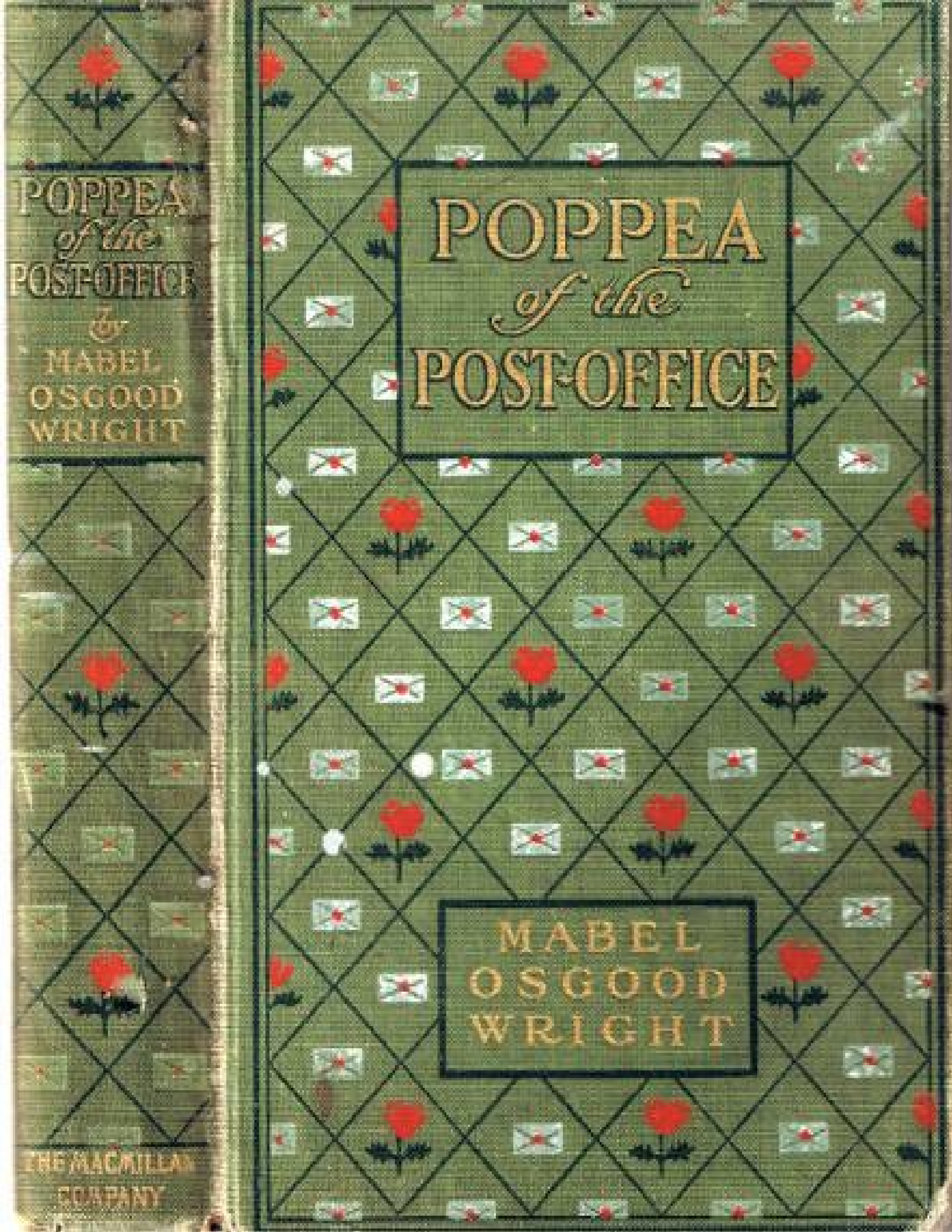

POPPEA
of the
POST-OFFICE
&
MABEL
OSGOOD
WRIGHT

THE MACMILLAN
COMPANY

POPPEA
of the
POST-OFFICE

MABEL
OSGOOD
WRIGHT

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POPPEA OF THE POST-OFFICE

BY MABEL OSGOOD WRIGHT (BARBARA)

AUTHOR OF "THE GARDEN OF A COMMUTER'S WIFE," "PEOPLE OF THE WHIRLPOOL," "THE OPEN WINDOW," ETC.

WITH FRONTISPIECE
BY THE KINNEYS

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To
E. C. S.
IN REMEMBRANCE

Poppea glanced wistfully across the room and then slipped out through one of the long windows

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POPPEA OF THE POST-OFFICE

CHAPTER I

THE TENTH OF MARCH

The six-thirty New York mail was late. So late that when the tall clock that faced the line of letter-boxes boomed eight, the usual hour for closing, Oliver Gilbert, the postmaster, ceased his halting tramp up and down the narrow length of the office, head and ears thrown forward in the attitude of a listening hunting-dog. Going to the door, he pulled it back with a nervous jerk and peered into the night.

As he did so, he was followed by a dozen men of various ages and social conditions, who, in waiting for the evening mail, the final social event of their day, had been standing about the stove, or, this choice space being limited, overflowed into the open room at the back of the post-office, with its work bench, chairs, and battered desk, topped by book shelves; for, in addition to his official position, the postmaster was a maker and mender of clocks and the Scribe for all those in the village of Harley's Mills who could not safely navigate the whirlpools of spelling.

In fact, a smattering of law, coupled with the taste for random browsing in every old book on which he could lay his hands, had given Gilbert the ability to draw up a will, a promissory note, or round an ardent yet decorous love-letter, with equal success.

It was nothing unusual that the men saw as they looked into the bleak March night, and yet they huddled together, listening spellbound and expectant. A week before there had been a breath of spring in the air. In a single day the heavy ice left the Moosatuck with a rush, to be lost in the bay; a flock of migrant robins rested and plumed themselves in the parsonage hedge; ploughing was possible in the fields that lay to the southwest, and the wiseacres, one and all, predicted an early spring. But in a single night this vision had vanished and winter returned in driving snow that, turning to rain, coated everything heavily with ice. Roadway, fences, and the sedate white colonial houses that flanked the elm-bordered main street absolutely glittered in such light as an occasional lantern on porch or fence post afforded. It seemed almost mocking to the men in the door of the post-office; in every way it had been a cruel season, this first winter of the War of the

Rebellion. It was not yet a year since the entire North had been brought to its feet by the loss of Fort Sumter, and had sent forth an army of seventy-five thousand volunteers as its reply.

The gloom of repeated defeat settled heavy as a cloud of cannon smoke over New England, whose invincibility had given birth to the union of states that it now sought to preserve, the only recent glimmer of light having been Grant's capture of Fort Donelson in February.

This was discounted on the east coast by the terrifying career of the *Merrimac*, beforetimes a United States cruiser, but now in Confederate hands, that, by closely sheathing the wooden vessel with metal plates, had converted her into a deadly ram which no wooden ship could withstand, and already having ran amuck through the waters of Hampton Roads, showed the possibility of putting every Union port in peril.

Then had come the news this very Monday morning, vague in detail and almost unbelievable, that the *Monitor*, the mysterious invention of Ericsson, a craft that to the casual observer looked as harmless as any harbor buoy, going from New York under tow, had, on Sunday morning, met and vanquished the great fire-spitting dragon that guarded the entrance to the James.

It was for confirmation or details of this news that the men of Harley's Mills were waiting and listening for the mail-train that did not come, in their unfeigned anxiety interpreting its unusual delay as a bad omen.

Presently, a faint whistle struggled up against the fierce gusts of east wind; a locomotive headlight, gaining in power after every disappearance, flashed across the rolling fields that lay toward Westboro. The train was coming at last.

"Here, take these lanterns, boys," cried Gilbert, "and do some of you go down to meet her and come back with the mail-bag. It's a tough walk for Binks's boy to bring it up alone in this storm."

"'Lisha Potts, do you unhook that red light from the horse-post yonder, and if the news is good (Binks will likely have it from the train crew or some passenger), wave the light above your head as you come back." This to a broad-shouldered, up-country giant, with a grim, square jaw, and hair the color and consistency of rye stubble.

"Good God! I can't stand this waiting and not knowing!" Gilbert almost shouted

as he closed the door behind the crowd and found himself alone in the now dimly lighted post-office, except for old Selectman Morse, white-haired and fragile, who, not being able to go out into the storm with the others, was groping his way towards the stove.

"If I had two sound legs," Gilbert continued, "my fifty years shouldn't stand between me and seeing and helping do what must be done down there south of Washington; the bitter part of it is staying here. Next month when the Felton ladies come back, I guess we'll have a telegraph operator right at the station, at least that's what Wheeler their foreman told me yesterday. You see, both Mr. Esterbrook and John Angus are directors in the Railroad Company, and what with one's wanting to hear the good news and the other the bad, we're likely to get it. Come back into the workroom, neighbor Morse. After your long wait you'll find a chair easier sitting than the coal-box lid."

"There's more than you that has to fight it out at home to give those that's gone free minds," replied the old man, shivering as he settled back in a carpet-covered rocker of strange construction. "Dan had turned forty when he went, and now little Dan has run off to follow him and he's scarce sixteen, so my fight must be fit out to keep son's wife and girl children in food meantime; but I hope the Lord'll understand and count it all for the same cause."

Gilbert, who had seated himself at his desk and was fumbling among some papers in an absent-minded way, wheeled toward the old man quickly.

"Of course He will, for that's what Lincoln wrote me, and he and the Lord have got to be of one mind in this business if it's going through as it must."

"Wrote *you*? Lincoln wrote you? When? How? Why didn't you tell the boys? They'd burst with pride to know a letter from Lincoln was in the town, much less right here in the post-office that's public property, so to speak!" cried Morse, leaving his chair and stiff limbs together, and coming toward the desk almost with a bound.

Gilbert started as he realized what secret had slipped past his lips, hesitated a moment, and then pulling a stool from under the desk, motioned his companion to sit beside him.

On the wall directly in front hung a very good engraving of Washington, in a home-made frame of charred wood; under it was suspended an old flint-lock, worm-eaten in stock and rusty at trigger. Below it, at one side of the desk so that

it came face to face with the owner, a large colored lithograph of Lincoln was tacked to the wall, framed only by a wreath of shrivelled ground-pine and wax-berries.

Taking a key from his vest-pocket where it lay in company with bits of sugared flag-root, Gilbert wiped it carefully and unlocking a drawer in the desk that, to the casual glance, seemed merely an ornamental panel, took out two letters and a double daguerreotype case that held the pictures of a young woman and a little girl a year old. Placing these things before him, Gilbert leaned back, grasping the arms of his chair as if bracing himself for an effort.

"Last year when Curtis died and it was thought well to have the post-office come up here in the centre of the town, the boys did all they could to push me for the place in spite of John Angus's opposition, and Mr. Esterbrook drew up a nicely worded account of who I was and why I should have the office, to go to Postmaster Blair by our Senator. Of course it was done the right way I suppose, with this and that claim for consideration, but I'd never known it was me it spoke of, and somehow it didn't seem quite square, for I'm nobody. So I thought I'd just send a few words to the President, explaining things, if word of such small offices ever reached him; anyway it would ease my mind. I made it short as I could: just told him that it wasn't all money need made me want the office, for I'd a trade, but I was lonesome with only the dead-and-gone people in books for company, and I wanted something to do that would keep me near to my fellow-men, without which age is souring.

"Well, Morse, in due time my appointment came and in with it, this—" carefully opening and spreading out one of the letters:—

"'WASHINGTON, April 2, 1861.

"'MR. OLIVER G. GILBERT:

"'MY DEAR SIR:—

"'Your letter is in my hands. I have been lonely and have lived in books. I was once a postmaster and I understand.

"'Faithfully yours,

"'A. LINCOLN.'

"When a couple of weeks ago, in the midst of all this turmoil, his son Willie died, I waked up in the night from dreaming of Mary and little Marygold, and thought that Mary wanted me to write something. So I says I guess I'll write Lincoln that I'm sorry, and that I understand his trouble because of Mary's leaving me ten years ago, and Marygold the next year, and how the Lord, through my crooked leg, won't let me join them quick by way of battle. I put it down right then and there and sent it the next morning, never thinking of a reply.

"Saturday, this came," and Gilbert unfolded the second letter:—

"'WASHINGTON, March 3, 1862.

"'OLIVER G. GILBERT:

"'MY FRIEND:—

"'It seems that we understand each other. I thank you for your letter. If the Lord's Will has stayed your joining in this conflict, be sure that He will find some other wrong for you to right, by your own door.

"'Gratefully,

"'A. LINCOLN.'

"Now, Morse, you can see why I haven't spoken of these letters and why I shouldn't brag of them, for they are not from the President, but from man to man.

"My grandfather, whose musket hangs up there, fought through the Revolution. That picture of Washington is framed in a piece of oak wood from this house that was set on fire by Arnold's men. Grandsir' revered Washington next to God, and later, when he saw him as President, he wrote a long letter, that cost eight shillings to deliver, to my grandmother, telling her of his visit to Mt. Vernon. One part I've always remembered, I've heard it read so often; it ran thus: 'His whole demeanor was so full of dignity that he assuredly is great enough to hold his own with kings, and be one in their company; yet though I desired to have speech with him, as others did, I dared not take upon myself to begin it. As he did not, I presently came away, much disappointed.'

"Don't shake your head, neighbor Morse, I'm drawing no comparisons, for there's no man fit to pair with either of them; but, mind you, if Washington was fit to match with kings, Abraham Lincoln is humble enough to be a man, a

brother of the Man of Sorrows, who well knew loneliness in the midst of a multitude, saying, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has not where to lay his head.'"

A shout came down the street. Hastily pushing his treasures into their drawer, the postmaster locked it with fingers that trembled, and reached the door with his old friend, in time to see the little procession crossing the road, the red lantern, held by a rake, swinging gayly above 'Lisha Potts's head.

"It's a true victory!" he called; "we've got the paper. Shouldn't wonder if next month saw the war end. Hey, Gilbert, now's the chance to run your big flag up with the little one atop, unless the halyard's frozen fast."

"Now, boys, bunch the lamps," said Gilbert, presently, as he cleared a place on his work table, adjusted his spectacles, and spread out the coveted sheet. The newspaper being fully three feet in length, the print very small, and the large captions of to-day lacking, it took Gilbert some time to locate the desired news. Meanwhile the boys pressed closer and closer until, as he stopped for the second time to adjust his glasses, 'Lisha Potts, peering over his shoulder, read at the top of his voice: "Naval Engagement in Hampton Roads—Loss of the Frigates *Cumberland* and *Congress*—Great Success of the Ericsson Battery!"

"That'll do, 'Lisha," said Gilbert, with some asperity. "I believe that I'm reading this paper—

"*First Edition*—Fortress Monroe, March 9.—The *Monitor* arrived at 10 P.M. yesterday and went immediately to the protection of the *Minnesota* lying aground just below Newport News. At 7 A.M. to-day the *Merrimac*, accompanied by two wooden steamers, the *Yorktown* and *Jamestown*, and several tugs, stood out toward the *Minnesota* and opened fire. The *Monitor* met them at once and opened fire, when the enemies' vessels returned, except the *Merrimac*. The two ironclads fought part of the time touching each other, from 8 A.M. until noon, when the *Merrimac* retreated—"

"Never mind the whole story now, get the finish first," chorused the audience.

"Here on the next page," cried 'Lisha.

"*Second Edition*," read Gilbert, deliberately. "The side of the *Merrimac* pierced by the *Monitor*! The Ericsson battery finally succeeded in forcing a long hole in the port side of the *Merrimac* and she retired with the whole rebel fleet to

Norfolk about one o'clock!"

Cheers drowned Gilbert's voice, and the paper passed from hand to hand, each man reading some particular phrase that pleased him, while Seth Moore, one of the retired sea-captains of which every coast town at this period had its quota, banging on the floor with his cane, cried: "It isn't only a blow to the rebels but to wooden ships as well; I didn't think so much scrap-iron could keep afloat. Mark my words, first thing we know even the passenger liners will all want their iron trim, and the Lord knows but what even the coastwise service'll come to it some day!"

It was after ten o'clock before, discussion ended, the men went their various ways. The storm had ceased, and the intense blue black of the sky set with stars seemed only a degree less cold and burnished than the ice-coated earth over which the "boys" went home, slipping and sliding; the younger making a frolic of the matter, the older clinging to the fence rails.

"It's going to be a mean walk for me to-night, three miles straight up hill and against the wind," said 'Lisha Potts to Gilbert, as he helped him fix the inside bars on the shutters, preparatory to closing the office.

"Then why not stop with me?" questioned the postmaster. "I couldn't think of sleeping for a couple of hours yet, and somehow, the idea of reading don't come natural to-night, though I've been mighty interested getting into the workings of the wars of the ancients, all about the way Xenophon managed to get those ten thousand Greeks to retreat across country, without really skedaddling. Ever heard about it? Mebbe you'd like I should read it to you."

'Lisha, a man of the remoter farming country and timber land, used to the big open spaces of life that some call loneliness, shook his head in an emphatic denial that almost amounted to alarm, and began to button his heavy frieze top-coat.

"Well, well, I won't, so don't get scared," laughed Gilbert, indulgently. "If folks don't thirst for knowledge, there's small use choking it down their throats. Not that the best of learning comes out of books, for you learned your trade of reading the ground and the weather 'n' hunting and tracking all out o' doors."

"I tell you what we'll do, go over back into the house, light all the lamps I've got, and set them in the windows for a victory illumination. Then we'll cook up a nice little supper for our two selves and have a smoke by the fire. I don't often do it

these days, haven't felt peart enough; but to-night, somehow, I feel skittish, like I did forty years ago when a pair of yearling steers I'd trained got first premium at the Old Haven Fair. To-night a pipe between my teeth's not a bad habit as the parsons preach, 'Lisha, but a necessity, yes, a bare, vital necessity."

This proposition being in the direct path of 'Lisha's own desires, he gave a cheerful whistle of consent and followed Gilbert through the partly roofed grape arbor that made a passageway between the post-office and the sloped roofed house of Gilbert's forefathers, that stood well back in the garden with its porch facing the hill road.

"Nobody'll see the lights this time of night," criticised 'Lisha, as Gilbert, mustering an array of six sperm-oil lamps and three sturdy pewter candlesticks, proceeded to distribute them between the various rooms, not forgetting the icy "spare chamber" upstairs, or the "foreroom" at the right of the front door with its scriptural engravings, bright three-ply carpet, and melodeon.

"That's as may be," Gilbert answered, while he regulated a wick, stiff from lack of use, "but they'll be there all the same, and we'll know it anyhow. What'll you have? There's beans and brown bread been in the oven all afternoon, besides apple pie, crullers, biscuits, and spice snaps in the pantry. I think this time o' night when we're wakeful anyway, we might as well have hot coffee to mix and blend the vittles and put some ginger in us. Mebbe you'd prefer hard cider, but since I found the stuff was tangling the feet of some good neighbors, I haven't kept any about. Yes, get a pail of fresh water while I grind the coffee; you can never get the flavor, Mary always said, without fresh-drawn water come to its first boil."

To have seen the neatness of the kitchen, pantry, and long, low bedroom that ran across the back of both, no one would have supposed that the house had been without the touch of a woman's hand for nine years. To be sure, at the critical periods of spring and fall cleaning the postmaster's sister, Satira Pegrim, a bustling widow of forty, came down from her little hill farm to officiate. Why she did not stay on and keep house for her brother had been a subject of much speculation during the year after the baby Marygold had followed her young mother. But though Gilbert said nothing, they came to understand that without the child to care for there was not sufficient work to keep in check Mrs. Pegrim's nervous energy, which found vent in a species of incessant reminiscent sympathy that poor Gilbert could not bear.

When the only love of a silent man's life comes upon him when he is nearly forty, fairly sweeping him from his feet, and in less than three years wife and the child just forming her first words are snatched away, leaving him deaf at heart, work is the only consoler that can gain even his ear. So Gilbert had baked and swept and garnished, kept the geraniums and the calla lilies and pink flowering "Gypsey" in the windows, and a white spread upon the bed, and the hooded mahogany cradle-cover of pink and white basket-pattern patchwork, as it had been during those years.

As Gilbert added an armful of wood to the fire in the cooking stove that was set in the wide chimney place, and opened the iron door of the brick oven at the side, the bright light threw against the opposite wall his somewhat remarkable silhouette. He was fully six feet tall with close-cut, iron-gray hair, bushy eyebrows, and long, gray beard that reached his waist, and so frequently got in his way that he twisted it up and fastened it under his chin with an elastic band, or hairpin, as upon the present occasion. Gilbert had craved education, but lacked the strength to force the opportunity, though his reading had nourished a gentle sentiment in him, and better speech than is often found in New Englanders of his surroundings.

When 'Lisha had filled the kettle, the two men lighted their pipes, and slipping off their clumsy shoes, in unison, spread feet covered by blue yarn socks before the open front of the stove and, puffing comfortably, drifted into desultory talk.

"It's mighty queer that John Angus, leading man in this town and his folks Yankee all through after they stopped being Scotch, should stand for slavery," mused 'Lisha. "Do you suppose he's got any reason other than his usual one of taking the off side of things?"

"He has big cotton interests for one thing," said Gilbert; "otherwise, who can tell why he does this or that? Why does he hate me? Because he can't drive me off the earth, I take it. We played together as boys, but I've never presumed on that. His father left him fully two hundred acres of land, mine left me three; but it stood something like a nose on the face of his holding, coming in the south front of it. He seemed to think all he had to do was offer me money for my home; he thought I had no right to love the place where I was born, but that he had. Once or twice I've been on the point of yielding, but never since it became the home of my wife and child."

"That's why, then, he did all he could to keep you from getting the post-office?"

"I reckon so, and now I've got it, he has all his mail sent to Westboro to keep down the receipts."

"Whew—!" whistled 'Lisha. "I didn't think he'd spite himself that far."

"Well," replied Gilbert, "I don't know but at bottom I'm sorry for him. He's got a grand place here, a city home, and money; he's been senator, and, they say, could have been governor; but he's all alone up there without love or kin."

"He had a dreadful pretty wife, and pleasant spoken. I remember selling her quail and partridge every fall of the year."

"Yes; when she first came home, she was not over twenty, and most as pretty as my Mary. He met her when he was travelling in Europe, the Miss Feltons said. She was there learning to sing or something. I heard her sing once up where the end of their garden stops short and the ground drops to my bit. It was just like the voice of the last wood robin that keeps singing till after dark, and then quits sudden as if he was lonesome. After living up there for ten years, she, that at first had a laughing face and skin like a peach, grew thin and white as marble, and then all of a sudden, she left him and died away in England, they say, about a year ago. Some claim he was always reproaching her because she was childless; others, that once when he was away, she went to the midsummer ball up at Felton Manor against his wish and danced with a nephew of Mr. Esterbrook's so beautifully that folks spoke of it until it got round to him. He'd never let her dance before, so nobody knew she could. Then next Sabbath the young man walked from church with her.

"I well remember the day she went, it's less than two years since. There was no running about it; she came down the hill in her carriage as if she was only going on a short journey. As she passed the shop, she plucked the coachman by the coat to stop him and came in to ask me to fit a key to her watch. I remember the watch too, small and thin, with a flower on the back in diamonds. Oh, yes, Angus was generous enough, and kept her well in clothes and jewels.

"All of a sudden she said, 'Mr. Gilbert, I'm going away and never coming back, and there's nobody to miss me or be sorry.'

"I was struck all of a heap, for I'd always liked her and spoke my mind, which added to his dislike of me, but I knew by her face she meant what she said. She looked like a crumpled roseleaf, so young and frail, that before I knew it, I had taken her cold little hands in mine and was telling her that *I* should miss her, and

that I never should forget the soft white slip made with her own hands she sent for Marygold to go to sleep in, or how she came to comfort me in face of John Angus's dislike. 'If ever I can do you a good turn, it's all I'd ask,' I said to her.

"With that, she put her poor thin arms about my shoulders, looked me straight in the face, and said, 'Yes, I believe you would,' and pulling my head down, kissed me on the forehead as if I'd been her father. Before I got my wits again, she was in her carriage and away, and now she's dead and gone. They say that the Miss Feltons have heard that John Angus is to be married again this spring to a woman as rich as he is, the daughter of somebody high up in New York life. So I suppose he'll raise a grand family now, and poor little roseleaf is forgotten."

"Hi there! the water's biled over," cried 'Lisha, and soon the subtle aroma of good coffee filled the kitchen, and the men drew the table toward the stove before sitting down to their supper, for in spite of the rousing fire, the room was draughty.

Three clocks that hung in a row between dresser and chimney, which were undergoing the delicate process of being regulated, struck twelve with different emphases and in three different keys before Gilbert had made a bed for his guest upon the wide lounge by the chimney-corner, and the two men went about the house to put out the lamps.

"What's that?" said Gilbert, pausing as they came down the creaking back stairs.

"Just a log of wood rolling off the heap on the stoop, I reckon," answered 'Lisha.

"There isn't any wood there; I fetched it all in," said Gilbert, giving a decided start, as the noise was repeated and this time resolved itself into a rhythmic knocking on the outer door.

'Lisha strode through the kitchen, picking up the poker on his way, and threw open the door. At first he saw nothing, the change from light to darkness was so sudden; then something white in the shadow beside the door caught his attention.

"It's only a dog," he thought; yet as training had made him cautious, he called, "Bring the lantern," to Gilbert, who had stopped to pull on his coat.

CHAPTER II

THE WRONG AT HIS DOOR

As the lantern held by Gilbert flashed upon the furry object, 'Lisha, who was bending over it, jumped back as though he had been shot, crying, "Good God, Gilbert, it isn't a dog; I reckon it's a child!"

At the same time he gathered up the bundle, and, almost trampling Gilbert in his haste, strode into the kitchen, where he laid it on the table.

The outer wrapping was a well-worn buffalo-robe, and from between its folds a small, white-mittened hand was visible.

For a moment the two men stood side by side, speechless with astonishment; then Gilbert began to unfold the robe with fingers that trembled so he could scarcely direct them. Inside the skin was an afghan of soft wool tied crosswise, while in the depths of this nest lay a child, wrapped from foot to head in coat and cap of white coney, even the face being hidden by a knitted Shetland veil. The little form was so still that Gilbert dreaded to touch it, but 'Lisha, having pulled himself together, lifted the veil, disclosing softly rounded, pink cheeks and red lips slightly parted in regular, if rather heavy, breathing. This action disturbed the sleeper without waking her, for she relaxed the arm that had been pressed close against her breast, and from under it a tiny puppy sprawled out, dragging with it a large handkerchief in which it had been wrapped, as if to make a doll of it. He was not an aristocrat of the dog world, but one of those waifs that, decorated with a bit of ribbon, are sold on city street corners for a dollar, the appeal of their youth, added to the speculative element in all of us, finding ready purchasers for them.

The puppy, tawny and roughish as to coat, having one ear that stuck up while the other lopped, and the keenest of eyes, after licking the face and the long-lashed lids of the child without getting a response, tumbled to the edge of the table and began wagging his ridiculous rat tail and making friendly advances to the men. Seeing that even the puppy's rough caresses did not waken the baby, Gilbert raised one of the eyelids gently, and then after holding his face close, whispered to 'Lisha: "Just as I thought, she's drugged with paregoric; we'll have to rouse her

even if she is scared of us and makes a time. I well remember how it was with Marygold when sister Pegrim, not having her glasses, gave her a large instead of a small spoon of cough syrup by mistake. I'll wash her face and see if I can't liven her up. Just pull that rocker over here, 'Lisha, and give me the tin basin of water."

As he talked, Gilbert was undoing the coat and cap from which came the head of a child of about a year, covered with a mass of hair that lay in close golden rings, with here and there a tinge of copper, in strange contrast to the dark lashes and eyebrows.

From the moment his eyes had rested on her, Gilbert had unconsciously said *she*, for every curve and line was feminine. Yet even with closed eyes, there was nothing doll-like about her, while there was almost a suggestion of resolution about the mouth corners.

"Now, precious, wake up and look at the pretty light," crooned Gilbert, holding her with awkward hands, against his shoulder, so that her head came above it, yet in a way that no man would have done who had not held his own child.

Presently, the heavy eyelids drew upward, and then after the consciousness of light became complete, she looked about the room, gave a little cry of delight, and held out her hands when she saw the puppy, rounding her lips into a sound like wow-wow; but as her eyes rested upon big, ugly 'Lisha, her chin quivered, her cooing voice trailed off into a heart-broken wail, and she hid her face in Gilbert's neck.

What the confiding touch meant to the lonely man, only he and his Maker knew. It thrilled him to his finger-tips, awakened life springs that he believed forever dry, and tears, unknown to him these nine years, became a possibility, but not while 'Lisha stood there gaping at him with hanging jaw. In a few moments the wailing stopped, and she began to look about once more.

"Fetch me a cup of water, 'Lisha; mebbe she's thirsty."

As he turned to carry out Gilbert's directions, the young lady began to smack her lips and show by her bodily motions that she knew what the word "thirsty" and a cup in sight promised.

As Gilbert helped to guide it to her mouth with one hand, the corners of her lips, assisted by a little quiver of the nose, expressed unmistakable disgust at finding

only water.

"Guess she's looking for milk same as kittens do," suggested 'Lisha, tiptoeing to the table and peering into an empty pitcher. "Great snakes!" his favorite ejaculation, "I spilled the last drop into my coffee. The pup wants some, too, I reckon," as the queer little beast, nose in air and tail wagging furiously, seemed bound to climb up his trousers leg.

"Of course she does, the lamb!" said Gilbert, holding her from him upon his knee, the better to look over her. "But where is it to come from? It's half an hour past midnight and I don't like to wake up the neighbors," he mused.

"Got a small open kettle?" asked 'Lisha, rummaging in the pantry. "I've found it; now do you fix up a place for her to sleep while I fetch her supper," he continued, with the air of one to whom the care of strange lady babies was an everyday occurrence, when, truth be told, he had never before come in contact with any young thing more delicate than a calf or a long-legged colt.

"Don't go to the Bakers'," pleaded Gilbert; "I know they're the nearest, but Mrs. Baker'll come back with you for sure, and I want time to turn around before any women folks bear down on me."

"Nope, I'm not going to confide in any female, least it's Brooks's red cow. I milked for them when the old man broke his leg last fall, 'n' the cow knows me. It's only a quarter of a mile up the road; cow barn has no windows on house side; key's kept under a mustard box on the window-sill. Baker took his gun to Bridgeton Saturday to get her cleaned. Not a bit of danger, and I'll explain to 'em to-morrow. Back in no time."

So, jerking out his words with gestures as mysterious as if he were going to commit a desperate crime, 'Lisha went out through the back hallway, lest opening the front door should let in too much air.

He had no sooner gone than Gilbert's whole attitude changed. Settling the little girl comfortably on his knees, he began to scrutinize her clothing carefully, babbling a string of baby talk that would have been almost unintelligible to the uninitiated, but that seemed very soothing and reassuring to the child, who, after wriggling for a few minutes, as though determined to get to her feet, suddenly discovered Gilbert's beard, which he had knotted up to get it out of the way of the cooking. It was fastened with a large shell hairpin that he had probably picked up in the post-office. Fascinated by this unusual object, she clutched at it

with both hands, gave a crow of delight, and began jerking up and down on his knee as if riding on a hobby-horse, treating Gilbert's beard as its mane. Next spying the puppy on the floor, she stiffened herself and prepared to slide down to him.

"All right," crooned Gilbert. "Let's see if the little lammy can stand? Yes, but not so very well," he added, as, after taking a single step, she doubled up and almost sat on the pup.

"Now we'll sit her on the lounge to play with doggy, while daddy gets her bed fixed."

The word "daddy" slipped from his lips unconsciously, as he pulled the high-backed sofa out from the wall and propped the child up with some husk pillows and a comforter. Then he stole across to the bedroom where, after choosing a key from the chain that was fastened to his pocket, he unlocked a high chest of drawers still keeping his eye on the lounge and its occupants.

"She's somewhere about a year, I reckon," he said, talking to himself, after the fashion of those who are much alone. "She's bigger than Marygold was at fourteen months, but not so clever on her feet. As for talking, they're something alike; Marygold only said 'Daddy' and 'Puss,' and I guess I can piece out some words from what *she* says when I get the time. Wow-wow means dog plain enough. I must get her undressed before 'Lisha comes back; he's all right, but too rough in his ways for handling a lady baby, and that's what the little one is."

Having taken some clothes from the drawers,—a pair of knitted socks, a little night-dress of yellow shaker flannel, and a quilted wrapper in gay-flowered print, all smelling of camphor and their long, pent-up years in the chest,—he spread them on a chair by the stove to air and warm.

Meanwhile, the child had nestled back among the pillows and was half dozing, the puppy clasped tight in her arms. Going once more to the bedroom, Gilbert stood a moment before the quaint hooded cradle, made up ready for occupancy from spread to pilch, the cradle from out of which he himself had gazed alternately at the leaves on the wall paper and the leaves against the sky, dreaming in knowledge after the manner of babies. Then lifting the cradle, he carried it into the kitchen, negotiating the doorway with difficulty, for his burden was heavy and the rockers wide of angle to prevent the overthrow of the occupant. Pushing his hand between the sheets and finding them clammy to the touch, he pulled them off and brought others from the inexhaustible chest.

Then came the undressing of the lady baby herself, which was done as dexterously as a woman might, for Gilbert's fingers, used to the handling of mere specks of machinery, did not fumble with strings, buttons, or the intricacies of shield pins. Moreover, memory crept into his finger-tips and guided the almost-forgotten task, even as feet that once have trodden a daily path, returning to it in the dark, after the lapse of a lifetime, follow each rise and fall.

Piling the clothes she had worn upon the table, he held the little feet in his big, rough palm, warming them, rocking gently the while. With a sleepy friendliness, the child nestled to him; then, twisting as though something pressed uncomfortably on her flesh, pushing her hand into the neck of the knitted shirt that Gilbert had left on for extra warmth, she began tugging at something, looking into his face and patting his hand as if to ask his help.

"What is it, lammy? A tight string that chokes? Let daddy feel."

Drawing up a chain of intricate links, his fingers closed upon a thin locket or watch, he could not tell which, as it would not open. He unfastened the chain and put it with the heap of clothes, as the door opened and 'Lisha, fairly blue with the cold, some of which rushed in with him, returned with the milk. The trip from the Brooks farm had cooled it sufficiently to make it palatable and this time the child took a long drink, sighing with satisfaction when she paused for breath, with her four tiny teeth clenched on the thick china cup to prevent its being taken away.

Then with unmistakable gestures, she asked that the puppy might also have some. She sat blinking and keeping her eyes open with difficulty watching until his little elastic stomach began to grow heavy, and rummaging a bit of carpet into a sort of nest, he settled for the night, half under the stove. This did not suit the lady baby; she wished to hold the puppy and began to show a decided bit of temper, until Gilbert, lifting her from the lounge, carried her on his shoulder to the bedroom, saying, "Hold crying a minute, lammy, 'til daddy sees what he can find in the drawer. Yes, I thought it was here;" and the child, hugging a rag doll flat faced and faded, allowed herself to be tucked into the cradle without a murmur, and fell into natural sleep, the deep hood of the cradle completely shutting off the light.

'Lisha gave a sigh of relief that was almost tragic. "She's safe off to sleep and we ain't dropped her, nor broke her, thank the Lord! Well, Gilbert, what do you think?" and the giant, spreading his hands behind him, backed toward the stove.

"Think? Why, I reckon, after Marygold, she's the sweetest little one I ever set eyes on, and in some ways she's remarkably like her, 'specially the way she sets her chin,—"

"Great snakes! I don't mean that," snorted 'Lisha. "How do you think she come here? Who brought her and why? Don't it strike you as anything unusual that a child of her age, all togged out fine, should be left on a porch in the middle of a perishing cold night?"

"Of course, of course, 'Lisha, it's unusual, and I reckon that's half the reason that I've been in a daze ever since; that, and feeling something warm and small on my knee. Now she's safe and asleep, it's our duty to investigate and let her people know her whereabouts soon as I've made up the morning mail. Draw up to the table and we'll find if there's any marks on her clothes.

"To my thinking, it's a case of kidnapping," Gilbert continued, "either for money, or perhaps spite. Even parents do queer things to outface each other sometimes. Oh, you needn't shake your head, I *know*; there's a chance to see a deal of life in a post-office.

"Whoever was making away with the lady baby likely got scared, or was sorry for the job, so left her here in a public place where she'd be soon found."

"Where'd they come from *last*?" persisted 'Lisha, but received no answer, as Gilbert was examining each garment, fingering them carefully, inch by inch, and though 'Lisha did likewise, no marks of any sort, not even an embroidered initial, could they discover.

The large locket of heavily chased gold, the pattern much worn on the sides, after many efforts at prying, at last flew open, purely by accident when its secret spring was touched. Within, the picture of a young woman seemed to look so directly in their faces, that both men exclaimed. The face was that of a girl of eighteen or nineteen. Dark brows and lashes guarded large hazel eyes, the nose was a trifle tip-tilted, and this, together with the parted lips, gave the impression that she was about to speak, while a very firm chin lent decision to the youthful roundness of the face. Exquisitely shaded hair, in tints of gold, copper, and ash, curved back from the broad forehead, and was loosely braided and coiled about the small head, while resting lightly, half sidewise on the braids, was a wreath of poppies, not the flaming oriental flowers that suggest sensuous drowsiness, but delicate, rosy-flushed blossoms with petals frail as the wings of a night moth.

The two men did not analyze the face that looked frankly into theirs, they only knew that it was beautiful. Presently, the light caught upon the inside of the cover of the locket showing, imperfectly, letters engraved thereon.

"Get me my watch-glass from the work bench," said Gilbert, his hands trembling with expectation. But this revealed only a single word and date,—"Poppea—1850."

"Poppea! what's that, a place?" asked 'Lisha, turning the locket this way and that in the hope of finding more.

"It's a woman's name if I remember rightly, and I think I've met it in Mr. Plutarch's book or some history. The wife of one of the Cæsars or some one of importance. I'll look it up to-morrow. Anyway, the picture is done on ivory like the one of Miss Felton's mother that she wears in a brooch. Some said it was only made of tea-cup china, so one day, when she was waiting for me to weigh a package, I made bold to ask, and she said, 'No, Mr. Gilbert, it is painted on ivory and is a work of art.' So I judged only the well-to-do can lay claim to this sort, which carries out what I say, as I did before, the lady baby has been kidnapped. Now lets us turn in. You go in my room and I'll take the shake-down on the lounge and keep a watch on the lady baby."

'Lisha, pulling himself stiffly to his feet to obey, stumbled over the corner of the buffalo-robe that had been pushed under the table and remained unnoticed.

"I wonder if this thing has anything to tell on the subject," he said, spreading it wrong side up on the floor and scrutinizing the patched and faded lining slowly.

"Look here, Gilbert! Just look at that patch there in the northeast corner, that piece of felt with moon and star figgers on it! 'Long about Christmas, Dr. Morewood was up at the farm in a sleigh from the stable at Westboro, his own being in the shop for new irons. He'd throwd the robe over his horse, and it slipping off, it got trampled, so he asked mother to take a stitch in it. But the hole being big, she threw in a hasty patch made from the end of an old table cover that had been in our setting room since I was knee high to a toad. What you're looking at is that patch."

"You'd reckon the party that brought the child had a team from Beers's stable then," said Gilbert, now all eagerness. "If so, why didn't we hear the rumble of it on the ice, and how would they account for the robe when they got back?"

"As for the team, it might have been a sleigh with hushed bells; we fellows up our way often fix them like that when we want to take the girls out riding on the sly and the old folks asleep. As for their going back, yer running on too fast; that's to be found to-morrow. That we've got a clew right here's enough for you now. One o'clock! Great snakes! it's to-morrow right now, and me due up home to milk at six and you to pack up the first mail down. Say, Gilbert, don't you want me to stop at Mis' Pegrim's as I go up and hustle her down for the day until this child business is settled up? You'll have your hands overflowin', what with her and it and all the people that'll be in ponderin' and advisin'."

"Well," replied Gilbert, his hands working nervously, as he twisted and untwisted the long beard from which the lady baby had pulled the pin, "under the circumstances, I guess it'll be best, and I'd be obliged if you'd hook up and fetch her yourself. 'Tisn't necessary for her to stop and talk to every fence post on the way, either. As to the locket, that's most likely *her* mother's picture; we'll keep quiet about it, lest, being valuable, it's wrongly claimed."

Soon comfortable snores sounded from the inner room. Gilbert, wrapping a quilt about him, lay down upon the lounge without undressing. Sleep would not come; instead, scenes and people of long ago flitted through the room as across a stage; the wind from chimney, keyholes, and window-sash supplying speech. Presently the light of the old moon, that would loiter in the west until after sunrise, crept in the window through the geraniums and reaching out long fingers toward the cradle, seemed to Gilbert's burning eyes to draw it from him. Getting up, he looked at the child, rosy with sleep, still clasping Marygold's faded doll, turned the cradle once more into the shadow, and kneeling by it with his arms clasped over the hood, half thought, half whispered, "I can't tell how or why, only that a child is here, but if to make up for my home-staying, as he wrote, this is that other wrong for me to right at my own door,—I thank Thee, Lord!" Then quickening the dying fire, Gilbert finished his vigil before it in Mary's rocking-chair.

CHAPTER III

THE NEXT DAY

Mrs. Jason Pegrim needed no urging in the matter of making haste to go to her brother's assistance. During the nine years that she had lived in her farm-house on the hill, her one desire had been to get back to the village, and ever since her brother had been appointed postmaster she had spent many sleepless nights in fruitless schemes for bringing it to pass. For if the clock-maker's little shop had been a place of social opportunities to the alert widow, how much wider a field could she find in the post-office?

Now the opportunity had almost dropped out of a dream, as she told 'Lisha Potts, when she hurried to admit him in the early dawn, her toilet being so far from complete that hairpins bristled from her mouth and rendered still more incoherent her announcement. "There now, and folks say there's nothing in dreams! To be sure, the man in my dream last night that came to price the heifer was dark and you're sandy, and while I went to lead her out, he stole my best spoons out of the clock-case, and slipped out of the back door, which, of course, no Potts would do, even in a dream. But where it comes out true is that a man did come, which is a matter for thankfulness, the first that's opened that gate in a week."

As 'Lisha explained his errand, his native shrewdness making him tell as little as possible, brief as the time was, Mrs. Pegrim finished the securing of the doorknob coil of hair at the back and freed her tongue for better action.

"Brother Oliver has his hands full and wants me to come down and help him out for a week? You're sure he doesn't feel sick and doesn't want to allow it? Or mebbe he's minded to get the spring cleaning done early; if so, he's too forehanded, for March cleaning won't hold over till fall, not but what I'm glad to go down and get three miles nearer to the news."

While her tongue flew, her hands and feet were not idle, for, shoving 'Lisha before her into the kitchen, Mrs. Pegrim quickly assembled a pick-up breakfast, of which she motioned him to eat in expressive pantomime, while continuing her questions.

"Do you reckon he'll want me for more than a week? If I thought he would, I'd put in my Sunday pelerine, but if not, I'd hate to muss it. Didn't specify any length of time, only said fetch her down? That's like a man. Anyhow, I'll tell neighbor Selleck to feed my fowls and the cow and heifer until he hears contrary, besides which, you'll have to get him to milk for you this morning if you're going to drive me down. Oliver must be in some sort of strait if you can't even wait to milk and do your chores first."

Having packed a capacious carpet-bag, drawn down the gayly painted paper window-shades, emptied and dried the tea-kettle, and made sure that not an ash was at large on the hearth, for she still cooked in the open chimney over a bed of wood embers by the aid of pot hook, crane, and trammel, Satira joined 'Lisha at the table and poured herself a cup of coffee. She had barely raised it to her lips when she set it down so suddenly that the coffee splashed upon her cherry-colored bonnet strings.

"'Lisha Potts," she adjured solemnly, "I know what it is! Oliver is going to take a second and he wants me to put things in shape! And why shouldn't he if he wishes? He's got a tidy sum laid by and a trade and a position under government. Of course I'll go and help him, not but what a widow must feel, losing her only brother twice, so to speak, but if I suspicioned who she is, I could ride down easier, and resign my spirits better if I knew it wasn't widow Baker."

"It isn't marrying anybody, so you're way off the track. It's just unexpected company that Oliver ain't got time to entertain suitable, and the quicker we get down there, the sooner you'll know all about it," said 'Lisha, indulging in what for him was a wild flight of fancy.

After the Sellecks had received instructions as to her live stock, Satira Pegrim relapsed into a silence that lasted for almost a mile.

"How much company is there?" asked Satira, launching the question suddenly in the hope of taking 'Lisha unawares.

"Two!" he replied, a gleam of amusement flitting across his grim visage.

"Males or females?"

"One of each."

"Married couple?"

"Nope."

"Brother and sister?"

"I reckon not."

"Just friends, then?"

"I guess you've hit it now, pretty near, though I should call them two down to Gilbert's more sort of travelling companions that was on the way to growin' real friendly." More than this, Satira Pegrim could not extract, and she contented herself by weaving romance about the unknown couple, paying no attention to the beauty of the morning, wherein every ice-covered twig glistened in the sun.

'Lisha pulled up at the post-office-house door, and after steering Mrs. Pegrim carefully along the slippery path to the side porch, having suddenly made up his mind to stay down at the village for another day, he led the horse and bobbing two-wheeled chaise to Gilbert's barn that stood at the end of the lot against the high bank that made John Angus's boundary.

The side door being open, Mrs. Pegrim went in without knocking, found no one in either kitchen, bedroom, or pantry, though the general confusion told its own story; as she almost fell over the cradle, its bedding tumbled about as if to air, the last straw was added to the mystery. With a gasp, combined of suppressed speech and astonishment, she seized her bag and going up to the room over the kitchen that she had previously occupied, donned a gown of stout indigo print, and throwing over head and shoulders a wonderful shawl of her own knitting, a marvellous blend of gray and purple stripes, resolutely crossed the passage between house and post-office, and entering by the workshop door, peered through into the office in an effort to see without being seen.

An unusual number of men for the time of the morning when chores are most pressing stood about the stove, while two women, one being the objectionable widow Baker, were actually holding an animated conversation with Gilbert through the delivery window of the beehive, standing a-tiptoe in their endeavors to see some object within the sacred precinct. At the same time Mrs. Baker exclaimed—"The darling!" in a wheezy tone that was meant to be confidential.

To the searching eye of his sister, Gilbert looked completely unnerved. His hair, usually so sleek and divided low over the left ear, stood on end; his beard was buttoned under his collarless blue flannel shirt, giving his face a curiously

chopped-off appearance, while his hands shook as he fumbled with the letters, and he continually cast furtive glances behind him.

Finally, Satira Pegrim made a dive through the group of men, and, without appearing to see the women, slipped through the door at the back of the sorting bench, only to trip over a soft something on the floor, and suddenly find herself kneeling and very much jarred upon the edge of a bright patchwork quilt, in the centre of which sat the lady baby, alternately feeding herself and the puppy with a thick slice of bread which she held butter side down. In the dull morning light, the child looked more pathetic than pretty, for she had an unmistakable snuffly cold, and a pair of tears that had been quivering on her long lashes rolled down her cheeks as she looked up at Mrs. Pegrim.

The puppy gave a shrill bark and began to play tug-of-war with a corner of the cherished shawl. At the sound Gilbert turned, a look of infinite relief spreading over his face when he saw his sister.

"Thank the Lord you've come," he jerked out over his shoulder as he handed widow Baker ten three-cent stamps that she had bought merely to prolong the interview. "Take 'em right back to the house and I'll come over soon as I can. She's got a cold and is wheezy; if you can't fix her up, I calculate 'Lisha'd better go for the doctor."

"Yes, I will, Oliver; the minute I set eyes on her it flashed through me, lard and nutmeg, on the chest, that's what she needs. But who *be* they, 'nd how'd they come here without parents is what I'd like to know; that is, the child, I mean, for lots of puppies don't have any."

"That's what we don't know and have got to find out. Didn't 'Lisha explain?"

"Not a word, only rigmarolled about company."

"'Lisha," called Gilbert to the backwoodsman, who had now come in, "will you go over home with sister Pegrim? She wants to talk to you 'bout last night."

"I reckon if it isn't against the law, I'd ruther step in there and dish out the rest of them letters," said 'Lisha; so brother and sister, the lady baby muffled in the quilt, and wow-wow nipping at the heels of Gilbert's carpet slippers, went together.

The door had no sooner closed behind them than the men began questioning 'Lisha all together, propounding their theories of the event before which the war

news had temporarily paled; for never, even in the memory of Selectman Morse, the oldest of them, had a baby been abandoned in the township,—much less a well-grown child of a year.

Mr. Morse, in view of his position, appointed two of the men present to take up the clew; for in these good old days of New England, the First Selectman was virtually mayor of the township and was so chosen.

'Lisha, by reason of his being the first to discover the child, was deputed to go to the stable at Westboro with the buffalo-robe, after which the course of the search would depend upon what the stableman could tell.

"Gilbert, are you willing that the child should stay here while we investigate?" the Selectman asked when the postmaster returned and 'Lisha had driven off to Westboro; "or would you rather she were handed over to proper authorities right now?"

"Who might those be?" asked Gilbert, by way of reply.

"Well, now, that raises a question of some moment," said the Selectman, fitting the tips of his fingers together precisely and making a flywheel of his thumbs, at the same time adjusting his upper teeth in place with a clicking sound. That it was the wandering disposition of these teeth that had prevented their owner from becoming an orator in the cause of patriotism, he firmly believed.

"If the child's an orphan foundling, she goes to the county asylum; if merely abandoned by worthless parents, she goes to the poor-house free; while if she can be attributed to a living male parent, he must pay her board either to the town or her mother."

"It appears to me," said Gilbert, moistening his lips nervously, and dangerous gleams shooting from his keen gray eyes, "that as you don't know where to send her, and you've no authority to take her, she will stay right where she was left! And now, boys, while I'm obliged to ye all for your interest, this matter isn't federal business, nor connected with this post-office, so if there's anything to say, come 'round to the house later on and have it out. Under anything that may come out, the child is innocent, and it might come pretty hard a score of years from now if she knew she was made light of by you fellows." Gilbert's voice broke at this juncture, and the boys were looking at each other sheepishly when a team rattled up to the door and 'Lisha and Beers, the Westboro liveryman, came in together, having met at the lower end of town.

"They hired a sleigh from Beers's all right and hushed the bells," cried 'Lisha, triumphantly.

"Who?" chorused the boys.

"The man and woman who brought the child here, of course."

"I didn't say it was a man *and* a woman," put in Beers, cutting off a generous quid of tobacco and passing the remainder around, as though preparing for a social occasion that would be a strain on the juices of speech.

"This here was the way of it," he said, settling himself within easy range of the box of sawdust by the stove, while Gilbert came from the hive to lean over the case where a collection of stationery, knickknacks, cigars, and packages of lozenges was kept.

"You know how late the mail-train was last night, and how it stormed? Well, the last train was late by that much too; after waiting 'round a spell I came home and I made up my mind I wouldn't send a team over to the depot again but trust to any folks that wanted one coming over, for it was near midnight. I suppose I must have dozed off by the stove in the office, because the first thing I knew, a man stood there by the fire stamping his feet to warm them, the spring bell on the door having waked me. 'I've got off at the wrong station, intending to go on to Harley's Mills,' says he in a voice like he'd an awful cold; 'can I get a team to drive my wife over? She's at the depot.'

"'A team you can have,' says I, 'but I've not a driver I could send out to-night. What part are you going to?'

"'To the post-office,' says he. 'Maybe you'd let me put up the team there and bring it back in the morning. I'll pay you ten dollars down for security,' says he, coughing and acting tired like.

"Thinks I, this isn't any night for horse thieves and if I give him Spunky Pete, it'll be a safe risk, for he won't go but just such a ways from the stable when he balks and bolts back.

"'All right,' says I, 'what kind of a team do you want, chaise or sleigh?' He thought a minute and says, 'A sleigh'll jar less a night like this, and if you've got any old rag of a robe, just pile her in.' Well, he started off all right toward the depot, the bells jingling nice, and pretty soon I see the sleigh come back with somebody else within and go up the turnpike this way, and so I went upstairs and

turned into bed. It was after I'd got into a good first sleep when something seemed to be pounding me in a dream and I started up with wife pulling my sleeve and calling, 'There's somebody pounding away on the front stoop and yelling like mad. Do you suppose one of the mules could have broke loose?'

"'One of the mules? That's Spunky Pete and no other,' says I, tumbling into my clothes and grabbing a lantern. He always pounds and screeches that way if I don't give him his feed first of the bunch. Yes, sure enough, there was Pete pounding away on the porch. At first I thought he'd served them some trick and upset them, but when my eyes fell on the lines, I knew different; they were tied to the dash rail with a bit of string!

"That made me suspicious and I looked Pete over as I led him to the stable. For a cold night he had surely sweat more than the short run warranted. Then I noticed the bells didn't jingle—the string on the girth was gone (I found it after under the seat) and the two big ones on the shafts were hushed by being wrapped in paper. 'I wonder what's up,' says I, 'the horse has come back safe, but there's something amiss somewhere. A man doesn't give up ten dollars to ride three miles on any straight errand.' So this morning I started up to find if any company had come up to Mr. Gilbert's, and I met 'Lisha here with the buffalo, which, I declare, I hadn't missed, and he told me the rest."

"Did you keep the bits of newspaper?" asked Gilbert.

"Yes, they're down home; they're torn from *The Boston Traveller* of last Friday."

"I wonder if any one took the milk freight down last night; it carries a passenger car," ventured the Justice of the Peace. "Nobody, so far as Mr. Binks the agent saw; he loaded on some milk, but the ticket-office isn't open for that train," said 'Lisha.

"Can you describe the man?" asked the Justice of the Peace, poising his pencil.

"That's just what I've been trying to do for myself," said the liveryman. "Not suspecting anything, I wasn't particular, and he had a dark cloth cap with a chin piece that pretty well covered his mouth. He was short and thick-set, 'n' I think his eyebrows were light, but that's about all, except that he had a long scar between the two first fingers of his right hand. I noticed that when he slapped the ten-dollar note down on the table."

"He asked you how far it was to Harley's Mills Post-office?" said Gilbert. "Then

wherever they came from and whoever they are, they *meant* to leave the child here, it wasn't mere chance. Do you hear that, all?"

"Yes," answered the Justice of the Peace; "but as you've said that you have no kin that she could come from, mightn't she be of some distant kin Down East of old Curtis's, who didn't know he was dead? He'd had the office about ever since there was one and was reputed rich, you know."

Gilbert winced as though some one had rudely touched a vital spot, and then, turning to the First Selectman, said quietly: "I don't know whether it's law or not, but I think a notice should be put in the best county paper. I reckon those from whom the child was stolen should have as much chance to know of it as if one of us had found a good horse tied at his gate. Then in a month's time, if there is no clew, other plans can be made. Meantime, as it seems she was left here with intention, sister Pegrim and I will look after her."

"That's well said—liberal too, for a man of your years—with prices what they are—" were some of the comments.

"That'll do for the present," said the First Selectman, gathering his gray long-shawl about him and steadying himself with his cane; "but we have a mystery among us for the first time, boys, and we must not treat it lightly. If Mr. Allan Pinkerton was not at this time needed by Mr. Lincoln, I should vote that we put the case before him."

Then, led by 'Lisha Potts, who announced that he was going to finish the day by asking a few questions at the Bridgeton station, the group, having already shortened their working day by a couple of hours, drifted away.

Oliver Gilbert watched them go, and mechanically took his seat before the sorting table. He was dizzy from lack of sleep and the rush of many emotions that he had almost forgotten he had ever felt before, blended with others wholly new. His life had been slow in blossoming, the crippled hip from his very childhood had kept him aloof and apart. Then he had lived in the full for three years and twilight again fell around him; for a while he had struggled against it, and then, as the neighbors said, "become resigned." Now, everything was upheaved; work, his consoler, lay on the bench untouched; the sun melted the ice from the halyards, and yet he did not go to raise the flag of victory where it must be seen from John Angus's windows. The hour struck and then the next before noon; he did not even remember that he had not eaten breakfast. Presently the outer door opened and a pair of small, heavily shod feet clumped across to the

delivery-window, through which their owner could not look, even on tiptoes, and after waiting for a few moments, the piping voice of a boy of six or so called, "It's me, Mr. Gilbert. I've come over to see your little girl, please."

Gilbert started from his revery and came toward the voice. "Oh, it's you, is it, Hughey, and who told you about her, pray?"

"Nobody told me 'xactly, but I heard Mr. Morse telling father and mother, and I asked her if I might come right down, and she said yes. You see, there wasn't any school this morning because it was too slippery, but now it's all wet. Broken for spring, father says. See my new rubber-boots, Mr. Gilbert; all red inside," and he held up one sturdy leg.

"As it's so close on to noon I guess I'll shut up, and we'll go in together and see little missy. Isn't this about the time of day for a barley stick, sonny?" said the postmaster, taking one from the glass case as he passed.

The kitchen was in its usual order; a boiled dinner was under way on the stove, beneath which the puppy slept, while Mrs. Pegrim sat mending some socks with the rocker drawn up close to the lounge upon which the lady baby was enthroned and playing gayly with a string of spools. When she saw Gilbert, she dropped them and tried to roll off the sofa to her feet.

"No, no!" said Mrs. Pegrim, pleasantly but decidedly, "it's too cold down there for little girls." Her face flushed, puckered up to cry; then, for some reason, she changed her mind and held out her arms.

"So she knows daddy already, does she?" crooned Gilbert, "and here's a little boy come to see her, the very first caller. Satira, this is Hugh Oldys from the Mills—Richard Oldys's boy, you know."

Richard Oldys was one of the representative men of this section of New England. He had rebuilt the original Harley's Mills near the mouth of the Moosatuck, for which the town had been named, and made them a great distributing centre of flour and all grains. The land had come down to his wife, whose mother had been a Harley and was, therefore, kin of the Misses Felton, who also had Harley blood in the female line. While a man of less wealth than John Angus, Oldys was so much more liberal with it, so much broader in his sympathies and culture, that nothing of importance was undertaken in the community without his advice and sanction. As for his wife,—in that clannish and conservative little town, almost old-world-like in its simplicity and loyalty to tradition,—it was a belief that a real Harley could do no wrong. Coupled with this, Pamela Oldys was a rare woman, almost too highly keyed to the needs and wishes of others for her own peace, and wrapped up in this boy Hugh, the only child that her frail health had allowed her.

Hugh surveyed the lady baby in silence for a moment, and then gravely shook her hand, saying, "How do you do?" A crow came from the prettily curved lips by way of answer, and she began a sort of game of peek-a-boo, covering her face with her hands and then peeping out. Evidently she had lived among responsive people.

"I suppose God sent her the same as usual," remarked Hugh, in the most matter-

of-fact way. "She's nice and big though, being so new; they're mostly blinky and queer at first, like kittens. We've never had a baby at our house; they often have them next door, but not as nice as this one."

At this moment the puppy spied Hugh's rubber-boots that had been left at the door, and made a dash for them, for if there is anything a young dog loves, it is either shoe leather or shoe rubber.

"Hi! there's a puppy. Is it yours, Mr. Gilbert? I had a puppy once and it died, and father's going to buy me one of a better kind next Christmas. I'll be seven then. There's so many cats around the mill that I hope they won't scratch its eyes out."

"That pup belongs to the lady baby," answered Gilbert, who was now brushing his tousled hair in front of the mirror over the sink.

"Did it come with her?" asked Hugh, eagerly.

"It surely did; she had it right in her little arms," answered Gilbert, busy with a collar button and not thinking ahead.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Hugh, clapping his hands, "for now I know that if dogs come from heaven, they must go back there too, and I was afraid that my puppy would be dreadful lonely if he couldn't go where there were little boys and girls, for he just loved them."

Satira Pegrim looked at her brother with a horrified expression. Her lips opened to speak, but something that she saw in his face made her close them again. Whatever her feelings as a hard-shell Baptist upon the future state of dogs might be, she did not propose to shorten her visit to her brother by expressing them.

"Have they got names yet?" asked Hugh, his attention now embarrassingly divided between the lady baby and the pup.

"No, sonny; that is, I'm not plumb sure, so I'm going to take time, say until along about the first of the month, to think out a name for the lady baby. As for the pup, suppose you help me out with that. Think up all the names that's short and slick, and then we'll have a choosing bee."

"Dinner is ready," called Mrs. Pegrim from the pantry, where she was slicing bread. "Won't you set up to the table, Hugh, and eat with us?"

"I think I'd better go home now, mother didn't say anything about dinner. Next

time I come, I'm going to bring you something, lady baby," Hugh said, gently kissing the dimpled hand she thrust into his face, "and byme by, when you can walk, I'll bring you up to my house to see my mother and lend you part of her, 'cause you've only got a daddy."

"That's just it, at best there'll only be a daddy," murmured Gilbert, drawing his chair to the table and eating as in a dream, in which the wording of the notice for the papers was the chief theme, until he was roused by a spoon pounding his hand vigorously, and found that the child was seated close beside him in Marygold's high-chair, her eyes fastened on his face.

"Look a-here now, Oliver," said Satira Pegrim, resting her arms on her elbows, with knife and fork raised in midair; "I've been thinking, suppose'n the Oldys took a fancy to adopt her. Wouldn't that square up everything for everybody just right? For it's plain to see that Hugh's just achin' for a sister."

Again the forbidding expression settled on Gilbert's face, but Satira did not see it until too late.

"Mrs. Pegrim, I don't know just how long you may be called to visit here, but longer or shorter, recollect one thing, you'll have no call to *think* about my business nor to *talk* about it to me, but just to keep quiet."

"Don't you want me to visit or have speech with the neighbors?" pleaded Satira, her cheery voice dropping to a ludicrous whimper, as the vision of social cups of tea flavored by neighborhood gossip began to fade.

"I don't ask anybody to do what they manifestly according to nature can't; I said *me*!" retorted Gilbert, about whose long forefinger the lady baby had gripped her hand as a bird clings to its perch.

CHAPTER IV

THE FELTONS

A month crept by with warm rains at the end of it, and the spring called the blood back to the pale tree-tops with a bound.

Though the people of Harley's Mills did not by any means hibernate in woodchuck fashion during winter, they did conserve their forces after the habits of their thrifty forebears and did not light or heat any more of their usually ample houses than was absolutely necessary. A strong tie of kinship threaded the whole community. The stately residents of Quality Hill and Westboro Road were often second and third cousins of the owners of the lonely hill farms, of the blacksmith at the cross-roads, or the joiner and carpenter, whose correct eye and a self-taught course of mechanical drawing enabled him to supply plans when required. Nor did this carpenter think it necessary to call himself an architect and builder, as he would to-day, in order to back his claims to consideration.

No one was jealous because the Misses Felton, year after year, went to New York after Thanksgiving, and returned via the South late in May. Rather were their doings a sort of general stimulant and tonic, administered in regular doses through the letters that Miss Emmy Felton wrote weekly to pretty little Mrs. Latimer, the Episcopal minister's wife, who had a love of life beyond the radius of eight hundred a year, while Miss Felton herself was in constant communication with her steward, Wheeler, as to every detail of the management of the place, so that all Harley's Mills knew exactly what to expect before it happened.

With the other wealthy landowner of the town the conditions were wholly different. When John Angus left his house for travel or the city, the gates were closed as far as knowledge of him was concerned. Ever since he had come home to take the property at his father's death, twelve years before, he had been a builder of barriers, not only between himself and those he thought beneath him, but he hedged himself with ceremony in his own household, his own inflexible will being his universal measure, and every act being in accord with a fixed plan. If, in his dislikes, he was deliberate and inexorable, those who knew him said that it was the same with his passions; in nothing had he the saving grace of

spontaneity. Small wonder that his roseleaf wife withered by his side until some final shock, too strong for her endurance, swept her away to die in oblivion.

Thus the news came to Harley's Mills not only that the Feltons would return the middle of April because the disturbed state of the South had made their usual journey impossible, but that John Angus, who had been running up at odd times all the month, was going to remodel his place for the reception of his bride in June; while following on the heels of this report, house-painters, paperers, masons, and a landscape-gardener came to confirm it. So it fell out that, for a time, the lady baby, who remained unclaimed at Oliver Gilbert's, became a thing of secondary interest to every one but the postmaster and Satira Pegrim, until the full month having gone, the village was again excited, this time by the news that Gilbert had taken the final steps toward adopting the child.

Immediately several impromptu debating societies of villagers took up the merits of the case for and against the adoption. The women of the Hospital Aid Society vowing, as they rolled bandages and scraped lint, that a man of Gilbert's age was no fit guardian for a female child, especially as Satira Pegrim might be relied on to take her second at any time he should come to hand, which might easily happen in a post-office, and leave her brother in the lurch.

The men did their talking in the blacksmith's shop, a place where Gilbert was not likely to appear suddenly, their objections being impersonal and based chiefly on the fact that it wasn't a good plan to encourage the leaving of stray children on people's stoops, also that the presence of the mysterious child might be prejudicial to his official position; next the three ministers of the town, Episcopal, Congregational, and Methodist, had all made friendly calls at the post-office house and asked, according to their different methods, whether Gilbert recognized the responsibility he was contemplating. Meanwhile, in the thick of the discussion, the Misses Felton and Mr. Esterbrook arrived. Not all together, it is true, for Miss Emmy, being a trifle delicate and disliking the mixed air, crowds, and jolting of the cars, always drove from New York in the family carriage, a spacious landau, lined with rose satin and swung high upon C springs, the journey of fifty odd miles being broken for luncheon and a change of horses, the sedate family grays having been sent on to this point the day previous. Mr. Esterbrook accompanied Miss Emmy on this excursion; Nora, maid and general factotum, making the third.

As for Miss Felton, this means of progress was too slow. She took the train with the other maids and Caleb, the colored man-servant; but even this method of

progression was far from rapid, as the cars were pulled singly by horses from the station in East Twenty-sixth Street, a little above the Feltons' house on Madison Square, through Fourth Avenue until, the press of traffic left behind, the cars were united and an engine attached. Still, journey as they might, the family group that parted after breakfast in the great high-ceiled house facing the square would meet at a flower-decked supper table in a new and healthier atmosphere, without hurry or disarrangement, so harmonious was Miss Felton's housekeeping in the subduing of annoying details.

Not to understand the component parts of the household that lived, or, one might almost say, reigned, at Felton Manor would be to have little understanding of the conditions of the life and surroundings into which the lady baby bid fair to be adopted. The Felton ladies were Bostonians by birth and education, their father having been a prominent judge. Failing of sons, he had, after being some years a widower, virtually adopted and educated a cousin's son to be his confidential secretary, and afterward appointed him in his will as a sort of guardian and adviser to his daughters, who were left at the respective ages of eighteen and twenty with a large property for those days. This man was William Esterbrook, ten years the senior of Elizabeth Felton.

When Squire Felton died, the combination household continued as before, except that the Boston house was given up for one in New York, as the east winds were bad for Miss Emmy's throat. Miss Felton, however, took her Aunt Lucretia's place at the helm. Strangers sometimes remarked upon the peculiarity of the household arrangements, where William Esterbrook, in a house not his own, filled the old-world position of guardian over attractive and marriageable wards. The family friends, however, saw nothing more than a brotherly and sisterly arrangement, and this was the view that the trio thought they held themselves. The real fact was that the kinship, so remote as to be merely a shadow, had kept them all three from leading the normal life that was their due.

Twenty years had passed, years full of event and social intercourse with the best that either came to or lived in the land, and still it was the Misses Felton that bought a picture from a rising but struggling artist; gave the young poet or musician a chance to be heard; entertained the sedate at dinner or the opera, and, though they no longer joined in it, gave the young a chance to dance in their great rooms, or sit out the dances on stairs or in the trim conservatory. For, motherless and young as they had been at the time of their father's death, they realized the true social and moral responsibility of their wealth. Miss Felton was independent, I had almost said masculine, of action; without being brusque, she

was direct and to the point, comprehended financial questions, and had an accurate judgment in real estate. Tall and of elegant proportions, she wore dark rich silks of simple lines, a plain linen collar and brooch, while her splendid hair, without a thread of gray, was drawn loosely over the ears and braided close to her head. She did not seem to make any exertion to follow the fashions, and yet was always distinguished.

Miss Emmy, having been the younger, and the pet of her father in addition, was of the spontaneous, romantic, and feminine type that, while it seems very yielding, has quite fixed ideas. She was but a trifle above medium height, with large gray eyes and light brown hair, that at forty was either heaped high in puffs, gathered in a netted "waterfall" at the back of her head, or let loose in a shower of ringlets as the whim of the moment required. She loved everything dainty, in people as well as in clothes; her skirts rippled with ribbons and lace as she trailed slowly along, her sunshades were of the daintiest, and her flowery hats bits of art that almost defied nature. Lyric music was her passion, and in spite of her years she still had a pretty voice, quite the size for ballads. Small wonder that between these two opposites William Esterbrook, who, though of somewhat superfine tastes combined with an undeveloped sense of responsibility, was still a man, stood undecided.

Twenty years before, his interests had centred upon Miss Felton, and together they had regarded pretty, kittenish Emmy as a child, a plaything. This aspect soon ceased, when Emmy, coming into the social world, had taken the sedate man of thirty-two for her cavalier quite as a matter of course, and alternately bullied him and turned to him in every strait. Once only he had come face to face with his manhood and resolved to make the plunge and propose to Emmy, but an over-estimate of the effect it might have upon Elizabeth held him back, and so the three had drifted through the best years of life, loyal to each other, yet too supremely and evenly comfortable to ever know the highest happiness.

If the trio had been separated even by a season of travel, they might have discovered their real selves, for absence is often quite necessary to give the perspective for rightly judging the feelings and relations with one another.

Six months before, the fire of war had entered Esterbrook's veins, and he, the veteran of a militia regiment, had almost broken away to join a company of his old comrades as a minor officer; but even here he was rebuffed and turned back by something wrong with his heart action that his physician discovered at the last moment. Consequently, at fifty odd, William Esterbrook, whom Miss Emmy

called Willy, and Miss Felton, cousin Esterbrook, though a very well-preserved man, who had no need as yet to use either hair tonic or other toilet accessories, was possessed by a sort of self-consciousness and a certain agitated courtesy of manner.

A married man of this age usually has relaxed his tension through natural processes; a confirmed bachelor, living in his own apartments, takes his ease because there is nothing to goad him to do otherwise; but for Esterbrook, he was still living in the play that had absorbed his youth without realizing that it was a play, and sometimes he was horribly bored.

In personal appearance he had a style quite his own. At a time of beards and many whiskers, low collar, and loose tie, he kept a clean-shaven face and still affected a modified stock. His coat—except in the evening, a Prince Albert—had a decided waist line; he wore spats that broke the plainness of the customary high boots of the time, and his taste in waistcoats was as refined as it was fanciful. After all, it was the hat that was the most distinguishing characteristic of his apparel. This was of the softest beaver, brushed until it shone like silk; the crown of moderate height was belled out at the top and the brim curled well at the sides. In the crown of this he invariably carried his right-hand glove, the left being always in place and neatly buttoned. This habit came of the old-time courtesy of either removing the glove when shaking hands with ladies or apologizing for its presence. Once Esterbrook had removed the glove with graceful ceremony before extending his well-shaped hand. Now?—well, he was a bit weary of manners and customs, so that the offending glove lived in his hat.

About ten o'clock on the morning after the Feltons' arrival Miss Emmy and Mr. Esterbrook were seen walking on the road that ran from Quality Hill down to Westboro. Many heads looked out of windows and nodded, and not a few hands were extended over gates by way of greeting, together with bits of local news, either offered at random or for exchange.

"Had the ladies heard of the lady baby left at old Oliver Gilbert's, and his preposterous idea of keeping her?" asked the farrier's wife, who had been one of the many helpers who had married from Felton Manor.

"Had they seen Miss Marcia Duane, John Angus's intended, and was she as handsome and rich as folks said? Able to wind him, who had never before bent head or knees, around her little finger? And if so, why did she take a man old enough to be her father?"

"Why?" said Mr. Esterbrook, with his jauntiest air. "John Angus and myself are nearly of an age, and I'm not yet out of the running."

"Oh! Mr. Esterbrook, present company is always suspected, and then I'm sure no one ever thinks how old *you* are; you've always been just the same," said the farrier's wife.

Yes, always the same, a house cat by the fire; the bitter thought flashed through his brain, yet the next moment he was stooping courteously to disentangle Miss Emmy's parasol from the fringe of her silk mantilla. Then they proceeded along the street, Miss Emmy's full skirt of gray chiné silk, with its bordered flounces of pink roses, rustling as it swung about her, buoyed out by many petticoats, for this dainty lady followed the fashion without the use of what she considered the unnecessary vulgarity of a harsh and unmanageable hoop-skirt.

Little Mrs. Latimer ran out to remind her friend that the Hospital Aid Society would meet at the Rectory that afternoon, and did she suppose that dear Miss Felton would come and say something to the ladies about the necessity of rolling the bandages straight, as Dr. Morewood had said that to expect an army surgeon in a hurry to use a long bandage rolled loosely on the bias, was simply to invite a lesson in profanity.

Finally the post-office was reached. Oliver Gilbert, who was at his work bench in the back shop, put down a cuckoo clock that he was tinkering with and came forward quite spryly to meet his visitors, the limp, caused in boyhood by the ill setting of a broken hip, being less noticeable than usual.

"We've come to see you first, and then to take a peep at this wonderful lady baby about whom the village is agog. That is, *I* have; Mr. Esterbrook would probably rather stay here and talk with you about the new soldier, Grant, who has come out of nowhere and is doing such great things.

"By the way, my watch has been losing time, though sister Elizabeth declares that I wind it in the dark and turn the hands backward; at any rate, it will be the better for a visit with you." Then turning to Mr. Esterbrook, who was trying to decide which of the three morning paper she should read first, "Willy, my watch, please; you have it in your pocket."

As Miss Emmy passed through the arbor to the house, she was surprised to hear the halting tap of Gilbert's footsteps behind her. "I do not need to take you from the office," she said, "for you must not forget that Mrs. Pegrim is an old friend of

mine."

""Tisn't that, but I want to know what you think of *her*."

"Hasn't she any name? I mean, haven't you decided what to call her?"

"I've pretty much made up my mind; I had to, for she's to be baptized this afternoon."

At this moment, Mrs. Pegrim, who had been chafing with impatience ever since she saw Miss Emmy go into the post-office, opened the door. By her side, standing straight and true, even though one hand clung to the woman's apron, was the lady baby.

Very scant was the greeting that Miss Emmy gave Satira Pegrim, for suddenly she picked up the child and, carrying her across the room, stood her upon the table so that their faces were upon a level, all oblivious of the fact that her mantilla had slipped from her shoulders and that the lace sunshade she had dropped had been seized by the pup, who bore it to his usual câche under the stove.

"The darling! how could any one have the heart to desert such an exquisite little creature? Positively, Mr. Gilbert, you must let us have her; I've always thought that I should adopt a young girl some day, twenty years hence, to buy pretty clothes for, after I grow too wrinkled and gray to wear pink and corn color, but I never before realized what a dear a lady baby could be. After all, it will be much nicer to watch her grow up; how surprised sister Elizabeth will be, and as for Mr. Esterbrook, I wonder what he would do if I asked him to carry her home for me."

As she leaned toward the child, who was clutching at her long pearl earrings, shaped like bunches of grapes, seeming to regard her as a new and improved species of doll, Gilbert's hand closed on Miss Emmy's arm with a grip that was by no means gentle.

"Hush!" he said almost roughly in her ear, "we don't speak about her being deserted and talk of that sort any more. None can tell when she will begin to understand. As for her being adopted by you or any one else, that's not to be. She was not left on Quality Hill; no lights were there that stormy night; there were no folks awake! She was as good as born to me. There's just three of us in this, God and her and me, and we've got to work it out between us, stand or fall."

"I could do so much more for her," Miss Emmy murmured apologetically; then

stopped, checked by the expression of his face, though she did not understand it.

"Yes, ma'am, you could and would as far as boughten things would carry, but I've held Marygold in my arms, her little fingers clasped around my neck, so I *know*, and time out of mind it's come to me that with women folks and children the *knowing* and *feeling sure* is more than the *having*."

"Miss Emmy, what is a parrotpet?" Satira Pegrim had been on pins and needles during this interview, and in seeking to cut it short, jerked out a sentence quite as irrelevant as those two that have become famous,—"There's milestones on the Dover road," and "Barneses goose was stole by tinkers."

"A paroquet is a bird, a small parrot. Don't you remember that I kept a pair until one died and the other one grew moody and bit Willy—I mean Mr. Esterbrook?" said Miss Emmy, also glad of the break in a strained situation.

"No, it isn't a bird, it's something to do with bricks. They've been carting them from sloops in Westboro Harbor up to John Angus's place this week past, and this morning, when I was raking up the leaves in the garden down beyond the apple trees, making ready to sow early radishes and lettuce, I climbed up the bank to Angus's boundary to take a look, and if the old fence wasn't gone! Half a dozen men were filling out the bank even with dirt from what was the old flower garden; the old shrubs was uptore and lying roots in air, and right at the end of what was the long path was a mountain of bricks.

"Peter Nichols, the overseer, was there, so I called out and asked him what became of the fence and said I wished I could have had some of the piney roots and garden stuff that was just tossed out for filling. He says, 'There's going to be a fine brick parrotpet instead of the fence, 'cause this here's to be a rose garden, and as for the posy roots and things, I daresn't give 'em, but later on I reckon that some of 'em'll root and sprout on the filled bank your side of the parrotpet."

"Oh, it's a parapet you mean!" exclaimed Miss Emmy; "a wall something like a fort. That proves the reports that John Angus is anxious to please his bride and let her carry out her tastes, for she has a charming rose garden at their estate on the Hudson that ends in a stone parapet overlooking the river."

"Only this one overlooks the post-office and me, though I believe they *can* see over the trees to salt water," said Gilbert, dryly; and then his frown changed to a smile, as the lady baby, tiring of her fingering inspection of Miss Emmy's ribbons, crawled to his knee with the sidewheel motion she used when she

wished to hurry, and holding her head on one side like an inquisitive bird, stretched out her arms and called "Daddy!" with unmistakable clearness.

"Mr. Gilbert, did I understand you to say that the child is to be baptized this afternoon?" asked Miss Emmy, presently, not a trace of annoyance at his rebuff remaining in her manner or voice. "Who is going to do it, and will it be here or at one of the churches? I should like to send the lady baby some of our roses; I know she will love flowers by the way her eyes follow my hat."

"Mr. Latimer is going to do it; he's coming here, Miss Emmy, and we'd be grateful for a few posies to trick out the foreroom. I reckoned to get a new paper on it before this, but it doesn't seem any season to spend for ornaments."

"Mr. Latimer, an Episcopalian? Why, I thought that you were a Congregationalist, and your wife was certainly the daughter of Mr. Moore, who used to be Methodist preacher in Bridgeton."

"That's all so, Miss Emmy; but what I'm striving at in regards to the bringing up of lady baby is to be fair and unbiassed in all things where I can. Now, Mary belonging to one of the sects in town and me to another, it seems fair to divide 'round and give this child whatever benefit there is in the third. Then, too, they've got an organ down to the 'Piscopal Church and we've only got a tuning-fork, 'cause whenever an organ is brought up, John Angus votes it down as sinful."

"Aye, aye! he still holds to Kirk o' Scotland; he's vairy serious and canty," interposed Miss Emmy, with a well-feigned accent, "for his housekeeper told that last winter, when the cook asked higher wages, he couldn't give an answer until he'd pondered it on communion sabbath, which put off the evil day four weeks."

"The child likes music," continued Gilbert, "for only yesterday, when a fiddler with a dancing bear came past and I had him in to play, she'd a crept off after him in a twinkling while Satira's back was turned, if the pup there hadn't barked and tugged her by the skirt.

"Well, I asked Mr. Latimer and explained to him, and he said, 'Why not bring her to the church after service Sunday morning,' but when I told him Marygold was named in the foreroom, then he said he'd come up. I'm not asking a company,—Satira couldn't see her way to manage,—so there'll only be jest two or three, but I'd be pleased to see you, Miss Emmy, if you're interested that far to take the

trouble."

"What is the news?" asked Miss Emmy, as she joined Mr. Esterbrook, who was walking to and fro under the maples that lined the walk opposite the post-office, a goodly quantity of their scarlet catkins decorating the wide brim of his hat.

"News? There isn't any, except that McClellan is still on his way to Richmond and there are some war bonds, 5-20's and 6-20's, going on the market that I think we should all subscribe to as far as we are able. I must speak to Elizabeth about them to-night."

Then as he raised the parasol in which there were several holes not in the original pattern and held it between her and the now really hot sun, he glanced at her face and saw, not only that it was flushed, but that it wore a wholly new expression, while the strings of her bonnet, that had been tied with a graceful precision, hung loose and bore the unmistakable print of moist fingers. Her face held Esterbrook's eyes until, unconsciously drawn, she looked up and in her turn was amazed at the sudden intensity of his usually placid countenance and the flash of his eyes as he shifted them.

"What is it? What has happened?" he said. "Has the child been temperish and vexed you, or did she pull your ribbons awry in play?"

"No, she was lovely, far too lovable;" then she paused to look over the neat picket-fence into one of the many gardens that filled the spaces between street and white-pillared porches, where tufts of golden daffodils shone like prisoned sunbeams on the lawn and single white violets, short stemmed and fragrant, huddled timidly about the roots of leafless rose-bushes in the long borders. "What has happened is that in this last hour I've been away, Willy," she said, as she made a wide-sweeping gesture, "so far away from you and Elizabeth that I almost forgot how you looked. So far that I saw quite back to things that might have been."

Emeline Felton had always been, within fixed boundaries, of a romantic and emotional disposition, but with that gesture, suggestive of the breaking of bonds, Esterbrook felt that she swept these boundaries aside.

"Was I other than I am now in those far-away days? Have I not always been the same to you? Do I not always study your interests?" Esterbrook said, again meeting her eyes that did not turn away.

"Yes, but you were different once, though not for long; since then, as you say, you've been always the same, and that's part of the matter."

"I wish that in those other days I'd had the courage to go away far enough to see if you would miss me and then haunt you until I'd made you marry me, Emeline."

"And I—I wish you had!"

Esterbrook caught his breath: "Is it too late? Am I too old to change the might have been?"

"Ah, yes; if I married, after to-day, it must be a younger man than you. Besides you could not stand the shock of telling Elizabeth, and if I told her, she might send me to bed without my supper!

"Then at our age we must consider our obligations to society; as Elizabeth puts it, how disappointed it would be if the institution known as the *Misses Felton and Mr. Esterbrook* should disintegrate! How we should be missed, we nice *safe* people! Ah, no, Willy, don't look so serious; it's only some left-over mad March Hare that has bewitched me," and Miss Emmy laughed with the same ripple in her voice as that of the bluebird on the roof of its box in the garden.

"We must not forget to be patriotic; we must hurry home to consult Elizabeth about those 6-20's you spoke of, and please, Willy, ask Wheeler to make me a nice little bouquet of roses with lace paper around it by three o'clock to-day, and tie up a box of loose flowers also. I'm going to the christening of Oliver Gilbert's lady baby."

The bonnet strings were tied as usual and the flush on her cheek had faded to its normal tint when Esterbrook next glanced at his companion, but in those few minutes he too had looked back and travelled afar, and his face changed as though he had been a ghost of himself.

CHAPTER V

THE NAMING

The Feltons, in common with their neighbors of Quality Hill, dined at one o'clock and had tea or supper, according to the heartiness of the meal, at six or half past, the village and farm folk having their mid-day meal at noon. While a number of these families kept the same hours in their winter city life, during the past four or five seasons there had been a move toward afternoon dinner at five. Dinner parties were given at even a later hour, oftentime not beginning until six, the Feltons being among those who adopted the extreme custom. So far, however, no one had brought the innovation to upset the almost historic domestic regulations of Harley's Mills.

Promptly at half-past two on this April afternoon, the carriage came around to take Miss Felton to the meeting of the Hospital Aid Society, where she was preparing to inaugurate a better system of work, the material for which was tied in a great bundle in the porch,—cotton cloth, soft unbleached muslin for bandages, and rolls of the gray blue flannel of the hue that for years after was known as army blue.

"Are you coming, Emeline? Or are you too tired after your long drive yesterday?" asked Miss Felton, as she stood before her bureau fastening a wide lace collar with the brooch to which Gilbert had referred, and then catching the folds of her India shawl with an inconspicuous pin of Scotch pebbles that blended with the fabric. Her bonnet was of finely braided straw of soft brown, the chaise-top front being filled in with geraniums of crimson velvet; the broad strings of brown watered ribbon were of the exact shade of her gown. Though the Misses Felton were but two years apart, Elizabeth, by far the handsomer of the two, dressed as a doting mother, who considers that all the daintily pretty things of life belong by right to her daughter.

Miss Emmy, who was searching for something in the many small drawers of her dressing-table, did not answer immediately, and her sister repeated the question.

"I'm not in the least tired, but I'm not going with you because I've promised dear quaint Oliver Gilbert that I will go to the christening of the mysterious lady baby

this afternoon."

"Do you think under the circumstances it is necessary? Is it not a rather public expression of our approval of what the conservative townspeople consider a very unwise action of Gilbert's?"

"It certainly is approval,—*my* approval, that is,—for really, Elizabeth, the only objection that I have to Gilbert's taking the lady baby is that it prevents me from adopting her myself. No, this isn't one of my little pleasantries, as you call them. I asked Gilbert for her and he refused. From your standpoint it may seem strange, and I have no wish to compromise you. I've come to think now that as we are both past forty and likely to remain the Misses Felton and live in one house to the end of our days, it is time that, at least, we allow ourselves to hold different opinions. It will make variety and keep us fresher, you know. See, I'm going to take the lady baby these coral beads that I wore at her age. She has precisely the colored hair and eyes to wear coral; when she looks up from under her long lashes, she might be a mer-baby, or whatever a mermaid's child should be called."

Miss Emmy chatted gayly along, nonchalantly and without the slightest air of being put out, yet Miss Felton knew that some great change had come over her volatile sister, but instead of accepting the warning in silence, she still felt called upon to chide.

"Do you think under the circumstances it is a wise thing to give ornaments to a foundling of whose antecedents we know nothing? Isn't it putting possible temptation in her way?"

"The knowing nothing is precisely what makes it right, my dear emotionless sister. As we know nothing about her, we can take it for granted that she is everything we could wish for. There, don't be vexed; you are so compounded of judgment and righteousness that you can't possibly understand people that want to do things simply because they feel that they must. Don't wait for me, but send the carriage back, please; I'm taking down some flowers."

Miss Emmy went on with her toilet, Nora lending a helping hand now and then to adjust the net of silk and beads that to-day held her curls, but so rapid and nervous were the fragile lady's movements that she had the air of a paradise bird pluming itself, and while the color her exertions spread upon her cheeks lasted, no one would have guessed her due in years by ten or fifteen.

The front yard at the post-office house was decked as for summer when Miss Emmy arrived. She had refused Nora's aid, preferring to carry her own bundles, and had a little single-handed tussle with the gate that allowed her to see in detail the row of pink conch shells, alternating with round stones freshly whitewashed, that outlined the path. While two settees, also spotless white, of the form once used in schools, set off the bit of lawn, one resting under a tall lilac bush, the other standing aimlessly in the open, as though it lacked the decision of character necessary for a choice of background, between a crab tree, the grape arbor, or the bank that rolled up to John Angus's garden. The little-used front door was open, and a pair of gigantic overshoes beside the mat told that one guest had arrived from a region where the roads were still "unsettled."

Satira Pegrim was at the door before Miss Emmy had reached the top step, and rushing out, laid hold of the boxes of flowers with one hand, while she half led, half shoved her visitor in with the other.

"Do mind your step, Miss Emmy; Oliver hasn't got the storm door off'n yet, he's been so eat up with worry this last month. Neither have I had the pluck to attack that hall tread and turn it. It's now dark figgers on light, but bein' three ply, if turned it would be light on dark and a sight fresher; so if you kin just play to see it that way, you'll ease my feelin's. Won't you step up into the best room and lay off your bunnit?

"Going to leave it on? Well, it's real handsome, and I've heard say that folks in New York keep their hats on to most all kinds of day parties, which I lay to folks not bein' as well acquainted as they are this way. Besides, there being such a heap o' ornery thievin' ones, the bunnits might get mixed or done away with if laid off'n. Still, bein' as it's right here in town, I do wish you'd loosen yours; it would seem more friendly like, and as if you was one of the family, of which the good Lord knows there's a lack, 'specially on an occasion like this."

Miss Emmy laughingly expressed her willingness to take off her head-gear, and after arranging the roses in two yellow and brown lustre pitchers on the mantel-shelf, and laying the little bouquet beside the deep bowl of Russian cut glass that was to do duty for the christening, she followed Mrs. Pegrim upstairs.

"Why, where is the lady baby?" she asked in surprise.

"I'm letting her sleep until the last moment, and Oliver, who's dressing and fussing between his room and the kitchen's, got an eye to her. 'Lisha Potts's in there talking to him. Oliver would have 'Lisha to the naming 'cause of his being

the one to open the door *that* night, you know." (This was as near as Satira ever allowed herself to approach the forbidden subject.) "He balked considerable, not being used to society down here at the centre, and settin' in there now he does look uncommon like a coon they had in a cage last county fair, 'n' we-all didn't tell him one of the Miss Feltons was coming, for fear he'd streak it, so you'd best stand just behind the door 'ntil he gets in.

"I'm turrible glad to see your bunnit off'n, and how you do your hair. Only a few of the daring hereabout has fixed theirs in what's called a waterfall, and those as has looks like they'd put spice bags on the back of their necks for a crick' n' they'd stuck fast. Yourn is just elegant, trickles down and hangs as easy as if there wasn't no net to gather it.

"Who all is coming to the naming? Only First Selectman Morse, little Hughey Oldys, me and you and 'Lisha and Gilbert, besides Mr. Latimer that does it. Gilbert he wanted more, but, says I, not having cleaned house I'm not ready for a charge o' the whole town 'at would come if we loosed the line, so we'd best draw it close as we can without choking ourselves, and that's how.

"No, brother hasn't told me the name yet, but I suspicion it's something choice and bookish, for though Gilbert never made out to get further'n three terms at the old Academy (that little building 'nexed behind the new one), he's always thought a sight of books. In fact, he got something of the taste from pa, who was a carpenter and the forehandedest man about naming his family in all Newfield County; he'd names for us all before he'd picked out his wife, pa had.

"You ain't never heard? Well, it come about this way: Thomas, Henry, and Gideon had been the male names among the Gilberts ever since they set foot in this land o' promise near two hundred years ago, and as they slumped down in one spot and didn't journey to speak of, with first, second, and third cousins all clinging to those names, things got mixed pretty well.

"Father, he that was to be, was jobbing around down at the Harley house, which is now Mis' Oldys's, fixin' more shelves in grandsir' Harley's liberary. My, but isn't there a sight of books there! They do claim that grandsir' Harley had every one that was made from Adam up to the time of his death, and the Oldys folks has been buyin' ever since.

"Well, they knowin' and trustin' father, he put in his dinner hour there in the liberary instead o' coming clear home, and he got real interested in the printing outside the books, and he came to find there was quite a few double names he'd

never heard of. So he says to himself, says he, 'I'll put a few down; they'll come handy some day mebbe, and freshen up the family,' and so he did, and after ma died we found his pocket-book all full of figgerin' on work and the names writ in the end. There was more than he ever used, there bein' only ten of us, six boys and four girls. Some o' the names he'd passed over, I reckon, 'cause he wasn't quite sure of their sect.

"The first of us was a girl and she was named Jane Grey, but didn't live out her second year; then come Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlow, and Clarissy Harlow, Robinson Crusoe, Charlotte Temple, Daniel Defoe, Oliver Goldsmith, Cotton Mather, and lastly me, with Oliver, all that's living. I was called for grandma on ma's side on account of her silver spoons, two candlesticks, and snufflers, which I didn't get, marryin' against her wishes before she died.

"Some of the names were a mouthful, but they did look real choice on headstones, and liven up the West Hill graveyard a lot. The marble man that came from Boston to set up John Angus's father's moniment allowed he'd never seen such a litery crop o' stones outside east Massachusetts."

A knock at the door sent Mrs. Pegrim scurrying away, Miss Emmy following more slowly, as the front stairs were so steep and high that a misstep was all that lay between the top and bottom. In the foreroom Mr. Latimer was alone, standing hands behind him looking out the south window, the waking voice of the lady baby having called away Mrs. Pegrim.

Miss Emmy had entered softly and waited a moment before she spoke. There was something about Stephen Latimer that always seemed as though it belonged to another world and appealed physically to her spiritual sense. Though of American birth and ancestry, he was a type of the old-world vicar, well born and cultured, yet who, through his intense introspection, spends his life in a small church of a remote parish, seeing each morning's sun through the dimly colored glass of the chancel windows, as a light sent especially from heaven to him, and basking in mystic joy as, between times, his fingers draw from the organ the simple linked notes that hold the village children to their hymns.

In figure Latimer was rather above the medium height, spare without thinness; a smoothly shaven face was saved by distinct mouth lines and a firm chin from the perfect symmetry that seems to lack sympathy. Iron-gray hair belied his age, which was barely forty years. In New England towns at this time people looked askance at men of this type. Patriotism rushed to any form of dissent in which to

cloak itself rather than lean toward anything that might be preëstablished and, therefore, un-American,—the middle classes knowing no distinction between catholicity and Romanism.

Such feelings had Stephen Latimer met with in coming to Harley's Mills six years before, yet he stayed on and soon came to be reckoned with as an influence, holding his own and more, by seeing over what he might not see through. The Misses Felton, though not of his fold, had given St. Luke's an organ, such as was not known in Newfield County, and through it, Latimer's influence went out even more than by the pulpit. For though his young wife played at service, on Wednesday afternoons, rain or shine, he sat before the keys and let his fingers speak the words that all might hear who would.

Sometimes the little church was filled by the Quality Hill folk and their guests, sometimes a tired woman with a fretful, half-sick child, or a pauper laborer creeping in to rest from his work on the roads, would be the only audience—it made no difference in the music.

Presently Latimer turned,—"Ah, so you are here! I thought I recognized your roses. Is it not a brave deed of Gilbert's, this going again into the fray after time had healed his wounds and let him at least build a shelter around his sorrow? Talk of the bravery of those who go to battle, I believe his courage in this matter in facing the unknown is the real heroism."

"I think you are right, though I had not looked at it in this way before; I only thought of the amusement of the child's companionship, not the responsibility. Ah, here is little Hugh Oldys."

Presently, Satira Pegrim came in, carrying the lady baby, who would have much preferred to walk, for having acquired this accomplishment all of a sudden, she was loath to relinquish it. Gilbert and 'Lisha Potts followed. It was not until Potts had come quite into the room, crossing to between the centre-table and Mary's melodeon that stood between the windows, that he saw Miss Emmy. All retreat being cut off, he gave a sort of gasp and tried in vain to sink into the depths of his stiff-collared, deep-cuffed Sunday shirt as a turtle disappears into its shell.

The sight of Miss Emmy produced a different effect upon the child, who crowed and stretched her hands toward her new friend, quietly allowed her to fasten the corals upon the plump, bare neck, and afterward tried to look at them with real satisfaction, moving them up and down with her dimpled chin.

For a moment general conversation reigned, then—

"What is she to be named? I cannot wait another moment," cried Miss Emmy.

"It's writ in this book," said Gilbert, taking a small morocco Bible from the table and showing the fly leaf, upon which, in characters painfully round and precise, was "Julia Poppea Gilbert, from her loving Daddy on her first birthday, April 20, 1862."

For a moment no one stirred, for all realized the final way in which the quiet man had settled the matter of birth and name, giving her an anchorage so far as might be.

Then Stephen Latimer spoke.

"Julia Poppea! Where did you find that name, Gilbert?"

"Julia was my mother's name; seems as if there should be family in it somehow. And the other—I've read it somewhere, and it's got my fancy." (Not a word of the locket.)

"If I remember," said Mr. Latimer, hesitatingly, "it was the name of one of Nero's wives; would not something nearer home be more suitable, neighbor Gilbert? Mary, or a flower name, if you like fanciful things, such as Violet or Rose?"

"No, I've settled to Poppea. I've known of some one called by it that wasn't kin of any Neroes or spoken of in Mr. Plutarch's books. Poppea comes near to being a posy too,—poppies, nice cheerful flowers that, come to recollect, have long lashes to their eyes, just like the lady baby."

When Stephen Latimer explained the need of sponsors according to his ritual, and their duties, Gilbert knit his brows at the unforeseen complication.

"It is customary to have some others than the parents of the child to stand, as it were, in their place of responsibility in case of need; under these circumstances, surely no one can be more suitable than Mrs. Pegrim and yourself, neighbor Gilbert."

"I couldn't stand for any such strange customs or their results," said Satira, closing her jaws quickly; she had been reading the sentences of promise in the prayer-book that Mr. Latimer had marked. "I couldn't go further than to agree to keep her in clothes, her body clean and well fed, and to say, 'Now I lay me.'"

"As I am in the eye of the law her father, the choice must be outside of me, parson," Gilbert said slowly. "Who is usually asked?"

"Near kin, or friends upon whom one can rely to take a true interest in the child."

"Then I ask you, Miss Emmy, and you, 'Lisha Potts."

"I'm Baptist born, but no church-member," said Potts, his words forced out as by some explosive.

"And I am a Channing Unitarian and therefore an arch dissenter," said Miss Emmy; yet at the same time, through the yearning of her eyes, she already had the lady baby in her arms.

Stephen Latimer looked from one to the other, an expression of satisfaction stealing over his features as if he saw some special significance in this strange combination, then whispered to Miss Emmy that upon her devolved the duty of holding the child, who began to fret strangely and pucker her face for tears.

Latimer said something to little Hugh, his music pupil, and going to the melodeon, covered and silent these many years, threw back the lid, coaxed the fitful breath and reluctant keys to speak again, so gently that there was no discord, only a far-away voice as of memory. Then the two, the childish treble and the baritone, sang,

"Saviour, Who Thy flock art feeding
With the shepherd's tenderest care,
All the feeble gently leading,
While the lambs Thy bosom share."

"That was her tune, Mary's, the last she sang to Marygold. How did you know?" asked Gilbert when the hymn ended, his voice sinking unconsciously to an awed whisper.

"*I* did not, but God does not forget."

Slowly and clearly Latimer read the brief service of private baptism, ending with the sentence, "If thou art not already baptized, Julia Poppea, I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—Amen."

"Is that in the book?" asked Gilbert; "then if it is, there are enough other children named that 'tisn't known about where or when, so that she isn't the only one."

"No, we are none of us the *only ones* either for sorrow or joy; in that lies the love of God, which is brotherhood;" and seeing the light of the smile upon Stephen Latimer's face, the child laughed and crowed, and succeeded in wriggling from Miss Emmy's arms down to the floor, where the pup was wagging furiously, as though trying to shake hands with everybody at once, having slipped in as Mrs. Pegrim hurried out for the christening cake.

"It is not as light as it should be," she said, bustling back, "but I made it sponge, so's the children could have it (I've fruit cake coming for we-all). It was the last of the limed eggs I used, and though fresh to taste, they do act sort of discouraged when it gets spring o' the year and the responsibility o' hefting sponge cake is laid on them.

"Would you mind, Miss Emmy, seeing as you stepped so far into the family, as to cut it, I mean break it, as a knife spiles sponge cake, while I pour the coffee?"

"Hasn't the pup got any name yet?" asked Hughey, joining the pair on the floor. "Mr. Gilbert, you promised he should have a name and that I might help choose."

"The boys in the office of nights call him Mack, after that little General

McClellan, 'cause he's always busy barking and running about, planning great things he never does, so I reckon that'll stick to him."

"Oh, I forgot! I've brought *her* a present," and Hughey tugged at a small parcel that was bulging from the pocket of his overcoat. "It's tin soldiers and a little cannon; father brought me them from Bridgeton. Aren't they fine? I'll show her how to stand them up."

"I've a whimsey name for you," said Miss Emmy, as she set down her coffee cup, a relic of grandma Gilbert's old Lowestoft with the little half Chinese flower on front and in bottom, and stooping over the child, kissed the rim of her ear that had an odd break in its curve like the blemish on the petal of a flower that has folded too tight in the bud, "a name that won't mix you up with any Mrs. Nero. You aren't to be called lady baby any more, but Poppea of the post-office!"

Poppea, however, gave no heed; she was absorbed in the ecstatic task of tasting tin soldier.

CHAPTER VI

AS IT WAS WRITTEN

The twilight had been long for April, as though the vivid sunset colors had fairly dazzled night, but now it was fading. Oliver Gilbert sat before his desk in the workshop. He was not looking at what was before him, but out of the window across road and fields to where a pearly mist, in which floated the crescent of the new moon, hung above Moosatuck. The rush of the river over the last dam that checked it above the mills was occasionally punctuated by the cry of a little screech-owl or the call of a robin shifting its perch, while the rhythmic chorus of peeping frogs insisted upon "sleep-sleep-sleep."

That Gilbert was tired was apparent in the deepened lines of his face and droop of his shoulders, but it was wholly fatigue of mind. The adoption which had for a month filled his waking and sleeping thoughts was a thing accomplished. A week before, when the matter hung in the balance, possession of the child had seemed the finality. To-night it appeared as merely an open gate through which stretched a vista beyond ken; across this many figures passed to and fro, but with faces in shadow or averted. A question asked by Satira Pegrim at supper had given birth to the entire throng.

"Don't you calkerlate, Gilbert, it'll be best to lead her up to calling us aunty and uncle? Then byme-by, when she comes to know, as know she must, there won't be such a mess o' unravellin' to do."

Gilbert had answered hotly, chided her unreasonably, ending by saying that the child called him Daddy already, and that it could do no harm as she grew up for the two white stones on the hillside to stand for Mother and little sister. Perhaps, God helping, she might not learn the truth until she was a woman and married. Then it need not hurt so much. Thus Gilbert drugged himself reckless with hope, after the manner of us all.

Darkness fell about him as he sat, his head fallen between his hands, the side rays of the post-office lamp only seeming to draw the shadows closer. Presently he pulled himself together, lighted the other lamps in office and workshop, talking to himself in an argumentative strain as he walked about. One man came

in for a paper of tobacco and another for some stamps, but seeing that the postmaster was preoccupied, they did not linger.

"That's just what I'll do," he said, as though after arguing with some one he had suddenly achieved a conclusion. Again seating himself before the desk and selecting a particular key from the chain he continued the conversation with the opponent who, being speechless, could not contradict. "When I was a boy, I always was scheming to write a book some day that should be printed out like them in Squire Oldys's study. The printing won't be compassed, but I can write out all that happens from *that night* on concerning the child, and the village doings, so's it'll be there plain and no hearsay when she comes to read it and I'm not here perhaps. Yes, and I must not forget discretion in the doing of it. Mr. Esterbrook lent me some books of Mr. Pepys's, his remarks on his own and neighborhood doings. They were fine and edifying in parts, but lacked the discreetness and holding back I always find in Mr. Plutarch. I wonder anyhow, if in the beginning books weren't written just for the sake of talking to some one."

After searching in a cupboard under the desk, Gilbert drew out a large ledgerlike volume, bound in sheep. The cover was worn merely by lying for years side by side with its shelf mates. The pages within were of thick smooth paper, finely ruled. Gilbert tried several pens, quill and steel, and finally brought a new one from the office; then slowly and painfully he inscribed on the first page:—

As it was written—by Oliver G. Gilbert for Julia Poppea, beginning March 10, 1862. Next he took his two precious Lincoln letters from their drawer and fastened them between the first and second pages by corner strips of gummed paper. Then began the diary.

Two hours passed ere he had finished the first week, but as time went on, he would naturally grow more brief—the more action the fewer words.

By the first of May the reconstructed post-office household was accepted as a matter of course, Satira Pegrim having leased her farm for a three years' term to 'Lisha Potts, and stored her furnishings in the empty half hayloft of the post-office barn. When urged by Potts to sell her farm, she had answered: "No, Gilbert or I either one of us may feel called to marry, then what's to do? 'Cause I wouldn't be number four to Deacon Green with his white chin whiskers, and his

'it's all for the best' and other heartless sayings when number one, two, and three was took, or, I claim, clean froze to death, isn't to say I'm set against the institution. To camp 'longside of an ice pond isn't marriage. I never did like lizards, real or human, since brother Cotton Mather put one down my neck in Sunday-school the day sister Clarissy Harlow 'sperienced religion and I screeched so folks thought I had it too."

On May Day itself, Poppea emerged from the hands of Satira Pegrim clad in the first attempts for many a year of that good woman in fashioning clothes for a child. The result was a sunbonnet of brown-and-white-checked gingham, a sack-shaped slip of the same material, reenforced by the species of extension-legged underwear called pantalets, below which came a glimpse of sturdy ankles and feet shod in stout ties. This being the universal garb of children of her age and station all over Newfield County, the color of the gingham being diversified.

Miss Emmy Felton had protested and begged to be allowed to keep the child in dainty nainsook and dimities, ribbons, and flowery hats, but Gilbert had stood firm that in clothing at least she must be like the neighborhood children, as he expressed it. Thus Poppea began life at Harley's Mills without pretence, having for guardian Mack, who was fast developing into a brown-and-white hound of medium size, a trace of setter blood showing in the grain of his hair, and having the forethought and human intelligence that is more often found in dogs of unknown parentage than in pampered thoroughbreds.

The parapet that made a barrier between the Angus garden and Gilbert's home acres was finished. A series of massive stone urns, filled with foliage plants that topped it, seemed in the half light of night and morning like seneschals in plumed helmets, keeping watch over the doings of those humbly encamped below, whom they suspected, but might not displace. Yet what does Nature care for such distinctions and boundaries? She does not even stop to snap her fingers at them, but simply keeps on surrounding, overlapping, or undermining all barriers that oppose her plans.

The wash of earth and water from Windy Hill was toward Gilbert's orchard, with its trees of mossed-branch crannies and knot holes, beloved of robins, bluebirds, and woodpeckers, where the ample red cow flavored her cud with apple blossoms, meadow mint, or nips of the sweet corn in the vegetable patch, according to season and the location and length of her tether.

Down through the ground gaps in the parapet, a combination of architectural

design and necessity, came the spirit of that other garden that the roseleaf wife had created, tended, and left to outlive her. From the bank presently there sprang a bunch of tulips here, a crimson peony there, a musk rose-bush in the débris put forth new branches reaching toward the light, then came the matted green of violets, tufts of velvet sweet william, a wand of madonna lilies. All through this season and others some deep-sleeping seed or bulb put forth, Johnny-jump-ups, prim quilled asters, and, with June, there swayed a flock of butterfly-winged poppies that in still other seasons would wander from their earth bank and alight among the plumes of orchard grass to colonize all the sunny spaces. This was the child's playground, where she first rolled among the daisies, while Mack, led by his nose, made quest of ground-hog and cottontail; there she sucked clover honey, was stung by jealous bees, solved the first mystery of the nest and eggs, told time by puff-ball clocks, and by and by, through playing make-believe, approached the real. Like the good fairy of a story who always comes to the christening to mend with her gift any evil that others have wrought, so at Poppea's naming, Nature the mother was the invisible sponsor, who gave her three gifts: love of the beautiful through eye and ear, love of the best through a warm heart, and the precious gift of the tears that cleanse the spirit.

As soon as the wind-flowers starred the lowlands and the red bells of the columbine swung from their many shrines in the rocky banks, Oliver Gilbert once more resumed his Sunday habit of taking a posy to Mary and Marygold in God's-acre on the hillside. When the afternoon was right, Poppea went with him, riding in the old chaise safe in the grasp of Daddy's left arm. It was on one of the first of these visits that Gilbert began to train the five-fingered woodbine, that, creeping through the half-wild grass, clung to the two white stones and would not be denied. Heretofore he had always pulled it away ruthlessly, but now he plucked a leaf here, a tendril there, coaxing it gently to make a living frame about the names and date of day and month, but praying it to overgrow the *year* that filled a sunken oval near the base of both the stones.

While he worked, he prattled unceasingly, as a child might, to the little one crawling in the mossy grass to gather the light-hued, short-stemmed violets and soft-pawed "pussy-toes." She neither paused nor seemed to heed, yet two sounds heard week after week lingered in her brain until her tongue should one day release them, and these words were "Mother" and "Ma'gold."

There was no Fourth of July celebration at Harley's Mills that year,—no picnics, no speeches. The depressing summer of McClellan's fruitless meanderings, as well as lack of money, forbade crackers or fireworks, so that the return of John

Angus with his bride, the second week of the month, was an event that helped to relieve the general tension.

Mr. Binks, who saw Mrs. Angus on her arrival as she crossed the platform of the little station, reported:—

"She's good-lookin', middlin' young 'n' dark haired with pale skin. She's a high stepper 'at knows which way she wants to go, 'n' mark my words, if John Angus's goin' to foller like she 'spects him to, he'll have to act freer and more quick'n he ever did for t'other one."

Next day the village had a shock almost as great as if Lee had suddenly entered Washington. Mr. and Mrs. Angus appeared, walking in the village street, he holding her sunshade to the best advantage, while she let her flounced, fresh organdie gown brush the ground that she might clasp both her hands over her husband's arm, the white roses on her wide chip hat tickling his ear the while as she moved her head in talking.

In and out of the half dozen shops they went marketing (John Angus had habitually marketed in Bridgeton), she chatting gayly. Presently, as they reached the post-office, there was a pause. Then she was heard to say, by a loiterer who sat upon the steps:—

"Don't be tiresome, Jack; you mustn't expect me to help keep afloat senseless old grudges. Please open the door, it hurts my hand. Oh, what a lovely child!" For though Angus did not actually enter with her, he held the door back without further opposition.

"I will take box fifteen," she said to Gilbert with decision. "I see that it is vacant. Is that your little grandchild? No, your daughter? You must let your wife bring her up to see me some day. I'm devoted to little children."

"I thought that he looked red and was getting mad," the witness said, "but when she come out, she stuck a big yaller rose she was wearing in her belt right under his chin, and says she, 'Jack, do you love butter?' Oh, Lordy, I thought I'd die, her callin' John Angus Jack, and ticklin' of his chin!"

Quality Hill called immediately, both those who had previously known Mrs. Angus in New York as Miss Duane and those who had not. Meanwhile the stern mansion on Windy Hill relaxed and bade fair to become a factor in the town, drawing its social life westward.

There was much discussion among the village people as to Mrs. Angus's age; at one of the Feltons' piazza days at home, Miss Emmy, by a process of calculation all her own, said thirty-six, but Mr. Esterbrook gallantly declared that as looks should be the only way of reckoning such matters, the lady could be barely twenty-five.

When Mrs. Angus returned her calls, a trim footman in white tops seated by the coachman on the box of the barouche, the first ever brought to Harley's Mills, the good folks stared and raised their hands. When she took a pew at St. Luke's church, her husband escorting her to the door each Sunday, they lost their breaths completely. But when she invited all to a garden party to see a new lawn game called *croquet* that had been sent her direct from London by a married sister, they found their tongues again to wonder if the mastering of its fascinating mysteries would in any way impeach their loyalty to the Declaration of Independence; then straightway succumbed as to an epidemic, grace hoops, battledore and shuttlecock, and even archery having to yield it place.

If Marcia Angus handled her husband somewhat dramatically, his satisfaction seemed complete as it was deep. Only two in the place, Gilbert and Miss Emmy, ever whispered even to themselves that she was playing the sort of comedy that is only possible to a woman when some motive of ambition rather than her affections has sway. So that it was a relief to both when, on the Anguses' return from town late the next spring, the touch of nature that makes all women kin colored the village gossip, and it was known that at last there would be a child born in the great house on Windy Hill. Satira Pegrim, who chatted often with the gardener's wife, though her brother had never let her take Poppea for the oft-requested visit to the hill, repeated wild tales of the fineness of the cambric needlework and lace upon the little wardrobe; of the blue silk draperies of the south room now fitted for a nursery; of the gilt bassinet, with its pillow and spread of real lace, and bed, they said, of swan's-down.

Finally a new rumor was whispered and then took visible shape. Harley's Mills, with its staff of competent women, single and widowed, who were ready and willing to "accommodate," was overlooked; an English head nurse of the brand accustomed to rear an infant from its birth and chosen by Mrs. Angus's sister, who had sent croquet, appeared in the stalwart person of a Mrs. Shandy.

Then the village pursed its lips, folded its hands, and waited.

Some random extracts from Oliver Gilbert's book, 1863, Jan. 1.—Three million slaves were freed to-day according to the promise of September. It had to be, but now I'm wondering what will become of them. Poppea may see the working out of this, though I shall not. Having her, there's somebody ahead to hand out hopes and fears to. Without somebody ahead to keep up with, old feet must stumble and get tired on the march.

July the 3.—Meade is in command and they're at it again hot and heavy around Gettysburg. Morse's boy is there and his grandson, or they were when it began. We've all been living around the station for the last three days, just gasping for news like stranded fish for water, but half the time the operator can't get the wire, and then it's only that they're at it still, with Lee to the better last night.

My head is on fire and seem's as if my hands can't feel. What if they should win —but they *can't while Lincoln's above ground*.

July 4.—We've won Gettysburg; but now the fight's over, the fields yonder are just seeded down with bodies, blue and gray together. The Union's safe, and all the town boys, big and little, are firing cannons and muskets, there not being a store that's charging for powder! There's been hallelujahs in the meeting-house, bell-ringings and speeches on the green. I've run up both the flags, one atop of t'other, and yet now it's night and I've come in out of the crowd, it seems like I must put a bit of black out somewhere for *those others*! The picture of them in the glass looks darkly, but byme-by, when Poppea comes to read this, mebbe it'll shine up clear and be seen face to face. Joy and sorrow, there's always the two around; the matter is *which of us gets which*.

July 5.—It's just come in by 'Lisha Potts that plucky Grant, who's been meandering down-stream and in the marshes this long time, got safe down the river past the fort and in back of Pemberton's men, and through battering and starving, Vicksburg has given in! *Hallelujah for victory!* say I with the rest, yet I can't get the thought out of my head of those famished women and children living in ground-holes and caves to keep out of shot range. Maybe when Poppea is grown, there'll be some way of keeping peace and right *without this murder*. Perhaps it might come about even through women themselves! Who knows?

July 7.—Joy and sorrow! Both amongst us in this village. John Angus's wife has borne him his long-wished-for son, but she is dead!

Oh, God! what has he done to be so dealt with? He bent his will considerable through love of her, or maybe it was pride. Must it be altogether broke? Or is it

because he withered little Roseleaf? I hauled my victory flags down just so soon as Dr. Morewood told me. Then I run the little one back, halfway up. I wouldn't want Angus to think that I bear malice or was aught but sorry; though if I told him so, he'd likely read it as a taunt. Mrs. Angus was pleasant spoken to the child and me; mebbe some day Poppea can pass those kind words back *to the little boy*.

July 10.—To-day they buried her up in God's-acre on the hill. The flowers and singing were beautiful,—'specially the little boys from Mr. Latimer's church that he teaches music. Hughey Oldys sang one piece all alone about flying away on the wings of a dove to find rest. It took me straight up after it and set me down far away, wondering where little Roseleaf lies and if any bedded her with flowers and singing.

The women folks brought home satisfaction from the funeral anyhow, for there on a graven silver plate was the age out plain—"In her thirty-seventh year."

1864, July 13.—Early tried to get into Washington yesterday, but he didn't. What a terrible year it's been so far, and only half over. Blood it seems everywhere, in earth and sky and sea. Our boys dropping down at more'n a thousand a day, week in and week out. Can we hold out? Yes, to the end, with patience; for Lincoln says, "Victory will come, but it comes slowly."

There's nobody else left to go soldiering from this town. 'Lisha Potts was the last likely one and went yesterday. His mother has come down to widow Baker's and they've sold most of their stock,—fodder and labor both being so high. Three dollars a day for a man at haying. Tough bull beef at thirty cents the pound; sack flour taken over from the Mills is at the rate of seventeen dollars a barrel, and taxes up to eight mills from five, they say, to help pay the war debt; things look pretty blue in my purse. Did I do wrong in keeping the child from those who could do better by her?

Sister Satira is all shook up by 'Lisha's going. I never suspicioned before that they were courting. But she claims ever since he hired her farm it sort of seems as if she belonged with it, and he claims ever since she left and shut the door more'n half the place is missing. Satira isn't in any hurry, even if 'Lisha hadn't enlisted, for she says she had less than a month's courting before and poor

quality at that, so now she means to make it last.

I pray she does. What would become of us?

Nov. 12.—The Union is safe for Lincoln is reëlected!

1865, Feb. 10.—Lincoln wanted to pay the owners something for the slaves set free, but the cabinet would not let *him*! Others wanted to hang the chief Rebel leaders, but he would not let *them*. So it goes. I want the child by and by to think of this every time she sees those letters that he wrote her Daddy, so's she'll remember what times and doings she came into to make her loyal to the land and the folks that stand next her.

This month the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution was passed that cuts out slavery from every State and Territory. So help us, God! that every soul of us on this soil may be free forever more, black or white, man, woman, or child. Keep us from bondage to ourselves, for slavery isn't only the body being bought and sold.

March 5.—Yesterday, Lincoln took oath again.

March 12.—'Lisha Potts came home to-day, honorably discharged and wounded some, but not past mending. He's been in three battles, and looks old enough to count out those four years that he's younger than Satira. Dave Morse came with him, but little Davy lies at Gettysburg. It seems as if we ones behind can't keep our hands from touching and feeling of the flesh of them that was there, or our eyes from searching the eyes of them that have seen!

April 5.—Yesterday, Lee surrendered and Richmond fell. This ends the war. Yet woe is still upon the land. What martyrs' blood must be shed to cleanse it?

April 15.—He is dead! Assassinated! None else would suffice!

April 24.—To-morrow we are going to see them take him home, the child and I. The Fennimans have made me free of their front porch; they have a house on Union Square, New York. He will pass that way. The neighbors think I'm crazy to take a child of four or five. She may not understand, but she will see, and byme-by, some day, it will come back to her, and she'll be glad that Daddy took her with him.

April 25.—We left at daybreak. As it was raw and threatening, the child wore a little blue cloak and cap like a soldier's that Satira made to please her last winter. It being eight years since I've seen the city, I was forced to ask my way, but Mr. Esterbrook being at the station to meet some friends, he counselled me. Carrying Poppea, for the streets were thronged, I went out to Madison Square and so down to Fifth Avenue. Black on every side, hanging from roof to street, black-banded flags, black bands on people's arms, the great clock shrouded in black. There were no public stages on the streets that I could see, so I walked down Fifth Avenue to Seventeenth Street, then eastward to Union Square, and so down to Fourteenth Street.

One large building in particular was covered with black from the dormers down to the street, with all the windows hid by black-trimmed flags. I asked a passer-by whose house it was, and he told me that it was the home of a society called the Union League, formed by the best men of this city for the upholding of the Union.

We got to the house at half after one o'clock. I don't know how long we waited, bells tolling. A groan ran up and down the street, and then a great silence. From where I stood out by the fence, the porch and verandy being crowded, I could see the black-covered horses swinging round the corner from Broadway, and after them the car. Down the street it came, from the corner seemed an hour. I lifted Poppea to the iron fence post by the walk. The groan rose once more, and then silence, with all hats off. When the car passed, it seemed as though the world was dead, and that after the minute guns would follow the last trump!

Gazing before her at the car, the child pulled her little soldier cap off, then whispered to me, drawing my head down, "I don't see him, Daddy. Is he going to heaven in that bed asleep?" "Yes, yes," I said. "'N' when he wakes up, will he see muvver and Ma'gold and tell 'em we was here?"

A band struck up a dirge, so I didn't have to answer. I can't but think perhaps he'll find *her* mother, and tell her that there's an old fellow who couldn't fight, that just lives to right her wrongs.

After the car a stream of faces followed, men and more men of high-up societies and committees. I was looking at them without seeing, until one man passed and looked back as he went, at us I thought. It was John Angus! My suz, but he's aged or something. His face was drawn as if by pain or anger, I can't judge which.

Poppea saw him too, and as he passed she waved her hand, she's such an eye for faces. Then she turned her mind to some cakes the ladies gave her, with pink tops. It's wonderful how nature eases things for children.

May 10.—The Anguses are back, and folks say that Philip is not well, does not keep his footing as a boy should who is turning three. Satira saw him yesterday, sitting in his little coach behind the parapet, and she says he looks old and tired across the eyes.

Some doctors are coming from New York to-night to see him. Morewood only shakes his head when asked, as much as saying, *I know*, but he will not believe *me*.

May 12.—Mrs. Shandy came down to Satira last evening crying, and blurted out that Philip has a twist or something in his backbone,—Pott's disease they call it. He will be a hunchback. "An' when he looks at me so lovin' with those big gray eyes of his, it seems that I can't bear it," she sobbed right on Satira's shoulder.

"What did his father say?" asked she.

"Mr. Angus? Well he was hard struck and stayed above stairs all yesterday. But this morning he came down and says to us help standing by, 'Do all the doctors say, but never mention to my son or to me that he is different from other boys. Who breaks my order—goes.' Ah! Mrs. Pegrim, but he's got an awful pride and will; I have my *doubts if God himself could break it*."

1867, May. Poppea is past six now and the Misses Felton think she should have lessons. She knows her letters from her blocks, and Hughey Oldys reads fairy books to her, but it's the hill-country speech that worries me, and also the Felton ladies. When I talk, I talk like those I live among, but when I put pen to paper, I do better, and write more like those I've met in reading.

Miss Emmy wants to learn her every day so when she's eight she can go to the Academy, and being a lady baby as she was, not shame her breeding. For manners, she's catching them already, and Stephen Latimer says she has a great ear for music, and can sing anything she hears Hugh sing in Sunday-school; not out loud, of course, but soft and strange, like a young bird that's trying.

CHAPTER VII

INTO THE DARK

During the week of the greenest Christmas that had been known at Harley's Mills for years, sudden and bitter cold turned a heavy rain to an ice-storm that locked village and country-side, laying low great trees by the clinging weight of icicles, freezing outright more than one veteran crow in the roost on Cedar Hill, and making prisoners of the ruffed grouse and bob-whites in their shelter of hemlock and juniper in the river woods.

In two nights Moosatuck became a vast mirror, in which the figures of the skaters by daylight and torchlight were reflected, framed by wonderful prismatic colors. Below the falls, however, the water, tempered by the breath of the sea, bedded the wild fowl, repulsed by the ice-pointed reed bayonets from their usual shelter.

From all the bordering towns the people gathered along the banks this particular Wednesday afternoon in a spirit of holiday festivity, whether they took the part of actors or spectators. Contrary to the custom of years, the Feltons and Mr. Esterbrook had returned to Quality Hill for the week, though quite against the wishes of Miss Elizabeth, who insisted that for Miss Emmy, with her sensitive lungs, the tropic atmosphere of a steam-heated New York house, with double windows to prevent even a breath of fresh air from entering unduly, was the only place. Miss Emmy, however, had rebelled, and seemed bent upon following the advice of a young practitioner, who had for two years been propounding the radical doctrine that fresh, cool air was the natural cure. The absurdity of his theory was on every tongue, even though he was backed by a few women of the progressive sort, who are always said by others to fly in the face of Providence.

Be this as it may, a quaint old push-sled that had belonged to Madam Harley, and been many years in the loft at the Mills, presently appeared on the ice, propelled by Patrick, somewhat indignant at his descent from the thronelike box of the carriage. When above a mass of fur robes Miss Emmy's eager face appeared, framed in a chinchilla hood tied with wide rose-colored ribbons, she was quickly surrounded, even before she had time to shrug her shoulders free and draw one hand from the depths of her great muff, extending it toward a young girl who

had come toward her with the grace of a swallow skimming the air, bending to kiss her almost before she had paused, saying in the same breath: "Oh, Miss Emmy, I'm so glad that you've come out; I was afraid that we had missed you, and I must be going soon, for I promised Daddy that I would be home by four. No, it's not cold if you keep moving, but it will never do for you to sit stock-still. Please let Hugh push and I will skate beside you, and Patrick can wait in that old shed yonder, back of the bonfire the boys have made.

"We've been pushing Philip Angus all the afternoon. His tutor is ill, and the man that brought him out only stood about stamping his feet and beating his hands. It must be hard enough not to be able to skate, for there's nothing like flying down with the wind and fighting your way back in spite of it, without having to be stuck in one spot like a snow man. So we simply made Philip fly along, until he said that he really, truly felt as if the runners were on his feet instead of on the sleigh, and his cheeks grew red and his big gray eyes shone so. He is such a dear little fellow, Miss Emmy, and so clever at making pictures and images of anything he sees. Last summer he made Mack's head out of pond clay and baked it in the sun, and it was ever so much like Mack when he holds one ear up to listen, you know. Then he tried to do a head of Aunt Satira, but it wasn't so good; the nose and bob of hair behind looked too much alike. But then he coaxed Mack up through one of the parapet holes into his garden, but he had to look over at aunty where she sits to sew or shell peas under the first apple tree. You see, Philip and I can't visit to and fro like other people, because his father is angry with Daddy about something that isn't Daddy's fault, but we love each other over the parapet just the same, so now I have two make-believe brothers, little Philip and big Hugh."

Poppea had chattered on without a break in obedience to a signal from Miss Emmy, who, putting her muff to her face, indicated that the young girl must carry on the conversation, as she did not think it wise to talk in the face of the wind. Then looking about for Hugh Oldys, Poppea saw that he was evidently searching for her in the zigzag line of skaters near the opposite bank, and as a wave of her scarlet muffler did not attract his attention, she started in pursuit, still with the grace of birdlike flight that makes of motion an embodied thought rather than a muscular action.

As she glanced after the girl, Miss Emmy seemed to see as a panorama all the years between the time that she had first found the lady baby in the post-office house, with Hughey Oldys giving her his beloved tin soldier and the present, nearly thirteen years. Poppea, now at the crisis of her girlhood, Hugh in his first

college year. Did she realize the lapse of time? In some ways not at all. Mr. Esterbrook was as courteous and precise as ever; if his morning walk was a little shorter and his before-dinner nap a little longer, the change was imperceptible to any outsider.

But it was through her interest in Poppea that Miss Emmy knew that time was passing, and yet the same interest kept middle age from laying hold upon her, either physically or mentally; Poppea, whom Miss Felton had from the beginning called Julia as a matter of principle, the second name having too theatrical a flavor to suit her. At first it had been the little child of five, coming to take her lesson in needlework on squares of dainty patchwork, one white, the alternate sprigged with blue forget-me-nots. The tiny silver thimble and work-box as a reward when the doll's bed-quilt was completed. With this came almost unconscious teaching of pretty manners, rising when some one enters the room, standing until all are seated.

Next came the discovery that Poppea was all music and rhythmic motion to her toe tips. At one of the summer afternoon concerts for which Felton Manor was famous, Louis Moreau Gottschalk had been the soloist, playing some of his Cuban dances, when to the surprise of all, the child of seven, who had been sitting on the porch steps listening intently, got up and, creeping inside the window of the music room, began to dance, suiting her steps to the music, now slow, now rapid, perfectly unconscious that any one was present, until the great emotional pianist, glancing up, finished abruptly, pausing to applaud, and Poppea, brought suddenly to herself and covered with confusion, fled out into the shrubbery, where, her face hidden in Mack's soft neck, she cried out her excitement. Then followed the music lessons, Poppea's legs dangling from the high piano-stool as Miss Emmy leaned over her, repeating the ceaseless, "one-two-three (thumb under) four-five-six-seven-eight" of the scale of C for the right hand.

Now, born of the last Christmas, a small upright piano stood in the foreroom of the post-office house, the room being further transformed by frilled draperies, flowery paper, and a few good prints, while in another year, Poppea would, if Oliver Gilbert could bring his mind to allow it, go away to school to have the necessary companionship of girls of her own age; not that she had the slightest feeling of aloofness or did not mingle with the village young people in the simplest way. It was the village people themselves, not Poppea, who seemed to hold aloof, as if they did not know how to place the girl, who, though belonging at the post-office, had the freedom of the Felton home, calling the ladies "aunt."

Gilbert could not realize this, and a possible parting put him in a state of panic, not only for himself, but for her. What questions might be asked her? What doubts raised?

The Misses Felton and Mr. Esterbrook, on this topic being united, said, "Farmington, of course!" Yet they had to confess that there were certain difficulties in the way, and were oftentimes inclined to agree with Hugh Oldys's mother, who said in her gentle way, "You may be right, cousins Felton, but my feeling would be to keep the dear child here close amongst us, Stephen Latimer helping, so that when the time comes when she must realize her natural loneliness, she need never otherwise feel alone."

Miss Emmy's momentary fit of retrospection was broken by the return of Poppea and Hugh, skating "cross-hands," and in a moment Miss Emmy was whirling over the ice until she began to feel, like Philip Angus, that the runners were on her own feet.

After a mile of this exhilaration, Hugh pushed the sled into a little cove, to the shelter of the high bank and a hemlock tree combined, that he might ease his numb hands and give Poppea a chance to collect her straggling hair.

"How do you like that, cousin Emmy?" he cried. "If it wasn't that gripping that confounded handle bar paralyzes my hands, I could push you clear up to Kirby; the mischief of it would be coming down again. Face the wind, Poppy, then your hair will blow back so you can grab it."

Hugh, of man's strength and stature, was still a boy in the joy of life that was stamped in every line of his frank, well-featured, dark face. His hair, tousled by a fur cap, had a wave above the forehead; his almost black eyes looked straight at you without boldness. The corners of both nostrils and mouth had a firmness of curve that might either develop to a keen expression of humor or the power of holding his emotions in check.

As he looked at Poppea who, having taken off her red woollen hood, was struggling to rebraid her long hair that had escaped from its ribbon, his expression was of the affectionate regard of a boy for his sister, who is also his chum, and so much a part of his normal life that it never occurs to him to analyze their relations.

"Here's your ribbon," he said, tossing it to her at the moment she reached the end of the strand. "It blew into my hands a quarter of a mile back. You tie and I'll

hold; I never could manage a bow."

"Put on your hood quick or you'll lose that too," laughed Miss Emmy, revelling in the youth and freshness of the pair before her. So Poppea tied tight the ample head-gear crocheted by Satira Pegrim's generous, if not artistic hands, and in so doing, hid her thick, long mane of golden brown, with the tints of copper and ash that painters love. Beautiful as her hair was, the great charm of her face lay in her eyes. These, a casual observer might say, were hazel, but at times they held slanting glints of gold and green, like the poppy's heart, shaded by dark lashes, and all the opal colors: yes, even the fire opal.

Sometimes as they looked out from under the straight, dark brows, their expression would have been wistful, almost sad, had it not been for the upward curve of the lips and tip tilt of the straight nose that separated them, the sort of a nose that in a child is termed kissable.

"Once more up to the turn," said Hugh, "and then home. I'm afraid it will snow to-night and spoil the skating."

"No, home now; that is, for me," answered Poppea, looking for a hump where she could take off her skates. "Daddy hasn't been feeling quite well for a few days and he likes me to look over the mail after he has tied up the packages. You see, he mismarked one, day before yesterday. Quarter of four already? Then I shall be late."

"Not if we take a short cut across the fields and go down the hill through the cemetery. There's no snow to speak of, and it will be easier walking that way than over the icy main roads. Yes, I'm going back with you; I've got to, anyway, for father told me to go to the express office and also buy a lot of stamps, and I forgot both this noon.

"Bah! How cold my hands are! I wonder if, by any chance, Mrs. Pegrim would give a couple of tramps a cup of tea and a doughnut."

"Not tea, Hugh, chocolate with whipped cream on top, and I'll make it. I've learned up at the Feltons'; the aunties have it every afternoon, and it's delicious."

In this mood, the girl and man tramped over the brown-and-white meadows with their tumbledown stone fences, until in the high pickets of the graveyard fence they met the first real obstruction, which they avoided by going around to the north gate that opened above Oliver Gilbert's plot.

"I hope the ice hasn't broken the young dogwoods," said Poppea; "they were growing so nicely. No, but they are bending. Stop one minute, Hugh, and help me break off the biggest icicles that are weighing down these branches until they will snap.

"Oh, look! the ice and wind have torn all the vines from Mother's stone and Daddy will feel dreadfully; he's trained it so as to make a frame and he would never let me touch even a leaf. I wonder if we can put it back? No," and she stooped to lift the vine; "the ice is too heavy."

As Poppea bent over she suddenly slipped to her knees before the stone, her eyes fixed upon it with an intensity amounting to terror. Hugh, close behind her, followed her glance. For a second, neither moved or spoke, then turning toward him, her hands outstretched and pleading, she cried:—

"Look, Hugh! look quick, and tell me if the snow has blinded me, or are those numbers 1851?"

He stooped and looked intently before he answered what he already knew, had known, these half dozen years; then said, "It is 1851, Poppea."

"But it must be a mistake then of the stone-cutters, that we've never noticed before because of the vines; it should be 1861, the year that I was born and Mother died, so that I never saw her.

"Don't you think that is the way of it, Hugh? Why don't you speak? What ails you?"

Again she turned from the stone to look him in the face. Something she saw there struck a chill into her more penetrating than the icy ground on which she continued to kneel.

Poor Hugh Oldys! What avail was his athletic strength or moral courage? If his playmate had been drowning, burning, or in any other form of physical peril, he could have dashed through anything, or even killed men to rescue her from harm, but now—He stood facing the intangible, with bent head, helplessly groping for some way of escape, not so much for himself as for Poppea. The truth lay bare before them, and he knew that it could no longer be veiled. The protective instinct of manhood told him to get her home quickly and under cover, that the blow need not seem so brutal as in the open cold. While he was trying to collect himself and form a plan, Poppea's intuition, keyed almost to second sight,

was reading his mind through his eyes.

"You do not think the date is a mistake, but you don't know what to say!"

The words came out so slowly that her lips hardly seemed to form them; then Poppea faced the stone once more, her hands pressed to the sides of her face.

"If 1851 is right, then '*Mary, beloved wife of Oliver G. Gilbert*' can't be my mother. Do you understand, Hugh? Not my mother. Why don't you speak? Oh, do say something, Hugh; that is, if you understand!"

Stumbling to her feet, Poppea went to the little stone and, pulling away the vine, exposed the other date, 1852!

"Then Marygold isn't my sister either! Who was my mother, Hugh? And Daddy —isn't Daddy my father? Tell me, you must!"

Grasping Hugh by the shoulders, half to steady herself, half in frenzy, she shook him as she swayed to and fro.

"Come home, Poppea, and ask Daddy himself; he is the one to tell you all about it," the lump in Hugh's throat almost stopping his voice, as he took her arm and tried, without force, to turn her homeward. But Poppea was at bay. Still holding fast and looking in his face, she gasped:—

"What were my mother's and father's names? Tell me that *now*! Where did Daddy get me? Tell me that!"

Unconsciously Hugh shook his head, at the same time his lips said, "This also you must ask Daddy."

"That means that no one knows; that I'm not anybody, not anybody," she repeated with a moan. "Did Miss Emmy and Mr. Esterbrook and 'Lisha and Aunt Satira and everybody know but me? Does little Philip know? Take your hand off my arm, Hugh. I'm not going home any more; how can I, when I haven't a home or even a *dead* mother or a Daddy, and every one has deceived me?"

The poor young fellow, meanwhile, was trying to lead her toward the highway gate in the hope that a team might pass so that they could beg a ride, for heavy snow clouds were hastening the dark, and even he began to feel the chill of it through his pea-jacket, while Poppea was colorless and rigid as one of the icicles that hung from the trees. Could this be the same being who, less than an hour

before, joyous and radiant, was skating up the river holding Miss Emmy by the hand? If she had cried, ever so passionately, it would have reassured him.

"If you don't want to go back, you must go over to my mother or Miss Emmy," he said, as she again halted outside the gate in sight of the cross-roads. "Listen, I hear a wagon in the turnpike; wait a moment while I stop it and beg a ride down; you are trembling all over, and if you stay here any longer, you'll be very ill maybe."

Hugh ran down the side road to the turnpike in time to stop the team, a wave of relief sweeping over him when he saw that it was 'Lisha Potts taking his evening milk down to the centre. ('Lisha, who was still courting Satira Pegrim.)

To 'Lisha no explanation was needed save the fact of the discovery of the date and the need of getting Poppea home.

"Great snakes!" he ejaculated, closing his jaw with the snap of a steel trap. "So it's come at last! At the very first I rather sided with Gilbert's keeping the thing dark from her, but Satiry had the common sense,—'It's got to come,' says she, 'so why not let her grow up with an aunty and uncle and fetch up to it drop by drop instead of gettin' the whole thing some day like a pail of cold water on the head that may jar the brain.' Now it seems the cold water's come. Go back and fetch her, Hughey man, I'll wait; but I can't turn this long wagon on a hill noway, nohow."

Hugh hurried back, calling Poppea's name as he went, but when he reached the gate, she was gone.

Rushing frantically to and fro, he looked back into the graveyard and behind the long line of stone fence opposite that the night was fast blending with its other shadows, but Poppea was nowhere to be seen.

"She would ha' passed this way if she'd gone down home," said 'Lisha, now thoroughly startled at Hugh's drawn face and hurried words of what had happened. "I can see almost all the way down the other road, and she ain't on that. 'Tain't like she'd take to the hill-country this time o' night. Anyway, it isn't no use trying to track her; the ground's froze so hard it doesn't take a hoof print. Well, come to think of it, if that isn't darned queer! It was froze jest like this the night she was left at Gilbert's! Best come down to the centre and I'll drop this milk and borrer a buggy and you and me'll do some tall searchin'. It does look some as if the Lord had meant I was to be sort of trackin' of the little gall from

the beginnin'. But mebbe it's jest because I'm a good deal round about and keep my eyes open.

"You'll best tell Gilbert, but make him stay to hum, and we'll do the searchin'. It's no fit night for his lame leg; jest say 'Lisha Potts's going on the trail and he'll trust me, and mention to Satiry that the coffee-pot on the back of the stove'll make a nice picture for us when we get back."

Meanwhile, the long-legged horses were making good time toward the village, and presently, as Hugh entered the post-office, he could see Oliver Gilbert's face looking anxiously up the road through the window by the beehive, for the Binks boy had already come for the mail-bag.

"Where's Poppy? Has anything happened? Don't say she's fell through the ice and drowned!" Gilbert said almost in a whisper.

"No, no, she's safe enough," and Hugh paused, realizing that even these words might not be true.

"Sit down, Daddy" (Hugh had fallen into using Poppea's epithets). "I must tell you something."

Hugh told all as it had happened, repeating Poppea's broken sentences word for word with unconscious emphasis and pathos. Then, after giving 'Lisha's message, he stopped short and, still standing, looked at the old man, who was sitting motionless.

Gilbert arose with difficulty, steadying himself by the table corner. "Go, Hugh, and do you and 'Lisha do the best you can. She—she came to me in the night, and in the darkness she has gone from me," and hiding his face in his arm he left the office and, stumbling across the passage to the house, passed through the kitchen and entered his bedroom, where he closed and locked the door.

Hugh followed to say a few words to Satira, and remind her of the deserted post-office. She, overcoming her desire to set forth the fulfilment of her prediction in all its details, sat down suddenly in the rocker, head between her hands, until the honest tears spattered both on the floor and on the coat of old Mack, who, gray and rheumatic, still kept the place, half under the stove, that he had first chosen almost thirteen years before.

Oliver Gilbert meanwhile paced up and down the inner room, the irregular tapping of his heels telling its own story to Satira Pegrim, though she could not

see the pitiful working of his face or the nervous clenching of his long, thin hands. Presently he paused by the hooded cradle that stood as of old between the bed and wall. Lighting a candle, he set it upon the chest of drawers, where its rays fell upon the cradle. Upon the white counterpane was a little bouquet of Prince's pine, wintergreen berries, and holly ferns that Poppea had placed there on Christmas eve.

Stiffly Gilbert dropped to his knees, his arms clasped about the cradle as on that first night.—"God keep her and lead her in somewhere out of the cold and harm. Oh, Lord! I've been short-sighted and selfish. I wanted her for my very own so bad that I've lived out a lie rather than have the truth come between ever so little. Now she is suffering for it when it should only be me. I was puffed up and said to myself in my pride,—'A wrong has been laid at my door because the Lord knew that I would right it,'—but instead I have added to it. Oh, Lord! have pity; keep her away from the river and the railroad and Brook's pea-brush swamp until she gets time to think."

CHAPTER VIII

SANCTUARY

When Hugh Oldys left Poppea by the graveyard gate, her first blind impulse was to hide somewhere, anywhere from familiar faces, this being an instinct common to all healthy young animals when either physically hurt or in trouble. Knowing as she did all the by-ways, lanes, and pent roads of the entire township, the very last thing she thought of was to follow the highway or any of its cross-roads. So when Hugh was peering among the shadows of the walls and bushes that hedged them on either side, Poppea was crossing the graveyard toward the Northeast gate by which they had entered, flitting swiftly behind the larger stones for concealment.

She had no voice to answer Hugh's call even if she had wished to; her throat was contracted and dry, and to her ears, still ringing with the rush of blood brought by the first shock, his voice sounded miles away. When finally she heard the rattle of the milk wagon going unmistakably downhill, she stopped her efforts at concealment, and walking directly to the round hill above the graveyard took such a view of the surroundings as the dusk would allow. The bitter north wind sweeping down from the hill-country turned her about when she faced in that direction, putting an end to a wild idea she had of spending the night in a rough camp the young people had made the previous summer in the hemlock woods. The Moosatuck was already being outlined by many bonfires and all the lanterns that the young folks could collect, for they meant to make the most of what might prove the only snowless skating of the winter.

The village lights began to twinkle below, and an up train, stopping at Harley's Mills Station, drew out again, taking long breaths, and, creeping through the fields like a great glow-worm, made its way toward Bridgeton. There would be a down train in a quarter of an hour; could she reach the station in time, she might gain the last car from the brook side of the track without being seen.

Then she realized that she had no money, and the Felton ladies, her only friends in what was to her the fathomless mystery of New York, were at Quality Hill. Could she have gone to Mrs. Oldys, sure of finding her alone, and begged to be hidden for a few days, that would have suited her mood and necessities the best.

As she closed her eyes for a moment, she saw the peaceful picture of Mr. Oldys sitting with his evening paper by the fire in the library of endless books in their white, varnished cases, discussing the doings of the day with Hugh. Through the doorway into the dining room was a glimpse of white-clothed table, a jar of flowers, and the delicate outlines of Mrs. Oldys' sensitive face, as she bent over the great silver tray, tea-caddy in hand, watching for the first puff of steam from the kettle in order to complete the brewing of her perfect tea, and summon the father and son to table.

To go there would be once more to give herself up to all the dearest things of home that she had experienced through the kindness of friends, but thought that she must forever more lack; but above all, she was held back by a bitter feeling of resentment toward those who had been kind to her, for had they not all banded to deceive her? she, who was nobody, saved from charity possibly,—so quickly did her mind travel ahead of what she knew,—from being a town charge! At this bitter moment, the conventional expression came back to her as applied to a child who was being brought up by the widow Baker, much being expected of her and little done for the girl.

Poppea did not analyze her feelings, she was too young and too miserable for any logical reasoning; it was only that impressions crowded her brain with the rapid confusion of a nightmare, and at this moment the germs of two distinct natures began to develop rapidly: one sensitive and emotional; the other stern, proud, and unflinching to the verge of stubbornness.

For a few moments she stood thus, overlooking the village, the upland, and marsh meadows that stretched to salt water, until it seemed that the winking eyes of the lights, one red and one yellow, that guarded the entrance of the shallow bay, were beckoning her to come to them. As she waited, a curtain dropped about her from the clouds, and fine, crisp snowflakes melted upon her upturned face.

Then she began to walk rapidly through the pasture, but whichever way she turned thickets of bay or huckleberry bushes caused her to go back, until, tired with groping, her feet found a worn track, one of the many cow-paths that wound about the lot. Keeping to it, no longer trying to think but walking blindly, she slipped and lost the narrow hollow worn smooth in the thick old turf; then picking it up again, stumbled on.

After she had gone many miles, as she thought, the path came to some bars; two

of these were down, left so probably since the cows had made their last homeward trip in November. On the other side of the bars, the path that had previously zigzagged down a steep hillside continued on a level, and the whistle of a locomotive sounded very near.

In a few minutes more a great hayrick stopped her short, and feeling a way around it, she could see two cows, who were pulling their supper from one side of the stack that had been hollowed into a sort of shelter by many such meals. Then a lantern shone a few steps ahead, and a voice, that she recognized as belonging to an old neighbor of their own, called the cows into the shelter of the barnyard.

Poppea, finding that she had travelled only a mile and was within a few feet of the village street, and thinking that the farmer had awakened and come to protect his cattle from the storm, was tempted to crawl into the hay for warmth and rest; her feet were almost without feeling, her hood and muffler were frayed in many places; she shivered so that she had bitten her tongue until it bled, and faintness was creeping over her.

As she groped to find a place where the hay was loose enough to make a place for her body, the clock in the tower of St. Luke's struck melodiously, not counting out ten or eleven strokes as Poppea expected, but stopping short at six.

It was the joy of Stephen Latimer that both clock and bells sent forth a cheerful message of love and hope for what good time might bring forth rather than a warning of passing hours. 'Lisha Potts had once voiced this interpretation with his characteristic direct emphasis, saying one day to Miss Emmy, who had given the bells and was asking his opinion of them:—

"Yes, marm, they're real coaxin', persuasive, and comfortable; the First Church bell allers calls jerky like, 'Re-pent, re-pent, re-pent,' and the Hill Meeting House's says, 'H E L L! HELL! *Hell!*' plain as words, so's I don't feel called to go, though they do say bein' set against a rock has a powerful lot to do with the expression."

Be this as it may, the chimes had hardly ceased when Poppea left the haystack and found her way to the main road through another pair of bars, familiar to all the village children as the daily short cut to the Academy. Perhaps the church door might be unlocked, it often was; surely no one would look for her there.

The snow flurry was one of a series of squalls, that stopped long enough for her

to see her way across the road, also that a dim light came through the chancel window. Then the snow began to fall again in large, loose flakes that quickly filled her footprints.

Her scarf caught upon one of the shrubs that lined the bit of flagged path from road to door, and when she had pulled herself free, she noticed that the outer porch door stood open; then the notes of the organ reached her.

What day was it? It took her a full minute to remember that it was Wednesday, the afternoon upon which Stephen Latimer played the organ, only it was much later than he usually stayed. Expecting that the people might come out at any moment, Poppea tried to turn away, but she was nearly spent. Pulling herself into the vestibule with great effort, she looked through the diamond panes of the inner door into the church; it was quite empty save for the figure of Latimer himself at the organ, a single lamp above his head breaking the darkness. The truth being that the skating carnival had drawn all the people toward the Moosatuck, and finding himself alone, Latimer had this day let loose his very soul, dreaming and playing on, oblivious of time or falling night.

Cautiously Poppea pushed open the felt-edged door and crept into the church, watching intently for any move on the part of the player. Once within she slipped into the first of the pair of pews, that were in the deep shadow of the loft that once held the organ before the new instrument had been placed beside the chancel. The backs and door ends were high to keep out draughts; likewise these pews were seldom used except for the infant class. Sinking upon the tufted seat, after trying in vain to sit up, she gradually took a half-crouching position, her head and shoulders supported by one of the little carpet footstools.

Oh! the unspeakable relief of it, after the hour out in the storm, this being surrounded once more by friendly walls, the sudden cessation of cold, the light, the subtle fragrance of the fir trees and pine of the Christmas greens, and the sight of a human being who was, at the same time, unconscious alike of her presence as of her misery.

Stephen Latimer, sitting upon the organ bench with the soft light of the oil lamp outlining his face, looked little, if any, older than on the day when he had baptized Poppea. It was his double vocation that kept him young, for in reality he led two separate lives: in one he was the tireless and sympathetic priest; in the other, romanticist, musician, and dreamer. To-night he was leading this second life to the full. Once he set the stops in order as though he had finished, then

releasing a few of the more delicate, he began to improvise, weaving together the themes of the Christmas carols in which he had been drilling his little choir throughout the Advent season. The very joy of the strains seemed to mock the young girl listening back among the shadows, and she sat upright with a gesture almost of impatience, so far away seemed the singing and lighted tree of Christmas Eve.

Presently his mood dropped from exalted joy down into the depths of stern reality, and the little church began to tremble with the opening chords of the *Stabat Mater* of Rossini.

Poppea knew nothing of the meaning of the music or the idea that it interpreted, yet the emotion of it seized upon her, and she felt that something inexplicable had found her in the dark hiding-place, and was struggling with her body and soul. Her breath came quick and fast when Latimer began the massive splendor of *Cujus Animam*, and when he let the stop *Vox Humana* sing the unpronounced words of *Sancta Mater*, it seemed as though she must cry out, while the *Amen* exalted her, but painfully, and without final relief.

Evidently, it had somewhat the same effect upon the organist, for he stopped abruptly, wiped his forehead, that was beaded by the masterly exertion, and, passing his hand wearily across his eyes, shut off the stops still quivering with passion, leaving only *Vox Humana*, and then, after a moment's pause, played the hymn of childhood, as though convinced that in its simplicity alone lay peace.

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child."

Poppea rose to her feet, grasping the back of the seat in front of her: the hymn was the first that Gilbert had taught her while she still slept in the hooded cradle. At last God was merciful: the tension broke; tears rained from her strained eyes and began to quench the fire in her brain.

Burying her face in her hood to stifle the blessed sobs, she again crouched in the pew corner.

At the same time, the door opened and Mrs. Latimer came into the church; feeling her way, she steadied herself by the door of the pew where Poppea lay until her eyes focussed to the surroundings. As Latimer reluctantly closed the keyboard with the lingering of one parting from a friend, she called, walking toward him as she spoke: "Stevie dear, what have you been about? It is half-past seven and the popovers that I made for tea have grown quite discouraged. I was expecting you hours ago, but Hugh Oldys came rushing in looking so ghastly that he put everything else out of my head. He was coming home with Poppy Gilbert from skating, they took the short cut across the graveyard—" then, as Mrs. Latimer reached her husband, she leaned over his shoulder and finished the sentence, but the crouching girl knew its import perfectly.

In a moment, husband and wife were hurrying from the church. As Stephen Latimer stooped to bolt the swinging inner door, Poppea heard Mrs. Latimer say, "Elisha Potts and Hugh are hunting everywhere, but if they do not find her by nine o'clock, don't you think we would better ring the church bells to collect the skaters and have a general search?"

"Yes, if it must be; but I wish we could find some less public way of reaching her, she is such a sensitive child, yet very proud beneath the surface. Do you know, Jeanne, she very often reminds me of you yourself. If you had fled before a cruel hurt, would you like to be brought home by the ringing of bells?"

"No, Stevie, all I should need *now* would be time to remember and know that you were waiting for me with your arms outstretched."

Then the doors closed, and Poppea was a prisoner. Yet in those few moments she had been given a glimpse of the perfection of one of the great mysteries of life, and it made a lasting impression on the soul of the girl who was pushed into

womanhood in a single night. For the time being she had what she most needed, rest and silence, with the single lamp that had been forgotten, to prevent the oppression of darkness. She was too physically numb to care what happened during the next hour or realize the possible necessity of the ringing of the bells. Fixing herself as comfortably as might be on the narrow seat, she fell into a heavy sleep pillowed by the little carpet stool worn bare by the restless feet of the infant class children.

Meanwhile 'Lisha Potts and Hugh Oldys had gone to all the places where Poppea would have been likely to take refuge, and finally, a little before nine o'clock, meeting with Stephen Latimer at the Feltons', where they snatched a hasty supper, held an impromptu consultation.

"Do you think," sobbed Miss Emmy, "that she could have drowned herself? It's all open water below the dam at Harley's Mills."

"No," almost shouted Latimer, "and do not let us give the ugly thought shape even by suggestion. To a healthy-minded, responsible girl such as Poppea, the idea would not even occur, for suicide is the final proof of irresponsibility. That she may be wandering, dazed, in the bay marshes is my greatest fear; still, before we make a general hue and cry, let us go back to Gilbert's and ask him his exact wishes. Whoever may be her father after the flesh, Gilbert is now according to the law."

"Yes," seconded 'Lisha, "we'd best go back and ask Daddy, and keep a good lookout by the way. She may head for home after a while, but not have push enough to get there."

For the third time during the twelve hours the mood of the weather had changed. The wind had parted and banished the heavier snow clouds, and the moon, edging its way persistently through those that remained, made the lanterns that the three men carried almost unnecessary.

Oliver Gilbert had sorted and distributed the seven o'clock mail, closed the post-office at the earliest legal moment, and was sitting by the kitchen fire; that is, he

sat there in the brief intervals when he was not peering from the window toward the road or listening at the different doors where the wind kept up a disconcerting tapping and rattling.

For the third time Satira Pegrim spread supper before her brother, but she had ceased urging him to eat. Mixing his coffee exactly to his taste, she set it close to his elbow and then silently left the room. As she closed the door at the bottom of the attic stairs and began a creaking ascent, Gilbert called after her: "Satiry, will you fetch the pair of little iron fire dogs from under the eaves when you come down? They lie to the north side under where the seed corn is hung."

Noticing the food apparently for the first time, he ate a few morsels, drank the coffee slowly, and then going to the side porch collected a large armful of logwood topped with kindlings which he proceeded to carry upstairs with no little difficulty, and coming in collision with his sister on the landing at the top.

"Sakes alive, man, what are you doing!" she cried, almost dropping the heavy andirons.

"I'm going to take out the chimney board in Poppy's room and start a fire so's it will look real cheerful when she comes home—for—she'll be tired and cold—most like. Mayhap the hearth'll need brushing," he added; "the swallows' nests always fall down of a winter."

The spare bedroom that was now Poppea's had an empty look, in spite of the bright-flowered wall paper and braided rugs. The straight white drapery at the windows, and on the old high-posted bed in which several generations had been ushered into the world, suggested ice and snow to Gilbert rather than a soft fabric.

"Haven't you got a warm-looking comfortable to throw over that?" he said to Mrs. Pegrim, who was standing in the doorway, jerking his thumb over his shoulder toward the bed without looking at it. When, after a few minutes of kneeling on the hearth and coaxing with the bellows, the ruddy glow of the fire had penetrated all the ghostly nooks, Gilbert got up and looked about with a sigh of satisfaction, letting his eyes rest upon the white bed for the first time.

Asking Satira to watch the fire until the sparks from the kindlings had subsided, he lit a lantern and made his way slowly to the little workshop back of the post-office, and seating himself before his desk, drew out the shabby ledger in which was written the record of the years since Poppea's coming. Below the record of

the previous day he drew a heavy line. Then writing *December twenty-eighth*, across the entire page, he traced under it, writing painfully and making three strokes to every letter,—"This day has the Lord taken the pen from my hand to put it into hers. In three days comes a New Year. Amen." From a panel beneath the drawer, that flew open when he touched the spring, he drew the miniature and its slender chain, wrapped in a piece of chamois leather.

It was several years since he had looked at it; yes, he was almost sure that the young woman must be of Poppea's blood, if not her mother, for the likeness between the two was now more than mere fancy. Dropping it into his pocket, he returned to Poppea's bedroom, where he fastened the miniature against the frilled pincushion on top of the high chest of drawers, and lighting the candles in the two straight glass holders that had been Miss Emmy's Christmas gift, set one on either side of it, then laid the precious book upon her work-table by the window, and crept back to the kitchen, where Mack was whining uneasily as though he missed some one, and scratching at the door to be let out.

Elisha Potts took the lead as the three men started on their slippery walk from Quality Hill down through the main street of the village. As they reached the Rectory, Mrs. Latimer flitted out to ask for news. When they came abreast of the church, her husband, who had a veiled idea that he had left the lamp burning, glanced up at the chancel window only to be reassured that all was dark within.

Brief as the stop was, Hugh Oldys, who had half turned toward the flagged pathway, saw something fluttering from one of the shrubs; raising his lantern he recognized it as a fraying of Poppea's scarf.

"She has passed this way," he cried, "and since the snow has stopped, for the worsted is quite dry, while the bush is crusted!" but lowering the lantern to the pavement, the footprints there shown were confused and told nothing, as Mrs. Latimer had gone in alone and come out with her husband.

"Have you the keys, Mr. Latimer? We must look here, though of course she may have merely stumbled into the bushes and gone on."

"I have them in my pocket, but I was in the church alone until half-past seven and heard no one."

"Most likely not, if you was a-playin' the organ," said 'Lisha, "for you kin make her beller powerful disconcertin', Parson. Lemme have them keys."

How long Poppea slept, she did not know. When she awoke, the church was in total darkness, the lamp having burned out, and the cold of the floor was creeping up to where she lay. Sitting up, she touched everything in reach, yet could not place herself. Was it one of the mazes of a bad dream?

Then the pungence of the fir trees came to her, and the moon without outlined the long window over the chancel.

Something shook the outer door, and then some one fumbled at the keyhole of the inner. The door was cautiously pushed open, and Poppea heard Hugh Oldys's voice saying, "Go quietly and don't stamp so, Potts; she may be asleep," and then Stephen Latimer's lantern was turned so full upon her face that she raised her arm to shield her dazzled eyes.

Hugh and Elisha drew back into the doorway, and it was Latimer who, sitting beside her, said: "We have come to take you home, Poppea. How long have you been here?" The answer came in a whisper.

"Ever since six o'clock."

"Then you were here while I was playing; it was you who were struggling with yourself. It seemed to me suddenly as I played that some one was in hard conflict, and that I must play to help them in some unseen way. I did not dream that it was you, my child. Now I know from the soul that struggled with me that you are ready to go home."

"Let me give her some supper and go up with her," begged Jeanne Latimer in her husband's ear, as she, alarmed by their long stay in the church, joined them when they were leaving. "Send Hugh home, and ask Potts to let Oliver Gilbert know that she will soon be there. She needs a woman of her own sort to be with her at this moment, not Satira Pegrim."

A pressure of the hand from Latimer told her that she was right, and putting an arm about Poppea, she drew her into the Rectory and ministered to her by the dim firelight, and presently the two were driven to the post-office house by Potts,

going together to Poppea's room without meeting any one except old Mack.

For a moment Poppea paused, her hand on the doorknob. The crackling sound of the fire within made her turn it quickly. Mrs. Latimer hastened to undress her, for she was nervously exhausted, and a red spot glowed in the middle of each white cheek.

As Poppea stood before the chest of drawers to braid her straggling hair, her eyes fell on the miniature. Seizing it, she gazed at the face intently, and then, with dilating eyes, turned to Mrs. Latimer.

"Who is it?" she whispered; "how did it come here?"

"You brought it with you about your neck the night you came. We do not know, Daddy and I; we can't be sure, but we think it must have been your mother."

Without speaking, Poppea looked at it once more, put her hand to her face as though struggling intently with memory, pressed the picture to her lips, and then slipped the chain about her neck.

Lying back between the white curtains with the flowery counterpane across her breast, her loosely braided hair wreathing her head, the resemblance to the miniature became almost startling, but Jeanne Latimer put a restraint upon her tongue and all she wished to say. Stooping, she quickly kissed Poppea good-night.

"Shall I never know anything more?" Poppea asked pleadingly; "isn't there anything to tell except that I am not me—that I don't belong to them?"

"Yes, a little more, but the telling of that belongs to Daddy." Then even as Mrs. Latimer spoke, Poppea's expression changed, the mouth hardened, and a rigid expression mantled the delicate features, that remained after the long fringed lashes shut out the changeful fire of her eyes.

Waiting a moment to see if they would open again, Mrs. Latimer tiptoed out.

From forcing her eyes shut, Poppea really dozed, and only awakened as the candles gave their final splutter before going out. Mack lay upon the mat before the fire twitching and whining in his sleep. Starting up, she felt, rather than saw, that there was some one in the room. Peering around the curtain, she came face to face with Oliver Gilbert, who, wrapped in his double gown, was sitting in the deep chintz chair by her bedside.

Instantly a long, thin hand was laid upon hers that struggled under it for a moment but could not pull itself away.

"Some things are real if others are hid from us for a little while, Poppy. You see your home is here, yours to have and hold under love and law, and you see you've still got a Daddy; perhaps if you'd *say* the word just once, we'd both feel better."

The prisoned hand stopped struggling; raising herself on one arm she repeated slowly, "Yes, I've a Daddy." Then she hid her face upon his shoulder, the miniature of the other Poppea dangling from her neck.

When she fell asleep, he did not go away, but sat there, replenishing the fire lest she should wake in some new terror.

Thus Gilbert kept his second vigil until dawn. In putting a last stick upon the embers he stumbled over Mack, who did not move; his faithful old life had gone out peacefully in the night, and with it his mistress's careless girlhood.

CHAPTER IX

THE MYSTERY OF THE NAME

It being Saturday and market-day, Satira Pegrim had gone to Bridgeton with 'Lisha Potts to look at furniture, for liberal as to matters of time though Potts was as a wooer, he had told Satira on Christmas Day that when a man reached fifty it was time he did something more about settling down than talk of it. Satira, on the whole, had enjoyed a very pleasant courtship during the years of her reign at the post-office. It is given to few women to attend the county fair for thirteen consecutive years at the expense of the same man without incurring further responsibility.

She was now divided between conscientious motives about leaving her brother until Poppea was able to keep house, and the fear lest 'Lisha become discouraged and transfer his affections to Judith, daughter of the widow Baker. This veteran, having failed to secure a second spouse for herself, was now trying to checkmate in turn every available man in the county for the benefit of her daughter. The Bakers lived almost opposite the Pegrim farm that 'Lisha leased, and well Satira knew that nearness means a good deal, especially in winter, so she had consented to look at furniture, saying demurely at the same time:—

"Of course, if you wish my housekeepin' 'xperience in trading, it'll pleasure me to give it, but if you want a woman that can rush into things helterskelter and unthinkin', why not try Judy Baker?"

"No old maids for me, Satiry," he flung back, slapping his knees to give emphasis to his words. "When I get spliced, it'll hev to be either a young woman or a widder, the last bespoke and preferred."

"Sakes alive! and what's Judy but a young woman? She's only turning twenty-four."

"Age hasn't got a thing to do with it; there's old maids at twenty and women folks turning forty that though unmarried ain't, and is young."

"Oliver Gilbert, he hit them differences plumb on the head once't some years back, when he was havin' considerable trouble in making folks understand that

he wasn't calculatin' to take a second. Gilbert he's read lots of unor'nary thoughts in books, and he says, says he: "Lisha, there's three kinds o' females when it comes to considerin' matrimony: widders that understand us men through 'xperience; just plain nice women folks that know what's necessary about us by intooition, as the Lord meant they should; and old maids that thinks they're dead wise, but all they know's by suspicion. Now don't you take one of those last, 'cause they suspect so much more bad of us than we really are that their idee is darned hard to live up tew!' Well, just at that time what I took to, was not gettin' married, but to the woods, and went in for trapping and lumbering for quite a spell.

"Judy Baker's terrible knowin' by suspicion. When she shakes hands, she'll jerk hern away before a man's really caught his grip, like she most *knew* he was goin' to squeeze it, which he, bein' I, hadn't no such idee. Then she looks mad, 'cause he, bein' I, didn't."

After this complete understanding, Satira Pegrim, who felt that in addition to the trip of inspection 'Lisha deserved some more positive encouragement, told him that if he would begin and mend the fence up at the farm and reshingle the buildings, she would begin to sew her carpet rags and sheets, and that would give them both time to be ready by Poppea's sixteenth birthday—this being the earliest age in Newfield County at which a well-brought-up girl could be expected to keep house, with a neighbor to accommodate in matter of washing and house cleaning.

'Lisha, jubilant over something so definite, not only bought tickets for Christy's Minstrels that chanced to be in Bridgeton that night, but insisted that they two sup at the Railway Hotel as well. Hence Satira's prolonged absence.

Thus it chanced that in two days after the night of Poppea's awakening, the post-office house, put in order from attic to porch, was left in her charge, and in the afternoon she read Gilbert's record written in the old ledger, they two sitting together in the long kitchen where the first scene had been set.

As she read, Gilbert, from the south window, where he sat fitting and adjusting an intricate bit of clockwork, furtively watched the varying color and expression of her face. After slowly reading his simple story, Poppea could not feel for a second that she was an unloved intruder, or fail herself to be filled anew with love for the old man who had opened his door. Her quick intuition and rapidly developing mentality scanned between the lines, learning of many acts of self-

sacrifice and devotion that Gilbert believed locked securely in his own thoughts. It was the *why* of it all that rankled: the circumstances, people, or both that had made the charity necessary. When the girl thought of this, a steely flash came from her eyes, and the will that had been latent, except for childish bursts of impetuosity, set its signals at the corners of lips and nostrils, making the watcher sigh.

"Well, perhaps she may need it to stiffen her up by and by, who knows," said Gilbert to himself; "if only the Lord lets her always love something harder than she hates something else."

Dear, patient Oliver Gilbert, in those few words he summed up the struggle that Poppea must fight her way through in the next ten years. Would she be victor or vanquished? As a girl glides unconsciously into womanhood, the mysteries that surround her are like the intangible, yet real, mists of daybreak that may clear away before the purifying rays of the sun, or solidify into angry storm clouds to blot out the entire day.

In addition to these, over Poppea there hung what to her was a darker cloud,—the mystery of the name; and the only rays that could penetrate its shadow must come from the sun of love.

Presently Poppea closed the book, and after resting with her arms clasped about it for a moment, laid it on the table. Going to the window where Gilbert was sitting, she stood behind him, stroking his hair gently and smoothing back one troublesome lock that kept falling over his eyes. Then stooping and laying her cheek upon his, she whispered:—

"Daddy, please say that I need not go away anywhere to school. I can learn a great deal more at the Academy if I try, and besides the Felton Aunties and Mr. Oldys lend me so many books, and they are going to have a French teacher next summer, and Miss Emmy has asked me to read with them. I want to work hard at my music, so that by and by I can play an organ perhaps, or sing in a Bridgeton choir. And I must help you in the post-office. You've said so often lately that people are more careless of their spelling than they used to be, and do not write the addresses well, that I'm quite sure your eyes are getting tired. Please, Daddy? It will make things so much easier."

Gilbert paused a moment in order to control his eagerness to assent.

"I never wanted you to go away, child, but for your own good, and now—it

doesn't seem to me that I could bear it. Miss Emmy thinks, though, that you'd be better of a little change, and she's spoken with me about your going down to them next month to spend a fortnight or so, to see the city, hear some good singing, the Opery she calls it, and things like that. Wouldn't you like it, Poppy? Yes, I thought so. Well, you go try your wings outside of Harley's Mills a bit, dearie. Mayhap you'll think you've never tasted life before, but if you get homesick for Daddy and the post-office, and feel peeky for a sight o' the river again and a sniff of the salt harbor wind that blows over Quality Hill, they'll be here, and all you've got to do is just to come right back."

A month later, Poppea was standing between the heavy crimson curtains of one of the Feltons' parlor windows on Madison Avenue, overlooking the Square. The sound of the traffic from the opposite side where Fifth Avenue and Broadway meet and cross was deadened to a sullen roar by the heavy double windows except when the stages passed, and then for a moment the distinct sound of hoof and wheel was distinguishable.

Over in the park many children were playing, rolling hoops to and fro, or wheeling about on roller-skates, having a row of small wheels set lengthwise under the foot that made the sport as much a matter of equipoise as ice skating.

Poppea longed to join them, to rush along and feel the air around her and facing the wind, meet it halfway. For an airing she went to drive every day with the Felton ladies in the new landau which was lined with tufted blue satin, with little mirrors let into the side panels. Sometimes they drove up Fifth Avenue to Central Park, through the east drive to the turn and back again, at a decorous and leisurely pace, Poppea and Mr. Esterbrook sitting opposite the ladies, who were continually bowing and smiling to those in other carriages that they passed. Even as late as 1874 to 1876, all those who kept private equipages were well known to one another, and if a stranger appeared in Mrs. —— barouche, the identity was soon revealed by the sending out of cards for a more or less stately reception to meet the guest. The informal and irresponsible afternoon teas of the last two decades of the century, their chief motive, as voiced by the Autocrat, being to "gabble, gobble, and git," were as yet unconceived. Sometimes a party of young folks on horseback, followed by an instructor, would come in sight, winding among the trees that separate drive from bridlepath, and pass before Poppea, all eagerness, could really see them, for except on very mild days the carriage

windows were closed in spite of Miss Emmy's protestation that she never really breathed except in the open air. The windows of Madam Felton's coach had always been closed against the east winds of Boston fifty years before, and Miss Elizabeth felt that to do otherwise would be too much of an exhibition of change. If Miss Emmy chose to sleep with her bedroom window open, that was a different matter; eccentric, of course, but inconspicuous.

One day Mr. Esterbrook had suggested that they two should leave the carriage, walk back to the entrance gate and take a stage or a horse-car home. How Poppea had enjoyed it. There had been enough wind to ripple the water of the reservoir, and the gulls were flying over it, preparing to bed down for the night as they did on Moosatuck. Another time, the ladies always being interested in everything concerning the good of the city, had driven across the park and out the west side of it to see where the building of the Museum of Natural History was to be located, the laying of the corner-stone by President Grant having been set for the following June. Continuing on over poorly paved streets or muddy roadways that ran between partly decayed country houses, or the shanties of squatter settlements, they came within sight of the Hudson, making their way northward through Manhattanville and Bloomingdale to a hill called Claremont, where there was a place of refreshment in an old farm-house.

The sight of the glorious river sweeping down between the high walls of the palisades, with shadowy suggestion of headlands and mountains, made the young girl's breath come quick and short. She could not keep her eyes from the window and she spoke either in monosyllables or kept silent. Could she, might she go out on the bank and see, not through the glass, and feel the wind that was bending the old tulip trees with the rattling seed cups?

Alas, no; it was a place of public entertainment where one, especially a young lady, must be very careful to do nothing unusual. So, though Miss Emmy looked as though she would not only have encouraged Poppea in her desire but gone with her if it had not been so cruelly windy, they turned their backs on the wonderful panorama, while Patrick sought an easier, if less picturesque, way home.

He, in fact, scowled upon the whole trip to such an extent that it was not repeated. The horses, used to half a dozen miles at most, had sweated unduly; the rim of one of the newly painted wheels had sunk between two cobbles and become badly scratched, while Patrick himself had been jolted to such an extent that he had been obliged, in order to keep his seat, to adapt himself to

circumstances and do something more than sit on the box and hold the reins, a new condition which raised his ire. It may be said with truth that the tyrannical family coachman of the old régime in New York was the logical and fitting ancestor of the arbitrary chauffeur of to-day. The first, however, having only the "lame horse" plea as his weapon; the other, any one of an endless series of complicated intestinal diseases concealed in the corpulent tonneau.

Thus, after the first week, Poppea's exercise was limited to the correct walk for girls of her age, up or down Fifth Avenue to Washington Square, or with Nora for attendant, dressed in the neat garb of a city maid, down Twenty-third Street and eastward to Gramercy Park, a key to which exclusive enclosure had been given to the Misses Felton by one of their many friends in the surrounding houses. She often looked longingly at the girls of her own age who walked in groups of twos and threes, chatting vivaciously, the maid following far enough away to be out of sight if not out of mind. At home she had never felt lonely. Now, for the first time, she realized that she had no real girl companions of her own age.

This particular afternoon when she stood between the curtains, a hand on each, looking alternately out into the square and then down the length of the three great rooms, divided by marble columns, their size further magnified by the vistas seen in the pier and mantel mirrors, she felt like some wild thing at bay. The ladies had gone in the carriage to Staten Island to visit a distant relative who was ill, taking Nora with them. Mr. Esterbrook had lunched as usual at his club, the Union League, only a few blocks further up the avenue, it having been his considerate custom to leave the house to the ladies and their friends at mid-day ever since luncheon had taken the place of early dinner.

Poppea tried to open first a front and then a back window to get a breath of air, but without success. She was too wise now to refresh herself by sitting on the outer doorstep, since the doing of it, during the first week, had brought a very decided remonstrance from the usually sympathetic Miss Emmy.

For a minute she was minded to get her hat and join the children in the square; then some street musicians with harp and violins struck up before the next house, riveting her attention. The playing was spirited and the time good, though imperfect as to technique. The pent-up energy in Poppea began to surge and sway her body to the music. Stepping from the recessed window before the long mirror, where there was a space clear of furniture, she began to dance, not with set steps or calculated gestures, merely letting the music lead her.

When she finally stopped, head forward, a sort of half-mocking courtesy to the looking-glass, laughing,—her good temper restored,—she was startled to see a reflection besides her own, that of a young man of perhaps eight and twenty, of medium height, clean shaven at a time when this was uncommon, immaculate as to clothes, having an air of being perfectly at ease in unusual surroundings that Poppea noticed even in her confusion.

Caleb had ushered him through the sliding door unthinkingly, for the colored servitor was standing transfixed, one hand raised in warning, saying in the brief time that it took Poppea to prepare for flight:—

"Sho, I didn't know you was here, Miss Poppy; I 'lowed Marsa Esterbrook was corned in."

Then in a confidential whisper to the caller as the girl slipped past him and flew rather than ran up the thickly padded stairs, he added:—

"It's jest Miss Poppy, a young missy from de country that Miss Emmy thinks a mighty heap of. She was lonesome-like I reckon, and just a-dancin' to keep up her spirits. Do set down, Marsa Winslow; the ladies should shuah be back by now and they'll feel powerful bad to have missed you. I well recomember your lady mother back in the old Boston time; she and Miss Emmy was like two twins for standing up for each other.

"Oh, so you'se livin' in New York an' can drop in any time. I'll deliber your message wif honah, sah, to the ladies' pleasure," and Caleb bowed the young man out, laying the silver salver with the bit of pasteboard in a spot upon the hall table where it could not fail to attract attention. The card read, Bradish Winslow, The Loiterers' Club.

"I should like to meet that girl four or five years hence; she's a wonderful bit of live color already," was Winslow's mental comment as he went down the steps, hesitating at the foot whether he should go up or down the avenue, or across the square.

Poppea, having gained her room, where the windows consisted of a single sash, threw one of them wide open, and kneeling on the floor so that her chin rested on the sill, drew in a long, refreshing breath.

For a moment she wondered who the caller might be, and thought of her dancing with regret, but on the return of the Misses Felton they had such a delightful bit

of news to impart that she forgot even to ask his name. The following week the opera of Lohengrin was to be sung, Christine Nilsson taking the part of Elsa for the last time in New York.

No such voice, Miss Felton declared, had been heard in America, except possibly that of Nilsson's countrywoman, Jenny Lind. To hear her would be a musical education in itself for Poppea; so not only had a box been secured for the night, but Stephen Latimer and his wife were coming to complete the party, in spite of the fact that there were some who thought the witnessing of all dramatic performances unclerical. That evening Miss Emmy played some fragments of the opera on the grand piano, promising Poppea that Stephen Latimer should explain its construction and motive to her when he came.

For a few days Poppea forgot her desire to run away in thinking of the opera, and trying to pick out bits from the score, but its complication baffled her and she had to content herself with persuading Nora to continue their walk from Gramercy Park down Irving Place to Fourteenth Street that she might look at the outside of the Academy of Music that was her Mecca.

When the strain began again and she was once more longing for freedom and a five-mile walk up the bank of the Moosatuck, alone or with Hugh, the magic day came and with it the Latimers, Mrs. Stephen dimpling under a bewitching spring bonnet entirely of her own manufacture, a cherished possession. This, Miss Emmy told her playfully but firmly, she could *not* wear to the opera, but that Bachmann should dress her hair when she came to do theirs.

"No matter what Stephen may say to-night, I'm going to dress you to suit myself," said Miss Emmy. "This pink brocade with the silver trimmings, your hair loosened into a crown of puffs with the pink feather at the side, and the coral comb. The coral necklace and the white lace shawl for shoulder drapery, if you think low neck a trifle too much for a clergyman's lady, and these white gloves topped with coral bands."

"I will wear the white gloves gladly," said Jeanne Latimer, looking at her two forefingers rather ruefully. One was roughened by the use of the vegetable knife, for the times had been hard and houseworkers scarce at Harley's Mills that winter; while the other was pricked deep from the sewing of harsh muslin for the clothing that some would otherwise have lacked. "But really, Miss Emmy, don't you think it would look more honest if I wore my own gown?"

Miss Emmy laughingly acknowledged that perhaps it might, yet held her point

with determination, and eight o'clock saw the party of six gathered in the opera-box, their faces differing almost as much in expression as the details of their clothing.

Jeanne Latimer and Miss Emmy were what might be called very much dressed without having overstepped the bounds of good taste. Miss Emmy wore pale blue satin with much fine lace and pearl ornaments; though pale in the morning, her color always grew somewhat hectic at night and helped justify a combination by far too young for her years.

While Jeanne Latimer enjoyed the novel sensation of wearing her gay attire, Miss Emmy's pleasure came from the conscious result of wearing hers. Miss Felton, who sat behind her sister, wore an almost straight robe of black velvet; the point lace fichu crossed in front and fastened by a heavy diamond brooch, her only ornament, covered all but her slim white throat. Her hair was parted in bandeaux and coiled at the back of her head as usual, the only addition being two waxy white camelias tucked into the mass. During the last two years, however, a decided thread of silver had woven itself among the dark coils. Talking in short sentences to, rather than with, Mr. Esterbrook, who sat next her, she had an anxious air and seemed to be striving to keep him awake, for scarcely had they been seated when an air of intense weariness came over his elaborately dressed person, and he began to nod.

The remaining two of the party thus had the right-hand corner of the box to themselves, Poppea, in her simple white summer muslin relieved by a cherry sash, sitting in a low chair, with Stephen Latimer back of her. From the moment of their entrance, he had busied himself in explaining the great building to her, from the arrangement of the seats, boxes, and orchestra, to the uses of the prompter's egg-shaped box. Music and certain phases of human nature that he felt allied to the Divine were the food for this man's dreams, and to-night he would have both very near.

Presently the orchestra took their places, falling into silence at the tap of the leader's baton and the prelude to the first act began with the high notes of the Grail motif, rising to a climax of trumpets and trombones, then fading away to silence again. With a word here and there to focus the story of the libretto, Latimer called Poppea's attention to the new theme, where the Herald calls for a champion for the accused girl, the Elsa motif is voiced by the wood-wind instruments, and presently Lohengrin appears in the boat drawn by the swan.

To Poppea the scene had the mystery of fairyland, but it was, at the same time, her first glimpse of visible active romance, and through the scenes that followed came her primal realization of the love of man and woman as separate from the friendship of girl and boy.

When Lohengrin sets the one condition for the marriage that Elsa shall never ask him his name and Latimer explained the *Mystery of the Name* motif, Poppea with hands clasped in the folds of her gown sat with strained eyes and parted lips scarcely breathing. Once heard, this motif never left her ears, whether it was whispered by the wood-wind instruments, the horn, or proclaimed by the whole orchestra, as when in the scene of the bridal chamber the knight calls Elsa passionately by name, but she, not knowing his, may not speak it, and so at last rebels and demands to know.

As Latimer watched Poppea's face, he saw the change that fell upon it. The joy of music, color, and pageant faded from it, until, finally, when the boat, now guided by the Dove of the Grail, bears Lohengrin, its knight, away and Elsa falls fainting, he saw Poppea's lips, from which the color had fled, frame rather than say:—

"She would not marry him because she did not know his name, and when at last she knew it, he had to go away; suppose, oh, suppose—?" Poppea turned her head from him, but Latimer, through the music and the dreaming, read the thought that had taken possession of her.

The Latimers returned to Harley's Mills the next afternoon, and Stephen, at his wife's instigation, asked Miss Emmy if Poppea might not accompany them. "It's very hard for her, Stephen," she said; "she isn't in a natural frame of mind now at best, and all the new things she sees and feels exaggerate it. I know how it is; last night, at first I loved my fine feathers and then they pricked like pins, and I thought, 'Oh! suppose I should have to wear them always and play a part and turn into some one else and never go back to tell you what day of the week it is, Stevie, or play the organ and peel potatoes and make nighties for stiff old Mrs. Ricker, who scolds because it is so much trouble to wear and wash them!' It simply paralyzes me.

"I *know* that Poppy feels, 'Suppose I should turn out to be somebody else, who was born to live indoors and be shut in by these double windows and never get back to Daddy and the post-office, and never any more hunt for lady's-slippers and arbutus in the Moosatuck woods with Hugh.'

"I never could understand why people's friends always try to get them away from home if there's anything they want them to forget. At home I can always keep a worry in one place and needn't go out of my way to look at it, but when one is away, it may turn up unexpectedly at any corner."

Miss Emmy, however, had replied: "Send Poppea home with you when she's only been here two weeks? Not a bit of it. The house hasn't been so gay in my memory, besides, I'm having Nora and the seamstress turn her out such a lot of pretty clothes. I'm sure, too, I'm giving her as nice a time as any girl could ask."

A few days later the roving mood returned, and would not be restrained. When the ladies had gone to a morning charitable meeting, leaving Poppea practising some little ballads she had found in one of their many music books, she slipped on her going-out things and, closing the front door, made her way quickly across the square to where the omnibus passed that Mr. Esterbrook had taken the day they two had left the carriage in Central Park. Once in the park, she felt sure she could find her way to that high bank overlooking the river, where she could feel the wind from the hills on her face and look at the water that was always coming, always passing, and yet never left one behind.

She had a small netted purse of dimes and nickels that Satira Pegrim had given her on parting, with the admonition, "'Tain't but what they'll feed and lodge you, Poppy, and more too; 'tisn't that, but mebbe you'd fancy an apple or a bit of spruce gum, and not be able to lay hand on it without buying, or need a penny for an organ monkey, for they do say that all the organs that goes through here in summer heads for New York in winter, and consequently monkeys must be plenty. There's 'busses in New York, too, they say, and most like you'd like to make a change from carriage riding."

Thus equipped, Poppea paid her fare and stole into a corner, where she remained until the omnibus reached the end of its route. Her walk up through the park to the northern outlet was easy, but after that, the other mile was broken and irregular; for though there were old country houses here and there, interspersed with newer buildings, the ground was hilly, many shanties perched upon the rocks and huddled together in the open fields.

Once she asked her way of a pleasant-faced woman at the gate of a large, brown building which proved to be an orphan asylum, and her informant told her that the location was called Bloomingdale, that another large building set in ample grounds that they could see to the northward was the asylum, and that if in going

back she would walk down the Bloomingdale Road (Broadway) a piece, she would find a stage that would take her back through Manhattanville and Harlem into the heart of the city. Also she cautioned Poppea not to loiter, for the water side was a lonesome spot for girls.

At last the river was in sight. Getting her bearings, she crossed a lot where a friendly cow followed her, trying to lick the rough woollen of her coat, and crawling between some rails, reached the bank that she had remembered, sitting to rest upon a low stump, where had been laid low one of a group of giant tulip trees.

The grandeur of it almost oppressed Poppea for a moment, then it seemed to compact itself and close up until the river became the Moosatuck winding its way from the hill country down to the Mills, and then onward through the marshes to the bay. There were not many boats upon it, but one was hers, built by 'Lisha Potts, and one was Hugh Oldys's, and they two were deciding which boat they should use, and whether both should row or only Hugh, for often they rowed together. Then the second boat disappeared, and Poppea rowed her boat, and in the stern sat Daddy fishing—Daddy, who seldom took a holiday. How young he looked when he caught that fine big bass; what jolly stories he told, and how good Satira Pegrim's basket lunch had tasted. This vision was vivid, and reminded Poppea that she was hungry.

Close in some bushes beside her a song-sparrow warbled his clear spring ditty, and the lump that had been gathering in her throat tightened and would not be swallowed. Scrambling to her feet she took one final look up and down before turning homeward, and, as she did so, her eyes fell upon a small marble shaft surmounted by an urn that stood not a dozen feet from where she had been sitting.

There were several like it in the hill graveyard at home, but this could not be a graveyard with only a single stone. Going near she looked for a name or date, but found only these words, *Erected to an Amiable Child.*

Who was it? Was this another mystery of a name. Had the child none?

Waving her hand good-by to the great river, she retraced her steps toward the Bloomingdale Road, and at that moment she heard in her ear, with bell-like clearness, the voice of Gilbert, calling to her as he often did when she stayed out late in the bank garden below the orchard: "Come home, Poppy, it's lonesome for you out there by yourself; besides, Daddy needs you!" Yes, Daddy needed her;

that must be the answer to everything that troubled her.

The next day it was Poppea who asked if she might go home, and Miss Emmy said yes.

CHAPTER X

PHILIP

When Poppea was nineteen, she became the assistant postmaster at Harley's Mills, with all the legal formality that the name implied, Mr. Oldys having "gone on her bond" as the local saying ran. Not that Gilbert's mental faculties were in any way impaired, but at seventy he was naturally less alert physically, and the long hours told on him. At least Poppea said so, and urged him to spend more time in the garden during pleasant weather in company with his pipe and one of his well-worn books. These, however, had palled upon him, or, as he once told Stephen Latimer, "It seems as if since Poppy grew up and into things, Mr. Plutarch is rather far back, and I don't any more care if Alcibiades returned or not, or much about the siege of Troy, though that's livelier. I want something with more up-to-date flesh and blood in it that'll help me to understand things that come up."

Latimer had suggested Shakespeare as a remedy, at the same time offering to lend Gilbert an edition that had clear print, and yet could be kept in the pocket. So from the day that Latimer brought the books, Gilbert had been under a new spell, while at the same period Miss Emmy had given Poppea the Waverley Novels, which still further changed his emotional horizon, and made him the more willing to leave the office in the warm June days and go to the bench under the widest spreading tree in the old orchard, with clover all about and the brilliant hues and perfumes of what Poppea called her parapet garden showing between the trees.

Satira Pegrim and 'Lisha Potts had finally joined names and farms, though the bustling woman had left her post of vantage at the village with many regrets. When Mrs. Shandy, Philip Angus's erstwhile nurse, had been obliged to leave him at fifteen altogether in the hands of a tutor, she had gladly, for the sake of being near the boy whom she almost worshipped, slipped into Satira's shoes as general caretaker at the post-office house, for Poppea's earnings, with her voice and as Gilbert's assistant, made such a helper possible.

No one in the village ever thought it strange that Poppea should fill a position hitherto occupied by a man. Once Harley's Mills, in the person of its elderly

females, would have raised its hands in horror at the thought of a young girl engaging in public business; but the Civil War had changed all that by becoming the origin of the general necessity in North and South alike for the woman's stepping into the man's empty shoes, so that the labor horizon for all time widened for all women.

From John Angus had come the only objection to the innovation. He said openly on several occasions that the charge of the United States mail should not be left in hands that were only fit to tie ribbons or tell a fortune with cards. This superficial criticism was attributed to his old grudge against Gilbert and his evident disgust at not having the chance to dislodge him that a change of postmasters might have rendered easier. As he took no steps toward doing anything in the matter by the usual method of presenting a petition, it was supposed that he had forgotten it, especially as immediately after, Angus went to Europe to be gone six months, on business, his lawyer announced, the truth being that the inscrutable man, jarred and rent by many disappointments and his own unyielding temperament, had received several warnings that he held life by a rather uncertain thread. Too secretive to confess that he was not well by calling in local physicians, he had gone abroad to seek advice under the plea of business.

The last disappointment that he had forced himself to bear with an immovable exterior was concerning Philip. Never from the day that he knew that his only child had the inexorable disease covered by so short a name, had he allowed any one to sympathize with him upon the subject, nor had he admitted by any word or sign that the boy was suffering from any physical limitation. Philip's life was arranged upon the same plan as that of normal children, and nothing by way of affectionate regard or added companionship was allowed to fill the place of all that he must refrain from doing.

Thus the greatest craving that the child had was for the warmth and protection of affection; he saw the fathers of other boys whom he sometimes visited put their arms about the lads' shoulders, draw them to their knees, or make room for them in the great easy-chair, where confidences about the work and play of the day were exchanged. Not so with Philip; the little real love that made him hunger for more had come from the servants and Mrs. Shandy, when they felt that they were out of eye- and ear-shot of the master.

Even this was stopped when Philip was fifteen by Mrs. Shandy's dismissal because John Angus deemed that she was retarding his son's development and

keeping him childish. Henceforward a tutor and various teachers of languages were the boy's associates, for Philip must needs go to college and become, if not a lawyer, a man of affairs and politics like his father.

Now Philip loved learning, but on its æsthetic rather than positive side; beauty of form, color, sound, all appealed to him intensely, and the thought of the beauty shone from his great gray eyes and beautified every feature of his exquisitely modelled face, as though in this Nature had outdone herself.

From the time he was a mere baby he had watched every butterfly and bird and tried to copy them in what Mrs. Shandy called his mud pies; which taste, as he grew, developed itself into a wonderful ability to comprehend both the anatomy of things and their spiritual expression. From time to time, during his winter city life, he had bought small copies of the great statues, for at least he was never at a lack for spending money, and gazed and gazed at them until he knew every curve and line by heart. In short, as boy and youth, Philip's one desire was to be a sculptor; but though John Angus never interfered with his modelling as a recreation, to his appeals to be allowed to enter a studio and study seriously he never made the slightest reply, and the preparations for college were forced on.

One day Philip's brain strength had flagged, suddenly, and, as his father thought, unaccountably. Once again physicians gathered, and this time the word came to John Angus, "If you wish your boy to live, his life must be of the open, and his work, if any, something that he craves and loves."

Then again did John Angus shut himself up for a day and night, to emerge as before and accept the inevitable with a denial of any need of sympathy. In a week he announced that Philip was to study modelling, therefore an outdoor studio was to be built in the garden, and he was to be under the guidance of Clay Howell, a famous sculptor, who not only had studios in Rome and New York, but also a summer home at Westboro. The latest tutor was retained as a companion, and Angus, more ill than he would confess even to himself, set sail at Christmas nominally for a six months' absence.

Philip had as a child a beautiful soprano voice which, by the time he was seventeen, had developed a tenor quality without losing any of its impersonal boyish sweetness. Stephen Latimer had taken great pains in its training, and in his friendship the boy had found the one soul who seemed to understand without spoken words. It was through this companionship that he found that other that seemed to him in his dark hours of self abasement and disappointment, the one

light that kept hope alive,—this was Poppea.

As a child he had longed to play with her, and used to watch her by the hour through the port-holes of the parapet, while she was working in the garden that extended from the treasure-trove bank little by little until it finally reached the apple trees. That they might not be playmates Mrs. Shandy made plain to him, though never the reason why. Later on they had met at children's parties at the Feltons' and at the choir practice at St. Luke's, and Poppea had always so sweet and gentle a way with him, that when he used to dream of angels or try to think what his mother must have looked like, Poppea's face was always blended in his visions, for he never *felt* the stately portrait by Huntington in the library to be his mother.

When at last it was decided that he was not to go to college and life held out an olive branch to Philip, Poppea seemed to be the dove that brought it; Poppea, for whom Stephen Latimer asked Philip to play accompaniments when she went of an afternoon to the Rectory for a singing lesson "between mails," and Jeanne Latimer could not be of the party.

To Latimer, Philip seemed a mere child; it never occurred to him that he might be reckoned with emotionally and sentimentally as a man, and it rejoiced his gentle heart to see the boy so happy.

Any boy is spiritualized and made better by the sympathetic companionship of an older woman if she be of the right mettle, and Latimer believed that this companionship would give Philip the very thing, the conception of the essence of woman's sympathy, that he had lacked all his sad life and that must be realized if he was to grapple successfully with his art. Consequently, he was quite unprepared and almost angry, when after coming into the room one day while they were practising, Jeanne had said:—

"Have a care, Stephen dear, that you do not develop a tragedy in, as you say, cultivating Philip's artistic perceptions. Will it be well, think you, that he falls entirely in love with Poppea?"

Even then Latimer would not understand. "There are many kinds of love that are far removed from tragedy," he answered.

"Yes, but to a sensitive dreamer for a woman like Poppea there is but one love," she had replied almost vehemently.

"You are mistaken, Jeanne, in this. I am with them, and I stand between their thoughts as they pass, and my soul reads them. The safety lies in that Poppea is what she is."

"Time will prove," said Jeanne, half sadly. By the very insistence of certain word combinations this commonplace saying of his wife refused to leave Latimer's memory, and even though it failed in any way to impress him, it left an irritation like the prick of an invisible thorn.

Meanwhile, Poppea and Philip drew nearer together each day.

Howell was finishing a large and important piece of work at his Westboro studio, and for this reason remained there during the summer, and there it was that Philip went every day. The master, to test his creative quality, told him to set about the bit of work he felt he would most like to do, and that he would help him with the technique. Philip's response had been to bring a rough crayon sketch that he had made of Poppea's head and shoulders the last summer when he, looking over the parapet, had seen her pick up a little bird that had fallen from the nest and, after holding it in her hand a moment to still its flutterings, put it back with its brothers. Under the drawing was written *Amor Consolatrix*.

"Who is it?" the sculptor had asked abruptly. "She will make a good model. I will send for her to come up here if she lives in the neighborhood, as I suppose she does."

"Oh! I couldn't ask her; she isn't a model, but I can remember her face as well as if she were here. Is it not perfect?"

"Head is well set on; forehead, eyes, and chin good; nose a bit too much tipped up for classic proportions." Then, as he saw Philip's face flush and quiver, he added "After all, noses are a matter of taste nowadays when we are getting a long way on the road from Greek placidity, that in the female face expressed little but form, toward the expression of temperament. She'll do, my lad, she'll do; if for no other reason than that you think so.

"Who is she, that is neither a model nor askable?" he inquired a half hour later, as he looked over from his work to where Philip was wrestling mentally and physically with the lump of clay of the size for a bust that the attendant had set upon its block.

"Poppea Gilbert; she lives at the post-office in our town, and there is nobody

quite like her," Philip answered, his shyness suddenly rent by the man's offhand air of comradeship, as well as in response to his own need of some one to whom he might speak without restraint.

Howell seldom took pupils, and the price that John Angus had offered him for his services would not alone have tempted him, but the boy had interested him from the first. Now, as he stood there watching the eager face, the light in his eyes, the energy with which he was attacking a well-nigh impossible task, he sighed and said to himself: "So long as he believes there is no one like *her*, whoever she may be, so long will he be able to work. Her strength will make up for his lack—but if his belief ends—" Here Howell had made an unconscious downward gesture that in its expression of complete destruction knocked the index finger from the outstretched hand of the figure upon which he was impressing the final details.

For Poppea the last year had been rather lonely, so that the post-office work was welcomed as a distraction as much as a necessity. A break had come in the one companionship of her life, for after graduation from college and the law school, Hugh Oldys, to carry out the carefully laid plans of his father, was spending a year in foreign travel before settling in New York, where a niche was waiting for the young man of whose ability and qualities of determination no one who had come in contact with him during his college life had any doubt.

During all this period Hugh had come home at the week ends, so that there had been no absolute break; but when he had finally gone, Poppea felt herself surrounded by a sort of open space wherein the air blew chilly and nothing offered a satisfactory shelter. She did not fully connect cause with effect in all its subtlety, but confessed to herself a loneliness that came simply from the cutting off of her glimpse of the outside world that Hugh had given her. His letters came at regular intervals, but they were largely of things, not people, and least of all himself, so that it was only when she went to see his mother and heard her homely talk that she felt any of the vitality that belonged to the real Hugh.

As for Mrs. Oldys, her eagerness to have Poppea with her was almost pathetic. Locked in her heart, where no one suspected its existence, was the simple mother-vision that so few cherish in its unselfish perfection: in this lay the future of her boy, spent away from her if it was best, and her place supplied by a younger woman to whom the knowledge she had held of his innermost thoughts must be transferred. But in this plan of hers for these many years it had been Poppea who was to be that other woman. Poppea, whom she had watched and

brooded over almost as though she had been her own, and to whom now she revealed day by day the devotion with which she had surrounded this only child without in any way letting it hamper his freedom or his manhood.

No word or hint was ever dropped by her, and yet her belief in the outcome was as firmly fixed as if it had been a vital point of religion. Would her faith be shattered? Who could tell or count the pulse beats of a man and a maid, that, being good friends, have temperament and the world before them? Hugh was now trying one with the other. Might it not happen, far away as it seemed, that the change might also lie before Poppea?

It was now May; in August Hugh would return. As for the other traveller from Harley's Mills, John Angus, he was due at almost any moment, and the chill that was settling over his household at the prospect was a tribute to the awe in which he was held that, had he been asked, he doubtless would have preferred to any demonstration of affection.

Philip alone seemed to look forward with pleasure to seeing his father. He was in love with his work; Howell, seeing genius even in his crude efforts, had not only written John Angus, but had told the boy himself all that he dared, knowing that his temperament lay too much on the side of self-abasement to take undue harm from praise. Moreover, Philip had, with his master's help in technique, the expression being all his own, finished the bust of Poppea and had placed it at the window of his garden studio, where the beauty of its modelling was brought out by a background of living green. Surely John Angus must be pleased; must see at last that his son had not so much found his calling as that it had found him.

All about the studio were a score of other attempts of Philip's, very crude, and yet none lacking in a truthful force, and in half of these, what might be called the Poppea motive was visible. This he did not realize, nor would he have thought it strange if he had. Why should he not worship her?

His feeling had been the motive of all art in all ages. So had many a dreaming monk of old in a cloistered garden wrought his thought into a missal's page, his inspiration coming not from his walled-in self, but from the light upon it, shed, it might be, from the ideal of the real Virgin behind her image in the dim-lit shrine.

It chanced that upon the afternoon of John Angus's unheralded return, Poppea and Philip had been bidden to the church to practise a duet which they were to sing on Whitsunday at St. Luke's. This time Stephen Latimer accompanied them on the organ, and the pair standing side by side in the front choir stall facing the

empty church, Poppea leaning forward slightly that she might see the music Philip held, with a tender, protective air, made a picture that would have appealed to any painter.

Going to his home to find it empty, Angus felt a quickening of the blood, a desire to see his son for his own sake, perhaps for the first time. Howell's words had pleased him in spite of himself; the crude, early American idea of material progress was now rapidly making way for the realm of literature and art. His life abroad had opened his eyes. To be the father of a famous sculptor had its mitigations, and then too, narrow though he was, he could not but realize the underlying compensation that art deals with the spirit of things and makes as naught any physical defect in its medium. Philip should also travel; he himself would take him.

So on the whole, John Angus was in what might almost be called a genial mood when, on hearing that his son was down at the church with Stephen Latimer, he ordered the carriage (he had walked up from the station) and went to seek him. He also looked in much better physical condition than when he went abroad, and only those who are expert in such matters would have detected the tension at the corners of the nostrils that came from the continual apprehension of the heart condition that had been his for years.

"They are in the church," Jeanne Latimer said, as he greeted her with the polished manner for which he was famous on the doorstep of the Rectory. Then she had fled indoors with the swift sense of foreboding and desire to reach cover that a bird feels when, on a summer day, the wind suddenly changes and the murmur rises of a thunder cloud that as yet but edges the horizon.

Angus, hearing music, opened the door and stepped into the shelter of the very pew that had shielded Poppea that winter night more than six years before. Why he did it he could not have said, but when one is watchful and suspicious by nature, the habit often becomes the dictator. Having turned aside, he waited until the song ended, waited in a condition of mixed rage and pain that amazed him, feelings stirred in him which he believed buried; he seemed in some distant place; he could not account for himself to himself. Even then he did not move at once; the blending of the voices to any other ear had been uplifting. As Philip stepped from the stall to the lower level of the chancel steps and Poppea laid her hand lightly on his shoulder to steady him, John Angus caught the expression of his face, and suspicion, as ever, being his interpreter, he gnashed his teeth.

In another minute he was walking up the aisle masked in the perfect self-control he wore to all outside his household.

"Philip, I have come for you," he said in clearly modulated tones, not realizing that a warmer greeting might be expected after five months of absence.

"Some other day, Mr. Latimer; I've only within an hour returned and wish to see my son," without even a hand clasp, was his reply to the rector's outstretched hand, words of greeting, and invitation to join Mrs. Latimer in a cup of tea in the Rectory.

To Poppea he did not speak; looking toward her, he swept her with a deliberate stare in which dislike and absolute non-recognition were curiously blended. She at first had been impelled to look away, but feeling his glance, she turned and met it proudly, head erect, without either contempt or flinching, and even as she stood thus, John Angus, gathering up the boy's music and the cloak he always wore, hurried him from the church, without time for a word of explanation or good-by.

"Poor Philip," said Poppea, lowering her head, while tears filled the eyes she turned toward Latimer.

"Yes, poor Philip," he echoed; "yet not so poor in any way as John Angus."

Once in the carriage, the man's self-control seemed to dominate him once more. He said nothing about the happenings of the past few minutes, but turned the talk to Philip's work, even before the boy himself had recovered from the suddenness of the meeting with its incomprehensible discordance. The tutor, who had been in Bridgeton, whither he frequently went during Philip's practice afternoons, had returned, and in an agony of apprehension was superintending the arrangements of the tea things on the screened veranda overlooking the garden. He need not have trembled, for John Angus paid no heed to him after a formal greeting, but relaxed unusually in his effort to interest Philip and draw him out, and the boy, warming under his father's rare interest, spoke frankly of his hopes and fears.

"Now will you come to the studio and see it for yourself, father? Of course it's lumpy and out of line in many ways yet, but Howell says that I can do it over and over until it is right, and then, perhaps, you'd have it cut in marble, not

because it's good, but because it's the first and I love it so."

Hand in hand father and son crossed the garden, the maids and men-servants peeping from their various windows in amazement until the pair disappeared within the studio door.

"There she is, father. Do you think it is like her?" Philip asked eagerly, pulling the wet cloth from the bust, for every day he saw the need of an added touch here and there.

John Angus had seated himself in a high-backed, carved chair and was gazing at the bust with fierce intensity; whenever he turned his eyes away, it was to see its lineaments in the crude attempts that filled every nook in the long room.

"Like? who is it?" he finally managed to say in well-feigned ignorance.

"Ah, then it can't be, if you do not know, for you saw her singing with me at the church half an hour ago. It is Poppea Gilbert from the post-office house. I suppose it was foolish of me to try to make her as lovely as she really is, though Howell sees the likeness, and yet you did not know."

"Lovely! Know!" John Angus half shouted, jumping to his feet and going toward Philip with an almost threatening gesture. "Do *you* know who this woman is, this adventuress? She was a waif left on Oliver Gilbert's doorstep; he took her in and bred her up, what for no one knows, unless to harry me; he who with his paltry four acres of ground and his damnable Yankee independence has been the only man who has dared to balk me with success. But now his time has come."

"I only wish she had been left on *our* doorstep; how different everything might have been," said Philip, who in a moment seemed to have gained bodily height through the sudden development of spirit.

"Yes, so do I!" shrieked John Angus, "and, as you say, everything would have been different, for I should have sent her to the almhouse!

"What do you know of those she came from? Tell me that. What do you know?" continued the man, lashed to frenzy.

"What do I know of you or you of me, either; what we are or may be?" said Philip, in the accents not only of manhood, but of a champion, the words coming from lips that once and for all had ceased to tremble. "But I do know that Poppea is a good woman and that I love her."

With a word that rang in Philip's ears for many a day and night, John Angus turned upon him as if to strike him down, even as long ago he had struck his roseleaf wife the day before she left him. Then as an invisible something stayed his hand, he rushed across the studio, and picking up a chair, brought it down full upon the bust, crashing it outward through the window in many fragments.

For a moment Philip stood with one arm across his eyes as though to shut out what to him seemed murder. Then dropping it to his side, he faced his father, who, his wrath having reached a climax, had sunk back in his chair, clutching his side, while an awful expression of apprehension crossed his face.

"I cannot tell you to leave the room, for it is yours; but I must go," Philip said slowly and clearly, then crossed the studio and closed the door quietly behind him.

For two days no one but the tutor saw John Angus, who remained in his room, to write important letters, the tutor said. Then word went forth that the house would be closed for the summer, as father and son were going yachting for a change of air.

CHAPTER XI

INCOGNITA

Philip and his father went away in early June. There were, of course, many rumors about their plans, one being to the effect that the house on Windy Hill might not be reopened for several years, in spite of the fact that greenhouses and gardens were to be maintained as usual. One thing alone was certain, that they were to spend the summer either on board the yacht of a Mr. Challoner, John Angus's close business associate, or at his house at one of the resorts on the Maine coast.

Poppea had seen very little of Philip since his father's return, for his singing lessons had become more and more irregular, until they finally ceased. Stephen Latimer, when he frankly asked John Angus the reason, was met by the vague excuse that he had been so long away that he wished his son's society; there was much to be arranged. Also Philip was tiring of singing.

On the day before he was to leave, Poppea met Philip at the Feltons', whither he had gone to say good-by. When she entered, he was in the great, cool library, and the blinds being drawn to keep out the afternoon sun, all the light in the room seemed focussed on his face where he sat by the book-strewn table, his head resting on one hand. He was so intensely quiet and so pale Poppea's heart went out to him more than ever; that he was suffering pain not merely physical she was sure, and equally so that she must not ask its cause.

Nora came into the room at that minute to say, "Miss Felton and Mr. Esterbrook had gone to Bridgeton and would Miss Gilbert come upstairs? Miss Emmy was suffering from a bad headache, and so Mr. Philip must excuse her."

"Then I must tell you good-by and go home," Philip said to Poppea; "Harvey is waiting for me with the chair, for somehow I'm rather tired this week. Please come into the light and turn your face as I saw you in the garden from the parapet the day, long ago, when you picked up the little bird. There, that is it. I want to remember every line to take with me, for I shall be so lonely."

"And I too, Philip. Look up at me and remember, that whatever is worrying you worries me also, and let me halve it with you," and Poppea, stooping, lifted his

face and kissed him gently on the forehead.

The young man bent his head as if in reverence for an instant, then raising it again to look Poppea in the eyes whispered, so far away his voice sounded, "I shall not be lonely any more, for it seems as though you must have called my mother's angel and she kissed me." And yet John Angus could not understand, and would not had he been there.

The summer residents of Quality Hill had returned in full force, increasing the work at the post-office so much that Poppea had but little time to herself. Yet she was satisfied so long as everything ran smoothly and no possible criticism could fall upon the postmaster; for it was not only the income and certain fixed position that mattered so much to Oliver Gilbert, but in and about the associations of his appointment were woven the very elements of his patriotism and the verbal contact with Lincoln that became more precious as time went on. Of course Gilbert knew that the day would come when he must resign what he called his trust, but that was not yet. In some respects he felt his seventy years less than he had the weight of a lonely fifty. That his conducting of the business might be unsatisfactory or the post-office might be taken away from him had never troubled his thoughts even remotely.

It was therefore a great surprise to both postmaster and mistress, when one day, about the middle of June, a duly accredited government inspector appeared one morning, and after going over the accounts and putting many abrupt and, to those in charge, meaningless questions, took a seat by the sorting shelf, opened a newspaper, and seemed prepared to spend the day. The visit being all the more strange from the fact that the usual but rather perfunctory official visit had been paid less than two months before.

When noontime came and the official made no move to leave, Gilbert, knowing that there was no suitable place of refreshment in town, with old-time hospitality asked the stranger to join them at their mid-day meal. The invitation was accepted, and the moment that the official left his post behind the beehive, his entire manner changed; he talked and laughed with Gilbert in a way that dismissed a growing apprehension, complimented Satira Potts, who was substituting for the day, upon her cooking, and kept his eyes fastened upon Poppea in a way that made her color hotly and then turn rigid with resentment,

saying that he had heard Harley's Mills was a very quaint town, and that there was a pretty walk by the river toward the hills. Wouldn't she be his guide that afternoon?

Poppea, feeling that she must hold herself in check at any cost, replied that she could not leave the office, but that Oliver Gilbert would doubtless drive him about town with horse and chaise; then turning to the old man, she urged him to go, as he had been out so little of late.

Poor Gilbert, entirely oblivious of the undercurrent, protested that he could do all the office work required before night, saying in good-hearted indiscretion, "Go you out, Poppy; the young gentleman will enjoy the trip much better than with a half-deaf old codger like me."

For a moment Poppea struggled for words less abrupt than "I will not go," with which to extricate herself from the net. Then Satira Potts (who was Pegrim, and having once taught Poppea what she called her manners never forgot it), grasping the situation, rose so suddenly from the table that she scattered the crumbs that she had in her apron, and said, "Poppy couldn't go with you noway, nohow, Mister—I don't think you've mentioned your name. Our Newfield County girls don't take up with strangers, and besides, even if they did, Miss Gilbert, holding what might be called a public place, has got to draw the line even shorter!"

Gilbert, who had raised his hand deprecatingly toward his, as he considered, too officious sister, stopped short as he caught sight of Poppea's face, while into the other man's eyes there flashed a glare of rage which was far less offensive than the expression it replaced. Getting up slowly with an affected yawn of boredom, he bit the end from a cigar, lit it without asking leave, nodded curtly to the postmaster and, picking up his bag of papers and hat, which he put on before reaching the door, went on his way.

"Shoo! Scat!" said Satira Potts, who, following him closely, drove away a stray cat from the porch and scattered the remaining crumbs in her apron on the flagging for the birds.

For a minute Gilbert and Poppea sat looking at one another, then he said: "I wonder why that smart Aleck dropped in here just now and hung around so? Most likely missed connections in Bridgeton for somewhere else and thought he'd pass the time and get a dinner. He wasn't mannered like the regular inspector that's been here for three years past. It's too bad he riled you so, Poppy;

it's likely he thought he was being polite and pleasuring of you."

It was well for his feeling of content that Gilbert did not look back, for when Satira Potts returned to the kitchen, Poppea, who had left the table for the window and was looking with eyes that did not see up through the orchard to the back garden, wheeled suddenly, and, throwing her arms about Satira's neck, began to sob with the broken-hearted abandon of a child.

"There, there, dearie, that skate has gone flying, so don't you care. I sensed right off the way he was squinting at you, and if only you hadn't been born a lady baby, and so mustn't, I could have wished you'd slapped his face."

All that afternoon and for many days, whenever Poppea paused in her work in the office or in the bank garden, where the flowers seeded from the garden above ran riot and needed much restraining, the thought, "I wonder, oh, I wonder, who sent that man here?" came to her.

One day, as the insistence of the query was beginning to pass, Miss Emmy sent for Poppea to come up to luncheon and hear the plans for the afternoon and evening entertainment that the Felton ladies were in the habit of giving each year, either at rose time or at midsummer. This year, the season being late and also the roses, the twenty-first of June, the summer equinox, was chosen; for, as time went on, the ladies felt less like entertaining and keeping open house in the humid July weather, though they did not yet acknowledge it even to one another. But at sixty and sixty-two, why should not even those to whom that form of tyranny known as duty to society is a law relax, and prepare to spend the afternoon of life a little more naturally?

As for Mr. Esterbrook, at threescore and ten, relaxation of any kind would be impossible. For the last dozen years, having practically ceased to take manly exercise, he was propped by his rigid surroundings, courteous formalities of the old school, and clothes to such a degree, that had he sought to escape from them, collapse would have resulted, and it would have been as impossible to collect him as water that suddenly rebelled against the confines of its pail.

The ladies themselves could hardly have told when the thinning iron-gray hair had been first subtly concealed, and then replaced by a wig of its own exact shade; nor did they know that he had abandoned billiards at the club in favor of whist or piquet, because following the course of the red or white balls over the vivid green cloth with eyes slow to focus had twice given him a fit of vertigo. As for riding, Oliver Gilbert, hip-crippled as he was, could still throw himself across

the old white horse and follow the cow to its hill pasture, while the very thought of riding made William Esterbrook dizzy; so wide apart is the life natural from the life artificial.

The afternoon reception, Poppea found, was to be general, the Bridgeton band supplying outdoor music; the evening function, an affair in costume combined of music, dancing, and a half-dozen tableaux of the seasons. To the latter the residents of the hill and their guests, together with the Feltons' more intimate neighborhood acquaintances, were bidden.

Before leaving home, Poppea had resolved to decline Miss Emmy's invitation to the evening party. Hugh being away and also Jeanne Latimer, she was not in the mood for going among strangers, as they would largely be. Then, too, a sense of depression had hung over her of late, as she realized for the first time that the comparative luxury and special privileges that her contact with the Feltons had surrounded her, were not only not hers by right, but that at any time she must become, at least in part, the financial protector of the man who had for twenty years protected her.

Virtually she was living under false pretences when she went to the Feltons and mingled with their guests. As a child it had been different; now it must stop, and the sooner the better. She did not find it easy to carry out her resolutions at once when she found that Miss Emmy took it for granted that she would sing half a dozen of the songs that Stephen Latimer said few others could sing so well, either from point of phrasing or simple pathos. Besides, Miss Emmy argued, New York friends would be there who might help her to turn her music to account, and as for the costume, anything dainty and summerish would do. There was a chest full of old muslins and flowered organdies in the attic from which Poppea could surely select something, and Nora should help her fashion it if she herself lacked time.

Under such circumstances how could Poppea refuse those who had made music possible, as well as given all her education, even to the final lessons in French pronunciation that made the Creole songs fall from her lips in such perfection. So saying to herself, "only this once," she had gone to the attic chest in question, and selected from it a soft green muslin with embroidered fern fronds scattered over it, a relic of the days when skirts were six yards full and further amplified by three flounces; then declining Nora's help, she took it home to brood over.

As she went slowly down the stairs, the muslin gathered into a hasty bundle,

Miss Emmy called to her from her morning room where she was sealing some invitations, the social secretary not, as yet, having become an institution. As she waited for the notes, Poppea, glancing idly about the room, caught sight of a colored print of Gainsborough's Mrs. Robinson as Perdita, in her pretty furbelows. This gave her an idea that once at home she quickly put into form with scissors, thread, and needle.

To the muslin bodice, made a trifle low, frills falling from the half sleeves, she added an open-fronted over-skirt, which, being caught back below the waist, gave somewhat the appearance of the print. Then, other matters calling her, she put the dress away until the day came for the party. By this time she had forgotten how Perdita had arranged her hair, and she had also discovered that the even green of the muslin looked monotonous by lamplight. Ah me, what could she do? Mrs. Shandy, being appealed to, with true bucolic British taste could suggest nothing but "red ribbons, and plenty of them, to liven of yourself up, Miss."

Walking about the room at a loss how to proceed, Poppea picked up the miniature of her "little mother" as she called her to herself, that other Poppea with the wreath of fragile summer poppies in her hair. It had become almost a habit, this looking at the picture in moments of perplexity either serious or trivial, as though the laughing eyes and parted lips could in some way respond. In this instance, the reply, though indirect, was instantaneous.

"The poppies twisted in the hair and bunched at the neck; could anything be better!" cried Poppea, "and the garden is full of the fall sown ones, open and in bud. Frail as they are, if I pick buds this morning and put them in water in the bright sun, they will be open by afternoon and keep open if I do not let them see the dark. The leaves are the color of the muslin, only of a lighter shade. Thank you, little mother!"

As Poppea dressed that evening, taking the flowers that she had transferred from sun to lamplight to put in her hair when she arrived, she again turned to the miniature, talking to it as if it were a person.

"You've stayed here by yourself too long," she said; "to-night you shall go out and whisper to the people who will hear me sing and ask them to be kind." Slipping the chain over her head, she let the locket hang half veiled among the folds of drapery that crossed her bosom.

There was no one but Nora in the dressing-room at the Feltons' when Poppea

looked shyly in, and, seizing the chance, dropped music and light shawl upon a chair to arrange the flowers. They adjusted themselves easily to her coiled hair. In a half wreath with a great bunch at the waist, so intangible did they seem in their cloud colors of rose, pink, salmon, and flame fading back to white, that it was impossible to believe that they would not flutter away from their perch like butterflies.

"Look at that now! there isn't a dress here to-night'll touch yours, dearie," said Nora, hands raised in honest admiration. "But I mistrust them posies not to last long, gi'n you dance too hard."

"That's precisely it, Nora," said Poppea, a mischievous smile banishing the little pathetic droop that her lips sometimes wore, and the opal colors flashing from the black-lashed eyes. "I must not dance, but sing my songs and disappear, else my finery will drop away as Cinderella's did when the clock struck."

Downstairs among the maze of faces, she saw that of Stephen Latimer, and motioning to him that she was there when needed, Poppea glanced wistfully across the room, slipped through one of the long windows, then drew into the shadows where she could see and not be seen, except as the light fell now and then upon her eager face as she leaned forward to watch the tableaux, dreading the time when she must step before so fashionable and critical an audience.

Evidently, she had not been as wholly unobserved as she thought, for Miss Emmy, who had reached the veranda through another window in company with a youngish man, came toward her, saying:—

"Ah, here she is, Bradish, keeping quiet until her own time comes. Julia dear" (Miss Emmy often used this name in formal society), "this is Mr. Winslow, the son of my dearest Boston friend, who wishes to meet you. It is the first time that we have been able to lure him into the country, and we wish him to like it. Where is your shawl, child? It is quite breezy here, and you mustn't risk your voice. Upstairs? No, don't go; I will tell Nora to fetch it," and as Miss Emmy flitted away, her shimmering silver costume, with a crescent and gold stars in her fluffy light hair still guiltless of gray, caught and held the combined lights of moon and lamp, helping to perfect the part of "Evening" for which she was costumed.

For a moment after she had recognized Mr. Winslow's bow, Poppea continued looking into the room. She wished that Miss Emmy had not introduced her to this stranger; she did not care to talk, but to remain quiet and alone. Then

making an effort, she turned toward him to put the orthodox query as to what character he represented, when before the sentence was half framed, she realized that he wore conventional evening dress, and her air of embarrassment turned to a smile when she saw the half quizzical, half satirical expression of his cleanly shaven face.

"Confess that you not only did not look at me, but that you are rather vexed at either being obliged to do so now or be rude," he said, placing a chair with a dexterous turn of the wrist in the exact spot where she could continue to look at the tableaux and yet be seated.

"I'm afraid that you are right, and yet I will not allow that I was even almost rude to one of the Aunties' friends. It is this way; I am to sing to-night before all these men and women from the city who know what music means; I have only sung before here in the church for Mr. Latimer or at some little musicals at Bridgeton. If I had to go into the room now and be shut in among them all, I should simply run away. So I came out here to find myself, and when Miss Emmy spoke your name, I was so far away that I do not think I heard it. Pray forgive me." Something about the direct simplicity of her excuse touched a new chord in Winslow's perfectly controlled nature. This was not the simpering, self-satisfied young woman of the small towns who usually, when taking part in amateur social functions, keeps well in the limelight.

He drew up a second chair, saying quietly: "I understand so well that I will either go away or stay and play watch-dog; which do you prefer? I see two callow youths in there who are looking toward this window as their only loophole of escape, but they will not come until I go."

"Then please stay," said Poppea, with a shimmer of a laugh, soothed into perfect tranquillity by the self-possession of her companion,—a condition that caused her much wonder when she afterward analyzed it.

Much clapping of hands announced the completion of the first group of pictures, and the stringed quartet struck up a Strauss waltz, to the compelling measure of which Poppea's fingers, hanging over the back of the chair, tapped time.

"Are you fond of dancing?"

"Yes and no; there are times when it seems as if I must dance, but I do not believe that I could ever dance to order."

"I have seen you somewhere before, but very long ago," he said abruptly.

"Yes, I remember your face. I have been thinking and thinking when and where. Ah! now I have it!" Poppea exclaimed, flushing deeply, so that even in the moonlight it rivalled the color of the flowers in her hair.

"Do you remember once calling upon the Felton ladies in New York one afternoon and finding a half-wild girl dancing before the parlor mirror?"

"By Jove! that's it, and you were the little girl! I can see it all perfectly. I should judge that it was one of the times that you danced because you must, was it not?"

"Oh, yes, the windows were so heavy that they would not open, and the carpets so thick they held my feet, and I began to feel as though I were in prison and should never get out, and so I danced to be sure that I was alive."

"Do you know what I said to myself as you slid away behind the heavy stair guards?"

"Probably that you wondered why the Feltons harbored such a barbarian."

"No, that I wished that I might meet you again six or seven years hence; and you see I have my wish."

Noticing that Poppea seemed once more inclined to withdraw into herself, Winslow dropped the personal tone that he had been forcing into the conversation and sought more neutral ground in his next venture.

"If, as I understand, you have lived about here all your life, you can give me some help in a little matter of business, that, combined with pleasure, brought me here. I suppose, of course, that you know every resident in the town?"

"Most surely, as well as almost every one who comes to or goes through it;" Poppea was going to add, "because all news comes to the post-office," but a sudden influence caused her to suppress the last sentence.

"Very good, now I will explain my errand, if you have the patience to listen, and I have confidence in asking that what I say will go no further, because the matter concerns others rather than myself."

Poppea, nodding her head in assent, leaned forward, her lips slightly parted in an attitude of undivided attention.

"A cousin of mine, a young New Yorker, who is working his way into politics *via* being secretary to the postmaster-general, was intrusted to look up a matter in this vicinity during a week of vacation. Meeting me at the club a couple of days ago and finding I was coming here, he asked me to help him out by doing the investigating and letting him spend his time in town.

"It seems that Postmaster Gilbert, here at Harley's Mills, is getting rather old and doddering, and has for his assistant a young woman, a foundling or something, that he has brought up. Complaints have been coming in for the past year of the conduct of the office from a man who is not only a prominent resident here, but one who has strong political influence both in New York and Washington."

Poppea straightened herself, opened her lips to speak, but no sound came; meanwhile Winslow, intent upon reciting the story word for word as he had had it from his cousin, paid no heed.

"Under ordinary circumstances a change would possibly have been made on the matter of age, but as the complainant is known to be a man of violent prejudices and the appointment was one of the few now existing made by Lincoln himself, extra trouble was taken in the matter. Examinations showed the accounts to be all straight, and there the affair halted on both sides.

"A month ago new complaints came from the same source in a different key; the young woman, called by the fantastic name of Poppea, it seems, was causing trouble among the youths of the town, and the complainant did not hesitate to call her a dangerous adventuress. A special sent to cast his eye over the ground brought back an unsatisfactory and garbled account. Now my point is, can you from an outside and perhaps kinder point of view set me straight upon this matter?"

It seemed to the woman sitting opposite that she had lived a lifetime while Winslow was speaking; shame and courage, despair and pride, were all struggling for the mastery, and courage, with the chance for justification, won.

"Yes, I know them both, the postmaster and his daughter, as well as John Angus, the man who has complained."

"Then his dislike is public property?"

"Most assuredly; he has harried Oliver Gilbert for years because he would not sell him his homestead to round out his own land."

"Very good, a motive proven; that settles one point," said Winslow, with legal brevity. "Now how about the girl?"

"That is—not, cannot be told in so few words," said Poppea, nerving herself with a visible effort. "It is true that she was a foundling left in a storm upon Oliver Gilbert's porch. He took her in for the sake of his dead wife and baby Marygold. Then he grew to love her until he quite forgot she was not his own, and she thought all the world of 'Daddy,' as she had learned to call him. By and by as he grew older she naturally helped him in the office until, as the business grew and she became of age, she was appointed his assistant.

"She tried, oh, so hard, to work steadily and not forget her place, but she could not help the fact that John Angus's son, a couple of years younger and a cripple, who had no one to be kind to him, liked to talk to her. She couldn't help being glad to find some one to help make up for the sisters and brothers she had never known, for all the real kin she had was an ivory miniature of a young woman with a wreath of poppies in her hair, that hung about her neck on a gold chain the night she came to Gilbert's. There was one word engraved upon the locket, 'Poppea' and a date, '1850.' So they two practised singing together with Mr. Latimer down at St. Luke's, Philip and she, and he made a bust of her, for he is studying to be a sculptor. But John Angus did not understand, and though no one but himself knows what he thought, it is bringing evil to Poppea, for the last man they sent from Washington dared to insult her. Yet all she asks is to be let work for her Daddy until his quarter century is out and he resigns; for it would kill him if he thought that any one could say anything against him or his that could take away the trust that Lincoln gave him."

Poppea stopped, her hands twisting at a flower that had fallen to her lap, and then looked quietly at Winslow as though waiting for his answer. As for him, he was completely taken out of himself and his acquired stoicism in regard to all things feminine. The spectacle of the beautiful young woman pleading the cause with such unconscious dignity swept him from his feet and made him feel until he tingled.

"Well?" she queried at last.

"You have made it as plain as if I had seen the whole business myself, and I'm no end grateful for the trouble you've taken. This meeting seems to have been quite providential for the post-office family; all I need do is to take a look at them to-morrow and leave. Let me think quickly; there is so much more I wanted to say

to you. I see the musical dominie coming our way, and they are drawing the curtains on the last tableau."

"Yes, it *was* providential your coming, but there is one thing more to be said, and I must say it before you go to the office to-morrow. Look at this," and bending toward him, she held out the locket on its chain that had lain concealed in the folds of her waist, pressing the spring that opened it as she did so.

Winslow looked and then grew bewildered.

"Read," she said. "'Poppea, 1850.'"

"Then you are—Impossible!"

"Poppea of the post-office, whom you have heard accused, and have tried, and, I hope, acquitted for her Daddy's sake." But the eyes that she turned so bravely to meet his reassuring ones were full of tears that could not be recalled.

"What a brute I have been," he said, standing with bent head.

Then Stephen Latimer came to lead her in.

"You will dance with me or at least speak to me afterward?" Winslow managed to ask, instinctively expecting refusal after the ordeal she had gone through.

"This is one of the nights I could not dance; in fact, I doubt if I ever shall again."

Winslow sought out the darkest corner of the porch, where he was yet within sound of her voice. Lighting a cigar, he gave himself over to an uninterrupted train of musing, while those within who missed him thought him merely escaping them after the manner of a man of the world, who, having been courted for a decade by maids, wives, and widows, prefers his own society.

After the final applause, which was unusually long and loud for such an audience, had ceased, Winslow threaded his way rapidly through the rooms in search of *Incognita*, as he called her to himself, but she was nowhere to be found.

"The excitement of her success was too much for the dear child," said Miss Emmy, taking his arm and switching him in the direction where he cared least to go.

"I've sent Nora home with her in the coupé, for she looked really overdone.

Don't be so disappointed; you can go and inquire for her to-morrow."

When Winslow broke away from his hostess at last, he wondered what had happened to him. He had intended leaving in the morning if he had completed his inquiry. Well, he would sleep on it; some impressions lose their color the next day. But in the morning he resolved to telegraph his cousin and put off going at least until another to-morrow.

CHAPTER XII

FRIENDSHIP?

When the next morning came, Poppea kept her bed for the first time since the childhood days of whooping-cough and measles. From sunrise waves of intense heat swept the village and outlying country, intensified rather than veiled by the low-hanging mists. Yet this alone could not account for the flushed cheeks and restless sparkle of her eyes, or the weariness of limb that almost refused to let her move. The fact was that she had not slept, but each hour of the summer night had brought a new phantom with which she had struggled. In so far as it was possible, she had ceased to dwell upon the theme of *The Mystery of the Name*, now it had returned with new force to haunt her, and with it the persecution of John Angus. This in itself was hard enough to bear, but it meant also complete separation from Philip, who had come to be such a part of her inner life that no one else seemed fully to comprehend that even the idea of readjustment was impossible.

The unintentional abruptness of Bradish Winslow in stating the pith of Angus's complaints against the post-office, by its very shock had brought her face to face with the fact that she had tried to conceal even from herself. Oliver Gilbert was swiftly coming to a time when, if he did not resign, his age and slowness of motion might surely be cast up against him for some trivial oversight that would, in a younger man, pass unnoticed.

For a time the danger of dismissal was probably averted; that is, if Winslow's attitude of apparent sympathy was sincere. Was he to be trusted? Standing face to face with him the night before, it had not occurred to her to doubt him. Away from him, a certain sustaining magnetism coming from his entire confidence in himself, blended with an agreeable personality, was lacking, and Poppea wondered if he had read her aright, or taken her justification as a clever bit of acting. And why not, if John Angus could so misjudge her!

Other women of her age and naturally emotional temperament might take peeps into the promised land of love and romance even before the gate opened and they were bidden to enter. The knowledge of her own name was the only key to the gate for her; she had long since resolved this, that evening at the opera when

the Knight of the Grail, to her a real personality, had disappeared. But since then the doubt had come to her, suppose that the knowing proved to her also a final barrier instead of the key?

Oliver Gilbert was appalled at Poppea's indisposition, which he viewed in the light of a positive disaster. Leaving his six o'clock cup of coffee untasted, he went about putting up the early mail with shaking hands and a lack of precision that might well have called down criticism, had it been observed. Neither did he draw comfort from Mrs. Shandy's common-sense assurance that "Miss Poppy is only a bit done up with the strong heat coming all of a sudden, and having to sing before such a gathering of the quality for the first time. When she's rested a bit and had a nice cup of breakfast tea and some toast, she'll be quite another thing."

The doctor must be had! Nothing else would satisfy Gilbert. So, about eleven o'clock, when Miss Emmy drove down in the barouche to tell Poppea the pleasant gossip about the party, together with the comments upon her singing, encountering Bradish Winslow in spotless white clothes sauntering in the same direction, Dr. Morewood's chaise came up the Westboro road and halted at the gate of the post-office house a little ahead of them.

Miss Emmy, on hearing that he had called to see Poppea, followed him into the house, while Winslow went into the office and, over the buying of a newspaper, drew Gilbert into conversation.

Whether it was the tea and toast that had the predicted effect, or the fact that Poppea had finally acquired the mastery of herself and remembered that Winslow had promised to look at the post-office and its master through his own eyes and judgment, at the moment that Miss Emmy was ushered into the parlor she heard, through the open window, Dr. Morewood's voice talking to Poppea in the room above.

"Something is worrying you, child; get away from here for a week and look at things from a different place," he said. "If it's too lively for you at Felton Manor, go over to the Mills. Dear little Mrs. Oldys is nearly down ill through homesickness for Hugh, and the next best thing to seeing him will be to see some one who knows him to whom she can read his letters. It'll do you good to go up there, with that view over the Moosatuck to the hills that every sunrise is like a glimpse of the promised land, and it will be a perfect godsend to her. Do you know, sometimes I think that plucky little woman is simply clinging to life

by the love she has for her husband and son. I've been so impressed with the idea this spring that about a month ago I wrote Hugh asking him if he couldn't shorten his trip and come home early in August, so as to give some leeway before he goes to his new work in September.

"I am going up to the Oldyses' now; may I tell Madam that you're coming, say this afternoon?"

Poppea was looking out the window to where the grim outline of the chimneys and roof of John Angus's house could be seen above the vines that covered the parapet. Yes, she realized that she must go somewhere if only for a couple of days, to be out of sight of that dominant house and all that it implied, until she could pull herself together once more, so she nodded in assent and followed the doctor downstairs.

"Not sick, but playing lazy and caught at it," was her reply to Miss Emmy's outstretched hands, and eyes full of sympathy.

"You see that putting on fine feathers and spending an evening with the quality has quite turned my head," she continued, forcing her sprightliest manner that Miss Emmy might be led from questioning her too closely.

"Then your head will have to stay turned, for every one who heard you sing last night wishes to hear you again," and the loquacious little lady ran over a long list of names that represented not only many of the bricks and beams of New York society, but much of the decorative superstructure as well.

"You always said that you wanted to step out and really do something against the time when Daddy would be too old to keep the post-office, and now here is the chance. You are to come to us in New York and be properly introduced at our first musical of the winter, and then you will have all the engagements you can fill at fifty dollars each for the rest of the season. Two or three a week will be a plenty and leave you time for lessons with Tostelli or some one equally good. Then, by and by, when you have acquired manner, and you are well known, you might consent to sing at a few public concerts, given of course under the patronage of our best people. But we mustn't whisper of that yet; sister Elizabeth would not hear of such a thing. You will naturally spend the winter with us, for the post-office work is very light in the off season, I've heard you say.

"I will tell you a secret," and Miss Emmy drew Poppea toward her with a dramatic air of extreme caution. "I've come to the time at which I used to think I

should adopt a young girl. I can no longer wear pink and pale blue with impunity! I'm growing sallow! I must, therefore, think out pretty costumes for some one else—for you. For the first winter, simple dresses with flower trimmings will be very telling; violet tulle and wistaria, corn-colored gauze and cowslips," and Miss Emmy's hands, flexible and nervous, described the lines and folds of flower-wreathed draperies, as she spoke.

"What do you think? Don't you like the idea, child? I'm going to carry you off to the Manor for luncheon, and afterward to call on some of the hill people before their guests, who came for last night, disperse. There is nothing like striking while the iron is hot, but especially with people of the *beau monde*; if you let them cool off, there's the heating process all to be done over again, whereas this time it was simply a case of spontaneous combustion with you as the spark."

In spite of her vivacity and high spirits, Miss Emmy coughed wrackingly when she stopped, and even a casual observer could see the ominous falling away at the temples and behind the ears, as well as the wrinkling of the throat under its bertha of embroidered mull.

"I like the idea of singing as an employment," said Poppea, when Miss Emmy paused long enough to let her be heard; "but as to all the rest—well, that would have to be on a business basis also. From the moment I begin to earn money, I must pay money. You see, dear Aunty, up to now it's been all for love and love in return, and now—it must be different."

"Don't be obstinate, Poppy, for if you are and put on that determined look, I shall have to call you Julia, even in private."

"No, I'm not obstinate, neither can I change; it is simply this, I cannot allow myself to be an object of charity any longer. Ask Mr. Latimer. I have talked of it with him, and he understands. Ah, Aunty, Aunty, I cannot go on standing in false positions. If they like my singing and it is worthy, I will sing, but I do not want it to come by social favor only."

"Think it over, child, and don't try to fly with ideas for wings that may do very well here at Harley's Mills, but not in New York," Miss Emmy replied, rather tartly for her. "I don't think that in your present state of mind you will improve your prospects by calling on those who heard you last night; they would best keep you in mind as the dreamy looking girl with downcast eyes and poppies in her hair." Miss Emmy walked out to the carriage without more ado, while Poppea wondered if it was going to be her fate to be misunderstood.

Going to the post-office, she encountered Winslow, who was occupying a chair inside the beehive and alternately chatting with and scrutinizing Gilbert over the edge of a *New York Herald* in which he was ostensibly studying the stock market.

By the furtive glance that Gilbert gave her, Poppea knew he had been talking of her, therefore her color heightened, and no one less keen than Winslow in taking every detail of a woman's appearance in a casual glance would have noticed that the shadows under her eyes were not those of her lashes. She was dressed in a straight white gown akin to that of a trained nurse in its simplicity, without a single touch of color other than her hair; yet the effect in the bare surroundings of the shop was to envelop her with a virginal freshness that appealed to Winslow even more than the more poetic costume of the previous evening.

"Having made the acquaintance of Cinderella, who vanished, I've now come to call upon the Postmistress, hoping that she will not also disappear," he said, taking her hand with a caressing touch that was personal enough to be remembered, but not of a quality to be resented.

"Sit down here, child, and just cast your eye over this money-order to be sure if it is right, for Stephen Latimer may come for it any time. Mr. Winslow will excuse you a minute, I reckon," said Gilbert, as Poppea hesitated a moment in embarrassed silence, not knowing whether she should ask Winslow to the porch or garden, or merely take the call in her official capacity. The request decided the matter, and as Gilbert went over to his work bench to become instantly absorbed, she slipped into his revolving chair, glanced rapidly over the figures, separated note from stub, and returned the book to the drawer. When she again faced Winslow, her hands were clasped rather nervously in her lap.

"I came over this morning for two reasons," he said, as though in answer to a question in her eyes. "I was afraid that last night's excitement was altogether too much of a strain, and I wanted to reassure myself by a peep at you. Then I wished to tell you in plain, open daylight how deeply I feel about my unknowing brutality concerning this post-office business, and to ask you, if you can help it, not to let it tinge or prejudice your feelings about me, but to judge me only by the outcome. As it is, no one else need ever know the details except our two selves."

The look of intense relief that lighted Poppea's face and raised the drooping lip corners was perfectly apparent to Winslow, and also told him that doubt as to

this outcome had probably broken her rest.

"I do not think of it as brutality even though it hurt, and though I shall not tell Daddy, because he would grieve himself sick, I *must* tell Mr. Latimer, because he has always known of everything concerning me, and helps me understand my troubles by holding them, as he says, in trust. For the rest, I can only thank you for taking the trouble to consider a passing stranger."

"I do not feel that you are a stranger; I did not when I first saw you dancing before the mirror, or yet again on the porch last night. You are to me Youth and all the good that belongs with it. We have met twice by accident, the third time by intent; does not that make us friends?"

As far as his emotions were concerned, Bradish Winslow at six and thirty might be said to have his second wind. The things that appealed to him with any permanence in these days knocked first at the door of his judgment where his æsthetic taste was doorkeeper. It was by this route that Poppea stole swiftly along until his heart was reached, and responded before he even remembered that he had one. Then, too, she was as refreshing as the first sun-ripened strawberries of June after the complicated winter confections of the club.

Winslow found himself leaning toward Poppea, holding her eyes and speaking with a vibrating eagerness that would have surprised any one of his half-hundred city intimates, both male and female. Of a distinguished family, rich in moderation, and with no one to please but himself, Winslow, though an indispensable social factor, was, as far as women were concerned, a devoted cynic, always at the beck and call of some modish woman, usually either married or a widow, but whenever the chains of his own forging seemed likely to fetter, he had always eluded them, to seek safety in numbers once more.

He had no further reason for sitting in the stuffy little post-office than to see Poppea; he had no other reason for having stayed the second day at the hill, and yet, with all of his resources, quick wit, and elastic principles, he could devise no way of prolonging the interview or bringing Poppea into less conventional relations than her expressions of gratitude implied.

His hesitation surprised him, for on a still briefer acquaintance he had brought a very difficult and much-sought widow to ask him to luncheon, after which she had taken him to a round of "teas" in her carriage.

Winslow realized this as they sat there, presently talking of inane and safe topics,

such as the heat, the city people visiting on the hill, and the tennis match to be held there next day, and it was almost a relief when Stephen Latimer, coming for his money-order, told Poppea that the Oldyses' rockaway was stopping at the Rectory and would be down for her in a quarter of an hour. As Latimer showed no signs of leaving immediately, there was nothing left for Winslow to do but bow himself out, more awkwardly than Stephen Latimer, who had known him of old, would have believed possible.

Once in the roadway, where he could throw back his shoulders and strike out, the web that he had sought to spin as a spider, but which had held him like a captive fly, parted, and he admonished himself in no measured terms.

"I wouldn't have thought it of you, Brad, my boy; there you sat as dumb as a fish, and she, when she got through being politely grateful, looked absolutely bored. It must be because you feel out of your running in a real cow-country place like this. Is it possible that you're falling in—? No, it's nonsense! But you'd give a pile to make her look in your face with something other than gratitude in her eyes. Well, maybe she'll go to the city some day, who knows. Meanwhile, we'll not let out of sight be out of mind."

This resolution was the foundation of a series of subtly chosen gifts sent at regular intervals that, coming in the mail, Poppea could not fail to see. As, however, after the first, from which fell a pressed poppy, they contained no sign, she could neither acknowledge nor return them, for their source was a matter of inference only. Neither did she know that Winslow, summering here, there, and everywhere, from Newport to the North Cape, had left an order with his agent for the sending of the remembrances; consequently, in spite of herself, he was kept in mind, and she was somewhat touched, according to his plan.

Poppea was shocked when she reached the Mill House to find how much Madam Oldys had changed in a few weeks, and she reproached herself for not having seen her oftener. But the house had seemed so strange and still without Hugh that she had avoided bringing herself face to face with its emptiness.

Yes, as the doctor said, the chord that held her soul in her body was Madam Oldys's love for husband and son. This Poppea saw as she knelt on the mat beside the straw lounging chair on the deeply shaded porch and watched the

rapid pulsing at the thin temples as the time drew near for Mr. Oldys to come home to tea. He was very busy these days in remodelling the Mills and fitting them for a new manufacturing enterprise that should not only retrieve the heavy loss of the last years in the waning of the old business, but give work to the men who had built their homes and houses about him and the surging outlet of Moosatuck.

This night he was unaccountably late, and Poppea had already run the gamut of plausible excuses before Charlotte came out to inquire, after the comfortable manner of the old colored servant, if Missy Oldys wouldn't better have her tea before she went all gone from waiting. But a negative shake of the head was her answer.

"I think, my dear, that I will walk down to the gate to-night as usual, where I can see beyond the turn," she said to Poppea, at the same time trying to rise without aid and finding it impossible.

"He is coming!" cried Poppea. "Mr. Oldys has this moment turned into the road from the little gate in the south meadow. Ah, he has a man with him, a stranger; some one about the new machinery, probably, which accounts for his being late. There, he is waving his handkerchief, so everything is right," and Poppea waved hers in return, thus keeping up the significant little signal that had passed between this sweet old couple every summer evening, time out of mind.

"A stranger," the wifely anxiety instantly merging into the hospitable interest in a guest. "Then please ask Charlotte to add coffee and one of what Hugh called 'her hasty hot dishes' to supper; the ham omelet will be best. He may have come by train and had merely a sandwich at noon."

Poppea gave the order, and on her return looked again at the pair who had almost reached the gate. She had never before realized that Mr. Oldys either stooped or was short of stature; in fact, he was taller than the average, but his companion, broad-shouldered, dark, and trimly bearded, towered over him by half a head. At the gate they paused, and Mr. Oldys, putting his hand on the other's shoulder, leaned affectionately on it, while the stranger lifted and waved the wide-brimmed soft felt hat.

It was Hugh! the forehead line told the tale to Poppea that the beard had concealed.

With a swift gesture that warned the pair to come slowly, dreading the shock to

Madam Oldys that might come from the unexpected, Poppea knelt again by the chair, and putting one hand each side of the face, still beautiful with all its delicacy, turned it toward her and whispered:—

"Close your eyes and think of some one you would like to see coming across the field, then make a wish, for the fairies are about to-night."

The lids quivered and closed, then opened, and the eyes that read Poppea's were full of new life.

"It is Hugh! it is my boy! All day I have felt him come nearer, closer, but I thought it was only in spirit. Give me your hand; he must not find me idling. See, I am stronger already;" and Madam Oldys not only stood up, but walked toward the steps, barely leaning on the arm that Poppea stretched out to steady her, to be grasped the next moment by a strong pair of arms in an embrace that stifled her cry halfway and lifted her from her feet, while as Poppea tried to slip back, she found her hand held in the same grasp and a kiss fell squarely upon her lips.

She did not blush then or separate the greeting in any way from the good-by of ten months before. But later, as they gathered about the supper table where Madam Oldys sat behind the tray, handling the chubby tea-caddy for the first time in months, and Poppea looked at Hugh as he attacked the "hasty hot dish" with a traveller's relish, she knew that he was and yet was not the same. The span of the months and distance had added immeasurably to the man, but the boy, the chum, the comrade, that he had been even throughout his college days, had vanished, and a hot color flushed her face up to her hair roots until she became so conscious of it that she put her hand up as though to shade her eyes from the light.

Before, Hugh Oldys had been clean shaven and slender for his height; now he was filled out without fleshiness, and a closely trimmed beard and crisp, clearly pencilled mustache gave a new masculinity to his face without in any way concealing the determined yet flexible lips or the nostril curve that told of nerves high strung but perfectly under the control of will.

Naturally it was Hugh who talked the most, his father putting brief questions and gazing in deep contentment at his wife, who, without expressing a shadow of the loneliness she must have felt or even asking Hugh why he had shortened his year by nearly three months, was reviving and expanding; a miracle under their very eyes, like the refreshment of a plant that, withered and famished, takes hold of

life anew even at the breath of the wind that brings rain.

A year before, Poppea would have stayed on as a matter of course, one of the family group, but now she felt that on this precious evening the three should be alone together, and when Hugh went upstairs to change to a coat more suitable to the sultry night, she whispered a few words in Madam Oldys's ear about feeling quite rested and not being needed now for company; then with a nod to Mr. Oldys, finger on lips, slipped through the side hall where hung her hat and scarf, and thence through the garden gate into the depths of the June evening, where every bush held a flower in bud and every tree a sleeping bird.

The Oldyses saw nothing strange in her going, for she had always come and gone at will. Rather it was another proof of her thought of them, this silent understanding that three was company that night; besides, a half-mile walk alone on a street where each house kept watch over its neighbor, was a mere nothing to a village girl.

"Where is Poppea?" was Hugh's question on reëntering, his hands full of the trinkets of travel that he had pulled hastily from his grip. "Gone home? alone in the dark? why, Mother!" and dropping his burden in her lap, he went out the low French window and sprang over the piazza rail without turning the corner for the steps.

Mother and father, sitting side by side, exchanged glances and a hand pressure that revealed that they two recognized a change in Hugh, but that they were well content in the knowledge.

Poppea walked down the side road to the main street that passed the base of Quality Hill before she heard the rapid footsteps behind her that halted presently by her side. No word was spoken, but her hand was drawn through a muscular arm and held there fast. A year ago this might have happened without comment, but the arm was not the same, neither the hand that rested on it.

"What made you run away, Poppea? You never did before; that is, never but once."

As soon as he had completed the heedless sentence, Hugh was sorry, while to Poppea it was as though some one had spread the last seven years of her life before her guised in a knitted fabric, and slipping the thread, bade her ravel it stitch by stitch to its beginning.

"I thought you would wish to be alone with the home people," she said, searching for her words as if they were packed away for lack of use.

"And what are you if you are not one of the home people? what else have you ever been to me since the day that I first saw you and for a moment wasn't quite sure whether I wanted you or the puppy the most?"

Poppea could not answer at once; the ground seemed unsteady. The months of parting had broken the old shuttle and snapped the thread; what pattern would the new loom weave that the meeting had set in motion?

At this moment they were passing the church, and the lamp in Stephen Latimer's study cast a path of light across the turf almost to their feet, against which the outline of his face was silhouetted.

"Aren't you going in to see the Latimers?" she said, forgetting that Hugh's last question was unanswered.

"No, not to-night; to-morrow. This hour is mine and yours, Poppea. Why do you shiver so and draw away; you've always taken my arm?"

"I didn't know that I was doing either, but somehow everything seems different to-night, strange and new. Perhaps it is because I've not been feeling quite myself for a few days. Only this morning the doctor sent me up to the Mill House for a change." Then, in her turn, Poppea regretted the final words.

"And my homecoming has sent you away when you were tired, and that is why you falter. This is a bitter thought."

"It is not exactly that; I don't know what it is, but that I seem to bring distress upon all those I care for," and from a rush of half-coherent words he heard of her friendship with Philip and its results to him, and in a partial way the danger to Oliver Gilbert. As she talked, they had reached the post-office house gate.

The house itself was dark, but a light shone from Gilbert's workroom. On the side porch the ample figure of Mrs. Shandy rocked to and fro, fanning vigorously.

As Poppea turned toward the steps, almost stumbling in her fatigue, Hugh guided her along the path to a bench by the orchard edge, an old schoolhouse bench with a platform under foot that he had made once, years ago, when Gilbert had chided Poppea for letting the dew spoil her new Sunday shoes.

"Sit here," he said; "take off your hat and let the air blow through your hair, while I get you some water."

How good it seemed to have some one say with authority, "do this," or "do that," the unspoken motive being "because it is for your good." Then she began to realize that during the last few months she and Daddy had rather been shifting places in point of responsibility.

She drank the water slowly and gratefully, knowing through the clear starlight that his eyes were on her face, and as she drank she breathed the perfume of the half-double damask roses that had long ago crept from the garden above the parapet to make a thicket on either side the bank.

"A little while ago you said that everything seemed different and strange. Then both of us feel this. I had not landed on the other shore last autumn, hardly left this even, when the wrench of parting told me that everything was different, and would remain so. But I wanted you to have a chance to feel it for yourself if might be, and I kept it from my letters,—though I knew they were like wretched guide-books,—because I dared not let myself go.

"To-night, when I came back, hurried by Dr. Morewood's letter, and saw the woman who gave me life clinging to my little comrade, I knew the time had come when I must tell her that my love had changed."

"Then can we no longer be friends?" Poppea asked faintly. "Must I lose you, too, as I have lost Philip?"

"Always friends, Poppea; that is the beginning. Are not Stephen Latimer and Jeanne friends? and my father and mother also? But it must be more than friends, everything that a man and woman may be to each other. The change is that I love you as Latimer does Jeanne, that I want you for my wife.

"Is that strange to you, Poppea? or does it seem to you as it does to me, the fulfilment?" and Hugh leaned toward her, pale and anxious, in the starlight and holding out his arms.

Poppea turned quickly as though she would let him take her, then catching her breath, drew back, covering her face with her hands, while a half-forgotten harmony forced itself on her ears, and once more the Knight of the Grail waving farewell, with the mystic sadness on his face, passed before her mental vision.

"Oh, Hugh!" she moaned, "I've lost you, lost you! It isn't what I feel; it isn't what

I wish! Don't you see that I can never be any man's wife, much less yours, who knows my whole life through, until I can give my own name with my love?"

"That is for me to say, and I say yes!" cried Hugh, holding her to him as though to prove her need of protection.

"No, it is for neither of us to say; it is something beyond ourselves. I cannot tell why, but I know it," Poppea answered, without the tremor of the previous moment, but with a pleading dignity that made Hugh drop his arms.

"Suppose that something should some day come to light, when it was too late, that made it wrong for me to love you, we might not be able to bear the harm of it only ourselves." Then springing up with all the intensity of nerve and lithe motion that marked her dancing, she stood before him, with hands clasped, beseeching.

"Oh, Hugh, Hugh, can't you help me; won't you help me find out who I am? for sometimes I think that Daddy knows and will not tell!"

"And if I can, is that all that stands between us, Poppea? Look into my face so that I can see your eyes when you answer me."

"Oh, Hugh, be patient with me, be merciful! How can I say until I know my name, for it may be—that I have no real right to any."

It was so long before Hugh spoke that Poppea found herself counting her heart-beats, so keenly was the silence borne in upon her.

Then she said timidly: "Meanwhile, Hugh, could you—could we go on being friends? Your mother and Daddy, what could I say to them if we didn't speak? What should I do without you?"

Once more he drew her toward him, this time gently, not passionately. "It isn't an easy road that is before us, little one, but it is hardest for you, because I must, in any event, go out to make my way. Though I do not agree with your resolution, I do not say it is wrong.

"I love you, man to woman; that is where I stand. You must not forget this for a moment, as I shall not. But you must not fear that I shall harry you. I shall not tell you this in words again until you say to me, 'I need you, Hugh.'"

"Not even if the mystery of the name is solved?"

"Not even then, for only under such conditions will you cease to be on your guard, and without frankness the name of friendship would be a farce."

"And your mother, if she asks you—I think now she has perhaps thought—"

"Yes, she loves you, Poppea, as my mother should love my wife. She is the only one who has a right to ask. I shall tell the truth, which is that we have come to a perfect understanding.

"One thing more, Poppea; remember *you* are not bound."

If he could only have known the aching loneliness that fell upon her at these words; again she seemed to feel herself cut adrift. With a sudden turn she clung to him, and he, lifting her face, kissed her on lips and eyes, whispering, "To-morrow or five years hence, you need only speak or write the four words."

CHAPTER XIII

THE TURNING

When one has spent the early morning hours of a journey, in which no steps may be retraced, in following a fairly straight and level path through a familiar wood, hindered only by a few briers, with sheltering trees above, pleasant vistas on every side, and in friendly company, hope rises high and straightway trusts the path ahead. But when an abrupt turn shows there is a steep to climb, the pathway itself becomes confused, indefinite, treacherous, and the guiding voices have scattered, some going one way and some another, what must one do? Hesitate? sit down to think it out? or still walk on foot-length by foot-length, trusting to circumstance for keeping the course that one may not divine?

It was at the turn of such a road as this that Poppea found herself; she could not go back if she would, and friendly voices called in opposite directions from her own instinct. Of one thing only she was quite sure, she must go on without a pause lest in it she lose courage; she must climb on her hands and knees even, if necessary. The only mistake she made was in thinking, as we all have done at times since the days of the self-gratulatory St. Paul enumerating his trials, that she had reached the turning alone.

If she had but realized it, Oliver Gilbert, near the end of his journey and travelling in the opposite direction, was confronted by the same sharp turn and the same barrier, that to each this bore the same name—The Future!

If Poppea had been pondering how she could help her Daddy and lead him naturally toward the resigning of his office, Gilbert was conscious of a like necessity, but this was nothing compared to the appalling realization of Poppea's womanhood that had suddenly confronted him.

In Gilbert's simple mind, when a girl crossed the boundary of the twentieth year, the mating time was at hand, and each year after that she remained unbespoken if not married, reflected in some way either upon her good looks, disposition, or opportunities. As in all rural districts, there were many long courtships in Newfield County lasting from half a dozen to even a dozen years, but after the serious intentions of the man were recognized, and the woman was spoken of as

"his intended," then the couple passed from the interest of the match-makers into a sort of intermediate state, wherein they were both supposed to be working for a common end and the duration of which was considered purely their own business.

As Oliver Gilbert looked about at the eligible male population of the country-side, his perplexity increased; many were prosperous after their own standards, and some were even ambitious, but which one of them was fit to mate with Poppea? Moreover, such an idea had never seemed to occur to any of them. The only youths, who, dressed in their best, had come of a Saturday evening to lean on the little shelf before the window of the beehive and cast boldly admiring glances and random and irrelevant remarks at the postmistress, were of the verdant and irrepressible sort that Gilbert would not have tolerated for a moment, and that Poppea had effectually withered by giving absolutely no more heed to their pleasantries than to the wind muttering about the windows.

The matter that had brought Gilbert face to face with the rock behind which lay the pathway to futurity, was a call from a prosperous manufacturer of Bridgeton, a clean, well-built man of five and thirty, self-made and commercially intelligent, if lacking the culture that marks the man of real education. He had met Poppea at the church, where she had sung for several months the previous winter, and was sincere and outspoken in his admiration of her.

In a straightforward way he had come to the point and, with old-fashioned courtesy, asked Gilbert for permission to court his daughter, stipulating that he wished no influence brought to bear upon her, only leave to make his own way if he might.

The whole thing was so sudden, and came from a sky so wholly cloudless, that Gilbert had difficulty at first in keeping down a choking resentment at the man's presumption, while, at the same time, these feelings were checked by the realization that as the world measures, the man who owned a well-equipped factory, and had half a hundred men on his pay-roll, was the one who was condescending. These mixed feelings caused Gilbert to hesitate, begin a sentence only to break it off, and finally, flushed and perspiring, say, "I'm afraid that you don't understand; it isn't all just what I've got to say about it nor Poppy, either, sir."

Then very quietly and with a good deal of dignity, this man had drawn near to Gilbert, and, lowering his voice, said: "That's what I do understand; I know that

she isn't your own born, for I was a lad driving for the Westboro stables the time that she came here. Fifteen years before that, I was left the same way at Deacon Tilley's in North Bridgeton, so there's no need of explanations between Miss Gilbert and myself; neither will have aught to hold against the other in family matters."

A groan had escaped Gilbert, before he could control himself sufficiently to say briefly that Poppea, being of age, was her own mistress. But after the man had gone, he paced up and down the shop, his hands working nervously, until at last big tears rolled down his cheeks, and, sitting at his desk, head on his arms, he said aloud: "The lady baby as good as asked in marriage by a boy left on old Tilley's steps, and then driving teams for Beers, and nothing for either to throw at the other! Well, why not old Gilbert's steps as well as old Tilley's? What can I say? I *feel* the difference, but that isn't proving it!

"I wonder what you'd have done, if you'd been cornered this way," he continued, looking up at the portrait of Lincoln, that hung in the same place as on the night of Poppea's coming. But now, a well-grown ivy plant was wreathed about it, growing from a pot that stood on the window ledge in a spot that the sun visited daily throughout the year, showing that a woman's affection had been added to that of the old man's hero-worship.

"Would you have stopped still just long enough to tell a story to make folks laugh, and then gone straight on and walked over or out of the trouble? Could you have done that if you'd had a more than daughter that was too good for any man and yet a nameless man asked for her on equal terms just because she *wasn't* your daughter?"

As the incoherence of his speech dawned upon him, he threw back his head and laughed aloud, then stopped short, calmed and steady of hand, as if there had been something almost prophetic in the sound.

This had happened on the day of Poppea's visit to the Mill House and Hugh Oldys's return. A week afterward, Poppea, very quietly and with some hesitation, broached the subject of singing in New York and of its possibilities, together with her intention of taking lessons of a famous teacher, who had been an opera singer, was a friend of the Feltons, and feeling the need of rest, was to spend the month of August with them on the hill.

Instead of the opposition that she had expected, both on the ground of Gilbert's seeing neither the necessity of self-support nor of her partial separation from

him, he not only gave a cheerful assent, but a look as of a weight having been lifted from him crossed his face, and he broke into what was for him voluble conversation about the virtue of having something to do and doing it "up brown"; for this move of Poppea's told the old man what he most wished to know, that either the Bridgeton admirer had altered his intentions or been repulsed.

Then drawing from his pocket a letter that had come by the milkman and not the post, Gilbert said: "Come to speaking of winter, Poppy, there's something that I've had it on my mind to tell you, but I couldn't see my way clear of it until to-day, and I didn't want to hamper you ahead. Mrs. Shandy has set her mind on going back to the old country next fall, as there's less and less likelihood of her seeing Philip, and she says the living so near is only an aggravation. Now to-day comes a letter from sister Satira Potts. She writes that 'Lisha has a chance to get the contract for cutting all the grown chestnut timber from the Stryker Hollow tract that lies along Moosatuck, to the west side, about twenty miles to the north of Bridgeton. If he takes it, and it will advantage them greatly if he does, he will have to stay in the camp all week and only come home for Sundays, Satiry thereby being left lonesome. So the pith of her letter is, that she's sort of feeling 'round to see if there is any chance of her being wanted down here for the winter, as it is handier for 'Lisha to come here from Bridgeton than to take the drive round about home. I reckon it'll seem good to me to have sister Satiry Potts back here. Mrs. Shandy's strong in British ways of toast and tea, boiling green peas and mint together, and having a forceful way of *looking* me into a clean collar at meal times when I've chanced to lay mine by for comfort. But for coffee and pancakes, brown bread and beans that's cooked until they're swelled to burst, but daresn't, being checked at just the moment, give me Satiry, who also speaks right out about my collar and such, without ado.

"So you see, child, that old Daddy'll be well cared for, and you'll have a ready listener to tell all about the city doings to when you come back; for if they fancy you down there, there'll be a great to do; most likely you'll have flowers thrown at you; I've read about its being done for opery singers in the paper, and if they, why not you? Though likely, if you're singing in folks' houses, they'll hand the posies to you, instead of throwin', as being more polite and safer for the mantel ornaments and mottoes on the wall.

"Oh, child, child," he continued, as, leaning over his chair in her old-time way, Poppea had laid her soft cheek against his grizzled beard, and at the contact the mental vision of each grew clearer, "a couple of weeks ago, all at once, things

fell into a sort of heaviness, and as late as yesterday I couldn't seem to see the way ahead. But now I think the corner's sort of swinging to the turning, and pretty soon we may come to another good stretch of road, and if the Lord hasn't other plans, mebbe he'll let me walk beside you on it for a little piece yet, until younger company comes up that's spryer, Poppy. And when they do, remember one thing, honey-clover, don't let old Daddy hold you backward; step right off brisk. Daddy'll be content to stop behind, so long as he sees you on before."

"Don't, Daddy, don't," she whispered, putting her hand over his mouth to stop him. "Nobody else is going to walk beside me; it's either you or loneliness, so never speak of falling back." She did not repeat the reason that she had given Hugh Oldys, but Gilbert quickly divined it from the tension of her arm, and the momentary joy that he had felt was stifled in a sigh as though self merged in super-self.

In early autumn, Hugh Oldys went to his work, and though he usually returned for Sunday, it was not always possible. To his mother the break seemed more complete and of a different quality than the separation either of his college life or his travels; these had been tentative, the last final. It was the first independent stepping out of the only one, upon the way that leads from home, not toward it, even by an indirect circuit.

Almost at the same time, Philip had returned, and had taken up his work anew at Howell's studio at Westboro. Physically, he looked much improved; his skin was sun-browned with sometimes a dash of color, he weighed more, and his face had gained in strength and resolution. But when he had been at work a month with the master, Howell saw that what he was gaining in accuracy and flexibility was more than discounted by a total lack of inspiration.

"Where is she? What has become of the young woman who is not a model or to be had for the asking? Why not try the head once more from memory?" Howell asked abruptly one day, after his pupil had worked for an entire morning with the listless accuracy that is almost infuriating to the real artist.

Taken off his guard, Philip cried out:—

"She is dead! My father murdered her and threw the pieces out of the window."

For a moment Howell was startled. Then, as he looked at the face turned toward him, proud yet quivering at a wound, he read therein a tragedy whose underlying principles were greater than mere murder.

"Come and tell me about it, or you will let it kill your work and you also," he said, fastening his eyes upon Philip in compelling sympathy, at the same time stretching out his hand with a gesture wholly compassionate, and motioning him to follow to an inner room beyond the studio, where strangers never entered.

It was quite an hour before the pair returned, the master's arm resting on Philip's shoulder.

"Now," he said, "we will make alive again, for that is the sculptor's trade. This is my studio, and what I tell my pupils to do, they obey if they are able, and it is the concern of no one outside. But this time make her joyous and not pensive, in love with life; make her look up; part her lips as though she were about to sing; twine poppies in her hair to carry out her name; a butterfly on her shoulder, the Greek emblem of immortality. Then she shall live here with us, and you can look

at her when you see nothing but bone and muscles in the lump of clay you are working."

So Philip went to work once more, buoyed up in that some one understood and did not scoff, and that some one was the master, who knew. But he saw the real Poppea only once to speak to her, at Stephen Latimer's, before the time when the Felton ladies bore her with them to New York for her musical début, in that season of social introduction that is crowded between Thanksgiving and Christmastide. She was cordial and the very same when looked at from a distance, but when Philip stood before her, he was conscious of a subtle change, a certain veiling and holding back of self, where all had been spontaneous and freely given before, yet, as a woman, this added distinctly to her charm.

"Can she know about my father; is it turning her away from me?" was his constant thought, finally to be banished by the impossibility of such a thing being the case, for the studio walls had no ears, and violent as John Angus was in private, Philip well knew from his summer's experience that it was no part of his father's policy to hold up his dislikes or grievances for the public to peck at.

The next time that he saw Poppea it was through the doorway of a flower-trimmed room, where she had been singing. During the intermission a stringed quartet was playing Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words* from behind a screen of palms. In the circle that surrounded her, to which she was in course of being presented by Miss Emmy, the evening gowns of women were equally mingled with the black coats of the men, while the figure nearest to her, holding her bouquet of Maréchal Neil roses and ferns, was that of Bradish Winslow.

As Philip gazed hesitant about entering alone and yet wishing to, he stepped backward, and in so doing jostled some one who was looking over his shoulder. Turning, he saw that it was Hugh Oldys.

"Are you going to speak to her?" Philip asked eagerly after the first words of greeting.

"Yes, surely, I am only waiting for the crowd to thin a little; I think, Philip, that she will be glad to see some home faces among all these strangers."

As they waited, Caleb came through the wide hall with an envelope in his hand, peering anxiously into every masculine face. When he caught sight of Hugh, he drew close to him, standing on tiptoe the better to reach his ear.

"This here's a telegraph despatch fo' you, Marsa Hugh, and de boy what brings it says it's a 'mergency and wants to be opened spry. Doan yo' want to step in the little 'ception room and circumnavigate it private like? Dem 'mergency despatches is terrible unsettlin', sah!"

Hugh seized the envelope, opening it with a nervous twist as he crossed the hall to the room indicated by Caleb where there was a drop-light, Philip following close.

> "Your father has had a serious accident. Your mother unstrung. Bring up MacLane or Grahammond, to-night, if possible. STEPHEN LATIMER."

Hugh dropped into a chair, and spreading the paper on the table, read it a second time, motioning Philip to do likewise.

"MacLane and Grahammond are both brain specialists, I think; it must be that the accident is to his head. I wonder where they live," he said, half to himself and half aloud. Then turning to Caleb, who stood at a respectful distance, the embodiment of discreet curiosity, he asked him if there was a city directory in the house.

"Not jest that big ornery volume what dey keeps in drug stores, Marsa Hugh, but Miss Emmy, she's got de little Blue Book on her desk, what records all de quality, sah, and guarantees 'em true, and I'll fotch it right away."

Hugh jotted the two addresses on a card, then rising, shook himself as though to be sure he was awake. At this moment the tones of a clear mezzo-soprano voice floated across the hall.

> "What's this dull town to me? Robin's not here!"

Poppea was singing *Robin Adair*. Hugh listened until the verse was ended, his face white and drawn with contending emotions. Then turning abruptly to Philip and reading both comprehension and sympathy in his glance, he said abruptly:—

"Tell her that I've been here, but was called away by bad news from home. No—not that, it might spoil her evening. Only say that I could not wait," and taking his hat and coat that Caleb was holding, he went out.

By the time Poppea had answered the last encore that her strength would allow, a Creole folk-song ending in the minor key, Philip had made his way through the

throng that surrounded the girl, who was radiant with a success that must appeal to her artistic sense, if her natural woman's love of approbation was in the background. When she saw Philip, her whole expression changed and softened, while the lips that had been parted in laughing repartee drooped to wistfulness.

Bradish Winslow, who still kept his post, noticed the change at once, and, following her eyes for the cause, was surprised at his own feeling of relief upon discovering Philip.

Poppea came forward and, refraining from putting her hand upon his shoulder in the old way that marked his boyishness, greeted him as she would any other young fellow of nineteen, drawing him into a little group back of the long piano where he saw Miss Emmy and half a dozen of the Quality Hill colony. At the same time, he was conscious that her eyes were looking over his head in a rapid search for something or some one that she did not see, which reminded him of the message.

"Hugh Oldys has been here," he said, "and was very sorry that he could not wait to see you."

"Then he has gone? Why could he not wait?"

Philip, who read Poppea's moods with mercurial swiftness, was tempted to add some words of explanation, but Winslow, hearing Poppea's question, intervened, saying, to her ear alone:—

"Now you have earned a rest in cooler air where you can enjoy the reflection of the pleasure you have given. Miss Emmy has a surprise for you; Capoul, the most expressive emotional tenor of a decade, is coming in from the opera where he is singing Wilhelm Meister in *Mignon*. You have never heard it? Ah, there is so much music that I wish to hear again for the first time through watching you hear it."

The next morning Poppea slept late, owing to the fact that Nora had slipped in and closed the shutters fast. She had intended taking the early train for home, as three days would elapse before she was to sing at an afternoon concert given for the benefit of a fashionable charity.

When Nora finally judged that it was proper for the household protégée, in whom she took no small pride, to awake, and brought her coffee and rolls to her room, after the Feltons' winter custom, Poppea found herself undergoing a sort

of nervous reaction caused by the excitement of the night before and the lack of air in the shuttered room. Twelve o'clock was the next train possible, and entering the library to make positive her going, she found Stephen Latimer standing before the fire, while the ladies and Mr. Esterbrook sat opposite him in benumbed silence, Miss Emmy having her handkerchief pressed to her eyes.

Miss Felton motioned Poppea to the lounge beside her: "Mr. Latimer has brought us dreadful news! Please tell her, Stephen."

For a moment Poppea thought that she would suffocate; suppose that Daddy was dead and she away! Then she found herself listening as through rushing water to the story of how Mr. Oldys, when superintending the placing of a heavy piece of the new machinery, had been instantly killed by its fall.

The mill hands, becoming demoralized in their wild rush to get a physician, had broken the news abruptly to Madam Oldys, which at first she did not believe. But later, when they brought her husband home and Dr. Morewood was sitting by watching for a heart collapse, her mind, not her body, had suddenly given way—not weakly or plaintively, but violently, in a manner that no one who had witnessed her frailty would have deemed possible, so that restraint was imperative.

Hugh had been sent for the previous evening, and two specialists were even then on their way to Harley's Mills for consultation. Latimer himself had come down to inform Hugh's new employers, as well as to do some friendly acts of necessity.

"I am going home at noon," was Poppea's spoken answer to Latimer, but between the brief words he read much besides.

"I expected that you would, and told Oliver Gilbert so in passing," was his reply.

"How is Hugh?" was her first question, when after the bustle of transit they were seated in the train with no other passengers in their immediate vicinity.

"Perfectly quiet, but as one stunned; his sorrow for his father is deep enough, but his anguish at his mother's condition is heartrending."

"Is there—do you think that there is anything I could do if I should go there?" she faltered.

"Not now, my child; it is a time when no friend and not even a man's wife must

come between him and his sorrow, his thoughts are only for the eye of God. Such help as Charlotte needs below stairs is being given by Jeanne and Satira Potts."

"And the funeral?"

"Will be from St. Luke's to-morrow."

The next day Poppea and Oliver Gilbert followed with the rest, the Feltons, Mr. Esterbrook, and half the summer colony. She only caught a glimpse of Hugh, who, tearless, looking neither to the right or left, seemed hewn from marble.

How could she go back to town, Poppea thought, and wreathe her hair and sing? If only she knew, if she could comfort Hugh in anyway; but he saw no one but Stephen Latimer. She had set her feet on the path of self-support and could not leave it now; there was nothing to do but wait.

Two weeks passed and public interest in Hugh Oldys's affairs had reached a high pitch. Were the Mills to be abandoned? What would become of the expectant men? Then it was whispered, though not maliciously, that Mr. Oldys's affairs were seriously involved, and that a strong, alert man with a keen business head would be required to save the property.

Poppea being at home one morning within the month of Mr. Oldys's death, Stephen Latimer came to the post-office house, and being as usual questioned as to whether there was any improvement in Mrs. Oldys's condition, said, almost as though he were giving a requested message.—

"No, there is none, nor ever likely to be; the specialists gave this as their decision yesterday and advised that she be sent at once to a trustworthy asylum, because the strain of her care, even if competent nurses came between, would be too much for any one person."

"Will Hugh let her be taken away?" asked Poppea, with dilating eyes and hands tightly clasped.

"No, never! He says that from now on he will, if necessary, withdraw from everything else to care for her and keep the home intact, in case that she comes to herself, and missing something, wonders.

"This is not all," Latimer continued. "In order to have the money to care for her, his father's funds being all placed in this new venture, he must leave his

profession, assume immediate control of the Mills, and fight it out to a finish. But in this forced work lies his salvation. When I saw him to-day, I marvelled at the new nobility of his face. Resolution has always been its chief characteristic, now resignation is blended with it. God grant that hope, born of the two, may presently soften its set lines."

That Hugh had wholly put away his need of her was the meaning that Poppea took from Latimer's words. Then she, too, would lose herself in work, and the next day that she went to the city to sing, she let Miss Emmy persuade her that she owed it to her art to tarry between times and take the lessons that Tostelli was so eager to give her. When once hard at work, with the best music to be heard by way of relaxation, small wonder if the days were winged to Poppea, and at times disappointment and responsibility alike seemed the unreal things of life; she would have been less than a woman had it been otherwise.

CHAPTER XIV

A PROPOSAL

On returning from her singing lesson in the middle of a bitter cold January afternoon, Poppea had walked the short distance from Chickering Hall back to the Felton house on Madison Square, so far up in the clouds that she was quite unconscious that her feet touched the icy pavements. For not only had Tostelli commended her improved vocalization with true Italian fervor expressed in elaborate French, but he had praised her first teacher, Stephen Latimer, saying: "He who has brought out Mademoiselle's voice thus far without a scratch or strain or a falsity has done so much that she may hope to be anything that she wills, even an *artiste* of the Grand Opera, after much study abroad. That she can also act, I am ver' certain, for what she sings that she is for the time, gay, *triste*, *pathetique*, simple *comme en enfant*, *mais toujours naturel*, *toujours ravissante*." Then he had asked her to take the leading part in an operetta that was to be given by his pupils toward the end of the season in one of the ample old houses on Gramercy Park that boasted a perfectly equipped private theatre.

So buoyed up was she by his words that she had crossed the park, the exquisite articulation of its crystal-covered trees still further keeping up the illusion of fairyland wherein she was for the moment living, and reached the steps of the house, before she realized where she was, and that she was expected to make a round of calls with Miss Emmy instead of going to sit by the fire and think it all out as she desired. She had been in the company of others all day and had the need, possessed by all those of her temperament, to be alone to realize herself.

"Are the ladies at home?" was her question to Caleb as he opened the door, knowing that the day's history would be forthcoming.

"Yes, Missy, and Mr. Esterbrook too; he doan seems to feel right peart to-day. He didn't go to the club for his luncheon, and he isn't going to the painter man's what's doing his picture. Miss 'Liz'beth's going out later, but Miss Emmy's 'cided not to budge herself, and's taking her comfort in the sitting room, where I'm to bring de tea soon's you come."

"Good!" cried Poppea, running up to her room as swiftly as she had done many

years before when Winslow had caught her dancing. Only this time, instead of kneeling in front of the open window for breath, she threw off her street things, loosened her hair that had been compressed by her hat, and slipping on a soft crimson wrapper that she and Satira Potts had fashioned when she had been getting together what the latter insisted upon calling her "trowsoo" for the city, went down to the sitting room, the door of which stood hospitably open.

The upstairs sitting room was one of the unsurpassed institutions of the day among those who had sufficiently ample houses to allow for it. Usually occupying the front room of the second floor, it served both as a watch-tower of the street and a comfortable place of retreat when "not at home," or "engaged," according to the moral veracity of the family, was the word at the door. While there is a certain responsibility about the coherent furnishings of all other rooms, from the music room of bare floor and scant drapery to the library with its heavy rugs, draped alcoves, and precise shelving—the sitting room may take tribute from all others. A small upright piano, an open case of books, a table serving both for writing and a comfortable litter of magazines, deep nestlike chairs and a lounge that invites impromptu sleep without the ceremonious disrobing suggested by a bedroom, a joyful canary or two, and a shelf of blooming plants in the sunniest window complete the setting.

The modern living room is undoubtedly grandchild of the sitting room that abdicated in its favor a quarter of a century ago, owing to an increasing contraction in house room. For the living room in ordinary houses is more often a combination of library, drawing and dining room, than a separate bit of luxury; also it is usually on the first floor, and therefore below the range of safety for flowing hair, kimonos, slippers, and pajamas.

When Poppea entered the Feltons' sitting room and saw Miss Emmy in one of the deep chairs, released from stays and elaborate hair-dress, actually sitting on her feet in curled-up comfort, while she petted Diva the great fox-gray Angora, so-called from the vocal quality of her purr,—whose wonderful fur enveloped her mistress like a lap robe,—she knew that Miss Elizabeth had already gone out and she felt a sudden relaxation and rush of comfort that brought tears of pleasure very near to her eyes.

"Ring for the tea, child, and then we can shut the door and be by ourselves," said Miss Emmy, keeping her eyes fixed on the fire.

When Caleb had brought in and lighted the kettle lamp and put another lump of

the unctuous Liverpool coal upon the fire, Poppea seated herself on the tiger rug by Miss Emmy's chair and fed bits of Sally Lunn cake to the cat while she waited for the elder woman to speak of the something that lay behind her eager, restless expression.

"Tell me about your day," said Miss Emmy, abruptly.

Poppea began with her call at Mrs. Hewlett's, that the songs for her afternoon musical of the next week might be chosen. In addition to the list of old English ballads, Mrs. Hewlett had asked if she knew any darky songs, and finding that she did, suggested that she make a separate specialty of these as novelty was a *must be* in social entertaining. Then Gloria Hooper had taken her home to luncheon almost forcibly, and there Bradish Winslow had drifted in and walked with her over to Chickering Hall. Tostelli's comments and the hopes that were aroused in her rounded out the narrative, while she waited, hands clasped about her knees and her eyes gazing into Miss Emmy's, for her judgment upon the matter.

"You are beginning, Poppea. Every one is very nice to you, as they should be, and New York seems to you the promised land; so it seemed to me thirty-five years ago. This singing, half socially, half professionally, is very pleasant while it lasts; but if, when the winter is over, you've made up your mind that you are going to let music hold the first place, then you must go on,—go abroad and study with the concert stage, if not opera, for the goal."

"Oh, Aunty, Aunty, you fly too fast!" Poppea cried. "Daddy is first, though music fills up all the gaps and fits in between times and people, and is letting me earn enough to save and help Daddy when he shall need it. I am not even dreaming of opera, and 'abroad' is such a far-away place. Why can't I stay where I am for at least a half a dozen years?"

"Why? because they won't let you;" then as if she feared by the look of pained wonder on Poppea's face that she had gone too far in the rather bitter mood that was upon her, she laughed lightly.

"There, there, you mustn't mind my nonsense, but I'm in a state of rebellion myself to-day, and so wish every one else to be likewise. I've just told sister Elizabeth that I will go on no more of the wild-goose-chase performances known as 'making formal calls,' and that after the dinners and other entertainments that are already afoot between now and March are over, I shall withdraw from what is known as 'society'; not from my real friends, mind you, but merely from the

tyranny of the thing that should be called the 'Institution for Amusement at the expense of one's own and one's neighbors' Comfort.' If Elizabeth wishes to continue, she must, to use a card phrase, 'go it alone.'

"I am going abroad in the early spring, and when I return, I mean to spend most of my time at Westboro, and see if Jeanne and Stephen Latimer between them cannot find some work for my hands and brain that will keep my heart from either freezing or turning wholly to stone," and Miss Emmy broke off and held up Diva before her face in a vain effort to suppress a dry sob that made her voice tremble.

"Why, Miss Emmy, I have always thought that you loved New York and all the people with whom you have lived so many years,—the art galleries, theatres, music, shops, and all the rest. Don't you remember what you said to me about it last autumn when you urged me to come down and try my luck? That no American has lived or is fit to judge how or where they will spend their lives until they have seen and known New York," and Poppea arose to her knees in front of her admonisher, an expression of incredulity on her upturned face, and her hands clasped in a half-beseeching, half-defensive attitude.

"Yes, I believe I did say that among other things, and it is true none the less because, after having tried it for the best of my life, I have decided to leave it before it leaves me. The New York that I knew is passing in more senses than one. When I first came to it, making the journey from Boston by boat, Washington Square was the north side of the residential city limit, the present corners of Fourteenth Street and Fifth Avenue cow pastures. There were many charming country houses all through the northern part of the Island and more especially near the Hudson, Bradish Winslow's grandfather, on the maternal side, living in one of them. We ourselves went to visit at the Waddell mansion set on the edge of a farm with its wheat fields near what is now the corner of Fifth Avenue and Thirty-seventh Street, the site of a church, a crowded city in itself and this was less than forty years ago. Young as you are, you can see the changes that seven or eight years have made, Poppea."

"Yes, I remember the fire-bell that pealed out numbers, and people looked in little books that they kept in their pockets to see in what district the fire was. Nora used to take me to a place down in Fourteenth Street where I fed goats and chickens through the fence, and there was a house on Broadway a little above Union Square that stood in a high-fenced garden where we used to feed the peacocks.

"But now the streets seem so much gayer and better lighted at night, and then it is easier to get about; there are so many street-cars instead of the slow, jolting busses, and the elevated railroad over there on Sixth Avenue is almost like flying. Though I'm very sorry there is to be a new opera-house so far uptown in the place of the dear old Academy, for I suppose the first of a thing must always seem the best because it is the first," and Poppea's first night at the opera again came before her, but this time there was more pleasure than pain in the memory.

Was it possible that she had been too sensitive? The people by whom she was surrounded seemed to make her one of themselves without question, and yet, coming from Quality Hill as many of them did, they must all know.

"It is not simply the growth of the city that appals me," she heard Miss Emmy's voice say as if from a distance. "Formerly, society was one; you knew your friends well, their houses and their coachmen in the distance. We who entertained did it to give our friends pleasure to the best of our ability. Now people are beginning to entertain to outvie, and this bidding for guests and the game of chance, where the victory is to the purse if it is only used with a certain degree of discretion, is drawing strangers to our social midst, and presto, society is no longer one but many, and we shall soon be driven by the crowd from our houses to entertain in hotels.

"Look at this!" and Miss Emmy tossed a couple of cards into Poppea's lap. One was the ordinary engraved card of a formal afternoon reception announcing that Mrs. John Sellers and the Misses Sellers would be at home on January the twenty-fourth, from four to seven. The second card bore simply the name of Mrs. M. E. Wilson, the address on both cards being the same.

"I do not see anything amiss about these cards," said Poppea, examining them carefully.

"Not in the cards, but in the facts back of them. Maria Wilson, one of the best known of the old set, has a large house, well furnished, but her husband's means have been decreasing ever since the Tweed Ring panic ten years ago. The Sellers are from Minneapolis, rich, ambitious, and their daughters decently educated, but as a family in a social sense positively unknown. Maria Wilson has rented them her house for the winter, herself included, for an enormous price. It is at their reception in her house where she is to stand sponsor for them, and if it is a success, it shows that society in New York is no longer able to stand upon its own resources. It is the entering wedge, for as soon as we cease to know

personally those we invite, one must have police in dress suits to see that the strangers that come do not steal the spoons."

"How do you know all this, Aunty dear?" asked Poppea, a bewildered expression crossing her face as she began to wonder if the social fabric could possibly be woven of other than the silk and fair colors in which it presented itself to her.

"Know? Maria Wilson came here to luncheon to-day and not only told me the scheme, but asked me to receive at *her* reception (as she called it) and bring you to sing 'in a perfectly friendly way,' which, of course, means without pay. I'm quite through with it all, and then, besides, dear child, I'm very tired; lately I only seem to breathe an inch at a time when I'm in a close room. I must get away and be myself for a little, even though it is a rather poor thing to be, I'm afraid.

"Now as to this trip abroad—I want to see England in May and then go to the continent for two months, and you must go with me, Poppea."

"You want me? But how about Miss Elizabeth and Mr. Esterbrook? Are they not going?"

"No, dear; I have struck at last. It is late in the day, I allow, but once before my eyes close I must see through them without benefit of the spectacles of other opinions. Besides, poor Willy is losing his hold upon things. Even Elizabeth has agreed that we must put our affairs at Harley's Mills into the hands of Hugh Oldys, and Mr. Cragin, our lawyer here, has practically all the responsibility at this end. Poppea child, whatever you do or do not do in this world, do not put off living your life to the full every day that it is possible. To-morrow is a good word for hope to know, but remember that it is a bad word for a woman's heart to feed upon. Will you go with me, dear?"

Poppea was looking into the fire, watching the little flock of sparks creep up and burn a pathway through the soot. "Folks going to meeting," Satira Pegrim had called them when she had watched the same procession, born of the wood embers, in the foreroom chimney. Without looking up, she could feel Miss Emmy's eyes upon her face and knew that the question in them was a double one.

"I should like to go abroad with you," she said at last, still keeping her eyes upon the fire, "and I crave living to the full, but that it might hurt some one else and, through them, me."

"That is what I thought for years, and now I know that what I thought would hurt another did not exist. You say that you would like to go. Now the remaining question is, will you?"

"I will try to make it yes, but between now and then something might happen or Daddy might need me, dear Miss Emmy."

"That will do for a beginning, child. See, the kettle has quite boiled away and you must have fresh water."

"De mail, ladies," said Caleb, advancing at that moment with half a dozen letters on his salver, while at the same time they discovered that Diva, unobserved, had finished the cake.

Miss Emmy's mail consisted of invitations, while of Poppea's two letters one was from Oliver Gilbert, the other from Hugh Oldys.

Gilbert wrote carefully and in detail of every village happening, how that it was proposed, through the influence of the Quality Hill people who did not like the prosaic name of the old town, to unite Westboro and Harley's Mills into a single town to be known as West Harbor. In this case the Westboro post-office would be consolidated with his, and he thought, under the circumstances, with the double work, he would be justified in resigning "his charge." What did Poppea think of it? Then he dwelt upon Hugh Oldys's kindness in coming frequently to see them and supping at the post-office house on Sunday nights. But he did not add that Hugh had cross-questioned him most keenly and persistently about any possible ideas that he might entertain about Poppea's origin, and had quietly told him that sooner or later he should find it out, thus putting Gilbert into something akin to rage; for, blindly enough, the one dread of his life was that some one should appear to claim the lady baby.

For the moment Poppea was divided. Was this change, by any chance, another scheme of John Angus's to oust her Daddy, or was it a providential happening to render it easy for Gilbert to retire? Being optimistic under all her trials, she decided upon the latter and turned to the other letter.

Hugh wrote in a subdued rather than in a sad key and, without reference to the interim, picked up their friendship as it was before the night of his return when the fabric began to change its weave and pattern. That he felt the need of her old-time letters and direct companionship he did not hesitate to say, at the same time taking it for granted that his would be a comfort to her. He told her freely of his

daily routine of life and asked for hers in such a frank way, free alike from either restraint or curiosity, that the comrade emerged once more, and she resolved again to write him the weekly letter of his college days.

Ah, what a boy he seemed, however much his manhood had been tried and developed in the last few months, compared to the men who crowded about her at the musicals, lavish in words of praise, personal compliments, and gifts of flowers. To be sure, they all seemed a part of the play world in which she was living—all but Bradish Winslow, and as he in a sense had stepped accidentally into her life in its own home surroundings, so he seemed in a way to belong to it.

"A polished man of the world" was Miss Felton's favorite expression concerning him; yet knowing this as she did, there was something about Winslow's personality, his deference, at once soothing and stimulating, that when she was with him made it the most natural and desirable place for her to be; but when he was absent, the condition was altered, and she not only wondered at a certain influence that he held over her, but experienced a sharp sense of repulsion at it.

It was the last of March when the rehearsals for the operetta drew to a close. The performance would be given in Easter week. Two large houses were to be thrown together for the occasion,—one for the musical part of the affair, the other for the cotillon and supper following, the two being joined by a covered passage between the gardens in the rear.

Poppea's character in the rather fantastic performance was that of a young girl of the pastoral type, who for a part of the play personated an actress, and for this scene, in which there was a dance, she was to utilize the green muslin Perdita gown of her first appearance at Quality Hill. Of course at this season the poppies must be artificial and more abundant for stage effect, and after many protestations she was told that she simply *must* have her eyes pencilled and a dash of color added to her cheeks to guard against nervous pallor.

When the night came, Mr. Esterbrook was not well, and Miss Felton, for some accountable reason, in no mood for going out, so that Miss Emmy and Poppea went to the Hoopers' alone in the depths of the last new carriage which, as though to carry out Miss Emmy's announcement that her days for light blue and pink were over, was lined with rich wine-colored cloth.

Poppea hardly knew whether she wished most to go or to run away, but by the time that she stood behind the dark green plush curtain peeping at the audience from between its folds, the desire for achievement had come to her, and she was

ready to stay and conquer. Very lovely were the young society girls of the chorus arrayed as shepherdesses; unembarrassed and statuesque was the contralto of the piece, Gloria Hooper, otherwise Daphnis, the lover, a superb brunette and daughter of the house; but for the time the sense of the music dominated her; she was no longer Poppea of the Post-office in whose way stood many fears, but Sylvaine of the Invincible Charm, whom she was personating.

Among the familiar faces in the audience, Philip's and Bradish Winslow's were the only ones that her memory retained as the orchestra finished the tinkling overture, full of the piping of shepherds, the sound of cow-bells, and the tripping of dancing feet, and the curtain was drawn aside. Then in a moment all faces vanished but that of Tostelli, who was conducting from under the shelter of a thick palm in a tub. He had faith in her, nor was it misplaced.

After the first act there was a storm of applause and flowers. In coming forward to bow, hand in hand with Gloria, her eyes fell upon a figure standing behind the last row of chairs. It was John Angus, who had evidently come without knowledge that Poppea was taking part, for the expression of his face was so blended of surprise, incredulity, anger, and something else akin to dread, which she could not formulate, that she was obliged to close her eyes for a second to blot it out, and then fortunately Sylvaine again absorbed her.

It was toward the end of the last act that the dance came, and as the time changed for it, something compelled Poppea, she abandoned the set steps she had been taught and improvised until the measure ended. Then the final storm of applause descended upon her. "Brava! brava!" Tostelli cried. Coming from under his bush, he first shook her by both hands and then kissed them publicly, saying for her ear alone, "For you the grand opera is near—very near!"

Still the applause continued. Tostelli looked at her to see if she could stand a repetition of the intricate song of the rather artificial scene, but she shook her head. The revulsion had come; she was no longer Sylvaine but herself, alone and among strangers but for the face of Philip, whose eyes hung on her own.

Stretching out one arm as though to enjoin silence, she stepped forward, her eyes seeing above and beyond. Then the clear legato notes of *Robin Adair* rang forth.

> "What's this dull town to me? Robin's not here!"

The effect of this sudden transition was marvellous, tears filled eyes to which they were strangers, and for no reason that their owners could understand.

Then Poppea, as soon as she could break away, her arms laden with flowers, looked for Miss Emmy, her one desire being to get home and be alone. But Winslow, who was her shadow for the time, told her that Miss Emmy had heard through some one who had come in from the club, where Dr. Markam, the Feltons' physician, happened to be spending the evening when sent for, that Mr. Esterbrook had been taken suddenly ill. Miss Emmy had at once returned, and would send Nora back in the carriage for Poppea as soon as possible.

"Is there any quiet spot where I can wait?" begged Poppea; "I'm so tired."

"Yes, at the end of the hall there are chairs among those palms; go there, and I will bring you some supper, for I'm sure that you are hungry quite as much as tired."

For a few moments Poppea waited at the place indicated, then the cooler air of the improvised passage, which was quite empty, tempted her, and crowding herself behind one of the curtains with which it was draped, she found an opening through which she could breathe the air of the first truly spring night.

Approaching voices sounded that she recognized as belonging to the three women who, aside from the Misses Felton, had done the most toward her establishment—Mrs. Hewlett; her hostess Mrs. Hooper, Gloria's mother; and a young widow, Hortense Gerard, a favorite cousin of Bradish Winslow's.

Fearing that they would insist upon her dancing the cotillon if she made known her presence, Poppea remained behind the curtain, and they, evidently in search of air also, seated themselves near by on a low divan. Presently the sound of her own name made Poppea regret her action, but it was already too late.

Mrs. Hewlett. "Well, Miss Gilbert has certainly achieved a great success; what a social institution she has become in a few months!"

The Widow. "Yes, but she will cease to be as quickly as she has achieved; the very fact that we have admired her so much this winter is the reason why no one will want her next."

Gloria's mother. "I'm not so sure of that, Hortense; I only wish that I could be. I'm afraid she's come to stay, or thinks she has as far as the men are concerned;

they all take her *so* seriously. My Johnnie had the folly to say this morning that as soon as he was a senior he should offer himself, and you know very well that your cousin Bradish won't let us say a word about her in his presence. Why didn't the Feltons have better sense than to take her into their family, a less than nobody? It puts the whole thing upon a semisocial footing: otherwise we need not have recognized her except by the envelope with the check in it."

Mrs. Hewlett. "I think you are a little hard on her, Charlotte; she's a very sweet girl and not responsible for her origin, or rather lack of it, though of course it would be deplorable if she should marry one of our sons."

The Widow. "*I* think I'll put it into some rich old rascal's head to offer to put up for her training abroad for an operatic career: she'll surely jump at that bait. Possibly even Brad might work himself up to that extent; in fact, I think it's a case when he would put himself out to any degree short of matrimony, which proves her dangerous, for if Brad will go so far, others less seasoned will go the whole ribbon. She's probably got a lot of magnetic bad blood beneath her baby skin. Think of her art and craft in dropping into *Robin Adair* to-night after that Frenchy rigmarole. Yes, she's got all the born wit of an adventuress, and she must go before she outwits us."

Mrs. Hewlett. "I had never thought of her in that light, before, but of course it may be so, and no mother wishes her sons to—"

They go on to the ball-room. Poppea clings to the curtain for support, her hand showing her hiding-place to Winslow, who has come through an opposite curtain with a plate and a glass of champagne.

"Drink this!" he said, in a voice that trembled. But Poppea shook her head.

"How long have you been here? Ever since those shameless fence cats came?"

Another motion of the head, this time in the affirmative.

"Then you've heard every word they said?"

"Yes," Poppea's lips managed to say. At the same time pride came to her rescue; she raised her head and looked him in the face in a way that was both supplication and a challenge.

Hastily putting aside the food that he had brought, Winslow threw back the curtain, and before she could resist, drew her into an anteroom out of the passageway.

"Sit down!" he commanded. Poppea dropped into a chair, but still kept her eyes, now grown dull with despair, upon him; in fact, it seemed impossible for her to remove them.

"Don't look at me so, child! I should like to wring every one of their scrawny necks; only tell me what to do, and I will do it."

"You can do nothing," were the words formed by Poppea's dry lips, but no sound came.

Suddenly stepping toward her and resting one knee on the divan, he began to speak rapidly in a voice whose vibrant tones were moderated with difficulty.

"I can, perhaps, do nothing alone, but *we*, we can do everything.

"Marry me, Poppea. I love you wholly, finally, and have ever since the night when I first met you, also on painful ground. But together we will put away the pain, and you shall trample on those harpies that have stuck their claws in you. As Bradish Winslow's wife your word will be law, your position in society unassailable, and my cousin Hortense in particular will come grovelling to you by to-morrow, afraid of what she thinks you may know of her.

"Come to me, child, and let me protect you once for all!"

Poppea dragged herself slowly to her feet until her face was on a level with his, her eyes still fastened upon him, but the dulness was gone, and they blazed with a wild fury akin to delirium, and the color in her cheeks outdid the rouge that had not been wiped away.

"There is no one among them all to compare with you!" he whispered, his voice turning hoarse; so moved was he by her wistful beauty that it became a pain.

She did not seem to hear the last words; her anger blazed out and cooled, and her motions were like those of a somnambulist. She put her hand to her head as though listening for something that she had forgotten but yet expected, but the Knight of the Grail and his music had deserted her.

"Yes, I will marry you," she said in steady, monotonous voice, wholly lacking in

emotion.

"Come then, we will go in and announce it to our hostess before the trio may guess the good—that they have done," and he leaned forward to clasp her to him, but as she shrank back, one arm before her face, still as some one who walks in a dream and wards off danger, he merely drew her hand through his arm, still grasping it.

"Not to-night, to-morrow! please let me go home!" and at that moment a man-servant came up to say that Miss Felton's carriage and maid were waiting for Miss Gilbert.

CHAPTER XV

NIGHT AND MORNING

The picture of the night was in three panels,—that of the morning in one.

According to Nora, Mr. Esterbrook had suffered a shock, that indefinite something that may mean so many things. He had been in the library and had evidently fallen in crossing the room. Miss Felton had found him and had sent for two or three doctors, who were now with him; she was terribly upset, and so the woman babbled on until the house was reached.

Three coupés were lined up before the door, and the house was lighted from top to bottom. Poppea judged that the physicians were still in consultation.

The cook opened the door, explaining that Caleb was wanted upstairs, and that Nora was to go at once to Miss Felton.

On her way to her room Poppea passed through the sitting room and tapped at Miss Emmy's door, which stood ajar, but there was no answer; the room was empty, so she continued on her way.

Turning up the light, she looked about the pretty bedroom, her eyes lingering on each article it contained. Was it possible that only four hours had elapsed since she had left it? Yes, the little Dresden clock was tinkling twelve.

Flowers from a concert of two days before filled the jars on the mantel-shelf, then she remembered that all the tributes of that evening had been forgotten and left behind. Philip had brought her a wicker basket of daffodils such as later in the season starred the bank garden below the parapet at home. She hoped that he would not know and be hurt; as for the rest, what did it matter?

The night was warm, yet she closed the window, and crouching before the hearth, lit the symmetrical pile of small logs put there chiefly for ornament. Stripping off her gay attire and dropping it in a heap on the floor of the dressing closet, she threw a wrapper about her and again kneeled before the fire, as though its upward motion was a spell against the loneliness of the room. As she looked at the curling flames, her eyes dilated, and a terror that was an absolute

pain swept over her: a strain of music had penetrated the fog that enveloped her brain; it was the song of the Knight—the Knight of the Grail.

"Oh, God, what have I done?" she whispered to the fire, "promised to marry Bradish Winslow, when I have vowed that I would never marry until *that* is no longer a mystery. Promised to marry him, not for love, but to trample on those who were trampling on me. It is true that when I am with him there is something that makes me wish to stay, but when I am alone, I want to keep away. There is no one to speak to, no one to ask; if only I could feel Daddy's hand upon my hair to-night. Ah, little mother, won't you ask God to help me in some way that I can feel and understand? To-morrow it will be too late!"

Clasping the locket to her breast, she crouched lower and lower until her face almost touched the fire guard. The wood snapped and a live coal fell upon the carpet. Crushing it out with her slipper, her eye fell upon something white beside the hearthstone. Picking it up she saw that it was Hugh's weekly letter that she had read and laid by the clock and that a draught had wafted to her feet. Holding it between her palms, she gradually grew calm, and as she looked at it the only recourse opened before her: she must write to Winslow so that he would receive the letter when he awoke.

Going to the secretary with its litter of invitations and complimentary social notes, she swept them to the floor with a gesture half contempt and half full of the regret of renunciation. Then having cleared the shelf, she began to write, slowly as a child pens its copy, giving each letter a separate stroke and weighing its value. She had need of this care, for before she had finished, the sheet was wet with tears.

Quarter of one, tittered the silly little clock. Poppea knew that no mail would be taken from the pillar at the street corner before six, but it might be her only chance to get out unobserved. The lights in the extension, where Mr. Esterbrook's rooms were located, were burning brightly; now was her chance. Slipping on a long ulster, she went down without meeting any one, threw off the night latch on the door, and closed it behind her. Two of the cabs had gone, and the driver of the one remaining slept upon the box.

It was but a step to the corner and back, the only live thing that she encountered being a long-bodied cat which seemed to separate itself from the shadow of one pair of steps only to be swallowed by another shadow farther on. Gaining her room once more, she put out the light and threw herself upon the bed without

undressing.

In the room beyond, which was Miss Felton's, Miss Emmy was pacing to and fro. The consulting physicians had gone and their own family stand-by, Dr. Markam, was now coming from Mr. Esterbrook's quarters ushered by Caleb, Miss Felton remaining behind.

"Tell me the best and worst," said Miss Emmy, following the doctor down to the sitting room.

Dr. Markam looked at her keenly as if to gauge the quality of her emotion, then said tersely, "The best is that he may be quickly released by another stroke, the worst that he may live for years partly or wholly helpless and with clouded mental faculties. Go up and try to persuade Miss Elizabeth that it is unnecessary for her to remain. She is not used to illness or misery. Caleb will stay to-night, and the nurse that I shall send will be here by daylight," and after drinking the glass of wine that Caleb offered him instinctively, he went out, thinking to himself how little his old friend Esterbrook had, at the end of life, to show for the elaborate trouble of his living.

Thus bidden, Miss Emmy crept softly into the outer room of Mr. Esterbrook's suite, then, not finding Elizabeth, she went through the dressing closet to the inner room where a night lamp burned with the pale rays of moonlight.

On the bed in the corner she could see the outline of Mr. Esterbrook's form, still as though he no longer breathed. A second look revealed a stranger object. Kneeling by the bed in the attitude of passionate despair, her face buried in the quilt, her hands clasping the rigid one, was Miss Elizabeth.

Miss Emmy could not at once take in the details; her natural supposition was that her sister was ill or had fainted and slipped from the near-by arm-chair. Going to her she touched her on the shoulder, and in a low tone gave the doctor's message about the nurse and the sufficiency of Caleb for the night.

Suddenly Miss Felton turned, but without moving from her kneeling posture, and her sister started back, amazed at the entire change in her face. Haggard and worn, furrowed under the eyes and pinched at the nostrils, it was a woman of seventy-five, not sixty-four, that looked up, while the carefully braided hair, always so exact a coronal to the unbending head, was loosened in a gray, dishevelled mass. Again Miss Emmy tried to explain the doctor's words. Pulling herself to her feet with difficulty, Miss Felton clutched her sister by one

shoulder, almost screaming in her ear.

"I will not go! I will not have a nurse! Caleb will stay with us; Caleb will be sufficient." Then as Miss Emmy did not move or seem to understand, she shook her arm.

"I am going to care for him now, because I love him, have always loved him, and you, or else your shadow, have always stood between. If he could have stepped out of it for a month, a week, he would have known. I thought once that you too loved him and you were my frail little sister, my charge, and so I repulsed him, suppressed my nature, and kept back. But you, you called him 'Willy' and played kitten and knitting ball with him until you tired, until it was too late. Now he will never know; but if he lives, and I can make him comfortable, he may perhaps realize the comfort, and through it that I love him. Now go—and leave us together at last! And if the people talk, tell them that Miss Felton does not care!"

Shaken, nay, almost shattered, Miss Emmy dragged herself from the room, clinging from chair to table like a child who creeps. Of all the possibilities of life, this that had happened seemed the most impossible. Elizabeth, the emotionless woman of perfect balance and judgment! Like a condemned criminal but half conscious of what he is accused, she groped her way along the hall. She must speak to some one, it seemed, or lose her mind.

Poppea had sent a message by Nora that she must be called if needed. Surely her need was great, so she opened the girl's door and listened before entering.

"I am not asleep," said Poppea from the white draped bed, and raising herself on her elbow, she lit the night lamp on the bed stand.

"Is he—is Mr. Esterbrook any worse? Is he very sick?"

"Yes, but being sick is not the worst," and Miss Emmy told Poppea briefly what her sister now seemed to glory in, willing that the whole world should know.

Clasping her arms about the fragile creature, scarcely more than a bundle of ribbon and lace, Poppea held her close, crying, "Poor Aunty, dear Aunt Emmy, you are not blamable, neither did *you* know."

After a few minutes the girl's human sympathy relaxed the tension, and freeing herself, Miss Emmy sat down by the bed.

"What is it, child? You are not yourself to-night, any more than I am. Were you

not well received? Something has happened. What is it?"

Poppea shivered as she tried to frame a sentence that should be truthful and yet not reveal, then she said:—

"One day you said that I could not keep on for long singing as I had this winter 'because they will not let you.' Every one was very kind, but afterward—it chanced to come to me that the women on whom I counted 'will not let me' continue, as you said, so I am going home, again—to-morrow."

"That is not all, Poppea."

"That is all that I shall ever say," she answered with the fixed intent that always astonished those who for the first time realized her capacity for firmness.

"You do not need; I understand. I, too, am going home to the Hill, Poppea, because they will not let me stay."

"Oh, Aunty! Aunty!" she cried, "lie down beside me. I'm afraid, afraid of I don't know what, as I used to be when I slept in the little hooded cradle and Daddy came and put Mack in beside me and sat and held my hand."

Then peace fell gently on Miss Emmy because this young creature needed her.

Bradish Winslow left the Hooper's as soon after Poppea as he might without having the two departures coupled. Not for the first time in his life had he been repelled and enraged by the absolute lack of social sincerity on the part of the group of women who, in their day, were the cohesive element of society. Yet he never realized the responsibility in the matter of men of his stamp who condone nearly everything in a woman so long as she is modish and amusing. Lighting a cigar and leaving his top-coat open that he might feel the vigor of the night air, Winslow strolled slowly from Gramercy Park westward to the Loiterers' Club. Contrary to his usual gregarious habits, he made his way to one of the least brilliantly lighted retiring-rooms, and ordering some club soda and Scotch, a kind of whiskey that was considered a marked eccentricity in the era of Rye and Bourbon, stretched himself on a sofa, hands behind head, and gave himself up wholly to steadying his nerves.

An hour later he entered his own bachelor home, a substantial and conservative

house in one of the wide streets that cross lower Fifth Avenue, a little north of Washington Square. The house was neither his birthplace nor the home of his childhood, but a legacy from a great-aunt, the last of the Bradish name. It was twelve years since a woman other than a caretaker or housemaid had lived in it; the first six it had remained virtually closed, while during the second half of the period, Winslow had developed the two first floors as suited the fancy of a man who entertained elegantly and conservatively, not choosing to establish a carousing Bohemia at too close range. If he had some or any of the vices of his class and position, he chose to pursue them away from his normal surroundings and at his own pace, where at any moment he might either outdistance them or drop behind without clamor.

Hence the house, as he entered it with his latch-key, had the subdued and grave air of any family residence in the same quarter. Turning out the lights in the lower rooms, he went to his personal suite on the second floor, lighted some gas-jets in the three rooms, rang for his man, and gave directions that he was to be wakened at half-past nine, breakfast in his room, and would under no consideration see any one before eleven o'clock. Then as the valet, but half awake, stumbled out, steadying himself by the portières as he drew them to, Winslow gave a sigh of relief, and flinging himself into a chair before the hearth, as Poppea had done, he stirred the embers and kindled a fire that was not for warmth but like summoning a sympathetic yet reticent friend.

Winslow's feeling during the two hours since he had, as he considered, rushed to Poppea's rescue was dual; he congratulated himself not a little that for once in his life he had let himself be swayed by a generous impulse and his own emotion. Also his curiosity was very expectant as to the stir that would be made by the announcement of his engagement to Poppea on the morrow and the consternation it would for various reasons cause. He could see the pallor come to the unprotected portion of his cousin Hortense's cheeks as she wondered if "Brad" would ever tell that baby-faced girl how desperately she had worked to enmesh him, and how deliberately and cleverly he had forced her to show a trumpless hand. Then there were others, and the thoughts of them were here and there tinged with regret. He had never been unscrupulous in his pleasures; he had simply lived life to the full as he saw it. As he was in a somewhat exalted and generous mood, why do things by halves?

Going to a large mahogany secretary in the corner, he unlocked a deep drawer that was hidden by a panel and took therefrom several bundles of letters and some photographs; to these he added a picture from a silver frame on the mantle,

of a very charming dark woman, well-groomed and poised, but with an air of not belonging exactly to his world. He held the bundle to his chest a moment as he stood looking into the fire; opening a pit in the middle of the molten coals, he cast the letters into it, not even glancing at the superscriptions, and only separating them sufficiently to be sure that they would ignite, sat and watched them until they were consumed.

From their ashes came a more natural mood. The house was at best rather gloomy; how Poppea's coming would brighten it, and her voice echo up and down those great rooms when she laughed; for he meant that she should laugh and have no time for tears. The idea was very soothing; he wondered why he had never seriously contemplated marrying before.

Jove! but she was beautiful and unusual; he would have a miniature painted of her in the green muslin with the poppies in her hair. Then he would take her everywhere that people might envy him her loveliness.

No, he would not! Formulating the thought brought a sharp revulsion. He would take her abroad, away from the carpers and fawners alike, where they two should be alone; for, after all contributing motives, what he had said was true, he had loved Poppea at first sight, and as far as the better side of his nature was concerned, he loved her finally.

What a splendid ring he would buy her to-morrow, no to-day! a ruby held in a setting of poppy leaves to form the flower. Ah! but she already held the spell of oblivion over him. He liked to feel this. Of course they would be married in a month; there was no reason for delay. The old man Gilbert? That was easily fixed: an annuity as a parting gift from Poppea and some tears, of course. It would be strange if she did not show some feeling, and besides, ingratitude was one of the traits he most detested in a woman.

So when Winslow at last settled himself in his bed, severe almost as a hospital cot, that stood in an alcove curtained from the luxurious room to which it formed a sharp contrast, there was a smile on his lips, and closing his eyes, he brought his finger-tips together, touched them fervently, and flung a message into the dark. He well knew how to play the lover, but it was only this night that he realized what it was to be entirely in love with some one other than himself.

The morning, like the night, was mild, but with the chilly undercurrent suggestive of sudden rain that divides April from May. The city, always early to awake in some quarter, now wore its widespread spring alertness, and the venders of plants in a cheerful burst of bloom added their cries to the street sounds.

Looking toward the square for a sign of color in the tree-tops, Poppea saw a jet of water rising from the fountain that filled the air with spray through which some birds were flitting. That the fountain was being set in order showed that the same spring impulse was moving the city wheels that sent all the little hillside springs rushing madly to swell the tide of Moosatuck. How she hungered and thirsted for a sight of it!

At half-past nine, precisely to the moment, the time that he had been directed, Winslow's valet came in, closed the windows, drew the curtains across the alcove, and after arranging the toilet articles in the ample bathroom, which was also used as a dressing-closet, went out until the bell should say that his master wished his breakfast. For accustomed to luxury as Winslow was in externals, his primitive tastes were direct and simple and he detested the fuss and servility of bodily service.

When in half an hour's time, clad in a comfortable bath-gown, he lounged into the library and rang for his coffee, picking up the letters that were neatly piled on the desk, so quickly does the mind of man travel to direct issues, that he was already considering the coming change of breakfasting in one of the smaller rooms below stairs, and picturing Poppea, gowned in some filmy draperies, flitting in like one of the streaks of morning sunshine. As he glanced carelessly at the writing upon the various envelopes that he might receive a clew as to which, if any, were worth the trouble of opening on this particular morning, Poppea's characters fixed his eye. It is true that he had previously received but two or three brief notes from her, acknowledging flowers or an invitation, but the writing, full of decision and so opposite from the girl's almost poetic appearance, was of the type that is called characteristic and became fixed in the memory.

So she was moved to write immediately upon getting home, was his first thought; but instead of hastily tearing the note open, he turned it slowly and reflectively in one hand as he poured himself a cup of coffee, then drank it

deliberately, and seated himself, before releasing the letter with a careful stroke of the paper-knife.

He had vainly tried the whimsical experiment of judging of the contents by the sense of touch. Everything about his connection with Poppea had been unusual, hence its added piquancy. Why should he not expect that its completion should be on the same plane? He almost dreaded the finding of a gushing and honeyed first love-letter of the newly engaged girl in her early twenties.

He read the letter through, then rubbed his eyes, turned the paper to the light, and read anew. In it was expressed gratitude to him coupled with self-reproach for allowing a bitter hurt to be revenged even in thought by the idea of marriage. There was a request for forgiveness, not for the retracting of a promise so much as for the sense of injury that had made the promise possible, and then the final statement that she would never take another's name until she had one of her own to yield. Piteous as was her agony of mind expressed, not so much in the words used as in their haste and almost incoherence, Winslow felt forcibly that the nature that lay beneath had its depths and measures of pride that his world could not fathom, because it was based upon a frankness, a fundamental *noblesse oblige*, that could neither be denied or argued away. A princess Poppea was, though wandering from her kingdom.

One thing was evident through it all. She had been doubtless attracted to him in a way, but she did not love him; her suffering, therefore, was complicated, but not keenly direct, as more and more every moment he felt his disappointment to be. Also the wind was taken out of any fanciful balloon of his self-sacrifice, and it fell collapsed.

No, she did not love him,—"By God, but she shall!" he cried, bringing his clenched hand down on the stand with a fervor that dashed the delicate porcelain cup and saucer to the floor in shivering fragments. "Life's been getting a sleepy nuisance these two years. What better to wake me up than to track her origin and find her name? Time, money, and grip I've got, if luck will only come in and take the fourth hand!

"What a conquest to remove her fantastic fortress and make her desire my love at one bound!"

This was the second time that a man had made this wish; a different man pitched in a different key.

This man, like the other, having made a resolution, went on his accustomed way, which in Winslow's case was to dress with unusual care, a dark red carnation, the prevailing flower for morning wear, in his buttonhole. His business affairs calling him down town but three days a week, he took a leisurely morning walk to the club, where he read the papers and listened to other news that would never appear in print. On some one's remarking upon the success that Miss Gilbert had achieved the previous night, that she had left early on account of Mr. Esterbrook's sudden illness before all the deserved congratulations had reached her, and that those who knew her best said that not less than two men of wealth were ready to back her for the study necessary to an operatic career, Winslow merely looked up, apparently only mildly interested, and observed in neutral tones:—

"Her voice has operatic capacity doubtless, but I should judge she lacked the physique. By the way, what is the news of poor old Esterbrook? A nice outlook ahead of us who grow old as bachelor dandies, I must say."

But what he *thought* was, "The cats have begun to weave their cradle for Poppea's undoing, and when they find she has gone, they will lay it to their strategy. Damn them!"

CHAPTER XVI

OUT OF THE ASHES

Poppea's chief wonder on her return home was in finding everything precisely as she had left it. A single winter does not witness a very great change in place or people, but to Poppea, so much having been crowded into those few months, it seemed as though the children of the village should have become men and women in her absence.

By the first of May, Miss Emmy had returned to Quality Hill. Miss Felton had decided to remain with Mr. Esterbrook in the Madison Square house for the present, the outlook being pleasant, though the nearness of the doctor was her first thought. As for Mr. Esterbrook himself, he had rallied sufficiently to be put in a wheel-chair. His right side was paralyzed and his speech as yet well-nigh unintelligible, so that his wants were filled mainly by the intuition of Miss Elizabeth and Caleb.

In spite of his absence of the previous summer and a report that it was to be repeated, John Angus had returned to Harley's Mills rather earlier than usual, and Stephen Latimer, the only one of the people who had received more than a casual greeting, said that he was looking ill, and that he had virtually confessed to Latimer that the winter had been a hard one to him, this being the first time that he had ever mentioned his health.

The new venture at the Mills was beginning to see daylight, for Hugh Oldys's inexperience was offset by the loyalty of the men who surrounded him. There was much also in connection with the growing plant that interested Hugh in an altruistic way, and already, in cooperation with Stephen Latimer, he was establishing relations with his employees and their families entirely different from those obtaining in the near-by New England factory towns.

It was Poppea who felt herself the odd number. Within the limits of a certain suppression of force, she had always seemed content, and her quiet, well-directed energy had been the reverse of the restlessness that now possessed her. She worked at everything with a feverish intensity wholly new and very disturbing to Oliver Gilbert, whose daily life had been unconsciously regulated

by her impulse. Poppea not only took charge of the making-up and sorting of the two heaviest mails of the day, but had undertaken a new and gratuitous task,—the writing of letters to the old country for those who either could not write at all or could only pen their names and had no way of pouring out their feelings to those they had left behind. In addition, she had announced her intention of doing all the housework herself when Satira Potts should leave, for although Mrs. Shandy had returned in April from her visit home, Hugh Oldys's need of a housekeeper had taken her from the field.

Jeanne Latimer, who had been appealed to both by Satira Potts and Miss Emmy as the one most likely to convince Poppea of the foolishness of such a course, ended by indorsing the girl's resolution, for she felt the growing tension that the others did not notice, and knew well, from her own temperament, that only what sometimes would appear to be foolish activity keeps the nerves elastic and from snapping.

One day, in talking to Hugh Oldys about the life in the city, when he had expressed, as far as he ever allowed himself to, the feeling of being out of the midst of things after having once broken his way in, he turned the matter quickly by saying to Poppea:—

"And you, how did you like the New York life? I do not mean the outside things, the theatre, music, galleries, and shops, but the inner life that you led of yourself?"

As he spoke they were walking down the road from Quality Hill toward the village and the afternoon sun was sifting through the hilltops that gradually increased in height as Moosatuck disappeared among them,—a slender, silvery thread unravelling toward its source.

For a moment the girl stood looking afar off to where one hill, called the mountain by the local youths who climbed it, arose above all the others; presently she said, speaking as of a state of existence where in passing through she had lost something of herself:—

"The life, the real life there in the city? Oh, Hugh! at first it seemed like being on the mountain where everything is spread before one. You are very lonely, to be sure, but still, somebody, and then suddenly you find that you are nothing at all but the wind among the grass that falls away as night comes!"

And reading from what she did not say rather than from what she did, Hugh

sighed and then quickened their pace, wondering what would be the end of it all for both of them.

That night, or rather morning, the fire signal was given by one of the factories on the Westboro road, to be repeated the next moment by the whistle of the Owl Express due to pass at three, and which halted presently, tolling its bell dismally. Instantly the male portion of the village was in its boots and trousers and running toward the red light at the north horizon. This was soon found to come from the railroad station at Harley's Mills. 'Lisha Potts, who had arrived at the post-office house with his team the previous evening to take his wife home the next day, was among the first to reach the building which had been set on fire at one end of the roof, presumably by a passing train.

Breaking into the ticket-office to haul out a small safe, and such express packages as had not been delivered, was the work of a few moments, while some energetic villagers, with more vigor than discretion, rushed into the attic and threw from the dormers a lot of old lanterns, boxes, broken bits of furniture, and like rubbish already partly on fire, that had been accumulating there ever since the station was built and antedating the checking system. The lanterns, of course, were shivered to atoms in transit, while the other smouldering stuff was promptly seized by the crowd below and dumped into the little brook that ran along the north side of the track.

After these efforts, no attempt was made to save the building, for there was no water-supply, or fire company other than a bucket-brigade, which was ineffectual against the keen spring wind that was scattering the brands over the thirsty old shingles. The burning station furnished an hour's spectacle both for the villagers and the passengers on the Owl Express which, being on the near track, had to wait; then shrivelled into a cellar full of ashes crossed by a few charred beams, the fire of which was soon changed to harmless smoke by the efforts of the bucket-brigade. The express ceased its tooting, gave one long and two short whistles, and proceeded on its way; while after the safe and miscellaneous contents of the express office had been transferred to the freight-house, the throng turned homeward to snatch a little sleep in the couple of hours that remained before the working day began.

'Lisha Potts was so thoroughly awake that it did not seem to him worth while to go to bed again, especially as he wished to make an early start for home. Satira, having also been to the fire, was in a bustling mood, so she prepared some of her famous coffee, and the pair sat down to a four o'clock pick-up breakfast in the

kitchen of the post-office house, with many cautions of silence interspersed with little jokes and much chuckling that belonged to a young couple on the verge of eloping rather than to people of sedate years who were about to take up housekeeping once more after a winter of partial separation.

Presently 'Lisha stood in the doorway facing the east, watching the sky redden until the climax was reached in the coming up of the sun over Moosatuck, while the swifts wheeling in and out of the stone chimney behind him were making mimic thunder. He was undecided whether to begin at once the grooming of his horses or take a stroll along the lane that indirectly joined the two main roads and get a sniff of the mist-laden morning air so necessary to those whose life has been of the open.

Choosing the latter, he had gone but a dozen rods when he met the station-master, who had come across lots with the direct intention of hunting him out. It seemed that the mass of smouldering débris cast from the attic into the brook had bunched together and formed an impromptu dam, to the extent that the little stream, unusually lusty from the spring rains, had been diverted from its course to the switch track, where it was now busily washing the ballast from between the ties. The station-master's errand was to see if 'Lisha would hook up and cart the stuff about half a mile farther down the road to where a bottomless bog-hole conveniently consumed the refuse of the community.

Armed with a potato-digger by way of a weapon, 'Lisha was soon loading the sodden stuff into his long wagon, which he chanced to be driving the night before, when he had come direct from the lumber camp to the post-office house.

"Do you reckon there's any of this old stuff that's any good to dry out?" he asked the station-master, who was standing on the switch track on the lookout for the milk train.

"Nope; there's no company property amongst it, only a lot of odds and ends that's been up there since old Binks's day, and his widder didn't see value in to move. That little cow-skin trunk I've never seen before; it must have lain away in the dark pit behind the chimney; it might have been a sort of a curiosity if it hadn't been scorched and bulged, but as it is, better dump the whole lot and done with it."

Not until 'Lisha was unloading the steaming and ill-smelling mass did the box in question excite his curiosity; then dropping it to the grass, he finished his task and swept out his wagon before waiting to examine the trunk.

The lock had been broken and rusted away, the strap also had disintegrated, so that all that held it together was a loop of wire. Jerking the top up disclosed a mass of smoking rags and a few bundles of scorched papers. The smell of the burned hide with which it was still partly covered nearly choked 'Lisha as he stooped to finger the contents. He was about to gather the things together and give the trunk a mighty toss into the swamp, when a bundle of yellow papers, swelled by the dampness and heat, squirmed and fell apart, leaving a long envelope, in fairly good condition, lying face upward. It was merely the sudden movement of the papers that drew the man's eye toward them, but he quickly went nearer for a second look, then seized upon the letter with hands that shook so that the characters danced about like will-o'-the-wisps before him. Yes, the address was plain enough, a well-known name, written in a delicate, pointed hand; the sight of it made his heart beat like a nervous woman's. Turning the letter, he saw that the large seal on it had never been broken.

Carefully wiping it on his coat, 'Lisha put it in his pocket and began to stir the other papers, but very carefully, for the heat and moisture made it very easy for a careless motion to turn the bundles into pulp. "To whomsoever's hands these papers may fall," was written across the wrapper of the most considerable package, while even as 'Lisha read it moisture altered the writing so that its identity vanished in a blurred streak. Quickly realizing that unless the papers were carefully dried and separated their purport would be lost, he tipped the water from the trunk and closed the lid, saying apparently to Toby the near horse, after the fashion of a woodsman who talks to his animals:—

"There's suthin queer about this trunk, but as I be the hands the papers have fallen into, I reckon I'll look into them."

Then, as an impetus akin to an electric spark touched the mists of conjecture that were gathering in his roomy if not systematically ordered brain, he jumped fairly off the ground, shouting:—

"Great snakes! suppos'n' these here have something to do with the lady baby! Maybe the box was meant to come along with her; those rags there look as if they was once baby clothes. But how did them villains that left her get her switched off from her goods, and why ain't the letter 'dressed to Oliver Gilbert instead of to—My Lord! but this here's a dilemma with three horns, not the two-horned, ornery kind.

"If I take 'em to Satiry, she'll be so fussed up she'll worry 'em to bits before read;

if Oliver Gilbert or Poppy gets 'em and I'm on the wrong track, as I've nothing yet but instinct to prove that I ain't, it'll pull her heart out with disappointment or maybe give him a stroke, for strokes comes frequent to folks turned of seventy. If a thing's so red-hot you can't handle it, there's folks that by nature's meant to do it for you, and them's the doctor, the lawyer, and the parson. I reckon in this case the parson's the best, 'cause if the Lord has let down a bit of his wisdom, discretion, and loving-kindness in a sheet by four corners in this neighborhood, it's fell on Stephen Latimer.

"I'll just clip over there by the back way and leave the box and home again before a soul's awake to spy and whisper; hey, Toby 'n Bill?"

And the horses, accustomed to respond to his cheerful address and being keen for breakfast, replied by a doubly shrill whinny.

It was past six o'clock when 'Lisha drove into the yard of the Rectory. Latimer had but then returned from the cottage colony at the Mills, where he had given courage to a young mother on the road of shadows that seemed doubly lonely in that she would leave her new-born son behind.

Latimer wore the look of having himself walked in the beyond at day dawn, and rough 'Lisha, no less than Jeanne, was struck by the illumination of his face.

At 'Lisha's whispered surmises concerning the contents of the trunk, he showed no surprise, but the rapt intensity that surrounded him increased.

"Take it to my study," was all he said; and when Jeanne came in a few minutes later, attracted by the sound of voices, 'Lisha had gone, and her husband sat looking at the object on the floor, his hands clasped as though he prayed.

He read the question in her face, all the more beautiful to him that the love and care of others had left their life-lines on the cheeks that were once as round and dimpled as a baby's. Telling the bare facts, he added: "Something was struggling to make known that this was coming, for all last night the face of the new-born babe I christened was Poppea's and the other face that of her mother. The day will come, Jeanne, when there will no longer be anything unnatural about the happenings that we call visions and miracles, because the knowledge will have come to us to understand them."

Then after breakfasting together in the sweet spring morning, in quiet confidence, only separated in degree from the other couple who ate at the post-

office house before the dawn, Stephen Latimer lay down to take some open-eyed rest before examining the trunk. When he began the work, he cautioned Jeanne to refuse him absolutely to all callers. Then, provided with blotters, a thin paper-knife, and warm irons, he spread a sheet upon the study floor and raised the water-soaked lid.

All through the morning he worked, separating and drying. At noon, when Jeanne opened the door, he did not turn his head, and setting the tray of luncheon where he could see it, she closed the door again without speaking. When supper-time came and she again entered, the papers were arranged upon his desk in tidy piles, and he was reading. He stretched his hand out for the cup of tea she held and still kept at his task.

It was after eight o'clock when he called her, and white and exhausted as he looked, she saw at once that he had reached some definite conclusion. Begging him to take at least a bowl of soup, he assented, and then drew her to him on the seat before the open window. Holding her hand as if the tender grasp of it would focus and harmonize his thoughts, he sat a moment silent, as though he had lost the gift of words.

"Was Poppea's secret hid among those papers?" Jeanne finally asked, unable to restrain her curiosity any longer. "And if it was, do tell me quickly and simply who she is, and then the why of it after. You don't realize, Stevie, what the strain of this long day has been upon a woman."

"It can be told quickly, but for the rest it's not a simple matter," replied Stephen, trying with his tired brain to sort his ideas and put them in sequence. "The papers in this trunk are various family letters, the certificate of Poppea's birth and baptism and some of her mother's diaries—"

"Yes, yes! but *who* was her mother?" cried Jeanne, the uncontrollable impetuosity of youth returning to her, so that she rose to a kneeling position on the window-seat and almost shook her husband, so vigorously did she grasp his shoulder.

"Helen Dudleigh, John Angus's first wife; she whom Gilbert calls 'the little roseleaf.'"

"Helen Dudleigh!" Jeanne repeated in an indrawn voice. "Then Poppea can have no legal father, because John Angus's first wife merely left him and there was never a divorce. Perhaps this was the reason for her going, you know none was

ever given; but no one ever dreamed that any fault lay with her."

"Yes, it was the reason of her going, yet no one need ever dream of legal wrong, for John Angus himself is Poppea's father."

Jeanne fell back, and then, after searching her husband's face and reading there that he was speaking the unmetaphorical truth, she drew a low chair to where she might continue to look at him and whispered:—

"Go on!"

"There is much detail among those papers that belongs to Poppea alone, but this is the brief story that I have drawn from them.

"Over thirty years ago, John Angus was travelling on the continent when, at the same hotel where he was stopping, he met an English artist, Walter Dudleigh, who was staying there, both on account of his health, and because his young daughter Helen was studying singing.

"Dudleigh was a widower of good birth but of frail health and uncertain means. That Angus was at once struck by the girl's delicate beauty—she was then only eighteen—some of these letters prove, and after hearing her sing at a fête of flowers given by the conservatory, in which she took the part of a poppy, he proposed to her, or rather to her father for her. The artist, knowing that he had only a short life before him and no one with whom to leave his child, urged on the match, and as a wedding gift to his son-in-law, painted a miniature of Helen as she had appeared at the fête with the poppies in her hair, having the fanciful name of Poppea engraved in the locket with the date.

"This is, of course, the miniature that hung about Poppea's neck when she was found.

"Dudleigh died of hemorrhage of the lungs almost before the honeymoon was over, leaving the girl an unexpected two thousand pounds that came from her mother, and Angus soon after returned to this country with his girl wife.

"From the first she seems to have had a hard time of it. An emotional child with an artistic temperament, thrown not only among strange people and customs, but married to a man who always commanded and never explained, and who considered that implicit affection, if it might be so called, was her legal duty, a sort of commercial article that he had bought, and nothing to be either won or kept by consideration or tenderness. She, chilled and lonely, evidently did not

make the marked social success he desired, and his constant reproach was that she bore him no children, for John Angus seems to have had an exaggerated idea of the political importance of founding a family, so often held by those of no especial ancestry.

"Ten years wore away, and Helen Angus, still under thirty, had faded to the timorous, trembling shadow that we knew, when one summer, the love of youth and life taking a final flicker, in John Angus's absence she came out of her seclusion and took part in some of the Feltons' entertainments, and renewed her habit of going to church, which had dropped away. At this time it chanced that Mr. Esterbrook's nephew, a young army officer, met her, danced with her, and showed her some courtesies, but no more than any woman might receive. Nevertheless, on his return, Angus upbraided her for going out, and upon her maintaining her own defence for the first time in many years, he struck her furiously and left the house, not returning for more than a week.

"During this period of outraged feeling and humiliation, she discovered that at last a child was to be born to her, and resolving that John Angus should not have it in his power to torture another human being as he had herself, she determined to go away, leaving a letter saying that the price of her silence concerning his treatment culminating in the blow was that he should not try to find her. Public censure on his private conduct was not what was desired by Angus in his prayer-meeting and political purity pose, so he seems to have heeded her request.

"Helen Angus went directly to the little village in Hampshire on the Isle of Wight where she had spent her childhood and sought out Betty Randal, a woman of fifty, who had also been her nurse and managed their little household prior to her father's going abroad. With Betty she arranged not only to care for her during the coming crisis, but if a daughter should be born, to keep her as long as her little sum of money lasted and to teach her to earn her living and thus make it possible for her to be free from her father if she so desired on learning her mother's story.

"A girl was born and duly baptized Helen Dudleigh, by the rector of St. Boniface's near Bonchurch, and the mother, worn out by contending emotions more than disease, lived to see her daughter three months old, and then was laid away, according to a death notice in a Hampshire paper. This notice was in an envelope lettered by an illiterate hand and is dated two weeks after the last record in Helen Angus's diary. That she knew that she could not live is certain, for all the written evidence was carefully prepared and the writing is

decipherable in spite of time and the blur of moisture.

"One package contains Helen Angus's marriage certificate and the certificate of Poppea's birth and baptism; another her diaries and some letters marked, 'Not to be read by my daughter until she is either eighteen or forced to return to her father.' And then a single thick letter (the one that had attracted 'Lisha Potts), sealed and addressed to John Angus, and underneath in brackets the words, 'To be delivered in case he should dispute my daughter's paternity.'"

As Latimer paused to wipe away the drops of sweat that stood upon his forehead, he laid the letter on the table beside his wife and both looked at the yellow paper and blurred writing with a feeling of awe at the living evidence of the poor little roseleaf, wife who, beneath their very eyes, had suffered so much in silence and then as silently gone away to die. Hot tears trickled between the fingers that Jeanne held before her face, but after the relief they brought, questions again formed themselves.

"But how did the child come here so soon and why was she left at Oliver Gilbert's instead of the Angus house?" asked Jeanne, "and how could the little trunk have been hidden away so long?"

"The last question might be easily answered," said Stephen. "It was left in the height of the excited war times when the checking of baggage was not as rigid as it is now. In fact, merely the name of the village may have been on the box, which was put aside until called for and presently forgotten."

"As to how Poppea came here, was separated from her possessions, and left at the wrong door, there we have another and unsolved mystery that must be learned from the man who left her, the man with the scar on his hand."

"Was it the wrong door after all, Stephen? Has she not been protected and loved as her mother would have wished until she knows what love is, even if she has suffered in a lesser way?"

"Yes, Jeanne, in one way; but do you realize, at the same time, in what a light she has learned to regard her father, and that a knowledge of his unrelenting spite is almost a part of her being? In all this is her mother justified, but how inextricably it complicates the future and its relations to every one concerned."

"How and when shall you tell her, Stephen? To-night?"

"No, I am much too worn. I will write her a brief note at once, saying that papers

have come to me concerning the identity of her parents, and asking her to come here at once. She will get the note in the morning mail and be able to accustom herself to the contents without the effort of speech."

"Why do you not go to her?"

"Because Poppea will need to be alone with her mother's papers for a space. It would be too trying if she should hear it first amid the confusion at the office or in the company of any one, even of Oliver Gilbert."

"Is it not strange, Stephen, that 'Lisha Potts, who was the first to open the door that night, should have been the one to bring this all about?"

"Yes, Jeanne, more than strange; we seem to be floating in mystery. No, I cannot sleep yet; I must let the organ speak to me. Come into the church for a little while, dearest, and sit beside me while I play."

CHAPTER XVII

DADDY!

Early in the afternoon of the day after the fire, as Stephen Latimer sat writing in his study, a shadow that did not shift fell across his paper. Glancing up, he saw Poppea, who, coming in the door behind, stood looking at him as intently as though she would force him to yield up his thoughts without the medium of words. Latimer, who knew that it would be a trying interview, sought vainly to gauge her mood by the expression of her face. When he thought, by the wistful lines of the mouth, that tenderness was uppermost, the calm and searching look from her eyes revealed indomitable pride, the trait of her later development.

"Will you stay here?" he said, trying to gain time and turning Jeanne's special low chair with its back to the bright light, "or would you rather go down into the sitting room?"

"Here, if you please," she replied, yet making no move toward the chair. Then, as he sat fumbling with the papers, she took two or three steps forward so that she could steady herself by resting her hands on the table.

"Please do not try to be ceremoniously polite, nor look away from me. I know that you have something to tell me that you think I shall not like to hear, perhaps cannot bear. Be it so, but remember you are making it less hard by telling me yourself. Now you must speak at once, for I think if this uncertainty lasts another hour, my heart will stop through dread."

Latimer stood up and faced her, moistening his lips the while, as if trying to grip his words.

"It is mainly good news, not bad, dear child," he said at last. "It is the uncertainty of how best to begin coupled with fatigue of nerves that makes me hesitate. Perhaps you would better read the papers first"—pointing to the packages on the table.

"Where did you get them?"

Latimer told her as briefly as might be.

"No, I cannot read them until I *know*; the printed words would prolong that,—my brain is already on fire, I think. If I question, will you answer, Mr. Latimer?"

"Yes," and he pointed once more to the chair, feeling that he himself had not strength to stand.

Poppea, always alert to the needs of others, realized this and seated herself, grasping the arms of the chair with a tension that made the blood settle about her finger nails.

"You know who my parents are?"

"Yes."

"Were they married?"

"Yes."

"Are they living?"

"Your mother is not."

"I think that I knew that; *she* would not have left me on a doorstep. Is the miniature in the locket my mother's portrait?"

"Your mother at nineteen."

"Ah, then, at least, I need not give up that idea! I have been telling her so many things these last years that I could not let her cast me off, and I could not leave her," Poppea murmured, looking over Latimer's head out through the open door.

"Would you not better read these papers now?" Latimer almost pleaded. He had been at many death-beds, and had once walked beside a murderer to the gallows without flinching, exalted by his calling, and able to impart his confidence to others; now not only were his sympathies worked to their highest pitch, but there was a complicated moral aspect about the case that might at any moment be turned at him in a way to render him speechless.

"Only one more question before I touch the papers," and Poppea crossed the room and again stood by the table facing the clergyman.

"*Who* was my mother?"

Now that the moment had come, Latimer's perturbation vanished, and rising and

resting his hands also upon the table, he faced her, holding her eyes by the firmness of his own.

"Your mother was Helen Dudleigh, the first wife of John Angus."

For a moment Poppea did not speak; she was communing with memory; when she did, the voice was but an echo of her own.

"Helen Angus, the roseleaf wife that Daddy has often told me about, who went away alone and died far off; who stopped to speak to him at the shop and have her watch fixed when she was leaving. I wonder if Daddy has not dreamed of this, for he has told me of her over and over again."

Then Poppea's wistful expression changed to one of new uncertainty. "But how can that be, Mr. Latimer? The roseleaf wife never was divorced from John Angus, Daddy says, and so she could not have been married to my father. Was he mistaken, or are you?"

"Neither of us, my child; do you not understand?"

Putting one hand to her forehead, she thought with knitted brows, then gave a sharp cry and started back.

"You don't mean—you can't mean me to think that John Angus is my father! No, God couldn't be so cruel to Daddy and to me. Anything, any one but that man! I would rather have never known at all or have had my mother alone and closed my eyes to all the rest."

"Think what you say, Poppea!"

"It is because I am thinking that I say it; I would rather for myself alone have been born outside of what is called wedlock; it would have been more natural and less horrible!"

"But it is not for yourself alone, remember that. If the end lay with ourselves and we could bear all the penalty, there would be many a law that every one of us in our time would push aside or shatter. But we are of the race on whom the charge is laid, *Thou shalt not!* and when we throw it off, the next in line, who has not felt the pressure of our motive, bears the penalty."

"I am the next and the end, and if I had to suffer, it would be alone."

"Read, little one; read the papers and think awhile in quiet. Then sleep on it; to-

morrow you may feel differently."

"To-morrow? There is no to-morrow to hate. You yourself told me years ago that love is the only thing that owns to-morrow."

For a moment Latimer winced, but only for a moment.

"Yes, and love will make the to-morrow yours, the love of your brother Philip!"

"Philip—he? Philip, my brother! Oh, God, have mercy and forgive me. I had not thought of him," and Poppea crouched by the table, burying her face in her hands.

Quietly and firmly Stephen Latimer raised her. Leading her to his chair, he pointed again to the papers; then, saying, "Jeanne and I will be in the room below; if you wish either of us, knock on the floor," he left the room, closing the door behind him.

At intervals during the afternoon there was a sound of rapid footsteps overhead, as though Poppea was pacing the floor, but all else was silent. It was almost supper-time when they heard steps upon the stairs, and Poppea came slowly into the sitting room, the papers gathered into a bundle in her arms.

Jeanne went to her, clasped her arms about her neck and kissed her; she then slipped out, saying she would hurry tea and that Poppea must stay to take the meal with them.

When Poppea, having wrapped her bundle in the light shawl she had brought, came toward him, Latimer was again surprised at the change in her whole bearing. Passion and tension had alike disappeared from her face, and though she was pale and her eyelids showed traces of tears, the eyes were clear and calm. When she spoke, there was no uncertainty or vacillation in her tone, but a quiet resolve that seemed as though it should have come through the experience and self-control of years instead of a single afternoon.

"Jeanne is very good, but I think I would best go home now; there are several things that I must do to-night."

"What are they, Poppea? I should think that you would need to rest first of all. Stay with us now, and after supper we will walk home with you."

"If you will do that, I will wait, for then you will stop and tell it all to Daddy

while I do—the other thing. Oh nothing, nothing you could do would help more than telling Daddy, Mr. Latimer, for I think it will be easier for him as it was for me to hear it from you. I only wish this had not happened while he is here, now he *must* know; yet after all, what he *thinks* will be the only difference it can make."

"What is the other thing, my child, that you must do to-night?" Latimer persisted.

"Go up to see John Angus and show him these," and from her loose blouse she pulled three papers, the certificate of her birth, baptism, and the sealed letter.

"But, Poppea, you must not do this yourself; suppose he will not listen, does not believe, or, possibly, in his bewilderment, should say something hard for you to bear and impossible for you to forget."

"He has already done that more than once."

"Be reasonable, my child; this is a matter for a lawyer, who will take the case from its legal aspect only and see to it that your claims are publicly maintained."

"My mother did not have a lawyer when she went away; she made no public claims, neither shall I."

"Then let me go to Angus as your friend, or else Hugh Oldys, who would be both friend and lawyer; you cannot possibly realize the position in which you may place yourself or, for that matter, place us all, through your suffering."

"I do not mean to be wilful, but this that I must do to-night and what I have to ask concerns only we three,—my mother, Philip, and myself,—so I must go alone; a half hour will be more than enough, and there will be no trouble. Will you not also tell Miss Emmy and Hugh? He has tried so hard in every way to find out what this fire has made known, purely for my sake, because he knew how much it meant to me, not that he cared. I want him to know before any one else but Daddy, and I hope—I pray that he will be *very* glad," and a look crossed Poppea's face that she did not know was there, but Latimer saw it, and his heart sank as he replied:—

"In these dark days Hugh Oldys keeps both joy (of which he has little) and sorrow to himself, as if the sharing of either might divert him from his fixed purpose concerning his mother."

Then Stephen Latimer ceased urging and they went to the supper table, all three creating talk merely to avoid the strain of silence.

It was a little past eight o'clock, the hour for closing, when Poppea and Stephen Latimer reached the post-office; the only light other than from the street lantern came from Oliver Gilbert's workshop. Going softly to the farther window, Poppea looked in, beckoning Latimer to follow her.

Gilbert sat at his desk, with all his little relics spread before him, the daguerreotype of Mary, a little black paper profile of Marygold, the shoes Poppea had first worn, and various photographs of her, from one taken at the county fair in company with Hugh Oldys, to the rather dramatic picture by Sarony in her first concert gown. Then putting these back into their drawer, he drew out the old ledger, read his Lincoln letters through, touching them lovingly. After putting these also away, he crossed the room to the work bench, lighted both lamps, and, in spite of the sultriness of the evening, began to work, now and then glancing first at the clock and then at the door, with a sigh.

"I wonder of what he is thinking," said Poppea. "Please go in, Mr. Latimer, and tell him that I am coming very soon. If I should go to him now, even for a minute, I should stay and these papers would be burned," and Poppea pressed her hand to her bosom as if to brace herself by the knowledge of what she carried.

"No, do not come with me, it is only a step up the hill and the moon is rising." So saying, Poppea turned the corner of the post-office and went up the hill road.

When she reached the massive gate, she paused before she laid her hand upon the latch, which, in all these years of proximity, she had never before touched. It yielded easily, and she found herself walking toward the house, guided on her way by the long beds of heavily scented hyacinth and narcissus that outlined the path.

A bronze lamp hung in the porch, the front door stood partly open, and Poppea could see lights in the long hall beyond. She was surprised at her own calmness. When she pulled the bell that jangled sharply through the great rooms, she felt no less at ease than if she had rung at the Feltons' door.

The butler, who answered the summons, was the one to evince surprise, or perhaps dismay is the apter term, for the feud as it was regarded between the great house and the post-office was well known below stairs, and of course

mightily exaggerated in its details.

Poppea said very quietly, "Please ask if Mr. John Angus can see Miss Gilbert on business."

The butler, however, wishing to take no risks, motioned Poppea to follow him, and throwing open the door of one of the rooms on the left of the long hall, announced in ringing tones, "Miss Gilbert to see Mr. Angus on business!" then promptly disappeared down the corridor only to slip back into the adjoining room where he could be a party to what was, to his mind, an occasion where anything including murder might happen.

As Poppea advanced into the room which was John Angus's library, he arose slowly from one of the deep chairs in which he had been half dozing, half reading. For a minute she thought that he had not heard her name.

John Angus, whatever his feelings might be, always kept up at least the external traditions of courtesy in the ceremonious rooms of his own house. Coming forward, but without asking her to be seated, in coldly civil tones he asked her what he could do for her, at the same time trying to gain an advantage by guessing her errand. Had she, possibly, laid to him the scheme of consolidating the two post-offices under a new name? Was she come to either beg or offer quarter in the shape of the original bit of land he coveted? Or, the feeling of apprehension that had come over him the night that he had seen her personate Sylvaine returned with redoubled force, but he pushed it aside as being too improbable.

Seeing that she was looking at him fixedly and did not reply, he repeated the question, motioning carelessly to a chair as he did so.

Poppea remained standing, and drawing two of the papers from her dress, she held them towards him, saying, "Read those."

There was no insolence in her words or manner, but there was that quality in her that precluded any idea of refusal. Without even feeling surprised, he took the papers and carrying them to his reading lamp, unfolded them deliberately.

The minutes passed slowly; when perhaps five had elapsed, he turned an ashy face toward Poppea, and asked curtly:—

"Where did you obtain these papers, and how long have you had them?"

Poppea answered with equal brevity, then there was another pause.

"Have you any other proof of this claim that you are making?" Angus asked, his hand shaking so that he laid the papers on the table with difficulty.

"I am making no claim for myself; I am merely acting for my mother," she replied, never taking her eyes from his face. "As to further proof, I have this letter that my mother left for you, should you raise the question."

Angus took the letter in his hand, saw the address in the characteristic writing of his first wife, and the words below in the corner. Crushing the envelope in an effort not to drop it, he said quickly:—

"I did not say that I disputed your claim to be the daughter of Helen Dudleigh, for you resemble her very closely, now that I see you for the first time face to face."

"Ah! you see it then; was that why you left the room so suddenly the night that I sang in the dress of the miniature?"

"Yes, it was," replied Angus, amazed at his direct answer, yet unable to hold it back.

"If it is not that but the other part that is in dispute, then you *must* read the letter!"

John Angus looked at her, then at the envelope, an angry flash in his eyes, the color surging back to his face until it was suffused with a deep, veiny red.

"And if I do not choose to read it? if I prefer to set a match to it, instead of troubling myself with what might be the clever scheme of an—" here Angus paused as though he were conscious of being swept farther than he cared or dared to go.

"Adventuress," said Poppea, "the same name that you gave me a year ago in your complaint to the government about the post-office." Angus's eyes dropped before the unexpected accusation, and Poppea continued:—

"You are perfectly at liberty to burn the letter, but you will not until you have read it, because you are more anxious to know its contents than to justify my mother or me."

It is always the unexpected that subdues a man of John Angus's fibre, who lives

by carefully made and guarded plans and prides himself on the fact of never changing his mind, and Poppea's quiet persistence, void of either impertinence, threat, or beseeching, was the last thing he had ever dreamed of encountering. Slowly he broke open the seal and envelope, having some difficulty in unfolding the single sheet that it contained, as the moistened ink had become sticky and in drying had left an offset that made the letter difficult to decipher. As he read he turned toward the light and Poppea could not see his face, but after he had refolded the paper and put it in his pocket, he continued sitting in the same position until, the silence becoming more than she could bear, she closed her eyes and tried to call up the picture of Daddy poring over his little relics at his desk in the shop, to give her relief.

When a slight noise caused her to open them, Angus was standing before her, his breath coming spasmodically, the drawn look having again driven the color from his face.

"What do you wish?" he asked abruptly. Poppea knew then that a more complete verbal explanation was unnecessary. In that brief sentence and its intonation lay the acknowledgment that she sought, while, at the same time, her comprehension of his moods, in spite of her dislike of the man, proved the bond of fundamental relationship.

"What do you wish?" he repeated.

"That you shall tell Philip what I *am* as decidedly as you once told him—what I was *not*."

If it had been possible for Angus to be abashed, one might have said that he was so now. In the suddenness of it all this phase had not occurred to him, but his dominant will soon overcame what he put down to the momentary physical weakness that had overcome him many times during the past year, and he said, with his old air of conferring a favor:—

"I will explain to my son to-morrow. I mean when do you wish to come—" (he was about to say home, and then the hollowness of the term even to his comprehension changed the words) "up here to live?"

Ignoring the second part of the sentence wholly, Poppea repeated:—

"Philip must know now, to-night. Suppose for one of the three to-morrow should not come? I hear him on the stairs. Will you not call him in?"

There was something in Poppea's suppressed passion that froze John Angus and caused his faculties to work more slowly than their wont. As he hesitated, trying to frame some moderate and dignified phrase, Poppea, unable to stand the strain of being alone with him any longer, finding her self-control vanishing and rash words pressing at her very lips, called:—

"Philip, Philip, come here to the library—It is I—Poppea!"

The slow steps quickened at the unexpected cry, and pushing the door open so vigorously that it crashed back against a piece of furniture, Philip came in—glanced at Poppea and his father both standing—remembered the latter's fury on the day that he had broken the plaster bust. Straightway going to Poppea, he threw one arm about her, and then turning, said:—

"What are you saying to her, Father? Why did she call me as if she were afraid?"

With the air of one to whom Philip's coming was at precisely the desired moment, Angus replied, "She called you that I might tell you that she is your half-sister, Philip; the daughter of my first wife."

All at once Poppea was kneeling beside Philip, her arms tight about him, whispering, "I called you because I need you, shall always need you to help me to bear this."

Looking down into her upturned face, an almost holy light came into Philip's eyes as he repeated softly, "Sister? You are my sister? Then that is what it means that I have been feeling for you all these years. Oh, sister! *I* need *you*; I have always needed you to help me bear to *live*." In that young face with all its artistic capacity for intense joy as well as suffering there was stamped already the knowledge that in such affection alone could he find place, that the barrier of his infirmity stood forever between him and the other love of woman.

As they spoke thus together John Angus waited for a moment, considering them critically. Noticing the little blemish on Poppea's ear, he involuntarily raised his hand to his own ear bearing the same mark.

Poppea had all the first fresh beauty of his wife Helen, that after the days of courtship he had thought to possess forever by mere force of will and legal right; but in Poppea he saw much of the strength of his own resolution with this, to him, incomprehensible cross,—Poppea knew what love meant, but Angus understood only the power of ambition and authority. There she was, his

daughter, yet only the unwilling kin of flesh, always to be a stranger in spirit. Then as he saw that the two had forgotten his presence, he left the room to seek his own chamber and pace up and down in a half-physical attempt to readjust himself to the circumstances that had overtaken him.

After all, he argued, thanks to the Feltons, his daughter was an accomplished woman with many friends. At last he would have some one to make his house a social centre, and probably she would after a time make a brilliant marriage. He had heard that Bradish Winslow had admired her—there would now be no reason on his part why he might not follow the game to a suitable finish. Toward Oliver Gilbert, however, his old-time resentment, instead of diminishing, was increased. How was it that this humble man always managed to come between? How utterly abominable to be obliged to assume an attitude of obligation!

Had his wife Helen directed in the case of her death that the child be left with Gilbert as a sort of spite to himself? Or was it a mistake and the intention been to leave her at his house on Windy Hill?

In either case he held Gilbert to blame, for he, in his comparative poverty, had supported the child and naturally (from Angus's standpoint) would expect recompense, while the very act had deprived Angus of rearing his own child. In this way he worked himself into a commendable fit of righteous indignation, entirely forgetting that had Poppea been left at his door, without the subsequent evidence, he would have been the first, on principle, to have sent her to the town farm.

As Poppea made her way up the hill, Stephen Latimer opened the door of Oliver Gilbert's workshop. Gilbert put down the bit of work at which he had been tinkering, and leaning back, hands behind head, prepared to enjoy a comfortable dish of talk with the dominie, who could always move satisfactorily from books and the political outlook to farming and local news, without either exertion to himself or condescension toward the listener, and then, first and last, he was always ready to speak of Poppea.

After delivering the girl's message that she would soon return, the consolidation of the two towns under the name of West Harbor, now practically an accomplished fact, was discussed, then the burning of the railway station

naturally followed.

"Has 'Lisha Potts been in to-day?" Latimer inquired.

"No, but he'll be down to-morrow; Satiry insists that she's coming to bake us up once a week or so. Poppy don't want it, but I must look to it she don't overdo her strength; you see she isn't in body one of our hard-working race, Mr. Latimer. I sort of think her mother was a rather delicate woman."

With this for the entering wedge, Mr. Latimer saw his way to going farther.

"Then you have some idea about her mother? I have thought this for some time. I have an idea also, more than an idea; suppose we compare them," and he told briefly of the trunk of papers and 'Lisha finding them.

Instantly Gilbert's bent shoulders straightened, new life came to his eyes; leaning forward he sat in an attitude of such expectant certainty of what he was to hear that Latimer could not help smiling as he said, "Poppea's mother was—"

"Helen Angus, little Roseleaf, wife of that man who drove her to do what she did!" broke in Gilbert, unable to hold his conviction any longer. "No one who knew her could blame her,—I, who know what Angus is and was, least of all. Young Esterbrook was a dashing, taking blade, like many an army man, not steady like his uncle. I kept track of him for years one way or another; he never married, and was killed in Indian warfare near Cheyenne, so he would never have turned up; and yet, of course before the world this will be a blight upon Poppea. I wish 'Lisha Potts had dropped the papers in the bog; I wish to God he had, Mr. Latimer! Could you find it right in your conscience to burn the papers and let the past be buried? Need *she* know?"

"She knows already, Gilbert."

The old man groaned and struck his clenched hand on the table. "Ah, well," he said, "that takes it from my hands and the temptation with it, but it's hard, right hard, to feel, link by link, that my power to protect her from trouble is going. But," as an idea made him brighten again, "she can keep my name, can't she, dominie? It's hers, isn't it, by law?"

"Yes, Gilbert, it is hers for good unless she chooses to renounce it," Latimer replied fervently. "But stop a minute, old friend, think—suppose that young Esterbrook was *not* Poppea's father, and that the only wrong (though it was a virtue, not a fault) that Helen Angus did was in preferring to have her child born

away from the atmosphere of tyranny that was crushing out her own life. Could you be glad? Not for yourself, not for ourselves, but for the law's full measure?"

For a while Gilbert sat so absolutely motionless that Latimer began to fear that he was suffering some sort of shock, while it was merely the slowness of his comprehension of what had never before occurred to him ever so remotely. A moment later, he started up with blazing eyes and all the fury of a madman.

"That! that! Oh, my God! Then he can take her from me in my old age, from me who have reared her. He can take her, but he cannot love her as I have nor make her love him! I withheld the bit of land, my birthright, that he coveted, and this is my punishment!

"Pray and pray quickly, dominie; it isn't the dying of the body that must soon come that I fear; no, nor even the craziness that is reaching out after me. I'm losing my hold on believing! It's all slipping and slipping until I'm going down out of sight of Mary and little Marygold. Help me! Stephen Latimer, help me keep my faith! Not in the everyday prayers from books or Bible; I want something nearer, something said by some one that has lived and suffered in the times that I have!

"There on that card that hangs under his picture—He knew,—he suffered. I've pieced his words together for my need, and said them every day and night these many years. Now all is a blank, I can't remember them," and Gilbert fell upon his knees, his head covered by his arms, strangled with sobs.

Following where Gilbert pointed, Latimer saw an old calendar card hanging below Lincoln's portrait. Seizing it, he found on the reverse side Gilbert's crooked writing, and straightway kneeling beside him, one arm about his shoulders, he read this prayer:—

"'Keep us free from giving offence, O Lord; neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction. Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us do our duty as we understand it to the end.'

"'Both of us read the same Bible and pray to the same God. Each invokes His aid against the other. The prayers of both cannot be answered—Thine it is to choose between us.

"'Thou hast Thine own purposes. Woe unto the world because of offences, for it

must needs be that offences come, but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh." Through Thine aid keep us with malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as it is given us to see the right; let us strive on to finish the work and to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Thee, O God, for the sake of Him who suffered to teach us how to bear suffering.'"

After Latimer's voice ceased, there was again a long silence, as if each man prayed alone. Then Gilbert pulled himself slowly to his chair, and with hands clasped upon his knees to hide their trembling, he said clearly, as if reading his own death sentence over in order to become used to the sound of it:—

"I must not forget! She will go to her own home and father upon the hill—"

"Daddy!" came the cry from the open door. A rush across the room and Poppea was clinging to the old man, laughing and sobbing at the same time.

"Daddy! dear Daddy! Don't you know that this is my home, and that you are my father, just as God is, because we love each other?"

Then it was Stephen Latimer's turn to steal away and turn his footsteps to where Jeanne was waiting with anxious eyes, straining to see through the dark.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SCAR ON THE HAND

Stephen Latimer, as soon as might be, communicated with the few people that Poppea considered had a right to know of the solving of the mystery of the name, and these were the Felton ladies, Satira and 'Lisha Potts, and Hugh Oldys. He wrote the details to Miss Felton and 'Lisha, but called upon Miss Emmy and Hugh the same evening.

If there is aught in the saying that bad news spreads like fire in dry grass, while good news requires three kindlings, then the news concerning Poppea must have been considered very bad indeed. Owing probably to the eavesdropping of the butler, accounts more or less garbled appeared within two days, not only in the local and county papers, but in the New York journals as well. It was only in the latter, however, that anything was attempted like writing up the matter as a streak of good luck, upon which the heroine, as Poppea was called, was to be congratulated; one paper adding optimistically that she would, the coming season, open her father's house to those who had the past winter welcomed and entertained her solely on account of her incomparable charm coupled with her vocal ability.

The way in which those nearest to her took the change was the greatest possible proof of their single-hearted love for herself alone.

'Lisha received an unexpected rating from Satira, who told him he'd have better let Beaver Brook wash out the whole railroad company than have fished out that box of misery. Miss Emmy took a more conventional view of the matter, but ended by saying with a sigh, "As long as Poppea could not have grown up with the knowledge, it was better unknown."

Hugh Oldys alone remained absolutely silent; finally, Poppea, who was waiting with feverish eagerness for him to make some sign, received these few lines from him.

> "I am glad for you if you are glad, little comrade. Yet oftentimes lately it has seemed to me that the positive knowledge of a thing is so much harder

to bear than the vague lack of it, that I have ceased to ask, Why?

"As ever your friend,

"HUGH."

Over these few words Poppea pondered long and sadly, seated in the window of her little bedroom with the warm air of late May again bringing the fragrance of apple blossoms with it. It was not yet a year since they two had walked home together and she had hidden her heart that with the first lift of its wings was poised, ready to fly to Hugh, and at the same time she proffered him friendship. Her motives, surely, had been of the most unselfish, and, as she then thought, far-seeing, but now how insignificant they seemed compared to her loss that lay in Hugh's acceptance of them. If she could have felt one pulse of the old pressure in his hand-clasp when they met, or read the faintest inclination toward a need of her between the lines of the brief note, how quickly she would have revealed herself. Not only had she ceased to be a necessity, but rather it seemed were their meetings becoming a strain upon him, where even his cordial outward friendship was forced.

Ah, back, far back, her thoughts flew, no longer the strains of the motive of the Mystery of the Name sang to her brain; like Elsa, in the pursuit of the mystery, she had not gained but lost. Moreover, though she was happy in the fact that she might now see Philip without restraint or reproach, her joy must be pale compared to his, for to him she was all.

For a week or more John Angus had made no move other than to see that a proper statement of the facts of her birth was added to the village record, writing tersely to Poppea that he had communicated with his London solicitor to have all possible details traced out; then he waited.

The second week brought another note addressed to Miss Angus, asking her to fix the time of her coming home, as there were some necessary preparations to be made.

This note remained unanswered for several days, not because of anything contemptuous or insolent in Poppea's attitude, but for the reason that she did not know how to word her refusal in order to make it final without first consulting Stephen Latimer, and yet if she did so, she feared that he might, from his high impersonal standpoint, try to dissuade her; until, as she was about to write, the New York lawyer of John Angus called at the post-office house.

He was a polished man of the world as well as a legal light, but all the subtly drawn pictures of advantage presented with the intricacies of his calling were shattered upon the bare rock of her simple statement, "This is my home, and I shall not leave Daddy or drop this name that has sheltered me so long."

Utterly baffled, the lawyer's admiration for the girl's firmness did not prevent his returning to Angus and imparting something of the bitter and sarcastic mood that opposition develops in legal temperaments. So that while Angus ceased his attempts to bring Poppea to him, he brooded over the matter to such an extent that he really came to believe that he alone was wronged. If he had been physically able, he would have again closed the house and gone away, but he could no longer hide his increasing feebleness even from himself; consequently he had lost the first field in his effort to conceal his condition from others. Besides, Philip, once more established at his work, was now to be reckoned with,—Philip with a man's spiritual courage and his newly acquired strength of having kin, no longer bearing that brand of utter desolation,—the being the last of one's race.

All the other outlets being closed, John Angus fell back upon the law for solace, and with its advice constructed a will under which, outside of the cautionary sum of one hundred dollars, Poppea was to benefit in no way by his estate. This was so tied up that Philip also would lose his rights if he attempted in any way to share with his sister, and the document being duly signed, sealed, was stowed away in the little safe inserted in the wall by his bed head. He would not be within hearing of criticism when the paper went into effect, so Angus, wearing his usual air of inscrutability, took up his life much as before, save that he suddenly announced that, owing to Philip's love of the sea, he would build a midsummer home for him with a studio attached, on a strip of land that he owned on the west side of Quality Hill, where the Moosatuck joins the bay; and almost before the community had grasped the news the quaintly gabled house was under way.

With Poppea the matter was not to be allowed to rest so soon. Letters came to her from all quarters, congratulating her, giving invitations for visits, the sudden desire for her company all too evidently the result of her supposedly changed condition. Gloria Hooper wrote more than cordially, while Mrs. Hewlett, the well-meaning but very dense mother of the two susceptible sons, ended her letter with this dubious sentence, "I take great credit to myself, dear child, for always having believed that you were not what you seemed to be."

Others yet asked her plans and prospects in the most direct language, with all their social training missing the fine reticence in this matter that had marked the neighborhood people of Harley's Mills.

In early June Poppea went up to visit Miss Emmy for a few days. Brave as this little lady had been, the complete breaking up of the family arrangements of years, and the lack of Miss Felton's strong personality against which to lean, was telling upon her sadly. Her idea of a summer abroad, once abandoned, was now again under discussion. A summer of long periods of rest rather than hasty travel, with Nora for maid and Poppea for companion, was the doctor's advice, and at the same time he said that when the July heat came, it would be necessary for Miss Felton and her charge to leave the city, and where else could they be so comfortable as the great house on Quality Hill.

Miss Emmy had been talking over the journey with Poppea, who at last had consented to go with her, the final inducement being that she could visit Hampshire, and in learning any possible facts concerning her mother's life and death there, bring her nearer as a reality.

The third week in July was the time now set, and the *Normanic*, with its popular captain, the ship chosen, after much debate. That other time, in the sixties, when Miss Emmy had been on the verge of breaking away, the *Scotia*, with its ponderous side-wheels, had been the only vessel to which women of sensibility felt that they could trust themselves.

Jeanne Latimer had come up for afternoon tea, and the two sat upon the broad piazza overlooking the rose garden, already showing the golden yellow of the scentless, old-fashioned, half-double brier roses contrasting with the vivid crimson and rich perfume of the Jacqueminots.

Each one of the three women was in a reflective mood, in which, strange to say, the thought focussed about each other rather than about themselves.

"Where is Mr. Latimer?" asked Poppea. "This morning, when I met him on the village road, he promised that he would surely come up this afternoon to help us plan the English end of our journey; besides that, he was to explain to me the best way for Daddy to write to Washington concerning the new post-office. He cannot, of course, resign from an office that will cease to exist the first of next January and he hopes to hold it to the end. But he wishes to write in such a way that it will be clearly seen that he does not desire the new *West Harbor* position. Not that they would give it to so old a man, but it satisfies his pride not to allow

himself to be merely dropped.

"Think of it, Aunt Emmy, very soon Poppea of the Post-Office must give up the name you gave her, not that she leaves it, but it will drop away from her."

"Why not take your mother's name, then?" said Jeanne Latimer. "Helen is more fitting to the woman than Poppea, though of course to us you will be Poppy for all time."

"That also is one of the things about which I wanted to speak to Mr. Latimer. Do you think that he is coming?"

"He started with me, but as we were waiting at the church to see the men who are doing something to the water-power that works the organ, Will Burt, one of the young doctors from the Bridgeton Hospital, came past on horseback, riding like mad. Stephen waved to him, for as a boy he had been one of his music pupils, and he stopped short. It seems that he was on his way to the Rectory on an errand that he had undertaken for its very strangeness.

"Late last night a short, thick-set man was brought into the hospital, a brakeman from one of the through freights, and apparently a new hand on the road, for he did not know of the low bridge at Moosatuck Junction, or understand the signal lights. He was swept off and crushed against the pier. Though hurt to death, he had remained conscious, and early this afternoon, when rallied to the utmost by drugs, asked to speak to one of the physicians alone. Burt, chancing through the ward, was appealed to. There was something about the man that struck him at once; past fifty, and bearing the signs of dissipation and recent neglect of his person, he did not come of the grade who keep to the road at his age. When he spoke, his words confirmed the impression.

"'What place am I in, Doctor?' he began.

"'Bridgeton, Connecticut,' Burt answered.

"The man repeated the name to himself several times, and then asked:—

"'Would that be near a little place called Harley's Mills?'

"'The next town to it.'

"'Is there a clergyman hereabout who would, think you, do an errand for a man that, being already dead in his legs, cannot do it for himself, a matter of—well,

we'll say *business* rather than religion?'

"Burt told him that there was a Roman Catholic priest always within call, besides ministers of other denominations that could be had; but the man sighed, hesitated, and finally said: 'I'm English born, though I've long ago sold out my birthright, yet there's that much left of it that makes me want to say what I must to the one that's the nearest like him that used to teach us our duty in the little church betwixt the wheat fields over there. I want the one that has the white robe, the book, and the law behind him; but maybe, sir, you do not understand?'

"Burt did understand, however, and remembering that the rector of St. John's in Bridgeton was ill, came galloping over for Stephen. Why he did it, or put Stephen to the trouble, he himself could not say, for maimed railway men and similar requests are not uncommon in a hospital. Stephen borrowed a horse from Hugh Oldys and fully expected to be back again by six; it is after five now. Shall I make the tea, Miss Emmy? He would be vexed to have you wait."

How many odd moments as well as times of painful suspense the tea-tray has bridged over. Many a time the period of waiting for the kettle to boil has given the necessary pause to think that has changed a whole life, and the need of balancing a cup and saucer in the hand has made an excuse for looking down when looking up would have betrayed the whole.

As Jeanne pottered and poured, Poppea's wandering eyes caught upon a mere speck in the distance on the lower Bridgeton road. As it reached the great span over Moosatuck it took the shape of horse and wheels. Before it reached the turn below the hill, she knew rather than saw that it was Hugh Oldys's outfit with Stephen Latimer driving, and that he was in great haste.

Though she neither spoke of it nor betrayed the slightest interest, yet her heart pounded so that the hand that held the cup pulsed in response, and she shifted it to the table, where she deliberately stirred the sugar. Then, feeling that she could no longer sit still, she said, looking toward the roses:—

"What a superb flower that is on the third bush. May I have it, Miss Emmy?" and she swung herself lightly over the rail at the end of the porch opposite the steps and arrived at the head of the walk with her rose at the same time that Latimer drove in the gate.

Seeing her, he threw the reins over the dashboard and jumped out; he had the same pallor, coupled with the tension of suppressed excitement, that he had worn

the day after the fire. Coming directly toward Poppea, he said:—

"Can you go through one more ordeal, the last?"

"Yes," she answered quietly. "I knew that it was coming half an hour ago. Is he dead? the man with the scar on his hand?"

Latimer, startled in spite of himself at her words, merely nodded his head for yes.

"I felt that it was he when Jeanne told me you had been sent for. Won't you please come and tell us all together, Jeanne and Miss Emmy? I have not the courage I once had; I cannot seem to bear things alone."

While Latimer walked slowly up the steps, his wife had time to gauge, in a degree, the scene he had been through, before Poppea, who was in advance of him, said, in answer to the questioning look upon the face of both women:—

"The man whom he went to see was the one who brought me to Daddy; now we shall know how," and dropping to a stool by Miss Emmy's side, she rested her head upon the elder woman's knees, as she was used in the old days of confidence before things began to happen.

Latimer took the cup of tea that Jeanne brought to him, and then another, before he drew his chair closer to the group of women and began, trying to compress his narrative as much as possible for the sake of all concerned, while he spoke as to Poppea alone.

"The man brought to the Bridgeton Hospital was Peter Randal, the son of Betty Randal, your grandfather Dudleigh's housekeeper and your mother's nurse. When your mother returned to Hampshire and you were born, Peter was away at sea, but came back soon after her death and married an old sweetheart, a pretty barmaid of the town. Betty Randal, though to all appearances in the prime of life and best of health, died suddenly a few months after your mother, without having had time to carry out any of her directions or safeguard you in any way, so that Peter and his wife found themselves left with you on their hands and the temptation of a snug fortune before them, because your little sum of money had been at the time entirely in Betty Randal's control.

"Peter's wife had a sister in Canada, who made great representations of the fortunes to be made there in farming if one only had money in hand; so after much persuading, Peter yielded doggedly to the scheme of keeping your money, which it would have been really difficult to prove did not belong to Betty herself.

"Peter, however, refused even to think of the plan of leaving you at some foundling asylum instead of taking you to your father, and insisted upon going to Canada by way of Boston, bringing you with them, and leaving you with John Angus *en route*. He also had sufficient family feeling to take with you the papers your mother had left, upon which he knew Betty had set such store.

"Knowing nothing of the country, they found upon their arrival that Boston was far east of their destination, and so, going to New York, worked their way backward, getting off in the confusion of the war excitement and the late train at Westboro, while the box, hastily addressed to John Angus, Harley's Mills, and not checked, was dropped off at this station, the tag evidently having been in some way mutilated in transit so that the place of destination only remained.

"On asking some chance loungers at the Westboro depot the direction of John Angus's house at Harley's Mills, Randal was told 'the first above the post-office,' and to that they drove, not realizing that their guides in this case considered the joined house and office as one building. In the fury of the storm the Randals only waited to be sure that the door was opened, and going to Bridgeton, were lost among many other travellers. For some time everything went well with the pair, and then luck turned. Peter's wife left him after securing the farm to herself, and first the man took to the road, trying in some way to return to the old country, but in spite of all, a bit of deep-down remorse made him wish to know what had become of the baby Helen on his way.—The rest you know."

"What will they do with him?" asked Poppea, softly.

"That which he asked of me," said Latimer.

"I must have known you would have thought of it, and yet there must be an odd touch of the same race feeling in me too. Thief as he was, his people were once loyal to mine, also I wish I might have thanked him for his mistake."

"I did it for you, child, and for us all," and in the look that Poppea turned on him he read a gratefulness beyond words.

CHAPTER XIX

JOHN ANGUS

In the early part of July, a lift having been added to the house to accommodate his wheel-chair, Miss Felton and Caleb brought Mr. Esterbrook to Quality Hill. The homecoming was in itself pathetic, but not to be compared with the starved and yearning affection that beamed from Miss Felton's eyes every time she looked at him, followed by an expression of gratitude when he managed to express the simplest wish.

In appearance the old man was as trim and dapper as of old; he never was allowed to be seen below stairs without his light gray or buff spats, and this toilet was made afresh every afternoon, though as to the evening there was no change, for he supped in his room and was put to bed by eight o'clock.

Of waistcoats and neckties he had a fresh assortment and appeared to take pleasure in them, and in some way express his choice to Caleb; but aside from the physical difficulty of speech, such as he could command had the aphasia warp, so that he usually said the opposite of what he meant, thus bringing an added bitterness to Miss Elizabeth. When she was in the room, he followed her with his eyes and sometimes refused to eat at all unless she fed him, and he often held and patted her hand when she walked beside his chair under the old shade trees, but when he tried to call her by name, it was always Emmy that he said and not Elizabeth, or Beth, as she had been called in childhood.

Sometimes Miss Felton would try to argue, saying:—

"This is Elizabeth. You know Elizabeth, do you not?" but still he would laugh noiselessly, the laugh of senility not mirth, and nod his head to and fro, saying:—

"Know Emmy? know Emmy? yes, yes, Emmy!" and sometimes throw kisses to her with the hand that he could move. So finally she let it pass unnoticed. But Miss Emmy, being once within hearing of it, conceived an intense aversion to the poor man, and afterward kept entirely out of his sight.

After a time of absolute silence, Poppea took up her singing with fresh interest,

and Stephen Latimer noticed the increased volume as well as sympathy of her voice. After all, it seemed a pity to put any check upon such a gift, and little by little he began to speak of the desirability of her still further developing it as an art, even as her brother Philip was developing his gift of modelling.

Latimer well knew that Poppea's nature was not one of those who can eke out a life of small things without the force of a mastering love to blend them into dignity, and so he talked of study abroad and travel until Poppea herself began to take up the idea.

Early one evening she had been walking up and down the grassy garden path, watching the poppies fold their petals, palm to palm, for the night, taking the form of pilgrim's cockle-shells, and all at once it came to her that these flowers from the old garden on the hill above had doubtless been planted by her mother long ago, for they were English poppies, delicate of tint, and not the heavy-hued Orientals. How wonderful it was, this handing down. Touching them lightly with her finger-tips as she walked, her heart began to sing back to that long ago, and then the music welled from her lips, all unconscious that she had two auditors; John Angus, sitting above on his piazza, muffled and chilly even in the balmy evening, and a man, who with the air of a stranger, had been walking up and down the road. Finally he opened the gate to the post-office house, but instead of following the sound of the music to its origin, proceeded to the door and knocked.

Presently Oliver Gilbert came stumbling out into the twilight, and, cane in hand, made his halting way into the garden.

"Poppy," he said, "there is some one who wants to see you; it's that Mr. Winslow who came down last summer, the day after the Felton ladies had the party. Do you remember?"

"Yes, Daddy," said Poppea, "I remember,"—the words feeling cold to her lips like drops of dew.

"Will you come indoors? or shall I tell him you are here?"

"I will come in," she said, rising quickly from the bench on which she had been seated for a moment. No, she did *not* want him to come there, for beside her in the twilight seemed to be sitting the ghost of Hugh.

Yet slow as Gilbert was, he gained the house before her, and when she reached

the porch, it was Bradish Winslow alone who stood in the open doorway, both hands extended.

"I have been abroad; I did not know until yesterday," he said at once without other greeting—as if she must have wondered at his silence. "And now the thing of which you made a barrier has vanished, how can you keep me out, how can you hold me away even if you want to, little one? But you don't, you can't; ah, child, child, do you know how I have missed you? How I had to put the ocean between in order to obey the plea in your letter?"

He had seized her hands in his greeting and still held them, drawing her nearer and nearer to him by a power that was not wholly physical force; while she, having forgotten a certain magnetism she had always felt in his presence, did not know how to protest.

Finally freeing her hand, she pulled forward a deep porch chair, and intrenched in its protecting arms, motioned him to take its mate.

"I did not know that you were away," she managed to say at last.

"Then why did you not write me only one word, 'Come'?"

"Because, because," she stammered miserably, "I didn't think of it, because it was better that you shouldn't," and she hid her face between her hands to free it from the yearning of his eyes.

"Poppea, do you not understand how much and why I care for you, for yourself and that only?" he said presently, his voice changing from the ringing, joyous tone of his greeting to one serious to the verge of sadness.

"I believe that you do, with all my heart and soul," she answered, and continued in an almost reverent tone, "Few men would have acted toward me as you did that night of humiliation. I did not realize it fully then, but I do now, and this makes me understand all the more the difference between what you offer me and the best I have to give."

"Even so, a little is a beginning, dear, and I can wait in patience if you will only let me be near you and teach you what love means. You do not even yet dream what it is, you, who, above all others I have met, were made for it and cannot be yourself without it." He saw that Poppea was moved, was trembling, and for the moment he believed he had almost won.

"Perhaps I have not yet dreamed as you say," she answered gently, "but of this I am certain: love does not come by learning, love knows and is sure."

Winslow's face changed, his throat felt dry, his lips seemed riveted together, his whole being fell under the spell of a complete depression.

"Then you do know?" he said in a broken, husky voice.

"Yes, I know," she replied like a faint echo.

He did not make any attempt either to reason with her or to go; he merely sat there in utter dejection, this man of the world and its affairs, whom women had these many years called callous.

When at last he pulled himself from the chair, he held out both his hands, but did not go toward Poppea.

"Then it is good-by?" he questioned.

"I'm afraid it must be," she replied, touched by a profound sadness, "but oh, I do wish for my own sake it need not be, for in spite of everything I am so very lonely." Then of her own accord she took his hands and looked into his face, but in her eyes there shone something that checked the parting kiss that he intended. If she were born for love, she was no less fashioned for fidelity even to an idea, and Winslow saw that young as she was and whether she realized it or not, he had come into her life too late.

John Angus, sitting alone on his piazza, had at first listened in irritation to the voice below in the garden, then the very quality of its tone brought back the past as a surging tide that he could not check. Once more he was at the open-air fête of a foreign city and the singing of a lovely girl, little more than a child, had crept into his heart, as her exquisite form and coloring had pleased his critical eye, and he had let himself go. Then to keep the time schedule he had arranged between himself and certain inexorable ambitions, he had suddenly pulled the chain brutally taut, and among those that it had cruelly bruised, must he not at last count himself?

What if he had not—but what was the use. The singing ceased and with it his unusual revery. Shivering at the touch of the dew on the arm of his chair, he went

indoors, closing the long porch window after him, and after wandering listlessly through the lower rooms for a while, climbed slowly up to his own chamber in the same wing with Philip's rooms, where he sat reading, and so seemed less lonely. For of late, without spoken words having passed between, Philip was becoming more and more estranged from his father, and sought his room or went to the studio as soon as might be after meals, until John Angus began to wonder, with a half-physical, half-emotional belief in the supernatural, if it were possible that Philip knew the policy of the will that he had made, by a form of second sight.

This thought was uppermost as he entered his private room, and after lighting the four lamps that it held, closed and locked the door. He would read the will over once more after he was comfortably fixed in bed. He could not understand why in July the air should be so cold, yet as fresh air was his chief necessity, he could not close the windows. Turning to ring for his valet, that he might light the wood fire that was laid ready at all seasons, he changed his mind and put a match to it himself. Drawing a chair before the blaze, that under ordinary conditions he would have deemed suffocating, he chafed and warmed his hands. This done, he slowly set about undressing.

When quite ready for bed, he again changed his mind, and throwing on a dressing-gown, slid back the panel from the small square closet by the bed, and opening the safe, took from it the will, which, from its completion, had seemed to exercise a strange fascination over him. He would read it once more to be sure that all points were covered, and on the morrow, as he expected to go to town, he would place it once for all in the safety vault, for such a paper had no place in one's house, even if under lock and key.

As he turned for the twentieth time the half dozen pages he knew almost by heart, a voice seemed to be making a running commentary in his ear, and the pith of it all was: "What have you gained by trying to control others absolutely all your life? What are you gaining now by trying to control others absolutely after you are dead?"

The worst of it was that the critic seemed waiting for an answer, and he, having none ready, sat trying to frame one, but he could not, for there was none to give.

Suddenly the pain that was an agony ran through the arm and hand that grasped the will and then gripped his chest. It was one of his seizures, but more intense than usual. He felt himself realizing that it would pass off as others had before,

but it did not. He could not reach the bell or little tablet vial on his dresser. He had known, of course, the end must come some day. Was that time now? The will, stirred by the tremor of his hand, fairly flaunted in his face.

Why had he made it? Why? "Why not destroy it now," the voice whispered, "and for once will for good?"

He tried to move, but the agony held him fast, he was suffocating and not even slowly.

"Try," whispered the voice; "the fire is almost at your feet, and it will help you."

Then inch by inch he worked himself forward, and unclasping his stiffening hand, dropped the paper on the hearth.

Would the blaze reach it? Would he live to know?

Yes, the eager flame caught hold; he saw the red seals melt, his signature disappear, and then—John Angus's greed for power was quenched by that last act.

It was late the next morning that the man-servant, unable to open the door, climbed in the open window and found his master fallen back in the arm-chair, his bed untouched. When, panic-stricken, he opened the door, calling loudly for help, Philip came quickly in, and saw his father, the open safe, and the fragments of burnt legal papers on the hearthstone, and reading the few words that remained, he understood. Putting his arms about the lifeless form as he never before had dared, he thanked God in his heart for the single tender memory.

Though due show of public respect was paid in the last rites, as due to a leading citizen whose name, known to them rather than his person, was always first on the subscription papers alike for foreign missions and civic improvements, John Angus's death did not affect any one. The only person who really took it to heart was Oliver Gilbert. To him the one idea was paramount, the death of his neighbor before the possibility of mutual understanding had come, and with the Puritan strain of self-reproach strong in him, Gilbert, sitting in his little shop, mentally scourged himself and followed painfully on foot in company with the humbler members of the town as though the fault lay on his side.

"What shall you do?" Jeanne Latimer had asked Poppea during the next day when Philip was closeted with her husband in whose hands he had placed all arrangements.

"Whatever Philip wishes," Poppea answered. "You know he is the family now, and he will never broach the one point I cannot yield."

"Shall you wear black?" Jeanne continued with some hesitation.

"I think so, for a time," Poppea said with brows knitted, "or else Philip will feel so entirely alone, so isolated."

In a week's time the lawyer, whom Poppea had met before, came to the Rectory, where Philip had been staying since the funeral, for the boy had told Stephen Latimer frankly that he should never again sleep in the house on Windy Hill, where the servants now remained alone, awaiting events and orders, or again go to the sombre city house that looked across Washington Square.

The lawyer met Philip and Mr. Latimer alone, as Poppea had asked to be released from any part in this interview, and spoke of the will that he had drawn up within the month and produced the draft of it.

Philip laid on the table the scorched fragments found upon the hearth on which a visible word here and there was enough to prove identity.

"Then the course of the law lies straight," the lawyer said; "but as Mr. Philip Angus is a minor until next year, a guardian must be appointed."

"I shall petition that Mr. Latimer acts as such," Philip replied.

"What has Miss Angus—Gilbert—or whatever she persists in calling herself, to say to that, pray?"

"She bids me say as her spokesman," Philip answered, "that she intends to make no personal claim in the matter. Whatever may be hereafter decided will be out of the range of business or of law and will lie only between her brother and herself."

"A close corporation, it seems," said the lawyer, puckering his mouth for a contemptuous whistle, but catching sight of a glance in Latimer's eye, he checked it by remarking:—

"Pray tell me, as between man and man, is this young woman quite sane? She

can claim half of an ample though not princely property."

"Yes, quite sane," said Latimer, in accents as steely and clear-cut as the man's own, "but the expression of her sanity does not chance to take a form familiar to members of your calling."

After this the wheels of local probate law began to turn with their usual deliberation.

At first Miss Emmy proposed to postpone their journey, but now it was Poppea who urged her on, feeling the positive necessity of a change and a little time away from familiar places, in which to readjust herself. She not only now wished to look over the field for musical study at close range, but dreams flitted through her head of a winter either in Florence or in Rome in company with Philip, though not, perhaps, at once; for winter was a perilous time for one of Oliver Gilbert's years, and this winter the post-office would cease to be, in itself no small bereavement to him.

Again Satira, her snapping black eyes always fixed eagerly upon the bustling life of the village centre, came to the fore, and 'Lisha, good, easy man, acquiesced, acknowledging that "twarn't no further to go up to the corn and potato fields of mornings than, living on the hill, to hev to drop down to the village o' nights for a dish of gossip and the news."

Finally the day before the one for sailing came, and with it the startling announcement from Oliver Gilbert that he was going to the city to see Poppea off.

"Land alive! you'll get lost; you don't know how the city's changed these near twenty years since the time you would fetch Poppy down to President Lincoln's obsequies!" cried Satira. "I've heard Miss Emmy say that what were cow pastures where she used to pick dandelions when a girl are built solid over with emporiums of fashion. Besides, you've never been aboard anything bigger'n Captain Secors's onion schooner, and if that big thing they're going on began to get up steam and snort, *how* it would quake your vitals. It did mine that trip I took."

That trip being the term applied to a wonderful excursion of the previous summer, from Bridgeton to the new-found land of pleasure, Coney Island, whither 'Lisha had taken her, and of which he was destined never to hear the last.

But Gilbert saying in a tone that barred discussion that he would take whatever risks there were, the matter was dropped as being decided.

Late in the scorching July afternoon he harnessed his old Roman-nosed horse to the chaise and disappeared on the cross-road that ran eastward toward the Moosatuck, without vouchsafing any explanation to his sister, who, having questioned him in vain, called his attention to the threatening array of 'thunder-heads' that were rolling over the hills, every few seconds being rent together by forks of lightning.

He had been gone perhaps half an hour when the storm reached the village, and great splashes of rain, falling upon the shed roof, were turned into steam by the heat of the tin.

Poppea, having given the finishing touches to her simple packing, was setting her room in order, fingering each article lovingly as though she felt that even should she come back and find all as she left it, yet there must be a difference.

As the rain increased to a steady downpour, she looked anxiously up the road and made a mental calculation as to what houses lay on the route Daddy had taken, and where he would be by now, his probable destination having been as obscure to her as to Satira.

Meanwhile, the horse and chaise were standing in the shelter of an abandoned lumber shack in the woods that overhung the west bank of Moosatuck, while Gilbert, utterly oblivious of the rain that gradually sifted to him through the heavy leafage, was following a narrow foot-path. Glancing from side to side, he pulled a long string of ground-pine here, there a fine branch of strong laurel, and then again a handful of the dark green, white-veined leaves of the wax-flowered pipsissewa; when his arms would hold no more and he again reached the chaise, the thunder-heads were scurrying across the bay and the rain was over.

Poppea had sorted the evening mail and was sitting at the desk in Gilbert's workshop when he came in, slowly yet without his cane, and crossing to where she was, laid his armful of dripping wood-treasure before her, saying, half-shamedfacedly, yet as to one who would understand:—

"Will you tie me a nice wreath, Poppy, like the one we always have to hang up there at Christmas, lacking of course the berries? I guess I'll go in and change and get a bite to eat, if you'll spell me here for twenty minutes longer," and Poppea, with a comprehending smile and nod, buried her face in the fresh, spicy

greenery.

What Gilbert wanted with the wreath or did with it when he took it from her hands presently, she did not know, for later, as she walked up and down the flagged walk between the porch and gate, thinking of the details of to-morrow, the latch clicked and Hugh Oldys came through the wicket.

It was not alone the colorless twilight that made the change in his face which struck her like a blow. Without having become absolutely thin, the man of a year before, with height and breadth, good color, wholesome flesh, natural joy and interest in life and living, seemed to have passed through some phase that, while it spiritualized in a sense, had eliminated much that was characteristic.

"Your mother—is she worse?" was Poppea's first question.

"I do not think so, though in a case like hers it is worse to be no better. I should have been to see you many days ago but for a sudden change in nurses. No one stays more than a month," he added, breaking through his habitual reticence on this subject, as though at last he must have the support of sympathy.

"No one but you, Hugh. Ah, how can you go on so when every one else falters?"

"Because she is my mother and not theirs; in that lies all."

"All?" Poppea echoed, leaning toward him with such unmistakable tenderness in her eyes that it must have broken through any self-raised barrier of the man's had he but seen and compassed it. Yet he never looked at her directly nor let her read his face, though it was not until after he had gone that Poppea realized this.

For an hour the conversation drifted to casual things, and save for Philip, his work and plans, in wholly impersonal channels, they two sitting on the top step of the porch. When at last Hugh rose to go, and walking slowly side by side down the narrow path they halted at the end, one inside the gate, one without, he said, looking backward up the way they had come, as if into the past:—

"It will be good when you come back, but it isn't to be supposed or hoped that after you have made the break you will care for this sleepy little village as you have, Poppea. I have always wondered why you cared so little for the New York life with the fine opening you made. In the few months I had there, the fulness and the vigor of it all gripped me so that leaving was a wrench."

"For New York? Yes, I cared for that and all the best it gives. But the life? Yes, I

cared for that too, in a way, until I stood off and looked back."

Then, clasping her hands about the post, she said, smiling shyly, with a little quizzical expression at the corners of her mouth:—

"Do you remember once, long ago, how you and I stood by the railroad brook and watched a big, striped snake charm and swallow a little green frog?

"We didn't mean to let the affair come to the swallowing, but though the beginning was slow, the frog sat still and waited too long, and the end came quicker than we expected. Then, as the lump that was the frog began to be moved down the snake's length in being digested, you took your foot and little by little edged the frog backward out of the snake's mouth to the ground, slime covered and quite insensible. Then we both took water in our hands, and dashing it washed the slime away, until presently the frog came to and hopped away like mad, without ever looking back.

"Well, once upon a time, Hugh, as the fairy stories say, I was a little green frog and the life down there the snake; it drew me, and I didn't want to get away, until, when it was almost too late, one night a great splash of cold water, thrown by people who did not throw it in kindness, and that nearly strangled me, brought me to, and I hopped away without even wishing to look back.

"So when you think to yourself again, 'Poppea will yet love the life of the city,' remember the little green frog!"

Thus they parted in a sudden ripple of laughter, good friends.

Next day, in the hurry and bustle that always belong to an outgoing steamer in the season of summer travel, some of those in the crowd on the deck of the *Normanic* were attracted by the sight of a young and well-bred woman of unusual beauty, accompanied by a maid and some one who might either be her mother or aunt, clinging tearfully about the neck of an old man, whom she was wishing good-by. While there was nothing unusual about the parting at such a time, yet the dainty dress and bearing of the woman were in striking contrast to the homespun plainness of the man, who wore the long, flowing beard, stiff clothes, and wide-brimmed Panama hat, his Sunday best for years, that marks the countryman. Moreover, he carried a home-made hickory cane and clutched to his breast a bulky newspaper parcel.

When the final blast of "all ashore" was sounded, the air quivering with the

vibrations, the girl loosed her hold, and crying, "Good-by, dear Daddy!" disappeared in the crowd that gathered by the stairway; while he, turning toward the gang-plank, marched down it with all the soldier-like precision his lameness would allow, never looking back, his bundle still clasped tightly to him.

Boarding a small blue car known as a "bob-tail," Gilbert rode across the city, carefully scanning his course. When he emerged presently from the region of crooked ways to where the avenues run north and south and the streets east and west, and saw ahead an open square, he stopped the car, and standing at the street curb, shielding his eyes from the pitiless sun, tried to get his bearings.

"Fourteenth Street," said one lamp-post, "University Place" another. Yes, the park opposite was Union Square, but where was the house on whose porch he had stood that April day in eighteen sixty-five when the procession swung around from Broadway?

A business building covered with signs replaced it; yet at the same moment, his eyes fell on what he sought. The statue of Lincoln, rugged and majestic, standing above the cobbled plateau, calm and unmoved by all the frantic bustle of the street.

Making his way carefully through the traffic, Gilbert approached the rail about the statue. He paused for a moment, and then, undoing his parcel, took from it the wreath, rested it on the railing, while he folded the paper and, winding the string about it, placed it in his pocket. Then getting stiffly over the barrier, he laid the wreath at Lincoln's feet, raised his old hat, looking up into Lincoln's face as one in perfect, if humble, comradeship, while his lips murmured, "Through you I have finished the course, with you I have kept the faith!"

The people of the street, big and little, loafer and gamin, who spring up about an unusual object as swiftly as the circles surround a stone flung in the water, neither jostled nor jeered nor plucked the wreath away, for among the simple-minded, hero-worship will never die out save for lack of heroes.

Then making his way back to Fifth Avenue, Gilbert, seeking the scanty bits of shade as best he might, walked up its length until he reached the third open space and turned eastward to the railway station.

At the coming of the evening mail he pottered as usual with the letters as though that day had been like all the others, and ate his supper with little sauce of conversation, to the inexpressible disappointment of Satira Potts.

CHAPTER XX

ON THE WINGS OF THE MORNING

During the remainder of the summer the village of Harley's Mills went into a sort of chrysalis state as befitted its coming change of name. The fact that the Felton house had ceased to exist as a social centre and that many of the Quality Hill folk had gone abroad added considerably to its somnolence. Some of what are generally referred to by the local press as "leading citizens" had under construction a brick block on the Westboro side of the blacksmith shop in which the chief trade interests of the place were to be sheltered, including the new post-office.

Philip Angus continued with the Latimers, for his new house overlooking the sea would not be ready before October, and if the rumor proved true that Howell, the sculptor, was anxious to take Philip with him to winter in Rome, it was unlikely that it would be occupied before spring.

Of course there was much speculation concerning the amount and disposition of John Angus's property, especially his holdings in real estate, for he owned some of the most sightly tracts in the township in addition to the house and home acres on Windy Hill. Early in the autumn a definite statement was given out concerning the latter by no less an authority than Stephen Latimer. Poppea and Philip, agreeing that under no circumstances could they live there, proposed to devote it to a hospital and home for crippled children from the city, and the necessary alterations began soon after.

It was almost Thanksgiving time when Miss Emmy and Poppea returned, Miss Emmy going directly to the house on Quality Hill which she now called home, Miss Felton and Caleb having moved Mr. Esterbrook back to Madison Square at the beginning of cold weather. The village did not realize how much it had missed them both until Poppea was again seen walking daily up the road to Quality Hill, and Miss Emmy resumed her morning marketing trips, where she sat in the barouche (the lining was now a durable russet leather) dressed in very suitable and becoming brown with a warming glint of color in the velvet rose on her bonnet, holding a sort of court, whereat the butcher extolled the quality of his sweetbreads, and the blacksmith's wife related the details of her rheumatism and

her husband's father's last seizure, with equal freedom.

Immediately after her return, Philip took Poppea to see the new house, to which a music room with a place for an organ had been added to the original plan by throwing out a wing to correspond with his studio. With her arm about his shoulders they walked slowly through the rooms, stopping before the picture that each window offered, until they came to one on the second floor, a bay from which one might not only look out to sea, but up the Moosatuck until it was lost in the hill-country.

"This is your room," he said, laying a detaining hand upon her arm to make her hear him out, "whenever you wish to come to it for an hour or forever, but I never shall ask you by so much as a word to leave Daddy, for I feel about it much as you do. What if he had not? Oh, Sister, what if he had not? You would have still been yourself, but I, what should I have been without you to love?" and the rapt expression stole across his face with which the devotee is pictured.

Presently, sitting side by side on the steps of the wide porch in the early winter sunshine, they talked over Philip's plans, the tide creeping up the sand laden with pungent seaweed, and the gulls now flying across with shrill cries, now dropping to rest upon the water.

At last Philip, taking Poppea's hand and laying it against his cheek, told her of what was closest to his heart,—his desire to go to Rome with Howell for the winter, to do there with the master a piece of work he could not hope yet to accomplish alone. Unrolling a paper he showed her the design for the group, the outcome of months of thought and dreaming. Two women, one taller than the other, with tender, radiant faces, standing side by side, hands outstretched to aid a crippled child, who, having dropped his crutch, was clinging to them. About the base this legend ran *Amor Consolatrix*.

"These are our mothers," he said softly, "yours and mine. When they are done in marble, they shall stand by the gate up at the hospital to welcome the children who must go in alone."

So Philip sailed away, and from the Christmas music at St. Luke's his silver voice was missing.

But if Philip's tones were silver, Poppea's now poured forth like rich, unalloyed gold. It seemed to her as though she had never fathomed the full joy of singing until, lacking necessity, it had ceased to be a possible commercial profession,

and become, as now she held it, a freewill gift to all who asked for or needed it, singing alike in church, hospital ward, the poor-house, or in the low farm-houses of the back hill-country, where she carried hope and music to those for whom all other doors were closed. Once even had she gone over the deeply drifted roads on a wood sled with 'Lisha Potts to a revival meeting at his lumber camp, and in the rough faces of the wood-choppers read a deeper, truer appreciation than she had ever felt respond to her among the music-lovers of the drawing-room.

Then, too, there were the Sunday evenings, she and Daddy sitting on either side the fire in the foreroom,—Satira going invariably to the muscular type of prayer-meeting that would satisfy her soul's hunger for the next seven days.—Then the heartstrings would quiver in vain for the magic thrill and the sound of the melody that only one may play for each one of us, until to break the oppressive silence, she would lift the piano lid and let her fingers feel their way a moment, until the old-time hymns and anthems made response. Gradually Daddy would join in, until at the end of half an hour he was singing with might and main, although often quite off the key and half a bar behind. As she paused, he would limp to and fro rubbing his hands together, and saying for the fortieth time:—

"Pretty good music you and I can make, eh, Poppy? Forty years ago I was the loudest bass singer in this township, and 'twas when I was singing in First Church Choir that Mary, a stranger to me, sang the second treble, and it was the kind way she had of keeping me in line when I'd shied from the tuning-fork that made me take to her. Yes, it's true what the poet says, that Music hath charms to soothe the savage breast. It soothed mine, Poppy, who always had dreaded women."

So the winter wore away. March, the tug of war between seasons, blustered out roaring defiance, and April, the capricious, in its last week had kept to one mood long enough to green the grass, draw red blood to the maple tops, and gold sap to the willows.

In two weeks more Philip would return. Poppea was entering the gate with a letter from him that had come in the last mail. She had walked slowly up from the new post-office in the brick block, reading it as she came. How different all concerning the new order was, to be sure: *Entrance* and *Exit* printed plainly on the doors; no little knots of men from the scattered back settlement exchanging news. Rather did these, after getting their mail, continue to come to their old haunt and talk to Gilbert as he sat in his shop, sometimes idle but never listless, while a large checkerboard put by Poppea's suggestion in the place of the boxes

of the old beehive, filled the gap when the powers of conversation needed rest.

She stopped to look at a cluster of daffodils, whose jolly yellow flowers kept on beaming even through the dusk, and then went toward the house, when the wheels of a vehicle, coming rapidly up the road, stopped short, and Hugh Oldys's voice called:—

"Poppea, wait a minute, please," and without pausing to fasten the horse, he pushed through the gate and strode toward her.

"What is it, Hugh?" she almost cried out, shocked by the ashiness of his face and its nervous working. "Can I help you in any way?"

"Yes, you can help me and only you, though I do not know that I ought to let you undergo the strain even if you are willing.

"Listen and judge, Poppea. Last night my mother became physically ill; until then her bodily health has been better than for years. This afternoon within two hours her mind has suddenly cleared, the doctors explain it by the moving of a clot. She called me to her and spoke as naturally as before the blow fell; yet she remembers perfectly well that father is dead and that she has been very ill, though she has no sense of the length of time. Then she begged me not to leave her for so long again, and asked for you, Poppea."

"Why, Hugh, I will go to her at once. Could you think that I would not?"

"That—that is not all," he faltered, his shoulders drooping and his whole attitude broken and dejected. "She thinks that everything is as she had believed it would be—two years—ago. She thinks that we are married—that you are in the house, but stay out of the room for fear of disturbing her. Oh, Poppea, could you—could you slip a loose shawl or a sack over your shoulders and go in for a moment and speak to her or answer her, so that she need not know? Will you do it for the sake of all those years that we were comrades?"

Only for a moment had Poppea drawn back, but it was so imperceptibly that Hugh did not notice.

"I will go," she said slowly, without looking at him, "and you need wait only a minute."

Going swiftly to her room, she made a wrapper and pair of slippers into a hasty bundle and threw a light shawl about her head and shoulders. Saying a few

words to Satira, who was in the kitchen kneading bread and so could not follow her to the gate for details other than she chose to give, she took her place silently by Hugh in the buggy.

On the drive neither spoke, for it was one of the hours when the softest spoken word is too harsh and jarring. Up from the marsh meadows the cry of the rejuvenated "peepers" rose in what to Poppea's nerves, strained to snapping, seemed a clamor that surrounded her head closely and dulled even her powers of thought.

At the threshold Mrs. Shandy was waiting, her eyes red from crying. With finger on her lips Poppea signalled that she wished to go to Mrs. Shandy's room. There she slipped on the wrapper she had brought, and loosing the pins, let her hair fall in a careless braid, as though she had but just waked up.

In the square upper hall Dr. Morewood sat in a deep easy-chair, reading by a shaded lamp. In answer to Poppea's questioning look he said in the low tone, that yet is not a whisper, which the sensitive physician acquires:—

"Yes, the brain is clear, but the physical vitality in its final flicker; at best it can hold its own but a few hours."

When, steadying herself by an almost superhuman effort, Poppea reached the door of Mrs. Oldys's chamber, so familiar in every detail even in the subdued light, Hugh was already there crouched by the bedside, one of his mother's transparent hands clasping his, while with the other she was striving to push back the heavy hair from his forehead.

At the sight of Poppea the nurse drew back into the alcove shadows. Seating herself in a vacant chair on the opposite side from Hugh and waiting a few seconds, the girl made a very slight motion that revealed her presence.

"My dear daughter!" Mrs. Oldys formed the words rather than spoke them, dropping her other hand upon Poppea's so that she was held fast as it were between them.

"Why have you stayed away so long? I have thought that you were ill," the voice was clearer now. "Did Hugh break your sleep to call you?"

"No,—Mother,—I was quite awake when he said you wanted me."

"And you will stay with me to-night?"

"Yes, surely I will stay."

"Now I am at peace, my two dear children—" the fluttering eyelids closed and for a while she seemed to sleep, except that the pressure of her hands did not relax.

Presently she looked up again.

"I cannot seem to think by myself," she said, "I need something to lean upon—to carry me with it. Do you remember, Hugh, the music—the song that you and Poppy used to sing sometimes without the organ? It brought me close to the gate—perhaps it would carry me through with it to-night."

Poppea, who was trembling like a leaf in the wind, looked toward Hugh, but his face was buried in his arm. Then a calm settled over her. Loosening the robe at her throat, she straightened herself, and from her lips the notes fell soft yet clear:—

"Hark! hark, my soul; angelic songs are swelling."

An expression of ineffable peace crossed Mrs. Oldys's face.

"Yes, that is it," she whispered, smiling.

Unfalteringly Poppea sang to the end, and it was not until the last note died away in complete silence that Hugh raised his head.

Presently the doctor looked in, the nurse came forward with some nourishment, and so the night wore on, but it was not until the dawn began to scatter darkness that the frail hands gradually relaxed their loving clasp, and the nurse looking from the shadows beckoned the watchers away.

Through the passageway and down the stairs Hugh and Poppea passed together. Then Hugh left her for a moment, returning to say that Dr. Morewood would drive her home as she must have some rest as soon as possible.

Mrs. Shandy, coming out, begged her to wait and take a cup of coffee, but Poppea shook her head.

Out on the porch in the fresh, yet mysterious air of coming day, they waited for the doctor to bring his chaise. Below lay Moosatuck veiled in mist; beyond, the blue ridge of the hills; one bird called, then another, until half a hundred had

picked up the anthem. Each moment it grew lighter, the darkness huddled cornerwise down the west, while the morning star and the harbor beacon paled together.

For a time neither spoke nor looked at each other, then Hugh broke the silence.

"In a few days, Poppea,—when I am no longer needed,—I shall be going away for a rest, a long rest, and perhaps it may be that afterward my life will lie in other places." Then suddenly breaking down, he grasped her hands, and pressing them to his lips, said, with a half-suppressed cry:—

"Little comrade! Little comrade! All that I can tell you, all that I must tell you, is that God himself could not have done more for me than you have this night."

Poppea, who had been looking off into the sunrise, turned her head quickly, and for the first time in months, found his eyes fixed full upon her face before he could shift them.

At last she knew! Leaving her hands in his, she leaned toward him, murmuring in a voice so full of joy that it quivered as though strung with tears:—

"Where is more rest than here? *I* need you, Hugh!"

Then to the one behind the closed door and to the two facing the dawn a new life came on the wings of the morning.

THE END

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