene might not know Jack. She should recognize him here socially, anyhow.

"My friend Miss Lawrence," she said with a world of dignity, "Mr. Darcy."

Jack bowed, in no wise abashed by this proud and handsome Miss Lawrence, though as a child she had snubbed him many a time. And she glanced him over with a sudden interest. It was a manly face and a manly figure; and she wondered from what remote corner of the earth Sylvie Barry had summoned this fair, stout giant, who made her think of the Norse gods of her childish romances. She always liked strength: Sylvie was for tenderness, pathos, and beauty.

"Good-evening," inclining her proud head. "Did I interrupt? You were singing?"

"That is finished," returned Sylvie, with her peculiar manner, as if, being hostess here, she should have proper respect paid to her position; and each guest should be as deferent to the other as if she were a little queen, and this her court.

She picked up a stray piece of music that had fallen to the floor, seated Irene, and half turned to Jack. Any other woman might have been awkward.

"I will leave you two ladies to yourselves," began Jack; but Irene interrupted, —

"No, Mr. Darcy: I shall think I have driven you away;" with a beguiling smile. "If you understand music, you may have a taste in the fine arts of dress as well. At all events, look over these elegant women in their party-gowns, and tell me which is fairest and rarest."

The honesty of the glance, although it was coquettish, told Jack that Miss Irene did not remember him. For, of all the haughty Lawrence women, she had the name of being the haughtiest. She gathered up her skirts in other people's houses when the plebeian element came too near. Now she waved him to a chair, and gently sank into another, her trailing robe of thin filmy black with golden flecks falling about her like clouds in a gusty sky.

He took the seat indicated. Some strange feeling moved him, an enchantment that he had never before experienced. The very air about her was filled with a subtle, indescribable perfume that he should always associate with a tall, dark-eyed woman, – a glimpse of the Orient and its sweetness, he fancied.

Sylvie took her place, and began to tumble over the colored plates.

"I'm so tired of those Watteau things!" began Miss Lawrence disdainfully. "They all savor of bread-and-butter girls, – a shepherdess with her crook, – bah! And I've been Marie Stuart so many times. If it were a masquerade; but garden-parties are beginning to prove bores, after all. There is nothing new about them, only to out-shine every other woman. A high ambition, is it not, Mr. Darcy?"

"A temptation perhaps."

The tone had in it a bit of delicate homage. Irene understood. She knew at once that this man was a little dazed by her beauty, just as many other men had been. Puny, delicate, namby-pamby men she despised, and always gave them a cut with her sharp tongue. Where had Sylvie picked up this Saul among his peers?

They were all interested in the pictures, and soon fell to making merry comments on them. Sylvie had a quick eye and a bright wit, and something made Jack Darcy brilliant. They selected bits of fine taste here, they made an elegant costume of no particular style, and Irene was struck with what she knew would be its becomingness.

"Mr. Darcy, are you an artist?" She remembered just then what an odd way the Barrys had of picking up people with some gift or grace.

"No," and Jack flushed boyishly.

"Then you must have a houseful of sisters."

"No, I never had a sister."

"When all things else fail with you, you can set up opposition to Worth. I shall come to you for designs. Now, this will be a peculiar source of gratification to me, because no one can possibly have the same combination. And you never can depend upon a modiste. Mr. Darcy, what makes women so faithless to one another?"

"Are they?" he asked with a man's simplicity.

She laughed gayly, and met Jack's fun-loving, shady blue eyes. How handsome they were!

Miss Barry entered the room, and joined in the pleasant chat: then a rumble of carriage-wheels was heard.

"It has stopped raining," said Sylvie, going to the window. "A few soft, melancholy stars have come out."

"You have been very obliging, Sylvie," said Miss Lawrence. "Miss Barry, I shall send the carriage over to-morrow. Good-night."

Jack Darcy handed her out, pushing aside a trailing rose that it might not catch her shawl. Then she half turned, and said "Good-night" in a softer tone.

Sylvie was standing on the porch. "It has been as good as a play, Jack," she said with her gay-humored laugh. "I don't believe she ever thought" —

"That I worked in her father's mill!" and Jack laughed; but it was a rather pained, jarring sound.

"Jack – why do you? You are a puzzle to me!" and Sylvie's voice sharpened unconsciously. "You do not like it. Why did you not go on at the academy, or" —

"Raise myself in the social scale? That's what you mean, Sylvie; although we pass just as pleasant hours as if I were a prince, and you the lady of high degree. Well, we have gone over the

ground a good many times, and it is always the same thing. I have no fancy for a profession; I have no genius for art, though Miss Lawrence suggests that I might become a man-milliner – is that what you call it? You know, I am staying here because mother and grandmother will not go anywhere else. And I dare say I make as much money as young Dr. Romer or Ned Remington. And somehow, now that I'm in it, I go on with a stubborn, plucky feeling. Some day I'll be a great manufacturer."

This time his laugh was cheerful and ringing.

"You see, Sylvie, your good-nature places you on the debatable ground. You and your aunt could be hand-in-glove with all these great people, and yet you open your generous heart to take in everybody."

"No, not everybody, Jack. And what a little coward I am just this minute! No, it is not that either. Jack, you *do* know that I should never be a bit ashamed of you before any one. I feel vexed when I think that you could take the high places, and yet you let people put you down, – people not half as worthy or half as good as you. There's Horace Eastman. He came here a comparatively poor man; and now he owns half Yerbury, and talks of the mill-hands as if they were – well, a flock of sheep."

"An apt comparison, Sylvie. To my mind, they are shorn pretty close to make broadcloth for their masters."

"And there is Fred – have you seen him since his return?"

"Not to speak to him, of course." And then Jack flushed deeply, with a little hurt feeling.

"And what friends you were! Is it the way of the world? Then it is a mean, hateful world!"

"Sylvie, you are talking wildly. Don't you see there is no point of union in our lives? Now, I do not feel so badly over an outgrown friendship. When I was a little boy, I remember having a wonderful fancy for Tom Deane. We traded jack-knives; we told each other of the best nut-trees; we hunted squirrels; we coasted together; and, I dare say, he was as much of a hero in my childish eyes as I used to be in Fred's. But think of any friendship between us now! There isn't a greater loafer in all Yerbury than Tom Deane. Why, we have not a feeling in common."

"Still I think it is rather different," and a shade of annoyance passed over her face. If Jack only would not call up these people below him, if he would not identify himself so strongly with that common brotherhood! He had so many nice tastes, such a clean, pure, honest soul. And, young as Sylvie was, she knew this was not always the result of culture or wealth or ambition.

Jack guessed what was passing in her mind. From his father he had inherited a kind of womanish intuition. A pleasant-tempered man Bernard Darcy had always been called, but it was that delicate tact, the intuitive knowledge of what would be pleasant to others.

"What else can I do here, Sylvie?" Jack cried with sudden heat. "If the chance ever comes, I shall be fitted for a good business man. You may think there is no worthy ambition in that, but wait. Do not judge me too hastily."

"I am impatient at times, I know; but it is because I see your capabilities, and I can't bear to think of your going through the world unappreciated."

"Do not worry about that. Good-night!" rather abruptly. "Miss Barry, I have forgotten myself. Pleasant dreams!"

"And we did not have our old hymn, after all," said Sylvie regretfully.

Jack took the short cut across the garden. There was a dim light in the sitting-room; and his mother lay in the hammock on the latticed porch, her favorite evening resort. She came in now, and Jack bolted the doors. Then, with a good-night kiss, he went to his room, and in ten minutes was asleep. Sylvie, on the other hand, girl-like, tossed and tumbled. Why was the world so queer and awry and obstinate? After all, you could do so little with it. Your plans came to nought so easily. Lizzie Wise, in her Sunday-school class, preferred going in the mill, and buying herself cheap finery, because the other girls did it. And so all through. You tried to train some one, and he or she followed the *ignis fatuus* more readily than any high, ennobling truth. It was hard lifting people out of their old grooves.

How bright and entertaining Jack had been this evening! Of course Irene had not remembered him. Would she be vexed, Sylvie wondered, – she who held herself up so high, and believed in a separate world as it were?

CHAPTER IV

The garden-party was a success, and Miss Lawrence the acknowledged belle of the evening. No one else could have carried off the peculiar style of dress. She knew that she was radiant; and triumphs were a necessary sweet incense, that she always kept alive on her shrine. There was no need of making a hurried election: indeed, her chief aim now was pleasure and conquest.

They were sitting over their dainty lunch, Mrs. Eastman having dropped in; and, after the party had been pretty thoroughly discussed, a little lull ensued. Fred toyed with some luscious cherries, in his usual indolent manner. Nothing in this world was worth a hurry or a worry, according to this young man's creed. He had dawdled through the party, waltzing with a languid grace that most girls considered the essence of high-breeding. It was all one to him. His "set" affected to think life something of a bore. Intense emotion of any kind was vulgar.

"By the by, Rene," said Mrs. Eastman, "do you suppose Sylvie Barry is engaged to that Darcy fellow? It was odd that she should go off on a picnic with him, instead of the party. She has the queerest, mixed-up tastes."

"What Darcy fellow?" asked Irene in surprise.

"Sylvie Barry! Jack Darcy!" exclaimed Fred, in as much amazement as his superfine breeding would allow.

Mrs. Eastman gave a mellifluous laugh.

"Don't you remember? but you were such a child! Fred does. The Damon to his Pythias."

"Oh!"

A vivid scarlet ran up to the edge of Irene's white brow. So that was Jack Darcy. What a blind fool she had been, *not* to think! She had laughed and chatted with him, smiled on him, worn the costume of his designing, – a common workingman! For a moment she could have torn her hair, or beaten her slender white hands against the table. What had possessed her?

"I do recall some green and salad days," rejoined Fred with a laugh.

"How Agatha and I used to badger you! We were little fools to think such a thing ever went on when one came to years of discretion. Only I believe we were afraid the elder and idiotic Darcy might foist his son on some college. I must say Yerbury has become quite endurable now that party lines have been set up;" and Mrs. Eastman crumbed her cake, watching her diamond sparkle.

"How do you know Sylvie went on a picnic?" asked Rene, with an angry glitter in her eyes.

"Didn't the dear confess? Rene, you do not keep your penitent in very good order."

Mrs. Eastman had a faculty of putting something extremely irritating in her voice. It was honey smooth, and yet it rasped.

"Really," answered Irene indifferently, "I do not see that Miss Barry's selection of friends need affect me much, so long as she keeps the distasteful ones out of my way. I may wonder at her choice of pleasures, but I suppose she suits herself."

"My nursery-girl belongs to the mission-school. It was very good of Lissette to let her off for a whole day, I thought. I left her to settle it. What Sylvie sees in such people, I cannot imagine. I own I was a trifle surprised when I found this remarkable Mr. Darcy was our old *bête noir*, Jack. Is he still in the mill, I wonder?"

"Apply to papa," laughed Irene.

"I don't believe papa could tell you the names of five workmen. As if he troubled his head about that!"

"Sylvie is a nice little thing," remarked Fred patronizingly.

"I have no patience with her!" declared Mrs. Eastman. "As if it was not necessary to have a line drawn somewhere! These people are all well enough in their way: they are a necessary factor," – picking the words slowly to give them weight, – "and society establishes schools and homes for

them, trains teachers, provides employment: what more do they want? A holiday now and then, of course; but why not go off by themselves as a class, as the French do? This maudlin, morbid sympathy we Americans give, spoils them. There is no keeping a servant in her place here. Before you know it she studies and graduates at some school, teaches for a while, goes abroad, and paints a picture, likely as not."

"Do not excite yourself, Gerty," and Fred pulled the ends of his silky moustache.

"Well, it does annoy me to see a young girl like Sylvie Barry with no better sense. Some day we shall have all these people rising up against us, as they did in the French Revolution. I hate socialism and all that; and I took good care to say to Mrs. Langton that Miss Barry had been casting in her lot that day with a parcel of charity-children, and would no doubt be too tired to enjoy the exquisite pleasure of her fête."

"I do not think Sylvie cares a penny!" said Irene with a touch of scorn, anxious to return her sister's little stab. "I suppose she comforts herself with the remembrance of her old blue blood, while Mr. Langton made his fortune as an army-contractor."

"The Wylies were a very good family, Irene."

"If you are through eating, I will have a cigar," said the young man, sauntering over to the bay-window.

What was there in this simple announcement of Sylvie having gone on a charity-school picnic with Jack Darcy that should so rouse the art-cultured pulses of Fred Lawrence? He had always liked Sylvie: her freshness and piquancy stirred him like a whiff of mountain air, – a sure sign that all healthy tone had not been cultivated out of him. It would be very foolish for Sylvie to commit a *mésalliance* with this young man, who was no doubt good enough in his way, – a rather rough, awkward, clownish fellow, with a coarsely generous heart. Sylvie so delicate and refined, with her pretty ways, her genius, – yes, she really did have a genius! In Paris or Rome she might make herself quite a name. He must see a little more of her: he must – well, did he want to marry any one?

Irene and Gertrude retired to the room of the former, and discussed Newport and Saratoga.

"I do hope we shall have a cottage at Newport another summer," said Mrs. Eastman.

"It gives you tone, of course," was Irene's response; "but honest, now, Gerty, don't you think it a little poky? I do not want to go anywhere for a whole summer: I like the fun of all. Agatha is to spend a month at Long Branch, and I am going down just for a little dazzle and to give my gowns an airing."

Their siesta was passed in this kind of small talk. Late in the afternoon she drove Mrs. Eastman home, and then went for Sylvie in her pretty pony-phaeton. As Sylvie was about nothing more important than a pale-blue zephyr "fascinator," she accepted the invitation.

What a delicious drive it was! A dappled under-roof of cloud with the sun just behind it, a golden-gray haze filming the air, and fragrant breezes suggestive of roses and honeysuckle. All the way was starred with daisies. Sylvie drew in long breaths of delight, for she never wearied of nature.

They turned homeward early. The bells were ringing for six, and the mills and factories began to empty out their swarm of human beings.

"Why do you go through here?" asked Sylvie in surprise. "I thought you hated all this."

"So I do," briefly.

She let the pony walk now. These shrill sounds jarred on the summer air. Groups of girls in procession in faded gear or tawdry finery; brawny men with an old-country, heavy cast of feature, in blue flannel, with arms bared to the elbow, and throats exposed; pale stripling youths of the American type, boys with the rough fun not yet knocked out of them by hard work or the harder blows of fate, – a motley crowd indeed.

It thinned a little just here. Two or three men came along leisurely, – one tall and compact, with a slow, firm step, the face grave, the eyes glancing over beyond the hills. Irene Lawrence shut her lips with a touch of displeasure. Was she to miss the satisfaction that had been brooding in her mind for the last hour, for the accomplishment of which she had driven through this dusty, ill-smelling street?

The pedestrian raised his head. A sudden warm, smiling glow overspread the face, no longer grave, but brightening like an April sky. The outlook of the eyes was so frank and clear; the half-smile playing about the parted lips had the honesty of a child. He touched his hat, and bowed with an almost stately deference.

Sylvie nodded and smiled, leaning forward a bit. What sent the glad light so quickly out of his countenance? The girl glanced at Irene.

Miss Lawrence had stared coolly, haughtily, decisively. This man might look at her hundreds of times in the days to come, but he would never again expect a social recognition from her. And, oh, perfection of cruelty! Sylvie, his fellow-sinner in these social laws, had witnessed his pain and discomfiture.

She turned with her face at white heat, one of those inward flashes of indignation that transcend any scarlet blaze of anger. Her eyes glowed with a fiery ray, and the curves of mouth and chin seemed as if frozen.

"It was a deliberate insult, Irene! How dared you" —

"How dared I pass one of my father's workmen? Well, Miss Barry, I happen not to be hand-in-glove with them. I can relegate them to their proper place when an ill-judged vanity brings them unduly forward."

"You met him at *my* house: he is *my* friend, and the friend of my aunt. His birth is as good as yours, or mine."

"Oh, I dare say!" with a satirical laugh. "Are you really going to marry him, Sylvie? Have you the courage to throw yourself quite away?"

"Stop!" and she caught at the reins. The next moment she was on the sidewalk. "Good-evening," she exclaimed with the dignity of a queen.

"The little spitfire!" laughed Miss Lawrence.

Sylvie's displeasure mattered very little to her. A few days later she was on her way to Long Branch, and the episode was soon danced out of mind.

As for Sylvie Barry, she made up her mind never to go to Hope Terrace again. The friendship was not of her seeking, and now it should end. Friendship, indeed! It disgraced the word to use it in connection with Irene Lawrence.

That very evening she went around to the Darcys. Neither she nor Jack mentioned the rencontre, but there was an indescribable something in her manner that told Jack the insult had been as much to her as to him.

Hardly a fortnight later the Lawrence carriage stood at the gate of the pretty court-yard, and the liveried driver brought a note to the door.

Dear Sylvie, — [in a tremulous, uncertain hand] I am wretched and lonely. Fred and Irene are away, and Mr. Lawrence has gone West on business. Will you not, out of the generosity of your heart, come and cheer me up a bit? I was in bed all day yesterday with a frightful headache, and can just crawl to-day. Do not disappoint me. I have set my heart on hearing you read, and have some nice new books.

Ever your obliged friend, A. L.

"You must go," was her aunt's comment in a sympathizing tone. "I have promised all the afternoon to the School Club, you know, and you would only be home alone. Poor Mrs. Lawrence! What an invalid she has become! And think of me," — with a cheery laugh, — "able to get about anywhere!"

So Sylvie went up to Hope Terrace in the luxurious carriage she thought she had tabooed forever.

Mrs. Lawrence did look very poorly. She kept to her room a great deal nowadays; or rather there were two of them, – one off the bedchamber, with a pretty oriel window, and exquisitely fitted up with every luxury wealth and taste could devise.

Mrs. Lawrence had already lost her interest in life. Her two daughters were well married. Irene would be, of course; but marriages were an old story for her. She had loved to shine at watering-places, but the gayety no longer lured her. She had dazzled in diamonds, silks, and velvets, been admired on the right hand and on the left, until it was an old, trite story. Servants managed her house admirably. Mr. Lawrence never wearied her with any business details. Her clothes were ordered, and made, and hung in the closets. The carriage was always at hand. Not a want of any kind, hardly a desire, that could not be instantly satisfied. She had sunk into a kind of graceful semi-invalidism, and enjoyed the coming and going of her children, but her own time was over.

"How good you are, Sylvie dear!" and, drawing the young girl to her, she kissed her fondly. "I don't know what I should do without you. Irene would stay at home if I wanted her; but she is so full of life and excitement, that it wears me out. You are not always in such a whirl of society, and then you *are* different. You have such a sweet, sympathetic nature, child! I can always feel it in your hand, and your voice is so soothing. What a difference there is in voices!"

Her own was finely modulated: indeed, Sylvie used to think sometimes that these Lawrences had more than their share of the good things of this world. No physical gift or grace had been denied them.

So Sylvie read and talked, and sang two or three songs before she went home. Then she came again and again, sometimes with her aunt, oftener alone. Miss Barry took duty calls with her neighbors as one of the demands of society, to be fulfilled with the fine grace of thorough good-breeding. Beyond the little formalities that always surrounded her like a delicate hoar-frost, there was a large heart for the weal and woe of all who could in any way be benefited.

"It is a pity to see such a waste of life," she said of Mrs. Lawrence. "Some people, after they have served their own turn, and had their good time, set about doing something for God and their neighbors at the eleventh hour; but she still clings to self, even when all the pleasure has dropped out. If she only would exert herself a little, her health and interest would improve, and she has so much in her hands."

One day Sylvie had turned the last leaf of her book, when Fred Lawrence crossed the hall, having come home unexpectedly half an hour before. "Miss Sylvie is with your mother," the housekeeper had said; and he had begged that they should not be disturbed. He stood now listening to the cool, soft voice, and an odd thought entered his mind.

Sylvie should really be a daughter of the house. How his mother liked her, depended upon her! She was not always going to watering-places and parties and theatres, she did not talk continually of dress and conquests. He did not despise cultivated elegance: in fact, it was a strong point with all the Lawrences; but he knew that a great deal of this much-praised culture ran into artificiality, while Sylvie's elegance had the comprehensiveness of nature. It would be quite impossible for her to do an awkward or ungraceful act; for her innate sense of beauty, harmony, and right guided her. Something higher than worldly maxims toned her soul. And though he, a man with his hands full of gold that he had never earned, could content himself with indolent diletteism, he wanted an earnest, honest, truthful woman, if he ever took a wife. He had flirted in a lazy fashion, common with young men who find themselves an object to women, and who have only to raise their hand, sultan-like, to bring a host of houris. That he had kept out of many grosser pleasures was perhaps a credit to him, although that was not the weak side of his character.

He did not fall in love with the picture before him, sweet as it was, – the young girl in a soft flowing white dress (she was too true an artist to have starchy outlines), the shimmering hair, the delicate wavering color, the proud poise of the head, the plump white arm and slender fingers with

their pale-pink nails, and, above all, the exquisite voice that seemed so to enter into the culmination of the story, the last few sentences of pathos, joy, and complete fruition.

She closed her book. Neither of the ladies spoke. Mrs. Lawrence had been deeply touched. She lived almost exclusively in this world of fictitious sentiment, I was going to say; but I remember that it is often a transcript of human lives. Still she liked sentiment in books, out of them she scarcely recognized it.

There was a step and a low tap at the door; then, before Mrs. Lawrence could answer, Fred marched in, kissed his mother dutifully, and shook hands with Sylvie.

He had always liked Sylvie better as a little girl than any one else who ever came to the house, and he liked her now. How happy his mother would be! for of course they would go on living here. Irene would be away presently, and his parents would need some one. His summer work was mapped out before him; and really it was a pleasure to think he should escape the bore of society as one found it at summer-resorts, and entertain himself with this piquant brown-eyed girl with a heart fresh as a rose. He did not want a woman who had been wooed by every Tom, Dick, and Harry.

Yet another and more heroic thought entered his mind after chatting with her a few moments. He would save *her* as well. She might have a slight fancy for Jack Darcy: his sisters had spoken of it, and these great, fair, muscular giants were often attractive to women, through the very strength and rude force with which they pushed their suit. But such a lumbering, vulgar fellow in Miss Barry's dainty, womanish parlor! and he smiled at the thought. Yes, he would be doing a good deed to snatch Sylvie from any such possibility.

Fred Lawrence suddenly assumed a new importance in his own eyes. He made himself very agreeable to both ladies. Sylvie remained to dinner; and, when Mrs. Lawrence would have sent her home in the carriage, he proposed to escort her, – he wished to pay his respects to Miss Barry.

They did not take the most direct course, but, leaving the streets with their noise of children and possibly vulgar contact, strolled through "Lovers' Lane." The old trees met overhead; there were dooryards full of sweet, old-fashioned flowers, and now and then the sound of a weak piano or a plaintive voice.

"I am glad these streets have been kept free from the vice of modern improvement," said he. "It always brings back a touch of my boyhood when I walk through them. Your aunt made a good fight, Miss Sylvie, when she refused to listen to the golden tongues of speculators, though of course you would have been much richer. But it can be turned into money any time."

"Money is not every thing," answered the young girl, with a touch of sharpness. "Are one's own desires and old associations to count for nothing? This place was very dear to my aunt and to many others. I am sure there is quite enough of Yerbury laid waste now. The town looks as if it were a sort of general house-cleaning, and every thing was thrust out of doors and windows. And it was so pretty!" with a curious heat and passion. "It was like a dream, with its winding river and green fields, and men at their hay, and cows grazing in knee-deep pastures. Now all the milkmaids are herded in mills and factories; and the children, – well, there are no children any more!"

"No children!" lifting his pencilled brows in languid surprise. "Why, I think you can find swarms of them. The poorer the man, the larger the family."

"There are babies and babies; then little prigs and drudges. I am not sure I am in love with the so-called civilization. For the great majority it only means harder work."

"Did we not learn in some school-book – I am quite sure I did – that

'Satan finds some mischief still,
For idle hands to do?'"

"Are you not afraid?" She turned with a bright, tormenting smile to the handsome young fellow, who flushed under her clear glance.

"For those who have brains, manual labor may not be the only chance of salvation," he returned with a somewhat haughty flippancy.

"I wonder they do not turn their brains to some account."

They reached the gate, and Miss Barry was sitting on the porch. Sylvie was too pretty and too womanly to be quarrelled with for the sake of a subject that did not in the least interest him. Beside, he meant to come in; so he opened the gate for her, and followed in a well-bred, gentlemanly way, that had nothing obtrusive in it. Miss Barry welcomed him with the quaint formality, the subtle air of education, refinement, and morality, so much a part of herself. It pleased him extremely, and settled him in his determination.

"Sylvie has a touch of radicalism," he mused to himself; "but it is a disease of youth, and thrives by association. Take her quite away, and she will soon recover her normal tone."

He found his mother still up on his return, and rather restless. She lay on her sofa, and dozed so much through the day, that night had but little slumber to bring her.

"I am so glad you did not go to Long Branch," she remarked, as she toyed with her son's silken, perfumed hair. "I get so lonesome when your father is away; and he seems to think of nothing but business" – in a complaining tone. "I do not know what I should do but for Sylvie. She is such a charming little body! Fred, do you think there is any truth in Gertrude's gossip about her and that – one of your father's mill-hands, is it not? How can Miss Barry allow it?"

"There is no truth in it," with a light, scornful laugh. "The families are neighbors, you know; and I suppose the boor takes a look for encouragement. I shall not go away this summer. I can find pleasanter employment."

She pressed his hand, and smiled, as their eyes met. Sons-in-law were very little to one, except in the way of respectability, but a daughter like Sylvie would be such a comfort! Fred had no need to marry a fortune, but Sylvie would not be poor.

CHAPTER V

Now that Fred Lawrence had come home, there was no need of going so often to Hope Terrace, Sylvie thought. Time never hung heavy on her hands; for she was not indolent, and there were friends and pleasures. Miss Barry had a conscientious misgiving that Sylvie ought to be taken about like other young ladies; but she shrank from fashionable life herself, and could not resolve to trust her darling with any other person. Beside, Sylvie always seemed contented.

She was content indeed; at least, with her home and her aunt. Up-stairs, just out of her sleeping-chamber, she had a studio, chosen because this room, of all in the house, had the finest view in summer, when the tall old trees shut out so much. From here there were two exquisite perspectives. The trees and houses were so arranged that a long, arrowy ray of light penetrated through a narrow space over to a small rise of ground called Berry Hill on account of its harvest of blueberries. Two old, scraggy, immense oak-trees still remained; and she used to watch them from their first faint green to the blood-red and copper tints of autumn, when the sun shone through them. Down behind he dropped when the day was done; sometimes a ball of fire, at others bathed in roseate hues, tinged with all the wondrous grades of color, and making fleecy islands in a far-off, weird world, dream-haunted. She used to study the grand effects of shifting light, that made the hill bold and strong, or fused it into dreamy harmonies that seemed to have the subtle essence of music; then contrasts that were abrupt and apparently dissonant, quite against well-known edicts of human taste. Who was right, – the great Author of all? She smiled to herself when she heard people talk so glibly of nature, as if the one little rose-leaf were the whole world.

The other picture held in its soft, still, light, an old-fashioned, low-gabled house with wide eaves; a broad doorway, with the upper half always open in summer; a well with curb and sweep and bucket where farm-hands came to drink; a pond with a shady side, where cows herded in their peaceful fashion, wading knee-deep on hot days, chewing their cud contentedly at others, browsing through golden hours; fields of glowing grain, then tawny stubble, a bit of corn with nodding tassels, and not infrequently a group of children, picturesque in this far light. It all stood out with the clearness of a stereoscope.

She had her ambitions too, this bright little girl. They were tinged with the crudeness of youth, and its boundless vision, it is true; and sometimes the passion of despair seized her soul in a cold grasp, when she felt hemmed in on every side, and longed for some opening, some step in the great world higher than fashionable frivolity.

Miss Barry had no taste for famous women. They were well enough in the world: she paid a proper and polite deference to Mrs. Somerville, Mrs. Browning, and Rosa Bonheur, – that kind of intellectual deference that sets them out of the sphere of ordinary women. Wives and mothers were better for the every-day life of the world; since pictures and poetry were luxuries, accessories, but not home or food or clothes. Though she had missed her woman's destiny, she had not lost faith in it; though she had held out her hand to the woman who had made shipwreck of her own life for the wild, graceless brother's sake, she still looked on clear seas and smooth sailing as possible for lovers' barks. In her plans for Sylvie there was a fine, manly, generous husband; a love so sweet and entire that the girl should forget her restless yearnings; baby hands to cling to her, baby lips to press, young lives to mould, and a future to plan for others.

Miss Barry believed in work devoutly, but gentlewomen had a firm place in her creed. The paintings and music were well enough as accomplishments, and she was proud of them; but she delicately repressed the other dreams and desires until Sylvie ceased to speak of them except to her friend Jack.

Miss Barry had experienced some anxiety on this point, it must be confessed. You would never have perceived it from the wise little woman's face or any tone of her voice. She went more frequently

to the Darcys of an evening with Sylvie: she rolled her easy-chair and work-table to the opposite side of the sitting-room, where it commanded a view of the piano and the sofa in the parlor, the door being always open. She could hear and see, she could make pleasant, trenchant remarks: indeed, she was one of themselves, as young in heart, if the hair did glisten silvery under the bit of exquisite thread-lace that did duty as an apology for a cap.

Jack and Sylvie were not lovers. A rare good friendship it was, more perfect than brotherly and sisterly regard, in that it held no duty-element, and was spontaneous. Sylvie never laughed at Jack in his awkward boyish days: he had never tormented her small belongings as brothers are wont to do.

Miss Barry feared the flame might be easily fanned. A little opposition or warning would bring Sylvie's innocent wandering thoughts to a focus, and kindle the fire. She was very wary. She trusted Sylvie to Jack with an air that said, "You are too honorable to betray the confidence I repose in you."

The old class prejudice spoke out in this covert objection to Jack as a suitor. She honored him sincerely for giving up the dreams of ambitious and energetic manhood to stay at home and comfort these two delicate women. Yet (strange contradiction) she had a half fancy that it betokened weakness or lack of some kind in the very content with which he seemed to go about his daily duties. Alas for consistency! We preach content from the pulpit on Sunday, and on Monday glance with quiet contempt on our plodding neighbor, who can commune with the daisies by the wayside, while there is gold lying untroubled in desert gulches.

Honest, sturdy Jack, taking up the duty of to-day cheerfully with a manful endurance, because the hands holding his fate were too weak and tender to be wrestled with, and that in his large, generous soul he could not war on a smaller antagonist, neither was it his nature to continually thrust any sacrifice he might make before the eyes of the one he was benefiting. How much silent heroism goes unpraised in the world, while we stand on the highways, and prate of our discrimination, our quick insight! Jack might be praised for his self-denial, but the higher appreciation was withheld. Even Sylvie was fretted at times, because he would get interested in all things pertaining to the mill.

Miss Barry said to herself, "It is best that Sylvie should marry in her own circle, a man of cultivation, refinement, and position. Jack is a dear good fellow, but not the person to satisfy her for a lifetime."

Jack thought nothing at all about it. He never gave up the idea of a great wide world, where he could have a hand-to-hand struggle with something as powerful as himself. He had come to no dreams of wife and children. He did like Sylvie with all his big, honest heart. If she had fallen in love with him, and betrayed it by some girlish sign, he would have been startled at first, then thought it over in his slow, careful way, asked her to marry him, and loved her devotedly all his days, leaving the dreams to the past with a tender benediction.

But Sylvie was no more in love than he.

As I said, she decided that she was not needed at Hope Terrace, and staid away four days. Then the carriage came, with a beseeching note. Had Fred gone again?

She found him there in all his elegant listlessness. It exasperated her strangely.

"What have you been about, Sylvie?" cried Mrs. Lawrence. "Is your aunt ill? It seems a full week since you were here."

"Oh, no!" with her beguiling little smile. "I cannot tell exactly what, only I thought" —

"You thought because Fred was home I would need no one else! As if a love-story would not bore him, and an invalid's whims — well, men are not women, my dear," decisively, and with a complacent expression as if she had settled the argument beyond any question, for the first time since the world began.

"Why, you never tried me on a love-story," interposed Fred. "You do not know how deeply sympathetic I might be with your favorite heroines."

"He is laughing at us, Sylvie. Ah, well! I suppose it is a man's duty to *make* love, not to listen to it second-hand. How charming and fresh you look this morning! And how lovely it is after the shower

of last night! Fred, if you could leave Latin verses and Greek essays you might take us to drive. We could stop and bring your aunt with us for lunch, Sylvie."

"Thank you for her. She has gone to Coldbridge to see about a nurse for the Orphans' Home, and will not be back until four."

"Then I can keep you without a single scruple," and Mrs. Lawrence looked oddly pleased. "Fred, tell them not to put the horses out. What wonderful health your aunt has, Sylvie! I don't see how she can endure the bother of those schools and institutions: it would wear me out in no time. But I have had a family of children;" and she leaned back on her pillow with a satisfied air.

The carriage came around again; and with the assistance of a maid, Sylvie, and her son, Mrs. Lawrence walked down stairs. He handed both ladies in, and seated himself opposite with the air of a prince.

Sylvie looked so bright and gay this morning, her velvety eyes full of tender light, her cheek all abloom with youth and health, the sweet scarlet lips half smiling, and her attire far enough removed from the rigor of fashion to have a kind of originality about it. She always wore something that added tone and brightness, – a bit of colored ribbon or a flower, or a bow that flashed out unexpectedly, as if greeting you with laughing surprise.

"What do you do to mother, Sylvie?" Fred asked, with a touch of complimentary curiosity in his voice. "Yesterday she was dull and moping. I could not persuade her to drive."

"It was so warm, no wonder. I felt dull and drowsy myself. But to-day is the perfection of loveliness."

"And you have a charm, Sylvie. I do not know but it is your perfect, buoyant health. You seem to lift one up. I only wish I could keep you all the time," remarked Mrs. Lawrence with a touch of longing.

Sylvie colored, and averted her eyes: then she gave herself a kind of mental shaking, and resolutely glanced back, uttering some rather trite remark. She would not suspect or understand.

They came home again, and had lunch: then, while Mrs. Lawrence was taking her siesta, Fred carried off Sylvie to his study. It was luxuriously beautiful. Several gems of pictures adorned the wall, which had been newly frescoed to suit his fancy. Easy chairs lured one to test their capacious depth, some exquisitely-bound books were arranged in a carved and polished case, and the table was daintily littered with papers. He had an idea that a man's surroundings were a very fair index to his character and tastes, quite forgetting that it implied length of purse as well.

He made spasmodic attempts at literary work. Abstruse essays were begun under the impression that he had something brilliant and original to say, but before they were finished a new train of thought led him captive. He dreamed delicately sensuous dreams, lapped in luxurious idleness, the rooms stifling with odorous hot-house flowers. He went clothed in soft raiment, he sunned himself in languid seas of imagination, and was too indifferent to concentrate his powers upon any great faith or belief, or even emotion. He had a contempt for cheap and plain belongings, as leaning insensibly to vitiation of taste. Nothing modern met his approbation. The old-time philosophies won him with their subtle flavor. He could propound his theories eloquently, but they did not touch him deeply enough to rouse him into action of any kind. All that his education and culture had done for him so far was to develop an incapacity for any regular, wholesome work that would be of the slightest use to any human being.

Something of this passed through Sylvie's mind as she sat there. This handsome and stalwart lily of the valley, with no desire for toiling, and no ability for spinning, would be content to drift and dawdle through life on his father's money. At that moment he was more contemptible to her than Irene, winning lovers by the score, and casting them aside with no more compunction than if they were the litter of faded flowers.

After all, why should she care if he did not reach her standard of moral and intellectual excellence, of that knightly chivalry whose rallying-cry was, "God and my fellow-men!" Why should she desire to rouse him from that complacent ease and fastidiousness, brought about by wealth, and

the certainty of no need of effort on his part? Surely she was no modern apostle carrying around the watchword of work.

Yet somehow – if all the subtile forces running to waste in both him and Jack could be galvanized into earnest, active life; if the sturdy, wholesome thought of the one could be mated with the clear, crisp training of the other; if both could have the wide outlook beyond material wants and comforts! It fretted her.

Yet these two, sitting here on this peerless summer day, skimmed over wide fields like gay butterflies. She could not be in earnest with him. Just when she was roused and warm, he seemed to lift her by some flight of eloquence, and waft her to his realm of fancy. It annoyed her to find he had that much power over her.

It must be admitted that when Fred Lawrence willed, he could be extremely fascinating. Women yielded gracefully, nay, eagerly, to his sway; and much delicate flattery had their eyes and lips fed him upon. Sylvie piqued him a trifle by her utter unconcern – or was it the fine instinct of coquetry inherent in feminine nature?

There was no telling what this queer, bright, unconventional little thing might do if left to herself. A good marriage would prove her salvation. She had many womanly possibilities: yet, with all due deference to Miss Barry and her old blue blood, Sylvie might overstep the bounds, and take up some of the reforming projects so dear to elderly spinsters. As Mrs. Fred Lawrence she would be held regally above them, and could depute her charitable work to her aunt.

In justice to the man, it must be confessed that Sylvie's dainty, piquant loveliness stirred his soul; and, if self had not been so intense a centre, he might have been ardently in love, or clearer-sighted. Much of the time her demeanor toward him was coldly indifferent: yet the misfortune was, her interest in all things kindled so easily that she could not, at a moment, change to him. Her moods of reticence and shy evasion added a flavor to the cup. With a man's egregious vanity, he jumped at the conclusion that these little intangible things signified love.

One day Sylvie stumbled over Irene. She came flying up stairs with some choice nectarines for Mrs. Lawrence, a kind that seemed only to reach perfection in Miss Barry's old-fashioned garden. There sat Irene, superb, nonchalant.

"Oh, you little darling!" clasping her, and pinching the peach-bloom cheek. "I am so glad to have a glimpse of you; for mamma has sung your praises until I ought to be jealous, but out of my boundless generosity I still smile upon you. No need to ask how *you* are, but one may inquire after your aunt?"

"Miss Barry is quite well," Sylvie said with some constraint, remembering their last parting.

Irene had honestly forgotten it. She laughed now, a low, ringing, melodious laugh.

"Why, it is quite a treat to see you open wide your sunrise eyes. I have taken everybody by surprise, and enjoy it immensely. Gerty and I are off to fresh fields and pastures new, and home came right in my way. Sylvie, you are a good little creature to come and amuse mamma when her own lovely and amiable daughter is racing after the pomps and vanities of this naughty world. Sit down;" and she made room on the sofa beside herself. "Don't let such a frivolous creature as I turn you from the post of duty."

"I did not come to stay," Sylvie answered rather stiffly.

"As if the intention were cast in adamant! Oh! why is not Fred here to use his persuasive tongue?"

There was a peculiar laughing light in Irene's eye that annoyed Sylvie, for it seemed to indicate a secret knowledge.

"I can stay just half an hour," was the reply in a decisive tone. "At eleven I take my lesson in painting. – Aunt wanted you to have these, Mrs. Lawrence, in their first bloom of ripeness."

"They are delightful. A thousand thanks to both of you, my dear."

"And you really manage to exist in this dull place, Sylvie! You are a miracle of content," interposed Irene.

"I have not come near dying yet," was the rather dry rejoinder.

"You need not be so curt and sharply sweet, my dear. Here I have been listening to marvellous accounts of your amiability and devotion" —

"Don't, Rene!" implored her mother. "Sylvie *is* good to me."

"And it might make the sweetness weak if she stretched it out to me! Keep it intact for those who so delight in it. I am fond of spice and high flavoring."

"These nectarines are perfect," declared Mrs. Lawrence. "One can taste the sunshine in them."

"How poetic, mother mine! Does Fred come and read Latin verses to you and Sylvie? I may have one" — stretching out her jewelled hand. "Oh, they are delicious! worth coming home for, even if I had not wanted mamma's pearls."

"And money and every thing," added her mother. "Rene, you ought not to be so extravagant. Papa is quite depressed with the state of business."

"Yes, I have heard *that* ever since I left my cradle;" and Rene laughed gayly.

It suddenly crossed Sylvie's mind: what if this proud, imperious girl should be reduced to poverty some day?

"Don't plan a conspiracy against me, Sylvie Barry! I saw it in your eyes!"

A vivid flush overspread Sylvie's face, as if she had been caught in the commission of some crime. Irene's laugh rang again with a peculiar irritating sound.

"I could not form a conspiracy against you — even if I so desired. And I must go."

Sylvie rose with a haughty air.

"Wish me worlds to conquer at least, or scalps to hang at my belt. No? You ungracious little thing! There is a good-by kiss to show you that I always hold out the right hand of peace."

"Have the carriage, Sylvie: it will not take a moment" —

"No, thank you," in a crisp tone. She would have nothing of these Lawrences just now.

"Fred will get a spicy wife," commented Irene, with a peculiar smile.

"She is never so with him. They get along beautifully," said the mother.

"Fred is too lazy to rouse Sylvie. Women have quite spoiled him. And Sylvie is ever so much prettier when a trifle vexed. Don't tell me about her angelic qualities, though I suppose she does keep super-amiable before you and Fred just now. I wonder if I could if I were in love!"

"Irene, I am sorry I hinted it. If you begin to tease Fred" —

"I shall not: set your heart at rest. I give full and free consent, and approve heartily. Beside, the little thing might throw herself away if she was not looked after. There will always be some one to stay at home with you."

Mrs. Lawrence turned to her book and her nectarines; and Irene tumbled over jewel-cases, — a proud, imperious beauty, whose heart had never been touched, who cared only for pleasure and triumphs. Over yonder, men and women were toiling, that she might have gold to squander. They lived scantily, that she might feast. And the brave old world, seeing it all, uttered a silent groan. One day it would speak out.

CHAPTER VI

Sylvie Barry meanwhile walked along rather rapidly for a warm morning. She felt irritated. Her sweet lips were set in defiant curves, the red heats of annoyance burned and faded on her cheek with each passing thought, and there was something out of harmony: a fateful discordance that swept over her, as if the parts of music had been wrongly put together.

Did they think – did Fred imagine —

She had never faced the idea before. Now she thrust it out in the garish sunlight. Her eyes sparkled, but there was no triumph in the girl's fine, resolute face. This man might lay his father's wealth at her feet, borrowed plumes in which he was quite content to shine; his heart – and a smile of withering scorn crossed her red lips. She would be a little dearer than his horse: dogs the fastidious man could not endure. Practically his wooing would be, —

"I will love thee – half a year,
As a man is able."

Not because of a fresher, fairer face: he would give her all he had, all that he could rouse his languid pulses to experience. She would be lifted out of her present occupations and interests; for Sylvie was too clear-eyed to blind herself with the specious reasoning that as the wife of a rich man's son, she would be a greater power in the world for good. They would fit her into *their* sphere. She fancied herself coming to an aimless middle-life like that of Mrs. Lawrence, taking no interest in any thing, but reading novels, and complaining, to pass away the time.

Did she really care for any one else? More than one young man in Yerbury had paid her the peculiar deferential attention that asks encouragement if there is any to give, but is too truly delicate to proceed without. Then there was Jack, who understood her soul better than any one else; but had he touched her heart in a lover-like way?

She turned her clear, honest eyes to the blue overhead, as if taking Heaven for a witness. Her heart and fancy were quite free. Much as she cared for him, there was no thrill of that high sentiment in it.

In some fascinating ideal life she had seen a lover with whom she could walk down through the years, whose life would touch hers at all points, who could fathom the depths of the nature that so puzzled herself, who could measure and supply the yearning reaches of intellect; who could awake in her soul a love, strong, deep, and unquestioning, so fervent, indeed, that she would turn from all other dreams and desires to him. A young girl's ideal – perhaps it is well for the world that some women have ideals, and keep faith with them.

As for Fred, his vanity led him straight on. She tried honestly to place herself right in his estimation; but he misunderstood her, and liked her the better for the variety. She saw too, with dismay, that her aunt favored him. Her natural kindness of heart shrank from the pain of rejecting him, and to her the triumph had no pleasure. But in her anxiety and desperation she saw only this one course.

He dropped in nearly every day, he took her and Miss Barry to drive. He haunted croquet-parties, which he hated, because she accepted invitations to them. He never met Jack. Some fine sense warned the latter that an encounter in Sylvie's parlor would be uncomfortable. Yet, strange to say, sometimes when he saw the handsome fellow sauntering by, a peculiar tenderness came over him, remembering the little boy who had clung fondly to him.

An old-fashioned courtship would prove no end of a bore, Fred decided. So one day he marched over to Larch Avenue when he knew Miss Barry was alone, and laid his case before her. She received him with graceful kindness, listened to his offer, and assented with evident pleasure. There was not

a happier woman that night in all Yerbury than Miss Barry. The care and desire of her life had been justly crowned. Her good-night kiss to Sylvie was inexpressibly sweet.

Fred did not see Sylvie for the next two days, but meanwhile wrought himself into a state that he was quite sure was proper and well-bred love. Then she came to Hope Terrace, and they kept her to tea. The late, heavy dinners were dispensed with at present.

"Will you walk home, to-night, Sylvie?" asked Fred. "I feel in a walking mood."

"The slightest symptom of industry ought to be encouraged," she made answer gayly. She had been of some real service this afternoon, charmed away a fretful headache, and restored Mrs. Lawrence to a comfortable state of feeling, and was correspondingly light-hearted. Then, too, Fred had kept out of the way, and been gravely polite to her at the tea-table. She liked him in such moods.

It was a late August evening, with a small crescent moon shining softly as if its forces were well-nigh spent. The heat of the day was over, and the falling dew evolved a kind of autumnal sweetness, the flavor of ripening fruits rather than flowers. Yerbury was very quiet in the part they were to traverse. They walked under great maples where a shadowy light sifted through, and the houses looked like fragments of dreams, with here and there a lamp in a distant window. The slow wind wandered through pines and hemlocks, as if some fairy Puck had laid his finger to his lips, saying to crooning insects, "Hush, hush!" A night to dream as one went down "Lovers' Lane."

Sylvie was radiantly beautiful. Her face always changed so with her moods. Every feature had a perfect sculptured look, but intensely human, – the straight nose with the flexible, sensitive nostrils, quivering at any sudden breath, the dainty chin and white throat, the red curved lips that seem to smile at some inward, richly satisfying thought, the large lustrous eyes serious as those of a nun, and the calm, clear brow that seemed to index the strength and fineness of the nature. He did not take in any of the occult meanings: to him she was simply a pretty girl whom he could dress in silk instead of lawn.

The small hand had lain on his arm without the faintest movement. Now he took it in his, and pressed it softly. She frowned, and made a slight, repellent gesture.

"Sylvie?" with a lingering intonation that was hardly inquiry.

"Well!" roused out of her quiet into a momentary petulance.

"Sylvie, I love you. Will you be my wife?"

In his most commonplace dreams he had never made love so briefly. He startled himself.

"Don't!" in a short, decisive tone, as if he were merely teasing.

"Sylvie, I am in earnest;" and in his tone the man spoke.

"Then I think you are mistaken." She seemed to look at him in the cool light of invincible candor and honesty.

"No, Sylvie, I am not mistaken," gaining courage that it was to be argument instead of sentiment. "I have had this purpose in my mind for some time, and have solicited your aunt's consent. You have only to say" —

"I have many things to say, but assent is not one of them;" in a voice that, though low, seemed to cleave the air with a steely ring. "You think you love me. Perhaps you do – as far as you are capable of loving any thing beside yourself. You have seen a good deal of me this summer, and have made up your mind to marry. I possess some of the necessary requirements, and doubtless suit you better than any mere fashionable woman. But you have none of that intense desire that makes a matter of life and death of love, that elects one woman, or forever keeps a vacant niche in the soul."

"Sylvie!"

Her passionate words stunned him. He turned to her with a puzzled look, a certain helplessness, as if he were stranded on some far, foreign shore. And then he met her lustrous eyes, so clear that they were almost pitiless in the glow of undimmed truth.

"Can you not trust me?" with the gentle reproachfulness so winning to most women, so confident of a victory over a heart that loves.

"I could trust you to care for no other woman when your word was passed, but it seems to me," and her heart swelled with something like contempt, "that you are but playing at love. Marriage in your estimation is a fit and proper step: your mother likes me, you prefer me to any one else" —

"Good heavens, Sylvie! what more do you want?" and a flood of scarlet mounted his calm, handsome brow. "When a man chooses a woman out of the whole circle of his friends and acquaintances, what higher compliment can he pay her? I have seen women beside those in Yerbury; and, though it may savor of vanity, I believe there *are* those who would appreciate" —

"I wonder you did not go to them;" with a fine irony, cutting short his sentence.

"Because I liked you, chose you."

"I do not so desire to be chosen," she answered quickly. "The man I marry must win my respect, my highest faith; must have an aim, an ambition, and not dawdle through life as some silly woman might."

The decisive voice seemed to cut a path between him and her as it went. It struck home uncomfortably.

"Then I suppose you call all men not engaged in manual labor, dawdlers, — scholars, poets, men of leisure, who can devote their lives to work that requires patience and fineness of detail, rather than the heavy swing of a blacksmith's hammer. When a man has no need of work" — and Fred paused, a trifle out of temper.

"I do not believe God ever made an idler," she said, with high gravity that widened the gulf between them. "To whom much is given, much will be required."

How unreasonable she was! He hated women who flung texts or proverbs at you; and yet he did not hate her. She had a girl's flighty notions, born of crude contact with inferior minds, and perhaps over-much novel-reading.

"I do not exactly understand what a man must do to win your love," he said in one of those calm, intensely irritating tones. "I have chosen what suited me best, — culture, refinement, and the education that fits me for the sphere in which I am likely to move all my days," impressively. "It is true, much of the wisdom of the world is little to my taste. I do not know why a man should wade through a slough of evil for the sake of repenting afterward, for looking white in contrast to that foul blackness. The ninety and nine just ones seem to me the better example."

"I am afraid I shall not be able to make you understand," she went on, with a little hesitation. "Perhaps I have not the power or patience to shape a man's soul to a noble purpose or ambition. I want him strong and earnest, full of energy and that high sense of duty to all around him, not satisfied to drift down the stream in frivolous content, but to make the way better for his having gone over it. I want him true as steel to his friends, generous, yet uncompromising to his foes, to all evil; the kind of man who, if crushed down by fate to-day, could see some ray above his head to-morrow, who has sufficient moral fibre not to be rigidly bound by class feelings and narrow prejudices."

Sylvie paused, startled at herself. She had never framed her hero in words before, and that she should do it for this man!

"These are the heroes of our youth, Miss Sylvie, and you are very young," in that insufferably patronizing tone.

"I am old enough to know what I want," she retorted, all the fiery blood in her pulses leaping to the charge. "I think, too, I can discern between the true worker, and him who is content with the frivolous outside show."

"Perhaps not. You have been advising me, now allow me a like privilege. Do not imagine me actuated by jealousy, — that vice of the Moor is not in my nature. I have seen with some surprise that your fancies were for those beneath you in the social scale. A woman always loses in this dangerous experiment. She seldom raises her commonplace hero to a level with the gods, and is much more likely to be dragged down."

She turned suddenly, her face flaming scarlet. The indignation misled him. He took it as a sign of personal anger, and wondered if she could, if she *dared*, throw him over for that coarse, stupid, blundering fellow.

"Yes," he continued, glad to stab her in a vulnerable point; "you certainly have made a mistake, if you think this soul an aspiring one. A boy who excels in brute strength and force merely, a man who makes a deliberate choice between the nobler results of education and the common purposes of rude daily labor, will hardly rank with a knight of Arthur's time, even if some self-deceived woman chooses to lavish her affection upon him."

"If you mean Mr. Darcy" – And she stood quite still, tremulous with passion.

"I mean Mr. Darcy." She had not shown such delicate consideration for his feelings that he should hesitate. "I do not see how you, with your artistic tastes and refinement, can find companionship in such a nature. I understand it very thoroughly. Beware, for you cannot plead even daffodil blindness, my fair Persephone."

Sylvie Barry could have struck the man beside her. All the passion of her nature surged up in contempt, great waves of white heat. If a look could have annihilated, hers might. Even in the shady gloom, he saw the flashing eye and quivering lip of scorn.

"Do not distress yourself about me," she answered, with suave bitterness. "Jack Darcy may be a mill-hand; but he has the honor, the white soul, of a gentleman! And you – you dare to trample on what was once a friendship!"

"I believe he was once my admiration because he used to show fight so easily. He was for marching West then, and doing some grand thing; but you see his hero days are gone by. Ten years from this he may be a demagogue, a rank socialist, whining about equality. Still, if I must congratulate you" —

She made a haughty gesture, and her first impulse was to let it go; but her truthful nature could not brook the implied deception.

"You may congratulate me upon the friendship alone," with a clear, sharp emphasis.

His shattered self-confidence returned suddenly, shaped to arrogance. If she was not entangled with Jack Darcy, there certainly was no one else.

"Sylvie," he began loftily, "this has been child's play, and I am heartily ashamed of my share of it. Let us go back, and forget it. You have had your tilt at windmills; so suppose we return to common sense. You are still heart-free, it seems; and I beg pardon for repeating foolish gossip. Your aunt has accepted me as your suitor; my mother is waiting to receive you as a daughter; and I think," with some pride in his tone, "that few men can offer you a cleaner hand, or a better record. You will have a life of ease and leisure, and – Why, Sylvie, you can teach *me*, – you can help me up these glowing heights."

"I have answered you!"

She seemed to grow tall and regal as she stood there by the gate, the long, arrowy ray of lamp-light from within illumining her proud, cold face, that could flush with such bewildering warmth. He discerned in some dim way that she had access to a life far above his; an atmosphere like hoar-frost surrounded her, raying off fine points, that thrust him farther away into darkness and coldness. Had something been taken out of his life?

The man's well-nigh imperturbable complacency had received a shock.

"Good-night," in a softer tone. One cannot break a pleasant friendship without a pang.

As one in a dream he heard the gate close, the soft footfall on the brick walk, and a waft of voices from within. Then it occurred to him that he, Frederic De Woolfe Lawrence, had been rejected by this little girl upon whose head he had meant to shower the blessing of marital protection, the regard of a soul that was not quite indifferent, after all. What was this dull pang somewhere in his symmetrical, well-kept body? Was it the night that made his pulses heavy and turgid?

Then he turned. "By Jove!" he muttered, "there's not another girl in the country that could have kept her fingers out of the governor's money-bags! Poor mother! What a disappointment for her! Of course Sylvie will marry Jack Darcy, – Pluto and Persephone again."

Then he softly whistled a stave of opera-music, and sauntered about leisurely. He had no fancy for facing his mother that night.

As for Sylvie, she knew her face was very white when she entered the door; but she bustled about with womanly evasion, and began to ask if her aunt had been lonesome, if any one had called, and declared she was tired from walking home, and her head ached a little, which was true; and presently the two women barred their doors, and went to bed.

Was she glad to have it over? Was she sorry she had left no loop-hole for future hope? Strange to say, she could not tell.

"But I could never live, like a pauper, on some other person's money!" she thought decisively. "And he did not care. It was for his mother's sake chiefly."

Again there was a breach between the Montagues and the Capulets, this time crossed by no lovers' hands. Mrs. Lawrence was highly indignant, Miss Barry vexed and sore disappointed. They went the even tenor of their way, however, while the poor self-made invalid at Hope Terrace grew more querulous and exacting. Fred took a week at Saratoga to restore his wounded vanity, and then settled himself at a hotel in New York, wondering if he had not better read a little law to pass away the winter. Mrs. Minor was a queen of fashion, and she was glad to have the attendance of her handsome brother. Irene and Mrs. Eastman flitted about like gay butterflies, with trains of admirers. The faint mutterings in the financial world made little difference to them. It was their province to spend, to enjoy; and what the strata beneath them did or suffered or hoped, was of no more account than the far-off ocean-froth beating up on the hard white sand, – picturesque in a drama or a story.

CHAPTER VII

It was a dull, gray day, the first of December. Autumn had set in early this year. There had been a week of cold rain that had quite destroyed the magnificent foliage, one of Yerbury's greatest charms; and it became a sodden mass, trodden under foot by pedestrians. The ground was baked by sharp frosts at night, making the unpaved streets a mass of ruts early and late, and quagmires in the middle of the day.

Yerbury had changed much from the pretty, clean, thriving country-town, to something that aped a grand city; unfinished streets, small farms laid waste, rows of pretentious houses or florid cottages that had never been thoroughly completed, nearly every one adorned with the ominous placard, "For Sale." They needed painting and tidying: vines were left about, dahlia-stalks hung to poles, steps were awry, and gates swinging on one hinge; heaps of ashes and garbage lay here and there.

This day Yerbury wore a particularly listless air. The leafless trees hung out long and drooping arms, that swayed to and fro in the biting wind. The sullen sky overhead added its tone of dreariness to the picture. There was no cheerful whirl of factories and shops, no brisk steps of men going to and fro, though there were enough standing around in groups with scowling faces and compressed lips, or flushed with angry gesticulation.

The only places that evinced any air of business were the beer-shops. Here a man harangued his fellows; there he did not deign to argue, but openly cursed. "Let's treat on that!" said one. "I'll stand to that sentiment," declared another. Sometimes voices rose so high that a proprietor was forced to command order.

Yerbury was on a strike. There had been a new scale of prices with the opening of autumn, submitted to by most of the men with a sympathetic good-nature. Trade was getting dull. Fancy prices no longer ruled. An ominous feeling pervaded all classes. Building fell off. One tenant gave up his house, and took part with another. Housewives looked about for the cheapest market, and talked of making last year's coat or cloak do for the winter.

Hope Mills had been among the first to propose this second reduction. David Lawrence had returned from his business tour much depressed. There was an undercurrent of distrust, a disinclination to lay in stock, a wordless questioning from eye to eye, with no hopeful response.

Horace Eastman had worked himself into the charge of the inside business. He had no real interest, but a liberal salary; and Mr. Lawrence felt that he lifted a weight of care from his shoulders. If only Fred – But with college training and elegant tastes he could hardly be expected to take to the dull routine of business cares. So matters had been left more and more to Eastman, who was shrewd and sharp, who always managed to get the most for his money.

Now Mr. Lawrence was appalled by the amount of stock on hand. They had been running the mills at full capacity all summer.

"We must offer goods at a lower figure," said Mr. Eastman promptly. "We must get command of trade again. Prices *will* come down, – that is a foregone conclusion. The abundant harvests have glutted the market, and living will be cheaper. The laborer can live on less; and, if we can manufacture at less cost, we shall be all right again."

"But there seems no demand for goods," said Mr. Lawrence faintly. "Store-shelves are full. People are carrying last year's stock with no call for it. It has always seemed to me, Eastman, that a liberal policy to workmen brought its own reward. They are large consumers. Cut them down to mere food and shelter, and clothes are the first to go. In decent times your workman is ashamed of a ragged coat."

"All very true, Mr. Lawrence; but, if there is no market, we must create one. Sell cheaper stock to new men. That will make a demand at once."

"Undersell! We used to call that a cut-throat business, Mr. Eastman;" and a flush stained the fine face, now rather worn and thin.

"It is what we must come to. There is next to no premium on gold, and the first man who touches bottom will be the lucky one, to my thinking. Cheap goods, cheap every thing, will be the next cry. The farmers must dispose of their wool, and labor must come down. Why, ordinary workmen have been living like princes."

The delicate brows were drawn thoughtfully.

"I always hated to grind workmen down to a bare subsistence," spoke the honest, loyal gentleman, as God made him. Trade had not warped body and soul. He was an aristocrat, if you please, and his home was as sacred to refinement and elegance as a ducal palace. A common person would have stood in his hall until his errand was done, and he would never even have asked a workman to take a seat in his office; but his soul was honorable, if haughty.

"Let me manage it," with a confident nod. "We'll keep the topmost wave, as you will see."

So to New York Horace Eastman went, and arranged for a large auction-sale of goods, which was a remarkable success, and created quite a ripple in the sea of stagnation. Then he contracted to deliver another lot by the first of January, at certain prices. And now either manufacturer must give up profits, or workman yield his margin, and be contented with daily bread alone.

"There really was no need of workmen owning houses, having Brussels carpets and pianos," argued Eastman. "They were in some degree answerable for the hard times. Every one wanted to out-do his neighbor. They were not content to live as their fathers had lived; and, where the mothers wore print dresses, the daughters must have silk. They had gone on altogether too fast."

Yet only a few years ago workingmen had been urged to put their money into homes. Rows of houses had been built for them, and sold on such ridiculously easy terms, only a trifle down. The interest would not be as much as rent. Then the fascinating shopkeeper had flaunted his wares in the faces of the thrifty housewives. "A good article is cheapest in the end. This Brussels will outwear two ingrain carpets, at a very little advance on the first cost. No moths will trouble it, once down it is there for years, saving worry and hard work;" and the buyer was persuaded. Then there must be new furniture, and so on to the end. Was it altogether their fault? The old things were passing away. The world was awaking from its Rip-Van-Winkle nap. There was to be a wider outlook, a liberal cultivation, a general rising of every one.

So there had been years of plenty, and men had pulled down the old storehouses to build new ones.

Such people as the Eastmans and the Lawrences could not economize at a moment's warning. The screws must be put on elsewhere.

At first the workmen looked at each other in blank dismay. Winter was coming on – a hard one it bid fair to be. Coal had risen, and in spite of the abundant harvest the absolute staples of life had not much decreased by the time they reached the consumer. Coffees were high: pease, beans, and chiccory were sold at a reduction, to be sure, and you could get lumpy heavy flour that spoiled your bread, and poor butter, and teas that were colored and doctored; and this was cheap living.

There was a stormy wrangle. Meetings were held, and speakers figured out the actual cost of living. Less than the present rates meant loss, privation, and want in the end. So a strike was determined upon.

Jack Darcy, being foreman of one department, stood, as it were, between the upper and nether millstone, at present just escaping both. He thought it hard that the men should have this second reduction so soon, and it did seem to him reasonable that profits ought to yield a little, that there ought to be a sympathy between them. Personally, he should be comfortable enough; but if he had a wife and three or four children, a helpless, bedridden mother, or a drunken father, or a do-nothing brother, hanging upon him, what then?

He advised a little moderation and patience. It might be better to take the wages now, and wait until spring —

"They doant give up any thing, as we sees," broke in an elderly English weaver. "The great house is full of every thing, and coal eno' burning in the greenhouses to ripen a few bunches of grapes out of God's own season, as would keep many of us warm. Who puts our coal down a dollar in the ton, or takes it off of house-rent when wages come down? I'll work as cheap as the next one if ye'll gi' me a cheap house to live in and cheap beef and bread. I doant care for money in the savin's bank, or a house that they tax all out o' sight. When I'm old I'll go to the poorhouse, I will; but I'm danged if I like starvin' before then, and they a-ridin' over us in their carriages. I left 'em over yonder" — with a nod of the head — "for that."

"What do you think of it?" asked a thin, hungry-looking man, fingering his Cardigan nervously. "See here! If I could have one more prosperous year, I'd be through the woods, have the house I've worked so hard for settled upon my old woman, and would be out of the reach of misfortune. But this thing hits me hard, it does."

"I don't believe striking will succeed just now," said Jack candidly. "And it's a bad time. Two or three weeks lost time will more than cover the odds in wages."

"I don't want to lose time. I'd rather keep straight on."

"It's the principle of the thing," broke in another. "I'd lose six months before I'd give in an inch. I'd have struck the other time."

There was a call for the overseers, and Jack left the group. Eastman was talking to several of the men in his office. A fine, portly figure he had, indicating rich living and good wines; a man still on the sunny side of forty, stout, rather florid, a full dark beard and hair, but with eyes that were light and furtive; eyes that could stare you out of countenance, and yet not meet yours ordinarily, with a frank, outward look. He always went handsomely dressed, and wore diamond shirt-studs, an expensive seal-ring, a substantial watch-chain with two or three costly charms. He had not a flashy look, but the sign and seal of gentlemanliness was wanting in that intensely selfish face.

He had heard of the disaffection. There was not much to say except that the new scale of prices would go into effect next Monday morning. He never asked a man to work for any less wages than he, the workman, considered his services worth. Here was the work, and the wages Hope Mills could afford to pay. They could take it, or leave it. There were plenty of men at Coldbridge, thrown out by the failure of Kendrick & Co., who would be glad to come. He could fill any vacant place.

But the ball grew and grew by handling. There were union-meetings and violent harangues, much of them truth, too, but badly and unwisely used. And the result was that the men demanded the old wages, were peremptorily refused, and struck. The great engine subsided, and a Sunday stillness reigned. Down at Hull's Iron Works the same proceedings were going on, but the saloons seemed to profit by it.

Jack hung around the mill for a while, then went down stairs. The chilliness in the air made him draw his coat together by one button, and slip his hands into his pockets. He sauntered through several streets, nodding to one and another, or exchanging a few words. Once again his advice was asked.

"I think you had better come to work to-morrow," he said. "Don't muddle your brains with beer or bad whiskey: that will not make the way any clearer."

"A good enough lad!" was the surly comment, "but why grudge a man a sup of beer when he can't have wine like the big folks?"

Jack had hardly planned for the enforced idleness. He did not want to go home and read, he could not call on Sylvie thus early in the morning, neither did he feel in the humor for argument with any of the men. So he stopped at the door of a small office, and turned the knob rather hesitatingly.

"Hillo, Darcy, is that you? Come in, come in! Sullen gray day, isn't it? Off on a strike, eh?"

Jack laughed, — the sound with no real music in it, the sort of lip-service merely.

"Come in, old fellow; don't be afraid. I've neither pistol nor bludgeon, and I'll promise to treat you civilly."

The man's accents were clear and curt, with a certain ring of out-door freshness, – a capital voice to travel with up mountain-sides and through forests. The face, too, indicated a kind of joyous strength; for the blue eyes were merry and baffling, the laughing lips a brilliant scarlet, the nose neither Grecian nor aquiline, but slightly *retroussé*; a bronze moustache with long curling ends that were undeniably red, and hair a little darker, slightly curling as well. A broad-shouldered man with the deep breathing of intense vitality; healthy nerves that could enjoy laziness to the full, as well as a brisk walk across the country.

A glance at the interior showed the place to be a doctor's office. On one side a long case with glass doors above and drawers underneath, filled with bottles and books and papers, perhaps in not the most systematic order; at the farther end a fire in an open-front stove; a luxurious Turkish lounge covered with russet leather, and a bright wool blanket thrown carelessly over it; several capacious armchairs; and in one, with his legs stretched out on another, sat Dr. Philip Maverick, eight and twenty or thirty years old, perhaps.

"How nice and cosey you are! I really did not know what to do with myself. Yes, we are all on a strike, I am sorry to say."

"Bad time," and Maverick shook his head. "What's the prospect? Have a cigar."

"The prospect is that the weakest goes to the wall, of course," answered Jack. "Maverick, I am dreadfully muddled on this point. I have thought of it all the week. It *is* hard on the men. I know the general advice is to economize more closely, but how can you do it just at the beginning of winter? One cannot move to a cheaper tenement, fire and lights cost more, and provision is a little dearer. Low living in winter does not conduce to a healthy state in the spring. Then, on the other hand, if they are going to make such sales as they did last month, they cannot pay the wages, and realize what they consider a fair profit. But why shouldn't the Lawrences and the Eastmans and many others give up something, as well?"

Jack turned an anxious face to his listener.

"All you manufacturers have been crazy the last few years," he said, delicately shaking the ashes from his cigar. "The country was such an extensive purchaser through the war, that your dreams became Utopian. Then everybody came home with some money and no clothes, and the people were large consumers. Now everybody has been clothed, and the stores are full, and here is a glutted market. Over-production, my dear fellow."

"Then I do believe it would be better to leave off for a while. Still that would not suit as well. Half a loaf is better than no bread, to a hungry man. But, after all," said Jack, knitting his brows, "I don't altogether believe in the cry of over-production. The boys of war times are men now. They are pushing in everywhere for work. They want food, shelter, raiment. There are a great many more people in this town than there were five years ago. Even if we only depended on the natural increase of population" —

"But, you see, people are forever crowding into cities," interposed Dr. Maverick.

"I have a fancy they do not come much faster than they are called," returned Jack dryly. "See what we have been doing around here. The small outlying farms have been bought up by speculators, cut up, destroyed for farming purposes. Their owners with families of children had to go somewhere. 'Come to the mills and factories,' was shouted in their ears, and they came. Now they are here, depending on their labor for bread, and Eastman will bring fifty or a hundred more from Coldbridge; and in the spring, if there is any difficulty, some more will come. The old ones cannot go back to their farms if they would. Their fertile gardens lie cut up into waste squares, their fruit-trees have been despoiled: they must starve here, or tramp to some other crowded town, and perhaps starve there. Will your farmer take in half a dozen hands at a moment's notice? Can they put themselves down in any country place, and go to work?"

Maverick studied Jack intently, and then gave a low whistle.

"Upon my word, Darcy, you *have* been going over the subject. Take the stump. And of course you go against capital?"

"No, I don't," returned Jack shortly. "Only it does seem to me that there ought to be some place where capital and labor could strike hands. It appears to me, both have been to blame. We cannot condemn men for crowding into cities, when there has been a steady call for them. We do blame them for not laying up a little money against a rainy day; but many of them have. Look at the cottages that have been sold to workingmen. Look at the bank savings. To-day, perhaps, as many poor men could pay their whole indebtedness, according to the ratio, as the rich. But we fly at the laboring classes, when it is only human nature cropping out. Your millionaire puts his money into whatever he thinks will bring him the greatest return; your poor man puts his capital, his capacity, health, and strength, where it will earn him the most money."

"Well, I don't see but they are both right enough," said Maverick. "And unless you are running over into communistic ideas" —

"I am not," was the decisive reply. "Some one much wiser than I said, ages ago, 'He among you that will not work, let him not eat:' yet," with a humorous laugh, "if the rule were strictly enforced, there would more than one go hungry, I'm thinking. The great consolation would be that the right man would suffer, not the innocent and guiltless."

"I really do not see what you are driving at, Darcy," and the other studied him curiously.

"Well, I told you in the beginning I was muddled. I don't pretend to see my way clear, only I think we have just begun the fight. It is as much of an irrepressible conflict as that other, for which so many brave men gave their lives. And one point in it no one seems to take note of. We are proud of the increase of population in our country. Every city, town, and hamlet boasts of it, and the depopulated places run to slow decay. We welcome these people; and yet they must eat to live, and the majority of them must work, or they will have nothing to eat. I think the most of them labor cheerfully, and my experience is that idleness is the worst foe of man. But, on the other hand, every year invention so protects and fortifies capital, that one must do a larger business or employ fewer men. In five years the condition of labor has greatly changed at Hope Mills, and in five years more it will change again. This is the inexorable law of nature, or, I ought to say, growing intelligence."

"Then I should say we wanted wider markets and a better classification of labor."

A quick light came into Jack's eyes.

"I think you have hit it, Maverick," he answered. "But what is everybody's business is nobody's; and we are so apt to forget that the world does move, and the condition of things changes all the time," and Jack's eyes dropped thoughtfully.

"See here, Darcy, take Brock's Hall, and talk to the men to-morrow night," began the doctor eagerly. "They will listen to you because to a certain extent you are in sympathy with them, one of their number; and you do seem to have some clear ideas on the subject. No: we'll say Wednesday night, and I will get out some posters."

Jack laughed. "What shall I tell them? I can't see how to get about the remedy clearly myself. The trade-unions have not hit it either. When they say to a man, 'Because I will not work for a certain sum, you shall not,' they lean on a reed that will surely break, and pierce themselves. Hunger is stronger than theory. No: I shall have to give the point a more thorough study before I become a blatant apostle."

Philip Maverick blew out a curling whiff of smoke, and looked at his visitor through it. Darcy gave him a curious feeling, as if a good deal of excellent material were running to waste, that if shaped and trained, and brought up to higher purposes, might be of much good service to the world. Did he realize it himself? He was twenty-four, and had a good position as things went; and Dr. Maverick had heard the women of the house were prudent and thrifty, and had a nice home. Was Darcy bounded

in by conservatism, or afraid of losing? or was he honest when he said he did not know just what to do? Yet he did not look like the kind of man to go plodding all his days.

"Darcy, you puzzle me!" he began abruptly. "With that great body of yours, those strong arms and hands that look as if they could wrest Nature's secrets from her mighty soul, with that brow, and the resolute mouth, it seems as if you ought to be in better business than making cloth: pardon me. You don't use up half your energy. You ought to be planning a ship-canal across Darien, or tunnelling mountains. You're the square man; and how upon earth did you ever get fitted so smoothly to a round hole?"

Jack laughed, and told his story very simply. To him there was neither romance nor heroism in it, just a plain every-day sort of compulsion. The tunnelling would have been much more to his mind.

"Go on with the problem," said Dr. Maverick abruptly. "In the next five years I think we will all have use for our wits. We are going to see another change in matters, that will require more wisdom than is needed in mere money-making. See here, I'm interested in the thing. Let us go out, and hear what the men say about it."

Maverick rose, and put on his great-coat, and lighted another cigar. Then the two started together.

Maverick had been in the town just six months. He had studied medicine in Philadelphia and Paris, taken a three-years ramble over Europe, when a college friend begged him to come to Yerbury, and step into a vacant place. And he had what he fancied an excellent reason for it.

CHAPTER VIII

The men were, for the most part, in sullen earnest. From their narrower outlook they could not see that capital was on the eve of a great revulsion; that credit had been stretched to its utmost. They had their own pet plans, their own indolences and careless habits; and, as was natural, their own desires were the sweetest to them.

There were labor-meetings and harangues. There was a good deal of talk about the rights of labor and the tyranny of capital; of the rich mill and factory owners living in palaces, and the men in hovels; of what England had done, and of what we surely were coming to, – the rich growing richer, and the poor poorer. But Jack remarked that of the speakers there was not one who owned a little plot of ground, or had a bank-account. Two of them were disaffected English weavers, a third an Irishman, and the only Yerbury man was a quick-tongued, but shiftless fellow who had started in business for himself, and failed; a kind of handy Jack-at-all-trades, and correspondingly good for nothing.

Before the close of the week the men in Watkins's shoe-shop had struck. There was quite an army of them now. The saloons were filled daily and nightly. Jack thought, with a little grimness, that they might better save their money for next week's bread.

Several of the men in his room dropped in to see what he thought; and the result was, that on the following Monday morning ten of them presented themselves with a tolerably cheerful demeanor, and accepted the situation. By Tuesday night every vacant place was filled with hungry, haggard-looking men from Coldbridge. They were jeered at, and annoyed in various ways: the Yerbury men were called rats and turncoats and cowards. The mills were driven. There was another great and successful sale; in fact, amid the failures and difficulties about, Hope Mills loomed up like a star of the first magnitude.

In the spring Mrs. Eastman and Miss Lawrence went to Europe; and Fred joined a party of young men on a pleasure-tour through California. Even Mrs. Lawrence was persuaded to try Saratoga in the summer. The great house was muffled, and left in the charge of servants; but greenhouses, graperies, and all the elegant adjuncts were cared for as assiduously as ever. David Lawrence used to think it over. Sometimes he was tempted to sell out his palatial residence, but who was there to buy? Other men had been caught with just such elephants on their hands. The papers were full of offers "at an immense sacrifice."

Business grew duller and duller. There was a very great overplus of every thing, it seemed, in the world. Harvests were so abundant, and prices so low, they were not worth the moving. Fruit lay and rotted on the ground: you could get nothing for it. And yet there were wan-eyed and hungry women and children who would have feasted regally on this waste. Mothers of families turned and patched and darned, and said there could be no new garments this winter, while store-shelves groaned under the accumulation of goods. Men were failing on this side and that; the Alton & West Line Railway stock came down with a crash, and banks were shaky. Hope Mills were closed for a month to make some repairs, as business was rather slow just now.

There was a great quaking in real estate as well. The large property-owners held on stiffly: times would improve; land was worth more to-day than ever, because every year there were more people, and they required more houses, and the thing would somehow right itself.

Jack had taken his two feminines off to a great roomy farmhouse, where they had a horse at their command. Sylvie and Miss Barry were summering at the White Mountains. Dr. Maverick found a good deal of sickness among the poorer classes, low fevers and various troubles, that he knew well enough came from insufficient diet. But what was to be done? There was so little work, so much lost time, the inexorable rent, and the importunate grocer's bill. Up on Hope Terrace the luscious grapes fell to the ground, and were swept up as so much litter; the fresh, lovely vegetables passed their prime unheeded, and were tossed in the garbage-pit.

September came in hot and sultry. Hope Mills started, but many another place did not open. There was a strange, deathly-quiet undercurrent, like the awful calm before a thunder-shower. Wages took another tumble, and now no one had the courage to make much of a fight.

The second week in October there came an appalling crash. Yerbury Bank closed its doors one morning, – the old bank that had weathered many a gale; that was considered as safe and stanch as the rock of Gibraltar itself; that held in trust the savings of widows and orphans, the balance of smaller business-men who would be ruined: indeed, it would almost ruin Yerbury itself.

There was the greatest consternation. People flew up the street, bank-book in hand; but the dumb doors seemed only to give back a pitiless glance to entreaties. What was it? What had happened? "Every penny I had in the world was in it," groaned one; and the saddening refrain was repeated over and over, sometimes with tears, at others with curses.

The old officers of Yerbury Bank had been men of the highest integrity. Some were dead; some had been pushed aside by the new, fast men who laughed at past methods, as if honor, honesty, and truth were virtues easily outgrown. Among these were the Eastmans. George was considered shrewd and far-sighted, and for two years had been one of the directors, as well as Horace. They paid the highest rate of interest, which attracted small savings from all around. There had been no whisper or fear about it, so solid was its olden reputation. There were people who would as soon have doubted the Bible.

Two days after this, George Eastman sailed for Europe, on a sudden summons, – his wife's illness. There had been a meeting called, and a short statement made. Owing to sudden and unexpected depreciation in railway-bonds and improvement-bonds, and what not, it was deemed best to suspend payment for the present. In a few weeks all would be straight again, with perhaps a trifling loss to depositors. Already the directors had been very magnanimous. Mr. Eastman and several others had turned over to the bank a large stock of mortgages: in fact, the virtue of these men was so lauded that the losses seemed to be quite thrown into the background.

But the examination revealed a sickening mass of selfishness and cupidity; transactions that were culpably careless, others dishonorable to the last degree. If the larger depositors had not been warned, there was certainly a remarkable unanimity of thought, as, for the past fortnight, they had been steadily drawing out their thousands. Wild railroad-speculations, immense mortgages on real estate that now lay flat and dead: scanty available assets that would hardly pay twenty cents on a dollar.

This was what David Lawrence heard when he returned from St. Louis, a heavy-hearted, dispirited man. Two recent failures had borne heavily upon him. If last winter had been dull, there was no adjective to apply to this. His first step was to mortgage Hope Terrace. He had deeded it to his wife, unincumbered; but now it appeared his only chance of salvation. Mrs. Lawrence made a feeble protest at first, and demanded that Fred should be sent for, but there was no time. He met his pressing notes, and was tided over; but, oh! what was to be the end of it all?

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