Warner Susan

# The House in Town

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**Warner S.**

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# Содержание

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## CHAPTER I

"Oh Norton! Oh Norton! do you know what has happened?"

Matilda had left the study and rushed out into the dining-room to tell her news, if indeed it were news to Norton. She had heard his step. Norton seemed in a preoccupied state of mind.

"Yes!" he said. "I know that confounded shoemaker has left something in the heel of my boot which is killing me."

Matilda was not like some children. She could wait; and she waited, while Norton pulled off his boot, made examinations into the interior, and went stoutly to work with penknife and file. In the midst of it he looked up, and asked, —

"What has happened to *you*, Pink?"

"Then don't you know yet, Norton?"

"Of course not. I would fine all shoemakers who leave their work in such a slovenly state! If I didn't limp all the way from the bridge here, it was because I wouldn't, – not because I wouldn't like to."

"Why not limp, if it saved your foot?" inquired Matilda.

"*You* would, Pink, wouldn't you?"

"Why, yes; certainly I would."

"Well, you might," said Norton. "But did you ever read the story of the Spartan boy and the fox?"

"No."

"He stole a fox," said Norton, working away at the inside of his boot, which gave him some trouble.

"But you haven't stolen a fox."

"I should think not," said Norton. "The boy carried the fox home under his cloak; and it was not a tame fox, Pink, by any means, and did not like being .carried, I suppose; and it cut and bit and tore at the boy all the while, under his cloak; so that by the time he got the fox home, it had made an end of him."

"Why didn't he let the fox go?"

"Ah! why didn't he?" said Norton. "He was a boy, and he would have been ashamed."

"And you would have been ashamed to limp in the street, Norton?"

"For a nail in my boot. What is a man good for, that can't stand anything?"

"I should not have been ashamed at all."

"You're a girl," said Norton approvingly. "It is a different thing. What is your news, Pink?"

"But Norton, I don't see why it is a different thing. Why should not a woman be as brave as a man, and as strong, – in one way?"

"I suppose, because she is not as strong in the other way. She hasn't got it to do, Pink, that's all. But a man, or a boy, that can't bear anything without limping, is a muff; that's the whole of it."

"A muff's a nice thing," said Matilda laughing.

"Not if it's a boy," said Norton. "Go on with your news, Pink. What is it?"

"I wonder if you know. Oh Norton, do you know what your mother and Mr. Richmond have been talking about?"

"I wasn't there," said Norton. "If you were, you may tell me."

"I was not there. But Mr. Richmond has been talking to me about it. Norton," – and Matilda's voice sank, – "do you know, they have been arranging, and your mother wishes it, that I should *stay* with her?"

Matilda spoke the last words very softly, in the manner of one who makes a communication of somewhat awful character; and in truth it had a kind of awe for her. Evidently not for Norton. He had almost finished his boot, and he kept on with his filing, as coolly as if what Matilda said had no particular interest or novelty. She would have been disappointed, but that she had caught one gleam from Norton's eye which flashed like an electric spark. She just caught it, and then Norton went on calmly, —

"I think that is a very sensible arrangement, Pink. I must say, it is not the first time it has occurred to me."

"Then you knew it before?"

"I did not know they had settled it," said Norton, still coolly.

"But you knew it was talked about? O Norton! why didn't you tell me?"

Norton looked up, smiled, dropped his boot, and at once took his new little sister in his arms and clasped her right heartily.

"What for should I tell you, Pink?" he said, kissing Matilda's eyes, where the tears of that incipient disappointment had gathered.

"How could you *help* telling me?"

"Ah, that is another thing," said Norton. "You couldn't have helped it, could you?"

"But it is true now, Norton."

"Ay, it is true; and you belong to mamma and me now, Pink; and to nobody else in the wide world. Isn't that jolly?"

"And to Mr. Richmond," Matilda added.

"Not a bit to Mr. Richmond; not a fraction," said Norton. "He may be your guardian and your minister if you like; and I like him too; he's a brick; but you belong to nobody in the whole world but mamma and me."

"Well, Norton," said Matilda, with a sigh of pleasure – "I'm glad."

"Glad!" said Norton. "Now come, – let us sit right down and see some of the things we'll do."

"Yes. But no, Norton; I must get Mr. Richmond's supper. I shall not have many times more to do that; Miss Redwood will be soon home, you know."

"And we too, I hope. I declare, Pink, I believe you like getting supper. Here goes! What is to do?"

"Nothing, for you, Norton."

"Kettle on?"

"On ages ago. You may see if it is boiling."

"How can an iron kettle boil? If you'll tell me that."

"Why, the water boils that is in it. The kettle is put for the water."

"And what right have you to put the kettle for the water? At that rate, one might do all sorts of things – Now Pink, how can I tell if the water boils? The steam is coming out of the nose."

"*That's* no sign, Norton. Does it sing?"

"Sing!" said Norton. "I never learned kettle music. No, I don't think it does. It bubbles; the water in it I mean."

Matilda came in laughing. "No," she said, "it has stopped singing; and now it boils. The steam is coming out from under the cover. *That's* a sign. Now, Norton, if you like, you may make a nice plate of toast, and I'll butter it. Mr. Richmond likes toast, and he is tired to-night, I know."

"I can't make a plate," said Norton; "but I'll try for the toast. Is it good for people that are tired?"

"Anything comfortable is, Norton."

"I wouldn't be a minister!" said Norton softly, as he carefully turned and toasted the bread, – "I would not be a minister, for as much as you could give me."

"Why, Norton? I think I would – if I was a man."

"He has no comfort of his life," said Norton. "This sort of a minister doesn't have. He is always going, going; and running to see people that want him, and stupid people too; he has to talk to them, all the same as if they were clever, and put up with them; and he's always working at his sermons and getting broken off. What comfort of his life does Mr. Richmond have now? except when you and I make toast for him?"

"O Norton, I think he has a great deal."

"I don't see it."

Matilda stood wondering, and then smiled; the comfort of *her* life was so much just then. The slices of toast were getting brown and buttered, and made a savory smell all through the kitchen; and now Matilda made the tea, and the flowery fragrance of that added another item to what seemed the great stock of pleasure that afternoon. As Miss Redwood had once said, the minister knew a cup of good tea when he saw it; and it was one of the few luxuries he ever took pains to secure; and the sweetness of it now in the little parsonage kitchen was something very delicious. Then Matilda went and put her head in at the study door.

"Tea is ready, Mr. Richmond."

But the minister did not immediately obey the summons, and the two children stood behind their respective chairs, waiting. Matilda's face was towards the western windows.

"Are you very miserable, Pink?" said Norton, watching her.

"I am so happy, Norton!"

"I want to get home now," said Norton, drumming upon his chair. "I want you there. You belong to mamma and me, and to nobody else in the whole world, Pink; do you know that?"

Except Mr. Richmond – was again in Matilda's thoughts; but she did not say it this time. It was nothing against Norton's claim.

"Where *is* the minister?" Norton went on. "You called him."

"O he has got some stupid body with him, keeping him from tea."

"That is what I said," Norton repeated. "I wouldn't live such a life – not for money."

Mr. Richmond came however at this moment, looking not at all miserable; glanced at the two happy faces with a bright eye; then for an instant they were still, while the sweet willing words of prayer went up from lips and heart to bless the board.

"What is it that you would not do for money, Norton?" Mr. Richmond asked as he received his cup of tea.

Norton hesitated and coloured. Matilda spoke for him.

"Mr. Richmond, may we ask you something?"

"Certainly!" said the minister, with a quick look at the two faces.

"If you wouldn't think it wrong for us to ask. – Is the – I mean, do you think, – the life of a minister is a very hard one?"

"So that is the question, is it?" said Mr. Richmond smiling. "Is Norton thinking of taking the situation?"

"Norton thinks it cannot be a comfortable life, Mr. Richmond; and I thought he was mistaken."

"What do you suppose a minister's business is, Norton? that is the first consideration. You must know what a man has to do, before you can judge whether it is hard to do it."

"I thought I knew, sir."

"Yes, I suppose so; but it don't follow that you do."

"I know part," said Norton. "A minister has to preach sermons, and marry people, and baptize children, and read prayers at funerals and – "

"Go on," said Mr. Richmond.

"I was going to say, it seems to me, he has to talk to everybody that wants to talk to him."

"How do you get along with that difficulty?" said Mr. Richmond. "It attacks other people besides ministers."

"I dodge them," said Norton. "But a minister cannot, – can he, sir?"

Mr. Richmond laughed.

"Well, Norton," he said, "you have given a somewhat sketchy outline of a minister's life; but my question remains yet, – what is the business of his life. You would not say that planing and sawing are the business of a carpenter's life – would you?"

"No, sir."

"What then?"

"Building houses, and ships, and barns, and bridges."

"And a tailor's life is not cutting and snipping, but making clothes. So my commission is not to make sermons. What is it?"

Norton looked at a loss, and expectant; Matilda enjoying.

"The same that was given to the apostle Paul, and no worse. I am sent to people 'to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified.'"

"But I do not understand, Mr. Richmond," said Norton, after a little pause.

"What?"

"If you will excuse me. I do not understand that. Can you open people's eyes?"

"He who sends me does that, by means of the message which I carry. 'How can they believe on him of whom they have not heard?'"

"I see – " said Norton very respectfully.

"You see, I am the King's messenger. And my business is, to carry the King's message. It is possible to make sermons, and not do that."

"I don't think I ever heard the message, or anything that sounded like a message, in our church," said Norton.

"Do you know what the message is?"

Norton looked up from his toast and seemed a little taken aback.

"You might have heard it without knowing it"

"Might I? What is the message, sir?"

"This is it. That God wants and calls for the love of every human heart; and that on his part he loves us so well, as to give his own Son to die for us, that we might be saved through him."

"Why to *die* for us?" inquired Norton.

"Because we all deserved to die, and he took our place. 'He tasted death for every man.' So for you and for me. What do we owe to one who gave his life to ransom ours?"

"I see," – said Norton again thoughtfully. "But Mr. Richmond, people do not always hear the message – do they?"

"You can tell," said Mr. Richmond, shortly.

"I see!" repeated Norton. "It isn't making sermons. I don't see, though, why it isn't a hard life."

"That requires another explanation, but it is not difficult. How would one naturally feel, Norton, towards another, who by his own suffering and death had saved him when he was bound to die?"

"You mean, who had done it on purpose?" said Norton.

"On purpose. Just because he loved the lost one."

"Why," said Norton, "if the man had any heart in him" —

"Well? What then?"

"Why, he wouldn't think that his *hand* was his own."

"He would belong to his redeemer?"

"Yes, sir."

"So I think, Norton. Then, tell me, do you think it would be hard work to do anything to please or serve such a friend? Would even hardships seem hard?"

"I can't think what *would* seem hard," said Norton eagerly.

But then a silence fell upon the little party. Matilda had opened all her ears to hear Norton speak in this manner; she was excited; she almost thought that he was about to enter into the life he seemed to understand so well; but Mr. Richmond went on with his tea quite composedly, and Norton was a little embarrassed. What was the matter? Matilda wished some one would speak again; but Mr. Richmond sent his cup to be filled, and stirred it, and took another piece of toast, and Norton never raised his eyes from his plate.

"That idea is new to you, my boy?" said Mr. Richmond at last, smiling.

"I never – well, yes; – I do not understand those things," said Norton.

"You understood *this?*"

"Your words; yes, sir."

"And the thing which my words meant?"

"I suppose – yes, I suppose I do," said Norton.

"Do you understand the bearing of it on all of us three at the table."

Norton looked up inquiringly.

"You comprehend how it touches me?"

"Yes, sir," – Norton answered with profound respect in eye and voice.

"And Matilda?"

The boy's eye went quick and sharp to the little figure at the head of the table. What his look meant, Matilda could not tell; and he did not speak.

"You comprehend how it touches Matilda?" Mr. Richmond repeated.

"No, sir," was answered rather stoutly. It had very much the air of not wanting to know.

"You should understand, if you are to live in the same house together. The same Friend has done the same kindness for Matilda that he has done for me; he has given himself to death that she might live; and she has heard it and believed it, and obeyed his voice and become his servant. What sort of life ought she to live?"

Norton stared at Mr. Richmond, not in the least rudely, but like one very much discomfited. He looked as if he were puzzling to find his way out of a trap. But Matilda clapped her hands together, exclaiming,

"I am so glad Norton understands that! I never could make him understand it."

"Why you never tried," said Norton.

"O yes, I did, Norton; in different ways. I suppose I never said it so that you could understand it."

"I don't understand it now," said Norton.

"O Mr. Richmond! don't he?" said Matilda.

"Tell him," said the minister. "Perhaps you put it too cautiously. Tell him in words that he cannot mistake, what sort of life you mean to lead."

The little girl hesitated and looked at Norton. Norton, like one acting under protest, looked at her. They waited, questioning each other's faces.

"It is that, Norton," Matilda said at last very gently, and with a sort of tenderness in tone and manner which spoke for her. "It is just that you said. I do not think that my *hand* is my own."

Norton looked at the little hand unconsciously extended to point her words, as if he would have liked to confiscate it; he made no reply, but turned to his supper again. The conversation had taken a turn he did not welcome.

"We have not done with the subject," Mr. Richmond went on. "You see how it touches me now, and how it touches Matilda. You know by your own shewing, what sort of life she ought to lead; and so you will know how you ought to help her and not hinder her in it. But Norton, – how does it touch you?"

The boy was not ready with an answer. Then he said, —

"I don't see that it touches me any way, sir."

"On honour?" said Mr. Richmond gently. "That same Friend has done the same kindness for you."

Norton looked as if he wished it were not true; and as if very unwilling to admit anything.

"I wish you could hear what I hear," said Mr. Richmond. "So many voices! – "

"What, sir?" asked both the children at once.

"So many voices!" repeated Mr. Richmond. "I hear the voice of love now, from the skies, speaking that soft, sweet 'Come!' in the heart. I hear my own voice giving the message. I hear the promise to them who seek for glory, honour, and immortality. And I hear the sound of the harps of those who have a new song to sing, which none can learn but the hundred and forty and four thousand which have been redeemed from the earth. And I hear the rejoicing in heaven of those who will say, 'Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth.' And then there is a throne and a judgment seat, and I hear a voice that says, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' – "

Mr. Richmond's voice had fallen a little; his eyes were cast down. Norton's eyes were downcast too, and his face; it did not respond, as Matilda's face did; and when the party rose from table a minute or two afterwards, Norton made use of his liberty to quit the room and the house. Matilda brought her tub of water to wash up the cups and plates. Mr. Richmond had gone off to his study.

The little girl touched the china with soft delicate fingers; lifted each piece and set it down with gentle noiselessness; the little clink of the china keeping measure, perhaps, with the thoughts which moved and touched, so gently, in her heart. Presently Mr. Richmond came out again. He walked up and down the little room several times; it was a small walk, for a very few of his steps took him from one corner to the other; then he came and stood beside the table where Matilda was at work. The child stopped and looked up at him wistfully. Their eyes met; and a smile of much love and confidence was exchanged between the two.

"Mr. Richmond," – said Matilda, "isn't it difficult, sometimes, to *keep* hearing those voices?"

You could see the light spring into the young man's eyes; but he answered very quietly, "Why, Matilda?"

"I think it is difficult," the child repeated.

"You find it so?"

"I think, sometimes, Mr. Richmond, I don't hear them at all."

"It is not necessary to be always thinking about them."

"No, I know that; but sometimes I seem to get out of the sound of them."

"How comes that?"

"I don't know. I think it must be because I am hearing other voices so much."

"You are right." Mr. Richmond began his pacing up and down again. Matilda stood with a cup in her hands which she had been washing, the water dripping from her fingers and it into the tub.

"How can I help it, Mr. Richmond?"

Mr. Richmond was thinking perhaps of Fenelon's words: "O how rare is it, to find a soul still enough to hear God speak!" – but he did not quote them to the child. He stood still again.

"Tilly, when one gets out of hearing of those voices, the enemy has a good chance to whisper to us; and he never loses a chance. That was what happened to Eve in the garden of Eden."

"How can I do, Mr. Richmond?"

"I should say, dear, don't get out of hearing of them."

"But, sometimes" – Matilda paused in difficulty. "Sometimes I am thinking of so many other things, and my head gets full; and then I do not know where I am."

Mr. Richmond smiled. "You could not have given a better description of the case," he said. "But Matilda, when you find that you do not know where you are, run away, shut yourself up, and find out. It isn't safe to get out of hearing of the Lord's voice."

"O Mr. Richmond!" said the child. "I want to be where I can hear it all the time."

"There is one way. Don't you know it?"

"No, sir; I don't think I do."

"My dear child, it is very simple. Only obey his voice when you hear it, and it will always be with you. Obedience is the little key that unlocks the whole mystery, – the whole mystery," said Mr. Richmond, beginning to walk up and down again. "When you hear ever so soft a whisper in your heart, saying, '*This* is the way,' follow there; and so the Lord will lead you always."

Mr. Richmond went off to his study, but paused again to say, "Study the twenty third verse of the fourteenth chapter of John, Matilda; and take that for your rule."

Matilda went about softly, putting the china in the pantry, making the table clean, hanging up her towel and putting away her tub. Just as she had finished, Mr. Richmond opened the door. He had his hat and great coat on.

"Tilly, look after my fire, will you?" he said. "I shall be gone some time probably."

# CHAPTER II

Matilda went to the study. It was in winter trim now. The red curtains fell over the windows; a carpet had replaced or covered the summer mat; the lamp was lighted, but burned low; and a fire of nut wood sticks blazed and crackled softly in the chimney. The whole room was sweet with the smell of it. Matilda sat down on the rug in front of the blaze; but she was hardly there when she heard the front door open and Norton come in. So she called him to the study.

"Is the dominie gone out?" said Norton, as he entered Mr. Richmond's sanctum.

"Gone out for a good while, he said. You and I have got to take care of the fire." And Matilda threw herself down on the rug again.

"This is jolly," said Norton.

"Isn't it?" said Matilda. "It is so nice here. And do you smell, Norton, how sweet it is with the hickory wood?"

"That isn't hickory," said Norton. "It's oak."

"Part of it is hickory, Norton, I know. But I suppose oak is sweet."

"I think everything is sweet to you," said Norton.

"I do think it is," said Matilda. "Everything is to-night, I am sure. Everything. Isn't this just as pleasant as it can be?"

"It's jolly," said Norton. "Let's have on another stick. Now we can think and talk what we will do."

"What we will *do*, Norton?" Matilda repeated.

"Yes. We've got no end of things to do. Why, now we can do what we like, Pink. You aren't going away any more; and we can just lay our plans in comfort."

"I didn't know we had any plans to lay," said Matilda. She looked as if the present was good enough. The firelight shone on a little figure and face of most utter contentment, there down on the rug; a soft little head, a very gentle face, but alive with pleasant thoughts.

"We want to get home now," continued Norton.

"But it is pleasant here, too. O Norton!" Matilda broke out suddenly, "you don't know how pleasant! Now I can take the good of it. I did before, in a way; but then I was always thinking it would maybe stop to-morrow. Now it will never stop; I am so glad!"

"What will never stop?"

"O I don't know. It seems to me my happiness will never stop. You don't know anything about it, Norton. To think I am not to go back to that old life again – I was afraid of it every day; and now to-night at tea, and *now*, I am as happy as I can be. I can't think of it enough."

"Of what, Pink?"

"Of that. That I am not to go back to aunt Candy any more."

"What do you think of where you *are* going?" asked Norton a little jealously. But his face cleared the next instant.

"Norton," said Matilda, "I *can't* think of it, – not yet. It is too good to think of all at once. I have to take part at a time. If I did think of it, I don't know but it would seem too good to be true."

"Well it isn't," said Norton. "Now Pink, we'll fix those hyacinth and tulip beds all right. You haven't chosen your bulbs yet. And then, when we have planted our bulbs – I hope it is not too late yet, but I declare I don't know! – perhaps we'll leave the winter to take care of them, and we'll go off to New York till spring. How would you like that?"

"I don't care where I go," said Matilda, – "with you and Mrs. Laval."

"You never saw New York, did you?"

"No, never. Is it pleasanter than Briery Bank, Norton?"

"Well, not when the tulips are out, perhaps; but in the cold weather it's jolly enough. It's queer, though."

"Queer?" repeated Matilda curiously.

"I wonder if you wouldn't think so," said Norton. "I don't mean New York, you know; that's all right; but our house."

"I didn't know you had a house in New York," said Matilda.

"No, of course not; how should you? but now it's different. Pink, it is very jolly!" said Norton, quitting his seat in the chimney corner and coming down on the rug beside Matilda. "That's a good fire to roast chestnuts."

"Is it? but we haven't any chestnuts to roast," said Matilda.

"That's another thing you don't know," said Norton. "We've got a lot of chestnuts, – splendid ones, too. I'll fetch 'em, and we'll roast some. It's the very best way."

Norton went off for a basket, which proved to be full of brown, plump chestnuts, large and shining as they should be. Sitting down upon the rug again he began to prepare some for roasting, by cutting a small bit off one corner. Matilda picked up these bits of skin and threw them into the fire as fast as they were cut.

"Never mind," said Norton. "We'll sweep 'em up in a heap at the end, and make one job of it."

"But Mr. Richmond might come in."

"Well, – he has seen chestnuts before," said Norton coolly.

"I don't believe he has seen people cutting and roasting them in his study, though."

"All right. We'll give him some."

"But what are you doing that for, Norton?"

"Did you never roast chestnuts, Pink?"

"No. We never had a fireplace, with wood, I mean, in our house."

"It's a good sort of thing to have in any house," said Norton. "I believe I'll have 'em all through my house."

"Your house?"

"Yes. I shall have a house some day; and then you and mamma will live with me."

Matilda could not see the reason for this inversion of arrangements, and she was silent a little while; studying it, without success.

"But what *are* you cutting these little pieces off for, Norton?"

"Why, they'd fly if I didn't."

"What would fly?"

"Why the chestnuts, Pink! They would fly all over."

"Out of the fire?"

"Yes. Certainly."

"What would make them fly? and how will that hinder it?"

Norton sat back on the rug – he had been bending over to screen his face from the heat of the blaze – and looked at Matilda with very benevolent, laughing eyes.

"Pink, the chestnuts are green."

"Aren't they ripe?" said Matilda. "They look so."

"Yes, yes, they are ripe; but what I mean is, that they are fresh; they are not dry. There is a great deal of water in them."

"Water?" said Matilda.

"Not standing in a pool, you know; but in the juice, or sap, or whatever you call it. Well, you know that fire makes water boil?"

"Yes."

"And when water turns into steam, you know it takes room?"

"Yes, I know," said Matilda.

"Well, that's it. When steam begins to make in the chestnut, the skin won't hold it; and unless I cut a place for it to get out, it will burst the chestnut. And when it bursts, the chestnuts will generally jump."

"Yes, I understand," said Matilda.

"And wherever it jumps to, it will be apt to make a hole in the carpet."

"But, Norton! I should think if the steam made very fast, in a hot place, you know, it might burst the chestnut in spite of the hole you have cut."

"Ay," said Norton. "That does happen occasionally. We'll be on the look-out."

Then he prepared a nice bed of ashes, laid the chestnuts in carefully, and covered them up artistically, first with ashes and then with coals. Matilda watched the process with great interest, and a little wonder what Mr. Richmond would think of it. However, he had said that he was likely to be out for some time, and it was now only half past seven o'clock. The fire burned gently, and the ash-bed of chestnuts looked very promising.

"What was it you said was jolly, when you came and sat down on the rug here, Norton?"

"I don't know."

"You said, 'Pink, it is very jolly!'"

"The fire, I guess. O, I know!" said Norton. "I meant *this*, Pink; that it is very capital we have got you now, and you belong to us, and whatever we do, we shall do together. I was thinking of that, I know, and of the New York house. Hallo!"

For an uneasy chestnut at this instant made a commotion in the bed of ashes; and presently another leaped clean out. But it was not roasted enough, Norton affirmed, and so was put back.

"What about the New York house?" said Matilda then.

"Why, a good many things, you'll find," said Norton; "and people too. You've got to know about it now. It's my grandmother's house, to begin with. Look out! there's another chestnut."

Matilda wondered that she had never heard of this lady before; though she did not say so.

"It is my grandmother's house," Norton repeated, as he recovered the erring chestnut; "and *she* would like that we should be there always; but there is more to be said about it. I have an aunt living there; an aunt that married a Jew; her husband is dead, and now she makes her home with my grandmother; she and her two children, my cousins."

"Then you have cousins!" Matilda repeated.

"Two Jew cousins. Yes."

"Are *they* Jews?"

"*She* isn't, my aunt isn't; but they are. Judith is a real little Jewess, with eyes as black as a dewberry, and as bright; and David – well, *he's* a Jew."

"How old are they?"

"About as old as we are. There's a chestnut, Pink! it went over there."

That chestnut was captured, and kept and eaten; and Matilda said she had never eaten anything so good in the shape of a chestnut.

"Of course you haven't," said Norton. "That one wasn't done, though. We must leave them a little while longer."

"And when you're in the city you all live together?" Matilda went on.

"When we are in the city we all live together. And grandmamma never will leave aunt Judy, and aunt Judy never will come up here; so in the summer we *don't* all live together. And I am glad of it."

Matilda wanted very much to ask why, but she did not. Norton presently went on.

"It is all very well in the winter. But then I am going to school all the while, and there isn't so much time for things. And I like driving here better than in the park."

"What is the park?" Matilda inquired.

"You don't know!" exclaimed Norton. "That's good fun. Promise me, Pink, that you will go with nobody but me the first time. Promise me!"

"Why, whom should I go with, Norton? Who would take me?"

"I don't know. Mamma might, or grandmother might, or aunt Judy. Promise, Pink."

"Well, I will not, if I can help it," said Matilda. "But how funny it is that I should be making you such a promise."

"Ay, isn't it?" said Norton. "There will be a good many such funny things, you'll find."

"But how are these cousins of yours Jews, Norton, when their mother is not a Jew?"

"Jewess," said Norton. "Why, because their father *was*, – a Jew, I mean. He was a Spanish Jew; and my aunt and cousins have lived in Spain till three years ago. How should a boy with his name, David Bartholomew, be anything but a Jew?"

"Bartholomew is English, isn't it?"

"Yes, the name. O they are not Spaniards entirely; only the family has lived out there for ever so long. They have relations enough in New York. I wish they hadn't."

"But how are they Jews, Norton? Don't they believe what we believe?" – Matilda's voice sunk.

"What we believe?" repeated Norton.

"Part of it, I suppose. They are not like Hindoos or Chinese. But you had better not talk to them just as you talked to Mr. Richmond to-night."

"But, Norton – I must live so."

"Live how you like; *they* have got nothing to do with your living. Now, Pink, I think we'll overhaul those chestnuts, – if you've no objection."

It was very exciting, getting the roasted fruit out from among the ashes and coals, burning their fingers, counting the chestnuts, and eating them; and then Norton prepared a second batch, that they might, as he said, have some to give to Mr. Richmond. Eating and cooking, a great deal of talk went on all the while. Eight o'clock came, and nine; and still not Mr. Richmond. Norton went out to look at the weather, as far as the piazza steps; and came in powdered with snow. It was thickly falling, he said; so the two children went to work again. It was impossible to sit there with the chestnuts and not eat them; so Norton roasted a third quantity. Just as these were reclaimed from the ashes, Mr. Richmond came in. He looked tired.

"So you have kept my hearth warm for me," he said; "and provided me supper. Thank you."

"We have done no harm, sir, I hope," said Norton; "though it was in your study."

"My study was the very place," said Mr. Richmond. "You cannot get such a fire everywhere; and my fire does not often have such pleasant use made of it. I shall miss you both."

"How soon shall we be ordered away, sir?" Norton asked.

"Your mother said to-morrow; but at the rate the snow is falling, that will hardly be. It looks like a great storm, or feels like it rather. It's impossible to *see*."

A great storm it proved the next morning. The snow was falling very thick; it lay heaped on the branches of the pines, and drifted into a great bank at the corner of the piazza, and blocked up the window-sills. It was piled up high on the house steps, and had quite covered all signs of path and roadway; the little sweep in front of the house was levelled and hid; the track to the barn could not be traced any longer. And still the snow came down, in gentle, swift, stayless supply; fast piling up fresh beautiful feathers of crystal on those that already settled soft upon all the earth. So Matilda found things when she got up in the morning. The air was dark with the snow-clouds, and yet light with a beautiful light from the universal whiteness; and the air was sweet with the pure sweetness of the falling snow. Matilda hurried down. It was Sunday morning.

"There'll be no getting away to-day," said Norton, as together they set the breakfast in readiness.

"Miss Redwood can't come home either," said Matilda. She was privately glad. A snowy Sunday at the parsonage, one more Sunday, would be pleasant.

"You can't get to church either," Norton went on.

"Why Norton! This little bit of way? It isn't but half a dozen steps."

"It is several half dozen," said Norton; "and the snow is all of a foot deep, and in places it has drifted, and there isn't a sign of anybody coming to clear it away yet. I don't believe there'll be twenty people in church, anyhow. It's falling as thick as it can."

"Mr. Ulshoeffer will clear it away in front of the church," said Matilda. "Some people will come. There! there's somebody at our back steps now."

Norton opened the kitchen door to see if it was true; and to his great astonishment found Mr. Richmond, in company with a large wooden shovel, clearing the snow from the steps and kitchen area.

"Good morning!" said the minister, from out of the snow.

"Good morning, sir. Mr. Richmond! isn't there somebody coming to do that for you, sir?"

"I don't know who is to come," said the minister pleasantly. "You had better shut the door and keep warm."

"Tell him breakfast is ready, Norton," Matilda cried.

"Well!" said Norton, shutting the door and coming in. "Do you mean to say that Mr. Richmond shovels his own snow?"

"His own snow!" repeated Matilda, with a little burst of laughter. "Which part of the snow is Mr. Richmond's?"

"What lies on his own ground, I should say. Why don't he have some one come to do it?"

"I don't know," said Matilda; and she looked grave now. "I don't know who there is to come to do it."

"There are people enough to do anything for money," said Norton. "Don't he have somebody come to do it?"

"I don't know," said Matilda. "If he had, I do not think he would do it himself."

"Then he gets very shabby treatment," said Norton; "that's all. I tell you, shovelling snow is work; and cold work at that."

"I suppose the people can't give great pay to their minister," said Matilda.

"Then they can come and clear away the snow for him. They have hands enough, if they haven't the cash. I wonder if they let him do it for himself always?"

"I don't know."

"Well, if I was a minister," said Norton, "which I am glad I'm not, I'd have a church where people could give me enough pay to keep my hands out of the snow!"

"Hush!" said Matilda. "Breakfast is ready, and Mr. Richmond is coming in."

The little dining-room was more pleasant than ever that morning. The white brightness that came in through the snowy air seemed to make fire and warmth and breakfast particularly cosy. And there was a hush, and a purity, and a crisp frost in the air, filling that Sunday morning with especial delights. But Mr. Richmond eat his breakfast like a man who had business on hand.

"Norton thinks there will not be many people at church, Mr. Richmond."

"There will be one," said Mr. Richmond. "And that he may get there, I have a good deal of work yet to do."

"More snow, sir?" inquired Norton.

"All the way from here to the church porch."

"Won't somebody come to do it, sir, and save you the trouble?"

"I can't tell," said the minister laughing. "Nobody ever did yet."

Norton said nothing; but Matilda was very much pleased that after breakfast he took a spade and joined Mr. Richmond in his work. Matilda never forgot that day. The snow continued to fall; flickering irregularly through the pine leaves and leaving a goodly portion of its stores gathered on the branches and massing on the tufts of foliage. Elsewhere the fall of the white flakes was steady and thick as the advance of an army of soldiers. No other resemblance between the two things. This was all whiteness and peace and hush and shelter for earth's needs. Matilda stood at the study window and watched it come down; watched the two dark figures working away in the deep snow to clear

the path; watched to see the shovelfuls of snow flung right and left with a will, and then to see the workers stop to take breath, and lean upon their shovels and talk. Norton was getting to know Mr. Richmond; Matilda was glad of that. Then Mr. Ulshoeffer rang the old church bell, and she went to make herself ready for church.

The storm continued, and there were few people out, as Norton had said. In the afternoon the Sunday school had a very small number, and the service did not last long. And then Matilda sat in the hush, at the study window, for Mr. Richmond had been called out; and thought of the change that had fallen on her life. The path to the church was getting covered up again even already. Suddenly some one came behind her and laid hands on her shoulders, and Norton's voice demanded what she was doing?

"I was only looking, – and thinking."

"You're always at one or the other," said Norton, giving the shoulders a little shake. "*Both* is too much at once."

"O Norton, how can one help it? It's so grand, to think that God is so rich and great, and can do such beautiful things."

"What now?" said Norton.

"What now? Why, the snow."

"Oh!" said Norton. "I've seen snow before."

"But it's always just so beautiful. No, not always, for it's a grand storm to-day. Just see how it comes down. It is getting dusk already. And every flake of it is just so lovely and wonderful. Mr. Richmond shewed me some on his hat once. I am so glad to know that God made it, and there is no end to the beautiful things he can make. It's covering your walk up again, Norton."

"It's very queer to hear you talk," said Norton.

"Queer?" said Matilda.

"It's so queer, that you have no idea, Pink, how queer it is. I don't know what you want."

"I know what I want," said Matilda. "I want to know more of God's beautiful work. Mr. Richmond says the earth is full of it; and I think it would be nice to be seeing it always; but I know so little."

"You'll learn," said Norton. "I wonder if mamma will send you to school, Pink? We must get home to-morrow! We have staid a terrible long time at the parsonage."

# CHAPTER III

When Matilda came down stairs the next morning to get breakfast, she found Miss Redwood in the kitchen. The fire was going, the kitchen was warm; Miss Redwood was preparing some potatoes for baking.

"Good morning!" said she. "Here I am again. It does seem funny to be washing the potatoes to put in the stove, just as if folks hadn't been sick and dying, you may say, and getting well, and all that, since I touched 'em last. Well! life's a queer thing; and it don't go by the rule of three, not by no means."

"What rule does it go by?" said Matilda, leaning on the table and looking up at the housekeeper.

"La! I don't know," said Miss Redwood. "I know what I've been workin' by all these weeks, pretty much; I kept at my multiplication table; but I couldn't get no further most days than the very beginning – 'Once one is one.' I tried hard to make it out two; but 'twas beyond me. I've learned that much, anyhow."

"Didn't Mrs. Laval help?"

"She helped all she could, poor critter, till she was 'most beat out. I declare I was sorry for her, next to the sick ones. She did all she could. She turned in to cook; and she didn't know no more about it than I know about talkin' any language beside my own. Not so much; for I kin tell French when I hear it; but she didn't know boiling water."

"What can I do to help you, Miss Redwood?" Matilda asked, suddenly remembering the present.

"There aint nothin' to do, child, 'cept what I'm doin'. The breakfast table is sot. I guess you've had *your* hands full, as well as the rest of us. But I declare you've kept things pretty straight. I don't let the butter set in the pantry, though; it goes down cellar when I'm to home."

"That kitchen pantry is cold, Miss Redwood."

"It's too cold, child. Butter hadn't ought to be where it kin freeze, or get freezing hard; it takes the sweetness out of it. You didn't know that. And the broom and pan I left at the head of the coal stairs. They ain't there now."

Matilda fetched them.

"The minister said you kept things in train, as if you'd been older," Miss Redwood went on. "I was always askin'; and he made me feel pretty comfortable. He said *he* was."

"We have had a very nice time, Miss Redwood. We hadn't the least trouble about anything."

"Trouble was our meat and drink down yonder," said Miss Redwood. "I thought two o' them poor furriners would surely give up; but they didn't; and it's over with. Praise the Lord! And I'm as glad to be home again as if I had found a fortin. But I was glad to be there, too. When a man – or a woman – knows she's in her place, she's just in the pleasantest spot she kin get to; so I think. And I knew I was in my place there. But dear, Mrs. Laval thinks your place is with her now; so she bid me tell you to be ready."

"When?"

"Well, some time along in the morning she will send the carriage to bring you, she said."

"Has Francis come back?"

"Who's Francis?"

"I mean the coachman."

"I don't know nobody's names," said Miss Redwood; "'cept the men I took care of; and I guess I had my own names for them. I couldn't pucker my mouth to call them after Mrs. Laval."

"Why, what did you call them?" said Matilda. "I know what their names were; they were Jules and Pierre Failly. What did you call them?"

"It didn't make no odds," said Miss Redwood, "so long as they knew I was speaking to 'em; and *that* they knew; 'cause when I raised one man's head up, he knew I warn't speaking to the other

man. I called one of 'em Johnson, and 'tother Peter. It did just as well. I dare say now," said Miss Redwood, with a bit of a smile on her face, "they thought Johnson meant beef tea, and Peter meant a spoonful of medicine. It did just as well. Come, dear; you may go get the coffee canister for me; for now I'm in a hurry. There ain't coffee burned for breakfast."

It was Matilda's last breakfast at the parsonage. She could have been sorry, only that she was so glad. After breakfast she had her bag to pack; and a little later the grey ponies trotted round the sweep and drew up at the door. Matilda had watched them turning in at the gate and coming down the lane, stepping so gayly to the sound of their bells; and they drew a dainty light sleigh covered with a wealth of fine buffalo robes. The children bade good bye to Mr. Richmond, and jumped in, and tucked the buffalo robes round them; the ponies shook their heads and began to walk round the sweep again; then getting into the straight line of the lane, away they went with a merry pace, making the snow fly.

It seemed to Matilda that such a feeling of luxury had never come over her as she felt then. The sleigh was so easy; the seats were so roomy; the buffalo robes were so soft and warm and elegant, and she was so happy. Norton pulled one of the robes up so as almost to cover her; no cold could get at her, for her feet were in another. Furs over and under her, she had nothing to do but to look and be whirled along over the smooth snow to the tune of the sleigh bells. It was charming, to look and see what the snow had done with the world. Thick, thick mantles of it lay upon the house roofs; how could it all stay there? The trees were loaded, bending their heads and drooping their branches under the weight which was almost too much for them. The fences had a pretty dressing, like the thick white frosting of a cake; the fields and gardens and roadway lay hidden under the soft warm carpet that was spread everywhere. But the snow clouds were all gone; and the clearest bright blue sky looked down through the white-laden tree branches.

"How much there is of it!" said Matilda.

"What?" said Norton.

"Why, I mean snow, Norton."

"Oh! Yes; there is apt to be a good deal of it," said Norton, "when it falls as hard as it can all one day and two nights."

"But Norton, to think that all that snow is just those elegant little star feathers piled up; all over the fields and house roofs, a foot and a half thick, it is all those feathery stars!"

"Well," said Norton; "what of it?"

"Why it is wonderful," said Matilda. "It almost seems like a waste, doesn't it? only that couldn't be."

"A waste?" said Norton. "A waste of what?"

"Why nobody sees, or thinks, that the street is covered with such beautiful things – the street and the fields and the houses; people only think it is snow, and that's all; when it is just little wonders of beauty, of a great many sorts too. It seems very strange."

"Only to you," said Norton. "It'll be rich to shew you things."

"But why do you suppose it is so, Norton? I should like to ask Mr. Richmond."

"Mr. Richmond couldn't tell," said Norton.

"It must be that God is so rich," Matilda went on reverently. "So rich!" she repeated, looking at the piled-up burden of snow along the house roofs of the street. "But then, Norton, he must care to have things beautiful."

"Pink!" exclaimed Norton, looking at his little companion with an air half of amusement and half of something like vexation.

"Well, don't you think so? Because nobody sees those white feathers of frost piled up there, and these that the horses are treading under feet. They do nobody any good."

"It does you good to know they are there," said Norton.

"That's true!" exclaimed Matilda. "O I'm very glad to know about them; and I am very glad the snow is so wonderful; and I am glad to feel that God is so rich, and that he has made things so beautiful."

There was something in this speech that jarred upon Norton; something, though he could not have told what it was, that seemed to separate Matilda from him; there was a sweet, innocent kind of *appropriation* which he could not share; it told of relations in which Matilda stood and to which he was a stranger. Norton liked nothing that seemed like division between them; but he did not find anything just then to say, and remained silent; while Matilda rode along in a kind of glorious vision that was half heavenly and half earthly. That was this snowy morning to her. Covered up warm in the furs of the sleigh, she leaned back and used her eyes; rejoicing in the white brilliance of the earth and the sunny blue of the heaven, and finding strange food for joy in them; or what appears strange to those who do not know it. The sleigh rushed along, past houses and shops and the familiar signs hung out along the street; then reaching the corner, whirled round to the left. Matilda's home, until now, had always lain the other way. She turned her head and looked back, up the street.

"What is it?" Norton asked.

"Nothing – except that I am so glad not to be going that way."

"No," said Norton. "Not that way any more. We have got you, Pink."

"I don't understand it," said Matilda. "It makes me dizzy when I think of it."

"Here we are!" cried Norton, as the horses wheeled in through the iron gate. "It's all snow, Pink; it will be too late to plant our tulips and hyacinths."

But even that was forgotten, as the sleigh stopped, and Norton helped Matilda out from under the furs, and she realized that she had come home. Home; yes, when her feet stepped upon the marble pavement of the hall she said to herself that this was *home*. It was very strange. But Mrs. Laval's warm arms were not strange; they were easy to understand; she would hardly let Matilda out of them, and kissed her and kissed her. The kisses were instead of words; *they* said that Matilda had come home.

"Run up now, dear, to your room," she said at last, "and get your wraps off. I have somebody here to see me on business; but I will come to you by and by."

Dismissed with more kisses, Matilda went up the stairs like one in a dream. Sharp and snowy as the world was without, here, inside the hall door, it was an atmosphere of summer. Soft warm air was around her as she mounted the stairs; in Mrs. Laval's room a wood fire was burning; in her own, oh joy! there was a little coal fire in the grate; all bright and blazing. Matilda slowly drew off her things and looked around her. The pretty green furniture with the rosebuds painted on it, this was her own now; a warm carpet covered the mat; the bed with its luxurious belongings was something she had not now to say good bye to; the time of parting had not come after all; would never come, as long as she lived. Slowly Matilda pulled off hood and gloves and moccasins, and went to the window. It was her own window! The hills and the country in view from it were hers to look at whenever she pleased. Mrs. Candy's bell could not sound there to break in upon anything. The child was so happy that she was almost afraid; it seemed too good to be really true and lasting. Gradually, as she stood there by the window, looking at what seemed to her "the treasures of the snow," it came to her mind what she had been thinking about that; the myriads of wonderfully fashioned, exquisite crystal stars, for every one of which God took care. Then she remembered, "the hairs of your head are all numbered;" and if so, of course no event that happened to any of God's children could be without meaning or carelessly sent. And also, if he was so rich in the beauty and perfectness of the snow supply for the earth, he was rich toward his children too, and would and could give them what were the best things for them. But then came the question; if he had brought a child like her into these new circumstances, into such a new home, what did he mean her to do with it? what use should she make of it? what effect was it intended to have upon her and upon her life? This seemed a very great question to Matilda. She softly shut her door and took out her Bible and kneeled down beside it. She would study and pray till she found out.

It happened well that Mrs. Laval's man of business kept her a good while. All that while Matilda kept up her study and search. Nevertheless she was puzzled. It was a question too large for her. All she could make out amounted to this; that she must be careful not to forget whose child she was; that before Mrs. Laval she owed love and obedience to her Saviour; that she must be on the watch for opportunities; and not allow her new circumstances to distract or divert her from them or make her unfitted for them when they came.

"I think I must watch," was Matilda's conclusion. "I might forget. Norton will want me to do things, – and Mrs. Laval will want me to do other things, – perhaps other people yet. If I keep to Mr. Richmond's rule – 'Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Lord Jesus,' – I shall be sure to be right; and He will teach me."

Some very earnest prayer ended in this conclusion. Then the question came up in Matilda's mind, what opportunities were likely to spring out of her new, changed circumstances? She could not tell; she found she could do nothing with that question; she could only leave it, and watch, and wait.

She opened her door then, to be ready for Mrs. Laval's coming; and presently the soft step and gentle rustle of drapery reminded Matilda anew that she had done for ever with Mrs. Candy's plump footfall and buckram skirts.

"My darling," said Mrs. Laval, "you have been all this time alone!" She took Matilda in her arms and sat down with her, looking at her as one examines a new, precious possession.

"You smile, as if being alone was nothing very dreadful," she went on.

"I don't think it is," said Matilda.

"I do! But you and I will not be alone any more, darling, will we? Norton is a boy; he must go and come; but you are my own – my little daughter! – yes, now and always."

She clasped Matilda in her arms and kissed her with lips that trembled very much; trembled so much that Matilda was afraid she would break into a passion of tears again; but that was restrained. After a little she sat back, and stroking Matilda's hair from her brow, asked softly, —

"And what do *you* say to it, Matilda?"

Matilda tried to find words and could not; trembled; was very near crying for her own part; finally answered in the only way. In her turn she threw her arms round Mrs. Laval's neck; in her turn kissed cheeks and lips, giving herself up for the first time to the feeling of the new relationship between them. The lady did not let her go, but sat still with her arms locked around Matilda and Matilda's head in her neck and both of them motionless, for a good while.

"Will you call me mamma, some day?" she whispered. "Not now; – when you feel like it. I do not ask it till you feel like it."

"Yes," – Matilda whispered in answer.

Presently Mrs. Laval began to tell her about the ship fever, and the nursing, and Miss Redwood; and how she and Miss Redwood had been alone with everything to do. Then she wanted to hear how Matilda had spent the weeks at the parsonage; and she was very much amused.

"I believe I'll get you to teach me some day," she said. "It's bad to be so helpless. But I have learned something in these weeks. Now, darling, is there anything you would like, that I can give you? anything that would be a pleasure to you? Speak and tell me, before we go down to lunch."

The colour started into Matilda's face.

"If I could," she said, – "I would like, if you liked it, – if Norton could go with me again, – I would like *very* much, to go and see Maria."

"Maria!" said Mrs. Laval. "At Poughkeepsie. Certainly. You shall go – let me see, this is Monday, – Norton shall take you Thursday. You must try and find something to take to Maria that she would like. What would she like?"

Mrs. Laval was drawing out her purse. Matilda, in a flush of delight, could not think what Maria would like; so Mrs. Laval gave her five dollars and bade her come to her for more if she needed it.

Five dollars to buy Maria a present! Matilda went down to luncheon with her head and her heart so full that she could hardly eat What should the present be? and what a beginning of beautiful and delightful things was this. She was as still as a mouse, and eat about as much. Mrs. Laval and Norton were full of business.

"How soon do we go to town, mamma?"

"As soon as possible! You ought to be going to school. But – what day is it to-day?"

"Monday, mamma."

"No, no; I mean what day of the month. It is the middle of November, and past. I can't go till the beginning of next month."

"Soon enough," said Norton. "Mamma, is Pink to go to school?"

Mrs. Laval looked at Matilda, smiled, but made no answer.

"Mamma, let me teach her."

"You?" said Mrs. Laval. "We will see."

"There's another thing. Mamma, is she to have an allowance?"

"Certainly."

"How much, mamma?"

"As much as you have."

"Then she'll be rich," said Norton. "She hasn't got boots to buy. My boots eat up my money."

"I am afraid Matilda's boots will be quite as troublesome to her. Don't you think she will want boots?"

"Girls' boots don't cost so much, do they?"

"It depends on where you get them."

"Mamma, Pink will not get her boots where you get yours, unless you give her the direction very carefully. She will think she must save the money for Lilac lane. You must take care of her, mamma; or she will think she ought to take a whole district on her hands, and a special block of old women."

Mrs. Laval again looked fondly at Matilda, and put a delicate bit on her plate, observing that she was not eating anything.

"You are to take her to Poughkeepsie Thursday, Norton, to see her sister."

"That's jolly," said Norton. "I want to be in Poughkeepsie, to see about some business of my own. We'll go to Blodgett's, Pink, and choose the hyacinths and tulips for our beds."

"You had a great deal better go to Vick, at Rochester," said Mrs. Laval. "You can depend upon what he gives you. I have not found Blodgett so careful."

"I should like to go to Mr. Vick's very much; but Rochester is rather too far off," said Norton.

"You can write, you foolish boy."

"Well," said Norton, "I believe that *will* be best. We cannot put the bulbs in now, unless we have a great stroke of good luck and there comes a soft bit of weather. I'll write to Vick. But we'll go to Blodgett's and get a few just for house blooming. Wouldn't you like that, Pink?"

Matilda liked it so much that she found no words to express herself. Norton and his mother both laughed at her.

After dinner Mrs. Laval went with Matilda up to her room, and looked over her whole wardrobe. Most of the things which belonged to it Mrs. Laval threw aside; Matilda's old calico dresses and several of the others; and her old stockings and pocket handkerchiefs; and told Matilda she might give them away. New linen, she said, Matilda should have, as soon as she could get it made; meanwhile some new things were provided already. She bade Matilda take a bath; and then she had her own maid come in to arrange her hair and dress her. There was not much to be done with Matilda's hair; it was in short wavy locks all over her head; but the maid brushed it till Matilda thought she would never have done; and then she was dressed in a new dark brown merino, made short, and bound with a wide ribband sash; and new stockings were put on her that were gartered above her knees; and

Matilda felt at once very nice and very funny. But when it was done, Mrs. Laval took her in her arms and half smothered her with caresses.

"We will get everything put in order, as soon as we get to New York," she said; "my rosebud! my pink, as Norton calls you; my Daphne blossom!"

"What is that, ma'am?" said Matilda laughing.

"Daphne? you shall have a plant of it, and then you will know. It is something very sweet, and yet very modest. It never calls people to come and look at it."

She had Matilda on her lap; and she stroked her hair, putting it back from her brow; took her face in both hands and looked at it and kissed it; played with her hands; passed her fingers over the new stockings to see how they fitted; tried the garters to see if they were too tight; Matilda felt the touch of *motherly* hands again, like no other hands. It filled her with a warm gladness and sorrow, both together; but it bound her to Mrs. Laval. She threw both arms at last around her neck, and they sat so, wrapped up in each other.

"You must go and call upon your aunt, Matilda," Mrs. Laval said after a long silence.

"Must I? I suppose I must," said Matilda.

"Certainly. And the sooner you do it, the more graceful it will be. I have been to see her. So it is only necessary for you. It is a proper mark of respect."

"I will go to-morrow; shall I?"

"Yes; go to-morrow. Now Norton spoke about an allowance. Would you like it?"

"I don't know what it is, ma'am."

"I give Norton, that is, I *allow* him, five dollars a month; fifteen dollars a quarter. Out of that he must provide himself with boots and shoes and gloves; the rest is for whatever he wants, fish-hooks or hyacinths, as the case may be. I shall give you the same, Matilda; five dollars every month. Then I shall expect you to be always nicely and properly dressed, in the matter of boots and shoes and gloves, without my attending to it. You are young to be charged with so much care of your dress, but I can trust you. With what is left of your allowance you will do whatever you like; nobody will ask any questions about it. Do you like that, my dear?"

"Very much, ma'am."

"I thought so," said Mrs. Laval smiling. "Now I want you to go with me and get something to put on your head. I have had a pelisse made for you that will do till we go to the city and can find something better. This can be then for second best. Put it on, dear, and be ready; the carriage will be at the door in a moment now."

Wondering, Matilda put on the pelisse. She had never had anything so nice in her life. It was of some thick, pretty, silver-grey cloth, lined and wadded, and delicately trimmed with silk. Then she went off with Mrs. Laval in the carriage, and was fitted with a warm little hat. Coming home towards evening, at the close of this eventful day, Matilda felt as if she hardly knew herself. To lay off her coat and hat in such a warm, cheery little room, where the fire in the grate bade her such a kind welcome; to come down to the drawing-room, where another fire shone and glowed on thick rugs and warm-coloured carpets and soft cushions and elegant furniture; and to know that she was at home amid all these things and comforts; it was bewildering. She sat down on a low cushion on the rug, and tried to collect her wits. What was it, she had resolved to do? – to watch for duty, and to do everything to the Lord Jesus? Then, so should her enjoyment of all this be. But Matilda felt as if she were taken off her feet. So she went to praying, for she could not think. She had only two minutes for that, before Norton rushed in and came to her side with Vick's Catalogue; and the whole rest of the evening was one delicious whirl through the wonders of a flower garden, and the beauties of various coloured hyacinths and tulips in particular.

The next day Matilda had two great matters on her heart; the present for Maria, and the visit to her aunt. She resolved to do the disagreeable business first. So she marched off to Mrs. Candy's in the middle of the morning, when she knew they were at leisure; and was ordered up into her aunt's room,

where she and Clarissa were at work after the old fashion. The room had a dismal, oppressive air to Matilda's refreshed vision. Her aunt and cousin received each a kiss from her, rather than gave it.

"Well, Matilda," said Mrs. Candy, "how do you do?"

This, Matilda knew, was an introduction to something following. The answer was a matter of form.

"You've changed hands; how do you like it?" Mrs. Candy went on.

It would seem ungracious to say she liked it; so Matilda said nothing.

"I suppose things are somewhat different at Mrs. Laval's from what you found them here?"

"Yes, ma'am; they are different."

"Have Mrs. Laval's servants got quite well?"

"Yes, ma'am, quite well."

"How many of them are there?"

"There are the mother and father, and two daughters, and the brother of the father, I believe."

"And does Mrs. Laval keep other servants beside those?"

"O yes. Those are the farm servants, partly. But one of them cooks, and one of the daughters is laundry maid; and the other is the dairy woman."

"And how many more?" asked Clarissa.

"There are the waiter and coachman, you know; and the chambermaid; and Mrs. Laval's own maid, and the sempstress."

"A sempstress constantly on hand?" said Mrs. Candy.

"I believe so. I have always seen her there. She seems to belong there."

"Well, you find some difference between a house with a dozen servants, and one where they keep only one, don't you?"

"It is different – " said Matilda, not knowing how to answer.

"What do *you* do, in that house with a dozen servants?"

"I don't know, ma'am; I haven't done anything yet."

"How did you get among the sick people in the first place? how came that? It was very careless!"

"Nobody knew what was the matter with them, aunt Candy. Mrs. Laval was gone to town, and I went to take some beef tea that the doctor had ordered."

"Doctor Bird?"

"Yes."

"Doctor Bird ought to have known better. He ought to have taken better care," said Clarissa.

"It is easy to say that afterwards," remarked Mrs. Candy. "How came Mrs. Laval not to be there herself?"

"She was there. She was only gone to New York to get help; for all the servants had run away."

"Then *they* knew what was the matter," said Clarissa.

"I don't know," said Matilda. "They seemed frightened or jealous. They all went off."

"Like them," said Mrs. Candy. "Who did the nursing at last?"

"Mrs. Laval and Miss Redwood."

"Who is Miss Redwood?"

"She keeps house for Mr. Richmond."

A perceptible shadow darkened the faces of both mother and daughter. Matilda wished herself away; but she could not end her visit while it was yet so short; that would not do.

"And so you have been wasting six weeks at the parsonage, – doing absolutely nothing!"

It had not been precisely that. But Matilda thought it was best to be silent.

"It seems to me you are not improving in politeness," Mrs. Candy remarked. "However, that is somebody else's affair now. Are you going to school?"

"Not yet, ma'am."

"When are you going to begin?"

"I do not know. Not till we get to New York, I think."

"To New York! Then you are going to New York?"

"How soon?" Clarissa inquired.

"Not till next month."

"That is almost here," said Mrs. Candy. "Well, it would have been a great deal better for you to have remained here with me; but I am clear of the responsibility, that is one thing. If there is one thing more thankless than another, it is to have anything to do with children that are not your own. You know how to darn stockings, at any rate, Matilda; I have taught you that."

"And to mend lace," Clarissa added.

"Matilda may find the good of that yet. She may have to earn her bread with doing it. Nothing is more likely."

"I hope not," said Clarissa.

"It is an absurd arrangement anyhow," Mrs. Candy went on. "Matilda at Mrs. Laval's, and Anne and Letitia earning *their* bread with something not a bit better than mending lace. They will not like it very well."

"Why not, aunt Candy?" Matilda asked.

"Wait and see if they do. Will they like it, do you think, to see that you do not belong to them any more and are part and parcel of quite another family? Will they like it, that your business will be to forget them now? See if they like it!"

"Why I shall not forget them at all!" cried Matilda; "how could I? and what makes you say so?"

"You are beginning by forgetting your mother," said Mrs. Candy, with a significant glance at the silver-grey pelisse.

"Yes," said Clarissa, "I noticed the minute she came in. How could Mrs. Laval do so!"

"What?" said Matilda. "That isn't true at all, aunt Candy."

"I see the signs," said Mrs. Candy. "There is no need to tell me what they mean. In this country it is considered a mark of respect and a sign that we do not forget our friends, to wear a dress of remembrance."

"It reminds us of them, too," said Clarissa. "And we like to be reminded of those we love."

"I do not want anything to remind me of *her*," said Matilda; and the little set of her head at the moment spoke volumes. "And besides, aunt Candy and Clarissa, I did not wear mourning when I was here, except only when I went to church."

"That shewed the respect," said Mrs. Candy. "You can see easily what Mrs. Laval means, by her dressing you out in that style. Have you got a black dress under your coat?"

"Let us see what you have got," said Clarissa.

As Matilda did not move, Mrs. Candy rose and went to her and lifted up the folds of her pelisse so as to show the brown merino.

"I thought so," she remarked, as she went back to her seat.

"Mrs. Laval ought to be ashamed!" said her daughter.

Matilda had got by this time about as much as she could bear. She rose up from her uneasy chair opposite Mrs. Candy.

"O, are you going?" said that lady. "You do not care to stay long with us."

"Not to-day," said little Matilda, with more dignity than she knew, and with an air of the head and shoulders that very much irritated Mrs. Candy.

"I'd cure you of *that*," she said, "if I had you. I thought I had cured you. You would not dare hold your head like that, if you were living with me."

Now Matilda had not the least knowledge that her head was held differently from usual. She said good bye.

"Are you not going to kiss me?" said her aunt. "You are forgetting fast."

It cost an effort, but Matilda offered her cheek to Mrs. Candy and to Clarissa, and left them. She ran down the stairs and out of the house. At the little gate she stood still.

What did it all mean? Forgetting her mother? Had she done her memory an injury, by putting on her brown frock and her grey pelisse? Was there any truth in all this flood of disagreeable words, which seemed to have flowed over and half drowned her. Ought her dress to be black? It had not been when she lived with her aunt, except on particular days and out of doors, as she had said. Was there any truth in all these charges? Matilda's heart had suddenly lost all its gayety, and the struggle in her thoughts was growing more and more unendurable every moment. A confusion of doubts, questions, suspicions which she could not at once see clearly enough to cast off, and sorrow, raged and fought in her mind with indignant rejection and disbelief of them. What should she do? How could she tell what was right? Mr. Richmond! She would go straight to him.

And so she did, hurrying along Butternut street like a little vessel in a gale; and she was just that, only the gale was in her own mind. It drove her on, and she rushed into the parsonage, excited by her own quick movements as well as by her thoughts. Miss Redwood was busy in the kitchen.

"What's the matter?" she exclaimed, for Matilda had gone in that way.

"I want to see Mr. Richmond."

"Well, he's in there. La! child, we keep open doors at the parsonage; there ain't no need that you should break 'em in by running against 'em. Take it easy, whatever there is to take. The minister's in his study. But his dinner'll be ready in a quarter of an hour, tell him."

Matilda went more quietly and knocked at the study door. She heard "Come in."

"Mr. Richmond, are you busy?" she asked, standing still inside of the study door. "Shall I disturb you?" She was quiet enough now. But the tears were shining in Matilda's eyes, and the eyes themselves were eager.

"Come here," said Mr. Richmond holding out his hand; "I am not too busy, and your disturbing me is very welcome. How do you do?"

Matilda's answer was to clasp Mr. Richmond's hand and cover her face.

"What is the matter?" he asked softly, though a little startled. "Nothing that we cannot set right, Tilly?"

He drew his arm protectingly round her, and Matilda presently looked up. "O Mr. Richmond," she said, "I don't know if anything is wrong; but I want to know."

"Well, we can find out. What is the question?"

"Mr. Richmond, the question is, Ought I to wear black things for mamma?"

The minister was much surprised.

"What put this in your head, Tilly?"

"Mrs. Laval gave me some new dresses yesterday; these, you see, Mr. Richmond; the frock is dark brown and the coat is grey. Ought they to be black?"

"Why should they be black?"

"I don't know, sir. People do wear black things when they have lost friends."

"What for do they so?"

"*I* don't know, Mr. Richmond; but people say it shews respect – and that I do not shew" —

"Let us look at it quietly," said her friend. "How does it shew respect to a lost friend, to put on a peculiar dress?"

"I don't know, sir; because it's the custom, I suppose. But I am not in black. Ought I to be?"

"Wait; we will come to it. Black dresses are supposed to be a sign of grief, are they not?"

"I don't know, Mr. Richmond; they *said*, of respect, and to put one in mind."

"The grief that wants putting in mind, is not a grief that pays much real respect, I should think. Do not you think so? that's one thing."

Matilda looked at him, with eyes intent and pitifully full of tears, just ready to run over, but eagerly watching his lips.

"Then as to respect, black dresses must shew respect, if any way, by saying to the world that we remember and are sorry. Now the fact is, Matilda, they do not say that at all. They are worn quite as much by people who do not remember, and who are not sorry. They tell nothing about the truth, except that some of those who wear them like to be in the fashion and some are afraid of what the world will say.

"But there is another question. When our friends have left us and are happy with the Lord Jesus, as all his children are, is it a mark of respect to their memory, that we should cover our faces with crape, and wear gloomy drapery, and shut up our shutters to keep the sunlight out of our rooms? Have we any right to stop the sunlight anywhere? Wouldn't it be better honour to our Christian friends who have gone, to be glad for them, and speak as if we were; and let it be seen that all the sorrow we have is on our own account, and we do not mean to indulge that selfishly? We do not sorrow as those that have no hope; for we believe that them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. There will be a glorious meeting again, by and by, when Jesus comes; then we and our dear ones who have loved him will be together again, and all of us with the Lord."

"Then people ought *not* to wear black for mourning?" said Matilda with a brightened but undecided face.

"I think myself it is a very unchristian fashion. It is not according to the spirit of the early Christian times; for people then who had had friends slain by wild beasts, and burned to death, for the truth of Jesus, gathered the poor remains that were left and laid them to rest, with the motto cut in the door of their resting place, – 'In peace. In Christ.'"

"Did they!" said Matilda.

"A very great many of them."

"Then wouldn't you wear mourning, Mr. Richmond?"

"I should not. I never have."

"Nor crape on your hat?"

"Nor crape anywhere."

"Then I don't care!" said Matilda.

"I do not think you need care."

"But it is very disagreeable!" continued Matilda.

"What?"

"That people will say such things."

Mr. Richmond smiled. "You must try and learn to bear that, Tilly. But it is not very difficult, when you are sure that you are in the right?"

"I think it is difficult to bear," said Matilda.

"The only question is, what is right? Do you remember the fairy tale, about the journey that a great many ladies and gentlemen took to the top of a hill, to get certain treasures that were there?"

"The golden bird and the singing water!" said Matilda. "Yes, I know. Do *you* know it, Mr. Richmond?"

"I heard you telling it to Norton."

"I didn't know that you heard!" said Matilda. "Well, Mr. Richmond? – how could you remember!"

"Well – if they looked round, when they were going up the hill, they lost all."

"They were turned into stone. And there were all sorts of noises in their ears, to make them look round."

"The only way to get to the top, was to stop their ears."

"Yes, Mr. Richmond; I know; I understand. But what golden bird and singing water are *we* going up hill after?"

"Something better. We want the 'Well done, good and faithful servant,' – do we not? And if we would have that, we must stop our ears against all sorts of voices that would turn aside our eyes from what is at the top of the hill."

"But Mr. Richmond, it is not *wicked* to wear mourning, is it?"

"No. I was thinking then of other things. But it is very unlike the spirit of religion, when a friend has gone home, to make a parade of gloom about it; very unlike the truth of Christ."

"Mr. Richmond, I am very glad; and now I know what is right, I am very much obliged to you. And Miss Redwood said your dinner would be ready in a quarter of an hour. I guess it is ready now."

Which was the fact; and Matilda ran home, in a different sort of gale now, and at luncheon was quite as light hearted as usual.

# CHAPTER IV

It was needful for Norton and Matilda, or they thought so, to take the early train which left the station at half past seven o'clock. The next train would not be till near eleven; and that, it was decided, would not do at all for their purposes. Taking the early train, they would have to go without breakfast; but that was no matter; they would get breakfast at Poughkeepsie, and have so much the more fun. The omnibus came for them a little after half past six, and they were ready; Matilda with an important basket on her arm, which Norton gallantly took charge of.

It was a delightful experience altogether. The omnibus did not immediately take the road to the station; there were several other passengers to gather up, and they drove round corners and stopped at houses in different streets of the village. First they took in old Mr. Kurtz; he was going to New York for his business, Norton whispered to Matilda; he had a large basket and an old lady with him. Then the omnibus went round into the street behind the parsonage and received Mr. Schonflöcken, the Lutheran minister, and from another house another old lady with another basket. Two men got in from the corner. Lastly the omnibus stopped before a house near the baker's; and here they waited. The people were not ready. There were two children missing from the travelling party, it seemed. Inquiries and exclamations were bandied about; the stage driver knocked impatiently and cried out to hurry; Matilda was very much afraid they might miss the train. "Never mind; he knows his business," Norton remarked coolly. At last a man who had been in quest, brought back the stray children from an opposite lumber yard, calling out that they were found; then there were kisses and leave takings, and "Good bye, grandma!" and "Come back again!" – and finally the mother put her children into the omnibus, the first, the second, the third, and the fourth; then got in herself, and the vehicle lumbered on. The omnibus was crowded now; and the new comers had been eating a breakfast of fried cakes and fish, pretty near the stove where it was cooked; for the smoke of the fry had filled their clothes. Of course it filled the omnibus also. This could be borne only a few minutes.

"Dear Norton," Matilda whispered, "can't you open this window for me? I cannot breathe."

"You'll catch cold," said Norton.

"No I won't. Please do! it is choking me."

Norton laughed, and opened the window, and Matilda putting her face close to the opening was able to get a breath of fresh air. Then she enjoyed herself again. The grey dawn was brightening over the fields; the morning air was brisk and frosty; and as soon as Matilda's lungs could play freely again, so could her imagination. How pretty the dusky clumps of trees were against the brightening sky; how lovely that growing light in the east, which every moment rose stronger and revealed more. The farm houses they passed looked as if they had not waked up yet; barns and farmyards were waiting for the day's work to begin; a waggoner or two, going slowly to the station, were all the moving things they saw. The omnibus passed them, and lumbered on.

"Norton," said Matilda suddenly, bringing her face round from the window, "it's delicious to be up so early."

"Unless you are obliged to take other people's breakfast before you get your own," said Norton. He looked disgusted, and Matilda could not help laughing in her turn.

"Put your nose to my window, – you can," she said. "The air is as sweet as can be."

"Outside" – grumbled Norton.

"Well, that is what I am getting," said Matilda. "Can't you get some of it? – poor Norton!"

"What I don't understand," said Norton, "is how people live."

At this point, the old woman with the basket got out, where a cross road branched off. Matilda was obliged to move up into the vacated place, to make more room for the others; and she lost her open window. However, the river came in sight now; the end of the ride was near; and soon she and Norton stood on the steps of the station house.

"I don't believe my coat will get over it all day," said the latter. "There ought to be two omnibuses."

"The poor people cannot help it, Norton; they are not to blame."

"Yes, they are," said Norton. "They might open their windows and air their houses. They are not fit to be in a carriage with clean people."

"I guess they don't know any better," said Matilda; "and they were rather poor people, Norton."

"Well?" said Norton. "That is what I say. There ought to be a coach for them specially."

He went in to buy the tickets, and Matilda remained on the steps, wondering a little why there should be poor people in the world. Why could not all have open windows and free air and sweet dresses? Being poor, she knew, was somehow at the bottom of it; and why should there be such differences? And then, what was the duty of those better off? "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you," – that opened a wide field. Too big to be gone over just now. Matilda was sure that she was in the right way so far, in going to give pleasure to Maria; and by the way she would take all the pleasure she could herself. How sweet it was now! The sun was up, and shining with bright yellow light upon the hills of Rosendale and the opposite shore. The river was all in lively motion under the breeze; the ferry boat just coming in from Rondout; the sky overhead clearing itself of some racks of grey vapour and getting all blue. Could anything be more delicious? Now the passengers came trooping over from the "Lark," to get their tickets; and presently came the rumble of the train. She and Norton jumped into one of the cars, and then they were off.

"I'm hungry," was Norton's first confidence in the cars.

"So am I, very," said Matilda. "It will not take more than an hour, will it, to go to Poughkeepsie?"

"Not that," said Norton. Then the very first thing will be, to go up to Smith's and get our breakfast."

"That's that restaurant?"

"Yes. A good one too."

"I never was in a restaurant in my life," said Matilda.

"We'll see how you like it, Pink; it's delightful that you have never seen anything."

"Why?"

"You have got so much to see. And I want to know what you will think of it all."

Matilda was almost too happy. So happy, that not a sunbeam, nor a ripple on the water, nor a cloud in the sky, but seemed to bring her more to be glad of. It was only that her joy met these things and glanced back. So Norton said. But Matilda thought it was something beside.

"Why Norton, I am glad of those things *themselves*," she insisted.

"Of the waves on the river?" said Norton.

"Yes, to be sure I am."

"Nonsense, Pink! What for?"

"I don't know what for," said Matilda. "They are so pretty. And they are so lively. And there is another thing, Norton," she said with a change of voice. "God made them."

"Do you like everything he has made?" said Norton.

"I think I do."

"Then you must like those poor people in the omnibus, and poor people everywhere. Do *they* give you pleasure?"

Matilda could not say that they did. She wished with all her heart there were no such thing as poverty in the world. She could not answer immediately. And before she could answer the whistle blew.

"Is this Poughkeepsie?"

"Yes, this is Poughkeepsie. Now we'll have breakfast! Look sharp, Pink" —

In another minute, the two were standing on the platform of the station.

"Is *this* the place?" Matilda inquired a little ruefully. She saw, inside the glass door, a large room with what seemed like a shop counter running down the length of it; and on this counter certainly eatables were set out; she could see cups of tea or coffee, and biscuits, and pieces of pie. People were crowding to this counter, and plates and cups seemed to have a busy time.

"This is Poughkeepsie," said Norton. "You have been here before. This our restaurant? I should think not! Not precisely. We have got to take a walk before we get to it. Smith's is at the top of the street."

"I am glad; I am ready to walk," said Matilda joyously; and they set off at a pace which shewed what sort of time their spirits were keeping. Nevertheless, all the way, between other things, Matilda was studying the problem of poverty which Norton had presented to her. The walk was quite a walk, and the footsteps were a little slower before the "top of the street" was reached. Why Norton called it so, Matilda did not see. The street went on, far beyond; but they turned aside round a corner, and presently were at the place they wanted.

They entered a nice quiet room, somewhat large, to be sure, and with a number of little tables set out; but nobody at any of them. Matilda and Norton went towards the back of the room, where it took an angle, and they could be a little more private. Here they took possession of one of the tables. Norton set down his basket, and Matilda took off her hat. Nothing, she thought, could possibly be any pleasanter than this expedition in which they were engaged. This was a rare experience; unparalleled.

"Now what shall we have?" said Norton.

"What *can* we have?" said Matilda.

"Everything. That is, any common thing. You couldn't get dishes of French make-ups, I suppose; and we don't want them. I am just as hungry as a bear."

"And I am as hungry as a bear*ess*."

Norton went off into a great laugh. "You look so like it!" he said. "But you might be as hungry as a bear; that don't say anything against your ladylike character. Though I always heard that she bears were fiercer than the others, when once they got their spirits up. Oh, Pink, Pink!" —

He was interrupted by the waiter.

"Now Pink, we've got to be civilized, and say what we'll have. You may have a cup of coffee."

"Yes, I would like it, Norton."

"And beefsteak? or cold chicken? We'll have chicken. I know you like it best."

It was nice of Norton; for he didn't.

"Buckwheats, Pink?"

"Yes. I like them," said Matilda.

"So do I, when they are good. And rolls, in case they shouldn't be. And good syrup – Silver Drip, mind."

Norton gave his order, and the two sat waiting. Matilda examined the place and its appointments. It was neat, if it was very plain.

"It's a good place enough," said Norton. "The country people come here in the middle of the day when they have driven in to Poughkeepsie to market and do shopping. Then the place is busy and all alive; now, you see, we have got it to ourselves. But anyhow, they have always good plain things here."

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.