Reed Myrtle

Master of the Vineyard

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Master of the Vineyard:

Содержание

I	5
II	18
III	33
IV	49
V	65
VI	80
VII	96
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	97

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Dedication

To

All Who Have Loved in Vain

I
The Hill of the Muses

From the Top of the Hill

The girl paused among the birches and drew a long breath of relief. It was good to be outdoors after the countless annoyances of the day; to feel the earth springing beneath her step, the keen, crisp air bringing the colour to her cheeks, and the silence of the woods ministering to her soul.

From the top of the hill she surveyed her little world. Where the small white houses clustered in the valley, far below her, she had spent her five-and-twenty years, shut in by the hills, and, more surely, by the iron bars of circumstance. To her the heights had always meant escape, for in the upper air and in solitude she found detachment – a sort of heavenly perspective upon the affairs of the common day.

Down in the bare, brown valley the river lay asleep. Grey patches of melting snow still filled the crevices along its banks, and fragments of broken crystal moved slowly toward the ultimate sea. The late afternoon sun touched the sharp edges, here and there to a faint iridescence. "The river-god dreams of rainbows," thought Rosemary, with a smile.

The Valley

Only one house was near the river; the others were set farther back. The one upon the shore was the oldest and largest house in the valley, severely simple in line and with a certain air of stateliness. The broad, Colonial porch looked out upon the river and the hills beyond it, while all around, upon the southern slope between the opposite hills and the valley, were the great vineyards of the Marshs', that had descended from father to son during the century that had elapsed since the house was built.

The gnarled and twisted vines scarcely showed now, upon the grey-brown background of the soil, but in a few places, where the snow had not yet melted, the tangled black threads were visible. Like the frame surrounding a tapestry, great pines bordered the vineyard save on the side nearest the valley, for the first of the Marshs, who had planted the vineyard and built the house, had taken care to protect his vines from the north-east storms.

The clanging notes of a bell, mellowed by distance, came faintly from the valley below. Rosemary took out the thin, old watch that had been her mother's and her mother's mother's before her, and set the hands at four upon the pale gold dial. Then she drew up the worn gold chain that hung around her neck, under her gown, and, with the key that dangled from it, wound the watch. In an hour or so, probably, it would stop, but it was pleasant to hear the cheerful little tick while she waited.

The Red Ribbon

The doors of the white schoolhouse in the valley burst open and the tide of exuberant youth rushed forth. Like so many ants, the children swarmed and scattered, their shrill voices sounding afar. Rosemary went to a hollow tree, took out a small wooden box, opened it, and unwound carefully a wide ribbon of flaming scarlet, a yard or more in length. Digging her heels into the soft earth, she went down to the lowest of the group of birches, on the side of the hill that overlooked the valley, and tied the ribbon to a drooping bough. Then she went back to the top of the hill, where a huge log, rolled against two trees, made a comfortable seat for two people.

Five minutes of the allotted twenty had passed since Rosemary had set her watch. At twenty minutes past four, or, at the most, twenty-five, he would come. For three years and more he had never failed to answer the signal, nor, indeed, to look for it when he brushed the chalk from his clothes and locked the door of the schoolhouse behind him.

A kindly wind, in passing, took the ribbon and made merry with it. In and out among the bare boughs of the birches it fluttered like a living thing, and Rosemary laughed aloud, as she had not done for many days. The hill, the scarlet signal, and the man who was coming symbolised, to her, the mysterious world of Romance.

Sometimes the birches were shy dryads, fleeing before the wrath of some unknown god. At other times, they were the Muses, for, as it happened, there were nine in the group and no others upon the hill. The vineyard across the valley was a tapestry, where, from earliest Spring until the grapes were gathered colour and light were caught and imprisoned within the web. At the bend in the river, where the rushes grew thickly, the river-god kept his harp, which answered with shy, musical murmurings to every vagrant wind.

Again, the hill was a tower, and she a captive princess, who had refused to marry except for love, and Love tarried strangely upon the way. Or, sometimes, she was the Elaine of an unknown Launcelot, safely guarding his shield. She placed in the woods all the dear people of the books, held forever between the covers and bound to the printed page, wondering if they, too, did not long for freedom.

The path up the hill wound in and out among the trees, and so it happened that Rosemary heard muffled footsteps before she saw him coming. A wayfaring squirrel, the first of his family to venture out, scampered madly up a tree and looked down upon the girl with questioning, fearful eyes. She rose from the log and looked up, with her hands outstretched in unconscious pleading.

He Comes

"Oh," she murmured, "don't be afraid of me!"

"I'm not," answered a man's voice. "I assure you I'm not."

"I wasn't speaking to you," she laughed, as she went to meet him.

"No?" he queried, flushed and breathless from the climb. "I wonder if there is anyone else for whom you wave red ribbons from your fortress!"

"Take it down, will you please?"

"Wait until I get three full breaths – then I will."

She went back to the log while he awkwardly untied the ribbon, rolled it up, in clumsy masculine fashion, and restored it to the wooden box in the hollow tree. "Aren't you cold?" he asked, as he sat down beside her.

"No – I'm too vividly alive to be cold, ever."

"But what's the use of being alive unless you can live?" he inquired, discontentedly.

She sighed and turned her face away. The colour vanished from her cheeks, the youth from her figure. Pensively, she gazed across the valley to the vineyard, where the black, knotted vines were blurred against the soil in the fast-gathering twilight. His eyes followed hers.

Rosemary

"I hate them," he said, passionately. "I wish I'd never seen a grape!"

"Were the children bad to-day?" she asked, irrelevantly.

"Of course. Aren't they always bad? What's the use of caging up fifty little imps and making 'em learn the multiplication table when they don't even aspire to the alphabet? Why should I have to teach 'em to read and write when they're determined not to learn? Why do I have to grow grapes when it would be the greatest joy of my life to know that I'd never have to see, touch, taste, or even smell another grape in this world or the next?"

She turned toward him. A late Winter sunset shimmered in the west like some pale, transparent cloth of gold hung from the walls of heaven, but the kindly light lent no beauty to her face. Rosemary's eyes were grey and lustreless, her hair ashen, and almost without colour. Her features were irregular and her skin dull and lifeless. She had not even the indefinable freshness that is the divine right of youth. Her mouth drooped wistfully at the corners, and even the half-discouraged dimple in her chin looked like a dent or a scar.

The bare hands that lay listlessly in her lap were rough and red from much uncongenial toil. He looked at her for a moment, still absorbed in himself, then, as he noted the pathos in every line of her face and figure, the expression of his face subtly changed.

His hand closed quickly over hers.

Their Moods

"Forgive me, Rosemary – I'm a brute. I have no right to inflict my moods upon you."

"Why not? Don't I bring mine to you?"

"Sometimes – not often."

"Let's get them out where we can look them over," she suggested, practically. "What do you hate most?"

"Grapes," he replied, readily, "and then children who aren't interested in the alphabet. All day I've been saying: 'See the cat. Can the cat run? Yes, the cat can run.' Of course they could repeat it after me, but they couldn't connect it in any way with the printed page. I sympathised strongly with an unwashed child of philosophical German lineage who inquired, earnestly: 'Teacher, what's the good of dat?'"

"What else do you hate?"

"Being tied up. Set down in one little corner of the world and being obliged to stay in it. I know to a certainty just what's going to happen to-morrow and next day and the day after that. Point out any day on the calendar, months ahead, and I can tell you just what I'll be doing. Nothing is uncertain but the weather."

His Looks

"Some people pray for anchorage," she said.

"I never have," he flashed back. "I want the open sea – tide and tempest and grey surges, with the wind in my face and the thrill of danger in my heart! I want my blood to race through my body; I want to be hungry, cold, despairing, afraid – everything! God, how I want to live!"

He paced back and forth restlessly, his hands in his pockets. Rosemary watched him, half afraid, though his mood was far from strange to her. He was taller than the average man, clean-shaven, and superbly built, with every muscle ready and even eager for use. His thirty years sat lightly upon him, though his dark hair was already slightly grey at the temples, for his great brown eyes were boyish and always would be. In the half-light, his clean-cut profile was outlined against the sky, and his mouth trembled perceptibly. He had neither the thin, colourless lips that would have made men distrust him, nor the thick lips that would have warned women to go slowly with him and to watch every step.

With obvious effort, he shook himself partially free of his mood. "What do you hate?" he asked, gently.

"Brown alpaca, sassafras tea, the eternal dishes, the scrubbing, the endless looking for dust where dust would never dare to stay, and – " She paused, and bit her lips.

"Might as well go on," he urged, with a smile.

"I can't. It isn't nice of me."

"But it's true. I don't know why you shouldn't hate your Grandmother and your Aunt Matilda. I do. It's better to be truthful than nice."

"Is it?"

"Sincerity always has a charm of its own. Even when two men are fighting, you are compelled to admire their earnestness and singleness of purpose."

"I wish you lived where you could admire Grandmother and Aunt Matilda. They're always fighting."

"No doubt. Isn't it a little early for sassafras tea?"

"I thought so, but Grandmother said Spring was coming early this year. She feels it in her bones and she intends to be ready for it."

"She should know the signs of the seasons, if anyone does. How old is she now?"

"Something past eighty."

"Suffering Moses! Eighty Springs and Summers and Autumns! Let me see – I was only twenty when I began with the grapes. If I live to be eighty, that means I've got to go to town sixty times to buy baskets, sell the crop, and hire help – go through the whole process from Spring to frost sixty times,

and I've only done it ten times. Fifty more! And when the imps who unwillingly learned their multiplication table from me are grandparents on their own account, I'll still be saying: 'See the cat! Can the cat run? Yes, the cat can run.'"

Slaves of the Vineyard

"Why don't you sell the vineyard?" she asked, though her heart sank at the mere suggestion.

"Sell it? Why didn't the Ancient Mariner sell his albatross and take a nice little trip around the world on the proceeds? Mother would die of a broken heart if I mentioned it to her. The Marsh family have been the slaves of that vineyard since the first mistaken ancestor went into the grape business. We've fertilised it, pruned it, protected it, tied it up, sat up nights with it, fanned the insects away from it, hired people to pick the fruit and pack it, fed the people, entertained them, sent presents to their wives and children – we've done everything! And what have we had for it? Only a very moderate living, all the grapes we could eat, and a few bottles of musty old wine.

"Mother, of course, has very little to do with it, and, to her, it has come to represent some sort of entailed possession that becomes more sacred every year. It's a family heirloom, like a title, or some very old and valuable piece of jewelry. Other people have family plate and family traditions, but we've got a vineyard, or, to speak more truthfully, it has us."

Happy Muses

"Look at the Muses," said Rosemary, after a silence. "Do you think they've gone to sleep?"

The nine slender birches, that had apparently paused in their flight down the hillside, were, indeed, very still. Not a twig stirred, and the white trunks were ghostly in the twilight. Seemingly they leaned toward each other for protection and support; for comfort in the loneliness of the night.

"Happy Muses," he responded. "No vineyard to look after and no school to teach."

"And no Grandmother," continued Rosemary, "and no Aunt. Nor any dishes or brooms or scrubbing-brushes, or stoves that are possessed by evil spirits."

Star-like, a single light appeared in the front window of the big white house on the shore of the river. It was answered almost immediately by another, far across the stream.

"I like to watch the lights," the girl went on. "The first one is always in your house."

"Yes, I know. Mother dislikes twilight."

"Ours is the last – on account of the price of oil."

"Here," he said. "I almost forgot your book. And I brought you two candles this time. You mustn't read by the light of one – you'll spoil your eyes."

Saying Good-Night

"Oh, Mr. Marsh! Thank you so much!"

"You're very welcome, Miss Starr."

"Please don't. I like to have you call me Rosemary."

"Then you must call me Alden. I've been telling you that for almost two years."

"I know, but I can't make myself say it, somehow. You're so much older and wiser than I."

"Don't be vain of your youth. I'm only five years ahead of you, and, as for wisdom, anybody could teach a country school in Winter and grow grapes the rest of the time."

"I'm not so sure of that. Come, it's getting late."

They went down the hill together, hand in hand like two children. The young man's mood had changed for the better and he was whistling cheerfully. They stopped at the corner where she must turn to go home.

"Good-night," she said.

"Good-night, Rosemary. I wish I could come to see you sometimes."

"So do I, but it's better that you shouldn't."

"I don't see why you can't come over in the evenings occasionally. I always read to Mother and you might as well listen, too. I'd gladly take you home."

"It would be lovely," she sighed, "but I can't."

"You know best," he answered, shivering. "It's pretty cold up there most of the time."

Lonely Heights

"The heights are always cold, aren't they?"

"Yes, and they're supposed to be lonely, too. Good-night again. Let me know how you like the book."

Woman-like, she watched him as he went down the street. She liked the way his head was set upon his broad shoulders; she admired his long, swinging stride. When his figure was lost in the gathering darkness she turned, regretfully, and went home.

II
Brown Alpaca

A Cheerless Room

At seven o'clock, precisely, Grandmother Starr limped into the dining-room. It was one of her "lame" days, though sometimes she forgot which was her lame side, and limped irregularly and impartially with either foot, as chanced to please her erratic fancy.

A small lamp cast a feeble, unshaded light from the middle of the table, for the morning was dark, and the room smelled abominably of oil. The flickering rays picked out here and there a bit of tarnished gold from the wall paper, and, as though purposely, made the worn spots in the carpet unusually distinct. Meaningless china ornaments crowded the mantel, but there was no saving grace of firelight in the small black cavern beneath. A little stove, in one corner of the room, smoked industriously and refused to give out any heat.

"Rosemary," said Grandmother Starr, fretfully, "I don't see why you can't never learn to build a fire. Get me my shoulder shawl."

Cold and Cross

The girl compressed her pale lips into a thin, tight line. She was tired and her head ached, but she said nothing. She found the shawl, of red-and-black plaid, and spread it over the old lady's shoulders.

"I didn't say for you to put it on," remarked Grandmother, sourly. "If I'd wanted you to put it on me, I'd have said so. Guess I ain't so old yet but what I can put on my own shawl. What I want it for is to wrap up my hands in."

"Where's my shawl?" demanded Aunt Matilda, entering the room at that moment.

Rosemary found the other shawl, of blue-and-brown plaid, and silently offered it to the owner.

Aunt Matilda inclined her grey head toward Rosemary. "You can put it on me if you like. I ain't ashamed to say I'm cold when I am, and if I wanted to wrap up my hands, I'd get my mittens – I wouldn't take a whole shawl."

"You ain't got no reason to be cold, as I see," remarked Grandmother, sharply. "Folks what lays abed till almost seven o'clock ought to be nice and warm unless they're lazy. P'r'aps if you moved around more, your blood would warm you."

"Better try it," Matilda suggested, pointedly.

An angry flush mounted to Grandmother's temples, where the thin white hair was drawn back so tightly that it must have hurt.

"I've moved around some in my day," she responded, shrilly, "but I never got any thanks for it. What with sweepin' and dustin' and scrubbin' and washin' and ironin' and bringin' up children and feedin' pigs and cows and chickens and churnin' and waitin' on your father, it's no wonder I'm a helpless cripple with the misery in my back."

Head of the House

"Dried peaches again," Matilda observed, scornfully, as Rosemary put a small saucer of fruit before her. "Who told you to get dried peaches?"

"I did, if you want to know," Grandmother snorted. "This is my house, ain't it?"

"I've heard tell that it was," Matilda answered, "and I'm beginnin' to believe it."

Miss Matilda was forty-six, but, in the pitiless glare of the odorous lamp, she looked much older. Her hair was grey and of uneven length, so that short, straight hair continually hung about her face, without even the saving grace of fluffiness. Her eyes were steel-blue and cold, her nose large and her mouth large also. Her lips drooped at the corners and there was a wart upon her chin.

Grandmother also had a wart, but it was upon her nose. Being a friendly and capable sort of wart, it held her steel-bowed spectacles at the proper angle for reading or knitting. During

conversation, she peered over her spectacles, and sometimes, to the discomfort of a sensitive observer, the steel frame appeared to divide her eyes horizontally.

All Wrong

They were very dark, beady eyes, set close together. At times they gleamed with the joy of conflict, but they always expressed a certain malicious cunning. With a single glance, she could make Rosemary feel mentally undressed. Had the girl's forehead been transparent, like the crystal of a watch, with the machinery of thought and emotion fully exposed to the eye of a master-mechanic, her sensation could not have differed from the helpless awe her grandmother so easily inspired.

Of course the breakfast was not right – it never was. The dried peaches were too sweet for one and not sweet enough for the other. Grandmother wanted her oatmeal cooked to a paste, but Aunt Matilda, whose teeth were better, desired something that must be chewed before it was swallowed, and unhesitatingly said so. The coffee was fated to please neither, though, as Rosemary found courage to say, you couldn't expect good coffee on Friday when the same grounds had been used ever since Sunday morning.

"I'd like to know what makes you so high and mighty all of a sudden," said Grandmother. "Coffee's just like tea – as long as colour comes into it when it's boiled, it's good. My mother

always used the same grounds for a week for a family of eight, and she didn't hear no complaints, neither. You ain't boiled this long enough – that's what's the matter."

The Common Task

Aunt Matilda muttered something about "beggars being choosers," and Rosemary pushed her plate away wearily. She had not tasted her breakfast.

Grandmother arose and noisily blew out the lamp, regardless of the fact that Matilda had not finished eating. "Now, Rosemary," she said, briskly, "after you get the dishes done and the kitchen cleaned up, I want you should go to the post-office and get my paper. When you come back, you can do the sweepin' and dustin' down here and I can set in the kitchen while you're doin' it. Then you can make the beds and do the up-stairs work and then go to the store. By the time you're ready to go to the store, I'll have decided what you're to get."

"And," continued Aunt Matilda, pushing back her chair, "this afternoon you can help me cut out some underclothes and get 'em basted together." She never attempted any sort of housework, being pathetically vain of her one beauty – her small, white hands. Even the family sewing she did under protest.

"Is the alpaca all gone?" asked Grandmother.

"Yes," Matilda replied. "I used the last of it patchin' Rosemary's dress under the arms. It beats all how hard she is on

her clothes."

A Question of Colour

"I'll have to order more," sighed the old lady. "I suppose the price has gone up again."

Rosemary's breath came and went quickly; her heart fluttered with a sudden wildness. "Grandmother," she pleaded, hesitatingly, "oh, Aunt Matilda – just for this once, couldn't I have grey alpaca instead of brown? I hate brown so!"

Both women stared at her as though she had all at once gone mad. The silence became intense, painful.

"I mean," faltered the girl, "if it's the same price. I wouldn't ask you to pay any more. Perhaps grey might be cheaper now – even cheaper than brown!"

"I was married in brown alpaca," said Grandmother. She used the tone in which royalty may possibly allude to coronation.

"I was wearing brown alpaca," observed Aunt Matilda, "the night the minister came to call."

"Made just like this," they said, together.

"If brown alpaca's good enough for weddin's and ministers, I reckon it'll do for orphans that don't half earn their keep," resumed Grandmother, with her keen eyes fixed upon Rosemary.

"What put the notion into your head?" queried Aunt Matilda, with the air of one athirst for knowledge.

A Surprise Party

"Why – nothing," the girl stammered, "except that – when I was looking at mother's things the other day, up in the attic, I found some pink ribbon, and I thought it would be pretty with grey, and if I had a grey dress – "

The other two exchanged glances. "Ain't it wonderful," asked Matilda of her mother, "how blood will tell?"

"It certainly is," responded Grandmother, polishing her spectacles vigorously with a corner of the plaid shawl. "Your ma," she went on, to Rosemary, "was wearin' grey when your pa brought her here to visit us. They was a surprise party – both of 'em. We didn't even know he was plannin' marriage and I don't believe he was, either. We've always thought your ma roped him into it, somehow."

Rosemary's eyes filled with mist and she bit her lips.

"She was wearin' grey," continued Aunt Matilda; "light grey that would show every spot. I told her it wasn't a very serviceable colour and she had the impudence to laugh at me. 'It'll clean, won't it?' she says, just like that, and Frank says, right after her, 'Yes, it'll clean.' He knew a lot about it, he did. She had psychologised him."

"You mean hypnotised," interrupted Grandmother. "There ain't no such word as 'psychologised.'"

Resentment

"Well, if there ain't, there ought to be."

"The pink has come out in the blood, too," Grandmother remarked, adjusting her spectacles firmly upon the ever-useful and unfailing wart. "She was wearin' pink roses on her bonnet and pink ribbon strings. It wouldn't surprise me if it was the very strings what Rosemary has found in the trunk and is layin' out to wear."

"Me neither," Matilda chimed in.

"She was wearin' lace on her petticoats and high-heeled shoes, and all her handkerchiefs was fine linen," Grandmother continued. "Maybe you'd like some lace ruffles under your grey alpaca, wouldn't you, Rosemary?"

The girl got to her feet blindly. She gathered up the dishes with cold hands that trembled, took them out into the kitchen, and noiselessly closed the door. Her heart was hot with resentment, even though she had heard the story, with variations, ever since she was old enough to understand it.

"Poor little mother," said Rosemary, to herself. "Dear little mother! Why couldn't you have taken me with you!"

As Grandmother had said, for the hundredth time and more, Frank Starr had brought home his young wife unexpectedly. The surprise, in itself, was a shock from which she and Matilda had never recovered. Even now, they were fond of alluding to the

years of ill-health directly caused by it, and of subtly blaming Rosemary for it.

An Orphan

At the end of the third day, the young couple had departed hastily, the bride in tears. A year or so afterward, when Rosemary was born, the little mother died, having lived only long enough to ask that the baby be named "Rosemary" – Rose for her own mother and Mary for Grandmother Starr.

Stern, white-faced, and broken-hearted, Frank Starr brought his child to his mother and sister, and almost immediately went West. Intermittently he wrote briefly, sent money, gave insufficient addresses, or none at all, and, at length, disappeared. At the time his last letter was written, he had expected to take a certain steamer plying along the Western coast. As the ship was wrecked and he was never heard from again, it seemed that Rosemary was an orphan, dependent upon her grandmother and aunt.

In their way, they were kind to her. She was sent to school regularly, and had plenty to eat and wear, of a certain sort. Every Spring, Aunt Matilda made the year's supply of underclothing, using for the purpose coarse, unbleached muslin, thriftily purchased by the bolt. The brown alpaca and brown gingham, in which she and her grandmother and aunt had been dressed ever since she could remember, were also bought by the

piece. The fashion of the garments had not changed, for one way of making a gown was held to be as good as another, and a great deal easier, if the maker were accustomed to doing it.

Year after Year

So, year after year, Rosemary wore full skirts of brown alpaca, gathered into a band, and tight-fitting waists, boned and lined, buttoning down the front with a row of small jet buttons. The sleeves were always long, plain, and tight, no matter what other people were wearing. A bit of cheap lace gathered at the top of the collar was the only attempt at adornment.

The brown ginghams were made in the same way, except that the waists were not boned. The cheap white muslin, which served as Rosemary's best Summer gown, was made like the ginghams. Her Winter hat was brown felt, trimmed with brown ribbon, her Summer hat was brown straw, trimmed with brown ribbon, and her Winter coat was also brown, of some heavy material which wore surpassingly well.

For years her beauty-loving soul had been in revolt, but never before had she dared to suggest a change. The lump in her throat choked her as she washed the dishes, heedless of the tears that fell into the dish-pan. But activity is a sovereign remedy for the blues, and by the time the kitchen was made spotless, she had recovered her composure. She washed her face in cold water, dusted her red eyes with a bit of corn-starch, and put the cups

and plates in their proper places.

Toiling Cheerfully

She listened half-fearfully for a moment before she opened the door, dreading to hear the dear memory of her mother still under discussion, but Grandmother and Aunt Matilda were wrangling happily over the hair-wreath in the parlour. This was a fruitful source of argument when all other subjects had failed, for Grandmother insisted that the yellow rose in the centre was made from the golden curls of Uncle Henry Underwood's oldest boy, while Aunt Matilda was equally certain that it had come from Sarah Starr's second daughter by her first husband.

Throughout the day Rosemary toiled cheerfully. She swept, dusted, scrubbed, cooked, did errands, mailed the letter which made certain another bolt of brown alpaca, built fires, and, in the afternoon, brought down the heavy roll of unbleached muslin from the attic. Aunt Matilda cleared off the dining-room table, got out the worn newspaper patterns, and had sent Rosemary out for a paper of pins before she remembered that it was Friday, and that no new task begun on a Friday could ever be a success.

So, while Rosemary set the table for supper, the other two harked back to the fateful day when Frank Starr brought his wife home. They were in the next room, but their shrill voices carried well and Rosemary heard every word, though she earnestly wished that she need not.

A Lucky Friday

"It was Friday, too, if you'll remember, when Frank brought her," said Aunt Matilda, indicating Rosemary by an inclination of her untidy head.

"Then you can't say Friday's always unlucky," commented Grandmother. "It may have been bad for us but it was good for her. Supposin' that butterfly had had her to bring up – what'd she have been by now?"

"She resembles her ma some," answered Matilda, irrelevantly; "at least she would if she was pretty. She's got the same look about her, somehow."

"I never thought her ma was pretty. It was always a mystery to me what Frank saw in her."

"Come to supper," called Rosemary, abruptly. She was unable to bear more.

The meal was unexpectedly enlivened by Grandmother's discovery of a well-soaked milk ticket in the pitcher. From the weekly issue of *The Household Guardian*, which had reached her that day, she had absorbed a vast amount of knowledge pertaining to the manners and customs of germs, and began to fear for her life. At first, it was thought to be Rosemary's fault, but upon recalling that for many years the ticket had always been left in the pitcher, the blame was shifted to the hapless milkman.

Some discussion ensued as to what should be said to the milkman and who should say it, but Rosemary observed, with more or less reason, that if his attention was called to the error, he might want another ticket. At length it was decided to say nothing, and Grandmother personally assumed charge of the ticket, putting it to dry between newspapers in the hope of using it again.

After supper, Rosemary washed the dishes, set the table for breakfast, and sat quietly, with her hands folded, until the others were ready to go to bed. She wrapped a hot brick in red flannel for each of them, put out the lamp, and followed them up-stairs. Rejoicing in the shelter afforded by a closed door, she sat in the dark, shivering a little, until sounds suggestive of deep slumber came from the two rooms beyond.

Then she lighted the two candles that Alden Marsh had given her, and hurriedly undressed, pausing only to make a wry face at her unbleached muslin nightgown, entirely without trimming. She brushed her hair with a worn brush, braided it, tied it with a bit of shoestring, and climbed into bed.

After assuring herself of the best light possible, she unwrapped the little red book he had given her a few days before, and began to read, eagerly, one of the two wonderful sonnet sequences of which the English language boasts:

"Love's throne was not with these; but far above
All passionate wind of welcome and farewell
He sat in breathless bowers they dream not of;"

Upon the Heights

As by magic, the cares of the common day slipped away from her and her spirit began to breathe. Upon the heights she walked firmly now, and as surely as though she felt the hills themselves beneath her feet.

"Born with her life, creature of poignant thirst
And exquisite hunger, at her heart Love lay
Quickening in darkness, till a voice that day
Cried on him and the bonds of birth were burst."

And again:

"Lo! it is done. Above the enthroning threat
The mouth's mould testifies of voice and kiss,
The shadowed eyes remember and foresee.
Her face is made her shrine. Let all men note
That in all years (Oh, love, thy gift is this!)
They that would look on her must come to me."

The divine melody of the words stirred her to the depths of

her soul. Hunger and thirst ran riot in her blood; her heart surged with the fulness of its tides.

The Unknown Joy

"But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss
Creep, as the Spring now thrills through every spray,
Up your warm throat to your warm lips, for this…"

Rosemary put the book aside with shaking hands. "I wonder," she thought, "how it would be if anyone should kiss me. Me," she whispered; "not the women in the books, but the real me."

The book slipped to the floor unheeded. She sat there in her ugly nightgown, yearning with every fibre of her for the unknown joy. The flickering light of the candles was answered by the strange fire that burned in her eyes. At last her head drooped forward and, blind with tears, she hid her face in her hands.

"Oh, dear God in Heaven," she prayed, passionately. "Open the door of the House of Life to me! Send someone to love me and to take me away, for Christ's sake – Amen!"

III
The Crystal Ball

A Function

"Am I late, Lady Mother?"

Madame Marsh turned toward Alden with a smile. "Only five minutes, and it doesn't matter, since it's Saturday."

"Five minutes," he repeated. "Some clever person once said that those who are five minutes late do more to upset the order of the universe than all the anarchists."

Madame's white hands fluttered out over the silver coffee service. "One lump or two?" she inquired, with the sugar-tongs poised over his cup.

"Two, please."

Of course she knew, but she liked to ask. She had been at the table, waiting for him, since the grandfather's clock in the hall struck eight.

In the old house on the shore of the river, breakfast was a function, luncheon a mild festivity, and dinner an affair of high state. Madame herself always appeared at dinner suitably clad, and, moreover, insisted upon evening clothes for her son. Once, years ago, he had protested at the formality.

"Why not?" she had queried coldly. "Shall we not be as civilised as we can?" And, again, when he had presented himself at the dinner hour in the serviceable garb of every day, she had refused to go to the table until he came down again, "dressed as a gentleman should be dressed after six o'clock."

The sunlight streamed into every nook and cranny of the room where they sat at breakfast. It lighted up the polished surfaces of old mahogany, woke forgotten gleams from the worn old silver, and summoned stray bits of iridescence from the prisms that hung from the heavy gilt chandeliers.

With less graciousness, it revealed several places on the frame of the mirror over the mantel, where the gold had fallen away and had been replaced by an inferior sort of gilding. By some subtle trickery with the lace curtain that hung at the open window, it laid an arabesque of delicate shadow upon the polished floor. In the room beyond, where Madame's crystal ball lay on the mahogany table, with a bit of black velvet beneath it, the sun had made a living rainbow that carried colour and light into the hall and even up the stairway.

As she sat with her back to it, the light was scarcely less gentle with Madame. It brought silver into her white hair, shimmered along the silken surface of her grey gown, and deepened the violet shadows in her eyes. It threw into vivid relief the cameo that

fastened the lace at her throat, rested for a moment upon the mellow gold of her worn wedding-ring as she filled Alden's cup, and paused reminiscently at the corner of her mouth, where there had once been a dimple.

Tales of a Mirror

Across the table, the light shone full upon Alden's face, but, man-like, he had no fear of it. Madame noted, with loving approval, how it illumined the dark depths of his eyes and showed the strength of his firm, boyish chin. Each day, to her, he grew more like his father.

"A penny for your thoughts," he said.

Madame sighed. "It seems so strange," she replied, after a pensive interval, "that I should be old and you should be young. You look so much like your father sometimes that it is as though the clock had turned back for him and I had gone on. You're older now than he was when we were married, but I need my mirror to remind me that I'm past my twenties."

"A woman and her mirror," laughed Alden, helping himself to a crisp muffin. "What tales each might tell of the other, if they would!"

"Don't misunderstand me, dear," she said, quickly. "It's not that I mind growing old. I've never been the unhappy sort of woman who desires to keep the year for ever at the Spring. Each season has its own beauty – its own charm. We would tire of

violets and apple-blossoms if they lasted always. Impermanence is the very essence of joy – the drop of bitterness that enables one to perceive the sweet."

Over the Breakfast Cups

"All of which is undoubtedly true," he returned, gallantly, "but the fact remains that you're not old and never will be. You're merely a girl who has powdered her hair for a fancy-dress ball."

"Flatterer!" she said, with affected severity, but the delicate pink flush that bloomed in her cheeks showed that she was pleased.

"Will you drive to-day?" he asked, as they rose from the table.

"I think not. I'm a hot-house plant, you know, and it seems cold outside."

"Have the new books come yet?"

"Yes, they came yesterday, but I haven't opened the parcel."

"I hope they won't prove as disappointing as the last lot. There wasn't a thing I could ask Rosemary to read. I'm continually falling back on the old ones."

"The old books are the best, after all, like the old friends and the old ways."

Alden walked around the room restlessly, his hands in his pockets. At length he paused before the window overlooking the vineyard, on the other side of the valley. The slope was bare of snow, now; the vines waited the call of Spring.

Alden's Revolt

A soft footfall sounded beside him, then his mother put a caressing hand upon his shoulder. "It's almost time to begin, isn't it?" she asked. Her beautiful old face was radiant.

Impatiently, he shook himself free from her touch. "Mother," he began, "let's have it out once for all. I can't stand this any longer."

She sank into the nearest chair, with all the life suddenly gone from her face and figure. In a moment she had grown old, but presently, with an effort, she regained her self-command. "Yes?" she returned, quietly. "What do you wish to do?"

"Anything," he answered, abruptly – "anything but this. I want to get out where I can breathe, where the sky fits the ground as far as you can see – where it isn't eternally broken into by these everlasting hills. I'd like to know that dinner wouldn't always be ready at seven o'clock – in fact, I'd like sometimes not to have any dinner at all. I want to get forty miles from a schoolhouse and two hundred miles from a grape. I never want to see another grape as long as I live."

He knew that he was hurting her, but his insurgent youth demanded its right of speech after long repression. "I'm a man," he cried, "and I want to do a man's work in the world and take a man's place. Just because my ancestors chose to slave in a treadmill, I don't have to stay in it, do I? You have no right to

keep me chained up here!"

Released

The clock ticked loudly in the hall, the canary hopped noisily about his cage and chirped shrilly. A passing breeze came through the open window and tinkled the prisms that hung from the chandelier. It sounded like the echo of some far-away bell.

"No," said Madame, dully. "As you say, I have no right to keep you chained up here."

"Mother!" he cried, with swift remorse. "Don't misunderstand me!"

She raised her hand and motioned him to the chair opposite. "Your language is sufficiently explicit," she went on, clearing her throat. "There is no chance for anyone to misunderstand you. I am very sorry that I – I have not seen, that you have been obliged to ask for release from an – unpleasant – position. Go – whenever you choose."

He stared at her for a moment, uncomprehending. "Mother! Oh, Mother!" he whispered. "Do you really mean it? Where shall we go?"

"'We,'" she repeated. "Now I do misunderstand you."

"Why, Mother! What do you mean? Of course we shall go together!"

Madame rose from her chair, with some difficulty. "You have said," she went on, choosing her words carefully, "that I had no

right to keep you chained up here. I admit it – I have not. Equally, you have no right to uproot me."

One's Own Choice

"But, Mother! Why, I couldn't go without you, and leave you alone. We belong together, you and I!"

The hard lines of her mouth relaxed, ever so little, but her eyes were very dark and stern. "As much as we belong together," she resumed, "we belong here. Dead hands built this house, dead hands laid out that vineyard, dead hands have given us our work. If we fail, we betray the trust of those who have gone before us – we have nothing to give to those who come.

"I've seen," she continued, with rising passion. "You were determined from the first to fail!"

"Fail!" he echoed, with lips that scarcely moved.

"Yes, for no man fails except by his own choice. You might have been master of the vineyard, but you have preferred to have the vineyard master you. Confronted with an uncongenial task, you slunk away from it and shielded yourself behind the sophistry that the work was unworthy of you. As if any work were unworthy of a man!"

"I hate it," he murmured, resentfully.

"Yes, just as people hate their superiors. You hate it because you can't do it. Year by year, I have seen the crop grow less and less; year by year I have seen our income decreasing. We are

living now on less than half of what we had when you took charge of the vineyard. Last year the grapes were so poor that I was ashamed to use them for wine. And to think," she flashed at him, bitterly, "that the name of Marsh used to stand for quality! What does it mean now? Nothing – thanks to you!"

The Name of Marsh

The dull red rose to his temples and he cringed visibly. "I – I – " he stammered.

"One moment, please, and then I shall say no more. This is between you and your own manhood, not between you and your mother. I put no obstacles in your path – you may go when and where you choose. I only ask you to remember that a man who has failed to do the work that lies nearest his hand is not likely to succeed at anything else.

"It is not for you to say whether or not anything is worthy when it has once been given you to do. You have only to do it and make it worthy by the doing. When you have proved yourself capable, another task will be given you, but not before. You hate the vineyard because you cannot raise good grapes, you hate to teach school because you cannot teach school well. You want to find something easy to do – something that will require no effort."

"No," he interrupted, "you're mistaken there. I want to do something great – I'm not asking for anything easy."

"Greatness comes slowly," she answered, her voice softening a little, "and by difficult steps – not by leaps and bounds. You must learn the multiplication table before you can be an astronomer. None the less, it is your right to choose."

"Then, granting that, why wouldn't you come with me?"

"Because it is also my right to choose for myself and I belong here. When I identified myself with the Marsh family, I did it in good faith. When I was married, I came here, my children were born here, your father and brother and sister died here, and I shall die here too. When you go, I shall do my best with the vineyard."

She spoke valiantly, but there was a pathetic little quiver in her lips as she said the last words. Alden stood at the window, contemplating the broad acres bordered with pine.

"Do not say *when* I go, Mother – say *if* I go."

"I thought you had decided," she murmured, but her heart began to beat quickly, nevertheless.

"No, I haven't, but I'll decide in the course of the day. Good-bye for the present."

He stooped, kissed the cheek she turned to him, and went out, assuming a cheerfulness he did not feel. Madame leaned back in her chair with her eyes closed, exhausted by the stress of emotion. The maid came in for orders, she gave them mechanically, then went into the living-room. She was anxious

to be alone, but felt unequal to the exertion of climbing the stairs.

The Pictured Face

As the hours passed, she slowly regained her composure. It seemed impossible that Alden should go away and leave her when they two were alone in the world, and, as he said, belonged together. More than ever that morning had he looked like his father.

Old memories crowded thickly upon her as she sat there. Bits of her childhood flashed back at her out of the eternal stillness, "even as the beads of a told rosary." Since the day she met Alden's father, everything was clear and distinct, for, with women, life begins with love and the rest is as though it had never been.

An old daguerreotype was close at hand in a table drawer. She opened the ornate case tenderly, brushed the blue velvet that lined it, and kissed the pictured face behind the glass. So much had they borne together, so much had they loved, and all was gone – save this!

The serene eyes, for ever youthful, looked back at her across the years. Except for the quaint, old-fashioned look inseparable from an old picture, the face was that of the boy who had left her a few hours ago. The deep, dark eyes, the regular features, the firm straight chin, the lovable mouth, the adorable boyishness – all were there, shut in by blue velvet and glass.

Madame smiled as she sat there looking at it. She had always had her way with the father – why should she doubt her power over the son? Supremely maternal as she was, the sheltering instinct had extended even to the man she loved. He had been outwardly strong and self-confident, assured, self-reliant, even severe with others, but behind the bold exterior, as always to the eyes of the beloved woman, had been a little, shrinking, helpless child, craving the comfort of a woman's hand – the sanctuary of a woman's breast.

Even in her own hours of stress and trial, she had feared to lean upon him too much, knowing how surely he depended upon her. He was more than forty when he died, yet to her he had been as one of her children, though infinitely dearer than any child could be.

The quick tears started at the thought of the children, for the childish prattle had so soon been hushed, the eager little feet had been so quickly stilled. Alden was the first-born son, with an older daughter, who had been named Virginia, for her mother. Virginia would have been thirty-two now, and probably married, with children of her own. The second son would have been twenty-eight, and, possibly, married also. There might have been a son-in-law, a daughter-in-law, and three or four children by this time, had these two lived.

The House of Memories

So, through the House of Memories her fancy sped, as though borne on wings. Childish voices rang through the empty corridors and the fairy patter of tiny feet sounded on the stairs. One by one, out of the shadows, old joys and old loves came toward her; forgotten hopes and lost dreams. Hands long since mingled with the dust clasped hers once more with perfect understanding – warm lips were crushed upon hers with the old ecstasy and the old thrill. Even the sorrows, from which the bitterness had strangely vanished, came back out of the darkness, not with hesitancy, but with assurance, as though already welcomed by a friend.

Alden did not come home to luncheon, so Madame made only a pretence of eating. As the long afternoon wore away, she reproached herself bitterly for her harshness. There had been pain in the boy's eyes when he bent to kiss her – and she had turned her cheek.

She would have faced any sort of privation for this one beloved son – the only gift Life had not as yet taken back. Perhaps, after all, he knew best, for have not men led and women followed since, back in Paradise, the First Woman gave her hand trustingly to the First Man?

Visions in the Crystal Ball

Long, slanting sunbeams, alight with the gold of afternoon, came into the room by another window, and chanced upon the crystal ball. Madame's face grew thoughtful. "I wonder," she mused, "if I dare to try!"

She was half afraid of her own sorcery, because, so many times, that which she had seen had come true. Once, when a child was ill, she had gazed into the crystal and seen the little white coffin that, a week later, was carried out of the front door. Again, she had seen the vision of a wedding which was unexpectedly fulfilled later, when a passing cousin begged the hospitality of her house for a marriage.

She drew her chair up to the table, made sure of the proper light, and leaned over the ball. For a time there was darkness, then confused images that meant nothing, then at last, clear and distinct as a flash of lightning, her own son, holding a woman in his arms.

Madame pushed the ball aside, profoundly disturbed. Was the solution of their problem, then, to come in that way? And who was the woman?

In the dazzling glimpse she had caught no detail save a shimmering white gown and her son's face half hidden by the masses of the woman's hair. A faint memory of the hair persisted; she had never seen anything quite like it. Was it brown,

or golden, or – perhaps red? Yes, red – that was it, and in all the circle of their acquaintance there was no woman with red hair.

Alden's Decision

It was evident, then, that he was going away. Very well, she would go too. And when Alden had found his woman with the red hair, she would come back, alone – of course they would not want her.

She felt suddenly lonely, as though she had lived too long. For the first time, she forgot to light the candles on the mantel when the room became too dark to see. She had sat alone in the darkness for some time when she heard Alden's step outside.

When he came in, he missed the accustomed lights. "Mother!" he called, vaguely alarmed. Then, again: "Mother! Where are you, Mother dear?"

"I'm here," she responded, rising from her chair and fumbling along the mantel-shelf for matches. "I'm sorry I forgot the candles." The mere sound of his voice had made her heart leap with joy.

He was muddy and tired and his face was very white. "I know it's late," he said, apologetically, "and I'll go up to dress right now. I – I've decided to – stay."

His voice broke a little on the last word. Madame drew his tall head down and kissed him, forgetting all about the crystal ball. "For your own sake?" she asked; "or for mine?"

"For yours, of course. I'll try to do as you want me to, Lady Mother. I have nothing to do but to make you happy."

For answer, she kissed him again. "I must dress, too," she said.

When they met at dinner, half an hour later, neither made any reference to the subject that had been under discussion. Outwardly all was calm and peaceful, as deep-flowing waters may hide the rocks beneath. By the time coffee was served, they were back upon the old footing of affectionate comradeship.

Afterward, he read the paper while Madame played solitaire. When she turned the queen of hearts, she remembered the red-haired woman whom she had seen in the crystal ball. And they were not going away, after all! Madame felt that she had in some way gained an unfair advantage over the red-haired woman. There would be no one, now, to take her boy away from her.

And yet, when the time came for her to go, would she want Alden to live on in the old house alone, looking after the hated vineyard and teaching the despised school? At best, it could be only a few years more.

Feeling her grave, sweet eyes upon him, Alden looked up from his paper. "What is it, Mother?"

"Dear," she said, thoughtfully, "I want you to marry and bring me a daughter. I want to hold your son in my arms before I die."

Madame's Dream

"Rather a large order, isn't it?" He laughed indifferently, and went on with his reading. Madame laughed, too, as she continued her solitaire, but, none the less, she dreamed that night that the house was full of women with red hair, and that each one was gazing earnestly into the depths of a crystal ball.

IV
April's Sun

The Joy of Morning

With a rush of warm winds and a tinkle of raindrops, Spring danced over the hills. The river stirred beneath the drifting ice, then woke into musical murmuring. Even the dead reeds and dry rushes at the bend of the stream gave forth a faint melody when swayed by the full waters beneath.

The joy of morning was abroad in the world. Robins sang it, winds whispered it, and, beneath the sod, every fibre of root and tree quivered with aspiration, groping through the labyrinth of darkness with a blind impulse toward the light. Across the valley, on the southern slope, a faint glow of green seemed to hover above the dark tangle of the vineyard, like some indefinite suggestion of colour, promising the sure beauty yet to come.

Rosemary had climbed the Hill of the Muses early in the afternoon. She, too, was awake, in every fibre of body and soul. Springs had come and gone before – twenty-five of them – but she had never known one like this. A vague delight possessed her, and her heart throbbed as from imprisoned wings. Purpose and uplift and aspiration swayed her strangely; she yearned blindly

toward some unknown goal.

The Family Religion

She had not seen Alden for a long time. The melting ice and snow had made the hill unpleasant, if not impossible, and the annual sewing had kept her closely indoors. She and Aunt Matilda had made the year's supply of underwear from the unbleached muslin, and one garment for each from the bolt of brown-and-white gingham. Rosemary disdained to say "gown" or even "dress," for the result of her labour was a garment, simply, and nothing more.

Every third Summer she had a new white muslin, of the cheapest quality, which she wore to church whenever it was ordained that she should go. Grandmother and Aunt Matilda were deeply religious, but not according to any popular plan. They had their own private path to Heaven, and had done their best to set Rosemary's feet firmly upon it, but with small success.

When she was a child, Rosemary had spent many long, desolate Sunday afternoons thinking how lonely it would be in Heaven with nobody there but God and the angels and the Starr family. Even the family, it seemed, was not to be admitted as an entity, but separately, according to individual merit. Grandmother and Aunt Matilda had many a wordy battle as to who would be there and who wouldn't, but both were sadly agreed that Frank must stay outside.

Rewards and Punishments

Rosemary was deeply hurt when she discovered that Grandmother did not expect to meet her son there, and as for her son's wife – the old lady had dismissed the hapless bride to the Abode of the Lost with a single comprehensive snort. Alternately, Rosemary had been rewarded for good behaviour by the promise of Heaven and punished for small misdemeanours by having the gates closed in her face. As she grew older and began to think for herself, she wondered how Grandmother and Aunt Matilda had obtained their celestial appointment as gate-keepers, and reflected that it might possibly be very pleasant outside, with the father and mother whom she had never seen.

So, of late years, religion had not disturbed Rosemary much. She paid no attention to the pointed allusions to "heathen" and "infidels" that assailed her ears from time to time, and ceased to feel her young flesh creep when the Place of Torment was described with all the power of two separate and vivid imaginations. Disobedience troubled her no longer unless she was found out, and, gradually, she developed a complicated system of deception.

When she was discovered reading a novel, she had accepted the inevitable punishment with outward submission. Naturally, it was not easy to tear out the leaves one by one, especially from a borrowed book, and put them into the fire, saying, each time she

put one in: "I will never read another novel as long as I live," but she had compelled herself to do it gracefully. Only her flaming cheeks had betrayed her real feeling.

Forbidden Reading

A week later, when she was locked in her room for the entire day, on account of some slight offence, she had wept so much over the sorrows of Jane Eyre that even Aunt Matilda was affected when she brought up the bread and milk for the captive's supper. Rosemary had hidden the book under the mattress at the first sound of approaching footsteps, but Aunt Matilda, by describing the tears of penitence to the stern authority below, obtained permission for Rosemary to come down-stairs, eat her bread and milk at the table, and, afterward, to wash the dishes.

She continued to borrow books from the school library, however, and later from Alden Marsh. When he learned that she dared not read at night, for fear of burning too much oil, he began to supply her with candles. Thus the world of books was opened to her, and many a midnight had found her, absorbed and breathless, straining her eyes over the last page. More than once she had read all night and fallen asleep afterward at the breakfast table.

Occasional Meetings

Once, long ago, Alden had called upon her, but the evening was made so unpleasant, both for him and his unhappy hostess, that he never came again. Rosemary used to go to the schoolhouse occasionally, to sit and talk for an hour or so after school, but some keen-eyed busy-body had told Grandmother and the innocent joy had come to an abrupt conclusion. Rosemary kept her promise not to go to the schoolhouse simply because she dared not break it.

The windows of the little brown house, where the Starrs lived, commanded an unobstructed view of the Marshs' big Colonial porch, in Winter, when the trees between were bare, so it was impossible for the girl to go there, openly, as Mrs. Marsh had never returned Aunt Matilda's last call.

Sometimes Alden wrote to her, but she was unable to answer, for stationery and stamps were unfamiliar possessions; Grandmother held the purse-strings tightly, and every penny had to be accounted for. On Thursday, Rosemary always went to the post-office, as *The Household Guardian* was due then, so it happened that occasionally she received a letter, or a book which she could not return until Spring.

At length, the Hill of the Muses became the one possible rendezvous, though, at the chosen hour of four, Rosemary was usually too weary to attempt the long climb. Moreover, she must

be back by six to get supper, so one little hour was all she might ever hope for, at a time.

Far Above Her

Yet these hours had become a rosary of memories to her, jewelled upon the chain of her uneventful days. Alden's unfailing friendliness and sympathy warmed her heart, though she had never thought of him as a possible lover. In her eyes, he was as far above her as the fairy prince had been above Cinderella. It was only kindness that made him stoop at all.

When the school bell, sounding for dismissal, echoed through the valley below, Rosemary hung her scarlet signal to the outstanding bough of the lowest birch, and went back to the crest of the hill to wait for him. She had with her the little red book that he had given her long ago, and which she had not had opportunity to return.

She turned the pages regretfully, though she knew the poems almost by heart. Days, while she washed dishes and scrubbed, the exquisite melody of the words haunted her, like some far-off strain of music. For the first time she had discovered the subtle harmonies of which the language is capable, entirely apart from sense.

Living lines stood out upon the printed page, glowing with a rapture all their own.

Thrilling Lines

"Now, shadowed by his wings, our faces yearn
Together,"

she read aloud, thrilled by the very sound.

"Tender as dawn's first hill-fire," … "What marshalled marvels on the skirts of May," … "Shadows and shoals that edge eternity." …

"Oh," she breathed, "if only I didn't have to give it back!"

"Lo! what am I to Love, the lord of all?
One murmuring shell he gathers from the sand, —
One little heart-flame sheltered in his hand."

"What, indeed?" thought Rosemary. What was she to Love, or what ever might she be?

"But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss
Creep, as the Spring now thrills through every spray,
Up your warm throat to your warm lips: for this" …

Rosemary put the book down, face to face at last with self-knowledge. She would have torn down the flaming signal, but

it was too late. If he were coming – and he never had failed to come – he would be there very soon.

Alden had closed his desk with a sigh as the last pair of restless little feet tumbled down the schoolhouse steps. Scraps of paper littered the floor and the room was musty and close in spite of two open windows. From where he sat, he could see the vineyard, with its perpetual demand upon him. Since his painful interview with his mother, he had shrunk, inwardly, from even the sight of the vineyard. It somehow seemed to have a malicious air about it. Mutely it challenged his manhood, menaced his soul.

Uneventful Days

He had accepted the inevitable but had not ceased to rebel. The coming years stretched out before him in a procession of grey, uneventful days. Breakfast, school, luncheon, school, long evenings spent in reading to his mother, and, from Spring to frost, the vineyard, with its multitudinous necessities.

He felt, keenly, that his mother did not quite understand him. In fact, nobody did, unless it was Rosemary, whom he had not seen for weeks. Brave little Rosemary, for whom life consisted wholly of deprivations! How seldom she complained and how often she had soothed his discontent!

It was three years ago that she had come shyly to the schoolhouse and asked if she might borrow a book. He had known her, of course, before that, but had scarcely exchanged

a dozen words with her. When he saw her, rarely, at church, Grandmother or Aunt Matilda was always with her, and the Starrs had had nothing to do with the Marshs for several years past, as Mrs. Marsh had been remiss in her social obligations.

A Growing Interest

At first, Rosemary had been purely negative to him, and he regarded her with kindly indifference. The girl's personality seemed as ashen as her hair, as colourless as her face. Her dull eyes seemed to see nothing, to care for nothing. Within the last few months he had begun to wonder whether her cold and impassive exterior might not be the shield with which she protected an abnormal sensitiveness. Now and then he had longed to awaken the woman who dwelt securely within the forbidding fortress – to strike from the flint some stray gleams of soul.

Of late he had begun to miss her, and, each afternoon, to look with a little more conscious eagerness for the scarlet thread on the hill-top signalling against the grey sky beyond. His interest in her welfare was becoming more surely personal, not merely human. During the Winter, though he had seen her only twice, he had thought about her a great deal, and had written to her several times without expecting an answer.

The iron bars of circumstance which bound her, had, though less narrowly, imprisoned him also. It seemed permanent for

them both, and, indeed, the way of escape was even more definitely closed for Rosemary than for him.

A New Rosemary

He sighed as he rose and brushed the chalk from his clothes. Through force of habit, he looked up to the crest of the Hill of the Muses as he locked the door. The red ribbon fluttered like an oriflamme against the blue-and-white of the April sky. His heart quickened its beat a little as he saw it, and his steps insensibly hastened as he began to climb the hill.

When he took her hand, with a word of friendly greeting, he noticed a change in her, though she had made a valiant effort to recover her composure. This was a new Rosemary, with eyes shining and the colour flaming in her cheeks and lips.

"Spring seems to have come to you, too," he said, seating himself on the log beside her. "How well you look!"

The deep crimson mounted to her temples, then as swiftly retreated. "Better take down the ribbon," she suggested, practically.

"I've been watching a long time for this," he resumed, as he folded it and restored it to its place in the hollow tree. "What have you been doing?"

"All the usual dreary things, to which a mountain of sewing has been added."

"Is that a new gown?"

She laughed, mirthlessly. "It's as new a gown as I'll ever have," she returned, trying to keep her voice even. "My wardrobe consists of an endless parade of brown alpaca and brown gingham garments, all made exactly alike."

Thwarted on All Sides

"Like a dozen stage soldiers, marching in and out, to create the illusion of a procession?"

"I suppose so. You know I've never seen a stage, much less a stage soldier."

Alden's heart softened with pity. He longed to take Rosemary to town and let her feast her eyes upon some gorgeous spectacle; to see her senses run riot, for once, with colour and light and sound.

"I feel sometimes," she was saying, "as though I had sold my soul for pretty things in some previous existence, and was paying the penalty for it now."

"You love pretty things, don't you?"

She turned brimming eyes toward him. "Love them?" she repeated, brokenly. "There aren't words enough to say how much!"

From a fresh point of view he saw her countless deprivations, binding her, thwarting her, oppressing her on all sides by continual denial. His own rebellion against circumstances seemed weak and unworthy.

"Whenever I think of you," he said, in a different tone, "I feel ashamed of myself. I have freedom, of a certain sort, and you've never had a chance to learn the meaning of the word. You're dominated, body and soul, by a couple of old women who haven't discovered, as yet, that the earth is round and not flat."

Freedom

"My soul isn't bound," returned Rosemary, softly, "but it would have been, if it hadn't been for you."

"I? Why, my dear girl, what have I done?"

"Everything. Think of all the books you've loaned me, all the candles you've given me – all the times you've climbed this steep hill just to talk to me for an hour and give me new strength to go on."

"It's only selfishness, Rosemary. I knew you were here and I like to talk to you. Don't forget that you've meant something to me, too. Why, you're the only woman I know, except my mother."

"Your mother is lovely," she returned. "I wish I could go to see her once in a while. I like to look at her. Even her voice is different someway."

"Yes, mother is 'different,'" he agreed, idly. "It's astonishing, sometimes, how 'different' she manages to be. We had it out the other day, about the vineyard, and I'm to stay here – all the rest of my life," he concluded bitterly.

"I don't see why, if you don't want to," she answered, half-fearfully. "You're a man, and men can do as they please."

"It probably seems so to you, but I assure you it's very far from the truth. I wonder, now and then, if any of us ever really do as we please. Freedom is the great gift."

Choosing

"And the great loneliness," she added, after a pause.

"You may be right," he sighed. "Still, I'd like to try it for a while. It's the one thing I'd choose. What would you take, if you could have anything you wanted?"

"Do you mean for just a little while, or for always?"

"For always. The one great gift you'd choose from all that Life has to give."

"I'd take love," she said, in a low tone. She was not looking at him now, but far across the valley where the vineyard lay. Her face was wistful in the half-light; the corners of her mouth quivered, ever so little.

Alden looked at her, then rubbed his eyes and looked at her again. In some subtle way she had changed, or he had, since they last met. Never before had he thought of her as a woman; she had been merely another individual to whom he liked to talk. To-day her womanhood carried its own appeal. She was not beautiful and no one would ever think her so, but she was sweet and wholesome and had a new, indefinable freshness about her that, in another

woman, would have been called charm.

It came to him, all at once, that, in some mysterious way, he and Rosemary belonged together. They had been born to the same lot, and must spend all their days in the valley, hedged in by the same narrow restrictions. Even an occasional hour on the Hill of the Muses was forbidden to her, and constant scheming was the price she was obliged to pay for it.

The Book

The restraint chafed and fretted him, for her as much as for himself. It was absurd that a girl of twenty-five and a man of thirty should not have some little independence of thought and action. The silence persisted and finally became awkward.

"It's the book," said Rosemary, with a forced laugh. She was endeavouring to brush her mood away as though it were an annoying cobweb. "I've grown foolish over the book."

"I'm glad you liked it," he returned, taking it from her. "I was sure you would. What part of it did you like best?"

"All of it. I can't choose, though of course some of it seems more beautiful than the rest."

"I suppose you know it by heart, now, don't you?"

"Almost."

"Listen. Isn't this like to-day?"

"Spring's foot half falters; scarce she yet may know

The leafless blackthorn-blossom from the snow;
And through her bowers the wind's way still is clear."

Rosemary got to her feet unsteadily. She went to the brow of the hill, on the side farthest from the vineyard, and stood facing the sunset. Scarcely knowing that she had moved, Alden read on:

"But April's sun strikes down the glades to-day;
So shut your eyes upturned, and feel my kiss – "

Alden Speaks

A smothered sob made him look up quickly. She stood with her back to him, but her shoulders were shaking. He dropped the book and went to her.

A strange, new tenderness possessed him. "Rosemary," he whispered, slipping his arm around her. "What is it – dear?"

"Nothing," she sobbed, trying to release herself. "I'm – I'm tired – and foolish – that's all. Please let me go!"

Something within him stirred in answer to the girl's infinite hunger, to the unspoken appeal that vibrated through her voice. "No," he said, with quiet mastery, "I won't let you go. I want to take care of you, Rosemary. Leave all that misery and come to me, won't you?"

Her eyes met his for an instant, then turned away. "I don't quite

– understand," she said, with difficulty.

"I'm asking you to marry me – to come to mother and me. We'll make the best of it together."

Her eyes met his clearly now, but her face was pale and cold. She was openly incredulous and frightened.

Her Birthright

"I mean it, dear. Don't be afraid. Oh, Rosemary, can't you trust me?"

"Trust you? Yes, a thousand times, yes!"

He drew her closer. "And love me – a little?"

"Love you?" The last light shone upon her face and the colour surged back in waves. She seemed exalted, transfigured, as by a radiance that shone from within.

He put his hand under her chin and lifted her face to his. "Kiss me, won't you, dear?"

And so, Rosemary came to her woman's birthright, in the shelter of a man's arms.

V
The House of the Broken Heart

Climbing in the Dark

The road was steep and very dark, but some unseen Power compelled her to climb. Dimly, through the shadow, she saw shafts of broken marbles and heard the sound of slow-falling waters. The desolation oppressed her, and, as she climbed, she pressed her hands tightly to her heart.

She was alone in an empty world. All traces of human occupation had long since vanished. Brambles and thorns grew thickly about her, and her brown gingham dress was torn to shreds. Rosemary shuddered in her dream, for Grandmother and Aunt Matilda would be displeased.

And yet, where were they? She had not seen them since she entered the darkness below. At first she had been unable to see anything, for the darkness was not merely absence of light but had a positive, palpable quality, it enshrouded her as by heavy folds of black velvet that suffocated her, but, as she climbed, the air became lighter and the darkness less.

She longed to stop for a few moments and rest, but the pitiless Power continually urged her on. Bats fluttered past her and ghostly wings brushed her face, but, strangely, she had no fear. As her eyes became accustomed to the all-encompassing night, she saw into it for a little distance on either side, but never ahead.

On the left was a vast, empty garden, neglected and dead. The hedge that surrounded it was only a tangled mass of undergrowth, and the paths were buried and choked by weeds. The desolate house beyond it loomed up whitely in the shadow. It was damp and cold in the garden, but she went in, mutely obeying the blind force that impelled her to go.

She struggled up the path that led to the house, falling once into a mass of thistles that pricked and stung. The broken marbles, as she saw now, were statues that had been placed about the garden and had fallen into decay. The slow-falling water was a fountain that still murmured, choked though it was by the dense undergrowth.

One of the steps that led to the house had fallen inward, so she put her knee on the one above that and climbed up. She tested each step of the long flight carefully before she trusted herself to it. When she reached the broad porch, her footsteps echoed strangely upon the floor. Each slight sound was caught up and repeated until it sounded like the tread of a marching army,

vanishing into the distance.

The Desolate House

The heavy door creaked on its hinges when she opened it. That sound, too, echoed and re-echoed in rhythmic pulsations that beat painfully upon her ears, but, after she was once inside, all the clamour ceased.

She could see clearly now, though it was still dark. A long, wide stairway wound up from the hall, and there were two great rooms upon either side. She turned into the wide doorway at the right.

Windows, grey with cobwebs, stretched from floor to ceiling, but very little light came through them. The wall paper, of indistinguishable pattern, was partially torn from the walls and the hanging portions swayed in the same current of air that waved the cobwebs. There was no furniture of any description in the room, except the heavy, gilt-framed mirror over the mantel. It was cracked and much of the gilt frame had fallen away. She went into the next room, then into the one beyond that, which seemed to stretch across the back of the house, and so through the door at the left of the room into the two on the other side of the house, at the left of the hall.

In the centre of the largest room was a small table, upon which rested a small object covered with a dome-shaped glass shade, precisely like that which covered the basket of wax flowers in

Grandmother's parlour. Rosemary went to it with keen interest and leaned over the table to peer in.

The Broken Heart

At first she could see nothing, for the glass was cloudy. She noted, with a pang of disgust, that the table-cover was made of brown alpaca, fringed all around by the fabric itself, cut unskilfully into shreds with the scissors. As she looked, the glass slowly cleared.

The small object was heart-shaped and made of wax in some dull colour half-way between red and brown. At length she saw that it was broken and the pieces had been laid together, carefully. Unless she had looked very closely she would not have seen that it was broken.

Suddenly she felt a Presence in the room, and looked up quickly, with terror clutching at her inmost soul. A tall, grey figure, mysteriously shrouded, stood motionless beside her. Only the eyes were unveiled and visible amid the misty folds of the fabric.

The eyes held her strangely. They were deep and dark and burning with secret fires. Hunger and longing were in their depths, and yet there was a certain exaltation, as of hope persisting against the knowledge of defeat.

Rosemary's terror gradually vanished. She felt an all-pervading calmness, a sense of acceptance, of fulfilment.

Not of One's Own Choice

For a long time she stood there, transfixed by the eyes that never for an instant wavered from hers. They searched her inmost soul; they saw all things past and to come. They questioned her, challenged her, urged something upon her, and yet she was not afraid.

At last, with dry lips, she spoke. "Who are you?" She did not recognise the sound of her own voice.

"The Lord of Life," the figure answered, in low, deep tones that vibrated through the empty rooms like the swept strings of a harp.

"And this is – ?"

"The House of the Broken Heart. I live here."

"Why?" she asked.

"Not of my own choice. Why have you come?"

"Not of my own choice," she repeated, dully. "I came because I had to."

"They all do. That is why I myself am here."

"Do – do many come?"

"Yes."

Rosemary looked back over her shoulder, then lifted her eyes to those of the grey figure. "Then it is strange," she said, "that I am here alone."

"You are not alone. These rooms are full, but no one sees

another in the House of the Broken Heart. Each one is absorbed in his own grief to the exclusion of all else. Only I may see them, with bowed heads, pacing to and fro.

Selfish Grief

"On the stairway," he went on, "is a young mother who has lost her child. She goes up and down endlessly, thinking first she hears it crying for her in the room above, and then in the room below. Her husband sits at the foot of the stairs with his face hidden in his hands, but she has no thought for him. He has lost wife and child too."

"Poor man!" said Rosemary, softly. "Poor woman!"

"Yonder is a grey-haired woman, reaping the bitterness that she has sown. There are a husband and wife who have always been jealous of one another, and will be, until the end of time. There is a girl who has trusted and been betrayed, but she will go out again when her courage comes back. Just behind you is a woman who has estranged her husband from his family and has found his heart closed to her in the hour of her greatest need. Coming toward you is a man who was cruel to his wife, and never knew it until after she was dead."

"But," Rosemary asked, "is there no punishment?"

"None whatever, except this. The consciousness of a sin is its own punishment."

Some One Gift

She stood there perplexed, leaning against the table. "Have all who are here, then, sinned?"

"No, some have been sinned against, and a few, like yourself, have come in by mistake."

"Then I may go?"

The Lord of Life bent his head graciously. "Whenever you choose. You have only to take your gift and depart."

"Is there a gift here for me? Nobody ever gave me anything."

"Some one gift is yours for the asking, and, because you have not sinned, you have the right to choose. What shall it be?"

"Love," returned Rosemary, very wistfully. "Oh, give me love!"

The Lord of Life sighed. "So many ask for that," he said. "They all confuse the end with the means. What they really want is joy, but they ask for love."

"Is there a greater joy than love?"

"No, but love in itself is not joy. It is always service and it may be sacrifice. It means giving, not receiving; asking, not answer."

"None the less," said Rosemary, stubbornly, "I will take love."

"They all do," he returned. "Wait."

He vanished so quickly that she could not tell which way he had gone. As she leaned against the table, the brown alpaca cover slipped back on the marble table and the glass case tottered. She

caught it hurriedly and saved it from falling, but the waxen pieces of the heart quivered underneath.

The Symbol of Hope

The grey figure was coming back, muffled to the eyes as before, but his footsteps made no sound. He moved slowly, yet with a certain authority. He laid a letter on the table and Rosemary snatched it up eagerly. It was addressed to Mrs. Virginia Marsh.

"That is not for me," she said, much disappointed. "My name is Rosemary Starr."

"It must have something to do with you," he returned, unmoved. "However, I will keep it until the owner comes."

"She doesn't belong here," Rosemary answered, somewhat resentfully. "She's the dearest, sweetest woman in the world. She's Alden's mother."

"The one who wrote it may be here, or coming," he explained, patiently. "Sometimes it happens that way. There are many letters in this place."

As he spoke, he placed a green wreath upon Rosemary's head and gave her a white lily, on a long stem. "Go," he said, kindly.

"But my gift?"

"Go and find it. Carry your symbol of Hope and wear your wreath of rue. You will come to it."

"But where? How shall I go from here? I'm afraid I shall lose

my way."

On the Upward Trail

The stern eyes fixed themselves upon her steadily. "Do not question Life too much," he warned her. "Accept it. Have I not told you to go?"

Her fear suddenly returned. She went backward, slowly, toward the door, away from the table and the tall grey figure that stood by it, holding the letter addressed to Mrs. Virginia Marsh. When she was outside, she drew a long breath of relief. It was daybreak, and grey lights on the far horizon foreshadowed the sunrise.

She ran down the steps, stumbling as she passed the broken one, and went hurriedly down the weed-choked path. The broken marble statues were green with mould and the falling waters seemed to move with difficulty, like the breath of one about to die. The stillness of the place was vast and far-reaching; it encompassed her as the night had previously done.

She soon found the trail that led upward, though she did not recognise the point at which she had turned into the garden. She had no doubt, now, about the path she must take. It led up, up, through thorns and brambles, past the crags upon which the first light shone, and around the crest of the peak to – what? Drawing a long breath, Rosemary started, carrying her lily and wearing her wreath of rue.

The Coming Dawn

The brown gingham hung in tatters and her worn shoes threatened to drop from her feet, but the divine fragrance of the lily she bore sustained her as she climbed. She was glad she had chosen as she had, though his words still puzzled her. "It is always service," she repeated, "and it may be sacrifice. It means giving, not receiving; asking, not answer."

"And yet," she mused, "he said they all asked for it. I should have taken the letter," she continued, to herself. "Alden could have given it to his mother."

It seemed strange to be thinking of him as "Alden" instead of "Mr. Marsh," and yet it was supremely sweet. She felt the colour burning in her cheeks, for she knew, now, that he awaited her, somewhere on the height. Had he not chosen Love too? Were they not to find it together?

Dull, prismatic fires glowed upon the distant clouds – dawn-jewels laid upon the breast of Night. Violet and blue mellowed into opal and turquoise, then, as the spectrum may merge into white light, a shaft of sunrise broke from the mysterious East, sending a javelin of glory half-way across the world.

The first light lay upon the crags, then deepened and spread, penetrating the darkness below, which was no longer black, but dusky purple. Rosemary's heart sang as she climbed, and the fragrance of the lily thrilled her soul with pure delight. The path

was smooth, now, and thorns no longer hurt her feet. The hand that held the lily, however, was bleeding, from some sharp thorn or projection of rock.

The Blood-Stained Lily

She wiped her hand upon her torn dress, and, as she did so, a drop of blood stained the lily. She tried to get it off, but all her efforts were fruitless. The crimson spread and darkened until half of the white petals were dyed. She noted, with a queer lump in her throat, that the lily was the same colour as the waxen heart that lay under the glass case in the house she had so recently left.

But she still held it tightly, though it was stained and no longer fragrant. Up somewhere in the sunrise Alden was waiting for her, and she climbed breathlessly. She was exhausted when she reached the summit, and the wreath of rue pressed heavily upon her temples.

She paused for a moment, realising that she had reached the end of her journey. Rainbow mists surrounded the height, but, as she looked, they lifted. She was not surprised to see Alden standing there. He had been hidden by the mists.

With a little laugh of joy, Rosemary tried to run toward him, but her feet refused to move. Then she called: "Alden!" and again, in a troubled tone: "Mr. Marsh!"

Calling in Vain

But only the echo of her own voice came back to her, for Alden did not move. Strong and finely-moulded, his youth surrounded him like some radiant garment of immortality. Every line of his figure was eloquent of his lusty manhood, and his face glowed not only from the sunrise, but from some inner light.

"Service, sacrifice. Giving, not receiving; asking, not answer." The words reverberated through her consciousness like a funeral knell. She dropped the stained lily and called again, weakly: "Alden!"

But, as before, he did not answer. His eyes were fixed upon a distant point where the coloured mists were slowly lifting. Rosemary, cold and still, could only stand there and watch, for her feet refused to stir.

Hungrily, she gazed upon him, but he did not see, for he was watching the drifting rainbow beyond. Then a cry of rapture broke from him and he started eagerly toward the insurmountable crags that divided him from the Vision.

Rosemary saw it, too, at the same instant – a woman whose white gown shimmered and shone, and whose face was hidden by the blinding glory of her sunlit hair.

She woke, murmuring his name, then rubbed her eyes. It took her several minutes to realise that it was all a dream. She was in her own little room in the brown house, and the sun was peeping

through the shutters. The holes in the rag carpet, the cheap, cracked mirror, the braided mat in front of her washstand, and the broken pitcher all contrived to reassure her.

The Fair Future

She sat up in bed, knowing that it was time to get up, but desperately needing a few moments in which to adjust herself to her realities. What had happened? Nothing, indeed, since yesterday – ah, that dear yesterday, when life had begun! What could ever happen now, when all the future lay fair before her and the miseries of her twenty-five years were overwhelmed by one deep intoxicating joy?

"Dreams," thought Rosemary, laughing to herself. "Ah, what are dreams!"

She opened the shutters wide and the daylight streamed in. It was not fraught with colour, like the mists of her dream, but was the clear, sane light of every day. A robin outside her window chirped cheerily, and a bluebird flashed across the distant meadow, then paused on the rushes at the bend of the river and swayed there for a moment, like some unfamiliar flower.

"Rosemary!" The shrill voice sounded just outside her door.

"Yes, Aunt Matilda," she answered, happily; "I'm coming!"

She sang to herself as she moved about her room, loving the dear, common things of every day – the splash of cool water on her face and throat, the patchwork quilt, and even the despised

brown gingham, which was, at least, fresh and clean.

Service and Sacrifice

"Service," she said to herself, "and sacrifice. Giving, not receiving; asking, and not answer. I wonder if it's true!" For an instant she was afraid, then her soul rallied as to a bugle call. "Even so," she thought, "I'll take it, and gladly. I'll serve and sacrifice and give, and never mind the answer."

She hurried down-stairs, where the others were waiting. "You're late, Rosemary," said Grandmother, sourly.

"Yes, I know," laughed the girl, stooping to kiss the withered cheek. "I'm sorry! I won't let it happen again!"

Out in the kitchen, she sang as she worked, and the clatter of pots and pans kept up a merry accompaniment. She had set the table the night before, as usual, so it was not long before she had breakfast ready. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were shining when she came in with the oatmeal.

"This is for you, Aunt Matilda – it isn't cooked quite so much. This is for you, Grandmother. It's nice and soft, for I soaked it over night. I'll have the eggs ready in just a minute."

When she went out, the other two exchanged glances. "What," asked Grandmother, "do you reckon has got into Rosemary?"

What Has Happened?

"I don't know," returned Aunt Matilda, gloomily. "Do you suppose it's religion?"

"I ain't never seen religion affect anybody like that, have you?'

"No, I ain't," Aunt Matilda admitted, after a moment's pondering.

"She reminds me of her ma," said Grandmother, reminiscently, "the day Frank brought her home."

VI
More Stately Mansions

A New Point of View

The new joy surged in every heart-beat as Rosemary went up the Hill of the Muses, late in the afternoon. Instinctively, she sought the place of fulfilment, yearning to be alone with the memory of yesterday.

Nothing was wrong in all the world; nothing ever could be wrong any more. She accepted the brown alpaca and the brown gingham as she did the sordid tasks of every day. That morning, for the first time, it had been a pleasure to wash dishes and happiness to build a fire.

Grandmother and Aunt Matilda had been annoyances to her ever since she could remember. Their continual nagging had fretted her, their constant restraint had chafed her, their narrowness had cramped her. To-day she saw them from a new point of view.

Grandmother was no longer a malicious spirit of evil who took delight in thwarting her, but a poor, fretful old lady whose soul was bound in shallows. And Aunt Matilda? Rosemary's eyes filled at the thought of Aunt Matilda, unloved and unsought.

Nobody wanted her, she belonged to nobody, in all her lonely life she had had nothing. She sat and listened to Grandmother, she did the annual sewing, and day by day resented more keenly the emptiness of her life. It was the conscious lack that made them both cross. Rosemary saw it now, with the clear vision that had come to her during the past twenty-four hours.

The Joy of Living

She wanted to be very kind to Grandmother and Aunt Matilda. It was not a philanthropic resolution, but a spontaneous desire to share her own gladness, and to lead the others, if she might, from the chill darkness in which they dwelt to the clear air of the heights.

Oh, but it was good to be alive! The little birds that hopped from bough to bough chirped ecstatically, the nine silver-clad birches swayed and nodded in the cool wind, and the peaceful river in the valley below sparkled and dimpled at the caress of the sun. The thousand sounds and fragrances of Spring thrilled her to eager answer; she, too, aspired and yearned upward as the wakened grass-blades pierced the sod and the violets of last year dreamed once more of bloom.

Yesterday she had emerged from darkness into light. She had been born again as surely as the tiny dweller of the sea casts off his shell. The outworn habitation of the past was forever left behind her, to be swept back, by the tides of the new life, into

some forgotten cave.

> "Build thee more stately mansions, oh my soul,
> As the swift seasons roll."

The Same, Yet Different

The words said themselves aloud. She had learned the whole poem long ago, but, to-day, the beautiful lines assumed a fresh significance, for had she not, by a single step, passed from the cell of self into comradeship with the whole world? Was she not a part of everything and had not everything become a part of her? What could go wrong when the finite was once merged with the infinite, the individual with the universal soul?

She sat down on the log that Alden had rolled back against the two trees, three years ago, when they had first begun to come to the Hill of the Muses for an occasional hour of friendly talk. Everything was the same, and yet subtly different, as though seen from another aspect or in another light. Over yonder, on the hillside farthest from the valley, he had put his arm around her and refused to let her go.

She remembered vividly every word and every look and that first shy kiss. Of course they belonged together! How foolish they had been not to see it before! Was she not the only woman he knew, and was he not the only man to whom she could say more

than "How do you do?" God had meant it so from the beginning, ever since He said: "Let there be light, and there was light."

An Unwonted Shyness

Dreaming happily, Rosemary sat on the fallen tree, leaning against the great oak that towered above her. The first pink leaves had come out upon the brown branches, and through them she could see the blue sky, deep as turquoise, without a single cloud. It seemed that she had always been happy, but had never known it until this new light shone upon her, flooding with divine radiance every darkened recess of her soul.

She went to the hollow tree, took out the wooden box, and unwound the scarlet ribbon. Yesterday, little dreaming of the portent that for once accompanied the signal, she had tied it in its accustomed place, and gone back, calmly to wait. The school bell echoed through the valley as she stood there, her eyes laughing, but her mouth very grave. She had taken two or three steps toward the birches when an unwonted shyness possessed her, and she hurried back.

"I can't," she said to herself. "Oh, I can't – to-day!"

So she restored it to its place, wondering, as she did so, why love should make such mysterious changes in the common things of every day. Won and awakened though she was, her womanhood imperatively demanded now that she must be sought and never seek, that she must not even beckon him to her, and

that she must wait, according to her destiny, as women have waited since the world began.

Waiting

Yet it was part of the beautiful magic of the day that presently he should come to her, unsummoned save by her longing and his own desire.

"Where is the ribbon?" he inquired, reproachfully, when he came within speaking distance.

"Where it belongs," she answered, with a flush.

"Didn't you want me to come?"

"Of course."

"Then why didn't you hang it up?"

"Just because I wanted you to come."

Alden laughed at her feminine inconsistency, as he took her face between his hands and kissed her, half-shyly still. "Did you sleep last night?" he asked.

"Yes, but I had a horrible dream. I was glad to wake up this morning."

"I didn't sleep, so all my dreams were wakeful ones. You're not sorry, are you, Rosemary?"

"No, indeed! How could I ever be sorry?"

"You never shall be, if I can help it. I want to be good to you, dear. If I'm ever otherwise, you'll tell me so, won't you?"

"Perhaps – I won't promise."

"Why not?"

"Because, even if you weren't good to me, I'd know you never meant it." Rosemary's eyes were grave and sweet; eloquent, as they were, of her perfect trust in him.

He laughed again. "I'd be a brute not to be good to you, whether I meant it or not."

"That sounds twisted," she commented, with a smile.

"But it isn't, as long as you know what I mean."

"I'll always know," sighed Rosemary, blissfully leaning her head against his shoulder. "I'll always understand and I'll never fail you. That's because I love you better than everything else in the world."

"Dear little saint," he murmured; "you're too good for me."

"No, I'm not. On the contrary, I'm not half good enough." Then, after a pause, she asked the old, old question, first always from the lips of the woman beloved: "When did you begin to – care?"

"I must have cared when we first began to come here, only I was so blind I didn't know it."

"When did you – know?"

"Yesterday. I didn't keep it to myself very long."

When Shall It Be?

"Dear yesterday!" she breathed, half regretfully.

"Do you want it back?"

She turned reproachful eyes upon him. "Why should I want yesterday when I have to-day?"

"And to-morrow," he supplemented, "and all the to-morrows to come."

"Together," she said, with a swift realisation of the sweetness underlying the word. "Yesterday was perfect, like a jewel that we can put away and keep. When we want to, we can always go back and look at it."

"No, dear," he returned, soberly; "no one can ever go back to yesterday." Then, with a swift change of mood, he asked: "When shall we be married?"

"Whenever you like," she whispered, her eyes downcast and her colour receding.

"In the Fall, then, when the grapes have been gathered and just before school begins?"

He could scarcely hear her murmured: "Yes."

"I want to take you to town and let you see things. Theatres, concerts, operas, parks, shops, art galleries, everything. If the crop is in early, we should be able to have two weeks. Do you think you could crowd all the lost opportunities of a lifetime into two weeks?"

"Into a day, with you."

He drew her closer. This sort of thing was very sweet to him, and the girl's dull personality had bloomed like some pale, delicate flower. He saw unfathomed depths in her grey eyes, shining now, with the indescribable light that comes from within. She had been negative and colourless, but now she was a lovely mystery – a half-blown windflower on some brown, bare hillside, where Life, in all its fulness, was yet to come.

What Will They Say?

"Did you tell your Grandmother and Aunt Matilda?"

"No. How could I?"

"You'd better not. They'd only make it hard for you, and I wouldn't be allowed in the parlour anyway."

Rosemary had not thought of that. It was only that her beautiful secret was too sacred to put into words. "They'll have to know some time," she temporised.

"Yes, of course, but not until the last minute. The day we're to be married, you can just put on your hat and say: 'Grandmother, and Aunty, I'm going out now, to be married to Alden Marsh. I shan't be back, so good-bye."

She laughed, but none the less the idea filled her with consternation. "What will they say!" she exclaimed.

"It doesn't matter what they say, as long as you're not there to hear it."

"Clothes," she said, half to herself. "I can't be married in brown alpaca, can I?"

The Difference

"I don't know why not. We'll take the fatal step as early as possible in the morning, catch the first train to town, you can shop all the afternoon to your heart's content, and be dressed like a fine lady in time for dinner in the evening."

"Grandmother was married in brown alpaca," she continued, irrelevantly, "and Aunt Matilda wore it the night the minister came to call."

"Did he never come again?"

"No. Do you think it could have been the alpaca?"

"I'm sure it wasn't. Aunt Matilda was foreordained to be an old maid."

"She won't allow anyone to speak of her as an old maid. She says she's a spinster."

"What's the difference?"

"I think," returned Rosemary, pensively, "that an old maid is a woman who never could have married and a spinster is merely one who hasn't."

"Is it a question of opportunity?"

"I believe so."

"Then you're wrong, because some of the worst old maids I've ever known have been married women. I've seen men, too, who

deserve the title."

"Poor Aunt Matilda," Rosemary sighed; "I'm sorry for her."

"Why?"

Alden's Mother

"Because she hasn't anyone to love her – because she hasn't you. I'm sorry for every other woman in the world," she concluded, generously, "because I have you all to myself."

"Sweet," he answered, possessing himself of her hand, "don't forget that you must divide me with mother."

"I won't. Will she care, do you think, because – " Her voice trailed off into an indistinct murmur.

"Of course not. She's glad. I told her this morning."

"Oh!" cried Rosemary, suddenly tremulous and afraid. "What did she say?"

"She was surprised at first." Alden carefully refrained from saying how much his mother had been surprised and how long it had been before she found herself equal to the occasion.

"Yes – and then?"

"Then she said she was glad; that she wanted me to be happy. She told me that she had always liked you and that the house wouldn't be so lonely after you came to live with us. Then she asked me to bring you to see her, as soon as you were ready to come."

The full tide overflowed in the girl's heart. She yearned toward

Mrs. Marsh with worship, adoration, love. The mother-hunger made her faint with longing for a woman's arms around her, for a woman's tears of joy to mingle with her own.

Madame's Welcome

"Take me to her," Rosemary pleaded. "Take me now!"

Madame saw them coming and went to the door to meet them. Rosemary was not at all what she had fancied in the way of a daughter-in-law, but, wisely, she determined to make the best of Alden's choice. Something in her stirred in answer to the infinite appeal in the girl's eyes. At the crowning moment of her life, Rosemary stood alone, fatherless, motherless, friendless, with only brown alpaca to take the place of all the pretty things that seem girlhood's right.

Madame smiled, then opened her arms. Without a word, Rosemary went to her, laid her head upon the sweet, silken softness of the old lady's shoulder, and began to cry softly.

"Daughter," whispered Madame, holding her close. "My dear daughter! Please don't!"

Rosemary laughed through her tears, then wiped her eyes. "It's only an April rain," she said. "I'm crying because I'm so happy."

"I wish," responded Madame, gently, with a glance at her son, "that I might be sure all the tears either of you are ever to shed would be tears of joy. It's the bitterness that hurts."

Tears

"Don't be pessimistic, Mother," said Alden, with a little break in his voice. Rosemary's tears woke all his tenderness. He longed to shield and shelter her; to stand, if he might, between her and the thousand pricks and stabs of the world.

"We'll have tea," Madame went on, brightly, ringing a silver bell as she spoke. "Then we shan't be quite so serious."

"Woman's inevitable solace," Alden observed, lounging about the room with his hands in his pockets. Man-like, he welcomed the change of mood.

"I wonder," he continued, with forced cheerfulness, "why people always cry at weddings and engagements and such things? A husband or wife is the only relative we are permitted to choose – we even have very little to say when it comes to a mother-in-law. With parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins all provided by a generous but sometimes indiscriminating Fate, it seems hard that one's only choice should be made unpleasant by salt water.

"Why," he went on, warming to his subject, "I remember how a certain woman angled industriously for months to capture an unsuspecting young man for her daughter. When she finally landed him, and the ceremony came off to the usual accompaniment of Mendelssohn and a crowded church, I feared that the bridal couple might have to come down the aisle from

the altar in a canoe, on account of the maternal tears."

A Contrast

"Perhaps," suggested Rosemary, timidly, "she was only crying because she was happy."

"If she was as happy as all those tears would indicate, it's a blessed wonder she didn't burst."

Madame smiled fondly at her son as she busied herself with the tea things. Rosemary watched the white, plump hands that moved so gracefully among the cups, and her heart contracted with a swift little pang of envy, of which she was immediately ashamed. Unconsciously, she glanced at her own rough, red hands. Madame saw the look, and understood.

"We'll soon fix them, my dear," she said, kindly. "I'll show you how to take care of them."

"Really?" cried Rosemary, gratefully. "Oh, thank you! Do you suppose that – that they'll ever look like yours?"

"Wait and see," Madame temporised. She was fond of saying that it took three generations of breeding to produce the hand of a lady.

The kettle began to sing and the cover danced cheerily. Tiny clouds of steam trailed off into space, disappearing in the late afternoon sunshine like a wraith at dawn. Madame filled the blue china tea-pot and the subtle fragrance permeated the room.

A Cup of Tea

"Think," she said, as she waited the allotted five minutes for it to steep, "of all I give you in a cup of tea. See the spicy, sunlit fields, where men, women, and children, in little jackets of faded blue, pick it while their queues bob back and forth. Think of all the chatter that goes in with the picking – marriage and birth and death and talk of houses and worldly possessions, and everything else that we speak of here.

"Then the long, sweet drying, and the packing in dim storehouses, and then the long journey. Sand and heat and purple dusk, tinkle of bells and scent of myrrh, the rustle of silks and the gleam of gold. Then the open sea, with infinite spaces of shining blue, and a wake of pearl and silver following the ship. Dreams and moonbeams and starry twilights, from the other side of the world – here, my dear, I give them all to you."

She offered Rosemary the cup as she concluded and the girl smiled back at her happily. This was all so different from the battered metal tea-pot that always stood on the back of the stove at Grandmother's, to be boiled and re-boiled until the colour was gone from the leaves. Alden was looking into his cup with assumed anxiety.

"What's the matter, dear?" asked his mother. "Isn't it right?"

"I was looking for the poem," he laughed, "and I see nothing but a stranger."

"Coming?" she asked, idly.

"Of course. See?"

"You're right – a stranger and trouble. What is there in your cup, Rosemary?"

"Nothing at all," she answered, with a smile, "but a little bit of sugar – just a few grains."

Alden came and looked over her shoulder. Then, with his arm over the back of her chair, he pressed his cheek to hers. "I hope, my dear, that whenever you come to the dregs, you'll always have that much sweetness left."

Rosemary, flushed and embarrassed, made her adieus awkwardly. "Come again very soon, dear, won't you?" asked Madame.

"Yes, indeed, if I may, and thank you so much. Good-bye, Mrs. Marsh."

"'Mrs. Marsh?'" repeated the old lady, reproachfully. Some memory of her lost Virginia made her very tender toward the motherless girl.

"May I?" Rosemary faltered. "Do you mean it?"

Madame smiled and lifted her beautiful old face. Rosemary

stooped and kissed her. "Mother," she said, for the first time in her life. "Dear Mother! Good-bye!"

VII
A Letter and a Guest

An Unexpected Missive

"A letter for you, Mother," Alden tossed a violet-scented envelope into the old lady's lap as he spoke, and stood there, waiting.

"For me!" she exclaimed. Letters for either of them were infrequent. She took it up curiously, scrutinised the address, sniffed at the fragrance the missive carried, noted the postmark, which was that of the town near by, and studied the waxen purple seal, stamped with indistinguishable initials.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.