Cousin Maude

COUSIN MAUDE.

by Mary J. Holmes

To Morris W. Smith,

of New Orleans,

This story of life among the Northern Hills is repectfully dedicated by his friend
The Author

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CHAPTER I.

DR. KENNEDY.

“If you please, marm, the man from York State is comin’ afoot. Too stingy to ride, I’ll warrant,” and Janet, the housekeeper, disappeared from the parlor, just as the sound of the gate was heard, and an unusually fine-looking middle-aged man was seen coming up the box-lined walk which led to the cottage door.

The person thus addressed was a lady, whose face, though young and handsome, wore a look which told of early sorrow. Matilda Remington had been a happy, loving wife, but the old churchyard in Vernon contained a grass-grown grave, where rested the noble heart which had won her girlish love. And she was a widow now, a fair-haired, blue-eyed widow, and the stranger who had so excited Janet’s wrath by walking from the depot, a distance of three miles, would claim her as his bride ere the morrow’s sun was midway in the heavens. How the engagement happened she could not exactly tell, but happened it had, and she was pledged to leave the vine-wreathed cottage which Harry had built for her, and go with one of whom she knew comparatively little.

Six months before our story opens she had spent a few days with him at the house of a mutual friend in an adjoining State, and since that time they had written to each other regularly, the correspondence resulting at last in an engagement, which he had now come to fulfill. He had never visited her before in her own home, consequently she was wholly unacquainted with his disposition or peculiarities. He was intelligent and refined, commanding in appearance, and agreeable in manner whenever he chose to be, and when he wrote to her of his home, which he said would be a second Paradise were she its mistress, when he spoke of the little curly-headed girl who so much needed a mother’s care, and when, more than all, he hinted that his was no beggar’s fortune, she yielded; for Matilda Remington did not dislike the luxuries which money alone can purchase. Her own fortune was small, and as there was now no

hand save her own to provide, she often found it necessary to economize more than she wished to do. But Dr. Kennedy was rich, and if she married him she would escape a multitude of annoyances, so she made herself believe that she loved him; and when she heard, as she more than once did hear, rumors of a sad, white-faced woman to whom the grave was a welcome rest, she said the story was false, and, shaking her pretty head, refused to believe that there was aught in the doctor of evil.

“To be sure, he was not at all like Harry—she could never find one who was—but he was so tall, so dignified, so grand, so particular, that it seemed almost like stooping, for one in his position to think of her, and she liked him all the better for his condescension.”

Thus she ever reasoned, and when Janet said that he was coming, and she, too, heard his step upon the piazza, the bright blushes broke over her youthful face, and casting a hurried glance at the mirror, she hastened out to meet him.

“Matty, my dear!” he said, and his thin lips touched her glowing cheek, but in his cold gray eye there shone no love,—no feeling,— no heart.

He was too supremely selfish to esteem another higher than himself, and though it flattered him to know that the young creature was so glad to meet him, it awoke no answering chord, and he merely thought that with her to minister to him he should possibly be happier than he had been with her predecessor.

“You must be very tired,” she said, as she led the way into the cozy parlor. Then, seating him in the easy chair near to the open window, she continued: “How warm you are. What made you walk this sultry afternoon?”

“It is a maxim of mine never to ride when I can walk,” said he, “for I don’t believe in humoring those omnibus drivers by paying their exorbitant prices.”

“Two shillings surely is not an exorbitant price,” trembled on Mrs. Remington’s lips, but she was prevented from saying so by his asking “if everything were in readiness for the morrow.”

“Yes, everything,” she replied. “The cottage is sold, and—”

“Ah, indeed, sold!” said he, interrupting her. “If I mistake not you told me, when I met you in Rome, that it was left by will to you. May I, as your tomorrow’s

husband, ask how much you received for it?" And he unbent his dignity so far as to wind his arm around her waist.

But the arm was involuntarily withdrawn when, with her usual frankness, Matty replied; "I received a thousand dollars, but there were debts to be paid, so that I had only five hundred left, and this I made over to my daughter to be used for her education."

Dr. Kennedy did not say that he was disappointed, and as Matty was not much of a physiognomist she did not read it in his face, and she continued: "Janet will remain here a while, to arrange matters, before joining me in my new home. She wished me to leave my little girl to come with her, but I can't do that. I must have my child with me. You've never seen her, have you? I'll call her at once." And stepping to the door she bade Janet bring "Maude" into the parlor.

"Maude!" How Dr. Kennedy started at the mention of a name which drove all thoughts of the five hundred dollars from his mind. There was feeling—passion —everything, now, in his cold gray eye, but quickly recovering his composure, he said calmly: "Maude, Matty— Maude, is that your child's name?"

"Why, yes," she answered laughingly. "Didn't you know it before? "

"How should I," he replied, "when in your letters you have always called her 'daughter'? But has she no other name? She surely was not baptized Maude?"

Ere Mrs. Remington could speak, the sound of little pattering feet was heard in the hall without, and in a moment Maude Remington stood before her stepfather-elect, looking, as that rather fastidious gentleman thought, more like a wild gipsy than the child of a civilized mother. She was a fat, chubby child, not yet five years old; black-eyed, black-haired, black-faced, with short, thick curls, which, damp with perspiration, stood up all over her head, giving her a singular appearance. She had been playing in the brook, her favorite companion, and now, with little spatters of mud ornamenting both face and pantalets, her sun-bonnet hanging down her back, and her hands full of pebble-stones, she stood furtively eyeing the stranger, whose mental exclamation was: "Mercy, what a fright!"

"Maude!" exclaimed the distressed Mrs. Remington, "where have you been? Go at once to Janet, and have your dress changed; then come back to me."

Nothing loath to join Janet, whose company was preferable to that of the stranger, Maude left the room, while Dr. Kennedy, turning to Mrs. Remington, said: “She is not at all like you, my dear.”

“No,” answered the lady; “she is like her father in everything; the same eyes, the same hair, and—”

She was going on to say more, when the expression of Dr. Kennedy’s face stopped her, and she began to wonder if she had displeased him. Dr. Kennedy could talk for hours of “the late Mrs. Kennedy,” accompanying his words with long-drawn sighs, and enumerating her many virtues, all of which he expected to be improved upon by her successor; but he could not bear to hear the name of Harry Remington spoken by one who was to be his wife, and he at once changed the subject of Maude’s looks to her name, which he learned was really Matilda. She had been called Maude, Matty said, after one who was once a very dear friend both of herself and her husband.

“Then we will call her Matilda,” said he, “as it is a maxim of mine never to spoil children by giving them pet names.”

“But you call your daughter Nellie,” suggested the little widow, and in her soft, blue eye there shone a mischievous twinkle, as if she fancied she had beaten him with his own argument.

But if she thought to convince that most unreasonable man, she was mistaken. What he did was no criterion for others, unless he chose that it should be so, and he answered, “That is sister Kelsey’s idea, and as she is very fond of Nellie I do not interfere. But, seriously, Matty, darling,”—and he drew her to his side, with an uncommon show of fondness,—” I cannot call your daughter Maude; I do not like the name, and it is a maxim of mine, that if a person dislikes a name, ‘tis an easy matter to dislike the one who bears it.”

Had Mrs. Remington cared less for him than she did, she might have wondered how many more disagreeable maxims he had in store. But love is blind, or nearly so; and when, as if to make amends for his remarks, he caressed her with an unusual degree of tenderness, the impulsive woman felt that she would call her daughter anything which suited him. Accordingly, when at last Maude returned to the parlor, with her dress changed, her curls arranged, and her dimpled cheeks shining with the suds in which they had been washed, she was prepared to say

Matilda or whatever else pleased his capricious fancy.

“Little girl,” he said, extending his hand toward her, “little girl, come here. I wish to talk with you.”

But the little girl hung back, and when tier mother insisted upon her going to the gentleman, asking if she did not like him, she answered decidedly, “No, I don’t like him, and he shan’t be my pa, either!”

“Maude, daughter!” exclaimed Mrs. Remington, while Dr. Kennedy, turning slightly pale, thought “wretch!” but said, “Matilda, come here, won’t you?”

“I aint Matilda,” she answered. “I won’t be Matilda—I’m Maude,” and her large black eyes flashed defiantly upon him.

It was in vain that Dr. Kennedy coaxed and Mrs. Remington threatened. Maude had taken a dislike to the stranger, and as he persisted in calling her Matilda, she persisted in refusing to answer, until at last, hearing Janet pass through the hall, she ran out to her, sure of finding comfort and sympathy there.

“I am afraid I have suffered Maude to have her own way too much, and for the future I must be more strict with her,” said Mrs. Remington apologetically; while the doctor replied, “I think, myself, a little wholesome discipline would not be amiss. ‘Tis a maxim of mine, spare the rod and spoil the child; but, of course, I shall not interfere in the matter.”

This last he said because he saw a shadow flit over the fair face of the widow, who, like most indulgent mothers, did not wholly believe in Solomon. The sight of Janet in the hall suggested a fresh subject to the doctor’s mind, and, after coughing a little, he said, “Did I understand that your domestic was intending to join you at Laurel Hill?”

“Yes,” returned Mrs. Remington, “Janet came to live with my mother when I was a little girl no larger than Maude. Since my marriage she has lived with me, and I would not part with her for anything.”

“But do you not think two kinds of servants are apt to make trouble, particularly if one is black and the other white?” and in the speaker’s face there was an expression which puzzled Mrs. Remington, who could scarce refrain from crying at the thoughts of parting with Janet, and who began to have a foretaste of the

dreary homesickness which was to wear her life away.

“I can’t do without Janet,” she said; “she knows all my ways, and I trust her with everything.”

“The very reason why she should not go,” re turned the doctor.” She and old Hannah would quarrel at once. You would take sides with Janet, I with Hannah, and that might produce a feeling which ought never to exist between man and wife. No, my dear, listen to me in this matter, and let Janet remain in Vernon. Old Hannah has been in my family a long time. She was formerly a slave, and belonged to my uncle, who lived in Virginia, and who, at his death, gave her to me. Of course I set her free, for I pride myself on being a man of humanity, and since that time she has lived with us, superintending the household entirely since Mrs. Kennedy’s death. She is very peculiar, and would never suffer Janet to dictate, as I am sure, from what you say, she would do. So, my dear, try and think all is for the best. You need not tell her she is not to come, for it is a maxim of mine to avoid all unnecessary scenes, and you can easily write it in a letter.”

Poor Mrs. Remington! she knew intuitively that the matter was decided, and was she not to be forgiven if at that moment she thought of the grass-grown grave whose occupant had in life been only too happy granting her slightest wish? But Harry was gone, and the man with whom she now had to deal was an exacting, tyrannical master, to whose will her own must ever be subservient. This, however, she did not then understand. She knew he was not at all like Harry, but she fancied that the difference consisted in his being so much older, graver, and wiser than her husband had been, and so with a sigh she yielded the point, thinking that Janet would be the greater sufferer of the two.

That evening several of her acquaintances called to see the bridegroom-elect, whom, in Mrs. Remington’s hearing, they pronounced very fine looking and quite agreeable in manner; compliments which tended in a measure to soothe her irritated feelings and quiet the rapid beatings of her heart, which for hours after she retired to rest would occasionally whisper to her that the path she was about to tread was far from being strewn with flowers.

“He loves me, I know,” she thought, “though his manner of showing it is so different from Harry; but I shall become accustomed to that after a while, and be very, very happy.” And comforted with this assurance she fell asleep, encircling within her arms the little Maude, whose name had awakened bitter memories in

the heart of him who in an adjoining chamber battled with thoughts of the dark past, which now on the eve of his second marriage passed in sad review before his mind.

Memories there were of a gentle, pale-faced woman, who, when her blue eyes were dim with coming death, had shudderingly turned away from him, as if his presence brought her more of pain than joy. Memories, too, there were of another—a peerlessly beautiful creature who, ere he had sought the white-faced woman for his wife, had trampled on his affections and spurned as a useless gift his offered love. He hated her now, he thought; and the little black-haired child, sleeping so sweetly in its mother's arms, was hateful in his sight, because it bore that woman's name. One, two, three— sounded the clock, and then he fell asleep, dreaming that underneath the willows which grew in the churchyard, far off on Laurel Hill, there were two graves instead of one; that in the house across the common there was a sound of rioting and mirth, unusual in that silent mansion. For she was there, the woman whom he had so madly loved, and wherever she went crowds gathered about her as in the olden time.

"Maude Glendower, why are you here?" he attempted to say, when a clear, silvery voice aroused him from his sleep, and starting up, he listened half in anger, half in disappointment, to the song which little Maude Remington sang as she sat in the open door awaiting the return of her mother, who had gone for the last time to see the sunshine fall on Harry's grave.

CHAPTER II.

THE JOURNEY.

Mrs. Kennedy looked charming in her traveling dress of brown, and the happy husband likened her to a Quakeress, as he kissed her blushing. cheek and called her his "little wife." He had passed through the ceremony remarkably well, standing very erect, making the responses very, loud, and squeezing very becomingly the soft white hand on whose third finger he placed the wedding ring—a very small one, by the way. It was over now, and many of the bridal guests were gone; the minister, too, had gone, and jogging leisurely along upon his sorrel horse had ascertained the size of his fee, feeling a little disappointed

that it was not larger—five dollars seemed so small, when he fully expected twenty from one of Dr. Kennedy's reputed wealth.

Janet had seen that everything was done for the comfort of the travelers, and then out behind the smokehouse had scolded herself soundly for crying, when she ought to appear brave, and encourage her young mistress. Not the slightest hint had she received that she was not to follow them in a few, weeks, and when at parting little Maude clung to her skirts, beseeching her to go, she comforted the child by telling her what she would bring her in the autumn, when she came. Half a dozen dolls, as many pounds of candy, a dancing jack, and a mewing kitten were promised, and then the faithful creature turned to the weeping bride, who clasped her hard old hand convulsively, for she knew it was a long good-by. Until the carriage disappeared from view did Mrs. Kennedy look back through blinding tears to the spot where Janet stood, wiping her eyes with a corner of her stiffly starched white apron, and holding up one foot to keep her from soiling her clean blue cotton stockings, for, in accordance with a superstition peculiar to her race, she had thrown after the travelers a shoe, by way of insuring them good luck.

For once in his life Dr. Kennedy tried to be very kind and attentive to his bride, who, naturally hopeful and inclined to look upon the brighter side, dried her tears soon after entering the cars, and began to fancy she was very happy in her new position as the wife of Dr. Kennedy. The seat in front of them was turned back and occupied by Maude, who busied herself a while in watching the fence and the trees, which she said were "running so fast toward Janet and home!" Then her dark eyes would scan curiously the faces of Dr. Kennedy and her mother, resting upon the latter with a puzzled expression, as if she could not exactly understand it. The doctor persisted in calling her Matilda, and as she resolutely persisted in refusing to answer to that name, it seemed quite improbable that they would ever talk much together. Occasionally, it is true, he made her some advances, by playfully offering her his hand, but she would not touch it, and after a time, standing upon the seat and turning round, she found more agreeable society in the company of two boys who sat directly behind her.

They were evidently twelve or thirteen years of age, and in personal appearance somewhat alike, save that the face of the brown-haired boy was more open, ingenuous, and pleasing than that of his companion, whose hair and eyes were black as night. A jolt of the cars caused Maude to lay her chubby hand upon the shoulder of the elder boy, who, being very fond of children, caught it within his

own, and in this way made her acquaintance. To him she was very communicative, and in a short time he learned that “her name was Maude Remington, that the pretty lady in brown was her mother, and that the naughty man was not her father, and never would be, for Janet said so.”

This at once awakened an interest in the boys, and for more than an hour they petted and played with the little girl, who, though very gracious to both, still manifested so much preference for the brown-haired, that the other laughingly asked her which she liked the best.

“I like you and you,” was Maude’s childlike answer, as she pointed a finger at each.

“But,” persisted her questioner, “you like my cousin the best. Will you tell me why?”

Maude hesitated a moment, then laying a hand on either side of the speaker’s face, and looking intently into his eyes, she answered, “You don’t look as if you meant for certain, and he does!”

Had Maude Remington been twenty instead of five, she could not better have defined the difference between those two young lads, and in after years she had sad cause for remembering words which seemed almost prophetic. At Albany they, parted company, for though the boys lived in Rochester they were to remain in the city through the night, and Dr. Kennedy had decided to go on. By doing so he would reach home near the close of the next day, beside saving a large hotel bill, and this last was with him a very weighty reason. But he did not say so to his wife; neither did he tell her that he had left orders for his carriage to be in Canadaigua on the arrival of the noon train, but he said “he was in haste to show her to his daughter—that ‘twas a maxim of his to save as much time as possible, and that unless she were very anxious to sleep, he would rather travel all night.” So the poor, weary woman, whose head was aching terribly, smiled faintly upon him as she said, “Go on, of course,” and nibbled at the hard seedcakes and harder crackers which he brought her, there not being time for supper in Albany.

It was a long, tedious ride, and though a strong arm was thrown around her, and her head was pillowed upon the bosom of her husband, who really tried to make her as comfortable as possible, Mrs. Kennedy could scarcely refrain from tears

as she thought how different was this bridal tour from what she had anticipated. She had fully expected to pass by daylight through the Empire State, and she had thought with how much delight her eye would rest upon the grassy meadows, the fertile plains, the winding Mohawk, the drone-like boats on the canal, the beautiful Cayuga, and the silvery water so famed in song; but, in contrast to all this, she was shut up in a dingy car, whose one dim lamp sent forth a sickly ray and sicklier smell, while without all was gloomy, dark, and drear. No wonder, then, that when toward morning Maude, who missed her soft, nice bed, began to cry for Janet and for home, the mother too burst forth in tears and choking sobs, which could not be controlled.

“Hush, Matty—don’t,” and the disturbed doctor shook her very gently; “it will soon be daylight, and ‘tis a max—” Here he stopped, for he had no maxim suited to that occasion; and, in a most unenviable frame of mind, he frowned at the crying Maude, and tried to soothe his weeping wife, until at last, as the face of the latter was covered, and the former grew more noisy and unmanageable, he administered a fatherly rebuke in the shape of a boxed ear, which had no other effect than the eliciting from the child the outcry, “Let me be, old doctor, you!” if, indeed, we except the long scratch made upon his hand by the little sharp nail of his stepdaughter.

At that moment Matty lifted up her head, but as Maude was no tale-bearer, and the doctor hardly dared to tell her that he had thus early taken upon himself the government of her child, she never knew exactly what it was which made Maude’s ear so red or her liege lord’s face so dark.

It was nearly noon when they arrived at Canandaigua, where the first object which caught Mrs. Kennedy’s eye was an old-fashioned carryall, which her husband honored with the appellation of carriage, said carriage being drawn by two farm-horses, which looked as if oats and corn were to them luxuries unknown.

“I must have a cup of tea,” said Mrs. Kennedy, as she saw the black man, John, arranging the baggage upon the rack of the carryall, and heard her husband bid him hurry, as there was no time to lose. “I must have a cup of tea, my head is aching dreadfully,” and her white lips quivered, while the tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Certainly, certainly,” answered the doctor, who was in unusually good spirits,

having just heard from an acquaintance whom he chanced to meet that a lawsuit which had long been pending was decided in his favor, and that the house and lot of a widow would probably come into his possession. “Certainly, two cups if you like; I should have proposed it myself, only I knew old Hannah would have dinner in readiness for us, and ‘tis a maxim of mine, that fasting provokes an appetite.”

“Hang dis nigger, if he aint a-maxin’ her so quick!” muttered the darkey, showing his teeth from ear to ear; and, coaxing Maude away from her mother, he took her to a restaurant, where he literally crammed her with ginger-bread, raisins, and candy, bidding her eat all she wanted at once, for it would be a long time, maybe, ere she’d have another chance!

“If you please, sar,” he said, when at last he had returned to his master, “if you please, Miss Nellie say how you must fotch her somethin’, and the old woman spec’s a present in honor of de ‘casion.”

Dr. Kennedy thought of the lawsuit, and so far opened both heart and purse as to buy for Nellie a paper of peanuts and for Hannah a tencent calico apron, after which he pronounced himself in readiness to go, and in a few moments Mrs. Kennedy was on her way to her new home.

The road led over rocky hills, reminding her so much of Vernon and its surrounding country that a feeling of rest stole over her, and she fell into a quiet sleep, from which she did not awaken until the carriage stopped suddenly and her husband whispered in her ear, “Wake, Matty, wake; we are home at last.”

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW HOME.

It was a large, square, wooden building, built in the olden time, with a wide hall in the center, a tiny portico in front, and a long piazza in the rear. In all the town there was not so delightful a location, for it commanded a view of the country for many miles around, while from the chamber windows was plainly discernible the sparkling Honeoye, whose waters slept so calmly ‘mid the hills which lay to

the southward. On the grassy lawn in front tall forest trees were growing, almost concealing the house from view, while their long branches so met together as to form a beautiful arch over the graveled walk which lead to the front door. It was, indeed, a pleasant spot, and Matty, as she passed through the iron gate, could not account for the feeling of desolation settling down upon her.

“Maybe it’s because there are no flowers here—no roses,” she thought, as she looked around in vain for her favorites, thinking the while how her first work should be to train a honeysuckle over the door and plant a rose bush underneath the window.

Poor Matty! Dr. Kennedy had no love for flowers, and the only rose bush he ever noticed was the one which John had planted at his mistress’ grave, and even this would, perchance, have been unseen, if he had not scratched his hand unmercifully upon it as he one day shook the stone to see if it were firmly placed in the ground ere he paid the man for putting it there! It was a maxim of the doctor’s never to have anything not strictly for use, consequently his house, both outside and in, was destitute of every kind of ornament; and the bride, as she followed him through the empty hall into the silent parlor, whose bare walls, faded carpet, and uncurtained windows seemed so uninviting, felt a chill creeping over her spirits, and sinking into the first hard chair she came to, she might, perhaps, have cried had not John, who followed close behind her, satchel on arm, whispered encouragingly in her ear, “Never you mind, missus, your chamber is a heap sight brighter than this, ‘case I tended to that myself.”

Mrs. Kennedy smiled gratefully upon him, feeling sure that beneath his black exterior there beat a kind and sympathizing heart, and that in him she had an ally and a friend.

“Where is Nellie?” said the doctor. “Call Nellie, John, and tell your mother we are here.”

John left the room, and a moment after a little tiny creature came tripping to the door, where she stopped suddenly, and throwing back her curls, gazed curiously first at Mrs. Kennedy and then at Maude, whose large black eyes fastened themselves upon her with a gaze quite as curious and eager as her own. She was more than a year older than Maude, but much smaller in size, and her face seemed to have been fashioned after a beautiful waxen doll, so brilliant was her complexion and so regular her features. She was naturally affectionate and

amiable, too, when suffered to have her own way. Neither was she at all inclined to be timid, and when her father, taking her hand in his, bade her speak to her new mother, she went unhesitatingly to the lady, and climbing into her lap, sat there very quietly so long as Mrs. Kennedy permitted her to play with her rings, pull her collar, and take out her side-combs, for she had laid aside her bonnet; but when at last her little sharp eyes ferreted out a watch, which she insisted upon having "all to herself," a liberty which Mrs. Kennedy refused to grant, she began to pout, and, sliding from her new mother's lap, walked up to Maude, whose acquaintance she made by asking if she had a pink silk dress. "No, but I guess Janet will bring me one," answered Maude, whose eyes never for an instant left the face of her stepsister.

She was an enthusiastic admirer of beauty, and Nellie had made an impression upon her at once; so, when the latter said, "What makes you look at me so funny?" she answered, "Because you are so pretty." This made a place for her at once in the heart of the vain little Nellie, who asked her to go upstairs and see the pink silk dress which "Aunt Kelsey had given her."

As they left the room Mrs. Kennedy said to her husband, "Your daughter is very beautiful."

Dr. Kennedy liked to have people say that of his child, for he knew she was much like himself, and he stroked his brown beard complacently, as he replied: "Yes, Nellie is rather pretty, and, considering all things, is as well-behaved a child as one often finds. She seldom gets into a passion or does anything rude," and he glanced at the long scratch upon his hand; but as his wife knew nothing of said scratch, the rebuke was wholly lost, and he continued: "I was anxious that she should be a boy, for it is a maxim of mine that the oldest child in every family ought to be a son, and so I said, repeatedly, to the late Mrs. Kennedy, who, though a most excellent woman in most matters, was in others unaccountably set in her way. I suppose I said some harsh things when I heard it was a daughter, but it can't be helped now," and with a slightly injured air the husband of "the late Mrs. Kennedy" began to pace up and down the room, while the present Mrs. Kennedy puzzled her rather weak brain to know "what in the world he meant."

Meantime between John and his mother there was a hurried conversation, the former inquiring naturally after the looks of her new mistress.

“Pretty as a pink,” answered John, “and neat as a fiddle, with the sweetest little baby ways; but I tell you what ‘tis,” and John’s voice fell to a whisper: “he’ll maxim her into heaven a heap sight quicker’n he did t’other one; ‘case you see she haint so much—what you call him—so much go off to her as Miss Katy had, and she can’t bar his grinding ways. They’ll scrush her to onct—see if they don’t. But I knows one thing, this yer nigger ‘tends to do his duty, and hold up them little cheese-curd hands of her’n, jest as some of them Scripter folks held up Moses with the bulrushes.”

“And what of the young one?” asked Hannah, who had been quite indignant at the thoughts of another child in the family, “what of the young one?”

“Bright as a dollar!” answered John. “Knows more’n a dozen of Nellie, and well she might, for she aint half as white, and as Master Kennedy says, it’s a maxim of mine, the blacker the hide the better the sense!”

By this time Hannah had washed the dough from her hands, and taking the roast chicken from the oven she donned a clean apron and started to see the stranger for herself. Although a tolerably good woman, Hannah’s face was not very prepossessing, and Mrs. Kennedy intuitively felt that ‘twould be long before her former domestic’s place was made good by the indolent African. It is true her obeisance was very low, and her greeting kindly enough, but there was about her an inquisitive, and at the same time, rather patronizing air which Mrs. Kennedy did not like, and she was glad when she at last left the parlor, telling them, as she did so, that “dinner was done ready.”

Notwithstanding that the house itself was so large, the dining room was a small, dark, cheerless apartment, and though she was beginning to feel the want of food, Mrs. Kennedy could scarcely force down a mouthful, for the homesick feeling at her heart; a feeling which whispered to her that the home to which she had come was not like that which she had left. Dinner being over, she asked permission to retire to her chamber, saying she needed rest, and should feel better after she had slept. Nellie volunteered to lead the way, and as they left the dining room old Hannah, who was notoriously lazy, muttered aloud: “A puny, sickly thing. Great help she’ll be to me; but I shan’t stay to wait on more’n forty more.”

Dr. Kennedy had his own private reason for wishing to conciliate Hannah. When he set her free he made her believe it was her duty to work for him for nothing,

and though she soon learned better, and often threatened to leave, he had always managed to keep her, for, on the whole, she liked her place, and did not care to change it for one where her task would be much harder. But if the new wife proved to be sickly, matters would be different, and so she fretted, as we have seen, while the doctor comforted her with the assurance that Mrs. Kennedy was only tired—that she was naturally well and strong, and would undoubtedly be of great assistance when the novelty of her position had worn away.

While this conversation was taking place Mrs. Kennedy was examining her chamber and thinking many pleasant things of John, whose handiwork was here so plainly visible. All the smaller and more fanciful pieces of furniture which the house afforded had been brought to this room, whose windows looked out upon the lake and the blue hills beyond. A clean white towel concealed the marred condition of the washstand, while the bed, which was made up high and round, especially in the middle, looked very inviting with its snowy spread. A large stuffed rocking chair, more comfortable than handsome, occupied the center of the room, while better far than all, the table, the mantel, and the windows were filled with flowers, which John had begged from the neighboring gardens, and which seemed to smile a welcome upon the weary woman, who, with a cry of delight, bent down and kissed them through her tears.

“Did these come from your garden?” she asked of Nellie, who, childlike, answered, “We haint any flowers. Pa won’t let John plant any. He told Aunt Kelsey the land had better be used for potatoes, and Aunt Kelsey said he was too stingy to live.”

“Who is Aunt Kelsey?” asked Mrs. Kennedy, a painful suspicion fastening itself upon her that the lady’s opinion might be correct.

“She is pa’s sister Charlotte,” answered Nellie, “and lives in Rochester, in a great big house, with the handsomest things; but she don’t come here often, it’s so heathenish, she says.”

Here spying John, who was going with the oxen to the meadow, she ran away, followed by Maude, between whom and herself there was for the present a most amicable understanding. Thus left alone Mrs. Kennedy had time for thought, which crowded upon her so fast that, at last throwing herself upon the bed, she wept bitterly, half wishing she had never come to Laurel Hill, but was still at home in her own pleasant cottage. Then hope whispered to her of a brighter day,

when things would not seem to her as they now did. She would fix up the desolate old house, she thought; the bare windows which now so stared her in the face should be shaded with pretty muslin curtains, and she would loop them back with ribbons. The carpet, too, on the parlor floor should be exchanged for a better one, and when her piano and marble table came, the only articles of furniture she had not sold, it would not seem so cheerless and so cold.

Comforted with these thoughts, she fell asleep, resting quietly until, just as the sun had set and it was growing dark within the room, Maude came rushing in, her dress all wet, her face flushed, and her eyes red with tears. She and Nellie had quarreled—nay, actually fought; Nellie telling Maude she was blacker than a nigger, and pushing her into the brook, while Maude, in return, had pulled out a handful of the young lady's hair, for which her stepfather had shaken her soundly and sent her to her mother, whom she begged "to go home, and not stay in that old house where the folks were ugly and the rooms not a bit pretty."

Mrs. Kennedy's heart was already full, and drawing Maude to her side, the two homesick children mingled their tears together, until a heavy footstep upon the stairs announced the approach of Dr. Kennedy. Not a word did he say of his late adventure with Maude, and his manner was very kind toward his weary wife, who, with his hand upon her aching forehead, and his voice in her ear, telling her how sorry he was that she was sick, forgot that she had been unhappy.

"Whatever else he may do," she thought, "he certainly loves me," and after a fashion he did perhaps love her. She was a pretty little creature, and her playful, coquettish ways had pleased him at first sight. He needed a wife, and when their mutual friend, who knew nothing of him save that he was a man of integrity and wealth, suggested Matty Remington, he too thought favorably of the matter, and yielding to the fascination of her soft blue eyes he had won her for his wife, pitying her, it may be, as he sat by her in the gathering twilight, and half guessed that she was homesick. And when he saw how confidingly she clung to him, he was conscious of a half-formed resolution to be to her what a husband ought to be. But Dr. Kennedy's resolves were like the morning dew, and as the days wore on his peculiarities, one after another, were discovered by his wife, who, womanlike, tried to think that he was right and she was wrong.

In due time most of the villagers called upon her, and though they were both intelligent and refined, she did not feel altogether at ease in their presence, for the fancy she had that they regarded her as one who for some reason was entitled

to their pity. And in this she was correct. They did pity her, for they remembered another gentle woman, whose brown hair had turned gray, and whose blue eyes had waxed dim beneath the withering influence of him she called her husband. She was dead, and when they saw the young, light-hearted Matty, they did not understand how she could ever have been induced to take that woman's place and wed a man of thirty-eight, and they blamed her somewhat, until they reflected that she knew nothing of him, and that her fancy was probably captivated by his dignified bearing, his manly figure, and handsome face. But these alone they knew could not make her happy, and ere she had been six weeks a wife they were not surprised that her face began to wear a weary look, as if the burden of life were hard to bear.

As far as she could she beautified the home, purchasing with her own means several little articles which the doctor called useless, though he never failed to appropriate to himself the easy chair which she had bought for the sitting room, and which when she was tired rested her so much. On the subject of curtains he was particularly obstinate. "There were blinds," he said, "and 'twas a maxim of his never to spend his money for anything unnecessary."

Still, when Matty bought them herself for the parlor, when her piano was unboxed and occupied a corner which had long been destitute of furniture, and when her marble table stood between the windows, with a fresh bouquet of flowers which John had brought, he exclaimed involuntarily, "How nice this is!" adding the next moment, lest his wife should be too much pleased, "but vastly foolish!"

In accordance with her husband's suggestion Mrs. Kennedy wrote to Janet, breaking to her as gently as possible the fact that she was not to come, but saying nothing definite concerning her new home or her own happiness as a second wife. Several weeks went by, and then an answer came.

"If you had of wanted me," wrote Janet, "I should of come, but bein' you didn't, I've went to live with Mr. Blodgett, who peddles milk, and raises butter and cheese, and who they say is worth a deal of money, and well he may be, for he's saved this forty years."

Then followed a detailed account of her household matters, occupying in all three pages of foolscap, to which was pinned a bit of paper, containing the following:

“Joel looked over my writing and said I’d left out the very thing I wanted to tell the most. We are married, me and Joel, and I only hope you are as happy with that doctor as I am with my man.”

This announcement crushed at once the faint hope which Mrs. Kennedy had secretly entertained, of eventually having Janet to supply the place of Hannah, who was notoriously lazy, and never under any circumstances did anything she possibly could avoid. Dr. Kennedy did not tell his wife that he expected her to make it easy for Hannah, so she would not leave them; but he told her how industrious the late Mrs. Kennedy had been, and hinted that a true woman was not above kitchen work. The consequence of this was that Matty, who really wished to please him, became in time a very drudge, doing things which she once thought she could not do, and then without a murmur ministering to her exacting husband when he came home from visiting a patient, and declared himself “tired to death.” Very still he sat while her weary little feet ran for the cool drink—the daily paper—or the morning mail; and very happy he looked when her snowy fingers combed his hair or brushed his threadbare coat; and if, perchance, she sighed amid her labor of love, his ear was deaf, and he did not hear, neither did he see how white and thin she grew as day by day went by.

Her piano was now seldom touched, for the doctor did not care for music; still he was glad that she could play, for “Sister Kelsey,” who was to him a kind of terror, would insist that Nellie should take music lessons, and, as his wife was wholly competent to give them, he would be spared a very great expense. “Save, save, save,” seemed to be his motto, and when at church the plate was passed to him he gave his dime a loving pinch ere parting company with it; and yet none read the service louder or defended his favorite liturgy more zealously than himself. In some things he was a pattern man, and when once his servant John announced his intention of withdrawing from the Episcopalians and joining himself to the Methodists, who held their meetings in the schoolhouse, he was greatly shocked, and labored long with the degenerate son of Ethiopia, who would render to him no reason for his most unaccountable taste, though he did to Matty, when she questioned him of his choice.

“You see, missus,” said he, “I wasn’t allus a herrytic, but was as good a ‘Piscopal as St. George ever had. That’s when I lived in Virginny, and was hired out to Marster Morton, who had a school for boys, and who larnt me how to read a little. After I’d arn’t a heap of money for Marster Kennedy he wanted to go to the Legislatur’, and as some on ‘em wouldn’t vote for him while he owned a

nigger, he set me free, and sent for me to come home. ‘Twas hard partin’ wid dem boys and Marster Morton, I tell you, but I kinder wanted to see mother, who had been here a good while, and who, like a fool, was a-workin’ an’ is a-workin’ for nothin’.”

“For nothing!” exclaimed Mrs. Kennedy, a suspicion of the reason why Janet was refused crossing her mind.

“Yes, marm, for nothin’,” answered John, “but I aint green enough for that, and ‘fused outright. Then marster, who got beat ‘lection day, threatened to send me back, but I knew he couldn’t do it, and so he agreed to pay eight dollars a month. I could get more somewhar else, but I’d rather stay with mother, and so I stayed.”

“But that has nothing to do with the church,” suggested Mrs. Kennedy, and John replied:

“I’m comin’ to the p’int now. I live with Marster Kennedy, and went with him to church, and when I see how he carried on week days, and how peart like he read up Sabba’ days, sayin’ the Lord’s Prar and ‘Postle’s Creed, I began to think thar’s somethin’ rotten in Denmark, as the boys use to say in Virginny; so when mother, who allus was a-roarin’ Methodis’, asked me to go wid her to meetin’, I went, and was never so mortified in my life, for arter the elder had ‘xorted a spell at the top of his voice, he sot down and said there was room for others. I couldn’t see how that was, bein’ he took up the whole chair, and while I was wonderin’ what he meant, as I’m a livin’ nigger, up got marm and spoke a piece right in meetin’! I never was so shamed, and I kep’ pullin’ at her gownd to make her set down, but the harder I pulled the louder she hollered, till at last she blowed her breath all away, and down she sot.”

“And did any of the rest speak pieces?” asked Mrs. Kennedy, convulsed with laughter at John’s vivid description.

“Bless your heart,” he answered, with a knowing look, “‘twarn’t a piece she was speaking—she was tellin’ her ‘sperience; but it sounded so like the boys at school that I was deceived, for I’d never seen such work before. But I’ve got so I like it now, and I believe thar’s more ‘sistency down in that schoolhouse than thar is in—I won’t say the ‘Piscopal church, ‘case thar’s heaps of shinin’ lights thar, but if you won’t be mad, I’ll say more than thar is in Marster Kennedy, who

has hisself to thank for my bein' a Methodis'."

Whatever Mrs. Kennedy might have thought she could not help laughing heartily at John, who was now a decided Methodist, and adorned his profession far more than his selfish, hard-hearted master. His promise of holding up his mistress' hands had been most faithfully kept, and, without any disparagement to Janet, Mrs. Kennedy felt that the loss of her former servant was in a great measure made up to her in the kind negro, who, as the months went by and her face grew thinner each day, purchased with his own money many a little delicacy which he hoped would tempt her capricious appetite. Maude, too, was a favorite with John, both on account of her color, which he greatly admired, and because, poor, ignorant creature though he was, he saw in her the germ of the noble girl who in the coming years was to bear uncomplainingly a burden of care from which the selfish Nellie would unhesitatingly turn away.

Toward Maude the doctor had ever manifested a feeling of aversion, both because of her name and because she had compelled him to yield when his mind was fully made up to do otherwise. She had resolutely refused to be called Matilda, and as it was necessary for him sometimes to address her, he called her first, "You girl," then "Mat," and finally arrived at "Maude," speaking it always spitefully, as if provoked that he had once in his life been conquered. With the management of her he seldom interfered, for that scratch had given him a timely lesson, and as he did not like to be unnecessarily troubled, he left both Maude and Nellie to his wife, who suffered the latter to do nearly as she pleased, and thus escaped many of the annoyances to which stepmothers are usually subject.

Although exceedingly selfish Nellie was affectionate in her disposition, and when Maude did not cross her path the two were on the best of terms. Disturbances there were, however—quarrels and fights, in the latter of which Maude, being the stronger of the two, always came off victor; but these did not last long, and had her husband been to her what he ought Mrs. Kennedy's life would not have been as dreary as it was. He meant well enough, perhaps, but he did not understand a woman, much less know how to treat her, and as the winter months went by Matty's heart would have fainted within her but for a hope which whispered to her, "He will love me better when next summer comes."

CHAPTER IV.

LITTLE LOUIS.

It is just one year since the summer morning when Matty Kennedy took upon herself a second time the duties of a wife, and now she lies in a darkened room, her face white as the winter snow, and her breath scarcely perceptible to the touch, as it comes faintly from her parted lips. In dignified silence the doctor sits by, counting her feeble pulse, while an expression of pride and almost perfect happiness breaks over his face as he glances toward the cradle which Hannah has brought from the garret, and where now slept the child born to him that day. His oft-repeated maxim that if the first were not a boy the second ought to be, had prevailed at last, and Dombey had a son. It was a puny thing, but the father said it looked as Nellie did when she first rested there, and Nellie, holding back her breath and pushing aside her curls, bent down to see the red-faced infant.

“I was never as ugly as that, and I don’t love him a bit!” she exclaimed, turning away in disgust; while Maude approached on tip-toe, and kneeling by the cradle side kissed the unconscious sleeper, whispering as she did so, “I love you, poor little brother.”

Darling Maude—blessed Maude—in all your after life you proved the truth of those low spoken words, “I love you, poor little brother.”

For many days did Mrs. Kennedy hover between life and death, never asking for her baby, and seldom noticing her husband, who, while declaring there was no danger, still deemed it necessary, in case anything should happen, to send for his sister, Mrs. Kelsey, who had not visited him since his last marriage. She was a proud, fashionable woman, who saw nothing attractive in the desolate old house, and who had conceived an idea that her brother’s second wife was a sort of nobody whom he had picked up among the New England hills. But the news of her illness softened her feelings in a measure, and she started for Laurel Hill, thinking that if Matty died she hoped a certain dashing, brilliant woman, called Maude Glendower, might go there, and govern the tyrannical doctor, even as he had governed others.

It was late in the afternoon when she reached her brother’s house, from which Nellie came running out to meet her, accompanied by Maude. From the latter the lady at first turned disdainfully away, but ere long stole another look at the

brown-faced girl, about whom there was something very attractive.

“Curtains, as I live!” she exclaimed, as she entered the parlor. “A piano, and marble table, too. Where did these come from?”

“They are ma’s, and she’s got a baby upstairs,” answered Maude, and the lady’s hand rested for an instant on the little curly head, for strange as it may seem, she esteemed more highly a woman who owned a piano and handsome table than she did one whose worldly possessions were more limited.

After making some changes in her dress, she went up to the sick-room, and as Matty was asleep, she had ample time to examine her face, and also to inspect the room, which showed in someone a refined and delicate taste.

“She must be more of a lady than I supposed,” she thought, and when at last her sister-in-law awoke she greeted her kindly, and during her visit, which lasted nearly two weeks, she exerted herself to be agreeable, succeeding so far that Matty parted from her at last with genuine regret.

“Poor thing—she’ll never see another winter,” was Mrs. Kelsey’s mental comment, as she bade the invalid good-by; but in this she was mistaken, for with the falling of the leaf Matty began to improve, and though she never fully regained her health, she was able again to be about the house, doing far more than she ought to have done, but never uttering a word of complaint, however heavy was the burden imposed upon her.

With Maude and her baby, who bore the name of Louis, she found her greatest comfort. He was a sweet, playful child, and sure never before was father so foolishly proud of his son as was Dr. Kennedy of his. For hours would he sit watching him while he slept, and building castles of the future, when “Louis Kennedy, only son of Dr. Kennedy,” should be honored among men. Toward the mother, too, who had borne him such a prodigy he became a little more indulgent, occasionally suffering her wishes to prevail over his maxims, and on three several occasions giving her a dollar to spend as she pleased. Surely such generosity did not deserve so severe a punishment as was in store for the proud father.

Louis had a most beautiful face, and in his soft, brown eyes there was a “look like the angels,” as Maude once said to her mother, who seldom spoke of him without a sigh, for on her mind a terrible fear was fastening itself. Although

mentally as forward as other children, Louis' body did not keep pace with the growth of his intellect, and when he was two years of age he could not bear his weight upon his feet, but in creeping dragged his limbs slowly, as if in them there was no life—no strength.

"Ma, why don't Louis walk?" asked Maude, one evening when she saw how long it took him to cross the room.

"Loui' tant walk," answered the child, who talked with perfect ease.

The tears came instantly to Mrs. Kennedy's eyes, for, availing herself of her husband's absence, she had that morning consulted another physician, who, after carefully examining Louis' body, had whispered in the poor woman's ear that which made every nerve quiver with pain, while at the same time it made dearer a thousandfold her baby-boy; for a mother's pity increases a mother's love.

"Say, ma, what is it?" persisted Maude. "Will Louis ever walk?"

"Loui'll never walk," answered the little fellow, shaking his brown curls, and tearing in twain a picture-book which his father had bought him the day before.

"Maude," said Mrs. Kennedy, drawing her daughter to her side, "I must tell somebody or my heart will burst," and laying her head upon the table she wept aloud.

"Don't try, ma, Loui' good," lisped the infant on the floor, while Mrs. Kennedy, drying at last her tears, told to the wondering Maude that Louis was not like other children—that he would probably never have the use of his feet—that a hunch was growing on his back—and he in time would be—she could not say "deformed," and so she said at last—"he'll be forever lame."

Poor little Maude! How all her childish dreams were blasted! She had anticipated so much pleasure in guiding her brother's tottering footsteps, in leading him to school, to church, and everywhere, and she could not have him lame.

"Oh, Louis, Louis!" she cried, winding her arms around his neck, as if she would thus avert the dreaded evil.

Very wonderfully the child looked up into her eyes, and raising his waxen hand

he wiped her tears away, saying as he did so, “Loui’ love Maude.”

With a choking sob Maude kissed her baby brother, then going back to her mother, whose head still lay upon the table, she whispered, “We will love poor Louis all the more, you and I.”

Blessed Maude, we say again, for these were no idle words, and the clinging, tender love with which she cherished her unfortunate brother ought to have shamed the heartless man who, when he heard of his affliction, refused to be comforted, and almost cursed the day when his only son was born. He had been absent for a week or more, and with the exception of the time when he first knew he had a son he did not remember of having experienced a moment of greater happiness than that in which he reached his home where dwelt his boy—his pride—his idol. Louis was not in the room, and on the mother’s face there was an expression of sadness, which at once awakened the father’s fears lest something had befallen his child.

“Where is Louis?” he asked. “Has anything happened to him that you look so pale?”

“Louis is well,” answered Matty, and then, unable longer to control her feelings, she burst into tears, while the doctor looked on in amazement, wondering if all women were as nervous and foolish as the two it had been his fortune to marry.

“Oh, husband,” she cried, feeling sure of his sympathy, and thinking it better to tell the truth at once; “has it never occurred to you that Louis was not like other children?”

“Of course it has,” he answered quickly. “He is a thousand times brighter than any child I have ever known.”

“‘Tisn’t that, ‘tisn’t that,” said Matty. “He’ll never walk—he’s lame—deformed!”

“What do you mean?” thundered the doctor, reeling for an instant like a drunken man; then, recovering his composure, he listened while Matty told him what she meant.

At that moment Maude drew Louis into the room, and, taking the child in his arms, the doctor examined him for himself, wondering he had never observed

before how small and seemingly destitute of life were his lower limbs. The bunch upon the back, though slight as yet, was really there, and Matty, when questioned, said it had been there for weeks, but she did not tell of it, for she hoped it would go away.

“It will stay until his dying day,” he muttered, as he ordered Maude to take the child away. “Louis deformed! Louis a cripple! What have I done that I should be thus sorely punished?” he exclaimed, when he was alone with his wife; and then, as he dared not blame the Almighty, he charged it to her, until at last his thoughts took another channel. Maude had dropped him—he knew she had, and Matty was to blame for letting her handle him so much, when she knew ‘twas a maxim of his that children should not take care of children.

He had forgotten the time when his worn-out wife had asked him to hire a nurse girl for Louis, and he had answered that “Maude was large enough for that.” On some points his memory was treacherous, and for days he continued to repine at his hard fate, wishing once in Matty’s presence that Louis had never been born.

“Oh, husband,” she cried, “how can you say that! Do you hate our poor boy because he is a cripple?”

“A cripple!” roared the doctor. “Never use that word again in my presence. My son a cripple! I can’t have it so! I won’t have it so! for ‘tis a max—”

Here he stopped, being for a second time in his life at a loss what to say.

“Sarve ‘em right, sarve ‘em right,” muttered John, whose quick eye saw everything. “Ole Sam payin’ him off good. He think he’ll be in the seventh heaven when he got a boy, and he mighty nigh torment that little gal’s life out with his mexens and things; but now he got a boy, he feel a heap like the bad place.”

Still much as John rejoiced that his master was so punished, his heart went out in pity toward the helpless child whom he almost worshiped, carrying him often to the fields, where, seeking out the shadiest spot and the softest grass for a throne, he would place the child upon it, and then pay him obeisance by bobbing up and down his wooly head in a manner quite as satisfactory to Louis as if he indeed had been a king and John his loyal subject. Old Hannah, too, was greatly softened, and many a little cake and pie she baked in secret for the child, while even Nellie gave up to him her favorite playthings, and her blue eyes wore a

pitying look whenever they rested on the poor unfortunate. All loved him seemingly the more— all, save the cruel father, who, as the months and years rolled on, seemed to acquire a positive dislike to the little boy, seldom noticing him in any way except to frown if he were brought into his sight. And Louis, with the quick instinct of childhood, learned to expect nothing from his father, whose attention he never tried to attract.

As if to make amends for his physical deformity, he possessed an uncommon mind, and when he was nearly six years of age accident revealed to him the reason of his father's continued coldness, and wrung from him the first tears he had ever shed for his misfortune. He heard one day his mother praying that God would soften her husband's heart toward his poor hunchback boy, who was not to blame for his misfortune—and laying his head upon the broad arm of the chair which had been made for him, he wept bitterly, for he knew now why he was not loved. That night, as in his crib he lay, watching the stars which shone upon him through the window, and wondering if in heaven there were hunchback boys like him, he overheard his father talking to his mother, and the words that his father said were never forgotten to his dying day. There were, "Don't ask me to be reconciled to a cripple! What good can he do me? He will never earn his own living, lame as he is, and will only be in the way."

"Oh, father, father," the cripple essayed to say, but he could not speak, so full of pain was his little, bursting heart, and that night he lay awake, praying that he might die and so be out of the way.

The next morning he asked Maude to draw him to the churchyard where "his other mother," as he called her, was buried. Maude complied, and when they were there, placed him at his request upon the ground, where stretching himself out at his full length, he said: "Look, Maude, won't mine be a little grave?" then, ere she could answer the strange question, he continued, "I want to die so bad; and if you leave me lying here in the long grass maybe God's angel will take me up to heaven. Will I be lame, there, think you?"

"Oh, Louis, Louis, what do you mean?" cried Maude, and as well as he could, for the tears he shed, Louis told her what he meant.

"Father don't love me because I'm lame, and he called me a cripple, too. What is a cripple, Maude? Is it anything very bad?" and his beautiful brown eyes turned anxiously toward his sister.

He had never heard that word before, and to him it had a fearful significance, even worse than lameness. In an instant Maude knelt by his side—his head was pillowed on her bosom, and in the silent graveyard, with the quiet dead around. them, she spoke blessed words of comfort to her brother, telling him what a cripple was, and that because he bore that name he was dearer far to her.

“Your father will love you, too,” she said, “when he learns how good you are. He loves Nellie, and—”

Ere she could say more she was interrupted by Louis, on whose mind another truth had dawned, and who now said, “But he don’t love you as he does Nellie. Why not? Are you a cripple, too?”

Folding him still closer in her arms, and kissing his fair, white brow, Maude answered: “Your father, Louis, is not mine—for mine is dead, and his grave is far away. I came here to live when I was a little girl, not quite as old as you, and Nellie is not my sister, though you are my darling brother.”

“And do you love father?” asked Louis, his eyes still fixed upon her face as if he would read the truth.

Every feeling of Maude Remington’s heart answered, “No,” to that question, but she could not say so to the boy, and she replied, “Not as I could love my own father—neither does he love me, for I am not his child.”

This explanation was not then wholly clear to Louis, but he understood that there was a barrier between his father and Maude, and this of itself was sufficient to draw him more closely to the latter, who, after that day, cherished him, if possible, more tenderly than she had done before, keeping him out of his father’s way, and cushioning his little crutches so they could not be heard, for she rightly guessed that the sound of them was hateful to the harsh man’s ears.

Maude was far older than her years, and during the period of time over which we have passed so briefly she had matured both in mind and body, until now at the age of twelve she was a self-reliant little woman on whom her mother wholly depended for comfort and counsel. Very rapidly was Mrs. Kennedy passing from the world, and as she felt the approach of death she leaned more and more upon her daughter, talking to her often of the future and commending Louis to her care, when with her he would be motherless. Maude’s position was now a trying one, for, when her mother became too ill to leave her room, and the doctor

refused to hire extra help, saying, “two great girls were help enough,” it was necessary for her to go into the kitchen, where she vainly tried to conciliate old Hannah, who “wouldn’t mind a chit of a girl, and wouldn’t fret herself either if things were not half done.”

From the first Nellie resolutely refused to work—“it would black her hands,” she said, and as her father never remonstrated she spent her time in reading, admiring her pretty face, and drumming upon the piano, which Maude, who was fonder even than Nellie of music, seldom found time to touch. One there was, however, who gave to Maude every possible assistance, and this was John. “Having tried his hand,” as he said, “at everything in Marster Norton’s school,” he proved of invaluable service—sweeping, dusting, washing dishes, cleaning knives, and once ironing Dr. Kennedy’s shirts, when old Hannah was in what he called her “tantrums.” But alas for John! the entire print of the iron upon the bosom of one, to say nothing of the piles of starch upon another, and more than all, the tremendous scolding which he received from the owner of said shirt, warned him never to turn laundress again, and in disgust he gave up his new vocation, devoting his leisure moments to the cultivation of flowers, which he carried to his mistress, who smiled gratefully upon him, saying they were the sweetest she had ever smelled. And so each morning a fresh bouquet was laid upon her pillow, and as she inhaled their perfume she thought of her New England home, which she would never see again—thought, too, of Janet, whose cheering words and motherly acts would be so grateful to her now when she so much needed care.

“‘Tis a long time since I’ve heard from her,” she said one day to Maude. “Suppose you write tomorrow, and tell her I am sick—tell her, too, that the sight of her would almost make me well, and maybe she will come,” and on the sick woman’s face there was a joyous expression as she thought how pleasant it would be to see once more one who had breathed the air of her native hills—had looked upon her Harry’s grave—nay, had known her Harry when in life, and wept over him in death.

Poor, lonesome, homesick woman! Janet shall surely come in answer to your call, and ere you deem it possible her shadow shall fall across your threshold—her step be heard upon the stairs—her hand be clasped in yours!

CHAPTER V.

MRS. JANET BLODGETT.

It was a chilly, rainy afternoon toward the latter part of August. John was gone, the doctor was cross, and Hannah was cross. Nellie, too, was unusually irritable, and venting her spite upon Hannah because there was nothing for dinner fit to eat, and upon Maude because the house was so desolate and dark, she crept away upstairs, and wrapping a shawl round her, sat down to a novel, pausing occasionally to frown at the rain which beat at the windows or the wind as it roared dismally through the trees. While thus employed she heard the sound of wheels, and looking up, saw standing before their gate a muddy wagon, from which a little, dumpy figure in black was alighting, carefully holding up her alpaca dress, and carrying in one hand a small box which seemed to be full of flowers.

“She must have come to stay a long time,” thought Nellie, as she saw the piles of baggage which the driver was depositing upon the stoop. “Who can it be?” she continued, as she recalled all her aunts and cousins, and found that none of them answered the description of this woman, who knocked loudly at the door, and then walked in to shelter herself from the storm.

“Forlornity!” Nellie heard her exclaim, as she left the chamber in answer to the summons. “Forlornity! No table, no hat-stand, no nothin’, and the dingiest old ile-cloth! What does it mean? Your servant, miss,” she added, dropping a courtesy to Nellie, who now stood on the stairs, with her finger between the pages of her book, so as not to lose the place. “I guess I’ve made a mistake,” said the woman; “is this Dr. Canady’s?”

“It is,” answered Nellie, and the stranger continued, “Dr. Canady who married the widder Remington? “

“The same,” returned Nellie, thinking how unmercifully she would tease Maude should this prove to be any of her relations.

“And who be you?” asked the stranger, feeling a little piqued at the coldness of her reception.

“I am Miss Helen—Dr. Kennedy’s daughter,” answered the young lady, assuming an air of dignity, which was not at all diminished by the very, expressive “Mortal!” which dropped from the woman’s lips.

“Can I do anything for you?” asked Nellie, and the stranger answered: “Yes, go and call Maude, but don’t tell her who I am.”

She forgot that Nellie did not herself know who she was, and sitting down upon her trunk, she waited while Nellie hurried to the kitchen, where, over a smoky fire, Maude was trying in vain to make a bit of nicely browned toast for her mother, who had expressed a wish for something good to eat.

“Here, Maude,” called out Nellie, “your grandmother or aunt has come, I guess, and wants to see you in the hall.”

“It’s Janet—it’s Janet, I know!” screamed Maude, and leaving her slice of bread to burn and blacken before the fire, she hurried away, while Nellie, who had heard nothing of the letter sent the week before, wondered much who the “witched old thing with the poking black bonnet could be.”

With a cry of delight Maude wound her arms around the neck of her old nurse, whom she knew in a moment, though Janet had more difficulty in recognizing the little girl of other years in the womanly looking maiden before her.

“It beats all how you’ve changed,” she said, “though your eyes and hair are the same,” and she passed her hand caressingly over the short glossy curls. Then looking intently in Maude’s face she continued. “You’ve grown handsome, child.”

“No, no, not handsome, Janet; Nellie is the beauty of the house,” and Maude shook her head mournfully, for on the subject of beauty she was a little sensitive, her sister always pronouncing her “a fright,” and manifesting a most unamiable spirit if anyone complimented her in the least.

“What, that yaller-haired, white-face chit who went for you?” rejoined Janet. “No such thing; but tell me now of your marm. How sick is she, and what of the little boy? Is he much deformed?”

“Come in here,” said Maude, leading the way into the parlor, and drawing a chair close to Janet, she told all she deemed it necessary to tell.

But the quick-witted Janet knew there was something more, and casting a scornful glance around the room she said: “You are a good girl, Maude; but you can’t deceive an old girl like me. I knew by the tremblin’ way you writ that somethin’ was wrong, and started the first blessed morning after gettin’ your letter. I was calculating to come pretty soon, anyway, and had all my arrangements made. So I can stay a good long spell—always, mebby—for I’m a widder now,” and she heaved a few sighs to the memory of Mr. Joel Blodgett, who, she said, “had been dead a year,” adding, in a whisper, “but there’s one consolation—he willed me all his property,” and she drew from her belt a huge silver time-piece, which she was in the habit of consulting quite often, by way of showing that “she could carry a watch as well as the next one.”

After a little her mind came back from her lamented husband, and she gave Maude a most minute account of her tedious ride in a lumber-wagon from Canandaigua to Laurel Hill, for the stage had left when she reached the depot, and she was in too great a hurry to remain at the hotel until the next morning.

“But what of that doctor—do you like him?” she said at last, and Maude answered: “Never mind him now; let us see mother first, or rather let me see to her dinner,” and she arose to leave the room.

“You don’t like him,” continued Janet, “and I knew you wouldn’t; but your poor mother, I pity her. Didn’t you say you was gettin’ her something to eat? She’s had a good time waitin’, but I’ll make amends by seein’ to her dinner myself,” and spite of Maude’s endeavors to keep her back she followed on into the disorderly kitchen, from which Nellie had disappeared, and where old Hannah sat smoking her pipe as leisurely as if on the table there were not piles of unwashed dishes, to say nothing of the unswept floor and dirty hearth.

“What a hole!” was Janet’s involuntary exclamation, to which Hannah responded a most contemptuous “Umph!” and thus was the war-cry raised on either side. “What was you goin’ to git for your mother?” asked Janet, without deigning to notice the portly African, who smoked on in dignified silence.

“Toast and tea,” answered Maude, and casting a deprecating glance at the fire Janet continued: “You can’t make any toast fit for a heathen to eat by that fire. Aint there any dry wood—kindlin’ nor nothin’?” and she walked into the woodshed, where, spying a pine board, she seized the ax and was about to commence operations when Hannah called out: “Ole marster ‘ll be in yer ha’r if

you tache that."

"I aint afraid of your old marster," answered Janet, and in a moment the board, which Dr. Kennedy would not suffer John to use because he might want it for something, was crackling on the fire.

The hearth was swept, the tea-kettle hung in the blaze, and then, with a look of perfect delight, Janet sat down to make the toast, fixing it just as she knew Matty liked it best.

"Biled eggs will be good for her digester, and if I only had one dropped in water," she said, and quick as thought Maude brought her one, while Hannah growled again, "Ole marster 'll raise de ruff, case he put 'em away to sell."

"Ole marster be hanged!" muttered Janet, breaking not one, but three, into the water, for her own stomach began to clamor for food.

Everything was ready at last; a clean towel covered the server, the fragrant black tea was made, the boiled egg was laid upon the toast, and then Janet said, "She ought to have a rellish—preserves, jelly, baked apple, or somethin'," and she opened a cupboard door, while Hannah, springing to her feet, exclaimed, "Quit dat; thar aint no sich truck in dis house."

But Janet's sharp eye had discovered behind a pile of papers, rags, and dried herbs a tumbler of currant jelly, which Hannah had secretly made and hidden away for her own private eating. Hannah's first impulse was to snatch the jelly from Janet's hand, but feeling intuitively that in the resolute Scotchwoman she had a mistress, and fearing lest Maude should betray her to the doctor she exclaimed, "If that aint the very stuff Miss Ruggles sent in for Miss Matty! I forgot it till this blessed minit!" and shutting the cupboard door, she stood with her back against it lest Janet should discover sundry other delicacies hidden away for a like purpose.

"Mother has not had a feast like this—and she'll enjoy it so much," said Maude, as she started up the stairs followed by Janet, who, ere they reached the chamber, suddenly stopped, saying, "I tell you what 'tis, if she knows I'm here she won't eat a mou'ful, so you say nothin', and when she's through I'll come."

This seemed reasonable to Maude, who, leaving Janet to look through a crevice in the door, entered alone into her mother's presence. Mrs. Kennedy had waited

long for Maude, and at last, weary with listening to the rain, which made her feel so desolate and sad, she fell asleep, as little Louis at her side had done before her; but Maude's cheering voice awoke her.

"Look, mother," she cried, "see the nice dinner!" and her own eyes fairly danced as she placed the tray upon the table before her mother, who, scarcely less pleased, exclaimed, "A boiled egg—and jelly, too!—I've wanted them both so much. How did it happen?"

"Eat first, and then I'll tell you," answered Maude, propping her up with pillows, and setting the server in her lap.

"It tastes like old times—like Janet," said the invalid, and from the room without, where Janet watched, there came a faint, choking sound, which Matty thought was the wind and which Maude knew was Janet.

Through the door she caught sight of her mistress, whose white, wasted face wrung from her that cry. Stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth, she waited until toast, tea, egg, and all had disappeared, then, with the exclamation, "She's et 'em all up slick and clean," she walked into the room.

It would be impossible to describe that meeting, when the poor sick woman bowed her weary head upon the motherly bosom of her faithful domestic, weeping most piteously while Janet folded her lovingly in her arms, saying to her soothingly, "Nay, now, Matty darling—nay, my bonnie bird—take it easy like—take is easy, and you'll feel better."

"You won't leave me, will you?" sobbed Matty, feeling that it would not be hard to die with Janet standing near.

"No, honey, no," answered Janet, "I'll stay till one or t'other of us is carried down the walk and across the common where them gravestones is standin', which I noticed when I drove up."

"It will be me, Janet. It will be me," said Matty. "They will bury me beneath the willows, for the other one is lying there, oh, so peacefully."

Louis was by this time awake, and taking him upon her lap Janet laughed and cried alternately, mentally resolving that so long as she should live, she would befriend the little helpless boy, whose face, she said, "was far winsomer than any

she had ever seen."

Then followed many mutual inquiries, during which Matty learned that Janet was a widow, and had really come to stay if necessary.

"I'm able now to live as I please, for I've got property," said Janet, again consulting the silver watch, as she usually did when speaking of her husband's will.

Many questions, too, did Matty ask concerning her former home—her friends—her flowers—and Harry's grave; "was it well kept now, or was it overrun with weeds?"

To this last question Janet did not reply directly, but making some excuse for leaving the room, she soon returned, bearing in one hand a box in which a small rose-bush was growing. In the other hand she held a beautiful bouquet which, having been kept moist, looked almost as fresh as when it was first gathered. This she gave to Matty, saying, "They grew on Harry's grave. I picked 'em myself yesterday morning before I left; and this," pointing to the rose-bush, "is a root I took from there last spring on purpose for you, for I meant to visit you this fall."

Need we say those flowers were dearer to Matty than the wealth of the Indies would have been! They had blossomed on Harry's grave—his dust had added to them life, and as if they were indeed a part of him, she hugged them to her heart—kissing them through her tears and blessing Janet for the priceless gift.

"Don't tell him, though," she whispered, and a deep flush mounted to her cheek as on the stairs she heard a heavy footstep, and knew that Dr. Kennedy was coming!

He had been in the kitchen, demanding of Hannah, "Whose is all that baggage in the hall?" and Hannah, glad of an opportunity to "free her mind," had answered, "Some low-lived truck or other that they called 'Janet,' and a body'd s'pose she owned the house, the way she went on, splittin' up yer board for kindlin', makin' missus' toast swim in butter, and a-bilin' three of them eggs you laid away to sell. If she stays here, this nigger won't—that's my 'pinion," and feeling greatly injured she left the kitchen, while Dr. Kennedy, with a dark, moody look upon his face, started for the sick-room.

He knew very well who his visitor was, and when his wife said, “Husband, this is my faithful Janet, or rather Mrs. Blodgett now. Wasn’t it kind in her to come so far to see me?” he merely nodded coolly to Mrs. Blodgett, who nodded as coolly in return; then, turning to his wife, he said, “You seem excited, my dear, and this ought not to be. ‘Tis a maxim of mine that company is injurious to sick people. What do you think, Mrs. Blodgett?”

Mrs. Blodgett didn’t think anything save that he was a most disagreeable man, and as she could not say this in his presence, she made no particular answer. Glancing toward the empty plate which stood upon the table, he continued, “Hannah tells me, my dear, that you have eaten three boiled eggs. I wonder at your want of discretion, when you know how indigestible they are,” and his eye rested reprovingly on Janet, who now found her tongue, and starting up, exclaimed, “One biled egg won’t hurt anybody’s digester, if it’s ever so much out of kilter—but the jade lied. Two of them eggs I cooked for myself, and I’ll warrant she’s guzzled ‘em down before this. Anyway, I’ll go and see,” and she arose to leave the room.

Just as she reached the door the doctor called after her, saying, “Mrs. Blodgett, I observed a trunk or two in the lower hall, which I presume are yours. Will you have them left there, or shall I bring them up to your chamber? You will stay all night with us, of course!”

For an instant Janet’s face was crimson, but forcing down her wrath for Matty’s sake, she answered, “I shall probably stay as long as that,” and slamming together the door she went downstairs, while Matty said sadly, “Oh, husband, how could you thus insult her when you knew she had come to stay a while at least, and that her presence would do me so much good?”

“How should I know she had come to stay, when I’ve heard nothing about it,” was the doctor’s reply; and then in no mild terms he gave his opinion of the lady —said opinion being based on what old Hannah had told him.

There were tears in Matty’s eyes, and they dropped from her long eyelashes as, taking the doctor’s hand, she said: “Husband, you know that I’m going to die—that ere the snow is falling you will be a second time alone. And you surely will not refuse me when I ask that Janet shall stay until the last. When I am gone you will, perhaps, be happier in the remembrance that you granted me one request.”

There was something in the tone of her voice far more convincing than her words, and when she added, “She does not expect wages, for she has money of her own,” Dr. Kennedy yielded the point, prophesying the while that there would be trouble with Hannah.

Meantime Mrs. Blodgett had wended her way to the kitchen, meeting in the way with Nellie, around whose mouth there was a substance greatly resembling the yolk of an egg! Thus prepared for the worst, Janet was not greatly disappointed when she found that her eggs had been disposed of by both the young lady and Hannah, the latter of whom was too busy with her dishes to turn her head or in any way acknowledge the presence of a second person.

“Joel Blodgett’s widow ought to be above havin’ words with a nigger,” was Janet’s mental comment as she contented herself with a slice of bread and a cup of tea, which, by this time, was of quite a reddish hue.

Her hunger being satisfied, she began to feel more amiably disposed toward the old negress, whose dishes she offered to wipe. This kindness was duly appreciated by Hannah, and that night, in speaking of Janet to her son, she pronounced her “not quite so onery a white woman as she at first took her to be.”

As the days wore on Janet’s presence in the family was felt in various ways. To Matty it brought a greater degree of happiness than she had experienced since she left her New England home, while even the doctor acknowledged an increased degree of comfort in his household, though not willing at first to attribute it to its proper source. He did not like Janet; her ideas were too extravagant for him, and on several different occasions he hinted quite strongly that she was not wanted there; but Janet was perfectly invincible to hints, and when at one time he embodied them in language that could not be misunderstood, telling her. “‘twas a maxim of his that if a person had a home of their own they had better stay there,” she promptly replied that “‘twas a maxim of hers to stay where she pleased, particularly as she was a woman of property,” and so, as she pleased to stay there, she stayed!

It took but a short time for her to understand the doctor, and to say that she disliked him would but feebly express the feeling of aversion with which she regarded him. Not a word, however, would Matty admit of past or present unkindness—neither was it necessary that she should, for Janet saw it all—saw how “Old Maxim,” as she called him, had worried her life away, and while

cherishing for him a sentiment of hatred, she strove to comfort her young mistress, who grew weaker and weaker every day, until at last the husband himself, aroused to a sense of her danger, strove by little acts of kindness unusual in him, to make amends for years of wrong. Experience is a thorough teacher, and he shrank from the bitter memories which spring from the grave of a neglected wife, and he would rather that Matty, when she died, should not turn away from him, shuddering at his touch, and asking him to take his hand from off her brow; just as one brown-haired woman had done. This feeling of his was appreciated by Janet, who in proportion as he became tender toward Matty, was respectful to him, until at last there came to be a tolerably good understanding between them, and she was suffered, in most matters, to have her own way.

With John she was a special favorite, and through his instrumentality open hostilities were prevented between herself and his mother, until the latter missed another cup of jelly from its new hiding-place. Then, indeed, the indignant African announced her intention of going at once to "Miss Ruggles'," who had offered her "twelve shillings a week and a heap of leisure."

"Let her go," said John, who knew Mrs. Ruggles to be a fashionable woman, the mother of nine children, whose ages varied from one to fifteen; "let her go—she'll be glad to come back," and the sequel proved he was right, for just as it was beginning to grow light on the second day of her absence, someone rapped at his window, and a half-crying voice whispered, "Let me in, John; I've been out to sarvice enough."

John complied with the request, and when Janet came down to the kitchen, how was she surprised at finding Hannah there, leisurely grinding her coffee, with an innocent look upon her sable face, as if nothing had ever happened. John's raillery, however, loosened her tongue at last, and very minutely she detailed her grievances. "She had done a two weeks' washing, besides all the work, and the whole of them young ones under her feet into the bargain. Then at night, when she hoped for a little rest, Mrs. Ruggles had gone off to a party and stayed till midnight, leaving her with that squallin' brat; but never you mind," said she, "I poured a little paregol down its throat, or my, name aint Hannah," and with a sigh of relief at her escape from "Miss Ruggles," she finished her story and resumed her accustomed duties, which for many weeks she faithfully performed, finding but little fault with the frequent suggestions of Mrs. Janet Blodgett, whose rule in the household was for the time being firmly established.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MOTHER.

From the tall trees which shade the desolate old house the leaves have fallen one by one, and the November rain makes mournful music as in the stillness of the night it drops upon the withered foliage, softly, slowly, as if weeping for the sorrow which has come upon the household. Matty Kennedy is dead; and in the husband's heart there is a gnawing pain, such as he never felt before; not even when Katy died; for Katy, though pure and good, was not so wholly unselfish as Matty had been, and in thinking of her, he could occasionally recall an impatient word; but from Matty none. Gentle, loving, and beautiful she had been to him in life; and now, beautiful in death, she lay in the silent parlor, on the marble table she had brought from home, while he—oh, who shall tell what thoughts were busy at his heart, as he sat there alone, that dismal, rainy night.

In one respect his wishes had been gratified; Matty had not turned from him in death. She had died within his arms; but so long as the light of reason shone in her blue eyes,—so long had they, rested on the rose-bush within the window,—the rose-bush brought from Harry's grave! Nestled among its leaves was a half-opened bud, and when none could hear, she whispered softly to Janet, "Place it in my bosom just as you placed one years ago, when I was Harry's bride."

To Nellie and to Maude she had spoken blessed words of comfort, commending to the latter as to a second mother the little Louis, who, trembling with fear, had hidden beneath the bedclothes, so that he could not see the white look upon her face. Then to her husband she had turned, pleading with all a mother's tenderness for her youngest born—her unfortunate one.

"Oh, husband," she said, "you will care for him when I am gone. You will love my poor, crippled boy! Promise me this, and death will not be hard to meet. Promise me, won't you?" and the voice was very, very faint.

He could not refuse, and bending low, he said, "Matty, I will, I will."

"Bless you, my husband, bless you for that," was Matty's dying words, for she

never spoke again.

It was morning then,—early morning, and a long, dreary day had intervened, until at last it was midnight, and silence reigned throughout the house. Maude, Nellie, Janet, and John had wept themselves sick, while in little Louis' bosom there was a sense of desolation which kept him wakeful, even after Maude had cried herself to sleep. Many a time that day had he stolen into the parlor, and climbing into a chair, as best he could, had laid his baby cheek against the cold, white face, and smoothing with his dimpled hand the shining hair, had whispered, "Poor, sick mother, won't you speak to Louis any more? "

He knew better than most children of his age what was meant by death, and as he lay awake, thinking how dreadful it was to have no mother, his thoughts turned toward his father, who had that day been too much absorbed in his own grief to notice him.

"Maybe he'll love me some now ma is dead," he thought, and with that yearning for paternal sympathy natural to the motherless, he crept out of bed, and groping his way with his noiseless crutches to his father's door, he knocked softly for admittance.

"Who's there?" demanded Dr. Kennedy, every, nerve thrilling to the answer.

"It's me, father; won't you let me in, for its dark out here, and lonesome, with her lying in the parlor. Oh, father, won't you love me a little, now mother's dead? I can't help it because I'm lame, and when I'm a man I will earn my own living. I won't be in the way. Say, pa, will you love me?"

He remembered the charges his father had preferred against him, and the father remembered them too. She to whom the cruel words were spoken was gone from him now and her child, their child, was at the door, pleading for his love. Could he refuse? No, by every kindly feeling, by every parental tie, we answer, No; he could not; and opening the door he took the little fellow in his arms, hugging him to his bosom, while tears, the first he had shed for many a year, fell like rain upon the face of his crippled boy. Like some mighty water, which breaking through its prison walls seeks again its natural channel, so did his love go out toward the child so long neglected, the child who was not now to him a cripple. He did not think of the deformity, he did not even see it. He saw only the beautiful face, the soft brown eyes and silken hair of the little one, who ere long

fell asleep, murmuring in his dreams, “He loves me, ma, he does.”

Surely the father cannot be blamed if, when he looked again upon the calm face of the dead, he fancied that it wore a happier look, as if the whispered words of Louis had reached her unconscious ear. Very beautiful looked Matty in her coffin—for thirty years had but slightly marred her youthful face, and the doctor, as he gazed upon her, thought within himself, “she was almost as fair as Maude Glendower.”

Then, as his eye fell upon the rosebud which Janet had laid upon her bosom, he said, “‘Twas kind in Mrs. Blodgett to place it there, for Matty was fond of flowers;” but he did not dream how closely was that rosebud connected with a grave made many years before.

Thoughts of Maude Glendower and mementos of Harry Remington meeting together at Matty’s coffin! Alas, that such should be our life!

Underneath the willows, and by the side of Katy, was Matty laid to rest, and then the desolate old house seemed doubly desolate—Maude mourning truly for her mother, while the impulsive Nellie, too, wept bitterly for one whom she had really loved. To the doctor, however, a new feeling had been born, and in the society of his son he found a balm for his sorrow, becoming ere long, to all outward appearance, the same exacting, overbearing man he had been before. The blows are hard and oft repeated which break the solid rock, and there will come a time when that selfish nature shall be subdued and broken down; but ‘tis not yet—not yet.

And now, leaving him a while to himself, we will pass on to a period when Maude herself shall become in reality the heroine of our story.

CHAPTER VII.

PAST AND PRESENT.

Four years and a half have passed away since the dark November night when Matty Kennedy died, and in her home all things are not as they were then. Janet,

the presiding genius of the household, is gone— married a second time, and by this means escaped, as she verily believes, the embarrassment of refusing outright to be Mrs. Dr. Kennedy, No. 3! Not that Dr. Kennedy ever entertained the slightest idea of making her his wife, but knowing how highly he valued money, and being herself "a woman of property," Janet came at last to fancy that he had serious thoughts of offering himself to her. He, on the contrary, was only intent upon the best means of removing her from his house, for, though he was not insensible to the comfort which her presence brought, it was a comfort for which he paid too dearly. Still he endured it for nearly three years, but at the end of that time he determined that she should go away, and as he dreaded a scene he did not tell her plainly what he meant, but hinted, and with each hint the widow groaned afresh over her lamented Joel.

At last, emboldened by some fresh extravagance, he said to her one day: "Mrs. Blodgett, ah—ahem." Here he stopped, while Mrs. Blodgett, thinking her time had come, drew out Joel's picture, which latterly she carried in her pocket, so as to be ready for any emergency. "Mrs. Blodgett, are you paying attention?" asked the doctor, observing how intently she was regarding the picture of the deceased.

"Yes, yes," she answered, and he continued:

"Mrs. Blodgett, I hardly know what to say, but I've been thinking for some time past—"

"I know you've been thinking," interrupted the widow, "but it won't do an atom of good, for my mind was made up long ago, and I shan't do it, and if you've any kind of feeling for Matty, which you haint, nor never had, you wouldn't think of such a thing, and I know, as well as I want to know, that it's my property, and nothin' else, which has put such an idee into your head!"

Here, overcome with her burst of indignation, she began to cry, while the doctor, wholly misunderstanding her, attempted to smooth the matter somewhat by saying: "I had no intention of distressing you, Mrs. Blodgett, but I thought I might as well free my mind. Were you a poor woman, I should feel differently, but knowing you have money—"

"Wretch!" fairly screamed the insulted Janet. "So you confess my property is at the bottom of it! But I'll fix it—I'll put an end to it!" and in a state of great excitement she rushed from the room.

Just across the way a newly-fledged lawyer had hung out his sign, and thither that very afternoon the wrathful widow wended her way, nor left the dingy office until one-half of her property, which was far greater than anyone supposed it to be, was transferred by deed of gift to Maude Remington, who was to come in possession of it on her eighteenth birthday, and was to inherit the remainder by will at the death of the donor.

“That fixes him,” she muttered, as she returned to the house; “that fixes Old Maxim good; to think of his insultin’ me by ownin’ right up that ‘twas my property he was after, the rascal! I wouldn’t have him if there warn’t another man in the world!” and entering the room where Maude was sewing, she astonished the young girl by telling her what she had done. “I have made you my heir,” said she, tossing the deed of gift and the will into Maude’s lap. “I’ve made you my heir; and the day you’re eighteen you’ll be worth five thousand dollars, besides havin’ the interest to use between this time and that. Then, if I ever die; you’ll have five thousand more. Joel Blodgett didn’t keep thirty cows and peddle milk for nothin’.”

Maude was at first too much astonished to comprehend the meaning of what she heard, but she understood it at last, and then with many tears thanked the eccentric woman for what she had done, and asked the reason for this unexpected generosity.

“‘Cause I like you!” answered Janet, determined not to injure Maude’s feelings by letting her know how soon her mother had been forgotten. “‘Cause I like you, and always meant to give it to you. But don’t tell anyone how much ‘tis, for if the old fool widowers round here know I am still worth five thousand dollars they’ll like enough be botherin’ me with offers, hopin’ I’ll change my will; but I shan’t. I’ll teach ‘em a trick or two, the good for-nothin’ Old Maxim.”

The latter part of this speech was made as Janet was leaving the room, consequently Maude did not hear it, neither would she have understood if she had. She knew her nurse was very peculiar, but she never dreamed it possible for her to fancy that Dr. Kennedy wished to make her his wife, and she was greatly puzzled to know why she had been so generous to her. But Janet knew; and when a few days afterward Dr. Kennedy, determining upon a fresh attempt to remove her from his house, came to her side, as she was sitting alone in the twilight, she felt glad that one-half her property at least was beyond her control.

“Mrs. Blodgett,” he said, clearing his throat and looking considerably embarrassed, “Mrs. Blodgett.”

“Well, what do you want of Mrs. Blodgett?” was the widow’s testy answer, and the doctor replied, “I did not finish what I wished to say to you the other day, and it’s a maxim of mine, if a person has anything on his mind, he had better tell it at once.”

“Certainly, ease yourself off, do,” and Janet’s little gray eyes twinkled with delight, as she thought how crestfallen he would look when she told him her property was gone.

“I was going, Mrs. Blodgett,” he continued, “I was going to propose to you—”

He never finished the sentence, for the widow sprang to her feet, exclaiming, “It’s of no kind of use! I’ve gin my property all to Maude; half of it the day she’s eighteen, and the rest on’t is willed to her when I die, so you may as well let me alone,” and feeling greatly flurried with what she verily believed to have been an offer, she walked away, leaving the doctor to think her the most inexplicable woman he ever saw.

The next day Janet received an invitation to visit her husband’s sister who lived in Canada. The invitation was accepted, and to his great delight the doctor saw her drive from his door, just one week after his last amusing interview. In Canada Janet formed the acquaintance of a man full ten years her junior. He had been a distant relative of her husband, and knowing of her property, asked her to be his wife. For several days Janet studied her face to see what was in it “which made every man in Christendom want her!” and, concluding at last that “handsome is that handsome does,” said “Yes,” and made Peter Hopkins the happiest of men.

There was a bridal trip to Laurel Hill, where the new husband ascertained that the half of that for which he had married was beyond his reach; but being naturally of a hopeful nature, he did not despair of eventually changing the will, so he swallowed his disappointment and redoubled his attentions to his mother-wife, now Mrs. Janet Blodgett Hopkins.

Meantime the story that Maude was an heiress circulated rapidly, and as the lawyer kept his own counsel and Maude, in accordance with Janet’s request, never told how much had been given her, the amount was doubled; nay, in some

cases trebled, and she suddenly found herself a person of considerable importance, particularly in the estimation of Dr. Kennedy, who, aside from setting a high value upon money, fancied he saw a way by which he himself could reap some benefit from his stepdaughter's fortune. If Maude had money she certainly ought to pay for her board, and so he said to her one day, prefacing his remarks with his stereotyped phrase that "'twas a maxim of his that one person should not live upon another if they could help it."

Since Janet's last marriage Maude had taken the entire management of affairs, and without her there would have been but little comfort or order in a household whose only servant was old and lazy, and whose eldest daughter was far too proud to work. This Maude knew, and with a flush of indignation upon her cheek she replied to her stepfather: "Very well, sir, I can pay for my board, if you like; but boarders, you know, never trouble themselves with the affairs of the kitchen."

The doctor was confounded. He knew he could not well dispense with Maude's services, and it had not before occurred to him that a housekeeper and boarder were two different persons.

"Ah—yes—just so," said he, "I see I'm laboring under a mistake; you prefer working for your board—all right," and feeling a good deal more disconcerted than he ever supposed it possible for him to feel, he gave up the contest.

Maude was at this time nearly sixteen years of age, and during the next year she was to all intents and purposes the housekeeper, discharging faithfully every duty and still finding time to pursue her own studies and superintend the education of little Louis, to whom she was indeed a second mother. She was very fond of books, and while Janet was with them she had with Nellie attended the seminary at Laurel Hill, where she stood high in all her classes, for learning was with her a delight, and when at last it seemed necessary for her to remain at home, she still devoted a portion of each day to her studies, reciting to a teacher who came regularly to the house and whom she paid with her own money. By this means she was at the age of seventeen a far better scholar than Nellie, who left every care to her stepsister, saying she was just suited to the kitchen work and the tiresome old books with which she kept her chamber littered. This chamber to which Nellie referred was Maude's particular province. Here she reigned joint sovereign with Louis, who thus early evinced a degree of intellectuality wonderful in one so young, and who in some things excelled even

Maude herself.

Drawing and painting seemed to be his ruling taste, and as Dr. Kennedy still cherished for his crippled boy a love almost idolatrous, he spared neither money nor pains to procure for him everything necessary for his favorite pursuit. Almost the entire day did Louis pass in what he termed Maude's library, where, poring over books or busy with his pencil, he whiled the hours away without a sigh for the green fields and shadowy woods, through which he could never hope to ramble. And Maude was very proud of her artist brother—proud of the beautiful boy whose face seemed not to be of earth, so calm, so angel-like was its expression. All the softer, gentler virtues of the mother, and all the intellectual qualities of the father were blended together in the child, who presented a combination of goodness, talent, beauty, and deformity such as this is seldom seen. For his sister Maude, Louis possessed a deep, undying love which neither time nor misfortune could in any way abate. She was part and portion of himself —his life—his light—his all, in all—and to his childlike imagination a purer, nobler being had never been created than his darling sister Maude. And well might Louis Kennedy love the self-sacrificing girl who devoted herself so wholly to him, and who well fulfilled her mother's charge, "Care for my little boy."

Nellie, too, was well beloved, but he soon grew weary of her company, for she seldom talked of anything save herself and the compliments which were given to her youthful beauty. And Nellie, at the age of eighteen, was beautiful, if that can be called beauty which is void of heart or soul or intellect. She was very small, and the profusion of golden curls which fell about her neck and shoulders gave her the appearance of being younger than she really was. Her features were almost painfully regular, her complexion dazzlingly brilliant, while her large blue eyes had in them a dreamy, languid expression exceedingly attractive to those who looked for nothing beyond—no inner chamber where dwell the graces which make a woman what she ought to be. Louis' artist eye, undeveloped though it was, acknowledged the rare loveliness of Nellie's face. She would make a beautiful picture, he thought; but for the noble, the good, the pure, he turned to the darkeyed Maude, who was as wholly unlike her stepsister as it was possible for her to be. The one was a delicate blonde, the other a decided brunette, with hair and eyes of deepest black. Her complexion, too, was dark, but tinged with a beautiful red, which Nellie would gladly have transferred to her own paler cheek. It was around the mouth, however, the exquisitely shaped mouth, and white even teeth, that Maude's principal beauty lay, and the bright

smile which lit up her features when at all animated in conversation would have made a plain face handsome. There were some who gave her the preference, saying there was far more beauty in her clear, beautiful eyes and sunny smile than in the dollish face of Nellie, who treated such remarks with the utmost scorn. She knew that she was beautiful. She had known it all her life—for had she not been told so by her mirror, her father, her schoolmates, her Aunt Kelsey, and more than all by J.C. De Vere, the elegant young man whom she had met in Rochester, where she had spent the winter preceding the summer of which we are writing, and which was four and one-half years after Matty's death.

Greatly had the young lady murmured on her return against the dreary old house and lonely life at Laurel Hill, which did indeed present a striking contrast to the city gayeties in which she had been mingling. Even the cozy little chamber which the kind-hearted Maude had fitted up for her with her own means was pronounced heathenish and old-fashioned, while Maude herself was constantly taunted with being countryfied and odd.

"I wish J.C. De Vere could see you now," she said one morning to her sister, who had donned her working dress, and with sleeves rolled up and wide checked apron tied around her waist was deep in the mysteries of bread making.

"I wish he could see her too," said Louis, who had rolled his chair into the kitchen so that he could be with Maude. "He would say he never saw a handsomer color than the red upon her cheeks."

"Pshaw!" returned Nellie. "I guess he knows the difference between rose-tint and sunburn. Why, he's the most fastidious man I ever saw. He can't endure the smell of cooking, and says he would never look twice at a lady whose hands were not as soft and white as—well, as mine," and she glanced admiringly at the little snowy fingers, which were beating a tune upon the window-sill.

"I wants no better proof that he's a fool," muttered old Hannah, who looked upon Nellie as being what she really was, a vain, silly thing.

"A fool, Hannah," retorted Nellie; "I'd like to have Aunt Kelsey hear you say that. Why, he's the very best match in Rochester. All the girls are dying for him, but he don't care a straw for one of them. He's out of health now, and is coming here this summer with Aunt Kelsey, and then you'll see how perfectly refined he is. By the way, Maude, if I had as much money at my command as you have I'd

fix up the parlor a little. You know father won't, and that carpet, I'll venture to say, was in the ark. I almost dread to have J.C. come, he's so particular; but then he knows we are rich, and beside that, Aunt Kelsey has told him just how stingy father is, so I don't care so much. Did I tell you J.C. has a cousin James, who may possibly come too. I never saw him, but Aunt Kelsey says he's the queerest man that ever lived. He never was known to pay the slightest attention to a woman unless she was married or engaged. He has a most delightful house at Hampton, where he lives with his mother; but he'll never marry, unless it is some hired girl who knows how to work. Why, he was once heard to say he would sooner marry a good-natured Irish girl than a fashionable city lady who knew nothing but to dress, and flirt, and play the piano—the wretch! "

"Oh! I know I should like him," exclaimed Louis, who had been an attentive listener.

"I dare say you would, and Maude, too," returned Nellie, adding, after a moment: "And I shouldn't wonder if Maude just suited him, particularly if he finds her up to her elbows in dough. So, Maude, it is for your interest to improve the old castle a little. Won't you buy a new carpet?" and she drew nearer to Maude, who made no direct reply.

The three hundred and fifty dollars interest money which she had received the year before had but little of it been expended on herself, though it had purchased many a comfort for the household, for Maude was generous, and freely gave what was her own to give. The parlor carpet troubled even her, but she would not pledge herself to buy another until she had first tried her powers of persuasion upon the doctor, who, as she expected, refused outright.

"He knew the carpet was faded," he said, "but 'twas hardly worn at all, and 'twas a maxim of his to make things last as long as possible."

It was in vain that Nellie, who was present, quoted Aunt Kelsey and J.C. De Vere, the old doctor didn't care a straw for either, unless indeed, J.C. should some time take Nellie off his hands, and pay her bills, which were altogether too large for one of his maxims. That this would probably be the result of the young man's expected visit had been strongly hinted by Mrs. Kelsey, and thus was he more willing to have him come. But on the subject of the carpet he was inexorable, and with tears of anger in her large blue eyes Nellie gave up the contest, while Maude very quietly walked over to the store and gave orders that

a handsome three-ply carpet which she had heard her sister admire should be sent home as soon as possible. “You are a dear good girl, after all, and I hope James De Vere will fall in love with you,” was Nellie’s exclamation as she saw a large roll deposited at their door, but not a stitch in the making of the carpet did she volunteer to take. “She should prick her fingers or callous her hand,” she said, “and Mr. De Vere thought so much of a pretty hand.”

“Nonsense!” said John, who was still a member of the family, “nonsense, Miss Nellie. I’d give a heap more for one of Miss Maude’s little fingers, red and rough as they be, than I would for both them soft, sickish feeling hands of yourn;” and John hastily disappeared from the room to escape the angry words which he knew would follow his bold remark.

Nellie was not a favorite at home, and no one humored her as much as Maude, who, on this occasion, almost outdid herself in her endeavors to please the exacting girl, and make the house as presentable as possible to the fashionable Mrs. Kelsey and the still more fashionable J.C. De Vere. The new carpet was nicely fitted to the floor, new curtains hung before the windows, the old sofa was recovered, the piano was tuned, a hat-stand purchased for the hall, the spare chamber cleaned, and then very impatiently Nellie waited for the day when her guests were expected to arrive.

The time came at last, a clear June afternoon, and immediately after dinner Nellie repaired to her chamber, so as to have ample time to try the effect of her different dresses, ere deciding upon any one. Maude, too, was a good deal excited, for one of her even temperament. She rather dreaded Mrs. Kelsey, whom she had seen but twice in her life, but for some reason, wholly inexplicable to herself, she felt a strange interest in the wonderful J.C., of whom she had heard so much. Not that he would notice her in the least, but a man who could turn the heads of all the girls in Rochester must be somewhat above the common order of mortals; and when at last her work was done, and she, too, went up to dress, it was with an unusual degree of earnestness that she asked her sister what she should wear that would be becoming.

“Wear what you please, but don’t bother me,” answered Nellie, smoothing down the folds of her light blue muslin, which harmonized admirably with her clear complexion.

“Maude,” called Louis, from the adjoining room, “wear white. You always look

pretty in white."

"So does every black person!" answered Nellie, feeling provoked that she had not advised the wearing of some color not as becoming to Maude as she knew white to be.

Maude had the utmost confidence in Louis' taste, and when fifteen minutes later she stood before the mirror, her short, glossy curls clustering about her head, a bright bloom on her cheek, and a brighter smile upon her lip, she thought it was the dress which made her look so well, for it had never entered her mind that she was handsome.

"Wear your coral earrings," said Louis, who had wheeled himself into the room, and was watching her with all a fond brother's pride.

The earrings were a decided improvement, and the jealous Nellie, when she saw how neat and tasteful was her sister's dress, began to cry, saying, "she herself looked a fright, that she'd nothing fit to wear, and if her father did not buy her something she'd run away."

This last was her usual threat when at all indignant, and as after giving vent to it she generally felt better, she soon dried her tears, saying, "she was glad anyway that she had blue eyes, for J.C. could not endure black ones."

"Maybe James can," was the quick rejoinder of Louis, who always defended Maude from Nellie's envious attacks.

By this time the clock was striking five. Half an hour more and they would be there, and going through the rooms below Nellie looked to see if everything was in order, then returning to her chamber above she waited impatiently until the sound of wheels was heard in the distance. A cloud of dust was visible next, and soon a large traveling carriage stopped at the gate, laden with trunks and boxes, as if its occupants had come to spend the remainder of the summer. A straight, slender, dandified-looking young man sprang out, followed by another far different in style, though equally as fine looking. The lady next alighted, and scarcely were her feet upon the ground when she was caught around the neck by a little fairy figure in blue, which had tripped gracefully down the walk, seemingly unconscious, but really very conscious of every step she took, for the black-mustached young man, who touched his hat to her so politely, was particular about a woman's gait.

A little apart from the rest stood the stranger, casually eyeing the diminutive creature, of whose beauty and perfections he had heard so much both from her partial aunt and his half-smitten cousin: There was a momentary thrill—a feeling such as one experiences in gazing upon a rare piece of sculpture—and then the heart of James De Vere resumed its accustomed beat, for he knew the inner chamber of the mind was empty, and henceforth Nellie's beauty would have no attraction for him. Very prettily she led the way to the house, and after ushering her guests into the parlor ran upstairs to Maude, bidding her to order supper at once, and telling her as a piece of important news which she did not already know, that "Aunt Kelsey, James, and J.C. had come."

CHAPTER VIII.

JAMES AND J.C.

James and J.C. De Vere were cousins, and also cousins of Mrs. Kelsey's husband; and hence the intimacy between that lady and themselves, or rather between that lady and J.C., who was undeniably the favorite, partly because he was much like herself and partly because of his name, which she thought so exclusive—so different from anyone's else. His romantic young mother, who liked anything savoring at all of "Waverly," had inflicted upon him the cognomen of Jedediah Cleishbotham, and repenting of her act when too late had dubbed him "J.C.," by which name he was now generally known. The ladies called him "a love of a man," and so he was, if a faultless form, a wicked black eye, a superb set of teeth, an unexceptionable mustache, a tiny foot, the finest of broadcloth, reported wealth, and perfect good humor constitute the ingredients which make up "a love of a man." Added to this, he really did possess a good share of common sense, and with the right kind of influence would have made a far different man from what he was. Self-love was the bane of his life, and as he liked dearly to be flattered, so he in turn became a most consummate flatterer; always, however, adapting his remarks to the nature of the person with whom he was conversing. Thus to Nellie Kennedy he said a thousand foolish things, just because he knew he gratified her vanity by doing so. Although possessing the reputation of a wealthy man, J.C. was far from being one, and his great object was to secure a wife who, while not distasteful to him, still had money enough to

cover many faults, and such a one he fancied Nellie Kennedy to be. From Mrs. Kelsey he had received the impression that the doctor was very rich, and as Nellie was the only daughter, her fortune would necessarily be large. To be sure, he would rather she had been a little more sensible, but as she was not he resolved to make the best of it, and although claiming to be something of an invalid in quest of health, it was really with the view of asking her to be his wife that he had come to Laurel Hill. He had first objected to his cousin accompanying him—not for fear of rivalry, but because he disliked what he might say of Nellie, for if there was a person in the world whose opinion he respected, and whose judgment he honored, it was his Cousin James.

Wholly unlike J.C. was James, and yet he was quite as popular, for one word from him was more highly prized by scheming mothers and artful young girls than the most complimentary speech that J.C. ever made. He meant what he said; and to the kindest, noblest of hearts he added a fine commanding person, a finished education, and a quiet, gentlemanly manner, to say nothing of his unbounded wealth, and musical voice, whose low, deep tones had stirred the heart-strings of more than one fair maiden in her teens, but stirred them in vain, for James De Vere had never seen the woman he wished to call his wife; and now, at the age of twenty-six, he was looked upon as a confirmed old bachelor, whom almost anyone would marry, but whom no one ever could. He had come to Laurel Hill because Mrs. Kelsey had asked him so to do, and because he thought it would be pleasant to spend a few weeks in that part of the country.

Of Maude’s existence he knew nothing, and when at last supper was announced, and he followed his cousin to the dining room, he started in surprise as his eye fell on the darkeyed girl who, with a heightened bloom upon her cheek, presided at the table with so much grace and dignity. Whether intentionally or not, we cannot say, but Nellie failed to introduce her stepsister, and as Mrs. Kelsey was too much absorbed in looking at her pretty niece, and in talking to her brother, to notice the omission, Maude’s position would have been peculiarly embarrassing but for the gentlemanly demeanor of James, who, always courteous, particularly to those whom he thought neglected, bowed politely, and made to her several remarks concerning the fineness of the day and the delightful view which Laurel Hill commanded of the surrounding country. She was no menial, he knew, and looking in her bright, black eyes he saw that she had far more mind than the dollish Nellie, who, as usual, was provoking J.C. to say all manner of foolish things.

As they were returning to the parlor J.C. said to Nellie: “By the way, Nell, who is that young girl in white, and what is she doing here?”

“Why, that’s Maude Remington, my stepsister,” answered Nellie. “I’m sure you’ve heard me speak of her.”

J.C. was sure he hadn’t; but he did not contradict the little lady, whose manner plainly indicated that any attention paid by him to the said Maude would be resented as an insult to herself. Just then Mrs. Kelsey went upstairs, taking her niece with her; and as Dr. Kennedy had a patient to visit he, too, asked to be excused, and the young men were left alone. The day was warm, and sauntering out beneath the trees they sat down upon a rustic seat which commanded a view of the dining room, the doors and windows of which were open, disclosing to view all that was transpiring within.

“In the name of wonder, what’s that?” exclaimed J.C., as he saw a curiously shaped chair wheeling itself, as it were, into the room.

“It must be Dr. Kennedy’s crippled boy,” answered James, as Louis skipped across the floor on crutches and climbed into the chair which Maude carefully held for him.

Louis did not wish to eat with the strangers until somewhat acquainted, consequently he waited until they were gone, and then came to the table, where Maude stood by his side, carefully ministering to his wants, and assisting him into his chair when he was through. Then, pushing back her curls, and donning the check apron which Nellie so much abhorred, she removed the dishes herself, for old Hannah she knew was very tired, having done an unusual amount of work that day.

“I tell you what, Jim, I wouldn’t wonder if that’s the very one for you,” said J.C., puffing leisurely at his cigar, and still keeping his eyes fixed upon the figure in white, as if to one of his fastidious taste there was nothing very revolting in seeing Maude Remington wash the supper dishes, even though her hands were brown and her arms a little red.

James did not answer immediately, and when he did he said: “Do you remember a little girl we met in the cars between Springfield and Albany, several years ago when we were returning from school? She was a funny little black-eyed creature, and amused us very much with her remarks.”

“I wouldn’t wonder if I remembered her,” returned J.C., “for didn’t she say I looked as if I didn’t mean for certain? I tell you what it is, Jim, I’ve thought of the speech more than a thousand times when I’ve been saying things I did not mean to foolish girls and their mammas. But what reminded you of her?”

“If I mistake not, that child and the young lady yonder are one and the same. You know she told us her name was Maude Remington, and that the naughty man behind us wasn’t her father, and she didn’t like him a bit, or something like that.”

“And I honor her judgment both in his case and mine,” interrupted J.C., continuing, after a moment: “The old fellow looks as that man did. I guess you are right. I mean to question ‘Cuffee’ on the subject,” and he beckoned to John, who was passing at no great distance.

“Sambo,” said he, as the negro approached, “who is that young lady using the broom-handle so vigorously?” and he pointed to Maude, who was finishing her domestic duties by brushing the crumbs from the carpet.

“If you please, sar, my name is John,” answered the African, assuming a dignity of manner which even J.C. respected.

“Be it John, then,” returned the young man, “but tell us how long has she lived here, and where did she come from?”

Nothing pleased John better than a chance to talk of Maude, and he replied: “She came here twelve years ago this very month with that little blue-eyed mother of hern, who is lyin’ under them willers in the graveyard. We couldn’t live without Miss Maude. She’s all the sunshine thar is about the lonesome old place. Why, she does everything, from takin’ care of her crippled half-brother to mendin’ t’other one’s gownd.”

“And who is t’other one?” asked J.C., beginning to feel greatly interested in the negro’s remarks.

“T’other one,” said John, “is Miss Nellie, who won’t work for fear of silin’ her hands, which some fool of a city chap has made her b’lieve are so white and handsome,” and a row of ivory was just visible, as, leaning against a tree, John watched the effect of his words upon “the fool of a city chap.”

J.C. was exceedingly good-natured, and tossing his cigar into the grass he

replied, “You don’t mean me, of course; but tell us more of this Maude, who mops the floor and mends Nellie’s dresses.”

“She don’t mop the floor,” muttered John. “This nigger wouldn’t let her do that—but she does mend Nellie’s gownds, which I wouldn’t do, if I’s worth as much money as she is!”

If J.C. had been interested before, he was doubly interested now, and coming nearer to John he said: “Money, my good fellow! Is Maude an heiress?”

“She aint nothin’ else,” returned John, who proceeded to speak of Janet and her generous gift, the amount of which he greatly exaggerated. “Nobody knows how much ‘tis,” said he: “but everybody s’poses that will and all it must be thirty or forty thousand,” and as the doctor was just then seen riding into the yard John walked away to attend to his master’s horse.

“Those butter and cheese men do accumulate money fast,” said J.C., more to himself than to his companion, who laughingly replied, “It would be funny if you should make this Maude my cousin instead of Nellie. Let me see—Cousin Nellie—Cousin Maude. I like the sound of the latter the best, though I am inclined to think she is altogether too good for a mercenary dog like you.”

“Pshaw!” returned J.C., pulling at the maple leaves which grew above his head, “I hope you don’t think I’d marry a rude country girl for her money. No, give me la charmant Nellie, even though she cannot mend her dress, and you are welcome to Cousin Maude, the milkman’s heiress.”

At that moment Mrs. Kelsey and Nellie appeared upon the stoop, and as Maude was no longer visible the young gentlemen returned to the parlor, where J.C. asked Nellie to favor him with some music. Nellie liked to play, for it showed her white hands to advantage, and seating herself at the piano she said: “I have learned a new song since I saw you, but Maude must sing the other part—maybe, though, I can get along without her.”

This last was said because she did not care to have Maude in the parlor, and she had inadvertently spoken of her singing. The young men, however, were not as willing to excuse her, and Maude was accordingly sent for. She came readily, and performed her part without the least embarrassment, although she more than once half paused to listen to the rich, full tones of James’ voice, for he was an unusually fine singer; Maude had never heard anything like it before, and when

the song was ended the bright, sparkling eyes which she turned upon him told of her delight quite as eloquently as words could have done.

“You play, I am sure, Miss Remington,” he said, as Nellie arose from the stool.

Maude glanced at her red hands, which J.C. would be sure to notice, then feeling ashamed to hesitate for a reason like this, she answered, “Yes, sometimes,” and taking her seat she played several pieces, keeping admirable time, and giving to the music a grace and finish which Nellie had often tried in vain to imitate.

“Mr. De Vere did not expect you to play all night,” called out the envious girl, who, not satisfied with having enticed J.C. from the piano, wished James to join her also.

“She is merely playing at my request,” said Mr. De Vere, “but if it is distasteful to Miss Kennedy, we will of course desist,” and bending low he said a few words of commendation to Maude, whose heart thrilled to the gentle tones of his voice, just as many another maiden’s had done before. Mr. De Vere was exceedingly agreeable, and so Maude found him to be, for feeling intuitively that she was somewhat slighted by the overbearing Nellie, he devoted himself to her entirely, talking first of books, then of music, and lastly of his home, which, without any apparent boasting, he described as a most beautiful spot.

For a long time that night did Louis wait for his sister in his little bed, and when at last she came to give him her accustomed kiss he pushed the thick curls from off her face and said, “I never saw you look so happy, Maude. Do you like that Mr. De Vere?”

“Which one?” asked Maude. “There are two, you know.”

“Yes, I know,” returned Louis, “but I mean the one with the voice. Forgive me, Maude, but I sat ever so long at the head of the stairs, listening as he talked. He is a good man, I am sure. Will you tell me how he looks?”

Maude could not well describe him. She only knew that he was taller than J.C., and, as she thought, much finer looking, with deep blue eyes, dark brown hair, and a mouth just fitted to his voice. Farther than this she could not tell. “But you will see him in the morning,” she said. “I have told him how gifted, how good, you are, and tomorrow, he says, he shall visit you in your den.”

“Don’t let the other one come,” said Louis hastily, “for if he can’t endure red hands he’d laugh at my withered feet and the bunch upon my back; but the other one won’t, I know.”

Maude knew so too, and somewhat impatiently she waited for the morrow, when she could introduce her brother to her friend. The morrow came, but, as was frequently the case, Louis was suffering from a severe pain in his back, which kept him confined to his room, so that Mr. De Vere neither saw him at all nor Maude as much as he wished to do. He had been greatly interested in her, and when at dinner he heard that she would not be down he was conscious of a feeling of disappointment. She was not present at supper either, but after it was over she joined him in the parlor, and, together with J.C. and Nellie, accompanied him to the graveyard, where, seating herself upon her mother’s grave, she told him of that mother, and the desolation which crept into her heart when first she knew she was an orphan. From talking of her mother it was an easy matter to speak of her Vernon home, which she had never seen since she left it twelve years before, and then Mr. De Vere asked if she had met two boys in the cars on her way to Albany. At first Maude could not recall them, and when at last she did so her recollections were so vague that Mr. De Vere felt another pang of disappointment, though wherefore he could not tell, unless indeed, he thought there would be something pleasant in being remembered twelve long years by a girl like Maude Remington. He reminded her of her remark made to his cousin, and in speaking of him casually alluded to his evident liking for Nellie, saying playfully, “Who knows, Miss Remington, but you may some time be related to me—not my cousin exactly, though Cousin Maude sounds well. I like that name.”

“I like it too,” she said impulsively, “much better than Miss Remington, which seems so stiff.”

“Then let me call you so. I have no girl cousin in the world,” and leaning forward he put back from her forehead one of her short, glossy curls, which had been displaced by the evening breeze.

This was a good deal for him to do. Never before had he touched a maiden’s tresses, and he had no idea that it would make his fingers tingle as it did. Still, on the whole, he liked it, and half-wished the wind would blow those curls over the upturned face again, but it did not, and he was about to make some casual remark when J.C., who was not far distant, called out, “Making love, I do

believe!”

The speech was sudden, and grated harshly on James’ ear. Not because the idea of making love to Maude was utterly distasteful, but because he fancied she might be annoyed, and over his features there came a shadow, which Maude did not fail to observe.

“He does not wish to be teased about me,” she thought, and around the warm spot which the name of “Cousin Maude” had made within her heart there crept a nameless chill—a fear that she had been degraded in his eyes. “I must go back to Louis,” she said at last, and rising from her mother’s grave she returned to the house, accompanied by Mr. De Vere, who walked by her side in silence, wondering if she really cared for J.C.‘s untimely joke.

James De Vere did not understand the female heart, and wishing to relieve Maude from all embarrassment in her future intercourse with himself, he said to her as they reached the door: “My Cousin Maude must not mind what J.C. said, for she knows it is not so.”

“Certainly not,” was Maude’s answer, as she ran upstairs, hardly knowing whether she wished it were or were not so.

One thing, however, she knew. She liked to have him call her Cousin Maude; and when Louis asked what Mr. De Vere had said beneath the willows she told him of her new name, and asked if he did not like it.

“Yes,” he answered, “but I’d rather you were his sister, for then maybe he’d call me brother, even if I am a cripple. How I wish I could see him, and perhaps I shall tomorrow.”

But on the morrow Louis was so much worse that in attending to him Maude found but little time to spend with Mr. De Vere, who was to leave them that evening. When, however, the carriage which was to take him away stood at the gate, she went down to bid him good-by, and ask him to visit them again.

“I shall be happy to do so,” he said; and then, as they were standing alone together, he continued: “Though I have not seen as much of you as I wished, I shall remember my visit at Laurel Hill with pleasure. In Hampton there are not many ladies for whose acquaintance I particularly care, and I have often wished that I had some female friend with whom I could correspond, and thus while

away some of my leisure moments. Will my Cousin Maude answer me if I should some time chance to write to her mere friendly, cousinly letters, of course?”

This last he said because he mistook the deep flush on Maude’s cheek for an unwillingness to do anything which looked at all like “making love.”

“I will write,” was all Maude had a chance to say ere Nellie joined them, accompanied by J.C., who had not yet terminated his visit at Laurel Hill, and as soon as his cousin left he intended removing to the hotel, where he would be independent of Dr. Kennedy, and at the same time, devote himself to the daughter or stepdaughter, just as he should feel inclined.

Some such idea might have intruded itself upon the mind of James, for, when at parting he took his cousin’s hand, he said, “You have my good wishes for your success with Nellie, but—”

“But not with t’other one, hey?” laughingly rejoined J.C., adding that James need have no fears, for there was not the slightest possibility of his addressing the milkman’s heiress.

Alas for J.C.‘s honesty! Even while he spoke there was treachery in his saucy eyes, for the milkman’s heiress, as he called her, was not to him an object of dislike, and when, after the carriage drove away, he saw the shadows on her face, and suspected their cause, he felt a strong desire that his departure might affect her in a similar manner. That evening, too, when Nellie sang to him his favorite song, he kept one ear turned toward the chamber above, where, in a low, sweet voice, Maude Remington sang her suffering brother to sleep.

The next morning he removed to the hotel, saying he should probably remain there during the summer, as the air of Laurel Hill was highly conducive to his rather delicate health; but whether he meant the invigorating breeze which blew front the surrounding hills, or an heir of a more substantial kind, time and our story will show.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MILKMAN’S HEIRESS.

Mr. De Vere had been gone four weeks. Louis had entirely recovered from his illness, and had made the acquaintance of J.C., with whom he was on the best of terms. Almost every bright day did the young man draw the little covered wagon through the village, and away to some lovely spot, where the boy artist could indulge in his favorite occupation—that of sketching the familiar objects around him. At first Nellie accompanied them in these excursions; but when one day her aunt, who still remained at Laurel Hill, pointed out to her a patch of sunburn and a dozen freckles, the result of her outdoor exercise, she declared her intention of remaining at home thereafter—a resolution not altogether unpleasant to J.C., as by this means Maude was more frequently his companion.

If our readers suppose that to a man of J.C.‘s nature there was anything particularly agreeable in thus devoting himself to a cripple boy they are mistaken, for Louis Kennedy might have remained indoors forever had it not been for the sunny smile and look of gratitude which Maude Remington always gave to J.C. De Vere when he came for or returned with her darling brother. Insensibly the domestic virtues and quiet ways of the black-haired Maude were winning a strong hold upon J.C.‘s affections, and still he had never seriously thought of making her his wife. He only, knew that he liked her, that he felt very comfortable where she was, and very uncomfortable where she was not; that the sound of her voice singing in the choir was the only music he heard on the Sabbath day, and though Nellie in her character of soprano ofttimes warbled like a bird, filling the old church with melody, he did not heed it, so intent was he in listening to the deeper, richer notes of her who sang the alto, and whose fingers swept the organ keys with so much grace and beauty.

And Maude! within her bosom was there no interest awakened for one who thought so much of her? Yes, but it was an interest of a different nature from his. She liked him, because he was so much more polite to her than she had expected him to be, and more than all, she liked him for his kindness to her brother, never dreaming that for her sake alone those kindly acts were done. Of James De Vere she often thought, repeating sometimes to herself the name of Cousin Maude, which had sounded so sweetly to her ear when he had spoken it. His promise she remembered, too, and as often as the mail came in, bringing her no letter, she sighed involuntarily to think she was forgotten. Not forgotten, Maude, no, not forgotten, and when one afternoon, five weeks after James’ departure J.C. stood at her side, he had good reason for turning his eyes away from her truthful

glance, for he knew of a secret wrong done to her that day. There had come to him that morning a letter from James, containing a note for Maude, and the request that he would hand it to her.

“I should have written to her sooner,” James wrote, “but mother’s illness and an unusual amount of business prevented me from doing so. ‘Better late than never,’ is, however, a good motto at times, and I intrust the letter to you, because I would save her from any gossip which an open correspondence with me might create.”

For James De Vere to write to a young girl was an unheard-of circumstance, and the sight of that note aroused in J.C.‘s bosom a feeling of jealousy lest the prize he now knew he coveted should be taken from him. No one but himself should write to Maude Remington, for she was his, or rather she should be his. The contents of that note might be of the most ordinary kind, but for some reason undefinable to himself he would rather she should not see it yet, and though it cost him a struggle to deal thus falsely with both, he resolved to keep it from her until she had promised to be his wife. He never dreamed it possible that she could tell him no, he had been so flattered and admired by the city belles; and the only point which troubled him was what his fashionable friends would say when in place of the Nellie whose name had been so long associated with his, he brought to them a Maude fresh from the rural districts, with naught in her disposition save goodness, purity, and truth. They would be surprised, he knew, but she was worth a thousand of them all, and then with a glow of pride he thought how his tender love and care would shield her from all unkind remarks, and how he would make himself worthy of such a treasure.

This was the nobler, better part of J.C.‘s nature, but anon a more sordid feeling crept in, and he blushed to find himself wondering how large her fortune really was! No one knew, save the lawyers and the trustee to whose care it had been committed, and since he had become interested in her he dared not question them lest they should accuse him of mercenary motives. Was it as large as Nellie’s? He wished he knew, while at the same time he declared to himself that it should make no difference. The heart which had withstood so many charms was really interested at last, and though he knew both Mrs. Kelsey and her niece would array themselves against him, he was prepared to withstand the indignation of the one and the opposition of the other.

So perfectly secure was Nellie in J.C.‘s admiration for herself, that she failed to

see his growing preference for Maude, whom she frequently ridiculed in his presence, just because she thought he would laugh at it, and think her witty. But in this she was mistaken, for her ridicule raised Maude higher in his estimation, and he was glad when at last an opportunity occurred for him to declare his intentions.

For a week or more Nellie and a few of the young people of the village had been planning a picnic to the lake, and the day was finally decided upon. Nellie did not ask J.C. if he were going; she expected it as a matter of course, just as she expected that Maude would stay at home to look after Louis and the house. But J.C. had his own opinion of the matter, and when the morning came he found it very convenient to be suffering from a severe headache which would not permit him to leave his bed, much less to join the pleasure party.

“Give my compliments to Miss Kennedy,” he said to the young man who came to his door, “and tell her I cannot possibly go this morning, but will perhaps come down this afternoon.”

“Mr. De Vere not going! I can’t believe it!” and the angry tears glittered in Nellie’s blue eyes when she heard the message he had sent her.

“Not going!” exclaimed Mrs. Kelsey, while even Maude sympathized in the general sorrow, for her hands had prepared the repast, and she had taken especial pains with the pies which Mr. De Vere liked the best, and which, notwithstanding his dislike to kitchen odors, he had seen her make, standing at her elbow and complimenting her skill.

Nellie was in favor of deferring the ride, but others of the party, who did not care so much for Mr. De Vere’s society objected, and poutingly tying on her hat, the young lady took her seat beside her aunt, who was scarcely less chagrined than herself at their disappointment.

Meanwhile, from behind his paper curtains J.C. looked after the party as they rode away, feeling somewhat relieved when the blue ribbons of Nellie’s hat disappeared from view. For appearance’s sake he felt obliged to keep his room for an hour or more, but at the end of that time he ventured to feel better, and dressing himself with unusual care he started for Dr. Kennedy’s, walking very slowly, as became one suffering from a nervous headache, as he was supposed to be. Maude had finished her domestic duties, and in tasteful gingham morning-

gown, with the whitest of linen collars upon her neck, she sat reading alone at the foot of the garden beneath a tall cherry tree where John had built her a rough seat of boards. This was her favorite resort, and here J.C. found her, so intent upon her book as not to observe his approach until he stood before her. She seemed surprised to see him, and made anxious inquiries concerning his headache, which he told her was much better. “And even if it were not,” said he, seating himself at her feet; “even if it were not, the sight of you, looking so bright, so fresh, and so neat, would dissipate it entirely,” and his eyes, from which the saucy, wicked look was for the moment gone, rested admiringly upon her face.

His manner was even more pointed than his words, and coloring crimson, Maude replied, “You are disposed to be complimentary, Mr. De Vere.”

“I am disposed for once to tell the truth,” he answered.” All my life long I have acted a part, saying and doing a thousand foolish things I did not mean, just because I thought it would please the senseless bubbles with whom I have been associated. But you, Maude Remington, have brought me to my senses, and determined me to be a man instead of a fool. Will you help me, Maude, in this resolution?” and seizing both her hands he poured into her astonished ear his declaration of love, speaking so rapidly and so vehemently as al most to take her breath away, for she had never expected a scene like this.

She had looked upon him as one who would undoubtedly be her sister’s husband, and the uniform kindness with which he had treated her, she attributed to his exceeding good nature; but to be loved by him, by J.C. De Vere, who had been sought after by the fairest ladies in the land, she could not believe possible, and with mingled feelings of pleasure, pain, and gratified vanity she burst into tears.

Very gently J.C. wiped her tears away, and sitting down beside her he said, “The first time I ever saw you, Maude, you told me ‘I did not look as if I meant for certain,’ and you were right, for all my life has been a humbug; but I mean ‘for certain’ now. I love you, Maude, love you for the very virtues which I have so often affected to despise, and you must make me what J.C. De Vere ought to be. Will you, Maude? Will you be my wife?”

To say Maude was not gratified that this man of fashion should prefer her to all the world would be an untruth, but she could not then say “Yes,” for another, and

a more melodious voice was still ringing in her ear, and she saw in fancy a taller, nobler form than that of him who was pressing her to answer.

“Not yet, Mr. De Vere,” she said. “Not yet. I must have time to think. It has come upon me so suddenly, so unexpectedly, for I have always thought of you as Nellie’s future husband, and my manners are so different from what you profess to admire.”

“‘Twas only profession, Maude,” he said, and then, still holding her closely to him, he frankly and ingenuously gave her a truthful history of his life up to the time of his first acquaintance with Nellie, of whom he spoke kindly, saying she pleased him better than most of his city friends, and as he began really to want a wife he had followed her to Laurel Hill, fully intending to offer her the heart which, ere he was aware of it, was given to another. “And now, I cannot live without you,” he said. “You must be mine. Won’t you, Maude? I will be a good husband. I will take lessons of Cousin James, who is called a pattern man.”

The mention of that name was unfortunate, and rising to her feet, Maude replied: “I cannot answer you now, Mr. De Vere. I should say No, if I did, I am sure, and I would rather think of it a while.”

He knew by her voice that she was in earnest, and kissing her hand he walked rapidly away, his love increasing in intensity with each step he took. He had not expected anything like hesitancy. Everyone else had met his advances at least halfway, and Maude’s indecision made him feel more ardent than he otherwise might have been.

“What if she should refuse me?” he said, as he paced up and down his room, working himself up to such a pitch of feeling that when that afternoon Nellie on the lake shore was waiting impatiently his coming he on his pillow was really suffering all the pangs of a racking headache, brought on by strong nervous excitement. “What if she should say No?” he kept repeating to himself, and at last, maddened by the thought, he arose, and dashing off a wild rambling letter, was about sending it by a servant, when he received a note from her, for an explanation of which we will go back an hour or so in our story.

In a state of great perplexity Maude returned to the house, and seeking out her brother, the only person to whom she could go for counsel, she told him of the offer she had received, and asked him what he thought. In most respect Louis

was far older than his years, and he entered at once into the feelings of his sister.

“J.C. De Vere proposed to you!” he exclaimed. “What will Nellie say?”

“If I refuse, she never need to know of it,” answered Maude, and Louis continued: “They say he is a great catch, and wouldn’t it be nice to get him away from everybody else. But what of the other De Vere? Don’t you like him the best?”

Maude’s heart beat rapidly, and the color on her cheek deepened to a brighter hue as she replied, “What made you think of him?”

“I don’t know,” was Louis’ answer, “only when he was here I fancied you were pleased with him, and that he would suit you better than J.C.”

“But he don’t like me,” said Maude. “He don’t like any woman well enough to make her his wife,” and she sighed deeply as she thought of his broken promise and the letter looked for so long.

“Maude,” said Louis suddenly, “men like J.C. De Vere sometimes marry for money, and maybe he thinks your fortune larger than it is. Most everybody does.”

That Maude was more interested in J.C. De Vere than she supposed was proved by the earnestness with which she defended him from all mercenary motives.

“He knows Nellie’s fortune is much larger than my own,” she said; “and by preferring me to her he shows that money is not his motive.”

Still Louis’ suggestion troubled her, and by way of testing the matter she sat down at once and wrote him a note, telling him frankly how much she had in her own name and how much in expectancy. This note she sent to him by John, who, naturally quick-witted, read a portion of the truth in her tell-tale face, and giving a loud whistle in token of his approbation he exclaimed, “This nigger’ll never quit larfin’ if you gets him after all Miss Nellie’s nonsense, and I hopes you will, for he’s a heap better chap than I s’posed, though I b’lieve I like t’other one the best!”

Poor Maude! That other one seemed destined to be continually thrust upon her, but resolving to banish him from her mind as one who had long since ceased to

think of her, she waited impatiently, for a reply to her letter.

Very hastily J.C. tore it open, hoping, believing, that it contained the much desired answer. “I knew she could not hold out against me— no one ever did,” he said; but when he read the few brief lines, he dashed it to the floor with an impatient “Pshaw!” feeling a good deal disappointed that she had not said Yes and a very little disappointed that the figures were not larger!

“Five thousand dollars the 20th of next June, and five thousand more when that old Janet dies; ten thousand in all. Quite a handsome property, if Maude could have it at once. I wonder if she’s healthy, this Mrs. Hopkins,” soliloquized J.C., until at last a new idea entered his mind, and striking his fist upon the table he exclaimed, “Of course she will. Such people always do, and that knocks the will in head!” and J.C. De Vere frowned wrathfully upon the little imaginary Hopkinses who were to share the milkman’s fortune with Maude.

Just then a girlish figure was seen beneath the trees in Dr. Kennedy’s yard, and glancing at the white cape bonnet J.C. knew that it was Maude, the sight of whom drove young Hopkins and the will effectually from his mind. “He would marry her, anyway,” he said, “five thousand dollars was enough;” and donning his hat he started at once for the doctor’s. Maude had returned to the house, and was sitting with her brother when the young man was announced. Wholly unmindful of Louis’ presence, he began at once by asking” if she esteemed him so lightly as to believe that money could make any difference whatever with him.”

“It influences some men,” answered Maude, “and though you may like me—”

“Like you, Maude Remington!” he exclaimed; “like is a feeble word. I worship you, I love the very air you breathe, and you must be mine. Will you, Maude?”

J.C. had never before been so much in earnest, for never before had he met with the least indecision, and he continued pleading his cause so vehemently that Louis, who was wholly unprepared for so stormy a wooing, stopped his ears and whispered to his sister, “Tell him Yes, before he drives me crazy!”

But Maude felt that she must have time for sober, serious reflection; J.C. was not indifferent to her, and the thought was very soothing that she who had never aspired to the honor had been chosen from all others to be his wife. He was handsome, agreeable, kind-hearted, and, as she believed, sincere in his love for

her. And still there was something lacking. She could not well tell what, unless, indeed, she would have him more like James De Vere.

“Will you answer me?” J.C. said, after there had been a moment’s silence, and in his deep black eyes there was a truthful, earnest look wholly unlike the wicked, treacherous expression usually hidden there.

“Wait a while,” answered Maude, coming to his side and laying her hand upon his shoulder. “Wait a few days, and I most know I shall tell you Yes. I like you, Mr. De Vere, and if I hesitate it is because—because—I really don’t know what, but something keeps telling me that our engagement may be broken, and if so, it had better not be made.”

There was another storm of words, and then, as Maude still seemed firm in her resolution to do nothing hastily, J.C. took his leave. As the door closed after him, Louis heaved a deep sigh of relief, and, turning to his sister, said: “I never heard anything like it; I wonder if James would act like that!”

“Louis,” said Maude, but ere Louis could reply she had changed her mind, and determined not to tell him that James De Vere alone stood between her and the decision J.C. pleaded for so earnestly. So she said: “Shall I marry J.C. De Vere?”

“Certainly, if you love him,” answered Louis. “He will take you to Rochester away from this lonesome house. I shall live with you more than half the time, and—”

Here Louis was interrupted by the sound of wheels. Mrs. Kelsey and Nellie had returned from the Lake, and bidding her brother say nothing of what he had heard, Maude went down to meet them. Nellie was in the worst of humors. “Her head was aching horridly—she had spent an awful day—and J.C. was wise in staying at home.”

“How is he?” she asked, “though of course you have not seen him.”

Maude was about to speak when Hannah, delighted with a chance to disturb Nellie, answered for her. “It’s my opinion that headache was all a sham, for you hadn’t been gone an hour, afore he was over here in the garden with Maude, where he stayed ever so long. Then he came agen this afternoon, and hasn’t but jest gone.”

Nellie had not sufficient discernment to read the truth of this assertion in Maude's crimson cheeks, but Mrs. Kelsey had, and very sarcastically she said: "Miss Remington, I think, might be better employed than in trying to supplant her sister."

"I have not tried to supplant her, madam," answered Maude, her look of embarrassment giving way to one of indignation at the unjust accusation.

"May I ask, then, if Mr. De Vere has visited you twice to-day, and if so, what was the object of those visits?" continued Mrs. Kelsey, who suddenly remembered several little incidents which had heretofore passed unheeded, and which, now that she recalled them to mind, proved that J.C. De Vere was interested in Maude.

"Mr. De Vere can answer for himself, and I refer you to him," was Maude's reply, as she walked away.

Nellie began to cry. "Maude had done something," she knew, "and it wouldn't be a bit improper for a woman as old as Aunt Kelsey to go over and see how Mr. De Vere was, particularly as by this means she might find out why he had been there so long with Maude."

Mrs. Kelsey was favorably impressed with this idea, and after changing her dusty dress and drinking a cup of tea she started for the hotel. J.C. was sitting near the window, watching anxiously for a glimpse of Maude when his visitor was announced. Seating herself directly opposite him, Mrs. Kelsey inquired after his headache, and then asked how he had passed the day.

"Oh, in lounging, generally," he answered, while she continued, "Hannah says you spent the morning there, and also a part of the afternoon. Was my brother at home?"

"He was not. I went to see Maude," J.C. replied somewhat stiffly, for he began to see the drift of her remarks.

Mrs. Kelsey hesitated a moment, and then proceeded to say that "J.C. ought not to pay Miss Remington much attention, as she was very susceptible and might fancy him in earnest."

"And suppose she does?" said J.C., determining to brave the worst. "Suppose

she does?”

Mrs. Kelsey was very uncomfortable, and coughing a little she replied, “It is wrong to raise hopes which cannot be realized, for of course you have never entertained a serious thought of a low country girl like Maude Remington.”

There had been a time when a remark like this from the fashionable Mrs. Kelsey would have banished any girl from J.C.‘s mind, for he was rather dependent on the opinion of others, but it made no difference now, and, warming up in Maude’s defense, he replied, “I assure you, madam, I have entertained serious thoughts toward Miss Remington, and have this day asked her to be my wife.”

“Your wife!” almost screamed the high-bred Mrs. Kelsey. “What will your city friends—What will Nellie say?”

“Confound them all, I don’t care what they, say,” and J.C. drove his knife-blade into the pine table, while he gave his reasons for having chosen Maude in preference to Nellie, or anyone else he had ever seen. “There’s something to her,” said he, “and with her for my wife I shall make a decent man. What would Nellie and I do together- -when neither of us know anything—about business, I mean,” he added, while Mrs. Kelsey rejoined, “I always intended that you would live with me, and I had that handsome suite of rooms arranged expressly for Nellie and her future husband. I have no children, and my niece will inherit my property.”

This, under some circumstances, would have strongly tempted the young man; nay, it might perchance have tempted him then, had not the deep tones of the organ at that moment have reached his ear. It was the night when Maude usually rehearsed for the coming Sabbath, and soon after her interview with her sister she had gone to the church where she sought to soothe her ruffled spirits by playing a most plaintive air. The music was singularly soft and sweet, and the heart of J.C. De Vere trembled to the sound, for he knew it was Maude who played—Maude, who out-weighed the tempting bait which Mrs. Kelsey offered, and with a magnanimity quite astonishing to himself he answered, “Poverty with Maude, rather than riches with another!”

“Be it so, then,” was Mrs. Kelsey’s curt reply, “but when in the city you blush at your bride’s awkwardness don’t expect me to lend a helping hand, for Maude Remington cannot by me be recognized as an equal,” and the proud lady swept

from the room, wearing a deeply injured look, as if she herself had been refused instead of her niece.

“Let me off easier than I supposed,” muttered J.C., as he watched her cross the street and enter Dr. Kennedy’s gate. “It will be mighty mean, though, if she does array herself against my wife, for Madam Kelsey is quoted everywhere, and even Mrs. Lane, who lives just opposite, dare not open her parlor blinds until assured by ocular demonstration that Mrs. Kelsey’s are open too. Oh, fashion, fashion, what fools you make of your votaries! I am glad that I for one dare break your chain and marry whom I please,” and feeling more amiably disposed toward J.C. De Vere than he had felt for many a day, the young man started for the church, where to his great joy he found Maude alone.

She was not surprised to see him, nay, she was half expecting him, and the flush which deepened on her cheek as he came to her side showed that his presence was not unwelcome. Human nature is the same everywhere, and though Maude was perhaps as free from its weaknesses as almost anyone, the fact that her lover was so greatly coveted by others increased rather than diminished her regard for him, and when he told her what had passed between himself and Mrs. Kelsey, and urged her to give him a right to defend her against that haughty woman’s attacks by engaging herself to him at once, she was more willing to tell him Yes than she had been in the morning. Thoughts of James De Vere did not trouble her now—he had ceased to remember her ere this—had never been more interested in her than in any ordinary acquaintance, and so, though she knew she could be happier with him than with the one who with his arm around her waist was pleading for her love, she yielded at last, and in that dim old church, with the summer moonlight stealing up the dusky aisles, she promised to be the wife of J.C. De Vere on her eighteenth birthday.

Very pleasant now it seemed sitting there alone with him in the silent church. Very pleasant walking with him down the quiet street, and when her chamber was reached, and Louis, to whom she told her story, whispered in her ear, “I am glad that is so,” she thought it very nice to be engaged, and was conscious of a happier, more independent feeling than she had ever known before. It seemed so strange that she, an unpretending country girl, had won the heart that many a city maiden had tried in vain to win, and then with a pang she thought of Nellie, wondering what excuse she could render her for having stolen J.C. away.

“But he will stand between us,” she said; “he will shield me from her anger,” and

grateful for so potent a protector, she fell asleep, dreaming alas, not of J.C., but of him who called her Cousin Maude, and whose cousin she really was to be.

J.C. De Vere, too, had dreams of a darkeyed girl, who, in the shadowy church, with the music she had made still vibrating on the ear, had promised to be his. Dreams, too, he had of a giddy throng who scoffed at the darkeyed girl, calling her by the name which he himself had given her. It was not meet, they said, that he should wed the “Milkman’s Heiress,” but with a nobleness of soul unusual in him, he paid no heed to their remarks, and folded the closer to his heart the bride which he had chosen.

Alas! that dreams so often prove untrue.

CHAPTER X.

THE ENGAGEMENT, REAL AND PROSPECTIVE.

To her niece Mrs. Kelsey had communicated the result of her interview with J.C., and that young lady had fallen into a violent passion, which merged itself at last into a flood of tears, and ended finally in strong hysterics. While in this latter condition Mrs. Kelsey deemed it necessary to summon her brother, to whom she narrated the circumstances of Nellie’s illness. To say that the doctor was angry would but feebly express the nature of his feelings. He had fully expected that Nellie would be taken off his hands, and he had latterly a very good reason for wishing that it might be so.

Grown-up daughters, he knew, were apt to look askance at stepmothers, and if he should wish to bring another there he would rather that Nellie should be out of the way. So he railed at the innocent Maude, and after exhausting all the maxims which would at all apply to that occasion, he suggested sending for Mr. De Vere and demanding an explanation. But this Mrs. Kelsey would not suffer.

“It will do no good,” she said, “and may make the matter worse by hastening the marriage. I shall return home tomorrow, and if you do not object shall take your daughter with me, to stay at least six months, as she needs a change of scene. I can, if necessary, intimate to my friends that she has refused J.C., who, in a fit of pique, has offered himself to Maude, and that will save Nellie from all embarrassment. He will soon tire of his new choice, and then—”

“I won’t have him if he does,” gasped Nellie, interrupting her aunt- -“I won’t have anybody who has first proposed to Maude. I wish she’d never come here, and if pa hadn’t brought that woman—”

“Helen!” and the doctor’s voice was very stern, for time had not erased from his heart all love for the blue-eyed Matty, the gentle mother of the offending Maude, and more than all, the mother of his boy—“Helen, that woman was my wife, and you must not speak disrespectfully of her.”

Nellie answered by a fresh burst of tears, for her own conscience smote her for having spoken thus lightly of one who had ever been kind to her.

After a moment Mrs. Kelsey resumed the conversation by suggesting that, as the matter could not now be helped, they had better say nothing, but go off on the morrow as quietly as possible, leaving J.C. to awake from his hallucination, which she was sure he would do soon, and follow them to the city. This arrangement seemed wholly satisfactory to all parties, and though Nellie declared she’d never again speak to Jed De Vere, she dried her tears, and retiring to rest, slept quite as soundly as she had ever done in her life.

The next morning when Maude as usual went down to superintend the breakfast, she was surprised to hear from Hannah that Mrs. Kelsey was going that day to Rochester, and that Nellie was to accompany her.

“Nobody can ‘cuse me,” said Hannah, “of not ‘fillin’ Scriptur’ oncet, whar it says `them as has ears to hear, let ‘em hear,’ for I did hear ‘em a-talkin’ last night

of you and Mr. De Vere, and I tell you they're ravin' mad to think you'd cotched him; but I'm glad on't. You desarves him, if anybody. I suppose that t'other chap aint none of your marryin' sort," and unconscious of the twinge her last words had inflicted Hannah carried the coffee-urn to the dining room, followed by Maude, who was greeted with dark faces and frowning looks.

Scarcely a word was spoken during breakfast, and when after it was over Maude offered to assist Nellie in packing her trunks, the latter answered decisively, "You've done enough, I think."

A few moments afterward J.C.'s voice was heard upon the stairs. He had come over to see the "lioness and her cub," as he styled Mrs. Kelsey and her niece, whose coolness was amply atoned for by the bright, joyous glance of Maude, to whom he whispered softly, "Won't we have glorious times when they are gone!"

Their projected departure pleased him greatly, and he was so very polite and attentive that Nellie relented a little, and asked how long he intended remaining at Laurel Hill, while even Mrs. Kelsey gave him her hand at parting, and said, "Whenever you recover from your unaccountable fancy I shall be glad to see you."

"You'll wait some time, if you wait for that," muttered J.C., as he returned to the house in quest of Maude, with whom he had a long and most delightful interview, for old Hannah, in unusually, good spirits, expressed her willingness to see to everything, saying to her young mistress, "You go along now and court a spell. I reckon I haint done forgot how I and Crockett sot on the fence in old Virginny and heard the bobolinks a-singin'."

Old Hannah was waxing sentimental, and with a heightened bloom upon her cheeks Maude left her to her memories of Crockett and the bobolinks, while she went back to her lover. J.C. was well skilled in the little, delicate acts which tend to win and keep a woman's heart, and in listening to his protestations of love Maude forgot all else, and abandoned herself to the belief that she was perfectly happy. Only once did her pulses quicken as they would not have done had her chosen husband been all that she could wish, and that was when he said to her, "I wrote to James last night, telling him of my engagement. He will congratulate me, I know, for he was greatly pleased with you."

Much did Maude wonder what James would say, and it was not long ere her

curiosity was gratified; for scarcely four days were passed when J.C. brought to her an unsealed note, directed to “Cousin Maude.”

“I have heard from Jim,” he said, “and he is the best fellow in the world. Hear what he says of you,” and from his own letter he read, “I do congratulate you upon your choice. Maude Remington is a noble creature—so beautiful, so refined, and withal so pure and good. Cherish her, my cousin, as she ought to be cherished, and bring her some time to my home, which will never boast so fair a mistress.”

“I’m so glad he’s pleased,” said J.C. “I would rather have his approval than that of the whole world. But what! Crying, I do believe!” and turning Maude’s face to the light he continued, “Yes, there are tears on your eyelashes. What is the matter?”

“Nothing, nothing,” answered Maude, “only I am so glad your relatives like me.”

J.C. was easily deceived, so was Maude—and mutually believing that nothing was the matter, J.C. drummed on the piano, while Maude tore open the note which James had written to her. It seemed so strange to think he wrote it, and Maude trembled violently, while the little red spots came out all over her neck and face as she glanced at the words, “My dear Cousin Maude.”

It was a kind, affectionate note, and told how the writer would welcome and love her as his cousin, while at the same time it chided her for not having answered the letter sent some weeks before. “Perhaps you did not deem it worthy of an answer,” he wrote, “but I was sadly disappointed in receiving none, and now that you are really to be my cousin I shall expect you to do better, and treat me as if I had an existence. J.C. must not monopolize you wholly, for I shall claim a share of you for myself.”

Poor, poor Maude! She did not feel the summer air upon her brow—did not hear the discordant notes which J.C. made upon the piano, for her whole soul was centered on the words, “sadly disappointed,” “love you as my cousin,” and “claim a share of you for myself.”

Only for a moment, though, and then recovering her composure she said aloud, “What does he mean? I never received a note.”

“I know it, I know it,” hastily spoke J.C., and coming to her side he handed her the soiled missive, saying, “It came a long time ago, and was mislaid among my papers, until this letter recalled it to my mind. There is nothing in it of any consequence, I dare say, and had it not been sealed I might, perhaps, have read it, for as the doctor says, `It’s a maxim of mine that a wife should have no secrets from her husband,’ hey, Maude?” and he caressed her burning cheek, as she read the note which, had it been earlier received, might have changed her whole after life.

And still it was not one-half as affectionate in its tone as was the last, for it began with, “Cousin Maude” and ended with “Yours respectfully,” but she knew he had been true to his promise, and without a suspicion that J.C. had deceived her she placed the letters in her pocket, to be read again when she was alone, and could measure every word and sentiment.

That afternoon when she went to her chamber to make some changes in her dress she found herself standing before the mirror much longer than usual, examining minutely the face which James De Vere had called beautiful.

“He thought so, or he would not have said it; but it is false,” she whispered; “even J.C. never called me handsome;” and taking out the note that day received, she read it again, wondering why the name “Cousin Maude” did not sound as pleasantly as when she first heard it.

That night as she sat with Louis in her room she showed the letters to him, at the same time explaining the reason why one of them was not received before.

“Oh, I am so glad,” said Louis, as he finished reading them, “for now I know that James De Vere don’t like you.”

“Don’t like me, Louis!” and in Maude’s voice there was a world of sadness.

“I mean,” returned Louis, “that he don’t love you for anything but a cousin. I like J.C. very, very much, and I am glad you are to be his wife; but I’ve sometimes thought that if you had waited the other one would have spoken, for I was almost sure he loved you, but he don’t, I know; he couldn’t be so pleased with your engagement, nor write you so affectionately if he really cared.”

Maude hardly knew whether she were pleased or not with Louis’ reasoning. It was true, though, she said, and inasmuch as James did not care for her, and she

did not care for James, she was very glad she was engaged to J.C.! And with reassured confidence in herself she sat down and wrote an answer to that note, a frank, impulsive, Maude-like answer, which, nevertheless, would convey to James De Vere no idea how large a share of that young girl's thoughts were given to himself.

The next day there came to Maude a letter bearing the Canada postmark, together with the unmistakable handwriting of Janet Hopkins. Maude had not heard of her for some time, and very eagerly she read the letter, laughing immoderately, and giving vent to sudden exclamations of astonishment at its surprising intelligence. Janet was a mother!—"a livin' mother to a child born out of due season," so the delighted creature wrote, "and what was better than all, it was a girl, and the Sunday before was baptized as Maude Matilda Remington Blodgett Hopkins, there being no reason," she said, "why she shouldn't give her child as many names as the Queen of England hitched on to hers, beside that it was not at all likely that she would ever have another, and so she had improved this opportunity, and named her daughter in honor of Maude, Matty, Harry, and her first husband Joel. But," she wrote, "I don't know what you'll say when I tell you that my old man and some others have made me believe that seein' I've an heir of my own flesh and blood, I ought to change that will of mine, so I've made another, and if Maude Matilda dies you'll have it yet. T'other five thousand is yours, anyway, and if I didn't love the little wudget as I do, I wouldn't have changed my will; but natur' is natur'."

Scarcely had Maude finished reading this letter when J.C. came in, and she handed it to him. He did not seem surprised, for he had always regarded the will as a doubtful matter; but in reality he was a little chagrined, for five thousand was only half as much as ten. Still his love for Maude was, as yet, stronger than his love for money, and he only laughed heartily at the string of names which Janet had given to her offspring, saying, "It was a pity it hadn't been a boy, so she could have called him Jedediah Cleishbotham."

"He does not care for my money," Maude thought, and her heart went out toward him more lovingly than it had ever done before, and her dark eyes filled with tears when he told her, as he ere long did, that he must leave the next day, and return to Rochester.

"The little property left me by my mother needs attention, so my agent writes me," he said, "and now the will has gone up, and we are poorer than we were

before by five thousand dollars, it is necessary that I should bestir myself, you know." Maude could not tell why it was that his words affected her unpleasantly, for she knew he was not rich, and she felt that she should respect him more if he really did bestir himself, but still she did not like his manner when speaking of the will, and her heart was heavy all the day. He, on the contrary, was in unusually good spirits. He was not tired of Maude, but he was tired of the monotonous life at Laurel Hill, and when his agent's summons came it found him ready to go. That for which he had visited Laurel Hill had in reality been accomplished. He had secured a wife, not Nellie, but Maude, and determining to do everything honorable, he on the morning of his departure went to the doctor, to whom he talked of Maude, expressing his wish to marry her. Very coldly the doctor answered that "Maude could marry whom she pleased. It was a maxim of his never to interfere with matches," and then, as if the subject were suggestive, he questioned the young man to know if in his travels he had ever met the lady Maude Glendower. J.C. had met her frequently at Saratoga.

"She was a splendid creature," he said, and he asked if the doctor knew her.

"I saw her as a child of seventeen, and again as a woman of twenty-five. She is forty now," was the doctor's answer, as he walked away, wondering if the Maude Glendower of to-day were greatly changed from the Maude of fifteen years ago.

To J.C.'s active mind a new idea was presented, and seeking out the other Maude —his Maude—he told her of his suspicion. There was a momentary pang, a thought of the willow-shaded grave where Kate and Matty slept, and then Maude Remington calmly questioned J.C. of Maude Glendower—who she was, and where did she live?

J.C. knew but little of the lady, but what little he knew he told. She was of both English and Spanish descent. Her friends, he believed, were nearly all dead, and she was alone in the world. Though forty years of age, she was well preserved, and called a wondrous beauty. She was a belle—a flirt—a spinster, and was living at present in Troy.

"She'll never marry the doctor," said Maude, laughing, as she thought of an elegant woman leaving the world of fashion to be mistress of that house.

Still the idea followed her, and when at last J.C. had bidden her adieu, and gone to his city home, she frequently found herself thinking of the beautiful Maude

Glendower, whose name, it seemed to her, she had heard before, though when or where she could not tell. A strange interest was awakened in her bosom for the unknown lady, and she often wondered if they would ever meet. The doctor thought of her, too—thought of her often, and thought of her long, and as his feelings toward her changed, so did his manner soften toward the dark-haired girl who bore her name, and who he began at last to fancy resembled her in more points than one. Maude was ceasing to be an object of perfect indifference to him. She was an engaged young lady, and as such, entitled to more respect than he was wont to pay her, and as the days wore on he began to have serious thoughts of making her his confidant and counselor in a matter which he would never have intrusted to Nellie.

Accordingly, one afternoon when he found her sitting upon the piazza, he said, first casting an anxious glance around to make sure no one heard him: “Maude, I wish to see you alone a while.”

Wonderingly Maude followed him into the parlor, where her astonishment was in no wise diminished by his shutting the blinds, dropping the curtains, and locking the door! Maude began to tremble, and when he drew his chair close to her side, she started up, alarmed. “Sit down—sit down,” he whispered; “I want to tell you something, which you must never mention in the world. You certainly have some sense, or I should not trust you. Maude, I am going—that is, I have every reason to believe—or rather, I should say perhaps- -well, anyway, there is a prospect of my being married.”

“Married!—to whom?” asked Maude.

“You are certain you’ll never tell, and that there’s no one in the hall,” said the doctor, going on tip-toe to the door, and assuring himself there was no one there. Then returning to his seat, he told her a strange story of a marvellously beautiful young girl, with Spanish fire in her lustrous eyes, and a satin gloss on her blue-black curls.

Her name was Maude Glendower, and years ago she won his love, leading him on and on until at last he paid her the highest honor a man can pay a woman—he offered her his heart, his hand, his name. But she refused him—scornfully, contemptuously, refused him, and he learned afterward that she had encouraged him for the sake of bringing another man to terms!—and that man, whose name the doctor never knew, was a college student not yet twenty-one.

“I hated her then,” said he, “hated this Maude Glendower, for her deception; but I could not forget her, and after Katy died I sought her again. She was the star of Saratoga, and no match for me. This I had sense enough to see, so I left her in her glory, and three years after married your departed mother. Maude Glendower has never married, and at the age of forty has come to her senses, and signified her willingness to become my wife—or, that is to say, I have been informed by my sister that she probably would not refuse me a second time. Now, Maude Remington, I have told you this because I must talk with someone, and as I before remarked, you are a girl of sense, and will keep the secret. It is a maxim of mine, when anything is to be done, to do it; so I shall visit Miss Glendower immediately, and if I like her well enough I shall marry her at once. Not while I am gone, of course, but very soon. I shall start for Troy one week from to-day, and I wish you would attend a little to my wardrobe; it’s in a most lamentable condition. My shirts are all worn out, my coat is rusty, and last Sunday I discovered a hole in my pantaloons—”

“Dr. Kennedy,” exclaimed Maude, interrupting him,” you surely do not intend to present yourself before the fastidious Miss Glendower with those old shabby clothes. She would say No sooner than she did before. You must have an entire new suit. You can afford it, too, for you have not had one since mother died.”

Dr. Kennedy was never in a condition to be so easily coaxed as now. Maude Glendower had a place in his heart, which no other woman bad ever held, and that very afternoon the village merchant was astonished at the penurious doctor’s inquiring the prices of the finest broadcloth in his store. It seemed a great deal of money to pay, but Maude Remington at his elbow and Maude Glendower in his mind conquered at last, and the new suit was bought, including vest, hat, boots, and all. There is something in handsome clothes very satisfactory to most people, and the doctor, when arrayed in his, was conscious of a feeling of pride quite unusual to him. On one point, however, he was obstinate, “he would not spoil them by wearing them on the road, when he could just as well dress at the hotel.”

So Maude, between whom and himself there was for the time being quite an amicable understanding, packed them in his trunk, while Hannah and Louis looked on wondering what it could mean.

“The Millennial is comin’, or else he’s goin’ a-courtin’,” said Hannah, and satisfied that she was right she went back to the kitchen, while Louis, catching at

once at her idea, began to cry, and laying his head on his sister's lap begged of her to tell him if what Hannah had said were true.

To him it seemed like trampling on the little grave beneath the willows, and it required all Maude's powers of persuasion to dry his tears and soothe the pain which every child must feel when first they know that the lost mother, whose memory they so fondly cherish, is to be succeeded by another.

CHAPTER XI.

MAUDE GLENDOWER.

She was a most magnificent looking woman, as she sat within her richly furnished room on that warm September night, now gazing idly dawn the street and again bending her head to catch the first sound of footsteps on the stairs. Personal preservation had been the great study of her life, and forty years had not dimmed the luster of her soft, black eyes, or woven one thread of silver among the luxuriant curls which clustered in such profusion around her face and neck. Gray hairs and Maude Glendower had nothing in common, and the fair, round cheek, the pearly teeth, the youthful bloom, and white, uncovered shoulders seemed to indicate that time had made an exception in her favor, and dropped her from its wheel.

With a portion of her history the reader is already acquainted. Early orphaned, she was thrown upon the care of an old aunt who, proud of her wondrous beauty, spared no pains to make her what nature seemed to will that she should be, a coquette and a belle. At seventeen we find her a schoolgirl in New Haven, where she turned the heads of all the college boys, and then murmured because one, a darkeyed youth of twenty, withheld from her the homage she claimed as her just due. In a fit of pique she besieged a staid, handsome young M.D. of twenty-seven, who had just commenced to practice in the city, and who, proudly keeping himself aloof from the college students, knew nothing of the youth she so much fancied. Perfectly intoxicated with her beauty, he offered her his hand, and was repulsed. Overwhelmed with disappointment and chagrin, he then left the city, and located himself at Laurel Hill, where now we find him the selfish, overbearing Dr. Kennedy.

But in after years Maude Glendower was punished for that act. The dark-haired student she so much loved was wedded to another, and with a festering wound within her heart she plunged at once into the giddy world of fashion, slaying her victims by scores, and exulting as each new trophy of her power was laid at her feet. She had no heart, the people said, and with a mocking laugh she thought of the quiet grave ‘mid the New England hills, where, one moonlight night two weeks after that grave was made, she had wept such tears as were never wept by her again. Maude Glendower had loved, but loved in vain; and now, at the age of forty, she was unmarried and alone in the wide world. The aunt, who had been to her a mother, had died a few months before, and as her annuity ceased with her death Maude was almost wholly destitute. The limited means she possessed would only suffice to pay her, board for a short time, and in this dilemma she thought of her old lover, and wondered if he could again be won. He was rich, she had always heard, and as his wife she could still enjoy the luxuries to which she had been accustomed. She knew his sister,—they had met in the salons of Saratoga,—and though it hurt her pride to do it, she at last signified her willingness to be again addressed.

It was many weeks ere Dr. Kennedy conquered wholly his olden grudge, but conquered it he had, and she sat expecting him on the night when first we introduced her to our readers. He had arrived in Troy on the western train, and written her a note announcing his intention to visit her that evening. For this visit Maude Glendower had arrayed herself with care, wearing a rich silk dress of crimson and black—colors well adapted to her complexion.

“He saw me at twenty-five. He shall not think me greatly changed since then,” she said, as over her bare neck and arms she threw an exquisitely wrought mantilla of lace.

The Glendower family had once been very wealthy, and the last daughter of the haughty race glittered with diamonds which had come to her from her great-grandmother, and had been but recently reset. And there she sat, beautiful Maude Glendower—the votary of fashion- -the woman of the world—sat waiting for the cold, hard, overbearing man who thought to make her his wife. A ring at the door, a heavy tread upon the winding stairs, and the lady rests her head upon her hand, so that her glossy curls fall over, but do not conceal her white, rounded arm, where the diamonds are shining.

“I could easily mistake him for my father,” she thought, as a gray-haired man

stepped into the room, where he paused an instant, bewildered with the glare of light and the display of pictures, mirrors, tapestry, rosewood, and marble, which met his view.

Mrs. Berkley, Maude Glendower's aunt, had stinted herself to gratify her niece's whims, and their surroundings had always been of the most expensive kind, so it was not strange that Dr. Kennedy, accustomed only to ingrain carpet and muslin curtains, was dazzled by so much elegance. With a well-feigned start the lady arose to her feet, and going to his side offered him her hand, saying, "You are Dr. Kennedy, I am sure. I should have known you anywhere, for you are but little changed."

She meant to flatter his self-love, though, thanks to Maude Remington for having insisted upon the broadcloth suit, he looked remarkably well.

"She had not changed at all," he said, and the admiring gaze he fixed upon her argued well for her success. It becomes us not to tell how that strange wooing sped. Suffice it to say that at the expiration of an hour Maude Glendower had promised to be the wife of Dr. Kennedy when another spring should come. She had humbled herself to say that she regretted her girlish freak, and he had so far unbent his dignity as to say that he could not understand why she should be willing to leave the luxuries which surrounded her and go with him, a plain, old-fashioned man. Maude Glendower scorned to make him think that it was love which actuated her, and she replied, "Now that my aunt is dead, I have no natural protector. I am alone and want a home."

"But mine is so different," he said. "There are no silk curtains there, no carpets such as this—"

"Is Maude Remington there?" the lady asked, and in her large black eyes there was a dewy tenderness, as she pronounced that name.

"Maude Remington!—yes," the doctor answered." Where did you hear of her? My sister told you, I suppose. Yes, Maude is there. She has lived with me ever since her mother died. You would have liked Matty, I think," and the doctor felt a glow of satisfaction in having thus paid a tribute to the memory of his wife.

"Is Maude like her mother?" the lady asked; a glow upon her cheek, and the expression of her face evincing the interest she felt in the answer.

“Not at all,” returned the doctor. “Matty was blue-eyed and fair, while Maude is dark, and resembles her father, they say.”

The white jeweled hands were clasped together, for a moment, and then Maude Glendower questioned him of the other one, Matty’s child and his. Very tenderly the doctor talked of his unfortunate boy, telling of his soft brown hair, his angel face, and dreamy eyes.

“He is like Matty,” the lady said, more to herself than her companion, who proceeded to speak of Nellie as a paragon of loveliness and virtue. “I shan’t like her, I know,” the lady thought, “but the other two,” how her heart bounded at the thoughts of folding them to her bosom.

Louis Kennedy, weeping that his mother was forgotten, had nothing to fear from Maude Glendower, for a child of Matty Remington was a sacred trust to her, and when as the doctor bade her good-night he said again, “You will find a great contrast between your home and mine,” she answered, “I shall be contented if Maude and Louis are there.”

“And Nellie, too,” the doctor added, unwilling that she should be overlooked.

“Yes, Nellie too,” the lady answered, the expression of her mouth indicating that Nellie too was an object of indifference to her.

The doctor is gone, his object is accomplished, and at the Mansion House near by he sleeps quietly and well. But the lady, Maude Glendower, oh, who shall tell what bitter tears she wept, or how in her in-most soul she shrank from the man she had chosen. And yet there was nothing repulsive in him, she knew. He was fine-looking,— he stood well in the world,—he was rich while she was poor. But not for this alone had she promised to be his wife. To hold Maude Remington within her arms, to look into her eyes, to call his daughter child, this was the strongest reason of them all. And was it strange that when at last she slept she was a girl again, looking across the college green to catch a glimpse of one whose indifference had made her what she was, a selfish, scheming, cold-hearted woman.

There was another interview next morning, and then the doctor left her, but not until with her soft hand in his, and her shining eyes upon his face, she said to him, “You think your home is not a desirable one for me. Can’t you fix it up a little? Are there two parlors, and do the windows come to the floor? I hope your

carriage horses are in good condition, for I am very fond of driving. Have you a flower garden? I anticipate much pleasure in working among the plants. Oh, it will be so cool and nice in the country. You have an ice-house, of course."

Poor doctor! Double parlors, low windows, ice-house, and flower garden he had none, while the old carryall had long since ceased to do its duty, and its place was supplied by an open buggy, drawn by a sorrel nag. But Maude Glendower could do with him what Katy and Matty could not have done, and after his return to Laurel Hill he was more than once closeted with Maude, to whom he confided his plan of improving the place, asking her if she thought the profits of next year's crop of wheat and wool would meet the whole expense. Maude guessed at random that it would, and as money in prospect seems not quite so valuable as money in hand, the doctor finally concluded to follow out Maude Glendower's suggestions, and greatly to the surprise of the neighbors, the repairing process commenced.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW THE ENGAGEMENTS PROSPERED.

The October sun had painted the forest trees with the gorgeous tints of autumn and the November winds had changed them to a more sober hue ere J.C. De Vere came again to Laurel Hill. Very regularly he wrote to Maude—kind, loving letters, which helped to cheer her solitary life. Nellie still remained with Mrs. Kelsey, and though she had so far forgiven her stepsister as to write to her occasionally, she still cherished toward her a feeling of animosity for having stolen away her lover.

On his return to Rochester J.C. De Vere had fully expected that his engagement would be the theme of every tongue, and he had prepared himself for the attack. How, then, was he surprised to find that no one had the least suspicion of it, though many joked him for having quarreled with Nellie as they were sure he had done, by his not returning when she did.

Mrs. Kelsey had changed her mind and resolved to say nothing of an affair which she was sure would never prove to be serious, and the result showed the

wisdom of her proceeding. No one spoke of Maude to J.C., for no one knew of her existence, and both Mrs. Kelsey, and Nellie, whom he frequently met, scrupulously refrained from mentioning her name. At first he felt annoyed, and more than once was tempted to tell of his engagement, but as time wore on and he became more and more interested in city gayeties, he thought less frequently of the darkeyed Maude, who, with fewer sources of amusement, was each day thinking more and more of him. Still, he was sure he loved her, and one morning near the middle of November, when he received a letter from her saying, “I am sometimes very lonely, and wish that you were here,” he started up with his usual impetuosity, and ere he was fully aware of his own intentions he found himself ticketed for Canandaigua, and the next morning Louis Kennedy, looking from his window and watching the daily stage as it came slowly up the hill, screamed out, “He’s come—he’s come!”

A few moments more and Maude was clasped in J.C.‘s arms. Kissing her forehead, her cheek, and her lips, he held her off and looked to see if she had changed. She had, and he knew it. Happiness and contentment are more certain beautifiers than the most powerful cosmetics, and under the combined effects of both Maude was greatly improved. She was happy in her engagement, happy in the increased respect it brought her from her friends, and happy, too, in the unusual kindness, of her stepfather. All this was manifest in her face, and for the first time in his life J.C. told her she was beautiful.

“If you only had more manner, and your clothes were fashionably made, you would far excel the city girls,” he said, a compliment which to Maude seemed rather equivocal.

When he was there before he had not presumed to criticise her style of dress, but he did so now, quoting the city belles until, half in earnest, half in ,jest, Maude said to him, “If you think so much of fashion, you ought not to marry a country girl.”

“Pshaw!” returned J.C. “I like you all the better for dressing as you please, and still I wish you could acquire a little city polish, for I don’t care to have my wife the subject of remark. If Maude Glendower comes in the spring, you can learn a great deal of her before the 20th of June.”

Maude colored deeply, thinking for the first time in her life that possibly J.C. might be ashamed of her, but his affectionate caresses soon drove all unpleasant

impressions from her mind, and the three days that he stayed with her passed rapidly away. He did not mention the will, but he questioned her of the five thousand which was to be hers on her eighteenth birthday, and vaguely, hinted that he might need it to set himself up in business. He had made no arrangements for the future, he said, there was time enough in the spring, and promising to be with her again during the holidays, he left her quite uncertain as to whether she were glad he had visited her or not.

The next; day she was greatly comforted by a long letter from James, who wrote occasionally, evincing so much interest in “Cousin Maude” that he always succeeded in making her cry, though why she could not tell, for his letters gave her more real satisfaction than did those of J.C., fraught as the latter were with protestations of constancy and love. Slowly dragged the weeks, and the holidays were at hand, when she received a message from J.C., saying he could not possibly come as he had promised. No reason was given for this change in his plan, and with a sigh of disappointment Maude turned to a letter from Nellie, received by the same mail. After dwelling at length upon the delightful time she was having in the city, Nellie spoke of a fancy ball to be given by her aunt during Christmas week. Mr. De Vere was to be “Ivanhoe,” she said, and she to be “Rowena.”

“You don’t know,” she wrote,” how interested J.C. is in the party. He really begins to appear more as he used to do. He has not forgotten you, though, for he said the other day you would make a splendid Rebecca. It takes a dark person for that, I believe!”

Maude knew the reason now why J.C. could not possibly come, and the week she had, anticipated so much seemed dreary, enough, notwithstanding it was enlivened by a box of oranges and figs from her betrothed, and a long, affectionate letter from James De Vere, who spoke of the next Christmas, saying he meant she should spend it at Hampton.

“You will really be my cousin then,” he wrote, “and I intend inviting yourself and husband to pass the holidays with us. I want my mother to know you, Maude. She will like you, I am sure, for she always thinks as I do.”

This letter was far more pleasing to Maude’s taste than were the oranges and figs, and: Louis was suffered to monopolize the latter— a privilege which he appreciated, as children usually do. After the holidays J.C. paid a flying visit to

Laurel Hill, where his presence caused quite as much pain as pleasure, so anxious he seemed to return. Rochester could not well exist without him, one would suppose, from hearing him talk of the rides he planned, the surprise parties he man—aged, and the private theatricals of which he was the leader.

“Do they pay you well for your services?” Louis asked him once, when wearying of the same old story.

J.C. understood the hit, and during the remainder of his stay was far less egotistical than he would otherwise have been. After his departure there ensued an interval of quiet, which, as spring approached, was broken by the doctor’s resuming the work of repairs, which had been suspended during the coldest weather. The partition between the parlor and the large square bedroom was removed; folding-doors were made between; the windows were cut down; a carpet was bought to match the one which Maude had purchased the summer before; and then, when all was done, the doctor was seized with a fit of the blues, because it had cost so much. But he could afford to be extravagant for a wife like Maude Glendower, and trusting much to the wheat crop and the wool, he started for Troy about the middle of March, fully expecting to receive from the lady a decisive answer as to when she would make them both perfectly happy!

With a most winning smile upon her lip and a bewitching glance in her black eyes, Maude Glendower took his hand in hers and begged for a little longer freedom.

“Wait till next fall,” she said; “I must go to Saratoga one more summer. I shall never be happy if I don’t, and you, I dare say, wouldn’t enjoy it a bit.”

The doctor was not so sure of that. Her eyes, her voice, and the soft touch of her hand made him feel very queer; and he was almost willing to go to Saratoga himself if by these means he could secure her.

“How much do they charge?” he asked; and, with a flash of her bright eyes, the lady answered, “I suppose both of us can get along with thirty or forty dollars a week, including everything; but that isn’t much, as I don’t care to stay more than two months!”

This decided the doctor. He had not three hundred dollars to throw away, and so he tried to persuade his companion to give up Saratoga and go with him to

Laurel Hill, telling her, as an inducement, of the improvements he had made.

“There were two parlors now,” he said, “and with her handsome furniture they would look remarkably well.”

She did not tell him that her handsome furniture was mortgaged for board and borrowed money—neither did she say that her object in going to Saratoga was to try her powers upon a rich old Southern bachelor who had returned from Europe, and who she knew was to pass the coming summer at the Springs. If she could secure him Dr. Kennedy might console himself as best he could, and she begged so hard to defer their marriage until the autumn that the or gave up the contest, and with a heavy heart prepared to turn his face homeward.

“You need not make any more repairs until I come; I’d rather see to them myself,” Miss Glendower said at parting; and wondering what further improvements she could possibly suggest, now that the parlor windows were all right, the doctor bade her adieu, and started for home.

Hitherto Maude had been his confidant, keeping her trust so well that no one at Laurel Hill knew, exactly what his intentions were, and, as was very, natural, immediately after his return he went to her for sympathy in his disappointment. He found her weeping bitterly, and ere he could lay before her his own grievances she appealed to him for sympathy and aid. The man to whom her money was intrusted had speculated largely, loaning some of it out West, at twenty per cent., investing some in doubtful railroad stocks, and experimenting with the rest, until by some unlucky chance he lost the whole, and, worse than all, had nothing of his own with which to make amends. In short, Maude was penniless, and J.C. De Vere in despair. She had written to him immediately, and he had come, suggesting nothing, offering no advice, and saying nothing at first, except that “the man was mighty mean, and he had never liked his looks.”

After a little, however, he rallied somewhat, and offered the consolatory remark that “they were in a mighty bad fix. I’ll be honest,” said he, “and confess that I depended upon that money to set me up in business. I was going to shave notes, and in order to do so I must have some ready, capital. It cramps me,” he continued, “for, as a married man, my expenses will necessarily be more than they now are.”

“We can defer our marriage,” sobbed Maude, whose heart throbbed painfully

with every word he uttered. “We can defer our marriage a while, and possibly a part of my fortune may be regained—or, if you wish it, I will release you at once. You need not wed a penniless bride,” and Maude hid her face in her hands while she awaited the answer to her suggestion. J.C. De Vere did love Maude Remington better than anyone he had ever seen, and though he caught eagerly at the marriage deferred, he was not then willing to give her up, and, with one of his impetuous bursts, he exclaimed, “I will not be released, though it may be wise to postpone our bridal day for a time, say until Christmas next, when I hope to be established in business,” and, touched by the suffering expression of her white face, he kissed her tears away and told her how gladly he would work for her, painting “love in a cottage,” with nothing else there, until he really made himself believe that he could live on bread and water with Maude, provided she gave him the lion’s share!

J.C.‘s great faults were selfishness, indolence, and love of money, and Maude’s loss affected him deeply; still, there was no redress, and playfully bidding her “not to cry for the milkman’s spilled milk,” he left her on the very day when Dr. Kennedy returned. Maude knew J.C. was keenly disappointed; that he was hardly aware what he was saying, and she wept for him rather than for the money.

Dr. Kennedy could offer no advice—no comfort. It had always been a maxim of his not to make that man her guardian; but women would do everything wrong, and then, as if his own trials were paramount to hers, he bored her with the story of his troubles, to which she simply answered, “I am sorry;” and this was all the sympathy either gained from the other!

In the course of a few days Maude received a long letter from James De Vere. He had heard from J.C. of his misfortune, and very tenderly he strove to comfort her, touching at once upon the subject which he naturally supposed lay heaviest upon her heart. The marriage need not be postponed, he said; there was room in his house and a place in his own and his mother’s affections for their “Cousin Maude.” She could live there as well as not. Hampton was only half an hour’s ride from Rochester, and J. G., who had been admitted at the bar, could open an office in the city until something better presented.

“Perhaps I may set him up in business myself,” he wrote. “At all events, dear Maude, you need not dim the brightness of your eyes by tears, for all will yet be well. Next June shall see you a bride, unless your intended husband refuse my

offer, in which case I may divine something better."

"Noble man," was Maude's exclamation, as she finished reading the letter, and if at that moment the two cousins rose up in contrast before her mind, who can blame her for awarding the preference to him who had penned those lines, and who thus kindly strove to remove from her pathway every obstacle to her happiness.

James De Vere was indeed a noble-hearted man. Generous, kind, and self-denying, he found his chief pleasure in doing others good, and he had written both to Maude and J.C. just as the great kindness of his heart had prompted him to write. He did not then know that he loved Maude Remington, for he had never fully analyzed the nature of his feelings toward her. He knew he admired her very much, and when he wrote the note J.C. withheld he said to himself, "If she answers this, I shall write again—and again, and maybe"—he did not exactly know what lay beyond the "maybe," so he added, "we shall be very good friends."

But the note was not answered, and when his cousin's letter came, telling him of the engagement, a sharp, quick pang shot through his heart, eliciting from him a faint outcry, which caused his mother, who was present, to ask what was the matter.

"Only a sudden pain," he answered, laying his hand upon his side.

"Pleurisy, perhaps," the practical mother rejoined, and supposing she was right he placed the letter in his pocket and went out into the open air. It had grown uncomfortably warm, he thought, while the noise of the falling fountain in the garden made his head ache as it had never ached before; and returning to the house he sought his pleasant library. But not a volume in all those crowded shelves had power to interest him then, and with a strange disquiet he wandered from room to room, until at last, as the sun went down, he laid his throbbing temples upon his pillow, and in his feverish dreams saw again the darkeyed Maude sitting on her mother's grave, her face upturned to him, and on her lip the smile that formed her greatest beauty.

The next morning the headache was gone, and with a steady hand he wrote to his cousin and Maude congratulations which he believed sincere. That J.C. was not worthy of the maiden he greatly feared, and he resolved to have a care of the

young man, and try to make him what Maude's husband ought to be, and when he heard of her misfortune he stepped forward with his generous offer, which J.C. instantly refused.

"He never would take his wife to live upon his relatives, he had too much pride for that, and the marriage must be deferred. A few months would make no difference. Christmas was not far from June, and by that time he could do something for himself."

Thus he wrote to James, who mused long upon the words, "A few months will make no difference," thinking within himself, "If I were like other men, and was about to marry Maude, a few months would make a good deal of difference, but everyone to their mind." Four weeks after this he went one day to Canandaigua on business, and having an hour's leisure ere the arrival of the train which would take him home he sauntered into the public parlor of the hotel. Near the window, at the farther extremity of the room, a young girl was looking out upon the passers-by. Something in her form and dress attracted his attention, and he was approaching the spot where she stood when the sound of his footsteps caught her ear, and turning round she disclosed to view the features of Maude Remington.

"Maude!" he exclaimed, "this is indeed a surprise. I must even claim a cousin's right to kiss you," and taking both her hands in his, he kissed her blushing cheek —coyly—timidly—for James De Vere was unused to such things, and not quite certain, whether under the circumstances it were perfectly proper for him to do so or not.

Leading her to the sofa, he soon learned that she had come to the village to trade, and having finished her shopping was waiting for her stepfather, who had accompanied her.

"And what of J.C.?" he asked, after a moment's silence. "Has he been to visit you more than once since the crisis, as he calls it?"

Maude's eyes filled with tears, for J.C.'s conduct was not wholly satisfactory to her. She remembered his loud protestations of utter disregard for her money, and she could not help thinking how little his theory and practice accorded. He had not been to see her since his flying visit in March, and though he had written several times his letters had contained little else save complaints against their "confounded luck." She could not tell this to James De Vere, and she replied,

“He is very busy now, I believe, in trying to make some business arrangement with the lawyer in whose office he formerly studied.”

“I am glad he has roused himself at last,” answered James; “he would not accept my offer, for which I am sorry, as I was anticipating much happiness in having my Cousin Maude at Hampton during the summer. You will remain at home, I suppose.”

“No,” said Maude hesitatingly; “or, that is, I have serious thoughts of teaching school, as I do not like to be dependent on Dr. Kennedy.”

James De Vere had once taught school for a few weeks by way of experiment, and now as he recalled the heated room, the stifling atmosphere, the constant care, and more than all, the noisy shout of triumph which greeted his ear on that memorable morning when he found himself fastened out, and knew his rule was at an end, he shuddered at the thought of Maude’s being exposed to similar indignities, and used all his powers of eloquence to dissuade her from her plan. Maude was frank, open-hearted, and impulsive, and emboldened by James’ kind, brotherly manner she gave in a most childlike manner her reason for wishing to teach.

“If I am married next winter,” she said, “my wardrobe will need replenishing, for J.C. would surely be ashamed to take me as I am, and I have now no means of my own for purchasing anything.”

In an instant James De Vere’s hand was on his purse, but ere he drew it forth he reflected that to offer money then might possibly be out of place, so he said, “I have no sister, no girl-cousin, no wife, and more money than I can use, and when the right time comes nothing can please me more than to give you your bridal outfit. May I, Maude? And if you do not like to stay with Dr. Kennedy, come to Hampton this summer and live with us, will you, Maude? I want you there so much,” and in the musical tones of his voice there was a deep pathos which brought the tears in torrents from Maude’s eyes; while she declined the generous offer she could not accept.

Just then Dr. Kennedy appeared. He was ready, to go, he said, and bidding Mr. De Vere good-by, Maude was soon on her way home, her spirits lighter and her heart happier for that chance meeting at the hotel. One week later Mr. De Vere wrote to her, saying that if she still wished to teach, she could have the school at

Hampton. He had seen the trustees, had agreed upon the price, and had even selected her a boarding-place near by. “I regret,” said he, “that we live so far from the schoolhouse as to render it impossible for you to board with us. You might ride, I suppose, and I would cheerfully carry you every day; but, on the whole, I think you had better stop with Mrs. Johnson.”

This letter Maude took at once to her brother, from whom she had hitherto withheld her intention to teach, as she did not wish to pain him unnecessarily with the dread of a separation, which might never be. Deeply had he sympathized with her in her misfortune, whispering to her that two—thirds of his own inheritance should be hers. “I can coax almost anything from father,” he said, “and when I am twenty-one I’ll ask him to give me my portion, and then I’ll take you to Europe. You won’t be old, Maude, only twenty-seven, and I shall be proud when the people say that beautiful woman with eyes like stars is the crippled artist’s sister!”

In all his plans he made no mention of J.C., whose conduct he despised, and whose character he began to read aright.

“Maude will never marry him, I hope,” he thought, and when she brought to him the letter from James De Vere, the noble little fellow conquered his own feelings, and with a hopeful heart as to the result of that summer’s teaching he bade her go. So it was all arranged, and the next letter which went from Maude to J.C. carried the intelligence that his betrothed was going “to turn country schoolma’am, and teach the Hampton brats their A B C’s,” so at last he said to Mrs. Kelsey and her niece, between whom and himself there was a perfectly good understanding, and to whom he talked of his future prospects without reserve. Mrs. Kelsey was secretly delighted, for matters were shaping themselves much as she would wish. Her brother evinced no particular, desire to have his daughter at home, and she determined to keep her as long as there was the slightest chance of winning J.C. De Vere. He was now a regular visitor at her house, and lest he should suspect her design, she spoke often and respectfully of Maude, whose cause she seemed to have espoused, and when he came to her with the news of her teaching she sympathized with him at once.

“It would be very mortifying,” she said, “to marry a district schoolmistress, though there was some comfort in knowing that his friends were as yet ignorant of the engagement.”

“Let them remain so a while longer,” was the hasty answer of J.C., who, as time passed on, became more and more unwilling that the gay world should know of his engagement with one who was not an heiress after all.

CHAPTER XIII.

HAMPTON.

Six happy weeks Maude had been a teacher, and though she knew J.C. did not approve her plan, she was more than repaid for his displeasure by the words of encouragement which James always had in store for her. Many times had she been to the handsome home of the De Veres, and the lady-mother, whom she at first so much dreaded to meet, had more than once stroked her silken curls, calling her “my child,” as tenderly as if she did indeed bear that relation to her. James De Vere was one of the trustees, and in that capacity he visited the school so often that the wise villagers shook their heads significantly, saying, “if he were any other man they should think the rights of J.C. were in danger.”

The young schoolmistress’ engagement with the fashionable Jedediah was generally known, and thus were the public blinded to the true state of affairs. Gradually James De Vere had learned how dear to him was the darkeyed girl he called his “Cousin Maude.” There was no light like that which shone in her truthful eyes—no music so sweet as the sound of her gentle voice—no presence which brought him so much joy as hers—no being in the world he loved so well. But she belonged to another—the time had passed when she might have been won. She could never be his, he said; and with his love he waged a mighty battle—a battle which lasted days and nights, wringing from him more than one bitter moan, as with his face bowed in his hands he murmured sadly, the mournful words, “It might have been.”

Matters were in this condition when J.C. came one day to Hampton, accompanied by some city friends, among whom were a few young ladies of the Kelsey order. Maude saw them as they passed the schoolhouse in the village omnibus; saw, too, how resolutely J.C.‘s head was turned away, as if afraid their eyes would meet.

“He wishes to show his resentment, but of course he’ll visit me ere he returns,” she thought. And many times that day she cast her eyes in the direction of Hampton Park, as the De Vere residence was often called.

But she looked in vain, and with a feeling of disappointment she dismissed her school, and glad to be alone, laid her head upon the desk, falling ere long asleep, for the day was warm and she was very tired. So quietly she slept that she did not hear the roll of wheels nor the sound of merry voices as the party from the city rode by on their way to the depot. Neither half an hour later did she hear the hasty footstep which crossed the threshold of they door; but when a hand was laid upon her shoulder and a well-known voice bade her awake, she started up, and saw before her James De Vere. He had been to her boarding-place, he said, and not finding her there had sought her in the schoolhouse.

“I have two letters for you,” he continued; “one from your brother, and one from J.C.”

“From J.C.!” she repeated. “Has he gone back? Why didn’t he call on me?”

“He’s a villain,” thought James De Vere, but he answered simply, “He had not time, and so wrote you instead,” and sitting down beside her he regarded her with a look in which pity, admiration, and love were all blended—the former predominating at that moment, and causing him to lay his hand caressingly on her forehead, saying as he did so, “Your head aches, don’t it, Maude?”

Maude’s heart was already full, and at this little act of sympathy she burst into tears, while James, drawing her to his side and resting her head upon his bosom, soothed her as he would have done had she been his only sister. He fancied that he knew the cause of her grief, and his heart swelled with indignation toward J.C., who had that day shown himself unworthy of a girl like Maude. He had come to Hampton without any definite idea as to whether he should see her or not ere his return, but when, as the omnibus drew near the schoolhouse and Maude was plainly visible through the open window, one of the ladies made some slighting remark concerning school-teachers generally, he determined not to hazard an interview, and quieted his conscience by thinking he would come out in a few days and make the matter right. How then was he chagrined when in the presence of his companions his cousin said: “Shall I send for Miss Remington? She can dismiss her school earlier than usual and come up to tea.”

“Dismiss her school!” cried one of the young ladies, while the other, the proud Miss Thayer, whose grandfather was a pedlar and whose great-uncle had been hanged, exclaimed, “Miss Remington! Pray who is she? That schoolmistress we saw in passing? Really, Mr. De Vere, you have been careful not to tell us of this new acquaintance. Where did you pick her up?” and the diamonds on her fingers shone brightly in the sunshine as she playfully pulled a lock of J.C.‘s hair. The disconcerted J.C. was about stammering out some reply when James, astonished both at the apparent ignorance of his guests and the strangeness of his cousin’s manner, answered for him, “Miss Remington is our teacher, and a splendid girl. J.C. became acquainted with her last summer at Laurel Hill. She is a stepsister of Miss Kennedy, whom you probably know.”

“Nellie, Kennedy’s stepsister. I never knew there was such a being,” said Miss Thayer, while young Robinson, a lisping, insipid dandy, drawled out, “A sthool-marm, J. Thee? I’th really romantic! Thend for her, of courth. A little dithipline won’t hurt any of uth.”

J.C. made a faint effort to rally, but they joked him so hard that he remained silent, while James regarded him with a look of cool contempt sufficiently indicative of his opinion.

At last when Miss Thayer asked “if the bridal day were fixed,” he roused himself, and thinking if he told the truth he should effectually deceive them, he answered, “Yes, next Christmas is the time appointed. We were to have been married in June, but the lady lost her fortune and the marriage was deferred.”

“Oh, teaching to purchase her bridal trousseau. I’m dying to see it,” laughingly replied Miss Thayer, while another rejoined, “Lost her fortune. Was she then an heiress?”

“Yes, a milkman’s heiress,” said J.C., with a slightly scornful emphasis on the name which he himself had given to Maude at a time when a milkman’s money seemed as valuable to him as that of any other man.

There was a dark, stern look on the face of James De Vere, and as Miss Thayer, the ruling spirit of the party, had an eye on him and his broad lands, she deemed it wise to change the conversation from the “Milkman’s Heiress” to a topic less displeasing to their handsome host. In the course of the afternoon the cousins were alone for a few moments, when the elder demanded of the other: “Do you

pretend to love Maude Remington, and still make light both of her and your engagement with her?"

"I pretend to nothing which is not real," was J.C.'s haughty answer; "but I do dislike having my matters canvassed by every silly tongue, and have consequently kept my relation to Miss Remington a secret. I cannot see her to-day, but with your permission I will pen a few lines by way of explanation," and, glad to escape from the rebuking glance he knew he so much deserved, he stepped into his cousin's library, where he wrote the note James gave to Maude.

Under some circumstances it would have been a very unsatisfactory message, but with her changed feelings toward the writer and James De Vere sitting at her side, she scarcely noticed how cold it was, and throwing it down, tore open Louis' letter which had come in the evening mail. It was very brief, and hastily perusing its contents Maude cast it from her with a cry of horror and disgust—then catching it up, she moaned, "Oh, must I go!—I can't! I can't!"

"What is it?" asked Mr. De Vere, and pointing to the lines Maude bade him read.

He did read, and as he read his own cheek blanched, and he wound his arm closely round the maiden's waist as if to keep her there and thus save her from danger. Dr. Kennedy had the smallpox, so Louis wrote, and Nellie, who had been home for a few days, had fled in fear back to the city. Hannah, too, had gone, and there was no one left to care for the sick man save John and the almost helpless Louis.

"Father is so sick," he wrote, "and he says, tell Maude, for humanity's sake, to come."

If there was one disease more than another of which Maude stood in mortal fear it was the smallpox, and her first impulse was, "I will not go." But when she reflected that Louis, too, might take it, and need her care, her resolution changed, and moving away from her companion she said firmly, "I must go, for if anything befall my brother, how can I answer to our mother for having betrayed my trust? Dr. Kennedy, too, was her husband, and he must not be left to die alone."

Mr. De Vere was about to expostulate, but she prevented him by saying, "Do not urge me to stay, but rather help me to go, for I must leave Hampton tomorrow. You will get someone to take my place, as I, of course, shall not return, and if I

have it—”

Here she paused, while the trembling of her body showed how terrible to her was the dread of the disease.

“Maude Remington,” said Mr. De Vere, struck with admiration by her noble, self-sacrificing spirit, “I will not bid you stay, for I know it would be useless; but if that which you so much fear comes upon you, if the face now so fair to took upon be marred and disfigured until not a lineament is left of the once beautiful girl, come back to me. I will love you all the same.”

As he spoke he stretched his arms involuntarily toward her, and scarce knowing what she did, she went forward to the embrace. Very lovingly he folded her for a moment to his bosom, then turning her face to the fading sunlight which streamed through the dingy window, he looked at it wistfully and long, as if he would remember every feature. Pushing back the silken curls which clustered around her forehead, he kissed her twice, and then releasing her said: “Forgive me, Maude, if I have taken more than a cousin’s liberty with you, I could not help it.”

Bewildered at his words and manner, Maude raised her eyes wonderingly to his, and looking into the shining orbs, he thought how soft, how beautiful they were, but little, little did he dream their light would e’er be quenched in midnight darkness. A while longer they talked together, Mr. De Vere promising to send a servant to take her home in the morning. Then, as the sun had set and the night shadows were deepening in the room, they bade each other good-by, and ere the next day’s sun was very high in the heavens Maude was far on her way to Laurel Hill.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DARK HOUR.

Dr. Kennedy had been to Buffalo, and taken the smallpox, so his attending physician said, and the news spread rapidly, frightening nervous people as they never were frightened before. Nellie had been home for a week or two, but at the

first alarm she fled, rushing headlong through the hall and down the stairs, unmindful of the tremulous voice, which cried imploringly, “Don’t leave me, daughter, to die alone!”

Hannah followed next, holding the camphor bottle to her nose, and saying to John when he expostulated with her, “I reckon I’s not gwine to spile what little beauty I’ve got with that fetched complaint.”

“But, mother,” persisted John, “may be it’s nothin’ but vary-o-lord after all, and that don’t mark folks, you know.”

“You needn’t talk to me about your very-o-lord,” returned Hannah. “I know it’s the very-o-devil himself, and I won’t have them pock-ed marks on me for all the niggers in Virginny.”

“Then go,” said John, “hold tight to the camphire, and run for your life, or it may cotch you before you git out of the house.”

Hannah needed no second bidding to run, and half an hour later she was domesticated with a colored family who lived not far from the Hill. Thus left to themselves, Louis and John, together with the physician, did what they could for the sick man, who at last proposed sending for Maude, feeling intuitively that she would not desert him as his own child had done. Silent, desolate, and forsaken the old house looked as Maude approached it, and she involuntarily held her breath as she stepped into the hall, whose close air seemed laden with infection. She experienced no difficulty in finding the sick-room, where Louis’ cry of delight, John’s expression of joy, and the sick man’s whispered words, “God bless you, Maude,” more than recompensed her for the risk she had incurred. Gradually her fear subsided, particularly when she learned that it was in fact the varioloid. Had it been possible to remove her brother from danger she would have done so, but it was too late now, and she suffered him to share her vigils, watching carefully for the first symptoms of the disease in him.

In this manner nearly two weeks passed away, and the panic-stricken villagers were beginning to breathe more freely, when it was told them one day that Maude and Louis were both smitten with the disease. Then indeed the more humane said to themselves, “Shall they be left to suffer alone?” and still no one was found who dared to breathe the air of the sick-room. Dr. Kennedy was by this time so much better that Louis was taken to his apartment, where he

ministered to him himself, while the heroic Maude was left to the care of John. Everything he could do for her he did, but his heart sunk within him when he saw how fast her fever came on, and heard her, in her sleep, mourn for her mother, to hold her aching head.

“She mustn’t die,” he said, and over his dark skin the tears rolled like rain, as raising his eyes to the ceiling he cried imploringly, “Will the good Father send someone to help?”

The prayer of the weak African was heard, and ere the sun went down a man of noble mien and noble heart stood at the maiden’s bedside, bathing her swollen face, pushing back her silken curls, counting her rapid pulses, and once, when she slept, kissing her parched lips, e’en though he knew that with that kiss he inhaled, perhaps, his death! James De Vere had never for a day lost sight of Maude. Immediately after her return he had written to the physician requesting a daily report, and when, at last he learned that she was ill, and all alone, he came unhesitatingly, presenting a striking contrast to the timid J.C., who had heard of her illness, and at first, dared not open the letter which his cousin wrote, apprising him of Maude’s affliction. But when he reflected that he could be re-vaccinated, and thus avert the dreaded evil, he broke the seal and read, commenting as follows: “Jim is a splendid fellow, though I can’t see why he takes so much interest in her. Don’t I have confounded luck, though? That will first, the five thousand dollars next, and now the smallpox, too. Of course she’ll be marked, and look like a fright. Poor girl! I’d help her if I could,” and, as the better nature of J.C. came over him, he added mournfully: “What if she should die?”

But Maude did not die; and at the expiration of ten days she was so far out of danger that James De Vere yielded to the importunity of his mother, who, in an agony of terror, besought him to return. When first he came to her bedside Maude had begged of him to leave her and not risk his life in her behalf; but he silenced her objections then, and now when he bade her adieu he would not listen to her protestations of gratitude.

“I would do even more for you if I could,” he said. “I am not afraid of the varioloid, and henceforth I shall think gratefully of it for having dealt so lightly with you.”

So saying, he turned away, feeling happier than he could well express, that

Maude had not only escaped from death, but that there would be no marks left to tell how near the ravager had been. Scarcely had the door closed on him when, emboldened by his last words to ask a question she greatly wished, yet dreaded to ask, Maude turned to John and said, “Am I much pitted?”

Rolling up his eyes and wholly mistaking her meaning, John replied, “I aint no great of a physiognomer, but when a thing is as plain as day I can discern it as well as the next one, and if that ar’ chap haint pitied you, and done a heap more’n that, I’m mistaken.”

“But,” continued Maude, smiling at his simplicity, “I mean shall I probably be scarred?”

“Oh, bless you, not a scar,” answered John, “for don’t you mind how he kep’ the iled silk and wet rags on yer face, and how that night when you was sickest he held yer hands so you couldn’t tache that little feller between yer eyes. That was the spunkiest varmint of ‘em all, and may leave a mark like the one under yer ear, but it won’t spile yer looks an atom.”

“And Louis?” said Maude, “is he disfigured?”

“Not a disfigurement,” returned John, “but the ole governor, he’s a right smart sprinklin’ of ‘em, one squar’ on the tip of his nose, and five or six more on his face.”

Thus relieved of her immediate fears Maude asked many questions concerning Louis, who she learned had not been very sick.

“You can see him afore long, I reckon,” said John, and in a few days she was able to join him in the sitting room below.

After a while Hannah returned to her post of duty, her beauty unimpaired, and herself thoroughly ashamed of having thus heartlessly deserted her master’s family in their affliction. As if to make amends for this she exerted herself to cleanse the house from everything which could possibly inspire fear on the villagers, and by the last of August there was scarce a trace left of the recent scourge, save the deep scar on the end of the doctor’s nose, one or two marks on Louis’ face, and a weakness of Maude’s eyes, which became at last a cause of serious alarm.

It was in vain that Louis implored his father to seek medical aid in Rochester, where the physicians were supposed to have more experience in such matters. The doctor refused, saying, "'twas a maxim of his not to counsel with anyone, and he guessed he knew how to manage sore eyes."

But Maude's eyes were not sore—they were merely weak, while the pain in the eyeball was sometimes so intense as to wring from her a cry, of suffering. Gradually there crept into her heart a horrid fear that her sight was growing dim, and often in the darkness of the night she wept most bitterly, praying that she might not be blind.

"Oh, Louis," she said to her brother one day, "I would so much rather die than to be blind, and never see you any more—never see the beautiful world I love so much. Oh, must it be? Is there no help? "

"James De Vere could help us if he were here," answered Louis, his own tears mingling with his sister's.

But James De Vere had left Hampton for New Orleans, where he would probably remain until the winter, and there could be no aid expected from him. The doctor, too, was wholly absorbed in thoughts of his approaching nuptials, for Maude Glendower, failing to secure the wealthy bachelor, and overhearing several times the remark that she was really getting old, had consented to name the 20th of October for their marriage. And so the other Maude was left to battle with the terrible fear which was strengthened every day.

At length J.C., roused not so much by the touching letter which she wrote him as by the uncertain handwriting, came himself, bringing with him a physician, who carefully examined the soft black eyes, which could not now endure the light, then shaking his head he said gravely, "There is still some hope, but she must go to the city, where I can see her every day."

J.C. looked at Dr. Kennedy, and Dr. Kennedy, looked at J.C., and then both their hands sought their pockets, but came out again— empty! J.C. really had not the ready means with which to meet the expense, while Dr. Kennedy had not the inclination. But one there was, the faithful John, who could not stand by unmoved, and darting from the room, he mounted the woodshed stairs, and from beneath the rafters drew out an old leathern wallet, where from time to time he had deposited money for "the wet day." That wet day had come at last; not to

him, but to another—and without a moment's hesitation he counted out the ten golden eagles which his purse contained, and, going back to Maude, placed them in her hand, saying: "Go to Rochester, Miss Maude. I saved 'em for you, for I wouldn't have the light squenched in them shinin' eyes for all the land in old Virginny."

It was a noble act, and it shamed the paler faces who witnessed it, but they offered no remonstrance, though Maude did, refusing to accept it, until Louis said: "Take it, sister—take it, and when I'm twenty-one I'll give to him ten times ten golden eagles."

The necessary arrangements were quickly made, and ere a week was passed Maude found herself in Rochester, and an inmate of Mrs. Kelsey's family; for, touched with pity, that lady had offered to receive her, and during her brief stay treated her with every possible attention. Nellie, too, was very kind, ministering carefully to the comfort of her stepsister, who had ceased to be a rival, for well she knew J.C. De Vere would never wed a penniless bride and blind!

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEW MISTRESS AT LAUREL HILL.

The 20th of October came, and with a firm hand Maude Glendower arrayed herself for the bridal, which was to take place at an early hour. The scar on the end of the doctor's nose had shaken her purpose for an instant, but when she thought again of the unpaid bills lying in her private drawer, and when, more than all, the doctor said, "We greatly fear Maude Remington will be blind," her resolution was fixed, and with a steady voice she took upon herself the marriage vows.

They were to go to Laurel Hill that day, and when the doctor saw that the handsome furniture of her rooms was still untouched, he ventured to ask "if she had left orders to have it sent."

"Oh, I didn't tell you, did I, that my furniture was all mortgaged to Mrs. Raymond for board and borrowed money, too; but of course you don't care; you

did not marry my furniture," and the little soft, white hands were laid upon those of the bridegroom, while the lustrous eyes sought his face, to witness the effect of her words.

The dent on the nose grew red a moment, and then the doctor, perfectly intoxicated with the beauty of his bride, answered, "No, Maude, I married you."

A rap at the door, and a note from Messrs. Barnabas Muggins & Brown "hoped Miss Glendower would not forget to settle her bill."

"It's really quite provoking to trouble you with my debts so soon," said the lady, "but I dare say it's a maxim of yours that we should have no secrets from each other, and so I may as well show you these at once," and she turned into his lap a handful of bills, amounting in all to four hundred dollars, due to the different tradesmen of Troy.

The spot on the nose was decidedly purple, and had Katy or Matty been there they would surely, have recognized the voice which began, "Really, I did not expect this, and 'tis a max—"

"Never mind the maxim," and the mouth of the speaker was covered by a dimpled hand, as Maude Glendower continued, "It's mean, I know, but four hundred dollars is not much, after all, and you ought to be willing to pay even more for me, don't you think so, dearest? "

"Ye-es," faintly answered the doctor, who, knowing there was no alternative, gave a check for the whole amount on a Rochester bank, where he had funds deposited.

Maude Glendower was a charming traveling companion, and in listening to her lively sallies, and noticing the admiration she received, the doctor forgot his lost four hundred dollars, and by the time they reached Canandaigua he believed himself supremely happy in having such a wife. John was waiting for them, just as thirteen years before he had waited for blue-eyed Matty, and the moment her eye fell upon the carriage he had borrowed from a neighbor, the new wife exclaimed, "Oh, I hope that lumbering old thing is not ours. It would give me the rickets to ride in it long."

"It's borrowed," the doctor said, 'and she continued, "I'll pick out mine, and my horses, too. I'm quite a connoisseur in those matters."

John rolled his eyes toward his master, whose face wore a look never seen there before.

“Henpecked!” was the negro’s mental comment, as he prepared to start.

When about three miles from the village the lady started up, saying, “she had left her shawl, and must go back immediately.”

“There is not time,” said the doctor, “for the sun is already nearly set. It will be perfectly safe.”

“But it’s my India shawl. I must have it,” and the lady’s hand was laid upon the reins to turn the horses’ heads.

Of course they went back, finding the shawl, not at the hotel, but under the carriage cushions, where the lady herself had placed it.

“It’s a maxim of mine to know what I’m about,” the doctor ventured to say, while a silvery voice returned, “So do I ordinarily, but it is not strange that I forget myself on my wedding day.” This was well timed, and wrapping the garment carefully round her to shelter her from the night air, the doctor bade the highly amused John to drive on. They were more than halfway home when some luscious oranges in a small grocery window, caught the bride’s eye, and “she must have some, she always kept them in her room,” she said, and to the grocer’s inquiry, “How many, madam?” she answered, “Two dozen, at least, and a box of figs, if you have them. I dote on figs.”

It was the doctor’s wedding day. He could not say no, and with a mental groan he parted company with another bill, while John, on the platform without, danced the “double shuffle” in token of his delight. There was a second grocery to be passed, but by taking a more circuitous route it could be avoided, and the discomfited bridegroom bade John “go through the Hollow.”

“Yes, sar,” answered the knowing negro, turning the heads of the unwilling horses in a direction which would not bring them home so soon by one whole hour.

But the grocery was shunned, and so the doctor did not care even if the clock did strike nine just as they stopped at their own gate. The night was dark and the bride could not distinguish the exterior of the house, neither was the interior

plainly discernible, lighted as it was with an oil lamp, and a single tallow candle. But she scarcely thought of this, so intent was she upon the beautiful face of the crippled boy, who sat in his armchair, eagerly awaiting her arrival.

“This is Louis,” the father said: and the scornful eyes which with one rapid glance had scanned the whole apartment filled with tears as they, turned toward the boy.

Dropping on one knee before him, the lady, parted the silken hair from his forehead, saying very gently, “You must be like your mother, save that your eyes are brown, and hers were blue. May I be your mother, Louis?”

Very wonderingly the child gazed into her face. It was radiantly beautiful, while the dreamy eyes rested upon him with such a yearning look that his heart went out toward her at once, and winding his arms around her neck, he murmured, “I shall love you very much, my mother.”

For a moment Maude Glendower held him to her bosom, while her thoughts went back to the long ago when another face much like his had rested there, and another voice had whispered in her ear, “I love you, Maude Glendower.” That voice was hushed in death, but through the child it spoke to her again, and with a throbbing heart she vowed to be to the crippled boy what Matty herself would well approve, could she speak from her low bed beneath the willows.

“What of your sister?” the lady said at last, rising to her feet. “Is she recovering her sight?”

“Nellie writes there is hope,” said Louis, “though she did not receive attention soon enough, the physician says.”

There was reproach, contempt, and anger in the large black eyes which sought the doctor’s face, but the light was dim, and he did not see it.

“It will be a great misfortune to her, and very hard on me if she is blind, for of course I must take care of her,” he said at last, while his wife indignantly replied, “Take care of her! Yes, I’d sell my diamonds rather than see her suffer!”

Supper was now announced, and in examining the arrangement of the table and inspecting the furniture of the dining room, the bride forgot everything save the novelty of her situation. Mentally styling the house “an old rookery,” she forced

back the bitter feelings which would rise up when she thought how unlike was all this to what she had been accustomed. It needed but one glance of her keen eyes to read the whole, and ere the close of the next day she understood her position perfectly, and summoning to her aid her iron will, she determined to make the most of everything. She knew the doctor had money, aye, and she knew, too, how to get it from him, but she was too wary to undertake it in any of the ordinary ways. She did not tell him how desolate the old house seemed, or that she was homesick because of its desolation; but after she had been there a few days she sat down by his side, and told him that with a few improvements it could be made the most delightful spot in all the country, and she was glad she had come there to help him to fix it up. She knew he had exquisite taste, and as he was now at leisure they would contrive together how their parlors could be improved. She didn't quite like them as they were, the window lights were too small, and they must have the large panes of glass. Then satin paper on the walls would look so much better, and the carpets, though really very nice, were hardly good enough for a man of Dr. Kennedy's standing in society.

"But," gasped the doctor, "the one in the back parlor is brand new— has scarcely been used at all and it is a maxim of mine—"

"Your maxim is good, undoubtedly," interrupted the lady, "but the chambers all need recarpeting, and this will exactly fit Maude's room, which I intend fixing before she returns."

The doctor looked aghast, and his wife continued: "The season is so far advanced that it is hardly worth while to make any changes now, but next spring I shall coax you into all manner or repairs. I do wonder what makes that spot on your nose so red at times. You are really very fine looking when it is not there. It is gone," she continued, and smoothing away a wrinkle in his forehead, she said, "We won't talk of the future now, but seriously, we must have some new Brussels carpets, and a furnace to warm the whole house."

Here she shivered and coughed quite naturally after which she returned to the charge, saying, "her family were consumptive, and she could not endure the cold."

"But, my dear," said the doctor, "it will cost a great deal of money to carry out your plans."

“Oh, no, not much,” she answered, “give me five hundred dollars and I will do everything necessary to make us comfortable for the winter.”

“Five hundred dollars, Mrs. Kennedy!” and the doctor’s gray eyes looked as they used to look when Katy and Matty asked him for five. “Five hundred dollars! Preposterous! Why, during the seven years I lived with your predecessor she did not cost me that!”

From old Hannah Mrs. Kennedy had, learned how her predecessor had been stinted by the doctor, and could he that moment have looked into her heart he would have seen there a fierce determination to avenge the wrongs so meekly borne. But she did not embody her thoughts in words, neither did she deem it advisable to press the subject further at that time, so she waited for nearly a week, and then resumed the attack with redoubled zeal.

“We must have another servant,” she said.

“Old Hannah is wholly inefficient, and so I have engaged a colored woman from the hotel; and did I tell you, I have spoken to a man about the furnace we are going to have, and I also told Mr. Jenks to buy me one hundred yards of Brussels carpeting in New York. He’s gone for goods, you know.”

“Really, Mrs. Kennedy, this exceeds all. My former companions saw fit to consult me always. Really, one hundred yards of carpeting and a black cook! Astonishing, Mrs. Kennedy! “

The doctor was quite too much confounded to think of a single maxim, for his wife’s effrontery took him wholly by surprise. She was a most energetic woman, and her proceedings were already the theme of many a tea-table gossip, in which the delighted villagers exulted that Dr. Kennedy had at last found his match. Yes, he had found his match, and when next day the black cook, Rose, came, and Mr. Brown asked when he would have the furnace put in his cellar, there was that in the eye of his better half which prompted a meek submission. When the bill for the new carpets was handed him he again rebelled, but all to no purpose. He paid the requisite amount, and tried to swallow his wrath with his wife’s consolatory remark, that “they were the handsomest couple in town, and ought to have the handsomest carpets!”

One day he found her giving directions to two or three men who were papering, painting, and whitewashing Maude’s room, and then, as John remarked, he

seemed more like himself than he had done before since his last marriage.

“If Maude is going to be blind,” he said, “it can make no difference with her how her chamber looks, and ‘tis a maxim of mine to let well enough alone.”

“I wish you would cure yourself of those disagreeable maxims,” was the lady’s cool reply, as, stepping to the head of the stairs, she bade John “bring up the carpet, if it were whipped enough.”

“Allow me to ask what you are going to do with it?” said the doctor, as from the windows he saw the back parlor carpet swinging on the line.

“Why, I told you I was going to fit up Maude’s room. She is coming home in a week, you know, and I am preparing a surprise. I have ordered a few pieces of light furniture from the cabinet-maker’s, and I think her chamber would look nicely if the walls were only a little higher. They can’t be raised, I suppose?”

She was perfectly collected, and no queen on her throne ever issued her orders with greater confidence in their being obeyed; and when that night she said to her husband, “These men must have their pay,” he had no alternative but to open his purse and give her what she asked. Thus it was with everything.

“Ki, aint him cotchin’ it good?” was John’s mental comment, as he daily watched the proceedings, and while Hannah pronounced him “the hen-peck-ed-est man she had ever seen,” the amused villagers knew that will had met will, and been conquered!

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BLIND GIRL.

Maude’s chamber was ready at last, and very inviting it looked with its coat of fresh paint, its cheerful paper, bright carpet, handsome bedstead, marble washstand, and mahogany bureau, on which were arranged various little articles for the toilet. The few pieces of furniture which Mrs. Kennedy had ordered from the cabinet-maker’s had amounted, in all, to nearly one hundred dollars, but the

bill was not yet sent in; and in blissful ignorance of the surprise awaiting him the doctor rubbed his hands and tried to seem pleased when his wife, passing her arm in his, led him to the room, which she compelled him to admire.

“It was all very nice,” he said, “but wholly unnecessary for a blind girl. What was the price of this?” he asked, laying his hand upon the bedstead.

“Only twenty-five dollars. Wasn’t it cheap?” and the wicked black eyes danced with merriment at the loud groan which succeeded the answer.

“Twenty-five dollars!” he exclaimed. “Why, the bedstead Matty and I slept on for seven years only cost three, and it is now as good as new.”

“But times have changed,” said the lady. “Everybody has nicer things; besides, do you know people used to talk dreadfully about a man of your standing being so stingy? But I have done considerable toward correcting that impression. You aint stingy, and in proof of it you’ll give me fifty cents to buy cologne for this.” And she took up a beautiful bottle which stood upon the bureau.

The doctor had not fifty cents in change, but a dollar bill would suit her exactly as well, she said, and secretly exulting in her mastery over the self-willed tyrant, she suffered him to depart, saying to himself as he descended the stair, “Twenty-five dollars for one bedstead. I won’t stand it! I’ll do something!”

“What are you saying, dear?” a melodious voice called after him, and so accelerated his movements that the extremity of his coat disappeared from view, just as the lady Maude reached the head of the stairs.

“Oh!” was the involuntary exclamation of Louis, who had been a spectator of the scene, and who felt intuitively that his father had found his mistress.

During her few weeks residence at Laurel Hill Maude Glendower had bound the crippled boy to herself by many a deed of love, and whatever she did was sure of meeting his approval. With him she had consulted concerning his sister’s room, yielding often to his artist taste in the arrangement of the furniture, and now that the chamber was ready they both awaited impatiently the arrival of its occupant. Nellie’s last letter had been rather encouraging, and Maude herself had appended her name at its close. The writing was tremulous and uncertain, but it brought hope to the heart of the brother, who had never really believed it possible for his sister to be blind. Very restless he seemed on the day when she was expected;

and when, just as the sun was setting, the carriage drove to the gate, a faint sickness crept over him, and wheeling his chair to the window of her room he looked anxiously at her, as with John's assistance, she alighted from the carriage.

"If she walks alone I shall know she is not very blind," he said, and with clasped hands he watched her intently as she came slowly toward the house with Nellie a little in advance.

Nearer and nearer she came—closer and closer the burning forehead was pressed against the window pane, and hope beat high in Louis' heart, when suddenly she turned aside—her foot rested on the withered violets which grew outside the walk, and her hand groped in the empty air.

"She's blind—she's blind," said Louis, and with a moaning cry he laid his head upon the broad arm of his chair, sobbing most bitterly.

Meantime below there was a strange interview between the new mother and her children, Maude Glendower clasping her namesake in her arms and weeping over her as she had never wept before but once, and that when the moonlight shone upon her sitting by a distant grave. Pushing back the clustering curls, she kissed the open brow and looked into the soft black eyes with a burning gaze which penetrated the shadowy darkness and brought a flush to the cheek of the young girl.

"Maude Remington! Maude Remington!" she said, dwelling long upon the latter name, "the sight of you affects me painfully; you are so like one I have lost. I shall love you, Maude Remington, for the sake of the dead, and you, too, must love me, and call me mother—will you?" and her lips again touched those of the astonished maiden.

Though fading fast, the light was not yet quenched in Maude's eyes, and very wistfully she scanned the face of the speaker, while her hands moved caressingly over each feature, as she said, "I will love you, beautiful lady, though you can never be to me what my gentle mother was."

At the sound of that voice Maude Glendower started suddenly, and turning aside, so her words could not be heard, she murmured sadly, "Both father and child prefer her to me." Then, recollecting herself, she offered her hand to the wondering Nellie, saying, "Your Sister's misfortune must be my excuse for devoting so much time to her, when you, as my eldest daughter, were entitled to

my first attention."

Her stepmother's evident preference for Maude had greatly offended the selfish Nellie, who coldly answered, "Don't trouble yourself, madam. It's not of the least consequence. But where is my father? He will welcome me, I am sure."

The feeling too often existing between stepmothers and stepdaughters had sprung into life, and henceforth the intercourse of Maude Glendower and Nellie Kennedy would be marked with studied politeness, and nothing more. But the former did not care. So long as her eye could feast itself upon the face and form of Maude Remington she was content, and as Nellie left the room she wound her arm around the comparatively helpless girl, saying, "Let me take you to your brother."

Although unwilling, usually, to be led, Maude yielded now, and suffered herself to be conducted to the chamber where Louis watched for her coming. She could see enough to know there was a change, and clasping her companion's hand she said, "I am surely indebted to you for this surprise."

"Maude, Maude!" and the tones of Louis' voice trembled with joy, as stretching his arms toward her, he cried, "You can see."

Guided more by the sound than by actual vision, Maude flew like lightning to his side, and kneeling before him hid her face in his lap, while he bent fondly over her, beseeching her to say if she could see. It was a most touching sight, and drawing near, Maude Glendower mingled her tears with those of the unfortunate children on whom affliction had laid her heavy hand.

Maude Remington was naturally of a hopeful nature, and though she had passed through many an hour of anguish, and had rebelled against the fearful doom which seemed to be approaching, she did not yet despair. She still saw a little—could discern colors and forms, and could tell one person from another. "I shall be better by and by," she said, when assured by the sound of retreating footsteps that they were alone. "I am following implicitly the doctor's directions, and I hope to see by Christmas; but if I do not—"

Here she broke down entirely, and wringing her hands she cried, "Oh, brother—brother, must I be blind? I can't—I can't, for who will care for poor, blind, helpless Maude?"

“I, sister, I,” and hushing his own great sorrow the crippled boy comforted the weeping girl just as she had once comforted him, when in the quiet graveyard he had lain him down in the long, rank grass and wished that he might die. “Pa’s new wife will care for you, too,” he said. “She’s a beautiful woman, Maude, and a good one, I am sure, for she cried so hard over mother’s grave, and her voice was so gentle when, just as though she had known our mother, she said, `Darling Matty, I will be kind to your children.’”

“Ah, that I will—I will,” came faintly from the hall without, where Maude Glendower stood, her eyes riveted upon the upturned face of Maude, and her whole body swelling with emotion.

A sad heritage had been bequeathed to her—a crippled boy and a weak, blind girl; but in some respects she was a noble woman, and as she gazed upon the two she resolved that so long as she should live, so long should the helpless children of Matty Remington have a steadfast friend. Hearing her husband’s voice below she glided down the stairs, leaving Louis and Maude really alone.

“Sister,” said Louis, after a moment, “what of Mr. De Vere? Is he true to the last?”

“I have released him,” answered Maude. “I am nothing to him now,” and very calmly she proceeded to tell him of the night when she had said to Mr. De Vere, “My money is gone—my sight is going too, and I give you back your troth, making you free to marry another—Nellie, if you choose. She is better suited to you than I have ever been.”

Though secretly pleased at her offering to give him up, J.C. made a show of resistance, but she had prevailed at last, and with the assurance that he should always esteem her highly, he consented to the breaking of the engagement, and the very, next afternoon, rode out with Nellie Kennedy.

“He will marry her, I think,” Maude said, as she finished narrating the circumstances, and looking into her calm, unruffled face Louis felt sure that she had outlived her love for one who had proved himself as fickle as J.C. De Vere.

“And what of James?” he asked. “Is he still in New Orleans.”

“He is,” answered Maude. “He has a large wholesale establishment there, and as one of the partners is sick, he has taken his place for the winter. He wrote to his

cousin often, bidding him spare no expense for me, and offering to pay the bills if J.C. was not able."

A while longer they conversed, and then they were summoned to supper, Mrs. Kennedy coming herself for Maude, who did not refuse to be assisted by her.

"The wind hurt my eyes—they will be better tomorrow," she said, and with her old sunny smile she greeted her stepfather, and then turned to Hannah and John, who had come in to see her.

But alas for the delusion! The morrow brought no improvement, neither the next day, nor the next, and as the world grew dim there crept into her heart a sense of utter desolation which neither the tender love of Maude Glendower nor yet the untiring devotion of Louis could in any degree dispel. All day would she sit opposite the window, her eyes fixed on the light with a longing, eager gaze, as if she feared that the next moment it might leave her forever. Whatever he could do for her Louis did, going to her room each morning and arranging her dress and hair just as he knew she used to wear it. She would not suffer anyone else to do this for her, and in performing these little offices Louis felt that he was only repaying her in part for all she had done for him.

Christmas Eve came at last, and if she thought of what was once to have been on the morrow, she gave no outward token, and with her accustomed smile bade the family good-night. The next morning Louis went often to her door, and hearing no sound within fancied she was sleeping, until at last, as the clock struck nine, he ventured to go in. Maude was awake, and advancing to her side he bade her a "Merry Christmas," playfully chiding her the while for having slept so late. A wild, startled expression flashed over her face, as she said: "Late, Louis! Is it morning, then? I've watched so long to see the light?"

Louis did not understand her, and he answered, "Morning, yes. The sunshine is streaming into the room. Don't you see it? "

"Sunshine!" and Maude's lips quivered with fear, as springing from her pillow. she whispered faintly, "Lead me to the window."

He complied with her request, watching her curiously, as she laid both hands in the warm sunshine, which bathed her fair, round arms and shone upon her raven hair. She felt what she could not see, and Louis Kennedy ne'er forgot the agonized expression of the white, beautiful face which turned toward him as the

wretched Maude moaned piteously, “Yes, brother, ‘tis morning to you, but dark, dark night to me. I’m blind! oh, I’m blind!”

She did not faint, she did not shriek, but she stood there rigid and immovable, her countenance giving fearful token of the terrible storm within. She was battling fiercely with her fate, and until twice repeated, she did not hear the childish voice which said to her pleadingly, “Don’t look so, sister. You frighten me, and there may be some hope yet.”

“Hope,” she repeated bitterly, turning her sightless eyes toward him, “there is no hope but death.”

“Maude,” and Louis’ voice was like a plaintive harp, so mournful was its tone, “Maude, once in the very spot where mother is lying now, you said because I was a cripple you would love me all the more. You have kept that promise well, my sister. You have been all the world to me, and now that you are blind I, too, will love you more. I will be your light—your eyes, and when James De Vere comes back—”

“No, no, no,” moaned Maude, sinking upon the floor. “Nobody will care for me. Nobody will love a blind girl. Oh, is it wicked to wish that I could die, lying here in the sunshine, which I shall never see again?”

There was a movement at the door, and Mrs. Kennedy appeared, starting back as her eye fell upon the face of the prostrate girl, who recognized her step, and murmured sadly, “Mother, I’m blind, wholly blind.”

Louis’ grief had been too great for tears, but Maude Glendower’s flowed at once, and bending over the white-faced girl she strove to comfort her, telling her how she would always love her, that every wish should be gratified.

“Then give me back my sight, oh, give me back my sight,” and Maude clasped her mother’s hands imploringly.

Ere long she grew more calm, and suffered herself to be dressed as usual, but she would not admit anyone to her room, neither on that day nor for many succeeding days. At length, however, this feeling wore away, and in the heartfelt sympathy of her family and friends she found a slight balm for her grief. Even the doctor was softened, and when Messrs. Beebe & Co. sent in a bill of ninety-five dollars for various articles of furniture, the frown upon his face gave way

when his wife said to him, “It was for Maude, you know!”

“Poor Maude!” seemed to be the sentiment of the whole household, and Nellie herself said it many a time, as with unwonted tenderness she caressed the unfortunate girl, fearing the while lest she had done her a wrong, for she did not then understand the nature of Maude’s feelings for J.C. De Vere, to whom Nellie was now engaged.

Urged on by Mrs. Kelsey and a fast diminishing income, J.C. had written to Nellie soon after her return to Laurel Hill, asking her to be his wife. He did not disguise his former love for Maude, neither did he pretend to have outlived it, but he said he could not wed a blind girl. And Nellie, forgetting her assertion that she would never marry one who had first proposed to Maude, was only too much pleased to answer Yes. And when J.C. insisted upon an early day, she named the 5th of March, her twentieth birthday. She was to be married at home, and as the preparations for the wedding would cause a great amount of bustle and confusion in the house, it seemed necessary that Maude should know the cause, and with a beating heart Nellie went to her one day to tell the news. Very composedly Maude listened to the story, and then as composedly replied, “I am truly glad, and trust you will be happy.”

“So I should be,” answered Nellie, “if I were sure you did not care.”

“Care! for whom?” returned Maude. “For J.C. De Vere? Every particle of love for him has died out, and I am now inclined to think I never entertained for him more than a girlish fancy, while he certainly did not truly care for me.”

This answer was very quieting to Nellie’s conscience, and in unusually good spirits she abandoned herself to the excitement which usually precedes a wedding. Mrs. Kennedy, too, entered heart and soul into the matter, and arming herself with the plea, that “it was his only daughter, who would probably never be married again,” she coaxed her husband into all manner of extravagances, and by the 1st of March few would have recognized the interior of the house, so changed was it by furniture and repairs. Handsome damask curtains shaded the parlor windows, which were further improved by large heavy panes of glass. Matty’s piano had been removed to Maude’s chamber, and its place supplied by a new and costly instrument, which the crafty woman made her husband believe was intended by Mrs. Kelsey, who selected it, as a bridal present for her niece. The furnace was in splendid order, keeping the whole house, as Hannah said,

“hotter than an oven,” while the disturbed doctor lamented daily over the amount of fuel it consumed, and nightly counted the contents of his purse or reckoned up how much he was probably worth. But neither his remonstrances nor yet his frequent groans had any effect upon his wife. Although she had no love for Nellie, she was determined upon a splendid wedding, one which would make folks talk for months, and when her liege lord complained of the confusion, she suggested to him a furnished room in the garret, where it would be very quiet for him to reckon up the bill, which from time to time she brought him.

“Might as well gin in at oncet,” John said to him one day, when he borrowed ten dollars for the payment of an oyster bill. “I tell you she’s got more besom in her than both them t’other ones.”

The doctor probably thought so too, for he became comparatively submissive, though he visited often the sunken graves, where he found a mournful solace in reading, “Katy, wife of Dr. Kennedy, aged twenty-nine,”—“Matty, second wife of Dr. Kennedy, aged thirty,” and once he was absolutely guilty of wondering how the words, “Maude, third wife of Dr. Kennedy, aged forty-one,” would look. But he repented him of the wicked thought, and when on his return from his “graveyard musings,” Maude, aged forty-one, asked him for the twenty dollars which she saw a man pay to him that morning, he gave it to her without a word.

Meanwhile the fickle J.C. in Rochester was one moment regretting the step he was about to take and the next wishing the day would hasten, so he could “have it over with.” Maude Remington had secured a place in his affections which Nellie could not fill, and though he had no wish to marry her now, he tried to make himself believe that but for her misfortune she should still have become his wife.

“Jim would marry her, I dare say, even if she were blind as a bat,” he said; “but then he is able to support her,” and reminded by this of an unanswered letter from his cousin, who was still in New Orleans, he sat down and wrote, telling him of Maude’s total blindness, and then, almost in the next sentence saying that his wedding was fixed for the 5th of March. “There,” he exclaimed, as he read over the letter, “I believe I must be crazy, for I never told him that the bride was Nellie; but no matter, I’d like to have him think me magnanimous for a while, and I want to hear what he says.”

Two weeks or more went by, and then there came an answer, fraught with

sympathy for Maude, and full of commendation for J.C., who “had shown himself a man.”

Accompanying the letter was a box containing a most exquisite set of pearls for the bride, together with a diamond ring, on which was inscribed, “Cousin Maude.”

“Aint I in a deuced scrape,” said J.C., as he examined the beautiful ornaments; “Nellie would be delighted with them, but she shan’t have them; they are not hers. I’ll write to Jim at once, and tell him the mistake,” and seizing his pen he dashed off a few lines, little guessing how much happiness they would carry to the far-off city, where daily and nightly James De Vere fought manfully with the love that clung with a deathlike grasp to the girl J.C. had forsaken, the poor, blind, helpless Maude.

CHAPTER XVII.

NELLIE’S BRIDAL NIGHT.

The blind girl sat alone in her chamber, listening to the sound of merry voices in the hall without, or the patter of feet, as the fast arriving guests tripped up and down the stairs. She had heard the voice of J.C. De Vere as he passed her door, but it awoke within her bosom no lingering regret, and when an hour later Nellie stood before her, arrayed in her bridal robes, she passed her hand caressingly over the flowing curls, the fair, round face, the satin dress, and streaming veil, saying as she did so, “I know you are beautiful, my sister, and if a blind girl’s blessing can be of any avail, you have it most cordially.”

Both Mrs. Kennedy and Nellie had urged Maude to be present at the ceremony, but she shrank from the gaze of strangers, and preferred remaining in her room, an arrangement quite satisfactory to J.C., who did not care to meet her then. It seemed probable that some of the guests would go up to see her, and knowing this, Mrs. Kennedy had arranged her curls and dress with unusual care, saying to her as she kissed her pale cheek, “You are far more beautiful than the bride.”

And Maude was beautiful. Recent suffering and non-exposure to the open air

had imparted a delicacy to her complexion which harmonized well with the mournful expression of her face and the idea of touching helplessness which her presence inspired. Her long, fringed eyelashes rested upon her cheek, and her short, glossy curls were never more becomingly arranged than now, when stepping backward a pace or two, Mrs. Kennedy stopped a moment to admire her again ere going below where her presence was already needed.

The din of voices grew louder in the hall, there was a tread of many feet upon the stairs, succeeded by a solemn hush, and Maude, listening to every sound, knew that the man to whom she had been plighted was giving to another his marriage vow. She had no love for J.C. De Vere, but as she sat there alone in her desolation, and thoughts of her sister's happiness rose up in contrast to her own dark, hopeless lot, who shall blame her if she covered her face with her hands and wept most bitterly. Poor Maude! It was dark, dark night within, and dark, dark night without; and her dim eye could not penetrate the gloom, nor see the star which hung o'er the brow of the distant hill, where a wayworn man was toiling on. Days and nights had he traveled, unmindful of fatigue, while his throbbing heart outstripped the steam-god by many a mile. The letter had fulfilled its mission, and with one wild burst of joy when he read that she was free, he started for the North. He was not expected at the wedding, but it would be a glad surprise, he knew, and he pressed untiringly on, thinking but one thought, and that, how he would comfort the poor, blind Maude. He did not know that even then her love belonged to him, but he could win it, perhaps, and then away to sunny France, where many a wonderful cure had been wrought, and might be wrought again.

The bridal was over, and the congratulations nearly so; when a stranger was announced, an uninvited guest, and from his armchair in the corner Louis saw that it was the same kind face which had bent so fearlessly over his pillow little more than six months before. James De Vere—the name was echoed from lip to lip, but did not penetrate the silent chamber where Maude sat weeping yet.

A rapid glance through the rooms assured the young man that she was not there: and when the summons to supper was given he went to Louis and asked him for his sister.

"She is upstairs," said Louis, adding impulsively: "she will be glad you have come, for she has talked of you so much."

“Talked of me!” and the eyes of James De Vere looked earnestly into Louis’ face. “And does she talk of me still?”

“Yes,” said Louis, “I heard her once when she was asleep, though I ought not to have mentioned it,” he continued, suddenly recollecting himself, “for when I told her, she blushed so red, and bade me not to tell.”

“Take me to her, will you?” said Mr. De Vere, and following his guide he was soon opposite the door of Maude’s room.

“Wait a moment,” he exclaimed, passing his fingers through his hair, and trying in vain to brush from his coat the dust which had settled there.

“It don’t matter, for she can’t see,” said Louis, who comprehended at once the feelings of his companion.

By this time they stood within the chamber, but so absorbed was Maude in her own grief that she did not hear her brother until he bent over her and whispered in her ear, “Wake, sister, if you’re sleeping. He’s come. He’s here!”

She had no need to ask of him who had come. She knew intuitively, and starting up, her unclosed eyes flashed eagerly around the room, turning at last toward the door where she felt that he was standing. James De Vere remained motionless, watching intently the fair, troubled face, which had never seemed so fair to him, before.

“Brother, have you deceived me? Where is he?” she said at last, as her listening ear caught no new sound.

“Here, Maude, here,” and gliding to her side, Mr. De Vere wound his arm around her, and kissing her lips, called her by the name to which she was getting accustomed, and which never sounded so soothingly as when breathed by his melodious voice. “My poor, blind Maude,” was all he said, but by the clasp of his warm hand, by the tear she felt upon her cheek, and by his very silence, she knew how deeply he sympathized with her.

Knowing that they would rather be alone, Louis went below, where many inquiries were making for the guest who had so suddenly disappeared. The interview between the two was short, for some of Maude’s acquaintance came up to see her, but it sufficed for Mr. De Vere to learn all that he cared particularly

to know then. Maude did not love J.C., whose marriage with another caused her no regret, and this knowledge made the future seem hopeful and bright. It was not the time to speak of that future to her, but he bade her take courage, hinting that his purse, should never be closed until every possible means had been used for the restoration of her sight. What wonder, then, if she dreamed that night that she could see again, and, that the good angel by whose agency this blessing had been restored to her was none other than James De Vere.

CHAPTER XVIII.

COUSIN MAUDE.

Three days had passed since the bridal, and James still lingered at Laurel Hill, while not very many miles away his mother waited and wondered why he did not come. J.C. and Nellie were gone, but ere they had left the former sought an interview with Maude, whose placid brow he kissed tenderly as he whispered in her ear: “Fate decreed that you should not be my wife, but I have made you my sister, and, if I mistake not, another wishes to make you my cousin.”

To James he had given back the ornaments intended for another bride than Nellie, saying, as he did so, “Maude De Vere may wear them yet.”

“What do you mean?” asked James, and J.C. replied: “I mean that I, and not you, will have a Cousin Maude.”

Two days had elapsed since then, and it was night again—but to the blind girl, drinking in the words of love which fell like music on her ear, it was high noon-day, and the sky undimmed by a single cloud.

“I once called you my cousin, Maude,” the deep-toned voice said, “and I thought it the sweetest name I had ever heard, but there is a nearer, dearer name which I would give to you, even my wife—Maude— shall it be?” and he looked into her sightless eyes to read her answer.

She had listened eagerly to the story of his love born so long ago— had held her breath lest she should lose a single word when he told her how he had battled

with that love, and how his heart had thrilled with joy when he heard that she was free—but when he asked her to be his wife the bright vision faded, and she answered mournfully, “You know not what you say. You would not take a blind girl in her helplessness.”

“A thousandfold dearer to me for that very helplessness,” he said, and then he told her of the land beyond the sea, where the physicians were well skilled in everything pertaining to the eye. “Thither they would go,” he said, “when the April winds were blowing, and should the experiment not succeed, he would love and cherish her all the more.”

Maude knew he was in earnest, and was about to answer him, when along the hall there came the sound of little crutches, and over her face there flitted a shadow of pain. It was the sister-love warring with the love of self, but James De Vere understood it all, and he hastened to say, “Louis will go, too, my darling. I have never had a thought of separating you. In Europe he will have a rare opportunity for developing his taste. Shall it not be so?”

“Let him decide,” was Maude’s answer, as the crutches struck the soft carpet of the room.

“Louis,” said Mr. De Vere, “shall Maude go with me to Europe as my wife?”

“Yes, yes—yes, yes,” was Louis’ hasty answer, his brown eyes filling with tears of joy when he heard that he, too, was to accompany them.

Maude could no longer refuse, and she half fancied she saw the flashing of the diamonds, when James placed upon her finger the ring which bore the inscription of “Cousin Maude.” Before coming there that night, Mr. De Vere had consulted a New York paper, and found that a steamship would sail for Liverpool on the 20th of April, about six weeks from that day.

“We will go in it,” he said, “my blind bird, Louis, and I,” and he parted lovingly the silken tresses of her to whom this new appellation was given.

There was much in the future to anticipate, and much in the past which he wished to talk over; so he remained late that night, and on passing through the lower hall was greatly surprised to see Mrs. Kennedy still sitting in the parlor. She had divined the object and result of his visit, and the moment he was gone she glided up the stairs to the room where Maude was quietly weeping for very

joy. The story of the engagement was soon told, and winding her arm around Maude's neck Mrs. Kennedy said, "I rejoice with you, daughter, in your happiness, but I shall be left so desolate when you and Louis are both gone."

Just then her eye caught the ring upon Maude's finger, and taking it in her hand. she admired its chaste beauty, and was calculating its probable cost, when glancing at the inside she started suddenly, exclaiming, "'Cousin Maude'—that is my name—the one by which he always called me. Has it been given to you, too?" and as the throng of memories that name awakened came rushing over her, the impulsive woman folded the blind girl to her bosom, saying to her, "My child, my, child, you should have been!"

"I do not understand you," said Maude, and Mrs. Kennedy replied, "It is not meet that we should part ere I tell you who and what I am. Is the name of Maude Glendower strange to you? Did you never hear it in your Vernon home?"

"It seemed familiar to me when J.C. De Vere first told me of you," answered Maude, "but I cannot recall any particular time when I heard it spoken. Did you know my mother?"

"Yes, father and mother both, and loved them too. Listen to me, Maude, while I tell you of the past. Though it seems so long ago, I was a schoolgirl once, and nightly in my arms there slept a fair-haired, blue-eyed maiden, four years my junior, over whom I exercised an elder sister's care. She loved me, this little blue-eyed girl, and when your brother first spoke to me I seemed again to hear her voice whispering in my ear, 'I love you, beautiful Maude.'"

"It was mother—it was mother!" and Maude Remington drew nearer to the excited woman, who answered:

"Yes, it was your mother, then little Matty Reed; we were at school together in New Haven, and she was my roommate. We were not at all alike, for I was wholly selfish, while she found her greatest pleasure in ministering to others' happiness; but she crossed my path at last, and then I thought I hated her."

"Not my mother, lady. You could not hate my mother!" and the blind eyes flashed as if they would tear away the veil of darkness in which they were enshrouded, and gaze upon a woman who could hate sweet Matty Remington.

"Hush, child! don't look so fiercely at me," said Maude Glendower. "Upon your

mother's grave I have wept that sin away, and I know I am forgiven as well as if her own soft voice had told me so. I loved your father, Maude, and this was my great error. He was a distant relative of your mother, whom he always called his cousin. He visited her often, for he was a college student, and ere I was aware of it, I loved him, oh, so madly, vainly fancying my affection was returned. He was bashful, I thought, for he was not then twenty-one, and by way of rousing him to action. I trifled with another—with Dr. Kennedy," and she uttered the name spitefully, as if it were even now hateful to her.

"I know it—I know it," returned Maude, "he told me that when he first talked with me of you, but I did not suppose the darkeyed student was my father."

"It was none other," said Mrs. Kennedy, "and you can form some conception of my love for him, when I tell you that it has never died away, but is as fresh within my heart this night as when I walked with him upon the College Green and he Called me 'Cousin Maude,' for he gave me that name because of my fondness for Matty, and he sealed it with a kiss. Matty was present at that time, and had I not been blind I should have seen how his whole soul was bound up in her, even while kissing me. I regarded her as a child, and so she was; but men sometimes love children, you know. When she was fifteen, she left New Haven. I, too, had ceased to be a schoolgirl, but I still remained in the city and wrote to her regularly, until at last your father came to me, and with the light of a great joy shining all over his face, told me she was to be his bride on her sixteenth birthday. She would have written it herself, he said, only she was a bashful little creature, and would rather he should tell me. I know not what I did, for the blow was sudden, and took my senses away. He had been so kind to me of late—had visited me so often, that my heart was full of hope. But it was all gone now. Matty Reed was preferred to me, and while my Spanish blood boiled at the fancied indignity, I said many a harsh thing of her—I called her designing, deceitful, and false; and then in my frenzy quitted the room. I never saw Harry, again, for he left the city next morning; but to my dying hour I shall not forget the expression of his face when I talked to him of Matty. Turn away, Maude, turn away! for there is the same look now upon your face. But I have repented of that act, though not till years after. I tore up Mattie's letters. I. said I would burn the soft brown tress—"

"Oh, woman, woman! you did not burn my mother's hair!" and with a shudder Maude unwound the soft, white arm which so closely encircled her.

“No, Maude, no. I couldn’t. It would not leave my fingers, but coiled around them with a loving grasp. I have it now, and esteem it my choicest treasure. When I heard that you were born, my heart softened toward the young girl. Mother and I wrote, asking that Harry’s child might be called for me. I did not disguise my love for him, and I said it would be some consolation to know that his daughter bore my name. My letter did not reach them until you had been baptized Matilda, which was the name of your mother and grandmother, but to prove their goodness, they ever after called you Maude.”

“Then I was named for you;” and Maude Remington came back to the embrace of Maude Glendower, who, kissing, her white brow, continued: “Two years afterward I found myself in Vernon, stopping for a night at the hotel. ‘I will see them in the morning,’ I said; ‘Harry, Matty, and the little child;’ and I asked the landlord where you lived. I was standing upon the stairs, and in the partial darkness he could not see my anguish when he replied, ‘Bless you, miss. Harry Remington died a fortnight ago.’”

“How I reached my room I never knew, but reach it I did, and half an hour later I knelt by his grave, where I wept away every womanly feeling of my heart, and then went back to the giddy world, the gayest of the gay. I did not seek an interview with your mother, though I have often regretted it since. Did she never speak of me? Think. Did you never hear my name?”

“In Vernon, I am sure I did,” answered Maude, “but I was then too young to receive a very vivid impression, and after we came here mother, I fear, was too unhappy to talk much of the past.”

“I understand it,” answered Maude Glendower, and over her fine features there stole a hard, dark look, as she continued, “I can see how one of her gentle nature would wither and die in this atmosphere, and forgive me, Maude, she never loved your father as I loved him, for had he called me wife I should never have been here.”

“What made you come?” asked Maude; and the lady answered, “For Louis’ sake and yours I came. I never lost sight of your mother. I knew she married the man I rejected, and from my inmost soul I pitied her. But I am redressing her wrongs and those of that other woman who wore her life away within these gloomy walls. Money is his idol, and when you touch his purse you touch his tenderest point. But I have opened it, and, struggle as he may, it shall not be closed again.”

She spoke bitterly, and Maude knew that Dr. Kennedy had more than met his equal in that woman of iron will.

“I should have made a splendid carpenter,” the lady continued, “for nothing pleases me more than the sound of the hammer and saw, and when you are gone I shall solace myself with fixing the entire house. I must have excitement, or die as the others did.”

“Maude—Mrs. Kennedy, do you know what time it is?” came from the foot of the stairs, and Mrs. Kennedy answered, “It is one o’clock, I believe.”

“Then why are you sitting up so late, and why is that lamp left burning in the parlor, with four tubes going off at once? It’s a maxim of mine—”

“Spare your maxims, do. I’m coming directly,” and kissing the blind girl affectionately, Mrs. Kennedy went down to her liege lord, whom she found extinguishing the light, and gently shaking the lamp to see how much fluid had been uselessly wasted.

He might have made some conjugal remark, but the expression of her face forbade anything like reproof, and he soon found use for his powers of speech in the invectives he heaped upon the long rocker of the chair over which he stumbled as he groped his way back to the bedroom, where his wife rather enjoyed, than otherwise, the lamentations which he made over his “bruised shin.” The story she had been telling had awakened many bitter memories in Maude Glendower’s bosom, and for hours she turned uneasily from side to side, trying in vain to sleep. Maude Remington, too, was wakeful, thinking over the strange tale she had heard, and marveling that her life should be so closely interwoven with that of the woman whom she called her mother.

“I love her all the more,” she said; “I shall pity her so, staying here alone, when I am gone.”

Then her thoughts turned upon the future, when she would be the wife of James De Vere, and while wondering if she should really ever see again, she fell asleep just as the morning was dimly breaking in the east.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SECOND BRIDAL.

After the night of which we have written, the tie of affection between Mrs. Kennedy and the blind girl was stronger than before, and when the former said to her husband, “Maude must have an outfit worthy of a rich man’s stepdaughter,” he knew by the tone of her voice that remonstrance was useless, and answered meekly, “I will do what is right, but don’t be too extravagant, for Nellie’s clothes almost ruined me, and I had to pay for that piano yesterday. Will fifty dollars do?”

“Fifty dollars!” repeated the lady. “Are you crazy?” Then, touched perhaps by the submissive expression of his face, she added, “As Maude is blind, she will not need as much as if she were going at once into society. I’ll try and make two hundred dollars answer, though that will purchase but a meager trousseau.”

Mrs. Kennedy’s pronounciation of French was not always correct, and John, who chanced to be within hearing, caught eagerly at the last word, exclaiming, “Ki! dem trouses must cost a heap sight mor’n mine! What dis nigger spec’ ‘em can be?” and he glanced ruefully at his own glazed pants of corduroy, which had done him service for two or three years.

Maude was a great favorite with John, and when he heard that she was going away forever he went up to the woodshed chamber where no one could see him, and seating himself upon a pile of old shingles, which had been put there for kindling, he cried like a child.

“It’ll be mighty lonesome, knowin’ she’s gone for good,” he said, “for, though she’ll come back agin, she’ll be married, and when a gal is married, that’s the last on ‘em. I wish I could give her somethin’, to show her my feelin’s.”

He examined his hands; they were hard, rough, and black. He drew from his pocket a bit of looking-glass and examined his face—that was blacker yet; and shaking his head, he whispered: “It might do for a mulatto gal, but not for her.” Then, as a new idea crossed his mind, he brightened up, exclaiming, “My heart is white, and if I have a tip-top case, mebby she won’t ‘spise a poor old nigger’s picter!”

In short, John contemplated having his daguerreotype taken as a bridal present

for Maude. Accordingly, that very afternoon he arrayed himself in his best, and, entering the yellow car of a traveling artist who had recently come to the village, he was soon in possession of a splendid case and a picture which he, pronounced "oncommon good-lookin' for him." This he laid carefully away until the wedding-day, which was fixed for the 15th of April. When Mr. De Vere heard of John's generosity to Maude in giving her the golden eagles, he promptly paid them back, adding five more as interest, and at the same time asking him if he would not like to accompany them to Europe.

"You can be of great assistance to us," he said, "and I will gladly take you."

This was a strong temptation, and for a moment the negro hesitated, but when his eye fell upon his master, who was just then entering the gate, his decision was taken, and he answered, "No, I'm bleeged to you. I'd rather stay and see the fun."

"What fun?" asked Mr. De Vere; and John replied, "The fun of seein' him cotch it;" and he pointed to the doctor coming slowly up the walk, his hands behind him and his head bent forward in a musing attitude.

Dr. Kennedy was at that moment in an unenviable frame of mind, for he was trying to decide whether he could part for a year or more with his crippled boy, who grew each day more dear to him. "It will do him good, I know," he said, "and I might, perhaps, consent, if I could spare the money; but I can't, for I haven't got it. That woman keeps me penniless, and will wheedle me out of two hundred dollars more. Oh, Mat—"

He did not finish the sentence, for by this time he had reached the hall, where he met Mr. De Vere, who asked if Louis was to go.

"He can't," answered the doctor. "I have not the means. Mrs. Kennedy says Maude's wardrobe will cost two hundred dollars."

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted Mr. De Vere. "I shall attend to Maude's wants myself, and if you are not able to bear Louis' expenses, I will willingly do it for the sake of having him with his sister. They ought not to be separated, and who knows but Louis' deformity may be in a measure relieved?"

This last decided the matter. Louis should go, even though his father mortgaged his farm to pay the bill, and during the few weeks which elapsed before the 15th

the house presented an air of bustle and confusion equal to that which preceded Nellie's bridal. Mr. De Vere remained firm in his intention to defray all Maude's expenses, and he delegated to Mrs. Kennedy the privilege of purchasing whatever she thought was needful. Her selections were usually in good taste, and in listening to her enthusiastic praises Maude enjoyed her new dresses almost as much as if she had really seen them. A handsome plain silk of blue and brown was decided upon for a traveling dress, and very sweetly the blind girl looked when, arrayed in her simple attire, she stood before the man of God whose words were to make her a happy bride. She could not see the sunlight of spring streaming into the room, neither could she see the sunlight of love shining over the face of James De Vere, nor yet the earnest gaze of those who thought her so beautiful in her helplessness, but she could feel it all, and the long eyelashes resting on her cheek were wet with tears when a warm kiss was pressed upon her lips and a voice murmured in her ear, "My wife—my darling Maude."

There were bitter tears shed at that parting; Maude Glendower weeping passionately over the child of Harry Remington, and Dr. Kennedy hugging to his bosom the little hunchback boy, Matty's boy and his. They might never meet again, and the father's heart clung fondly to his only son. He could not even summon to his aid a maxim with which to season his farewell, and bidding a kind good-by to Maude, he sought the privacy of his chamber, where he could weep alone in his desolation.

Hannah and John grieved to part with the travelers, but the latter was somewhat consoled by the gracious manner with which Maude had accepted his gift.

"I cannot see it," she said, "but when I open the casing I shall know your kind, honest face is there, and it will bring me many pleasant memories of you."

"Heaven bless you, Miss Maude," answered John, struggling hard to keep back the tears he deemed it unmanly to shed. "Heaven bless you, but if you keep talking so book-like and good, I'll bust out a-cryin', I know, for I'm nothin' but an old fool anyhow," and wringing her hand, he hurried off into the woodshed chamber, where he could give free vent to his grief.

Through the harbor, down the bay, and out upon the sea, a noble vessel rides; and as the evening wind comes dancing o'er the wave it sweeps across the deck, kissing the cheek of a brown-eyed boy and lifting the curls from the brow of one whose face, upturned to the tall man at her side, seems almost angelic, so calm,

so peaceful, is its expression of perfect bliss. Many have gazed curiously upon that group, and the voices were very, low which said, “The little boy is deformed,” while there was a world of sadness in the whisper, which told to the wondering passengers that “the beautiful bride was blind.”

They knew it by the constant drooping of her eyelids, by the graceful motion of her hand as it groped in the air, and more than all by the untiring watchfulness of the husband and brother who constantly hovered near. It seemed terrible that so fair a creature should be blind; and like the throb of one great heart did the sympathy of that vessel’s crew go out toward the gentle Maude, who in her newborn happiness forgot almost the darkness of the world without, or if she thought of it, looked forward to a time when hope said that she should see again. So, leaving her upon the sea, speeding away to sunny France, we glance backward for a moment to the lonely house where Maude Glendower mourns for Harry’s child, and where the father thinks often of his boy, listening in vain for the sound which once was hateful to his ear, the sound of Louis’ crutches.

Neither does John forget the absent ones, but in the garden, in the barn, in the fields, and the woodshed chamber, he prays in his mongrel dialect that He who holds the wind in the hollow of His hand will give to the treacherous deep charge concerning the precious freight it bears. He does not say it in those words, but his untutored language, coming from a pure heart, is heard by the Most High. And so the breeze blows gently o’er the bark thus followed by black John’s prayers—the skies look brightly down upon it—the blue waves ripple at its side, until at last it sails into its destined port; and when the apple-blossoms are dropping from the trees, and old Hannah lays upon the grass to bleach the fanciful white bed-spread which her own hands have knit for Maude, there comes a letter to the lonely household, telling them that the feet of those they love have reached the shores of the Old World.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SEXTON.

The Methodist Society of Laurel Hill had built themselves a new church upon the corner of the common, and as a mark of respect had made black John their

sexton. Perfectly delighted with the office, he discharged his duties faithfully, particularly the ringing of the bell, in which accomplishment he greatly excelled his Episcopal rival, who tried to imitate his peculiar style in vain. No one could make such music as the negro, or ring so many changes. In short, it was conceded that on great occasions he actually made the old bell talk; and one day toward the last of September, and five months after the events of the preceding chapter, an opportunity was presented for a display of his skill.

The afternoon was warm and sultry, and overcome by the heat the village loungers had disposed of themselves, some on the long piazza of the hotel, and others in front of the principal store, where, with elevated heels and busy jackknives, they whittled out shapeless things, or made remarks concerning any luckless female who chanced to pass. While thus engaged they were startled by a loud, sharp ring from the belfry of the Methodist church succeeded by a merry peal, which seemed to proclaim some joyful event. It was a musical, rollicking ring, consisting of three rapid strokes, the last prolonged a little, as if to give it emphasis.

“What’s up now?” the loungers said to each other, as the three strokes were repeated in rapid succession. “What’s got into John?” and those who were fortunate enough to own houses in the village, went into the street to assure themselves there was no fire.

“It can’t be a toll,” they said. “It’s too much like a dancing tune for that,” and as the sound continued they walked rapidly to the church, where they found the African bending himself with might and main to his task, the perspiration dripping from his sable face, which was all aglow with happiness.

It was no common occasion which had thus affected John, and to the eager questioning of his audience he replied, “Can’t you hear the ding—dong—de-el. Don’t you know what it says? Listen now,” and the bell again rang forth the three short sounds. But the crowd still professed their ignorance, and, pausing a moment, John said, with a deprecating manner: “I’ll tell the first word, and you’ll surely guess the rest: it’s ‘Maude.’ Now try ‘em,” and wiping the sweat from his brow, he turned again to his labor of love, nodding his head with every stroke. “No ear at all for music,” he muttered, as he saw they were as mystified as ever, and in a loud, clear voice, he sang, “Maude can see-e! Maude can see-e!”

It was enough. Most of that group had known and respected the blind girl, and joining at once in the negro's enthusiasm they sent up a deafening shout for "Maude De Vere, restored to sight."

John's face at that moment was a curiosity, so divided was it between smiles and tears, the latter of which won the mastery, as with the last hurrah the bell gave one tremendous crash, and he sank exhausted upon the floor, saying to those who gathered round, "Will 'em hear that, think, in France?"

"How do you know it is true?" asked one, and John replied, "She writ her own self to tell it, and sent her love to me; think of dat—sent her love to an old nigger!" and John glanced at the bell, as if he intended a repetition of the rejoicings.

Surely Maude De Vere, across the sea, never received a greater tribute of respect than was paid to her that day by the warm-hearted John, who, the moment he heard the glad news, sped away, to proclaim it from the church-tower. The letter had come that afternoon, and, as John said, was written by Maude herself. The experiment had been performed weeks before, but she would wait until assurance was doubly sure ere she sent home the joyful tidings. It was a wonderful cure, for the chance of success was small, but the efforts used in her behalf had succeeded, and she could see again.

"But what of Louis?" asked Dr. Kennedy, who was listening while his wife read to him the letter. "What of Louis? Have they done anything for him?"

"They had tried, but his deformity could not be helped," and with a pang of disappointment the father was turning away when something caught his ear which caused him to listen again.

"You don't know," Maude wrote, "how great a lion Louis is getting to be. He painted a picture of me just as I looked that dreadful morning when I stood in the sunshine and felt that I was blind. It is a strange, wild thing, but its wildness is relieved by the angel-faced boy who looks up at me so pityingly. Louis is perfect, but Maude—oh! I can scarce believe that she ever wore that expression of fierce despair. Strange as it may seem, this picture took the fancy of the excitable French, and ere Louis was aware of it he found himself famous. They come to our rooms daily to see le petit artist, and many ask for pictures or sketches, for which they pay an exorbitant price. One wealthy American

gentleman brought him. a daguerreotype of his dead child, with the request that he would paint from it a life-sized portrait, and if he succeeds in getting a natural face he is to receive five hundred dollars. Think of little Louis Kennedy earning five hundred dollars, for he will succeed. The daguerreotype is much like Nellie, which will make it easier for Louis."

This was very gratifying to Dr. Kennedy, who that day more than once repeated to himself, "Five hundred dollars: it's a great deal of money, for him to earn; maybe he'll soon be able to help me, and mercy knows I shall soon need it if that woman continues her unheard-of extravagances. More city company tomorrow, and I heard her this morning tell that Jezebel in the kitchen to put the whites of sixteen eggs into one loaf of cake. What am I coming to?" and Dr. Kennedy, groaned in spirit as he walked through the handsome apartments, seeking in vain for a place where he could sit and have it seem as it used to do, when the rocking-chair which Matty had brought stood invitingly in the middle of the room where now a center-table was standing, covered with books and ornaments of the most expensive kind.

Since last we looked in upon her Maude Glendower had ruled with a high hand. She could not live without excitement, and rallying from her grief at parting with her child, she plunged at once into repairs, tearing down and building up, while her husband looked on in dismay. When they were about it, she said, they might as well have all the modern improvements, and water, both hot and cold, was accordingly carried to all the sleeping apartments, the fountain-head being a large spring distant from the house nearly half a mile. Gas she could not have, though the doctor would hardly have been surprised had she ordered the laying of pipes from Rochester to Laurel Hill, so utterly reckless did she seem. She was fond of company, and as she had visited everybody, so everybody in return must visit her, she said, and toward the last of summer she filled the house with city people, who vastly enjoyed the good cheer with which her table was always spread.

John's desire to see the fun was more than satisfied, as was also Hannah's, and after the receipt of Maude's letter the latter determined to write herself, "and let Miss De Vere know just how things was managed." In order to do this, it was necessary to employ an amanuensis, and she enlisted the services of the gardener, who wrote her exact language, a mixture of negro, Southern, and Yankee. A portion of this letter we give to the reader.

After expressing her pleasure that Maude could see, and saying that she believed the new Miss to be a good woman, but a mighty queer one, she continued:

“The doin’s here is wonderful, and you’d hardly know the old place. Thar’s a big dining room run out to the south, with an expansion table mighty nigh a rod long, and what’s more, it’t allus full too, of city stuck-ups—and the way they do eat! I haint churned nary pound of butter since you went away. Why, bless yer soul, we has to buy. Do you mind that patch of land what the doctor used to plant with corn? Well, the garden sass grows there now, and t’other garden raises nothin’ but flowers and strabries, and thar’s a man hired on purpose to tend ‘em. He’s writin’ this for me. Thar’s a tower run up in the northeast eend, and when it’s complete, she’s goin’ to have a what you call ‘em—somethin’ that blows up the water—oh, a fountain. Thar’s one in the yard, and, if you’ll believe it, she’s got one of Cary’s rotary pumpin’ things, that folks are runnin’ crazy about, and every hot day she keeps John a-turnin’ the injin’ to squirt the water all over the yard, and make it seem like a thunder shower! Thar’s a bathroom, and when them city folks is here some on ‘em is a-washin’ in thar all the time. I don’t do nothin’ now but wash and iron, and if I have fifty towels I have one! But what pesters me most is the wide skirts I has to do up; Miss Canady wears a hoop bigger than an amberell. They say Miss Empress, who makes these things, lives in Paris, and I wish you’d put yourself out a little to see her, and ask her, for me, to quit sendin’ over them fetched hoops. Thar aint no sense in it! We’ve got jiggers in every chamber where the water spirts out. Besides turnin’ the injin John drives the horses in the new carriage. Dr. Canady looks poorly, and yet madam purrs round him like a kitten, but I knows the claws is thar. She’s about broke him of usin’ them maxims of his, and your poor marm would enjoy it a spell seein’ him paid off, but she’d pity him after a while. I do, and if things continners to grow wus, I shall just ask pra’rs for him in my meetin’. Elder Blossom is powerful at that. My health is considerable good, but I find I grow old. Yours, with respect and regrets,” Hannah.

“P.S.—I don’t believe that t’other beau of yourn is none the happiest. They live with Miss Kelsey yet, but thar’s a story round that she’s a-gwine to marry again, and the man don’t like De Vere, and won’t have him thar, so if the doctor should run out, as I’m afraid he will, what’ll them lazy critters do? Nellie’s got to be kinder sozzlin’ in her dress, and he has took to chawin’ tobacker by the pound. They was here a spell ago, and deaf as I be, I hearn ‘em have one right smart quarrel. He said she was slatterly, or somethin’ like that, and she called him a fool, and said she ‘most knew he wished he’d took you, blind as you was, and he

said, kinder sorry-like, ‘Maude would never of called me a fool, nor wore such holes in the heels of her stockin’s.’ I couldn’t hear no more, but I knew by her voice that she was cryin’, and when I went below and seen the doctor out behind the woodshed a-figgerin’ up, says I to myself, `If I was a Univarselar, I should b’lieve they was all on ‘em a-gittin’ thar pay,’ but bein’ I’m a Methodis’, I don’t believe nothin’.”

This letter, which conveyed to Maude a tolerably correct idea of matters at home, will also show to the reader the state of feeling existing between J.C. and Nellie. They were not suited to each other, and though married but seven months, there had been many a quarrel besides the one which Hannah overheard. Nellie demanded of her husband more love than he had to bestow, and the consequence was, a feeling of bitter jealousy on her part and an increasing coldness on his. They were an ill-assorted couple, utterly incapable of taking care of themselves, and when they heard from Mrs. Kelsey that she really contemplated a second marriage, they looked forward to the future with a kind of hopeless apathy, wholly at variance with the feelings of the beautiful, darkeyed Maude and the noble James De Vere.

Their love for each other had increased each day, and their happiness seemed almost greater than they could bear on that memorable morn when the husband bent fondly over his young girl-wife, who laid a hand on each side of his face, and while the great tears rolled down her cheeks, whispered joyfully, “I can see you, darling; I can see!”

CHAPTER XXI.

HOME AGAIN.

Little more than two years have passed away since the September afternoon when the deep-toned bell rang out the merry tidings, “Maude can see—Maude can see,” and again upon the billow another vessel rides. But this time to the westward; and the beautiful lady, whose soft, dark eyes look eagerly over the wave says to her companion, “It is very pleasant going home.”

They had tarried for a long time in Italy, both for Louis’ sake and because, after

the recovery of her sight, Maude's health had been delicate, and her husband would stay until it was fully re-established. She was better now; roses were blooming on her cheek— joy was sparkling in her eye—while her bounding step, her ringing laugh, and finely rounded form told of youthful vigor and perfect health. And they were going home at last—James, Louis, and Maude—going to Hampton, where Mrs. De Vere awaited so anxiously their coming. She did not, however, expect them so soon, for they had left England earlier than they anticipated, and they surprised her one day; as she sat by her pleasant window gazing out upon the western sky and wondering how many more suns would set ere her children would be with her. It was a happy meeting; and after the first joy of it was over Maude inquired after the people at Laurel Hill.

"It is more than four months since we heard from them," she said, "and then Mrs. Kennedy's letter was very unsatisfactory. The doctor, she hinted, had lost his senses, but she made no explanation. What did she mean?"

"Why," returned Mrs. De Vere, "he had a paralytic shock more than six months ago."

"Oh, poor father," cried Louis, while Mrs. De Vere continued, "It was not a severe attack, but it has impaired his health somewhat. You knew, of course, that his house and farm were to be sold."

"Our house, our old home! It shall not be!" and the tears glittered in Louis' eyes, while, turning to Mrs. De Vere, Maude whispered softly, "His wife has ruined him, but don't let us talk of it before Louis."

The lady nodded, and when at last they were alone, told all she knew of the affair. Maude Glendower had persisted in her folly until her husband's property was reduced to a mere pittance. There was a heavy mortgage upon the farm, and even a chattel-mortgage upon the furniture, and as the man who held them was stern and unrelenting, he had foreclosed, and the house was to be sold at auction. "Why has mother kept it from us?" said Maude, and Mrs. De Vere replied, "Pride and a dread of what you might say prevented her writing it, I think. I was there myself a few weeks since, and she said it could do no good to trouble you. The doctor is completely broken down, and seems like an old man. He cannot endure the handsome rooms below, but stays all day in that small garret chamber, which is furnished with your carpet, your mother's chair, and the high-past bedstead which his first wife owned."

Maude's sympathies were roused, and, fatigued as she was, she started the next morning with her husband and brother for Laurel Hill. Louis seemed very sad, and not even the familiar way-marks, as he drew near his home, had power to dissipate that sadness. He could not endure the thought that the house where he was born and where his mother had died should pass into the hands of strangers. He had been fortunate with his paintings, and of his own money had nearly two thousand dollars; but this could do but little toward canceling the mortgage, and he continued in the same dejected mood until the tall poplars of Laurel Hill appeared in view. Then, indeed, he brightened up, for there is something in the sight of home which brings joy to every human heart.

It was a hazy October day. The leaves were dropping one by one, and lay in little hillocks upon the faded grass. The blue hills which embosomed the lake were encircled with a misty veil, while the sunshine seemed to fall with a somber light upon the fields of yellow corn. Everything, even the gossamer thistle-top which floated upon the autumnal air, conspired to make the day one of those indescribable days when all hearts are pervaded with a feeling of pleasurable sadness—a sense of beauty mingled with decay.

"Is this home?" cried Maude, as they stopped before the gate. "I should hardly have recognized it."

It was indeed greatly changed, for Maude Glendower had perfect taste, and if she had expended thousands upon the place, she had greatly increased its value.

"Beautiful home, beautiful home—it must not be sold," was Louis' exclamation as he gazed upon it.

"No, it must not be sold," returned Maude, while her husband smiled quietly upon them both, and said nothing.

Maude Glendower had gone to an adjoining town, but Hannah and John greeted the strangers with nosy demonstrations, the latter making frequent use of his coat skirts to wipe away his tears.

"Can you see, marm—see me as true as you live?" he said, bowing with great humility to Maude, of whom he stood a little in awe, so polished were her manners and so elegant her appearance. Maude assured him that she could, and then observing how impatient Louis appeared, she asked for Dr. Kennedy. Assuming a mysterious air, old Hannah whispered, "He's up in de ruff, at de top

of de house, in dat little charmber, where he stays mostly, to get shet of de music and dancin' and raisin' ob cain generally. He's mighty broke down, but the sight of you will peart him up right smart. You'd better go up alone—he'll bar it better one at a time."

"Yes, go, sister," said Louis, who heard the last part of Hannah's remarks, and felt that he could not take his father by surprise. So, leaving her husband and brother below, Maude glided noiselessly upstairs to the low attic room, where, by an open window, gazing sorrowfully out upon the broad harvest-fields, soon to be no longer his, a seemingly old man sat. And Dr. Kennedy was old, not in years, perhaps, but in appearance. His hair had bleached as white as snow, his form was bent, his face was furrowed with many a line of care, while the tremulous motion of his head told of the palsy's blighting power. And he sat there alone, that hazy autumnal day, shrinking from the future and musing sadly of the past. From his armchair the top of a willow tree was just discernible, and as he thought of the two graves beneath that tree he moaned, "Oh, Katy, Matty, darlings. You would pity me, I know, could you see me now so lonesome. My only boy is over the sea—my only daughter is selfish and cold, and all the day I'm listening in vain for someone to call me father."

"Father!" The name dropped involuntarily from the lips of Maude, standing without the door.

But he did not hear it, and she could not say it again; for he was not her father; but her heart was moved with sympathy, and going to him laid her hands on his head and looked into his face.

"Maude—Matty's Maude—my Maude!" And the poor head shook with a palsied tremor, as he wound his arms around her and asked her when she came.

Her sudden coming unmanned him wholly, and bending over her he wept like a little child. It would seem that her presence inspired in him a sense of protection, a longing to detail his grievances, and with quivering lips he said, "I am broken in body and mind. I've nothing to call my own, nothing but a lock of Matty's hair and Louis' little crutches—the crutches that you cushioned so that I should not hear their sound. I was a hard-hearted monster then. I aint much better now, but I love my child. What of Louis, Maude? Tell me of my boy," and over the wrinkled face of the old man broke beautifully the father-love, giving place to the father-pride, as Maude told of Louis' success, of the fame he won, and the

money he had earned.

“Money!” Dr. Kennedy started quickly at that word, but ere he could repeat it his ear caught a coming sound, and his eyes flashed eagerly as, grasping the arm of Maude, he whispered, “It’s music, Maude—it’s music—don’t you hear it? Louis crutches on the stairs. He comes! he comes! Matty’s boy and mine! Thank Heaven, I have something left in which that woman has no part.”

In his excitement he had risen, and with lips apart, and eyes bent on the open door he waited for his crippled boy; nor waited long ere Louis came in sight, when with a wild, glad cry which made the very rafters ring he caught him to his bosom. Silently Maude stole from the room, leaving them thus together, the father and his son. Nor is it for us to intrude upon the sanctity of that interview, which lasted more than an hour, and was finally terminated by the arrival of Maude Glendower. She had returned sooner than was anticipated, and, after joyfully greeting Maude started in quest of Louis.

“Don’t let her in here,” whispered the doctor, as he heard her on the stairs. “Don’t let her in here; she’d be seized with a fit of repairs. Go to her; she loves you, at least.”

Louis obeyed, and in a moment was in the arms of his stepmother. She had changed since last they, met. Much of her soft, voluptuous beauty was gone, and in its place was a look of desperation, as if she did not care for what she had done, and meant to brave it through. Still, when alone with Mr. De Vere and Maude, she conversed freely of their misfortunes, and ere the day was over they thoroughly understood the matter. The doctor was ruined; and when his wife was questioned of the future she professed to have formed no plan, unless, indeed, her husband lived with Nellie, who was now housekeeping, while she went whither she could find a place. To this arrangement Mr. De Vere made no comment. He did not seem disposed to talk, but when the day of sale came he acted; and it was soon understood that the house together with fifty acres of land would pass into his hands. Louis, too, was busy. Singling out every article of furniture which had been his mother’s, he bought it with his own money, while John, determining that “t’other one,” as he called Katy, should not be entirely overlooked, bid off the high-post bedstead and chest of drawers which once were hers. Many of the more elegant pieces of furniture were sold, but Mr. De Vere kept enough to furnish the house handsomely; and when the sale was over and the family once more reassembled in the pleasant parlor, Dr. Kennedy wept like

a child as he blessed the noble young man who had kept for him his home. Maude Glendower, too, was softened; and going up to Mr. De Vere she said, “If I know how to spend lavishly I know also how to economize, and henceforth none shall accuse me of extravagance.”

These were no idle words, for, as well as she could, she kept her promise; and though she often committed errors, she usually tried to do the thing which her children would approve. After a day or two Mr. De Vere and Maude returned to Hampton, leaving Louis with his father, who, in his society, grew better and happier each day. Hannah, who was growing old, went, from choice, to live with Maude, but John would not forsake his master. Nobody knew the kinks of the old place like himself, he said, and he accordingly stayed, superintending the whole, and coming ere long to speak of it all as his. It was his farm, his oxen, his horses, his everything, except the pump which Hannah in her letter to Mauda, had designated as an injun.

“‘Twas a mighty good thing in its place,” he said, “and at a fire it couldn’t be beat, but he’d be hanged if he didn’t b’lieve a nigger was made for somethin’ harder and more sweaty-like than turnin’ that crank to make b’lieve rain when it didn’t. He reckoned the Lord knew what he was about, and if He was a mind to dry up the grass and the arbs, it wasn’t for Cary nor nary other chap to take the matter into their own hands, and invent a patent thunder shower.”

John reasoned clearly upon some subjects, and though his reasoning was not always correct, he proved a most invaluable servant. Old Hannah’s place was filled by another colored woman, Sylvia, and though John greatly admired her complexion, as being one which would not fade, he lamented her inefficiency, often wishing that the services of Janet Hopkins could be again secured.

But Janet was otherwise engaged; and here, near the close of our story, it may not be amiss to glance for a moment at one who in the commencement of the narrative occupied a conspicuous place. About the time of Maude’s blindness she had removed to a town in the southern part of New York, and though she wrote apprising her young mistress of the change, she forgot entirely to say where she was going, consequently the family were ignorant of her place of residence, until accident revealed it to J.C. De Vere. It was but a few weeks preceding Maude’s return from Europe that he found himself compelled to spend a Sabbath in the quiet town of Fayette. Not far from his hotel an Episcopal church reared its slender tower, and thither, at the usual hour for service, he

wended his way. There was to be a baptism that morning, and many a smile flitted over the face of matron and maid, as a meek-looking man came slowly up the aisle, followed by a short, thick, resolute Scotchwoman, in whom we recognize our old friend Janet Hopkins. Notwithstanding her firm conviction that Maude Matilda Remington Blodgett was her last and only one, she was now the mother of a sturdy boy, which the meek man carried in his arms. Hot disputes there had been between the twain concerning a name, Mr. Hopkins advocating simply John, as having been borne by his sire, while Janet, a little proud of the notoriety which her daughter's cognomen had brought to her, determined to honor her boy with a name which should astonish every one.

At the time of Maude's engagement with J.C. De Vere she had written to know what J.C. was for, and Jedediah Cleishbotham pleased her fancy as being unusual and odd. Indirectly she had heard that Maude was married to Mr. De Vere, and gone to Europe, and supposing it was of course J.C., she on this occasion startled her better half by declaring that her son should be baptized "John Joel Jedediah Cleishbotham," or nothing! It was in vain that he remonstrated. Janet was firm, and hunting up Maude's letter, written more than three years before, she bade him write down the name, so as not to make a blunder. But this he refused to do. "He guessed he could remember that horrid name; there was not another like it in Christendom," he said, and on the Sunday morning of which we write he took his baby in his arms, and in a state of great nervous irritability started for church, repeating to himself the names, particularly the last, which troubled him the most. Many a change he rang upon it, and by the time he stood before the altar the perspiration was starting from every pore, so anxious was he to acquit himself creditably, and thus avoid the Caudle lecture which was sure to follow a mistake. "But he should not make a mistake; he knew exactly what the name was; he'd said it over a hundred times," and when the minister, taking the baby in his arms, said, "Name this child," he spoke up loud and promptly, jerking out the last word with a vengeance, as if relieved to have it off his mind, "John Joel Jedediah Leusebottom."

"That's for me," was J.C.'s involuntary exclamation, which, however, was lost amid the general titter which ran through the house.

In an agony of anxiety Janet strove to rectify the mistake, while her elbow sought the ribs of her conjugal lord; but the minister paid no heed, and when the screaming infant was given back to its frightened father's arms it bore the name of "John Joel," and nothing more.

To this catastrophe Janet was in a measure reconciled when after church J.C. sought her out and, introducing himself, informed her of the true state of affairs.

“Then you aint married to Maude after all,” said the astonished Janet, as she proceeded to question him of the doctor’s family. “It beats all, I never heard on’t; but no wonder, livin’ as we do in this out o’ the way place—no cars, no stage, no post office but twice a week—no nothin’.”

This was indeed the reason why Janet had remained so long in ignorance of the people with whom she formerly lived. Fayette, as she said, was an out of the way place, and after hearing from a man who met them in New York, that Maude and Louis were both gone to Europe, she gave Laurel Hill no further thought, and settled quietly down among the hills until her monotonous life was broken by the birth of a son, the John Joel who, as she talked with J.C., slept calmly in his crib.

“So you aint merried to her,” she kept repeating, her anger at her husband’s treacherous memory fast decreasing. “I kinder thought her losin’ my money might make a difference, but you’re jest as happy with Nellie, aint you?”

The question was abrupt, and J.C. colored crimson as he tried to stammer out an answer.

“Never you mind,” returned Janet, noticing his embarrassment.” Married life is just like a checker-board, and all on us has as much as we can do to swaller it at times; but you would of been happy with Maude, I know.”

J.C. knew so, too, and long after he parted with Janet her last words were ringing in his ears, while mingled with them was the bitter memory, “It might perhaps have been.”

But there was no hope now, and with an increased air of dejection he went back to his cheerless home. They were housekeeping, Nellie and himself, for Mrs. Kelsey had married again, and as the new husband did not fancy the young people they had set up an establishment of their own, and J.C. was fast learning how utterly valueless are soft, white hands when their owner knows not how to use them. Though keeping up an outside show, he was really very poor, and when he heard of the doctor’s misfortune he went to his chamber and wept as few men ever weep. As Hannah well expressed it, “he was shiftless,” and did not know how to take care of himself. This James De Vere understood, and after the sale at Laurel Hill he turned his attention to his unfortunate cousin, and

succeeded at last in securing for him the situation of bookkeeper in a large establishment in New York with which he was himself remotely connected. Thither about Christmas J.C. and Nellie went, and from her small back room in the fifth story of a New York boarding-house Nellie writes to Louis glowing descriptions of high life in the city, and Louis, glancing at his crutches and withered feet, smiles as he thinks how weary he should be climbing the four flights of stairs which lead to that high life.

And now, with one more glance at Maude, we bring our story to a close. It is Easter, and over the earth the April sun shines brightly, just as it shone on the Judean hills eighteen hundred years ago. The Sabbath bells are ringing, and the merry peal which comes from the Methodist tower bespeaks in John a frame of mind unsuited to the occasion. Since forsaking the Episcopalians. he had seldom attended their service, but this morning, after his task is done, he will steal quietly across the common to the old stone church, where James De Vere and Maude sing together the glorious Easter Anthem. Maude formerly sang the alto, but in the old world her voice was trained to the higher notes, and to-day it will be heard in the choir where it has so long been missed.

The bells have ceased to toll, and a family group come slowly up the aisle. Dr. Kennedy, slightly bent, his white hair shading a brow from which much of his former sternness has gone, and his hand shaking but slightly as he opens the pew door and then steps back for the lady to enter, the lady Maude Glendower, who walks not as proudly as of old. She, too, has been made better by adversity, and though she will never love the palsied man, her husband, she will be to him a faithful wife, and a devoted mother to his boy, who in the square, old-fashioned pew sits where his eye can rest upon his beautiful sister, as her snowy fingers sweep once more the organ keys, which tremble joyfully as it were to the familiar touch. Low, deep-toned, and heavy is the prelude to the song, and they who listen feel the floor tremble beneath their feet. Then a strain of richest melody echoes through the house, arid the congregation hold their breath, as Maude De Vere sings to them of the Passover once sacrificed for us.

And now, shall we not leave them thus with the holy Easter light streaming up the aisles and the sweet music of the Easter song dying on the air?