

Raymond Evelyn

Reels and Spindles: A Story of Mill Life



Evelyn Raymond

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PREFACE

It was love for others which made Amy Kaye make use of the first opportunity which offered, even though it was an humble one and she was handicapped by ignorance. But having once decided what course was right for her, she followed it with a singleness of purpose and a thoroughness of effort which brought a prompt success. The help she was to others was no small part of this success. For in an age of shams and low ideals the influence of even one sincere girl is far-reaching; and when to that sincerity she adds the sympathy which makes another's interests as vital to her as her own, this influence becomes incalculable for good.

It is the author's hope that the story of "Reels and Spindles" may aid some young readers to comprehend and make their own this beauty of simplicity and this charm of sympathy which are the outcome of unselfishness.

E. R.

Baltimore, April 3, 1900.

CHAPTER I.

A BYWAY OF THE ARDSLEY

The white burro had a will of her own. So, distinctly, had her mistress. As had often happened, these two wills conflicted.

For the pair had come to a point where three ways met. Pepita wanted to ascend the hill, by a path she knew, to stable and supper. Amy wished to follow a descending road, which she did not know, into the depths of the forest. Neither inclined toward the safe middle course, straight onward through the village, now picturesque in the coloring of a late September day.

"No, Pepita. You must obey me. If I'm not firm this time, you'll act worse the next. To the right, amiable beastie!"

Both firmness and sarcasm were wasted. The burro rigidly planted her forefeet in the dust and sorrowfully dropped her head.

Amy tugged at the bridle.

"Pepita! To – the – right! Go on. In your native Californian — *Vamos!*"

The "Californian" budged not, but posed, an image of dejection. The happiness of life had departed; the tale of her woe seemed pictured in every hair of her thickly coated body; she was a broken-hearted donkey.

Amy Kaye was neither broken-hearted nor broken-spirited, and she was wholly comfortable. Her saddle was soft and fitted well. The air was delightful. She pulled a book from her pocket and began to read. In five minutes she was so absorbed that she had forgotten Pepita's little mannerisms.

After a while the "Californian" moved her head just enough to gain a corner-wise glimpse of a calm and unresponsive face beneath a scarlet Tam; and evidently realizing that she had become a mere support to the maid who owned her, uttered her protest.

"Bra-a-ay! Ah-umph! Ah-umph – umph – mph – ph – h!"

Amy read on.

Pepita changed her tactics. She began to double herself together in a fashion disconcerting to most riders; whereupon Amy simply drew her own limbs up out of harm's way and waited for the burro's anatomy to settle itself in a heap on the ground.

"All right, honey."

Then she resumed her book, and the beast her meditations. Thus they remained until the rumble of an approaching wagon caused the now submissive animal to rise and move aside out of the road.

Again Amy tested the bridle, and found that she might now ride whither she pleased.

"Is it so, beloved? Well, then, that's right; and when you do right because I make you, it is one lump of sugar. Open your mouth. Here. But, Pepita, when you do right without compulsion, there are always two lumps. Into the forest – go!"

Pepita went. Suddenly, swiftly, and so recklessly that Amy nearly slid over her head.

"Very well! What suits you suits me. I'm as good a sticker-on as you are a shaker-off. Besides, a word in your ear. It would be quite the proper, story-book sort of thing for you to try and break my neck, as a punishment, since I'm almost running away."

Though she had always lived within a few miles of the spot the girl had never before visited it. That she did so now, without knowledge of anybody at home, gave her a sense of daring, almost of danger, as new as it was fascinating. True, she had not been forbidden, simply because nobody had thought of her wandering so far afield; yet the habit of her life had been such as to make anything out of the common seem strange, even wrong.

"However, since I'm here, I'll see what there is to see and tell them all about it afterward – that is, if they will care to hear," she ended her remark to the burro with a sigh, and for a bit forgot

her surroundings. Then she rallied, and with the spirit of an explorer, peered curiously into all the delightful nooks and corners which presented; not observing that the road grew steadily more steep and rough, nor that Pepita's feet slipped and stumbled, warningly, among the loose stones, which were so hidden by fallen leaves that Amy could not see them. Along the sides, seasoning at convenient intervals, were rows of felled timber, gay with a summer's growth of woodbine and clematis, now ripened to scarlet and silvery white.

Amy was an artist's daughter. At every turn her trained eye saw wonderful "bits" of pictures, and she exclaimed to Pepita: —

"If father were only here! See that great rock with its gray-green lichens and its trailing crimson tendrils! Just that on a tiny canvas, say six by eight or, even, eight by twelve, how it would brighten mother's room!"

The "Californian" kicked the leaves impatiently. She had no eye for "bits" of anything less material than sugar, and she had long since finished her one lump; she was tired of travelling in the wrong direction, with her head much lower than her heels, and she suddenly stopped.

It was quite time. Another step forward would have sent them tobogganing into a brawling stream. With a shiver of fear Amy realized this.

"O-oh! Oh! You knew best, after all! You wouldn't come till I made you; and now — how shall we get out! Hark! What's that?"

The burro had already pricked up her ears. There was a shout from somewhere.

Amy managed to slide off and fling herself flat against the slope. When she tried to climb back to a less dangerous spot the twigs she clutched broke in her hands and the rocks cut her flesh. The adventure which had been fascinating was fast becoming frightful.

"Hil-loa! Hil-l-loa!"

Clinging desperately to the undergrowth, she managed to move her head and look down. Far below in the ravine somebody was waving a white cloth.

"Hilloa, up there!"

She was too terrified to speak; yet, after the salute had reached her several times, she dared to loose one hand and wave a returning signal.

"You — just — hold on! I'll come — and get — you!"

As "holding on" was all that either Amy or Pepita could do just then, they obeyed, perforce; although, presently, the burro had scrambled to a narrow ledge, whence she could see the whole descent and from which, if left to herself, she would doubtless have found a way into the valley.

They clung and waited for so long that the girl grew confused; then tried to rally her own courage by addressing the "Californian."

"It's so — so absurd — I mean, awful! If that man doesn't come soon, I shall surely fall. My fingers ache so, and I'm slipping. I — am — slipping! Ah!"

Fortunately, her rescuer was near. He had worked his way upward on all fours, his bare feet clinging securely where shoe-soles would have been useless. He approached without noise, save of breaking twigs, until he was close beside them, when Pepita concluded it was time to bid him welcome.

"Br-r-r-ray! A-humph! A-humph — umph — mph — ph — h!"

The climber halted suddenly.

"Sho-o!"

Also startled, Amy lost her hold and shot downward straight into the arms of the stranger, who seized her, croaking in her ear: —

"Hilloa! What you up to? Can't you wait a minute?"

Then, with a strong grasp of her clothing, he wriggled himself sideways along the bank to a spot where the rock gave place to earth and shrubs.

"Now catch your breath and let her go!"

The girl might have screamed, but she had no time. Instantly, she was again sliding downward, with an ever-increasing momentum, toward apparent destruction, yet landing finally upon a safe and mossy place; past which, for a brief space, the otherwhere rough stream flowed placidly. She caught the hum of happy insects and the moist sweet odor of growing ferns, then heard another rush and tumble. But she was as yet too dazed to look up or realize fresh peril, before Pepita and the other stood beside her.

"Sho! That beats – huckleberries!"

Amy struggled to her feet. She had never heard a voice like that, which began a sentence with mighty volume and ended it in a whisper. She stared at the owner curiously, and with a fresh fear. "He looks as queer as his voice," she thought.

She was right. His physique was as grotesque as his attire; which consisted of a white oilskin blouse, gayly bordered with the national colors, trousers of the most aggressive blue, and a helmet-shaped hat, adorned by a miniature battle-axe, while a tiny broom was strapped upon his shoulders.

"Huh! pretty, ain't I? The boys gave 'em to me."

"Did – they?"

"Yes. You needn't be scared. I shan't hurt you. I'm a Rep-Dem-Prob."

"Ah, indeed?"

"Yes. I march with the whole kerboodle. I tell you, it's fun."

It was "Presidential year," and Amy began to understand, not only that the lad before her was a "natural," but, presumably, that he had been made the victim of village wit. She had heard of the "marching bands," and inferred that the strange dress of her rescuer was made up by fragments from rival political uniforms.

"Yes. I'm out every night. Hurrah for Clevey-Harris!"

"You must get very tired."

"No. It's fun. I drag the gun carriage. That's on account o' my strength. Look a' there for an arm!" And he thrust out his illy proportioned limb with a pitiable pride.

"I see. But now that you've helped me down the bank, will you as kindly show me the way home?"

"Never slid that way before, did you? Only thing, though. I'll show you all right if you'll let me ride your donkey. Funny, ain't she? Make her talk."

"I think she's very pretty; and you may ride her, certainly, if she will let you."

A puzzled and angry expression came over the youth's face as he looked toward the burro, who had already begun to make hay for herself out of the lush grasses bordering the Ardsley.

"Make her talk, I say."

"She'll do that only to please herself. She's rather self-willed, and besides –"

"Who do *you* march with?"

"March? *March!* I?"

"Yes."

"Why, nobody. Of course not. Why should you think it?"

The lad scrutinized her dress and gazed abstractedly upon the white "Californian." Just then, a "parade" was the dominant idea in the poor fellow's limited intelligence. Amy's simple white flannel frock, with its scarlet sash, and the scarlet cap upon her dark curls, suggested only another "uniform." The girls with whose appearance he was familiar were not so attired.

Neither did they ride upon white donkeys. Yet a donkey of venerable and unhappy appearance did nightly help to swell the ranks of the country's patriots, and the beast which he knew enjoyed a sort of honor: it drew an illuminated "float" wherein rode a greatly envied fifer.

"What makes you ask that?" again demanded Amy, now laughing; for she had just imagined what her mother's face would express, should her daughter become a part of a "parade."

"Oh! because."

Pepita now took share in the conversation. "Br-r-rr-a-y! Ah-huh-um-umph! Ah-umph – u-m-ph – ah-umph – umph – mph – ph – h-h-h!" she observed.

Never was a remark more felicitous. The lad threw himself down on the grass, laughing boisterously. Amy joined, in natural reaction from her former fear, and even the "Californian" helped on the fun by observing them with an absurdly injured expression.

"She is funny, I admit; though she is as nothing compared to her brother Balaam. If you like that kind of music, you should hear their duet about breakfast time. Which is the shortest way to some real road?"

"Come on. I'll show you."

"Thank you; and, you are so tall, would you mind getting me that bunch of yellow leaves – just there? They are so very, very lovely I'd like to take them home to put in father's studio."

"What's that? Where's it at? Who are you, anyhow?"

"Amy Kaye."

"I'm 'Bony,' – Bonaparte Lafayette Jimpson. Who's he?"

"My father is Cuthbert Kaye, the artist. Maybe you know him. He is always discovering original people."

The speech was out before she realized that it was not especially flattering. Her father liked novel models, and she had imagined how her new acquaintance would look as a "study." Then she reflected that the lad was not as pleasing as he was "original."

"No. I don't know him. He don't live in the village, I 'low?"

"Of course not. We live at Fairacres. It has been our home, our family's home, for two hundred years."

"Sho! You don't look it. An' you needn't get mad, if it has. I ain't made you mad, have I? I'd like to ride that critter. I'd like to, first rate."

Amy flushed, ashamed of her indignation against such an unfortunate object, and replied: —

"I'd like to have you 'first rate,' too, if Pepita is willing. You get on her back and show me which way to go, and I'll try to make her behave well. I have some sugar left. That turning? All right. See, Pepita, pretty Pepita! Smell what's in my fingers, amiable. Then follow me, and we'll see what – we shall see."

"Bony" was much impressed by Amy's stratagem of walking ahead of the burro with the lump of sugar held temptingly just beyond reach. For the girl knew that the "Californian" would pursue the enticing titbit to the sweetest end.

Yet this end seemed long in coming. For more than a mile their path lay close to the water's edge, through bogs and upon rocks, over rough and smooth, with the bluff rising steeply on their right and the stream preventing their crossing to the farm lands on its left. But at length they emerged upon a wider level and a view that was worth walking far to see.

Here the lad dismounted. He was so much too large for the beast he bestrode that he had been obliged to hold his feet up awkwardly, while riding. Besides, deep in his clouded heart there had arisen a desire to please this girl who so pleased him.

"Hmm. If you like leaves, there's some that's pretty," he said, pointing upward toward a brilliant branch, hanging far out above the stream.

"Yes, those are exquisite, but quite out of reach. We can get on faster now; and tell me, please, what are all those buildings yonder? How picturesque they look, clustered amid the trees on the river's bank."

Her answer was a rustle overhead. She fancied that a squirrel could not have climbed more swiftly; for, glancing up, she discovered the witless youth already upon the projecting branch, moving toward its slender tips, which swayed beneath his weight, threatening instant breakage. Below him roared the rapids, hurrying to dash over the great dam not many yards away.

"Oh! how dare you? Come back – at once!"

"Scare you, do I? Sho! This is nothing. You just ought to see what I can do. Catch 'em. There you are. That's prettier than any. Hello! Yonder's a yellow-robin's nest. Wait. I'll get it for you!"

Amy shut her eyes that she might not see; though she could not but hear the snapping of boughs, the yell, and the heavy splash which followed.

CHAPTER II.

THE MILL IN THE GLEN

"Hi! ducked myself that time, sure!"

Amy ventured to open her eyes. There, dripping and grinning, evidently enjoying the fright he had given her, stood her strange new acquaintance. His hand still clutched the scarlet branch with its swinging nest that he had risked his safety to secure, nor would relinquish for so trivial a matter as a fall into the water.

"You – you might have been drowned!"

"But I wasn't."

"I should have felt that it was all my fault!" she exclaimed, now that her fear was past, growing angry at his hardihood.

He stared at her in genuine surprise; all the gayety of his expression giving place to disappointment.

"Don't you like it? They always build far out."

"Oh, yes. It's beautiful, and I thank you, of course. But I want to get home. You must show me the way."

"Make the donkey carry 'em."

"Very well."

So they piled the branches upon the back of the dumbly protesting "Californian," Amy retaining the delicate nest and gently shaking the water from it.

"She don't like 'em, does she?"

"Not at all. Idle Pepita likes nothing that is labor. But I love her, even though she's lazy."

"What'll you take for her?"

"Why – nothing."

"Won't swop?"

"No, indeed."

"Why not?"

"Oh! dozens of 'whys.' The idea of my selling Pepita! For one thing, she was a gift."

"Who from?"

"My uncle Frederic."

"When? Where? What for?"

"Oh! what a question asker. Come, Pepit! Tcht!"

Shaking her body viciously, but unable to rid herself of her brilliant burden, the burro started swiftly along the footpath running toward the distant buildings, and over the little bridge that crossed just there. Both path and bridge were worn smooth by the feet of the operatives from the mills, which interested Amy more and more, the nearer she approached them. Once or twice, on some rare outing among the hills where her home lay, she had caught glimpses of their roofs and chimneys, and she remembered to have asked some questions about them; but her father had answered her so indifferently, even shortly, that she had learned little.

Seen from this point they impressed her by contrast to all she had ever known. There was a whirl and stir of life about them that excited and thrilled her. Through the almost numberless windows, wide open to the air, she could see hundreds of busy people moving to and fro, in a sort of a rhythmic measure with the pulsating engines.

As yet she did not know what these engines were. She heard the mighty beat and rumble, regular, unchanging, like a gigantic heart of which this many-storied structure was the enclosing body;

and she slowly advanced, fascinated, and quite heedless of some staring eyes which regarded her curiously from those wide windows.

A discontented bray and the touch of a hand upon her shoulder suddenly recalled her, to observe that she had reached the bottom of a steep stairway, and was face to face with another stranger.

"Beg pardon, but can I be of service to you?"

"Oh! sir. Thank you. I – I don't know just where I am."

"In the yard of the Crawford carpet mill."

"Is that the wonderful building yonder?"

"Yes. Have you never seen it before?"

"Not at near hand. I am here by accident. I was lost on the river bank, a long distance back, and a strange lad helped me so far. I don't see him now, and I'm rather frightened about him, for he fell into the water, getting me this nest. He doesn't act just like other people, I think."

"No. Poor 'Bony'! He has run up into the street above us, yet even he knew better than to have brought you just here," and he glanced significantly toward a large sign of "No Admittance."

"Is it wrong? I'm very sorry. I'll go away at once, when I'm shown how."

Gazing about, her perplexity became almost distress; for she found herself shut in a little space by buildings of varying heights. Behind her lay the difficult route over which she had come, and on the east uprose a steep bank or bluff. Against this was placed a nearly perpendicular sort of ladder, and this steep stair was the only visible outlet from the ravine.

The gentleman smiled at her dismay.

"Oh, that isn't as bad as it looks. I fancy you could easily climb it, as do our own mill girls; but this pretty beast of yours, with the fanciful burden, how about him?"

"I don't know. She might. She's right nimble-footed – when she chooses to be."

"So 'he' is a young lady, too? Well, I have great faith in girls, even girl donkeys, as well as in those who own them. There will certainly be a way out; if not up the bank, then through the mill. By the by, if you've never visited such a place, and have come to it 'by accident,' wouldn't you like to go through it now? I'm the superintendent, William Metcalf, and am just about to make my rounds, before we shut down for the night. I'd be pleased to show you about, though we must first find a safe place where we can tie your donkey. She looks very intelligent."

"Oh, indeed, sir, she is! She's the dearest burro. She and her brother Balaam were sent to my brother and me from California. Her name is Pepita, and I am Amy Kaye. I live at Fairacres."

At this announcement the gentleman looked as if he were about to whistle, though courtesy prevented. He bowed gravely: —

"I'm very glad to know you. If you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll find something with which to tie the burro."

He soon returned, bringing a leather strap.

"We'll fasten her to the stair, but it will be better to put these branches on the ground. Having them on her back frets her."

"Thank you. You're very kind."

Pepita did not endorse this opinion. In the matter of tying she gave them all the trouble she could, and allowed them to depart only after a most indignant bray. Her racket brought various heads to the windows, and the visitors were as much of interest to the artisans as themselves were to Amy.

She followed her guide eagerly, too self-unconscious to be abashed by any stare; and though he had shown many strangers "over the works," he felt that explaining things to this bright-eyed girl would be a pleasanter task than ordinary.

"I like to begin all things at the foundation," he remarked, with a smile, "so we'll go to the fire-room first."

This was down another short flight of steps, and over a bridge spanning the race, which deep, dark watercourse immediately caught Amy's attention.

"How smooth and swift it looks; and so black. Isn't that man afraid to stand there?" indicating a workman stationed upon the sluice gate, engaged in the endless task of raking fallen leaves away from the rack.

"Oh, no! not afraid! The work is monotonous, but it must be done, or there'll be the mischief to pay. Now, here are the fires."

A soot-grimed man approached the door of the furnace room, and respectfully touched his forehead to his superior, then glanced toward Amy.

"I'm afeared the little lady will soil her pretty frock," he remarked, with another pull at his forelock.

"Thank you for thinking of it. I'll try to be careful," she answered, tiptoeing across the earthen floor, to stoop and peer into the roaring furnaces. "I should be afraid it would burn the whole place up. How hot it is! Is it all right?"

"Yes; they're doing prime to-day. We takes care of the danger, miss. But hot? Well, you should ought to be here about midsummer, say. Ah! this isn't bad, is it, boss?"

"Very comfortable. You like your job, eh, Ben?"

"Sure; it's a good one. Steady, an' wages regular. Good day, miss, you're welcome, I'm sure," he concluded, as she thanked him again for opening the furnace doors and explaining how it was he managed the great fires.

"Now, the engine room; to see the object of all that heat," said Mr. Metcalf.

"If only Hallam were here!" exclaimed Amy.

"Is he your brother?"

"Yes. Oh! it all seems just like fairyland; even better, for this is useful, while fairyland is merely pleasant."

"Then you deem useful things of more account than pleasant ones? Hmm; most young ladies who have visited us have seemed afraid rather than pleased. The whirl of the machinery frightened them."

"It frightens me, too, and yet – I like it. The power of it all awes me."

"Well, your enthusiasm is certainly agreeable."

Nor was he the only one who found it so. Even the usually silent workmen in the fireproof storehouse, where the bales of wool were piled to the ceiling with little aisles of passage between, were moved to explanation by the alert, inquiring glances of this dainty visitor. So she quickly learned the difference between Turkish and Scottish fleeces, and remarked to her guide on the oddity of the sorted ones, "that look just like whole sheepskins, legs and tail and all, with the skins left out." In the scouring room she saw the wool washing and passing forward through the long tanks of alkaline baths; and in the "wilying" house her lungs were filled by the dust that the great machines cleaned from the freshly dried fleeces. Indeed, she would have lingered long before the big chute, through which compressed air forced the cleansed fibres to the height of four stories and the apartment where began its real manufacture into yarn.

Mr. Metcalf took her next to this top floor; and though the deafening noise of the machinery made her own voice sound queerly in her ears, she managed to ask so many questions, that before she again reached the ground floor and passed outward to the impatient Pepita, she had gained a clear general idea how some sorts of carpets are made.

"And now, Miss Amy, that our little tour is over, I'd like to hear what, of all you've seen, has most impressed you," said Mr. Metcalf, kindly.

"The girls."

"The – girls? In the spinning room?"

"Everywhere; all of them. They are so clean, so jolly, and – think! They are actually earning money."

"Of course; else they wouldn't be here. Does it strike you oddly that a girl should earn her own living?"

"I think it's grand."

"Hmm. You caught but a fleeting glimpse of them. There's a deal of reality in their lives, poor things."

"Why! Are you sorry for them?"

"No, – and yes. They haven't much leisure, and I dare say that you are an object of envy to every mill girl who has seen you to-day."

"Oh! I hope not. I liked them so. It seems so fine to really earn some of the money which everybody needs so much, just by standing before one of those 'jennies' and doing what little they did. They laughed often, as if they were glad. Nobody looked sorrowful, so I don't see why you pity them."

"It may be misplaced, for, after all, they *are* happy in their way. I do not think it is always the best way; still – Why, here's 'Bony.' Well, young man, what mischief's up now? Do you march again to-night?"

"No. I'm going with her."

"Best wait till you're invited," suggested the superintendent.

The lad said nothing, but kept on tying into a compact bundle all the branches heaped upon the ground, and to which he had made a considerable addition during Amy's inspection of the mill. He had begged a bit of rope from the office in the street above; and when he had secured the boughs to his satisfaction, he slung them across his shoulder.

"Come on. I'll pack 'em for you to where you live."

He seemed none the worse for his fall into the water, and Amy laughed; not only at the readiness with which he constituted himself her assistant, but also at Pepita's frantic efforts to ascend the steep stairway.

"Thank you. But if we can get her up there, above, she can carry the stuff herself. I can walk, when I am told the road."

"Up she goes she!" shouted the startling Lafayette, and gave the unprepared burro a sharp prod with a stick he held.

Astonished, Pepita leaped to escape the attack and landed her forefeet upon the fourth stair.

"Hi! There you be! You're a regular Rep-Dem-Prob! Up you go – I tell you!"

"Oh! you dreadful boy!" exclaimed Amy, and tried to take the stick from the fellow's hand.

"Don't. He isn't hurting her, and she *is* going up!" laughed the superintendent, as the burro made another skyward spring. But his merriment suddenly ceased.

The "Californian" could use her nimble feet for more than one purpose. She resented the indignity of her present position in the only manner possible to her, and when a third prod touched her dainty flesh, she flung one heel backward, with an airy readiness that might have been funny save for its result.

CHAPTER III. FAIRACRES

"How dreadful! Is he killed?" cried Amy, pale with fear.

For the indignant Pepita had planted her active hoof squarely in the mouth of the lad who was tormenting her, and had knocked him backward from the stair. During a brief time he lay, dazed by the blow, with a trickle of blood rapidly staining his features.

"Wait. Don't get frightened. There may not be much damage done. That boy has as many lives as a cat. I'll see to him," returned Mr. Metcalf, quietly.

With a strong, kindly touch, the gentleman helped the unfortunate "Bony" to his feet; whereupon, the lad flew into a fearful rage and started up the ladder, in pursuit of the burro.

His movement roused Amy also to action, and she followed him so swiftly that she reached the top, and the broad road there, almost as soon as he. Before then, however, he had caught up a barrel stave, which happened to be lying in a too convenient spot, and was belaboring Pepita with all his might.

The latter, after her ascent of the steps, had remained standing at their head, gazing dreamily downward in her own demure manner and evidently considering that she had quite properly adjusted matters.

Amy succeeded in reaching them just as the third blow was descending upon Pepita's flank and by a deft movement arrested the stroke. The stave flew out of the lad's grasp, and his astonishment at her strength cooled his anger.

"Don't you strike her again! You shall not. Aren't you ashamed of yourself to beat a helpless creature like that? If you are still able to act so – so brutally – you can't be much hurt. I was terribly frightened and sorry, but now I don't care. She served you just right."

Then the red Tam dropped on the burro's neck and a torrent of affectionate words was poured into the creature's indifferent ears.

"Sho! Huckleberries! She's drove my teeth clean down my throat!" slowly ejaculated the youth.

This was about half true. One tooth had been broken out by the blow upon the lad's jaw and another had been loosened. The copious bleeding of these wounds gave him a startling appearance, and when Amy looked up a shudder of repellent pity ran through her. Then she seemed to see her mother's gentle face and, conquering the aversion she felt, she pulled out her handkerchief and began to wipe the discolored, ill-shapen lips of the half-wit.

He submitted to the operation in amazed silence. Even Mr. Metcalf had nothing to say, though he watched with keen interest the outcome of this little transaction.

"There. If I had some water, I could do it nicely. I'm sorry you were hurt. But don't you ever strike my Pepita again! Next time she might kill you. It was her only way of defending herself, for she hasn't sense like you – "

Regarding the imbecile face before her, Amy's sentence ended in confusion. Nor did it add to her comfort that the unhappy fellow now began to weep in a whimpering sort of way, that might have suited a spoiled child of a few years.

"Why, what is it? Do you suffer so terribly! Oh! I am so sorry!"

"There, my dear Miss Amy, let it pass. This is only one of 'Bony's' charming habits," said Mr. Metcalf, smiling derisively. "He has rather outgrown his age. Haven't you, lad? Well, it's all right. I'm sorry for you. You're sorry for yourself; and our young lady here is sorry for us both. Come. Brace up. Be a man. What would the 'boys' think of you, in this uniform, crying? Eh!"

"Huh – huh – huh – huh-h-h!" responded the natural.

"I'm going home, Bonaparte. Good night. Thank you for the leaves. Mr. Metcalf, will you tell me the nearest way, please?"

Amy picked up the fallen bundle of boughs, which the superintendent had brought with him from the yard below, and laid them upon Pepita's back.

"These have given us some trouble, but they are still too beautiful to lose."

The gentleman directed her, courteously escorted her through the gateway, which bore another of those prohibitory "No Admittance" signs, and watched her walk briskly away, thinking what a bright feature of the landscape she made.

"Not a beautiful girl, by any means, yet one of the most wholesome, honest, and engaging ones who ever stepped foot within this old mill. Odd, too! A Kaye. I wonder if she will ever come again to what, if all had gone as was expected, might easily have been her own great property. Well, that was pretty to see: the way in which she wiped the face of poor 'Bony.' The lad grows sillier every day, it seems, and the 'boys' are making him worse by their nonsense. Where is he now? I'll have a talk with him and try to keep him out of the parades. They are not good for him," reflected Mr. Metcalf.

But the talk had to be postponed; for there was "Bony" already far along the road toward Fairacres, following doggedly in Amy's footsteps, though she repeatedly assured him that she could manage quite well without him and preferred to be alone.

"No, I'm going," he asserted; and when she could not dissuade him, she gave up trying to do so and led him to talk of himself – his most interesting subject. So that, by the time they had come to the front of the old mansion, she knew his simple history completely, and her pity had almost outgrown her aversion.

"See, Cleena! Cleena Keegan! See what I have brought!"

The shout summoned a large woman to the door, who threw up her arms with the answering cry: —

"Faith, an' I thought you was lost! Whatever has kept you such gait, Miss Amy?"

"Oh! adventures. Truly, Cleena. Real, regular adventures. See my leaves? See this lad! He got them for me. He is Bonaparte Jimpson."

"An' a curious spalpeen that same," casting a suspicious glance over the youth's strange attire.

"I'm Bonaparte Lafayette Jimpson," he explained gravely and, to Amy's surprise, timidly.

"The mischief, you be! An' what's Napoleon Bonyparty's ginerals' pleasure at Fairacres, the night?"

"Cleena, wait. I'll tell you. Yes, you will have time enough. The train isn't due till after six, and they'll be a half-hour longer getting home from the station. Sit you down, Goodsoul, just for one little bit of minute. The scrubbing must surely be done by now. Isn't it?"

"Humph! The scrubbin's never done in this dirty world. Well, an' what is it? Be quick with you!"

Amy coaxed the old servant down upon the doorstep of the freshly cleaned kitchen, whither they had now gone, and speedily narrated her afternoon's experiences.

"So you see, dear old Scrubbub, that he must have a fine feast of the best there is in the house. Besides," and she pulled the other's ear down to her lips, "I'd just like to have father see him. He isn't pretty, of course, but he's *new*. I wonder, could he pose?"

"Pose, is it?" groaned Cleena, with a comical grimace. "Pose! Sure, it's I minds the time when the master caught me diggin' petaties an' kept me standin', with me foot on me spade, an' me spade in the ground, an' me body this shape," bending forward, "till I got such a crick in me back I couldn't walk upright, for better 'n a week. Posin', indeed! Well, he might. He looks fit for naught else."

"Pooh, Cleena! you know it's an honor. But, come now, I want to put all these leaves up in the dining room. Will you help me?"

"Will I what – such truck! No, me colleen, not a help helps Cleena the day."

"Oh, yes, you will. I'll bring the step ladder and hand them to you, while you put them over the doors and windows. We'll make the place a perfect bower of cheerfulness, and if our dears, when they come – Oh, Cleena! they may need the cheerfulness very much."

However, it was not Amy's habit to borrow trouble, and she ran lightly away, calling to the boy on the porch: —

"I'm going to put Pepita in the stable. If you'd like to see her brother, you can come with me."

"Sho! Ain't he black!" exclaimed "Bony," as they led Pepita into the great stables and he discovered Balaam.

Amid ample accommodations for a dozen horses, the two burros seemed almost lost; but they occupied adjoining box-stalls which, if rather time-worn and broken, were still most roomy and comfortable.

"Why, huckleberries! It's bigger 'n the mill sheds. And only them two. Will he swop?"

As he asked this question the lad pulled from his pocket a miscellaneous collection of objects, and invitingly displayed them upon the palm of his long hand.

"No, I think not. I fancy we are not a 'swopping' family. But I must choose some name for you besides that dreadful 'Bony.' Bonaparte is too long. So is Lafayette. Let me see. Suppose we make it just 'Fayette'? That is short and pleasant to speak, and I like my friends to have nice names. Would you like it?"

"Bully!"

"Why – why, Fayette! That doesn't sound well."

"Sho! Don't it? One all black an' t'other all white. Hum."

"Br-r-r-ray! Ah-umph – h-umph – umph – mph – ph – h-h-h!" observed Balaam to his sister.

Fayette laughed, so noisily and uproariously that the burros brayed again; and they kept up this amusing concert until Amy had brought each an armful of hay, and had directed her companion where to find a pail and water for their drink.

Then they returned to the house and beheld Cleena in the dining room, already mounted upon the step-ladder, trying to arrange the branches with more regard to the saving of time than to grace. But she made to the picture-seeing girl a very attractive "bit."

Indeed, Cleena Keegan was a person of sufficient importance to warrant a paragraph quite to herself. She was a woman of middle age, with a wealth of curling, iron-gray hair, which she tucked away under a plain white cap. Her figure was large and grandly developed. She wore a blue print gown, carefully pinned back about her hips, thus disclosing her scarlet flannel petticoat; both garments faded by time and frequent washings to a most "artistic" hue. Upon her shoulders was folded a kerchief of coarse white muslin, spotlessly clean; and as she stood, poised among the glowing branches, with the dying sunset light touching her honest face to unusual brightness, she was well worth Amy's eager wish: —

"Oh, Cleena! That father were only here to see and paint you just as you are this minute!"

"Humph! It's meself's glad he isn't."

"Why! That's not nice of you, Goodsoul. Yet it's a great pity that a body who is such a 'study' in herself can't fix those branches a bit more gracefully. You're jamming the leaves all into a little mess and showing the stems! Oh, Cleena, I wonder if I can't reach them."

"Truth, it's meself's willin' you should try. Belike I'd be handier at the pullin' them down nor the puttin' them up."

With head erect she descended from the ladder, and stood, arms akimbo, regarding the results of her labor. Even to her it suggested something not "artistic," and at Fairacres anything inartistic was duly frowned upon.

"Faith, it's not the way the master would do it, I see that, but – "

Before either she could finish her sentence or Amy mount the ladder, Fayette had run to its top and stood there rapidly pulling from the wall the branches Cleena had arranged. Thrusting all but

one between his knees, he fastened that over the window-frame so deftly and charmingly that Amy clapped her hands in delight.

"Oh, that's lovely! Try another – and another!"

He obeyed. His vacant face flushed with a glow of enthusiasm equalling, if not exceeding her own, and even Cleena spent some moments of her rarely wasted time in watching him.

Her own face had again become a "study," yet of a sort to provoke a smile, as her gaze roved from his handiwork, over the length of his ungainly person, to rest upon his bare and not too cleanly feet; then travelled slowly upward again, trying to settle once for all his rightful position in the social scale. Her thought might have been thus expressed: —

"His foot's heathen. His head's the same. His clothes – they're the heathenest of all. I'd disdain 'em. But, arrah musha! The hand of him! The master himself couldn't better them fixin's."

Then she hastened to her kitchen, and soon the appetizing odor of a well-cooked meal was in their nostrils, and the two young decorators realized that they were very hungry.

"There, that will do. It is perfect. Thank you ever and ever so much, Fayette."

"Shucks!"

"Now I'll light the candles. I always do when the people are coming home from town. They go there quite often; at least father does, though mother hasn't been before in months. The candles are terrible extravagance, Cleena says, but they're so pretty."

Fayette carried away the step-ladder, then returned to watch Amy as she set the old-fashioned candelabra upon the already daintily spread table. She had bordered the white cloth with some of the most dazzling-hued leaves, and when the wax tapers threw their soft radiance over the whole charming interior, poor Fayette felt his weak head grow dizzy and confused by the beauty of it all.

He dimly realized that he was in a new world, which soothed and appealed to his clouded nature as did the birds and the flowers. That impulse, which he could neither express nor understand, which sent him so constantly into the woods and solitudes, was gratified now. This was as delightful as his favorite pastime of lying upon the grass and gazing upward into the sunlit sky.

"Sho! It's pretty. I like it. I'm glad I come. I'll stay."

Amy had almost forgotten him.

"Yes, of course you'll stay till after supper. I'll –"

But a shadow fell across the threshold of the still open door, and looking up she saw a stranger, – an old man of rather forbidding aspect, whose glance passed swiftly from herself to the youth near the big fireplace.

There followed an instant of mutual and frowning recognition between these two; then Fayette disappeared through an inner doorway, while the newcomer remained at the entrance, his hat in his hand, and an assumed suavity in his manner.

Yet there was still a note of anger in the tone with which he observed: —

"I have called upon business with Cuthbert Kaye. Your father, I presume. Is he at home?"

"Not yet. He went to the city, yesterday, with my mother and brother. I expect them back on the next train. Will you come in?"

"Yes, thank you. I'll wait."

He accepted the great chair Amy rolled toward him, and let his gaze slowly sweep the cheerful apartment. Yet he knew it by heart, already, and his face brightened as he saw how little it had been changed since these many years. Apparently not one of its quaint and rich old furnishings was missing, and the passage of time had but added to the remembered charm of the place. Even the chair into which he sank had a familiar feel, as if his back had long ago fitted to those simple, comfortable lines. The antique candelabra – how often had he watched his grandmother's fingers polishing them to brilliancy.

But the girl was new. The only modern thing, save the freshly gathered leaves, – which also seemed but a memory of his childhood, – to remind him of the present and the errand upon which he had come.

"She's Kaye, though, to the bone. Dark, crisp hair. Those short curls are like a boy's. Her eyes are the Kaye eyes; and that toss of her head, like her great-grandmother come to life again. All our women had it. Ah, well. If things – hmm."

The visitor became absorbed in his thoughts, and his wandering gaze came home to rest, seemingly, upon the tips of his own boots, for he did not notice when Amy disappeared and Cleena entered.

"Alanna! But this is a smart decent piece of work, now, isn't it?"

At this sudden and derisive remark the gentleman looked up.

"Oh, ho! You, is it?"

"Faith an' it is. An' likin' to know what brings you this gait."

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, woman. I'm not to be put off this time by any false stories. Here I am, and here I shall stay until I see your master."

Steadily and silently confronting one another for some seconds, they measured each other's wills. The unwelcome guest was not sure but that the woman would lift him bodily and fling him out of doors. She looked ably strong and quite minded so to do; but, after a further reflection, she appeared to change her mind as well as her tone.

"Hmm – yes. There's no irreverence meant. Come in by, to the library yon. There's pictures to see, an' books a plenty. Leave the master be, like a gentleman now, as you was born, till he eats his meal in peace. A body can bear trouble better on a full stummick nor an empty. Come by."

To his own amazement, the caller rose and followed her. He told himself he was a simpleton to have left the cheery supper room and the certain presence of the man he wished to see for an hour of solitary waiting in an unknown place.

"Library." There had been none in his grandmother's time. But he knew it well – from the outside. A detached, strong little building, of hewn stone like the mansion; one of Cuthbert Kaye's many "follies." Planned with a studio on the second floor above the spacious book room on the first. Well, it made the property so much the more valuable. Yes, after all, he would better visit it while the coast was clear.

"Sure, sir, an' it's here the master do be spending all his time. Here an' above. You was never in the paintin' study, now was you?" she asked suggestively.

"No."

"Alanna! An' you two of the same blood!"

"Hmm – yes, of course I'll go, since I'm here."

So he followed her up the graceful staircase, with its softly covered steps, and into a room which rumor said was worth travelling far to see; and though thus prepared, its half-revealed beauty astonished him.

"Well, it is a fine apartment. It must have cost a power of money. And – it explains many things."

"Money, says you? It did that," echoed Cleena, with a pious sigh.

"Yes, yes. I suppose so. It's rather dark, however, for me to see as I would like. Isn't there a lamp here?"

"Lamp, is it? Askin' pardon for forgettin' me manners, but it's never a lamp will the master have left in this place. If one comes, indeed, 'tis himself brings it. Forby, on occasion like this, I'll fetch it an' take all the blame for that same. It's below. I'll step down;" and she departed hastily, leaving him alone.

CHAPTER IV. HALLAM

As the stage from the railway station rolled up to Fairacres, Amy was waiting upon the wide porch. She had put on her daintiest frock, white, of course, since her father liked her to wear no other sort of dress; and she had twisted sprays of scarlet woodbine through her dark hair and about her shoulders. Before the vehicle stopped, she called out eagerly: —

"Oh! how glad I am you're here! It's been such a long two days! Are you all well? Is everything right, mother dearest? Did you have a nice time?"

The father reached her first, remarking, with a fond smile: —

"You make a sweet picture, daughter, with that open doorway behind you, with the firelight and candlelight, and — Ah! did you speak, Salome?" turning toward his wife.

"The man is waiting, Cuthbert. Has thee the money for him?"

Mr. Kaye fumbled in one pocket, tried another, frowned, and appeared distressed.

"Never mind, dear. Hallam can attend to it."

But the crippled lad had already swung himself over the steps upon his crutches, and the artist remarked, with a fresh annoyance: —

"He must put it in the bill, Salome. Why always bother with such trifles? If one could only get away from the thought and sound of money. Its sordidness is the torment of one's life."

Mrs. Kaye sighed, as she paid the hackman from her own purse, then followed her husband into the house.

His face had already lost all its expression of annoyance, and now beamed with satisfaction as he regarded Amy's efforts to celebrate the home-coming.

"Good child. Good little girl. Truly, very beautiful. Why, my darling, you'll be an artist yourself some day, I believe."

"The saints forbid!" murmured a voice from the further side the room, where Cleena had appeared, bearing a tray of dishes.

Nobody heard the ejaculation, however, save Hallam, and he didn't count, being of one and the same opinion as the old serving-woman. All the lad's ambitions lay toward a ceaseless activity, and the coloring of canvases attracted him less than even the meanest kind of manual labor.

Nor did Amy share in her father's hope, though she loved art for his sake, and she answered, with conviction: —

"Never such an one as you are, father dear."

But all this while the daughter's eyes had been studying her mother's face, with the keen penetration of sympathy, and the whispered advice: —

"Be especially gentle with Hallam to-night, my child," but confirmed the answer she had already found in that careworn countenance.

Yet Hallam showed no need of consolation as he sturdily stumped across the room and exclaimed, cheerfully enough: —

"Fetch on the provender, Goodsoul. We're all as hungry as bears. What's for us?"

"What should be? save the best rasher of bacon ever blessed eyesight, with tea-biscuits galore. For second course — My! but that pullet was a tender bird, so she was. An' them east-lot petaties would fain melt in your mouth, they're so hot-foot to be ate."

"The pullet? Not the little brown one you have cared for yourself, Cleena?"

"What for no? Eat your victuals askin' no questions, for that's aye bad for the appetite."

Both Amy and Cleena knew, without words, that this last city trip had been a failure, like so many that had preceded it. Once more had the too sanguine father dragged his crippled son to

undergo a fresh examination of his well-formed though useless limbs; and once more had an adverse verdict been rendered.

This time the authority was of the highest. A European specialist, whose name was known and revered upon two continents, had come to New York and had been consulted. Interested more than common by the boy's fair face and the sweet womanliness of the mother, the surgeon had given extra attention to Hallam, and his decision had been as reluctantly reached as it was final.

"Only a miracle will ever enable him to walk. Yet a miracle may occur, for we live in an age of them, and nothing seems impossible to science. However, in all mortal probability, he is as one dead below his knees. My lad, take your medicine bravely and be a man in spite of it all. Use your brain, thanking God for it, and let the rest go."

"That's an easy thing for you to say, but it is I who have to bear it!" burst forth the unhappy boy, and was at once ashamed of his rude speech, even if it in no wise offended the sympathetic physician.

The return journey had been a sad and silent one, though Hallam had roused at its end with the sort of bravado that Amy had seen, and which deceived her no more than it did any of the others; but she loyally seconded his assumed cheerfulness, and after they had gathered about the table, gave them a lively description of her afternoon's outing, ending with: —

"For, mother dear, you hadn't said just where I might or might not ride, and I'd never seen the carpet mills, though I now hope to go there often; and, indeed, I think I would like to work in that busy place, among all those bright, active girls."

Then her enthusiasm was promptly dashed by her father's exclamation: —

"Amy! Amy Kaye! Never again say such a thing! Let there be no more of that mill talk, not a word."

Mr. Kaye's tone was more stern than his child had ever heard, and as if he recognized this he continued, more gently: —

"But I am interested in that silly Bonaparte. I almost wish you had kept him till I came."

Amy happened to glance at Cleena, who had warned her not to mention the fact of the strange gentleman calling; nor had she known just when Fayette went away, though she supposed he had done so after so suddenly leaving the dining room.

"Why, Goodsoul, you are as beaming as if you had found a treasure."

"Faith, an' I have. Try a bit of the chicken, mistress, now do;" and she waved the dish toward the lady, with a smile that was more than cheerful.

"Well, Cleena, it's heartening to see anybody so bright. The work must have gone finely to-day, and thee have had plenty of time for scrubbing. No, thank thee; nothing more. Not even those delicious baked apples. The best apples in the world grow on that old tree by the dairy door, I believe," replied the mistress, with another half-suppressed sigh.

As she rose to leave the table, she turned toward her husband: —

"I hope thee'll soon be coming upstairs, Cuthbert."

It was noticeable that Cleena paused, tray in hand, to hear the answer, which was out of common, for the old servant rarely presumed upon the fact that she was also the confidential friend of her employers.

"Well, after a little, dear; but, first, I must go over to the studio."

"Arrah, musha, but, master! The painting's all right. What for no? Indeed, then, it's the mistress herself needs more attention this minute nor any picture ever was drawn."

"Why, Cleena!" exclaimed the lady, in surprise. Such an interference had never been offered by the devoted creature to the head of the house.

"Asking pardon, I'm sure; though I know I know. I've lighted a fire in the sittin' room above, an' it's sure for the comfort of both that yous make yourselves easy the night."

"That's true, husband. Do leave the picture till morning. We're all tired and needing the rest."

Always easily persuaded where physical comfort was at stake, the artist acquiesced, and with his arm about his wife's slender waist he gently led her from the room.

Cleena heard him murmuring tender apologies that he had not before observed how utterly fatigued she looked; and a whimsical smile broke on the Irishwoman's face as she cleared the table and assured the cups and saucers, with a vigorous disdain, that: —

"Them two's no more nor a couple of childer still. But, alanna! Never a doubt I doubt there'll be trouble with old Cleena when the cat leaps the bag. Well, he's in it now, tied fast and tight."

Whereupon, there being nobody to see, the good woman executed a sort of jig, and having thus relieved her feelings departed to the kitchen, muttering: —

"It wasn't for naught Miss Amy fetched a simpleton home in her pocket. Sure, I scared the life clean out of *him*, so I did, an' he'll stay where he's settled till he's wanted, so long as I keep fillin' his stummick with victuals like these. Will I carry a bit o' the fowl to the lib'ry – will I no? Hmm. Will I – nill I?"

Having decided, Cleena passed swiftly from the house into the darkness and in the direction of the distant library.

Meanwhile, up in the little chamber which had once been their nursery and was still their own sitting room, Amy had drawn a lounge before the grate, and, after his accustomed fashion, Hallam lay upon it, while his sister curled upon the rug beside him.

But she did not look at him. She rested her chin in her palms and gazed at the dancing flames, as she observed: —

"Even a king might envy us this fire of pine cones, mightn't he? Isn't it sweet and woodsy? and so bright. I've gathered bushels and bushels of them, while you were away, and we can have all the fun we want up here. So now – can't you just begin and tell, Hal dear? Part of it I guess, but start as you always do: 'I went from here – ' and keep right on till you get back again to me and – this."

She purposely made her tone light, but she was not surprised when her answer was a smothered sob. Indeed, there was such a lump in her own throat that she had to swallow twice before she could say: —

"No, darling, you needn't tell one word. I know it all – all – all; and I can't bear it. I won't – I will not have it so!"

Then she turned and buried her face in the pillow beside her brother's, crying so passionately that he had to become comforter himself; and his thin fingers stroked her hair until she grew ashamed of her weakness and looked up again, trying to smile.

"Forgive me, brotherkin. I'm such a baby, and I meant to be so brave! If I could only take your lameness on myself, and give you my own strong, active legs!"

"Don't, Amy! Besides, how often have you said that very same thing? Yet it isn't any use. Nothing is of any use. Life isn't, I fancy."

Even the vehement Amy was shocked by this, and her tears stopped, instantly.

"Why, Hal!"

"Sounds wicked, doesn't it? Well, I feel wicked. I feel like, was it Job or one of his friends? that it would be good to 'curse God and die.' Dying would be so much easier than living."

The girl sprang up, clinching her brown hands, and staring at her brother defiantly.

"Hallam Kaye, don't you talk like that! Don't you dare! Suppose God heard you? Suppose He took you at your word and made you die just now, this instant? What then?"

Hallam smiled, wanly, "I won't scare you by saying what then, girlie. If He did, I suppose it would all be right. Everything is right – to the folks who don't have to suffer the thing. Even the doctor – and I liked him as much as I envied him – even he preached to me and bade me not to mind, to 'forget.' Hmm, I wish *he* could feel, just for one little minute, the helplessness that I must feel always, eternally."

Hallam was dearer to his sister than any other human being, and the despair in her idol's tone promptly banished her anger against his irreverence. She went down on her knees and caught away the arm with which he had hidden his face, kissing him again and again.

"Oh! there will be some way out of this misery, laddie. There must be. It wouldn't be right, that anybody as clever and splendid as you should be left a cripple for life. I won't believe it. I won't!"

"How like father you are!"

Amy's head tossed slightly, and a faint protest came into her eyes, but was banished as soon because of its disloyalty.

"Am I? In what way? and why shouldn't I be?"

"You never know when you're down nor why you shouldn't have all that you want."

"Isn't it a good thing? Would it help to go moping and unbelieving?"

"I suppose not. Anyway, it makes things easier for you and him, and so, maybe, for the rest of us."

The sister dropped back into her favorite attitude upon the rug and regarded her brother curiously.

"Hal, you're as queer as can be, to-night. Seems as if there was something the matter with you, beyond what that know-nothing doctor said. Isn't there?"

"Don't call the poor man hard names, girlie. He was fine, and I was impertinent enough for the whole family. Only, I reckon he was too high up to feel anything we could say. But there *is* something. Something I must tell you, and I don't know how to begin. Promise that you won't get into a tantrum, or run and disturb the little mother about it."

"Hallam Kaye! Do I ever?"

"Hmm! Sometimes. Don't you? Never mind. Sit closer, dear, and let me get hold of your hand. Then you'll understand why I am so bitter; why this disappointment about my lameness is so much worse than any that has gone before. And I've been disappointed often enough, conscience knows."

Amy crept up and snuggled her dark head against Hallam's fair one, remarking, with emphasis:

—
"Now I'm all ready. I'll be as still as a mouse, and not interrupt you once. What other dreadful trouble has come? Is it a grocery bill, or Claflin's for artists' stuff?"

"Something far worse than that."

"What?"

"Did you ever think we might have – might have – oh, Amy! I can't tell you 'gently,' as mother bade – all it is – well, we've got to go away from Fairacres. *Its not ours any longer.*"

"Wh-a-at?" cried the girl, springing up, or striving to do so, though Hallam's hold upon her fingers drew her down again.

"I don't wonder you're amazed. I was, too, at first. Now I simply wonder how we have kept the place so long."

"Why isn't it ours? Whose is it?"

"It belongs to a cousin of mother's, Archibald Wingate. Did you ever hear of him?"

"Never. How can it?"

"I hardly understand myself, though mother's lawyer tried to explain. It's something about indorsing notes and mortgages and things. Big boy as I am, I know no more about business than – you do."

"Thanks, truly. But I do know. I attended to the marketing yesterday when the wagon came. Cleena said that I did very well."

"Glad of it. You'll have a chance to exercise your talents in that line."

"But, Hal, mother will never let anybody take away our home. How could she? What would father do without his studio that he had built expressly after his own plan? or we without all this?" sweeping her arm about to indicate the cosiness of their own room.

"Mother can't help herself, dear. She was rich once, but she's desperately poor now."

"I knew there was trouble about money, of course. There never seems to be quite enough, but that's been so since I can remember. Why shouldn't we go on just as we have? What does this cousin of our mother's want of the place, anyway?"

"I don't know. I don't know him. I hate him unseen."

"So do I. Still, if he's a cousin, he should be fond of mother, and not bother."

"Amy, we're all a set of simpletons, I guess, as a family, and in relation to practical matters."

"Speak for yourself, John."

"That isn't all. There's something – something wrong with father."

"Hallam Kaye! Now I do believe you're out of your head. I was afraid you were, you've talked and acted so queerly. I'm going for Cleena. Is your face hot? Do you ache more than usual?"

"Don't be silly. I'm as right as I ever shall be. Listen. I found it all out in the city. Father had gone to some exhibition, and mother and I were waiting for the time to go to the doctor. A gentleman called, and I never saw anybody look so frightened and ill as mother did when she received him, though I knew it wasn't about me. She hadn't hoped for anything better in that line. She called the man 'Friend Howard Corson,' and he was very courteous to her; but all of a sudden she cried out: —

"Don't tell me that the end has come! I can't bear both sorrows in one day!" And then she looked across at me. I smiled as bravely as I could, and, Amy, I believe our mother is the very most beautiful woman in this world."

"Why, of course; and father's the handsomest man."

"Certainly," agreed the lad, with rather more haste than conviction.

"Well, what next?"

Before the answer could be given, there burst upon their ears an uproarious clamor of angry voices, such as neither had ever heard at Fairacres; and Amy sprang up in wild alarm, while Hallam groped blindly for the crutches he had tossed aside.

CHAPTER V. A KINSMAN OF THE HOUSE

"It's from the library!" reported Amy, who had first reached and opened the window. "I can't make out anything except – yes, it is! That's Fayette's voice. Hear that croak?"

"The foolish boy? Here yet?"

"So it seems. I'll go and find out."

"Wait. That's Cleena talking now, and another voice, a man's. What can it all mean?"

Amy ran down the stairs and out of the house so swiftly that she did not observe her father following with almost equal haste. Behind him sped Mrs. Kaye, far more anxious concerning her husband than the noise outside.

"Slowly, Cuthbert. Please do take care. Thee must not hurry so, and I hear Cleena. She'll look out for everything. For my sake, don't run."

Hallam upon his crutches came last of all, and for a moment the entire family stood in silent wonder at the scene before them.

Two men were wrestling like angry schoolboys; and the light from a lantern in Cleena's hand fell over them and showed the distorted face of "Bony" in one of his wildest rages. His contestant was gray haired and stout, and was evidently getting the worst of the struggle. The library door was open, and it seemed as if the half-wit were trying to force the other backward into the building.

One glance revealed something of the situation to Mrs. Kaye, and, as the wrestlers paused for breath, she moved forward and laid her hand upon the old man's arm.

"Archibald, what does this mean?"

The low voice acted like magic. Fayette slunk away, ashamed, and the other paused to recover himself. But his anger soon returned and was now directed against the astonished woman herself.

"Mean! mean? That's for you to say. Since when has a Kaye stooped to the pettiness of locking up an unwelcome visitor like a rat in a trap? A pretty greeting and meeting, Cuthbert, after all these years!" he cried, turning next toward the artist, with indignant contempt.

But the object of his wrath scarcely heard what he said. His own eyes were fixed upon the ruined panel of his beautiful library door, and he caught up the lantern and peered anxiously to learn the extent of the disaster.

The wife again answered, as if speaking for both: —

"Archibald, no. Whatever indignity thee has suffered, none of thy kin know anything about it or could be parties to it. Thy own heart must tell thee that; and now explain what it all means."

At the old familiar speech, the man's expression altered, and when he replied it was in a far gentler tone.

"I came to see Cuthbert; for the thousandth time, isn't it? Failing him again, though I didn't mean to fail, I had to talk with – thee," his voice tripping slightly over the pronoun, "and that virago brought me here to wait. Then she locked me up and set this idiot to watch. There are no windows to get out of from above, nothing but that skylight, so I finally forced the door at the foot of the stairs, and then again this. Here was that ruffian, armed with a cudgel, and – the rest thee knows."

"I am very sorry, cousin. I can but apologize for what I would never have permitted had I known," and the mistress's gaze rested upon Cleena most reproachfully.

Yet that bold-spirited creature was in no wise disturbed, and replied, with great enjoyment: —

"Sure, mistress, I did but do what I'd do again, come same chance. What for no? If it wasn't for him, yon, there'd be peace an' plenty at Fairacres the now. Faith, I harmed him none."

"Cleena!"

"Askin' pardon if I overstepped me aut'ority, mistress. Come, Ginerall Bonyparty, I'm surmisin' you an' me better be fixin' things up whiles the family goes home to their beds."

Just then Mr. Kaye's silent examination of the injury done his beloved studio came to an end. He set down the lighted lantern with the ultra caution of one who dreads fire above all accidents, and turned toward his wife. However, he took but few steps forward before he paused, staggered, and would have fallen had not the ill-treated visitor sprung to his aid, – to be himself pushed aside, while Cleena caught up her master and strode off toward the house, as if she were but carrying an overgrown child in her strong arms. Indeed, the artist's weight was painfully light, nor was this the first time that Cleena's strength had thus served his need; though this fact not even Hallam nor Amy knew.

The wife hurried after her fainting husband, and Amy started also; then reflected that it was she who had brought Fayette to the house, and was, in a measure, responsible for what had since happened there.

But the lad gave her time for neither reproof nor question, as he eagerly exclaimed: —

"'Twa'n't none o' my doin's. She made me. She told me to set here an' keep Mr. Wingate in, an' if he broke out I wasn't to let him. I don't know what for. I didn't ask questions. 'Twa'n't none o' my business, anyway. So I was just trying to jab him back. She fed me first rate. Say, is that your brother?"

"Yes. Oh, Hal! what shall we do?"

"You run to the house and see if mother wants anybody to go for the doctor, while I try to help this boy stop up the doorway. It's going to rain, and it would break father's heart if anything here were harmed."

A curious smile crossed the stranger's face, but he advanced to lend his aid to the lad, Fayette, and succeeded in getting the parts of the door so far into place that they would prevent any damage by rain, except in case of severe storm. The broken lock was, of course, useless, and as the mill lad saw the cripple fingering it, he remarked: —

"You needn't be scared. I'll stay an' watch. I won't march to-night. Oh, I can do it all right. I often stay with the watchmen round the mill, an' I've got a good muscle, if anybody wants to tackle it," with which he glared invitingly toward the late prisoner.

A protesting groan was the only reply; and the lad received this with a snort of disdain.

"Druther let old scores rest, had ye? All right. Suits me well enough now, but I ain't forgot the lickin's you've given me, an' I ain't goin' to forget, neither."

Fayette's look was again so vindictive that Hallam interposed, fearing another battle between these uninvited guests.

"Well, I wish you *would* watch here for a while. As soon as Cleena can be spared, she shall bring you a blanket. And anyway, if you'll keep everything safe, I'll try to find something to pay you for your trouble."

"Hmm, I'd take your donkey an' give back considerable to boot."

"My donkey? Balaam? Well, I guess not."

"I could do it. I could, first rate. I've got money. It's in the savings bank. 'Supe' put it in for me."

"I couldn't think of it, not for a second. Mr. Wingate – is it?"

"Archibald Wingate, and your kinsman, young sir."

"So I heard my mother say. She would wish you to come to the house with me, and we'll try to make you comfortable. I must go – I am wild to know what is wrong with my father."

"We will, at once," answered the other, coldly. "Your father was always weak – was never very rugged, and he hasn't lived in a way to make himself more robust. A man's place is in the open; not penned like a woman behind closed doors and windows."

"Beg pardon, but you are speaking of my father."

"Exactly, and of my cousin. Oh, I've known him since we sat together under our grandmother's table, munching gingerbread cakes. Ah, she was a famous cook, else the flavor of a bit of dough wouldn't last that long."

"I've heard of my great-grandmother's talent for cookery. Father and mother often speak of it, and some of her old recipes are in use in our kitchen to-day."

Mr. Wingate had kept an even pace with Hallam's eager swings upon his crutches, and they were speedily at the old house door, with a kindly feeling toward one another springing into life within the heart of each; though but a little while before Hallam had exclaimed to Amy, in all sincerity, "I hate him unseen."

With the ready trustfulness of youth, Hallam began to think his mother's and the lawyer's words had not meant literally what they expressed.

On Mr. Wingate's side, the sight of Hallam's physical infirmity had roused regret at the action he must take. Up till this meeting he had lived with but one object in view – the possession of Fairacres; nor did he now waver in his determination. There had simply entered into the matter a sentiment of compassion which was a surprise to himself, and which he banished as completely as he could.

Amy met them at the door with the gratifying report: —

"Father is about all right again. It was a sudden faint. Cleena says that he has had them before, but that mother had not wished us told. There is no need of a doctor, and Cleena is to get the west chamber ready for Mr. Wingate to sleep in. I'm to freshen the fire and – here is mother herself."

The house mistress came toward them, vial and glass in hand, on her way back to the sick-room. The hall was dimly lighted, and as she turned at the stair's foot and passed upward, with that soft gliding motion peculiar to herself, she seemed to the entering guest like a sad-faced ghost of a girl he had known. Halfway up she paused upon the landing and smiled down upon them; and the serenity of that smile made the hard facts of the case – illness, poverty, and home-breaking – seem even more unreal than anything else could have done.

Amy looked into Mr. Wingate's eyes, which were fixed upon their mother. "Isn't she like the Madonna? Father has so often painted her as such."

"Yes – hmm. He ought to. A Madonna of Way and Means. Say, little girl, you are bright enough, but you act a good deal younger than your years. How happens it you've never learned to look after your father yourself, and so spare your mother? Can you do anything useful?"

"That depends. I can arrange father's palette, and crack his eggs just right, and buy things – when there's money," she finished naïvely.

"It all seems 'father.' What about your mother? What can you do, or have you done, to help her, eh?"

Amy flushed. She thought this sort of cross-questioning very rude and uncalled for. As soon as she had heard this man's name she had realized that it must be he of whom Hallam had spoken, and whom she, also, had decided she "hated unseen." But, in truth, hatred was a feeling of which the carefully sheltered girl knew absolutely nothing, though it came very near entering her heart at that instant when the shrewd, penetrating gaze of her kinsman forced her to answer his question.

"Why – nothing, I'm afraid. Only to love her."

"Hmm. Well, you'll have to add a bit of practical aid to the loving, I guess, if you want to keep her with you. She looks as if the wind might blow her away if she got caught out in it. Now, good night. You and your brother can go. I'll sit here till that saucy Irishwoman gets my room ready. Take care! If you don't mind where you're going, you'll drop sperm on the rug, tipping that candlestick so!"

Hallam had been standing, leaning against the newel post, with his own too ready temper flaming within him. But there was one tenet in the Kaye household which had been held to rigidly by all its members: the guest within the house was sacred from any discourteous word or deed. Else the boy felt he should have given his new-found relative what Cleena called "a good pie-shaped piece of his mind."

He had to wait a moment before he could say "good night" in a decent tone of voice, then swung up the staircase in the direction of his mother's room.

Amy was too much astonished to say even thus much. She righted the candlestick, amazed at the interest in rugs which Mr. Wingate displayed, and followed her brother very slowly, like one entering a dark passage wherein she might go astray.

She stopped where Hallam had, before their mother's door, which was so rarely closed against them. Even now, as she heard her children whispering behind the panel, Mrs. Kaye came out and gave them each their accustomed caress; then bade them get straight to bed, for she would be having a long talk with them in the morning, and she wanted them to be "as bright as daisies," to understand it.

"Mother, that man! He – he's so dreadful! He scolded me about the candlestick, and – and you – and he made me feel like a great baby."

"I wish he might have waited; but, no matter. Good night."

It was a very confused and troubled Amy who crept into bed a little while afterward, and she meant to lie awake and think everything out straight, but she was too sound and healthy to give up slumber for any such purpose, and in a few minutes she was asleep.

CHAPTER VI. SETTLEMENTS

On the following morning the guest was the first person astir at Fairacres, not even excepting Cleena, who rose with the birds; and when she opened her kitchen door, the sight of him pacing the grass-grown driveway did not tend to put her in good humor.

But there was little danger of her breaking bounds again, in the matter of behavior. A short talk had passed between her mistress and herself, before they bade each other good night, that had not left the too devoted servant very proud of her overzeal; and she now turned to her stove to rattle off her indignation among its lids and grates. But she kept "speakin' with herself," after her odd fashion, and her tone was neither humble nor flattering.

"Arrah musha! The impidence of him! Hasn't he decency to wait till all's over 'fore he struts about that gait? But, faith, an' I'll show him one thing: that's as good a breakfast as ever he got in the old lady's time, as one hears so much tell of."

Whereupon, with this praiseworthy ambition, a calm fell upon poor Cleena's troubled spirit, and when, a couple of hours later, the family assembled in the dining room, everybody was astonished at the feast prepared; while all but the stranger knew that a week's rations had been mortgaged to furnish that one meal. However, nobody made any comment, though Mr. Wingate found in this show of luxury another explanation of the Kayes' financial straits.

"Cuthbert will not be down this morning, Archibald. I hope thee rested well. Hallam, will thee take thy father's place?"

Mrs. Kaye's manner, as she greeted her kinsman, betrayed little of what must have been her real feeling toward him, nor had her children ever seen her more composed and gentle, though Hallam noticed that she was paler than ever, and that her eyes were dull, as if she had not slept.

"It's going to be a miserable day outside," remarked the guest, a little stiffly.

"Inside, too, I fancy," answered Amy. "I hate undecided things. I like either a cheerful downpour or else sunshine. I think wobbly weather is as bad as wobbly folks – trying to a body's temper."

Mr. Wingate laughed, though rather harshly. Amy was already his favorite in that household, and he reflected that under different circumstances than those which brought him to Fairacres, he would have found her very interesting.

"The weather should not be allowed to affect one's spirits," said Mrs. Kaye.

"No, mother; I suppose not. Yet, it was so pretty here, last night; and now the leaves over the windows are all shrivelled up, while this border on the tablecloth is as crooked as can be. It all has such an afterward sort of look. Ah, it *is* raining, good and fast."

Mrs. Kaye excused herself and went to look out toward the library. The wind was howling in that direction, and she exclaimed, anxiously: —

"Cleena, go at once and see if it is doing any harm out there! That broken door and window – put something against them, if it is."

"I don't think there's any danger of harm. I've sent for a carpenter more than an hour ago," observed Mr. Wingate.

"Thee?"

For a moment there was a flash in the matron's eyes, but she did not remark further, though Hallam took up her cause with the words: —

"I suppose you meant it for kindness, but my father does not allow any one to interfere with that place. Even if it rained in, I think he would rather give his own orders."

"Probably," answered the guest, dryly, while Cleena deposited a dish of steaming waffles upon the table with such vigor as to set them all bouncing.

"Sure, mistress, you'll be takin' a few of these, why not. I never turned me finer, an' that honey's the last of the lot, three times strained, too, an' you please."

"Waffles, Cleena? Did thee take some up to the master? I am sure he would enjoy them."

"Indeed, I did that. Would I forget? So eat, to please Cleena, and to be strong for what comes."

Even Mrs. Kaye's indifference was not proof against the tempting delicacy, and doubtless the food did give her strength the better to go through a trying interview. For immediately breakfast was over, she rose, and, inviting the visitor into the old parlor, bade her children join them.

"What our cousin Archibald has to say concerns us all. I leave it to him to tell the whole story," and she sat down with Amy snuggled beside her, while Hallam stood upon his crutches at her back.

Somehow, Mr. Wingate found it a little difficult to begin, and after several attempts he put the plain question abruptly: —

"When can you leave, Salome?"

She caught her breath, and Amy felt the arm about her waist grow rigid, but she answered by another question: —

"Must thee really turn us out, Archibald?"

The plain, affectionate "thee" touched him, yet for that reason he settled himself all the more firmly in his decision.

"What has to be done would better be done at once. It is a long time, Salome, since I have had any recompense for the use of this — my property — "

"Your property?" cried Hallam.

"Yes, mine. Mine it should have been by lawful inheritance, save for a rank injustice and favoritism. Mine it is now, by right of actual purchase, the purchase of my own! Your mother seems to desire that you should at last learn the whole truth, and I assure you that I have advanced more than twice the money required to buy this place, even at an inflated market value. So, lad, don't get angry or indignant. I make no statements that I cannot prove, nor can your parents deny that I notified them to vacate these premises more than two years ago."

"Mother, is that so?"

"Yes, Hallam."

"Why didn't we go, then?"

"Our cousin had a heart and did not force us."

"Why do you now, sir?"

"Because I'm tired of waiting. The case grows worse each day. I'm sick of throwing good money after bad, while, all the time, such folly as is yonder goes on," pointing toward the distant studio. "One man is as good to labor as another. Cuthbert Kaye has had money all his life; *my* money, of which I was defrauded — "

"Archibald! Beg pardon, but that is not so."

"But it is so, Salome. If you have been hoodwinked and believed false tales, it is time these youngsters learned the facts. They are Kayes, like you and me. It is honest blood, mostly, that runs in all our veins. Well then, the life they are living is not an honest life. No man has a right to more than he can pay for. Can Cuthbert — "

"Archibald, thee shall leave him out of the question!" cried the wife, roused from her firm self-control. There was something so appealing in her tone that her children watched her in alarm.

"Very well. So be it. Since he is not man enough to stand by you in the trouble he has brought upon you — "

"If thee continues, we will leave the room."

"Why haven't I been able ever to meet him then? Why has he always thrust you between himself and me? If he thought because you were a woman I would forever put off the day of judgment, he has for once reckoned without his host. I tell you the end has come."

Mrs. Kaye sank back in her chair, trembling; but still her lips were closed until the angry guest had finished his speech and had walked off some of his excitement in a hasty pacing of the long room. At length he paused before her and said, more quietly: —

"There is no need of our having recourse to legal force. You should leave without being put out. That is why I came, to arrange it all to your satisfaction. You are a good woman, Salome, as good as any of your race before you, and just as big a simpleton when your affections are touched. A little more firmness on your part, a little less devotee sort of worship of a — "

"Archibald, remember thee is speaking of what does not concern thee. There is no need for rudeness, nor, indeed, 'legal' violence. Had I understood, two years ago, that thee needed — needed — this old home for thyself, I would have left it then. It has, of course, been to our advantage to occupy it, but it has also been to thine. An empty house goes swift to ruin. Everything here has been well cared for, as things held in trust should be. We will leave here as soon as I can find a house somewhere to shelter us."

Mrs. Kaye rose, as if to terminate the interview; but Mr. Wingate cleared his throat and lifted his hand as if he had something further to say.

"I suppose you have thought about this many times, Salome. What are your plans?"

"They are not definite. House-hunting is the first, I suppose, since we cannot do without a roof to cover us."

"How — I can't forget that we are kinsfolk, Salome — how do you propose to live? I am a plain business man, as practical as — I mean, use common sense. There are few houses to rent in this out-of-the-way town, where everybody, except the mill folks, owns his own home, — and even some of them do. I've come into possession of a house which might suit you — 'Hardscrabble.' I'll let you have it cheap."

"'Hardscrabble'! The 'Spite House'?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Archibald!"

"Exactly. I knew how it would strike you. We both know the story of the place, but our grandfather's enemy took good care to make his tenement comfortable inside, even if it was ugly as sin outside."

For a while Mrs. Kaye remained silent, debating with herself. Very soon she was able to look up and smile gratefully.

"Thee knows as well as I what a stab thee has given my pride, Archibald; but there is that saving 'common sense' in the offer, and love is stronger than pride. Tell me what rent thee will ask, and I will take the place if I can."

"Ten dollars a month."

The prompt, strictly business-like answer fairly startled its hearer. Then she smiled again.

"I have never lived anywhere save at Fairacres, thee knows. I must trust thee in the matter. I have no definite ideas about the values of houses, but I think I can pay that. I must. There is nowhere else to go. Yes, I will take it."

"It's dirt cheap, Salome. You will never think kindly of me, of course, but I'm dealing squarely, even generously by you. If 'thee'd,'" for the second time he dropped into the speech of his childhood, which his cousin Salome had always retained, and she was quick to observe this, "if thee had trusted me years ago, things might have gone better with us both. When will thee move?"

"To-day."

"To-day? There's no need for quite such haste."

"Thee said 'the sooner the better,' and I agree. Get the lease ready as soon as possible, and I will sign it. I've only one thing to ask about that: please don't have the name put as either 'Hardscrabble' or 'Spite House.' I'd like it called 'Charity House.'"

"Upon my word, Salome, you're the queerest mixture of business and sentiment that I ever met. You're as fanciful as a girl, still. But the name doesn't matter. Call the place 'Faith' and 'Hope' as well as 'Charity,' if you wish, after you get there; but I won't alter the lease which I brought along with me last night."

"Brought already, Archibald? Thee expected me to go to that place, then?"

"Under the circumstances, Salome, and, as you've just admitted, I didn't see what else you could do. I've sent 'Bony' into the village for my lawyer, because I want you should have things all straight. He'll witness our signatures to the lease, and if you'll pick out such furniture as you most especially care to have, I'll try to spare it, though the mortgage covers all."

But the speaker's glance moved so reluctantly and covetously over the antique plenishing that Mrs. Kaye promptly relieved his anxiety.

"It would be a pity to disturb these old, beloved things in their appropriate places – "

"You're right," interrupted the gentleman. "I've a better notion than that. I'll leave whatever is in 'Spite House' for your use, and not break up Fairacres at all."

"Is it still furnished, then?"

"Yes, according to old Ingraham's ideas – for hard use and no nonsense. He had a big family and nothing much but his temper to keep it on. However, if there's anything actually needed, I suppose I could advance a trifle more. It would be for your sake, only, Salome."

"Thank thee, but I hope not to run further into thy debt, Archibald, save in case of direst need. And do not think but that I fully understand and appreciate all the kindness which has permitted us to stay at Fairacres so long. In some things, as thee will one day discover, thee has mistaken and misjudged us; but in one thing I have understood and sympathized with thee, always, and with all my heart: the passionate love which a Kaye must feel for his home and all this."

There was pathos and dignity in the quiet gesture which Salome Kaye swept over the apartment that had been her own for all her life; but there was also courage and determination in her bearing as she walked out of it, leaning lightly upon Amy's shoulder, and with Hallam limping beside her. Somehow, too, Archibald Wingate did not feel quite as jubilant and successful as he had anticipated, and he welcomed, as an agreeable diversion, the approach of a buggy, conveying his friend, Lawyer Smith, to witness the lease and to give any needful advice in the matter.

"Hello, Smith. Quite a rainy day, isn't it? I've been studying that row of old pines and spruces. How do you think the avenue'd look if I was to have 'em trimmed up, say about as high as your head, from the ground? Give a better view of the old Ardsley Valley, wouldn't it?"

The lawyer stepped down from his vehicle, backward and cautiously, then turned, screwed up his eyes, and replied deliberately: —

"Well, it might; and then again it mightn't. It's taken a good many years for those branches to grow, and once they're off they can't be put back again. If I was in your place, I'd rather let things slide easy for a spell; then – go as you please. Have you come to a settlement? Will they quit without lawing?"

"Yes, they'll quit at once. Say, woman! You, Cleena, bring me a hatchet, will you? I'll just lop off a little limb on one side, and see the effect. Hurry up!"

"Faith, I'll fetch it!" responded Cleena, loudly. But when she did so, she advanced with such a menacing gesture upon the new proprietor of her old home that he shrank back, doubtful of her intent. "Ain't it enough to break hearts, without breakin' the helpless trees your own forebears planted long by? – Aha, my fine geniral, so you're bad penny back again? Well, then, you're the handle o' time. By the way you tacked up them boughs, you'll be clever at packin'. Come by. I'll give ye a job."

Thus, partly to Lawyer Smith's caution and partly to Cleena's indignation, the fine evergreens of Fairacres owed the fact that they, for the time being, escaped mutilation.

CHAPTER VII.

THE "SPITE HOUSE" OF BAREACRE

By nightfall it was all over; and Cleena, Hallam, and Amy, with their self-constituted bodyguard, Fayette, were gathered about a big table in the kitchen of the "Spite House," to eat a supper of bread and milk, and to discuss the events of that memorable day. Strangely enough, as Amy thought, none of them realized anything clearly except the facts of fatigue and hunger.

"Arrah musha! but the face of that lawyer body, when I tells him I was takin' the loan of his bit buggy wagon for the master an' mistress to ride to Burnside the morn, an' how as old Adam would sure send it back by a farm-hand, which he did that same. An' them two goin' off so quiet, even smilin', as if – But there, there! Have some more milk, Master Hal. It's like cream itself, so 'tis; an' that neighbor woman in the cottage yon is that friendly she'd be givin' me three pints to the quart if I'd leave her be."

"Well, dear old Adam will be glad to see them on any terms, he is so fond of father and mother. But knowing they're in such trouble, he'll have the best of everything for them to-night."

"Yes, Adam Burns is as likely as any man creature can be, which I've never been bothered with meself, me guardian angel be praised."

"Well, Cleena, I've seen you work hard before, but you did as much as ten Cleenas in one to-day."

The good woman sighed, then laughed outright. "It's been a hard row for that wicked body to hoe."

"Who, Cleena?"

"That sweet, decent kinsman o' your own. Was many an odd bit o' stuff went into the van 't he never meant should go there. The face of him when I went trampin' up the libr'y stairs, an' caught him watchin' Master Hallam packing the paint trash that he'd allowed the master might have. 'Take anything you want here, my boy,' says he. So, seein' Master Hal was working dainty an' slow, I just sweeps me arm over the whole business; an' I'm thinkin' there'll be 'tubes' a plenty for all the pictures master'll ever paint. In a fine heap, though, an' that must be your job, Master Hal, come to-morrow, to put them all tidy, as 'tis himself likes."

"I'll be glad to do it, Cleena; but in which of these old rooms am I to sleep?"

Cleena had taken a rapid survey of the dusty, musty bedchambers, and her cleanly soul revolted against her "childer" using any of them in their present condition. So for Amy she had put Mrs. Kaye's own mattress on the floor of what might be a parlor, and spread it with clean sheets; for Hallam there was in another place his father's easy lounge; and for herself and Fayette, who insisted upon staying for the night, there were "shakedown" of old, warm "comforts."

"And it's time we were all off to Noddle's Island. It's up in the mornin' early we must be. So scatter yourselves, all of ye, an' to sleep right away. Not forgettin' your prayers, as good Christians shouldn't."

"Of course not," answered Amy, drowsily; but Fayette looked as if he did not understand.

"Sure, *you'll* have to be taught then, my fine sir, an' I'll tackle that job with the rest of to-morrow's."

But when daylight broke and roused the active Cleena to begin her formidable task of scrubbing away the accumulated dirt of years there was no Fayette to be found. Dreamily, she recalled the sound of musical instruments, the shouts of voices, and the squealing of the rats that had hitherto been the tenants of "Spite House"; but which of these, if any, was answerable for the lad's absence, she could not guess.

"Well, I was mindin' to keep him busy, had he stayed; but since he's gone, there's one mouth less to feed."

It did not take the observant woman long to discover that the outlook for the comfort of "her folks" was even less by daylight than it had seemed the night before. Her heart sank, though she lost no time in useless regrets, and she did most cordially thank that "guardian angel" to whom she so constantly referred for having prevented her spending the last twenty-five dollars she possessed. This would long ago have wasted away had it not been placed in the care of that true friend of the family, Adam Burns, with whom her master and mistress had now taken refuge.

"Alanna, that's luck! I was for usin' it long syne, but the old man wouldn't leave me do it. 'No, Cleena, thee's not so young as thee was, an' thee might be wantin' it for doctor's stuff,' says he. Twenty-five dollars! That'd pay the rent an' buy flour an' tea, an' what not;" and with cheerful visions of the unlimited power of her small capital, the old servant stooped to fill her apron with the stray chips and branches the bare place afforded.

At that moment there fell upon her ears the familiar sound of Pepita and Balaam braying in concert for their breakfast.

"Now what's to feed *them* is more nor I know; yet never a doubt I doubt it would clean break the colleen's heart must she part with her neat little beast."

The braying roused Hallam and Amy, also, from a night of dreamless sleep; and as they passed out from the musty house into the crisp air of a frosty morning, they felt more cheerful than they considered was quite the proper thing, under the circumstances. Then Amy looked at her brother and laughed.

"Isn't it splendid after the rain? and isn't it funny to be here? Yesterday it seemed as if the world had come to an end, and now it seems as if it had just been made new."

"Every morn is a fresh beginning," quoted Hallam, who loved books better than his sister did.

"Let's go down to the gate, or place where a gate should be, and take a good look at our – home."

"All right. Though we've seen it at a distance, I suppose it will appear differently to us at near hand."

"And uglier. Oh, but it's horrid! *horrid!*" and with a sudden revulsion of feeling Amy buried her face in her hands and began to cry. "I hate it. I won't stay here. I will not. I'd rather go home and live in the old stable than here."

"That wouldn't have been a bad idea, only we shouldn't have been allowed."

"Who could have hindered that? Who'd want an empty stable?"

"Our cousin Archibald!" answered Hallam, with scornful emphasis. "I believe he feels as if he had a mortgage on our very souls. Indeed, he said I might sometime be able to earn enough to buy the place back, as well as pay all other debts. He said he couldn't live forever, and it was but fair he should have a few years' possession of 'his own.' He – Well, there's no use talking. I wish – I wish I were –"

"No, no! you don't! No, you don't either, Hallam Kaye! I know what you began to say, and you shall not finish. You shall not die. You shall get well and strong and do all those things he said. I'm ashamed of myself that I cried. I felt last night as if my old life were all a beautiful dream, and that I had just waked up into a real world where I had to do things for myself and for others; not have others do for me any longer."

"That was about the state of the case, I fancy."

"Well, that isn't so bad. It shouldn't be, that is; for I have such health and strength and everything. Nothing matters so much as long as we are all together."

"Nobody knows how long we shall be. I don't like these 'attacks' of father's, Amy. I'm afraid of them. It will kill him to live here."

It needed but the possibility of giving comfort to somebody to arouse all Amy's natural hopefulness, and she commanded with a shake of her forefinger: —

"Hallam Kaye, you stop it! I won't have it! If you keep it up, I shall have to – to cuff you."

"Try it!" cried the brother, already laughing at her fierce show of spirit; yet to tempt her audacity he thrust his fingers through her short curls and wagged her head playfully.

She did not resent it; she could resent nothing Hallam ever did save that morbid talk of his. She had been fighting with this spirit ever since she could remember, and their brief "tussle" over, she crept closer to him along the old stone wall and begged: —

"Cleena has tied the burros out to graze in the weeds, and that will be their breakfast, and while we're waiting for ours, I wish you'd tell me all you know about 'Spite House.' I've heard it, of course, but it's all mixed up in my mind, and I don't see just where that cousin Archibald comes in."

"Oh, he comes in easily enough. He's a descendant of old Jacob Ingraham as well as of the house of Kaye. I believe it was in this way: our great-grandfather Thomas Kaye and Jacob were brothers-in-law, and there was some trouble about money matters."

"Seems to me all the mean, hateful troubles *are* about money. I don't see why it was ever made."

"Well, they had such trouble anyway. Great-grandfather had just built Fairacres, and had spent a great deal to beautify the grounds. He was a pretty rich man, I fancy, and loved to live in a great whirl of society and entertain lots of people and all that. He was especially fond of the view from the front of the house and had cut away some of the trees for 'vistas' and 'outlooks' and 'views.' There were no mills on the Ardsley then. They came in our own grandfather's time. It was just a beautiful, shimmering river —"

"Hal, you're a poet!"

"Never," said the boy, with a blush.

"But you are. You tell things so I can just see them. I can see that shimmering river this instant, in my mind, with my eyes shut. I can see boats full of people sailing on it, and hear music and laughter and everything lovely."

"Who's the poet now?"

"I'm not. But go on."

"It seems that old Mr. Ingraham thought he had been cheated by great-grandfather —"

"Likely enough he had. Else I don't see where he got all that money to do things."

"But, missy, he was *our* relative. He was a *Kaye*."

"There might be good Kayes and bad Kayes, mightn't there?"

"Amy, you're too honest for comfort. You may think a spade's a spade, but you needn't always mention it."

"Go on with the story. In a few minutes Cleena will call us to our 'frugal repast,' like the poor children in stories, and I want to hear all about this 'ruined castle' I've come to live in, I mean 'dwell,' for story-book girls — 'maidens' — never do anything so commonplace as just 'live.' Hally, boy, there's a lot of humbug in this world."

"How did you find that out, Miss Experience?"

"I didn't trouble to find it, I just read it. I thought it sounded sort of nice and old, so I said it."

"Humph! Well, do you want to hear, or will you keep interrupting?"

"I do want to hear, and I probably shall interrupt. I am not blind to my own besetting sins."

"Listen. Just as great-grandfather had everything fixed to his taste and was enjoying life to the utmost, old Jacob came here to this knoll that faces Fairacres — Oh, you needn't turn around to see. The trees have grown again, and the view is hidden. On this knoll, if there was anything tall, it would spoil the Fairacres' view. So Jacob built this 'Spite House.' He made it as ugly as he could, and he did everything outrageous to make great-grandfather disgusted. He named this rocky barren 'Bareacre,' and that little gully yonder he called 'Glenpolly,' because his enemy had named the beautiful ravine we know as 'Glenellen.' Polly and Ellen were the wives' names, and I've heard they grieved greatly over the quarrel. Mr. Ingraham painted huge signs with the names on them, and hung up scarecrows on poles, because he wouldn't let a tree grow here, even if it could. There are a few now, though. Look like old plum trees. My, what a home for our mother!"

Amy's face sobered again, as she regarded the ugly stone structure which still looked strong enough to defy all time, but which no lapse of years had done much to beautify. Nothing had ever

thrived at Bareacre, which was, in fact, a hill of apparently solid stone, sparsely covered by the poorest of soil. The house was big, for the Ingraham family had been numerous, but it was as square and austere as the builders could make it. The roof ended exactly at the walls, which made it look, as Amy said, "like a girl with her eyelashes cut off." There were no blinds or shutters of any sort, and nothing to break the bleak winds which swept down between the hills of Ardsley, and which nipped the life of any brave green thing that tried to make a hold there. A few mullein stalks were all that flourished, and the stunted fruit trees which Hallam had noticed seemed but a pitiful parody upon the rich verdure of the elsewhere favored region.

"Has nobody ever lived here since that wicked old man?"

"Oh, yes. I think so. But nobody for long, nor could anybody make it a home."

"It looks as if it had been blue, up there by the roof."

"I believe it was. I've heard that every color possible was used in painting it, so as to make it the more annoying to a person of good taste, such as great-grandfather was."

"Heigho! Well, *we've* got to live here."

"Or die. It's hopeless. I can't see a ray of light in the whole situation."

"You dear old bat, you should wear specs. I can see several rays. I'll count them off. Ray one: the ugly all-sorts-of-paint has been washed away by the weather. Ray two: the air up here is as pure as it's sharp, and there's nothing to obstruct or keep it from blowing your 'hypo' away. Ray three: there are our own darling burros already helping to 'settle' by mowing the weeds with their mouths. What a blessing is hunger, rightly utilized! And, finally, there's that worth-her-weight-in-gold Goodsoul waving her pudding-stick, which in this new, unique life of ours must mean 'breakfast.' Come along. Heigho! Who's that? Our esteemed political friend, 'Rep-Dem-Prob.' I'd forgotten him. Now, by the lofty bearing with which he ascends to our castle of discontent, I believe he's been out 'marching.'"

It was, indeed, Fayette whom they saw climbing over the rocks. He wore his oilcloth blouse and his gay helmet, and soon they could hear his rude voice singing and see the waving of his broom.

"He? Coming back again? Why, we can't keep him. We can't even 'keep' ourselves."

"Yet never a doubt I doubt he means to tarry," quoted Amy, laughing at her brother's rueful countenance.

CHAPTER VIII. NEEDS AND HELPERS

"Sure, I thought ye had lost yourself or been ate by the rats!" cried Cleena, as Fayette rather timidly peered in at the open kitchen door. "But all rogues is fond o' good atin', so I suppose you've come for your breakfast, eh?"

"No. I've et."

"Must ha' been up with the lark then. No, hold on. Don't go in there. They're master Hallam an' Miss Amy still, an' always will be. They eats by themselves, as the gentry should. If there's ought left when they're done, time enough for you an' me."

"I've had my breakfast, I told you."

"Didn't seem to set well on your stummick either, by the way your temper troubles ye. Are ye as ready to work as ye was yesterday?"

"Yes. What I come back for."

Cleena paused and studied the ill-shaped, vacant, though not vicious, face of the unfortunate waif. Something drew her sympathy toward him, and she pitied him for the mother whom he had never known. In the adjoining room she could hear the voices of her own "childer," with their cultured inflection and language, which was theirs by inheritance and as unconsciously as were "Bony's" harsh tones and rude speech his own.

"Arrah musha! but it's a queer world, I d'know. There's them an' there's him, an' the Lord made 'em both. Hear me, me ginerel. Take a hold o' that broom o' yours, an' show me what it's made for. If you're as clean as you're homebly, I might stand your good friend. What for no?"

Fayette had returned Cleena's cool stare with another as steady. He liked her far better and more promptly than she liked him, yet in that moment of scrutiny each had measured the other and formed a tacit partnership. "For the family," was Cleena's watchword, and it had already become the half-wit's.

Cleena went to the well, tied her clothesline to the leaky old bucket and lowered it. On the night before she had obtained a pail of spring water from the cottage at the foot of the knoll, from the same friendly neighbor who had sold her the milk. But their own well must be fixed. To her dismay she found that it was very deep, and that the bit of water which remained in the bucket when it was drawn up was quite unfit even for cleaning purposes.

This worried her. A scarcity of water was one of the few trials which she had been spared, and she could hardly have met a heavier. As she turned toward the house she saw that Fayette had carefully set out of doors the old chairs and the other movable furniture which the kitchen had contained, and that, before sweeping, he was using his broom to brush the cobwebs from the ceiling. The sight filled her with joy and amazement.

"Saints bless us! That's the first man body I ever met that had sense like that!" and she lifted up her voice in a glad summons: —

"You, Napoleon Ginerel Bonyparty, come by!"

"Before I finish here?"

"Before the wag o' dog's tail. Hurry up!"

"The wind'll blow it all over again."

"Leave it blow. Come by. Here's more trouble even nor cobwebs, avick! First need is first served."

This summoned Hallam and Amy out to see what was going on, and after learning the difficulty and peering into the depths of the old pit they offered their suggestions. Said Amy: —

"We might draw it up, bucket by bucket, and throw it away. Then I suppose it would fill with clean water, wouldn't it?"

"If we did, 'twould break all our backs an' there's more to do than empty old wells. Master Hal, what's *your* say?"

"Hmm, we might rig up some sort of machinery and stir it all up, and with chemicals we could clear it and – "

"Troth we could, if we'd a month o' Sundays to do it in an' slathers o' time an' money spoilin' to be spent."

Hallam was disgusted. Already he had blamed himself for his haughty refusal of Mr. Wingate's offer, on the previous day, to send a practical man to look over the premises and "set them going," as any landlord would.

But the lad had replied, as one in authority to decide for his absent parents: "We won't trouble you, sir. What happens to us, after we leave Fairacres, is our own affair. If you get your rent, that should be sufficient for you."

After that the offer was not renewed; for Mr. Wingate was not the man to waste either money or service, and the lad's tone angered him.

Regrets were now, as always, useless, and Cleena's open disdain of Hallam's suggestion sent him limping angrily away; though Amy laughed over her own "valuable contribution to the solution of the dilemma," and by her intentional use of the longest words at hand caused Fayette to regard her with a wonderment that was ludicrous in itself.

"Well, Goodsoul, we've helped a lot. Ask our 'Rep-Dem-Prob' what his 'boys' would do."

"What for no? Sure, he's more sense nor the whole of us. Say, me ginerel, what's the way out?"

Fayette colored with pride. He had an inordinate vanity, and, like most of his sort, he possessed an almost startling keenness of intelligence in some respects, as contrasted with his foolishness in others. Moreover, he had been disciplined by poverty, and had always lived among working people and, for a long time, about the carpet mills.

"Well, the 'Supe's' force-pump."

"Hmm, I know, I know. But what's the 'Supe' an' his pump? Is he fish, flesh, or fowl, eh?"

"He's the 'Supe' to the mill. Ain't ye any sense?"

"No. None left after botherin' with you. What's it, Miss Amy?"

"I know. You mean Mr. Metcalf, don't you?"

"Yes."

"What would he do? How could he help us?"

"Lend me the donkey. I'll ride and tell him. All them houses – see them mill cottages, down yonder?"

"Certainly. They look very pretty from here, with all the trees about them."

"They've got wells. Once in six months the wells has to be cleared out. That's orders. Me an' another fellow goes down 'em, after the pump's drawed out all it can. We bail 'em out. I clean cisterns, too. Ain't another fellow in the village as good at a cistern as me. See, I'm slim. I can get down a man-hole 't nobody else can. Shall I go?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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