

Douglas Amanda M.

Helen Grant's Schooldays



Amanda Douglas
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CHAPTER I HELEN

It had been a great day for the children at Hope Center the closing day of school, the last of the term, the last of the week. The larger boys and girls had spent the morning decorating the "big" room, which was to be the assembly-room. At the Center they were still quite primitive. There were many old or rather elderly people very much opposed to "putting on airs." Boys and girls went to school together, but they wouldn't have called it co-education. So the main room where various meetings and occasional entertainments were held, was always known by the appellation "big."

It was very prettily trimmed with the shining sprays of "bread and butter," and wild clematis, and the platform was gay with flowers. Seats were arranged on either hand for the graduating class, and the best singers in school. There was a very good attendance. Closing day was held in as high esteem as Washington's Birthday, or Decoration Day. Christmas was only partly kept, the old Hope settlers being an offshoot of the

Puritans, and the one little Episcopalian chapel had almost to fight for its Holy days.

The first three seats in the audience-room were full of children in Sunday attire. The girl graduates were in white, with various colored ribbons. The boys' habiliments had followed no especial rule. But they were a bright, happy-looking lot, taking a deep interest in what they were to do. The boys had an entertaining historical exercise. One began with a brief account of causes leading to the revolution. Another followed with the part Boston played, then New York, then Philadelphia, Virginia, and the surrender of Cornwallis; afterward, two or three patriotic songs, several recitations – two distinctly humorous – another song or two, and then Helen Grant's selection, which was "Hervé Riel," a poem she had cut from a paper, that somehow inspired her. Diplomas were then distributed, and the "Star Spangled Banner," sung by everybody, finished the exercises.

Helen was fourteen, well-grown and very well-looking, without being pretty enough to arouse anyone's envy. "A great girl for book-learning," her uncle said, while Aunt Jane declared "She didn't see but people got along just as well without so much of it. It had never done a great deal for Ad Grant."

Helen had a bright, sunny nature – well, for that matter, she had a good many sides to her nature, and no girl of fourteen has them all definite at once. Some get toned down, some flash out here and there, and those of real worth come to have a steady shining light later on. But she never could hear Aunt Jane say

"Ad Grant" in the peculiar tone she used without a sharp pang. For Addison Grant was her father, that is if he was still alive, and when Aunt Jane wanted to be particularly tormenting, she was sure he was roaming the world somewhere, and forgetting that he had a child.

Sixteen years before he had come to Hope Center and taught school. A tall, thin nondescript sort of man, a college graduate, but that didn't raise him in anyone's estimation. He was queer and always working at some kind of problems, and doing bits of translating from old Latin and Greek writers, and spent his money for books that he considered of great value. Why pretty Kitty Mulford should have married him was a mystery, but why he should have taken her would have seemed a greater puzzle to intellectual people. They went to one of the larger cities, where he taught, then to another, and so on; and when Helen was seven her mother came back to the Center a hopeless invalid with consumption, and died. Mr. Grant seemed very much broken. No one knew what a trial the frivolous, childish wife had been. He *was* disappointed at not having a son. He had some peculiar ideas about a boy's education, and he didn't know what to do with a girl. So he left her with her aunt and uncle, and for four years sent them two hundred dollars a year for her keep. Then he went to Europe without so much as coming to say good-by, and no one had ever heard of him since.

Helen's memories of her mother were not delightful enough to build an altar to remembrance. She had fretted a good deal.

When she was out of temper she slapped Helen on the shoulder, and said she was "just like her father." Helen waited on her, changed her slippers, brushed her hair, and would have made a famous nurse if the end had not come. And then the life was so different.

The Mulfords were in many respects happy-go-lucky people. Aunt Jane scolded a good deal, or rather talked in a very scolding tone. But the children came up without much governing. Once in a while Uncle Jason struck one of them with his old gray felt hat; Helen didn't remember ever seeing him have a new one, but he wore a black one on Sunday. There were five rollicking children, and one daughter grown, who was engaged to be married at seventeen. Helen ran and played and worked and sewed a little, which she hated, and studied and read everything she could get hold of. There were Sunday-school library books, some of them very good, too; there were books she borrowed, and some old ones up in the garret belonging to her father. She read these quite on the sly, for she knew she should hate to hear comments made about them, and Aunt Jane might burn them up.

"It's mine!" declared Helen. "I'll hide it away. You have no business with it."

"What's that?" demanded Aunt Jane sharply. "Helen Grant, you just give that doll to 'Reely. You're too big for such nonsense! Now, 'Reely, that doll is yours, and if Helen takes it away, I'll just settle with her in a way she'll remember one while. You great baby-calf playing with dolls!"

Helen never troubled the doll after that. There was a crooked old apple-tree in the orchard, and after she had dipped into mythology she made a friend and confidant of it, read her stories to it, studied her lessons with it even in real cold weather. It was a sort of desultory education, until the last year, when Mr. Warfield came, and then Helen really found a friend worlds better than the old apple tree, though she still told it her dreams. And sometimes when the wind souged through its branches it seemed as if she could translate what it said.

"Of course you go to the High School next year," Mr. Warfield said a week or so before school closed. "It would be such a pity for you to stop here. You have the making of a good scholar, and there is no reason why you shouldn't be a teacher. You have one admirable quality, you go so directly to the point, you are so ambitious, so in earnest, and you acquire knowledge so easily. You will make a broad-minded woman. I must say the Center people are rather narrow and self-satisfied, except the few new ones that have come in." And Mr. Warfield smiled.

Helen felt in her inner consciousness that it would be unwise to talk about the High School. And she was very busy. She was called upon to help with the ironing now. She darned all the stockings. She washed the supper dishes because Aunt Jane was tired out, and Jenny wanted to sew on her wedding outfit.

Everything had gone along very comfortably. Her white frock had a scant ruffle put on the bottom to lengthen it down, and new sleeves put in. Uncle Jason was really proud that she had to

"speak a piece."

Everybody stopped to talk and discuss the exercises. The singing was pronounced first-rate. The History talk stirred up some revolutionary reminiscences among the old folks. Someone praised Helen's share in the entertainment.

"Well, I didn't just see the sense of it," declared Aunt Jane. "After all that great thing, savin' of the ships, as one may say, why didn't he ask for something worth while? Just a day to go off and see some woman – "

"She was his wife."

"And, I dare say, he had chances enough to see her. You can't tell what they are driving at in these new-fangled stories. Now there's 'Pity the sorrows of a poor old man, whose trembling limbs have borne him to your door,' and 'Columbia, Columbia, to glory arise, The Queen of the world, and the child of the skies' that children used to speak when I went to school, and you could sense them."

Mrs. Mulford repeated them as if she was reeling off so much prose, and paused out of breath. She was getting rather stout now.

"I thought it rather *theatrical*," said Mrs. Keen. "I didn't understand it a bit. The Searings are going to send Louise to the High School. They have it all fixed, and she's going to board with her sister through the week. Marty Pendleton's going, too. Dear me! There wa'n't any High School in my day, and I guess girls were just as smart."

Helen was with the girls in a merry crowd. Some were

going away to aunts and grandmothers, and the envied one, Ella Graham, was going to the seaside, as the doctor had recommended that to her ailing mother. So they walked on, chatting, until paths began to diverge. Two roads ran through the Center, north and south, east and west. There were South Hope and North Hope, settlements that had branched out from the Center. North Hope had grown into quite a thriving town with a railroad station and several social advantages. The High School for the towns around was situated here.

"Now," began Aunt Jane, as they neared the gate and said good-bye to a few who were going farther on, "now Helen, you just run in and take off your frock and that white petticoat. They'll do for Sunday. There's peas to shell and potatoes to clean, and I have to look after the chickens, and make some biscuits. After spending 'most all the day it's time you did something."

Helen drew a long breath. She wanted to go out to the old apple tree to dream and plan. But Aunt Jane didn't consider anything real work outside of housekeeping and earning money, though Helen had been up since five in the morning, and very busy with chores before she went to help adorn the schoolroom.

Sam, who had been inducted into farming two years before, was out in the field mowing with father and the man. Nathan, next in age, was most enthusiastic about the good time they had, only if there'd been a treat like a Sunday School picnic!

"Do stop!" said his mother, "I'm tired and sick of all this school stuff. Go out and bring in a good basket of wood, or you

won't have any chicken potpie for supper."

Helen hung up her frock, and put on the faded gingham and a checked apron, and kept busy right along. 'Reely helped shell peas; Fan and Lou were out playing.

"It's splendid that there isn't any more school," said Fan. "We can just play and play and play."

The big girl inside was sorry enough there was no more school. Somehow Aunt Jane's voice rasped her terribly this afternoon. Two whole months of it! A shudder ran all over her.

There was a savory fragrance through the house presently. Helen tried to remember everything that went on the table, though she was repeating snatches of verses to herself. Then Jenny came up the path, stood her umbrella in the corner, gave her hat a toss that landed it on a stand under the glass, that Helen had just cleared up, and dropped into a rocking chair.

"It's been hot to-day, now I tell you;" she said. "Well, did your fandango go off to suit, Helen?"

"I shouldn't call it fandango," the girl replied.

"Oh, well, what's in a name! Now I'll bet you can't tell what smart chap said that!"

"Shakspeare."

"Did he really? I suppose it's always safe to tack his name to everything;" and Jenny laughed. The word buxom could be justly applied to her. Her two long walks, and her day in the factory, did not seem to wear on her. Her color was rather high, her eyes and hair dark, her voice untrained, and everything about

her commonplace.

"Go and blow the horn," said Aunt Jane to Helen.

"Did you go, mother? Was it anything worth while?" asked the daughter.

"Oh, well, so, so. Mr. Warfield seemed very proud of his pupils. Yes, the singing was good. Harry Lane had the 'Surrender of Cornwallis', and it was just fine."

Father and Sam and the hired man came in. The two children straggled along, and Helen had to wash them, but presently they were all ranged about the table.

"Well, how did it go?" Uncle Jason asked, looking up as Helen finally took her place after doing Aunt Jane's bidding several times.

"Oh, it was splendid!" A thrill of delight swept over Helen as she met the good-humored eyes. "And I have a diploma."

"And did you carry the house by storm, or did you forget two lines in the most important place?" asked Sam, mischievously. "Dan Erlick is going to the High School in the fall. Are you?"

"O, I wish I could," cried Helen, eagerly, with a beseeching glance at her uncle. Occasionally he did decide matters.

"Well, I declare!" Aunt Jane threw back her head with her fork poised half way to her mouth, "And I dare say you'd like to go over to Europe, too!"

"I just should," said Helen with a good natured accent. "There are a great many things I should like to do."

"Where's the money coming from to do 'em?"

"I hope to earn it. I should like to teach, and Mr. Warfield thinks I ought."

"And follow in your father's steps."

Helen's face was scarlet.

"You just won't go to any High School, I can tell you," began her aunt in an arbitrary tone. "You'd look fine walking in three mile and out again every day. Who'd keep you in shoes? Or did you think you'd take the horse and wagon? You're learning enough for the kind of life you're likely to lead, and there are other things to do."

"And I'll tell you one of them, Nell," said Jenny with a rough comfort in her tone. "There will be three vacancies in the factory come September, and you better take one of them. Now I haven't been there but little more than two years, and take up my twelve dollars every two weeks. The work isn't hard. I almost think I'm a fool to get married quite so soon, only Joe does need a housekeeper, and will have the house all fixed up – and doesn't want to wait;" laughingly.

"Joe's a nice fellow," said her mother, "and well to do. And you didn't go to any High School, either."

Mrs. Mulford took great pride in her daughter's prospects, though when Joe Northrup first began to "wait on her," she said: "I don't see how you'll ever get along with old lady Northrup, and Joe won't leave his mother."

"I aint in any hurry," returned Jenny. "Joe's a good catch and worth waiting for."

In March Mrs. Northrup began to clean house and took a bad cold, and a month later was buried. Quite a sum of ready money came to Joe, and he built on a parlor room, a new wide porch, papered and painted, and Jenny felt not a little elated at her good luck. She had been steadily at work preparing for her new home, improving evenings and odd hours, for she was an industrious girl, and she declared Mrs. Northrup's old things would be a "disgrace to the folks on the ridge." These were the poorest and most inelegant people at the Center, and had somehow herded together.

"Yes, that will be a good thing for Helen," said Aunt Jane. "She's old enough to do something to earn her way. And you'll want everything new this winter, you've grown so. And if you have had any idee of High Schools and that folderol, you may just get it out of your head at once. If you'd a fortune it would be more to the purpose, but a girl – "

"It would be too far for her to walk," said Uncle Jason, warding off a reference to her father as he saw tears in Helen's eyes. "Mother, this is a tip-top potpie. You do beat the Dutch!"

"And I never went to school a day after I was twelve. I've kept a house and helped save and had six children of my own and Helen, and none of 'em have gone in rags. And there's Kate Weston, who's secretary of something over to North Hope, and who paints on chiny, and see what a house she keeps!"

"You can have lots of learning, and if it isn't of the right sort it won't do you much good," said Jenny sententiously. "There's a

girl in the factory who was at boarding school two years. She's twenty and she never earns over four dollars a week, and if I didn't know more than she does – well I'd go in a convent!"

Some other topics came up, and after dinner Sam went to milk, the hired man to care for the stock, Aunt Jane took the big rocking chair and settled herself to a few winks of sleep, as was her custom, and the walk of to-day had fatigued her more than usual. Helen and 'Reely cleared the table. Jenny sat down to the sewing machine and hemmed yards of ruffling for her various purposes. Then Helen put Fan and little Tom to bed, and sat a while out on the porch, thinking, strangely sore at heart.

She had not considered the subject seriously. It had been an ardent desire to go on studying. She had just reached the place where knowledge was fascinating to a girl of her temperament. Mr. Warfield had roused the best in her and she had, as it were, skipped over the years and seen herself just where she would like to be, able to travel, to make friends, to have books and the pictures she loved. She had not seen many that she cared for, until one day Mr. Warfield brought a portfolio of prints *he* admired, and she was so touched that she sat in a breathless thrill of joy with her eyes full of tears.

"Oh, I did not know there were such beautiful things in the world," she said with a sob in her breath. "And that people could really make them! How wonderful it must be to do something the whole world can enjoy."

He smiled kindly. "The world is large," he replied, "and if

only a little circle commends us, that must satisfy the most of us. And perhaps you know people who would rather have a bright chromo of fruit or flowers than all of these."

"Yes," she admitted with a flush.

"But in everything it is worth while to try to come up to the best within us."

This sentence lingered in her mind. But she was a very busy girl for the next two weeks, for there was a good deal to do at home. Then she was not old enough to have outgrown play. Girls really played in country places round about.

But some new thing was growing up within her. There comes a dividing line in many lives when the soul awakens and reaches up and seems suddenly to sweep past the old things, just as the bud pushes out of its sheath that then becomes a dry husk. So many desires crept up to the light. Study, languages, histories of men and women, and deeds that had changed the aspect of the world. Travel, a life of her own in which she was first, not in any selfish fashion, but to have things peculiarly her own, the things that appealed to her, not other people's ideas of what was best for you. She had had some of Jenny's frocks made over for her, and had been wearing Jenny's coat all winter. Aurelia was too small to make these changes economical, and Mrs. Mulford was one of the thrifty kind that believed in putting everything to the best use. Yet Helen longed for the time when second-hand clothes and ideas were no longer forced upon you, but you could come into some of your very own.

She thought she would go up to her own room and have a good cry. Just as she reached the door Aunt Jane said: "Yes, she's old enough now to go to work. It's a good idea."

"I'll speak to Mr. Brown and engage the place for her. After a fortnight, if she pays any sort of attention she'll get three dollars a week, for she's quick to see into things."

"Yes, if she settles her mind to them. Dear me! I hope she won't turn out trifling and inefficient like her father. She's got his eyes, only they're more wide awake. And when a girl has to do for herself, the sooner she begins the better. I'd reckoned on setting her to do something this fall, for there's 'Reely to work in the odds and ends; I always did say I wouldn't bring up a lot of shiftless girls, and I'll do my duty by her if she isn't altogether mine."

Helen went round to the side entrance and slipped upstairs. Fan and 'Reely slept in the big bed. There was a jog in the room and Helen's cot was here. She threw off her clothes and crept into bed, and cried with her whole soul in revolt. What right had anyone to order another's life, to put one in hard and distasteful places! She had never thought of the factory before, indeed she had never thought much of the future. For most healthy energetic girls the present is sufficient, and to Aunt Jane it was everything. Children were to do to-day's work, there was no fear but there would be enough to fill up to-morrow when it came.

To go in the factory when Mr. Warfield had said she could make a teacher! To miss three years in the High School, three

splendid satisfying years, to miss the wonderful knowledges of the wide, beautiful world when she had just come to know what a few leaves of them were like. No wonder she cried with a girl's passionate disappointment. No wonder she saw possibilities in the enchanted future and was confident of reaching them if she could be allowed.

CHAPTER II

AN EXCURSION TO HOPE

Helen was up at five the next morning. They were early risers in the summer time at the Mulfords', except Fan and little Tom. Mrs. Mulford didn't want young ones about bothering, when they could be no sort of use. Mr. Mulford had quoted the advantage of good habits, and that you never could begin too soon.

"When I have need of their habits I'll see that they have 'em," she replied with a confident nod. "Plenty of sleep is good for 'em."

Helen and 'Reely had reached the period of "habits." Mrs. Mulford always called out sharply at five o'clock.

Oh, what a beautiful world it was! Over east was a chain of high hills, blue in the morning light, except where the sun struck them. They seemed part of another world. Between were bits of woodland, meadows, orchards and the creek that was laid down on the State map as a river, but no one called it that. Nearer was a cluster of houses, two or three factories stretching out to South Hope and the railroad station. Oh, why were beautiful things always so far off?

She hurried on her gown and twisted up her hair in a knot. It was a faded cambric of last summer, rather short in the skirt for such a large girl, but then it was pretty well worn out. She helped

with the breakfast, she laid out the dainties for Jenny's lunch, she ran to do things for Uncle Jason, the world was just full of odds and ends jumbled together. She wondered why people had to eat so much. Why hadn't they been made so one meal a day would suffice?

Jenny took her little lunch satchel and trudged on with a cheerful good-morning. Nearly a mile to walk, and then to work all day in the hot stuffy place full of unfragrant smells, and the gossip about beaux and what was going to be the fashion, and perhaps unfriendly comments or common teasing jokes. That was what they talked about when they came to see Jenny. They were no great readers, these girls. And was her lot to be cast with them? Oh, had school days really come to an end? She had known their worth such a little while, only during the last year, the last three months she might say. School was a period everyone went through, but now, to her it had unfolded its magical labyrinth, and she wanted to roam there forever. Yet though she had shed bitter tears last night, she did not feel at all like crying now. An exultant life seemed throbbing within her.

"Now, Helen, you just go upstairs and sweep, and look out for the corners when you wipe up, and shake the mats out good and hard. See how quick you can get through."

Aunt Jane always said this Saturday morning. "Just as if I couldn't remember when I've done it for two years," Helen thought, but she made no reply. She worked away with her mind on a dozen other things, and her work was well done, too.

The great oven was heated on Saturday, an old-fashioned brick oven. Pies and cake and bread, and a big jar full of beans went in it to come out done to perfection. And the towels and handkerchiefs and stockings were washed on that day, it saved so much from Monday's work. Nathan and 'Reely weeded in the garden, then peeled apples for sauce, and picked raspberries to can, making what Aunt Jane called a clean sweep of them. Dinner again for a hungry host.

"I'm going over to Hope this afternoon," said Uncle Jason, "I s'pose there's some butter ready to take. Now what do you want?"

"Oh, my! What I don't want would be less. Some of that green and white gingham, spools of thread, shirting muslin good and stout, and Jenny said if anyone went over there was a list of things she wanted. It's in her machine drawer."

"Oh, I never can look after so much. Come mother, go along yourself."

"On Sat'day afternoon! Jason Mulford!"

"Well you can't go on Sunday," and he laughed.

"Yes, I could go over to church on Sunday," she retorted sharply. "Thank the Lord there's one day you don't have to cook from morning to night, though like the old Israelites you have to do a double portion on Sat'day. Dear me, I sometimes wished we lived on manna."

"What is manna?" inquired 'Reely.

"Bread and honey," said her father.

"No, twan't bread and honey either. Jason, why do you say

such things! It's what the children of Israel had to live on forty years in the wilderness, and they got mighty tired of it too. It's my opinion, 'Reely Mulford, you'd rather have bread and cake and potpie and baked beans and berries and such."

'Reely stared with her big brown eyes.

"And – didn't they have any – "

"You're big enough to read the Bible, 'Reely. When I was twelve I had read it all through, except the chapters with the names which mother said didn't count. But we didn't have Sunday school books then, and that was all there was to read on Sunday."

Helen thought everything that happened to Aunt Jane happened before she was twelve. She had made her father some shirts, she had pieced several quilts, made bread and cake and spun on the little wheel and could do a week's washing.

"Well, about Hope?" They seldom said North Hope, or tacked Hope on to the Center.

"Oh, I couldn't go."

"Well, I can't get all those things. See here, let Helen go."

Aunt Jane looked at her. Helen knew by experience that to want a thing very much was a sure way of being denied, so she merely went to the machine drawer and brought the list Jenny had written out, in which were several misspelled words.

"O Lordy!" ejaculated Uncle Jason.

"Before all these children too! No one would think you were a church member, Jason," said his wife severely.

"Well, if you want all them things you'll have to send Helen along to remember. An' I dunno's I have time."

Uncle Jason rose from the table. So did the hired man and Sam. Helen picked up the list and put it back in the drawer, brought the cloth to wash Tom's hands and began to pile up the dishes, her heart in a tumult of desire.

"Jason, what time you going?"

"'Bout two. I've got to see Warren at three. And isn't there butter to take over?"

"Yes, to Mrs. Dayton. Well – I think it is best to send Helen. Now, Helen, you wash up the dishes quick and do it well, too. Then wash yourself and dress. You know it puts Uncle Jason out to wait, he hasn't the longest temper in the world."

Helen was both quick and deft. Aunt Jane took the credit of this to her own training, but there was an instinctive delicacy in the girl that made her wish she had finer and prettier dishes to wash. She did not truly despise the work so much. She really loved to read advertisements of fine china and glass, Berlin and Copenhagen wares, Wedgewood and Limoges, and hunted them up in the big school dictionary.

She was standing on the porch five minutes before two, a wholesome, happy-looking girl with two braids of light brown hair, tied together half-way down with a brown ribbon, and some wavy little ends about her forehead that would curl when they were wet. Her straw hat had a wreath of rather soiled daisies that sun and showers had not refreshed, but her blue cambric with

white bands looked fresh and nice, though it had been made from Jenny's skirt, turned the other side out. Aunt Jane had made her add her wants to the list, so she wouldn't forget a single thing. The butter was a nice roll wrapped in a cloth and shut tight in an immaculate tin pail.

With many charges they started off.

"I wish mother'd learn there wan't any sense in fussin so much, but land! I suppose people are as they grow. Mebbe they can't help it."

"But if one tried? Isn't it like learning other things, or unlearning them?"

"Well – no, I guess not. You see all these habits and things are inside of one, born with him or her as you might say, while the book learning is just – well determination I s'pose. And so's farming."

That wasn't very lucid.

"But if you found some better way of farming."

"There aint many better ways. Keep your ground light and free from weeds and fertilize and get the best seed and then keep at it."

"And if you do a wrong or foolish thing, try not to repeat it."

"That's about it. But folks are mighty sot in their opinions, and hate to change. If I find a better way I take it up. Land! We couldn't farm in some things as people did a hundred year ago."

There was a splendid row of shade trees on the road to North Hope, mostly maples, but here and there an elm or a chestnut.

There were farms and gardens, and old settlers who did not want any change. Then the railroad had established business lines outside the Center, while that had hardly changed in fifty years. But it kept a quaint beauty of its own. Here and there was an old well sweep, then a long line of stone wall covered with Virginia creeper or clematis. And then a tall row of hollyhocks in all colors, or great sunflowers with their buds stretching out of close coverts. It was so tranquil that the tired girl lapsed into a kind of dreamy content. She used to think in later years this was a sort of turning point in her life, and yet she had no presentiment.

"Now the thing you better do, Helen," said her uncle, "is to get out here and go straight over Main Street and do your tradin'. Land sakes! I wouldn't look up those forty botherin' things for a handful of money. I'll drive round and leave the butter, and then you go to Mrs. Dayton's when you're through. I may be a little belated. Be sure now you don't forget anything."

Helen sprang out, holding her satchel with its precious contents very tightly. The stores were really quite showy, and on Saturday afternoon everybody who could, went out. She met some of her schoolmates. Ella Graham and her mother were buying pretty articles for their sea-side trip. Many were just looking. The day was not so very hot, indeed now it began to cloud over a little, just enough to soften the atmosphere.

She kept studying the list. She couldn't match the edging, but she took two samples that were nearest to it, and she couldn't find the peculiar blue shade of sewing silk. She made believe

now and then, that she was ordering some of the lovely lawns and cambrics, and that she didn't have to consider whether they would wash well, and how they would get made. She chose ribbons and laces to trim them with. And oh, the pretty hats, the fresh crisp flowers!

Then she made a sudden pause. Finery went out of her head. A book and picture store, and in the very front, the post of honor, a most exquisite Mother and Child – the Bodenhause Madonna.

Mr. Warfield had two or three in his collection, and the Sistine Madonna had gone to her heart. But this child with his mother's eyes, and the tender clinging love as if he was afraid some hand might wrest him from his mother's clasp, the love unutterable in both faces filled her with a wordless admiration. It seemed as if she could stand there forever, as if all her longings were lost in this rapture.

Presently she summoned courage to go in and inquire about it. A modern Madonna by a young German, a new thought of divine motherhood. It was a very fine photograph, framed, and the price was fifteen dollars.

Of course she had no more thought of buying it than of the lawns and laces. But she was very glad she had seen it. Sometime there might be a new world for her, where she could have a few of these lovely things. She must descend to gingham and shirting muslin.

Then she hurried on to Mrs. Dayton's. Uncle Jason had not come. There was a very fine old lady sitting on the porch in a

silken gown with ruffles and laces, a heavy golden chain drooping about her waist, a large diamond flashing at her throat and smaller ones in her ears; while her fingers were jeweled to the last degree. But oh, how wrinkled she was, and her hair was threaded with white, while her eyes seemed almost faded out.

Helen went around to the side entrance. Mrs. Dayton was arranging the table for supper. A very pleasant, plump, amiable woman of middle-life in a white gown, almost covered with a big apron.

"Why Helen Grant! Aren't you tired to death with those bundles? Sit down and get a breath. Your uncle said you would come. Take off your hat. You're just in time to have a bit of supper. Mr. Mulford said you were sent to do a lot of shopping. How did you make out?"

"Oh, very well, I think. You see I did not have to use my taste or judgment, it was all mapped out for me," smiling. "I was afraid I should be late."

"Oh, your uncle said it would be near seven when he came. And it is only quarter past six. Now take off your hat and fan yourself cool, and in five minutes I'll call the folks. They haven't all come yet. The Disbrowes get here to-night. I heard you quite distinguished yourself at school! You take learning from your father's side. The Mulford genius does not run in that channel."

Mrs. Dayton gave a pleasant smile. There was no malice in her speech. Helen colored a little under the praise.

"Pity you don't live nearer so that you could come in to the

High School."

"Oh, I wish I could. I love to study. And there are so many splendid things in the world that one would like to know."

"What are you going to do with yourself?"

Ah, it was not what she wanted to do. The tears suddenly softened her eyes.

"Oh, Helen, an idea has just come to me." Mrs. Dayton had been putting some last touches to the table and paused at the corner with a glass in her hand, studying the girl with comprehensive interest. "I suppose you meant to stay at home during vacation and help your Aunt? But Aurelia's getting a big girl and there are so many of you. I wonder if you wouldn't like to come over here and help me, and get paid for it? Why, I think you'd just suit. Did you see that old lady sitting on the front porch? That's Mrs. Van Dorn. She was here last summer. She had a companion then, a real nice girl about twenty, that she had sort of adopted. She has no end of money and is queer and full of whims. She wants to go to Europe in the fall and spend the winter in France. She travels all over. But the girl, Miss Gage, didn't want to go."

"Oh, dear, you don't mean" – Helen stopped and colored scarlet, and her breath came in bounds.

"That you should go in her place? Oh; no, you can't indulge in such luxuries just yet. Miss Gage finally consented on condition that she could spend the summer with her folks on Long Island. There's quite a family of them, and they seem to care a good

deal for each other. Mrs. Van Dorn wants someone to run up and down for her, read to her, fan her sometimes and go out driving with her. She doesn't get up until after eight, and has coffee, fruit, and rolls brought up to her room. And she's a great hand for flowers – her vases must be washed out and filled every day. Then she comes down on the porch, wants the paper read to her and likes to talk over things. After dinner she takes a nap. Then she goes for a drive. They used to take a book along last summer, she's as fond of poetry as any young girl. Mr. Warfield said you were the finest reader of poetry in the school. And what I'm driving at is that I do believe you could suit her, and I'd like someone to help me out a little when I'm rushed. Joanna's good, but one pair of hands can't do everything. I asked Mary Cross to come over and read, but she drones, and she can't bear poetry. And I've been thinking who I could find. You see it isn't like a maid. Miss Gray, the nurse, comes in every morning and gives her massage and all that. She's smart enough to help herself and hates to be thought old. Now, if you could come and help both, and earn a little money? It would be three dollars a week, and no real hard work."

"Oh!" cried Helen in a fervor of delight that made her absolutely faint at heart.

Joanna opened the door. "Haven't you rung the bell?" she asked in surprise.

"I declare!" Mrs. Dayton laughed and rang it at once. Joanna brought in the soup tureen and stood it on the side table.

"We will finish the talk by and by," the mistress said.

The boarders came in. Mr. and Mrs. Pratt, Mrs. Lessing and her daughters, Mr. Conway and Mrs. Van Dorn. When the Disbrowes arrived the house would be filled.

"This is my young friend Miss Helen Grant," announced Mrs. Dayton, and she gave the girl a seat beside her. Mrs. Van Dorn was next.

Helen enjoyed it so much. The spotless cloth with its fern leaves and wild roses, the small bowl of flowers at each end of the table, the shining silver, and Joanna's quiet serving. The guests talked in low, pleasant tones. At home there was always a din and a clatter and two or three children talking at once, a coarse and generally soiled table cloth, and Aunt Jane scolding one and another. And there was always a slop of some kind.

After the soup came the dinner proper; roast chicken and cold boiled ham cut in thin slices, not chunks. What a luscious pinky tint it had. And the vegetables had a dainty tempting aspect. The table service was delicately decorated porcelain, but it seemed rare china to the girl. What lovely living this was!

Helen possessed a certain kind of adaptiveness. Aunt Jane would have called it "putting on airs." She made no blunders, she answered the few questions addressed to her, in a quiet tone, for she did not have to shout to be heard over the din of children.

There was dessert and fruit, not so much more than they were used to having at home, for the Mulford's were good liver. Afterward the boarders sauntered out on the porch or the lawn

seats, where the gentlemen smoked.

"Now you've seen Mrs. Van Dorn, and she isn't so very formidable, is she? Sometimes she is very amiable, but I suppose few of us keep that even tenor of the way so much talked about. And there are queer people all over the world."

"Whoa, Betty, whoa! You'll get home to your supper presently," exclaimed a well-known voice, as wheels announced the approaching vehicle.

Mrs. Dayton and Helen went out. Mr. Mulford thought first he couldn't stop a minute, it was late. But the hostess explained that she had something very important to talk over, and he could have his supper while he was listening.

He demurred a little, but finally assented. Mrs. Dayton brought him a tempting plateful, and then unfolded her plan which had shaped itself definitely in this brief while. She would come over Monday afternoon, meanwhile he was to prepare the way for her.

"Well, that does beat me! Why Helen, you've struck luck! I don't see how mother can make any real objection, though she'll fuss at first. That's her way. And as you say ma'am we've a houseful at home, Helen ought to be mighty obliged to you."

Helen caught Mrs. Dayton's hand and pressed it against her cheek in a mute caress.

"And now we must start off home. Oh, Helen, here's a letter for you. Come, you're too young for that sort of work," and her uncle laughed.

She lingered in the door-way opening it. Mr. Warfield had to go away before he had expected, but he begged her to take the High School examination and see how she stood. When he returned they would talk the matter over. It would be such a pity for her to stop here. He sent a list of questions for her to study out.

They hurried off home, and Betty was nothing loth. Uncle Jason said he would lay the matter before mother to-morrow. Helen better not say anything.

"And you'll be so fine riding out every day, and keeping company with big bugs that I don't see how you'll ever get back to us again. Mebbe you won't. The High School may be next step."

She squeezed Uncle Jason's arm in a sort of transport. A shadowy thought like this had crossed her brain.

Aunt Jane was out on the doorstep with some of the younger children.

"Well, you *have* come at last, after keeping one on tenterhooks and supper warmed up and got cold again, and no one knowing whether you were thrown out and killed or waylaid – "

"There mother, nothing happened except that Warren fellow went off and I waited and waited for him. I was bound to get my note. And we had supper at Mrs. Dayton's. I sent Helen there to wait for me."

"Oh, Helen – we couldn't think! Did you get the things? If you'd lost my money – " and Jenny made a threatening pause.

"I didn't lose anything." Helen began to unpack her satchel on the cleanest end of the dining table. "I found everything but the

lace and the blue sewing silk, and Mr. Morris is going to order them by mail. He sent some samples of lace in case he couldn't find the exact match."

"But it's got to match," returned Jenny in a positive tone. "And I did want that blue silk to finish my stitching Monday night. If you'd come home early with it I could have finished it to-night. H'm, h'm," opening the parcel and nodding. "Mrs. Dayton got her house full? And what did you see nice? Have prices gone down any, but I s'pose its hardly time! And was the style out in their best? Are they wearing ruffles on skirts or just plain? And are they real scant? Dear me! I haven't been over to North Hope in a dog's age."

Helen didn't remember about skirts except that Mrs. Van Dorn's light silk had a beautiful black lace flounce. And the Madonna was still plain before her eyes.

"Well you are stupid enough," cried Jenny in disgust. "I think I'd used my eyes to a better purpose. And you didn't even bring home any fashion-papers!"

Mr. and Mrs. Mulford were still having a little bickering on the stoop. Then she came in, examined the gingham and the muslin, sent the children to bed, told Helen to take the things off the table, and said she was tired to death, and that no one ever thought about her, or cared whether they kept her up till midnight.

Helen was very glad to get away to bed, and live over the meal at Mrs. Dayton's, with its ease and refinement. How could she help building air-castles when youth is so rich in imagination,

and hope is boundless! And if one unlooked-for thing happened,
might not another?

CHAPTER III

AIR CASTLES WITH FOUNDATIONS

Aunt Jane said Helen must stay home from church Sunday morning, and help with the dinner. Joe Northrup and two cousins were coming to visit. In the afternoon all the younger portion went to Sunday School, and the little leisure Helen had afterward was devoted to reading aloud their library books. And when she came down Monday morning, Aunt Jane said in her brisk, authoritative fashion:

"Now, Helen, you fly 'round and get at the washing. See if you can't learn something useful in vacation. A big girl like you ought to know how to do 'most everything. I washed when I had to stand up on a stool to reach the washboard."

Considering that for the last two months Helen had helped with the washing before school time, and had often run every step of the way because she was late, the request did not strike her as pertaining strictly to vacation. She went about her work cheerily. Uncle Jason had whispered in her ear, "Don't you worry. I guess it will all come out right."

Then the clothes were folded down, and after clearing the dinner away, Helen began to iron. Aunt Jane dropped on the old lounge and took her forty winks, then changed her gown, put

on a clean white apron, which Helen knew was for company, and the thought added to her blitheness. Between three and four Mrs. Dayton drove up in the coupé with Mrs. Van Dorn, who continued her journeying around. The Mulfords' front-yard was rather pretty, with two borders of various flowers in bloom, and, as the younger children had gone over to the woods, it was quiet and serene all about. Helen glanced out of the side window, and gave thanks for the decent appearance of the place.

The conversation seemed to be not altogether dispassionate. She heard Aunt Jane raise her voice, and talk in her dogmatic manner. Oh! what if she couldn't go! She clasped her hot hands up to her face, and the iron stood there on the cloth and scorched, a thing Aunt Jane made a fuss about.

Truth to tell, Mrs. Mulford had two minds pulling her in opposite directions. It would just spoil Helen to go. She would hate working in the shop afterward. She would be planning all the time to get to the High School. She knew enough for ordinary girls. She would have to work for her living, and she couldn't spend three years getting ready. There was a little feeling, also, that she didn't want Helen any nicer or finer than her own girls. They had a father who could help them along. Helen hadn't. And if education shouldn't do more for her than it had for her father!

But there was the money, and any kind of work that made actual money was a great thing in Mrs. Mulford's estimation. Nine or ten weeks. Twenty-seven or thirty dollars!

"You see, I'd counted on giving Helen a good training in

housework this vacation. When girls go to school they aint good for much that way. And 'long in October she's going in the shop, and then she won't have much chance to learn. An' I d' know as it'll be a good thing for her to spend her time readin' novels an' settin' 'round dreamin' and moonin'."

"She'll read a good deal beside novels. Mrs. Van Dorn is a very intelligent woman, and keeps up to the times. She has all the magazines, and the fine weekly papers, and she knows more of what is going on in the big world than most of the men. Then Helen would assist me in many things. Oh! I would see that she'd learn something useful every day," Mrs. Dayton declared, with a bright smile.

"Then she aint fixed up. She's outgrown most of her clothes, an' I'd 'lotted on having her sew some. She can run the machine, and I don't believe in girls who can't do any sewing. I'd be ashamed to bring up one so helpless. Here's my Jenny making most of her weddin' things. We don't count on having a dressmaker till the last, to put on the finishing touches."

"About the clothes," began Mrs. Dayton in a persuasive tone, "I have two or three lawn dresses that would make over nicely for Helen. And you know I did quite a bit of dressmaking through Mr. Dayton's long illness. And there's my machine. She would have some time to sew. Oh, you could depend on me not to let her waste her time."

Mrs. Dayton had certainly been a thrifty woman, if it was on higher lines than anything Mrs. Jason aspired to. She had money

in the bank, beside getting her house clear.

Aunt Jane's arguments seemed over-ruled in such a pleasant yet decisive manner that she began to feel out-generated. Uncle Jason had said yesterday, "You'd better let her go. If they wanted her in the shop right away you'd send her. So what's the difference!"

"There's a great deal of difference," she answered sharply, but she couldn't quite explain it. For Helen the three dollars a week really won the day. Aunt Jane tried to stand out for the rest of the week, but Mrs. Dayton said she would come over on Wednesday, and she knew she could fix Helen up, without a bit of trouble.

"Don't let her fool away her money," said Aunt Jane. "You'd better keep it until the end of the month."

Mrs. Dayton nodded and rose. The carriage was coming slowly up the road.

Aunt Jane did not go out in the kitchen, but upstairs, and looked over Helen's wardrobe. A white frock, a cambric, blue, with white dots, and a seersucker, trimmed with bands of blue. Then, there was the striped white skirt of Jenny's she meant to make over. They could do that to-morrow. She could conjure some of it out before supper-time, and put in the shirts and collars, though at fourteen Helen ought to know how to iron them. She would forget all she had learned. It really wasn't the thing to let her go.

Helen went on ironing. 'Reely's white frock fell to her share; indeed, it seemed as if 'most everything did to-day. She was hot

and tired, and, oh! if she could not go!

"I don't see why those young ones don't come back. 'Reely hasn't a bit more sense than Fan. She needs a good trouncing, and she'll get it, too. You leave off, Helen, and shell them beans; they ought to have been on half an hour ago. And lay the two slices of ham in cold water to draw out some of the salt; then the potatoes. I'll iron."

She did not ask, and Aunt Jane did not proffer her decision. Helen feared it was adverse, then she recalled the fact that Aunt Jane always told the unpleasant things at once. Ill tidings with her never lagged. So she took heart of hope again. Then there were raspberries to pick. And supper, and children scolded and threatened.

"Well?" said Uncle Jason inquiringly.

"She was here, but I haven't just made up my mind. She'll be here Wednesday."

"Whew!" ejaculated Uncle Jason.

She went down the garden path to meet Jenny, who took the shortest way across lots.

"I'm goin' to sleep on it," she said, after she had told Jenny.

"But you'll let her go! Why, it would be foolish!"

"I s'pose I shall. But I'll keep her on tenter hooks to-night. Right down to the bottom I don't approve of it. She'll be planning all summer to get to that High School. Three years is too much to throw away when you're dependent on other folks."

So Helen had to go to bed unsatisfied, for Uncle Jason

wouldn't be waylaid.

"I've cut you a frock out of that striped muslin of Jenny's," Aunt Jane announced, the next morning. "Sew up the seams, and put in the hem, and then I'll fix the waist."

Aunt Jane was "handy," as many country women have to be.

"You were mighty close about that business of Sat'day afternoon," Aunt Jane flung out when she could no longer contain herself. "I s'pose it don't make much difference whether you go or not?"

"Oh, I should like to go." Helen's voice was unsteady. "But Mrs. Dayton told Uncle Jason to talk it over with you, and then she would come and see you, and he said – that it would be as – as – and it seemed as if I hadn't much to do with it until – "

"Well, I've decided to let you go and try. They may not like you. Rich old women are generally queer and finicky, and don't keep one mind hardly a week at a time. So it's doubtful if you stay. Then it is a good deal like being a servant, and none of the Mulfords ever lived out, as far as I've heard."

Helen colored. She had not thought of that aspect. Neither had she considered that her dream might come to an untimely end.

"And it seems a shame to waste the whole summer when there's so much to do."

"But if they had wanted me in the shop you would have let me go, wouldn't you?" Helen said in a tone that she tried hard to keep from being pert.

"That would have been different. A steady job for years, and

getting higher wages all the time. I've told Jenny to engage the chance."

Years in a shop, doing one thing over and over! She recalled a sentence she had heard Mr. Warfield quote several times from an English writer, "But that one man should die ignorant who had a capacity for knowledge, this I call tragedy!" She was not very clear in her own mind as to what tragedy really was, but if one had a capacity for wider knowledge, would it not be tragedy to spend years doing what one loathed? She hated the smells of the shoe shop, the common air that seemed to envelop everyone, the loud voices and boisterous laughs. And she wouldn't mind helping someone for her board, and going to the High School. Why, she did a great deal of work here, but it seemed nothing to Aunt Jane.

The frock was finished, and she washed it out, starched it, and would iron it to-morrow morning. Then there were stockings to mend, although the two younger boys went barefoot around the farm. And she worked up to the very moment the carriage turned up the bend in the road, when she ran and dressed herself while Aunt Jane packed the old valise. The children stood around.

"Oh, Mis' Dayton, can't I come some day?" cried Fanny. "How long are you going to keep Helen?"

"Till she gets tired and homesick," was the reply.

A smile crossed Helen's lips and stayed there, softening her face wonderfully.

They shouted out their good-bys, and asked their mother a

dozen questions, receiving about as many slaps in return. For the remainder of the day, Mrs. Jason was undeniably cross.

"That girl'll turn out just like her father," she said to Jenny. "She hasn't a bit of gratitude."

"And I hope the old woman will be as queer as they make them," returned Jenny with a laugh.

In the few years of her life, Helen had never been visiting, to stay away over night. This was like some of the stories she had read and envied the heroine. There was a small alcove off Mrs. Dayton's room, with a curtain stretched across. For now the house was really full, except one guest chamber. There was a closet for her clothes just off the end of the short hall, that led to the back stairs, which ran down to the kitchen, a spacious orderly kitchen, good enough to live in altogether, Helen thought.

She helped to take the dishes out to Joanna, and begged to wipe them for her.

"If you're not heavy handed," said Joanna, a little doubtful.

"Or butter-fingered," laughed Helen. "That's what we say at home. But these dishes are so lovely that it is like – well it's like reading verses after some heavy prose."

"I'm not much on verses," replied Joanna, watching her new help warily. She did work with a dainty kind of touch.

Mrs. Dayton came, and stood looking at them with a humorous sort of smile.

"She knows how to wipe dishes," said Joanna, nodding approvingly.

"It is a good deal to suit Joanna. No doubt she will excuse you this time from wiping pots and pans, and you may come out of doors with me."

The lawn – they called it that here at North Hope – presented a picturesque aspect. A party were playing croquet. Mrs. Disbrowe was walking her twenty-months'-old little girl up and down the path. Mrs. Van Dorn sat in a wicker rocking chair that had a hood over the top to shield her from the air. Her silk gown flowed around gracefully, and her hands were a sparkle of rings.

"Oh, how sweet the air is," said Helen. "There's sweet-clover somewhere, and when the dew falls it is so delightful."

"They have it in the next-door lawn and the mower was run over it awhile ago."

Helen drew long delicious breaths. No noisy children, and the soft laughs, the gay talk was like music to her. She walked across the porch.

"Mrs. Dayton said you were fond of reading aloud," began Mrs. Van Dorn. "Your voice is nice and smooth."

"Your voice is like your father's, Helen! I had not remarked it before. Only it is a girl's voice," Mrs. Dayton commented.

"I am glad it suggests his," exclaimed Helen with a pleasurable thrill.

"Where is your father?" asked Mrs. Van Dorn.

"He is dead," said Mrs. Dayton. "Both father and mother are dead."

"I was an orphan, too," continued Mrs. Van Dorn. "And I had

no near relatives. It is a sorrowful lot."

"Helen has had good friends, relatives."

"That's a comfort. I heard, we all did, that you were one of the best speakers at the closing of school. It was in the paper."

"Oh, was it?" Helen's eyes glowed with gratification.

"Yes. So Mrs. Dayton suggested you might be as good as some grown-up body. That was Robert Browning's poem you recited."

"It is a splendid poem," cried Helen enthusiastically. "You can see it all; the squadron – what was left of it after the battle – and the 'brief and bitter debate,' and the order to blow up the vessels on the beach. And then Hervé Riel, just a sailor, stepping out and making his daring proposal, and going 'safe through shoal and rock!' Oh, how the captain must have stood breathless! And the English coming too late! I'm glad someone put it in stirring verse."

Helen paused with a scarlet face. She never talked this way to anyone except Mr. Warfield.

"Yes," said Mrs. Van Dorn, "I have seen the man who wrote it, talked with him and his lovely wife, who wrote verses quite as beautiful. I think you like stirring poems," in a half inquiry.

"Yes, I do," she replied tremulously, and in her girlish enthusiasm she thought she could have fallen down at the feet of the man who wrote Hervé Riel. She never had thought of his being an actual living man.

"And do you know Macaulay's 'Horatius'?"

"Oh, I don't know very much – only the poems in the

reading books, and a few that Mr. Warfield had. I know most of Longfellow."

"The Center is rather behind the towns around, although it is the oldest part; settled more than a hundred years ago. But it is largely farms. The railroad passed it by some fifteen years ago, and the stations have improved rapidly. Why, we have quite a library here, and the High School for more than a half the county," explained Mrs. Dayton.

"It's not as pretty as this Hope. And the range of hills to the northeast – I suppose you call them mountains – and the river, add so much to it."

"And we have only a little creek that empties into Piqua River, and a pond in a low place, that we skate on in the winter," said Helen rather mirthfully. "I can't help wondering what the ocean is like, and the great lakes, and Niagara Falls, and the Mississippi River with all its mouths emptying into the Gulf of Mexico. And the Amazon, and the Andes."

"And Europe, and the Alps, and the lovely lakes, and the Balkans, and the Gulf of Arabia, and India, and the Himalayas, and Japan – "

"Oh, dear, what a grand world!" exclaimed Helen, when Mrs. Van Dorn paused. "I don't suppose anyone has ever seen it all," and her tone was freighted with regret.

"I have seen a good deal of it. I have been round the world, and lived in many foreign cities."

"Oh! oh!" Helen put her head down suddenly and pressed her

lips on the jeweled hand. The unconscious and impulsive homage touched the old heart.

"And people who have done wonderful things, who have painted pictures, and made beautiful statues, and built bridges and churches and palaces," the girl assumed.

"Most of them were built before my time, hundreds of years ago. But I have been in a great many of them."

"And seen the Queen!"

"If you mean Queen Victoria, yes. And other queens as well. And the Empress of the French when she had her beauty and her throne."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Helen with a long breath. And Aunt Jane had called her a queer old woman; Aunt Jane, who had never even been to New York.

It was getting too dark to play croquet. Mrs. Disbrowe had gone in some time ago with her baby in her arms, and somehow it had suggested the Madonna picture to Helen. The gentlemen smoked and talked. Then Mrs. Van Dorn rose and bade them good-night, and pressed Helen's hand.

"I think I shall like your little girl very much," she said to Mrs. Dayton, in the hall. "She's modest and not at all dull."

Mrs. Van Dorn stepped off, as if she was still at middle life. She was wonderfully well preserved, but then, for almost forty years she had taken the best of care of herself. She wouldn't have admitted to anyone that she was past eighty. Sometimes in her travels she had a maid, often when she was abroad she had both

a maid and a man. For two years she had been traveling about her own country, and seeing the changes.

Yet her life had not been set in rose leaves in her youth. She had worked hard, had a lover who jilted her for a girl not half as pretty but rich. And when she was thirty-five, a rich old man married her, and gave her a lovely home; then, ten years afterward, left her a rich widow, and told her to have the best time she could. If she could only have had one little girl! She thought she would adopt one, but the child with the lovely face had some mean traits, and she provided for her elsewhere. She traveled, she met entertaining people; she liked refined society; she acquired a good deal of knowledge with her pleasure.

But to grow old! And one had to some time. At ninety perhaps. What did Ninon de l'Enclos do, and Madame Recamier? Plenty of fresh air, as much exercise as she could stand, bathing and massage, cheerfulness, keeping in touch with the world of to-day, and once-in-a-while a long, quiet rest, and early to bed as she was doing here. Ah! if one could be set back twenty years even, twenty real years, and have all that much longer to live!

The child's admiration had touched her. It was not for her diamonds and emeralds, for her Chantilly lace, nor for the fact that she had money enough to buy costly things. Helen Grant was ignorant of the value of these adornments. It was for the understanding of something finer and larger, experiences garnered up, real knowledge. How odd in a little country maiden! And this was sweeter than any of the ordinary flatteries offered

her.

Helen thought her little bed delightful, and she was not sure but it was all a dream. She was still more bewildered when she opened her eyes. Someone was gently stirring about. She sprang out on the floor.

"You needn't get up just yet," said Mrs. Dayton.

"Oh, I am used to it," with a bright smile. "And maybe I can help."

She did find many little things to do. It was so pleasant to be allowed to see them herself, and do them without ordering. Mrs. Dayton said "Will you do this or that," as if she *could* decline, but she was very glad to be of service.

Then the boarders sauntered in to breakfast, and that was done with. Helen dusted the parlor, she had swept the porch and the paved walk down to the street before the boarders were up. Then she helped with the dishes.

"That girl knows how to work," and Joanna nodded approvingly.

"Perhaps you would like to go to market with me," suggested Mrs. Dayton. "It would be well for you to learn your way about in case I wanted to send you out of an errand."

"Oh! it would be splendid! But Mrs. Van Dorn – "

Mrs. Dayton laughed. "There comes Miss Gray, and the fussing will take a good hour. Though I think it pays, even at a dollar an hour."

Helen was silent from amazement.

"Oh, she has patients at three dollars an hour, real invalids. And she could get more in the city. Joanna knows about the breakfast. Mrs. Van Dorn is wise enough not to gorge her stomach with useless and injurious food. I never saw a person take better care of herself."

It was a very pleasant walk under maples and elms, with here and there an old-fashioned Lombardy poplar; lindens with their fringy tassels, and horse-chestnuts with their dense, spreading leaves. There was but one real market in Hope, but numerous smaller attempts. Mrs. Dayton gave her orders for the day's provision.

"Now, we will go around the longest way," smilingly. "There's the High School. It calls in quite a number of winter boarders, and sometimes the large boys prove very troublesome. And here is the Free Library, though there is quite a tax to support it, and numerous contributions. There is a fine reference-room for the scholars. Education seems to be made easy now-a-days. Let us go in."

The lower floor was devoted to the library. A large room was shelved around in alcoves, reserved for some particular kind of books. History, biography, science, music, discoveries and travels, as well as novels. The reading-room was at one end, the reference department at the other. Just now it was very quiet, being rather dull times.

Up on the next floor was a fine auditorium for amusements and lectures. In the wings were small rooms used for lodge

meetings and such purposes. Helen was very much interested. Oh, what a happy time! And yet she felt a little conscience-smitten, as if she wasn't doing her whole duty.

The papers had come, and presently Mrs. Van Dorn took her accustomed seat. Mrs. Pratt was at the corner of the piazza doing needlework. Miss Lessing was sketching from nature. The younger girl was out hunting wild flowers.

Helen read the home news, then the foreign news. It seemed queer to know what they were doing in London, and Paris, and Rome, that hitherto had been merely places on the map to her. And then what financiers in New York were talking of, which really was an unknown language to her, but not to Mrs. Van Dorn, who for years had held the key.

Perhaps the charm in Helen was her interest in what she was doing. Sometimes she made quite a fanciful thing of her work at home, though she was not what you would call a romantic girl. And now most of the time she was reading, she put life into her tones. Mrs. Van Dorn had been here and there, and she wanted the descriptions of things to seem real to her.

"You're a very good reader," she said approvingly. "You must not let anyone cultivate you on different lines with their elocutionary ideas, or you will be spoiled. Who taught you?"

"Mr. Warfield. He was principal of the school. I was in his class last year."

"He has some common sense. When you go to an opera you expect to hear ranting and sighing, and sobbing, but sensible

people do not talk that way about the every-day things of life."

"I don't know what an opera is like," said Helen with a kind of bright mirthfulness at her own ignorance.

"I suppose not. Men and women singing the love, and sorrow, and woe, and trials of other men and women, long ago dead, or perhaps never alive anywhere but in the composer's brain. It is the exquisite singing that thrills you. But you wouldn't want it for steady diet."

Miss Lessing spoke of two famous singers who had been in New York during the winter. And she had heard the Wagner Trilogy, which she thought magnificent.

"Yes. I've heard it at Beyreuth." Mrs. Van Dorn nodded, as if it might be an ordinary entertainment.

"Oh, it has been my dream to go abroad some time," and Miss Lessing sighed.

And there was a girl in the world who loved her own folks quite as well as a journey abroad. There was pure affection for you! Miss Lessing would jump at the offer she had made Clara Gage.

They were summoned in to luncheon. Mr. Conway was the only man of the party, not much of a talker, but the ladies loved to sit and talk over their morning's adventures, or their afternoon's intentions. Mrs. Dayton never hurried them. They all considered it the most home-y place at which they had ever boarded.

Mrs. Van Dorn went off for her nap. So did several of the others. Mrs. Dayton took Helen up-stairs. She had exhumed two

of her old lawns, and thought they could modernize them into summer frocks. They were very fine and pretty, and Helen was delighted.

It was four o'clock when the coupé came, and Mrs. Van Dorn rang for Helen to come up to her room, and carry her shawl, and her dainty case with the opera glass in it for far sights, and a bottle of lavender salts. And then the driver helped them in, and away they started.

"One could almost envy that girl!" said Daisy Lessing. "I don't see why some of us couldn't be as good company."

They paused at the Public Library.

"Will you go in, Helen, and ask for 'Lays of Ancient Rome,' Macaulay's," said Mrs. Van Dorn. "I hope it won't be out."

Helen came back with the book, and sparkling eyes.

CHAPTER IV

PLANTING OF SMALL SEEDS

But it was not all smooth sailing for Helen, although it had begun so fair. The very next week was trying to everybody. It was warm and close and rainy, not a heartsome downpour that sweeps everything clean, and clears up with laughing skies, but drizzles and mists and general sogginess, not a breath of clear air anywhere. No one could sit on the porch, for the vines and eaves dripped, the parlor had a rather dismal aspect, and everybody seemed dispirited.

Mrs. Van Dorn was not well. She lost her appetite. It seemed as if she had a little fever. And she was dreadfully afraid of being ill. So many people had dropped down in the midst of apparent health, had paralysis or apoplexy, or developed an unsuspected heart-weakness. She would make a vigorous effort to keep from dying, she had no organic disease, but something *might* happen. Young people died, but that did not comfort her for she was not young. Helen fanned her on the sofa, in the chair. The cushions and pillows grew hot, she fanned them cool. She ran out to the well, and brought in a pitcher of fresh cold water.

"It tastes queer. I do wonder if there is any drainage about that could get into it."

Then it was, "Helen, don't read so loud. Your voice goes

through my head!" and when Helen lowered her tone, she said, "Don't mumble so! I can't half hear what you are saying. How stupid the papers are! There's really nothing in them!"

If Helen had not been used to fault-finding, it would have gone hard with her. As it was she was rather dazed at first at the change.

"She'll get over it," comforted Mrs. Dayton. "And if this weather ever lets up we shall all feel better."

The Disbrowe baby was ill, too, and two or three times Helen went to relieve the poor mother. Miss Gage came and stayed one night with Mrs. Van Dorn.

Friday noon the sun shone gayly out, a fresh wind blew much cooler from the west, and everybody cheered up.

"Railly," said Uncle Jason, when he came in Saturday with butter and eggs, "you're a big stranger! Mother, she feels kinder hurt an' put out, an' wishes she hadn't let you come. You do ridin' round every day an' never come near us, as if you felt yourself too grand."

"Oh, Uncle Jason, it isn't that at all," cried Helen in protest. "We were out just a little while on Monday, and the mist came up. Mrs. Van Dorn took a cold, and has been poorly, and the weather has been just horrid until to-day. Then I have been helping Joanna with the jelly and canning, and Mrs. Disbrowe with her baby. I couldn't walk over, could I?" glancing up laughingly.

"Well, I s'pose you might – on a pinch – "

"Oh, no; it would have to be on my own two feet. And see

what a mess the roads have been! Good going for ducks, but bad for your best shoes."

He laughed. Her tone was so merry it was good to hear. He had missed her cheerful presence. Aunt Jane would hardly have admitted how much she missed her about the work. 'Reely had so many slaps that she just wished Helen would come home again, it made mother so cross to have her away.

"I s'pose, now, you couldn't go back with me, and I'll bring you over Sunday."

Helen was sorry, and yet she shrank from the proposal, and was glad she could not go. Was that ungrateful?

"Oh, I really could not, Uncle Jason. You see, Mrs. Van Dorn is just getting better, and she wants a dozen things all at once, but I'll try when we go out. Perhaps the first of the week."

"I'll have to hold on to my scalp when I get home," he said rather ruefully. "Mother told me to bring you back."

"But I'm hired to stay here, and I can't run away as I like," she answered pleasantly, but with dignity.

"That's so! That's so! Well, come soon as you can."

Mrs. Van Dorn's bell rang and she had to say good-by. Mrs. Dayton entered at that moment.

"Helen," Mrs. Van Dorn said: "I've a mind to go down on the porch and sit on the west side in the sun. I'm tired to death of this room. Get me that white lambs-wool sacque, though I hate bundling up like an old woman! I think I did take a little cold. And people who are seldom ill are always the worst invalids, I've

heard. Then bring that big Persian wrap, I really do feel shaky, and that's ridiculous for me."

She managed to get down stairs very well. Helen fixed the wrap about the chair and then crossed it on her knees. The white sacque was tied with rose colored ribbons, and with her fluffy, curly hair she looked like an old baby.

"Has the *Saturday Gazette* come? Let's hear the little gossip of the town. Who is going out of it, who is coming in, who played euchre at Mrs. So and So's, and who won first prize, and who has a new baby."

There were other things – a column about some wonderful exhumations in Arizona that were indications of a pre-historic people.

"Queer," she commented when Helen had finished, "but everywhere it seems as if cities were built on the ruins of old cities. And no one knows the thousands of years the world has stood. There is a theory that we come back to life every so often, that some component part of us doesn't die. Still, I do not see the use if one can't remember."

"But there is – heaven – " Helen was a little awe-struck at the unorthodox views.

"Well – no one has come back from heaven. I believe there are several cases of trances where people thought they were there, and had to come back, and were very miserable over it. But it seems to me being here is the best thing we know about. I feel as if I should like to live hundreds of years, if I could be well and

have my faculties."

"There's Auntie Briggs, as they call her, over to Center, who is ninety-seven, and grandmother White was ninety-five on Christmas day."

"Tell me about them. Are they well? Do they get about?"

"Grandmother White is spry as a cricket, as people say. She sews and knits and doesn't wear glasses."

"That's something like." The incident cheered her amazingly. "And the other old lady?"

"She is quite deaf and walks about with a cane, but I think she's pretty well." Helen did not say she was cross and crabbed and a trial to her grand-daughter's family. It really was sad to live past the time when people wanted you. But couldn't you be sweet and comforting? Must old age be queer and disagreeable?

"I shall try to live to a hundred," said Mrs. Van Dorn. "Let me see – I wish you'd read something bright, about people having good times. Why do writers put so much sorrow in stories? It is bad enough to have it in the world."

Helen ran up and brought down a pile of novels that Mr. Disbrowe had selected in the city. But one did not suit and another did not suit.

"We will look at the sun going down. What wonderful sunsets I have seen!"

"Tell me about them," entreated Helen.

"There was one at the Golden Gate, California. No one ever could paint anything like it." Mrs. Van Dorn looked across

the sky as if she saw it again. She was an excellent hand at description. Then the men were coming in, the dinner bell rang.

"I won't bother to dress, I'll play invalid."

Helen pushed the chair in a sheltered place, and laid the shawl over the back of a hall chair. Everybody congratulated Mrs. Van Dorn, and she said with a little laugh that she thought it was the weather, and she had been playing off, that she hadn't been really ill.

"I think we all gave in to the weather," said Mrs. Lessing. "I had a touch of rheumatism. You can have a fire in wet cool weather, but when it is wet hot weather, you can hardly get your breath and feel smothered."

"It's been a dreadful week for trade," remarked Mr. Disbrowe. "I haven't made my salt. Perhaps it would have been better to have tried pepper."

They all laughed at that.

"Mrs. Dayton has tried both salt and pepper and been cheerful as a lark," said Mrs. Pratt.

"And plenty of sugar," laughed Mrs. Dayton. "Though I confess I have been tried with jelly that wouldn't jell. The weather has been bad for that."

"And Miss Helen has kept rosy. She has been good to look at," subjoined Mrs. Disbrowe.

Mrs. Van Dorn smiled at the girl who flushed with the praise. She wanted to be read to sleep that night, just as she had been the night before, and chose Tennyson.

"Well, I do hope we will have a nice week to come," Mrs. Dayton said when they were alone. "Old lady Van Dorn *has* been trying. Helen, you have kept your temper excellently. What are you smiling about?"

"I guess I have been trained to keep my temper."

"Because your aunt doesn't let anyone fly out but herself? That's in the Cummings blood. And you haven't any of that. Sometimes your voice has the sound of your father's. You are more Grant than Mulford."

"You knew my father – " Helen paused and glanced up wondering whether it was much or little.

"Well – yes," slowly. "And not so very much either. You see I was beyond my school days," and Mrs. Dayton gave a retrospective smile. "Your mother went to school to him the first year he taught. I never could understand – " and she wrinkled her brow a little.

"I suppose he was very much in love with her?" Helen colored vividly as if she was peering into a secret. The love stories she had been reading were taking effect in a certain fashion. She was beginning to weave romances about people. Aunt Jane blamed her father for a good many things, and especially the marriage. But she never had a good word for him.

"Oh, what nonsense for children like you to think about love! Well," rather reluctantly, "he must have been pleased with her, she was bright and pretty, but it wasn't wise for either of them, and it did surprise everybody. She was one of the

butterfly kind with lots of beaux. Dan Erlick's father waited on her considerably, he was pretty gay, and people thought she liked him a good deal. Then he married a Waterbury girl, and not long after she married your father. There were others she could have had – we all thought more suitable. He was a good deal older, and cared mostly for books and study. Then he began with some queer notions, at least the Center people thought so – that the world had stood thousands of years we knew nothing about, and that the Mosaic account wasn't – well then people hadn't heard so much about science and all that, and were a little worried lest their children should turn out infidels. And he found a place in some college at the West, but it seemed as if they made a good many changes until she came home to die. But she always appeared to think he had been kind and taken good care of her. If he hadn't the Center would have heard about it."

That didn't altogether answer the question. Helen wanted some devotion on which to build a romance. Since she could not put her mother in a heroine's place, she wanted her father for a hero. But she had never seen much of him, and she had always felt a little afraid of the grave, tall, thin man who never caressed her, or indeed seemed to care about her. Had anyone really loved him? Somehow she felt his had been a rather solitary life and pitied him.

"He had a curious sort of voice," continued Mrs. Dayton. "It wasn't loud or aggressive, but – well I think persuasive is the word I mean. He had a way of making people think a good deal as he

did, without really believing in him or his theories. He was a man out of place, you'll find what that means as you go on through life, a sort of round peg that couldn't get fitted to the square hole in Hope Center."

"Oh, dear! I wonder if I shall be like him?" The tone was half apprehensive, half amusing and the light in her eyes was full of curious longing.

"I *do* suppose you get your desire for knowledge from him. I never heard of a Mulford who was much of a student, nor a Cummings either. Though I am not sure education does all for people. You have to possess some good sense to make right use of it. And some people with very little book learning have no end of common sense and get along successfully."

Then Mrs. Van Dorn's bell rang. Helen had been polishing the glasses with a dry towel. Joanna always went over them twice, and this was quite a relief to her.

Mrs. Dayton was putting away dishes and thinking. Helen was different from the Mulford children. She was ambitious to step up higher, to get out of the common-place round. It was not that she hated work, she did it cheerfully, looking beyond the work for something, not exactly the reward, but the thing that satisfied her. And Mrs. Dayton had found in her life that a little of what one really wanted was much more enjoyable than a good deal of what one did not want, no matter how excellent it might be.

The book to-night was talks about Rome. Mrs. Van Dorn lived over again in her reminiscences, making sundry interruptions.

"It was here I met such a one," she would say. "This artist from England or America was painting such a picture." And there were walks on the Pincio, lingering in churches, viewing palaces. And then – it was all real. Hadn't St. Paul written letters from Rome ever and ever so long ago? Somewhere he had "Thanked God and taken courage?" Yes. Rome *was* real. Had her father ever seen it? She would like to see it some day. And if she could ever get to where she could teach school – Mr. Warfield had earned enough to go abroad, and she remembered hearing him say he had worked all one year with a farmer for the sake of eight months' schooling.

There was a gentle sound of hard regular breathing, not to be called a snore, but a sign of sleep. Helen went on with a dream. Why couldn't she stay somewhere in North Hope and work for her board nights and mornings and go to the High School? She was learning so many things now about history and literature, and the whole world it seemed. Occasionally she looked over the list of examination studies and caught here and there a fact she had not understood a few weeks ago. Why this was as good as a school.

She would not breathe her plans to a soul. If only Mrs. Dayton might, or could keep her! But early in October Mrs. Dayton shut up her house and went on a round of visits after her summer's work, and Joanna went to her sister's who had seven children, the eldest hardly fourteen. But some place might open. If boys could work their way up, why not a girl?

There was a succession of pleasant days with a bright reviving westerly wind. Driving was a delight. Sometimes they went out an hour or two after breakfast, and oh, how glorious the world looked.

For two days Helen felt she was a coward. She ought to go home, but she dreaded it somehow. Why wasn't Aunt Jane like – well, Mrs. Dayton for instance, glad that other people should have some enjoyment? Yes, she did enjoy Jenny's pleasure, but how often she threatened the others!

"Could we drive around by the Center this afternoon?" Helen asked a little hesitatingly.

"Why – I thought we would go to Chestnut Hill. I like those long faded yellow chestnut blooms that hang where there are to be no chestnuts. It is like old age hanging on to some forlorn hope."

"But you do not like old age," Helen said, with a bright smile.

"Not for myself. Not for people in general. But it is pretty among the clusters of green chestnut leaves. Mrs. Dayton could make a little sermon out of that – useless old age."

"We might come round that way on our return," ventured the girl.

"Are you homesick?"

"Oh, no." A bright flush overspread Helen's face, and the light in her eyes as she turned them on Mrs. Van Dorn was so beautiful it touched her heart. "Uncle wanted to take me back on Saturday to stay over Sunday. They think – "

"Did you want to go?" with quick jealousy.

"Not very much, oh, no, I'm not homesick at all. I like it so much over here. But I ought to go now and then."

"Well – we will see."

Helen had put on her last summer's white frock. She would rather have worn the blue lawn or the pretty embroidered white muslin, made out of Mrs. Dayton's long ago skirt, but some feeling withheld her.

How beautiful Chestnut Hill was to-day! It was not all chestnuts, though they were there tall and stately, but with a mingling of maple and beech and dogwood, and here and there hemlocks and cedars. A sort of wild garden of trees, but all about the edges common little shrubs and sumac stood up loyally as if the trees were not to have it all. And smaller things in bloom tangled here and there with clematis and Virginia creeper, and a riot of mid-summer bloom. They had brought along a volume of Wordsworth's shorter poems, and Helen read here and there in the pauses.

Mrs. Van Dorn was ruminating over a thought that had crossed her mind. Wouldn't this girl be glad to go off somewhere and thrust her old life behind her? How much did she care for her people? Someone could make a fine and attractive young woman out of her, yes, there was a certain noble beauty that might be cultivated and bloom satisfactorily from twenty to thirty. Ten or twelve years?

"Take the lower road round by the Center," she said to the

driver.

Helen raised her eyes in acknowledgment. They passed the old farm houses, and at the gate of one of them stood Grandmother White, a small wrinkled old lady in a faded gown and checked apron. She nodded to Helen. Was that worth the living to old age? Mrs. Van Dorn shrugged her shoulders. Thank Heaven she should not be like that when she came near the hundred mark.

"Now I will drive around a little while you make your call. It must not be very long, or we shall be late for dinner."

Helen sprang out with an airy lightness. The front windows were all darkened as usual. She ran up the path, around the side of the house. Aurelia was weeding among the late planted beets where dwarf peas had taken the early part of the season.

"Oh, Helen!" She sprang up with the trowel in her hand, "I'm so glad you've come. Are you going to stay all night? I miss you so much. I have such lots of work to do, and mother's cross a good deal of the time. We all miss you so. I s'pose its real nice over at Mrs. Dayton's, but I shall be so glad when you come back."

"No, I can't stay all night – "

"But the carriage went away – "

"Reely, you come in and peel the potatoes. You ought to have had that weeding done long ago. Oh, Helen," as the girl had turned around the corner that led to the kitchen. "Well I declare! I began to think you had grown so fine that the Center would never see you again!"

She looked Helen over from head to foot and gave a little sniff.

"Are you coming in?" rather tartly.

"Why – yes," forcing herself to smile.

How different from Joanna's tidy kitchen! It was clean but in confusion with the odds and ends of everything. The green paper shade was all askew, there were two chairs with the backs broken off, the kitchen table was littered, the closet door was open and betrayed a huddle of articles.

"You don't seem to be very sociable, I must say. Why didn't you come over Saturday? Your uncle felt quite hurt about it. Seems to me you're mighty taken up with those people," nodding her head northward.

"I couldn't on so short a notice. Mrs. Van Dorn had not been well. I read her to sleep nearly every night. And there are so many little things to do."

"Well, if she'd employ herself about something useful she wouldn't need to be read to sleep, nor want so much waiting on."

"That is what I am hired to do," Helen returned with a good-natured intonation that she kept from being flippant.

"Well, if I had ever so much money I couldn't find it in my conscience to dawdle away time and have someone wait upon me. And how's Mrs. Dayton? All the boarders staying?"

"Yes, the house is full."

"Mrs. Dayton does have the luck of things! But she hasn't a chick nor a child, nor a husband and a lot of boys to mend for. I was foolish to let you go over there, Helen, when I needed you so much myself. It isn't even as if you were learning anything, just

fiddling round waiting on a woman who hasn't an earthly thing to do. And I'm so put about, I don't know what to take up first. 'Reely, you hurry with the potatoes or you'll get a good slap."

There was a diversion with Fan and Tommy who shook sand over the kitchen floor. Fan's face was stained with berries but she flung her arms about Helen and kissed her rapturously, while Tom dug his elbows into her lap.

"Did you come in a horse and carriage?" asked Fan, wide-eyed.

"I came in the carriage."

"You know well enough what she meant, Helen. You'll get so fine there'll be hardly any living with you when you come back."

"When she came back." A tremor ran through Helen's nerves. Oh, must she come back!

"How is Jenny?" she inquired.

"Oh, Jenny's first rate, working like a beaver. There's a girl worth something, if she is mine! And the house is getting done up just splendid. Joe's crazy to be married right off, but Jenny's like me, when her mind's made up it's made up. There's a good deal of Cummings in her. Why don't you take off your hat? You're going to stay to supper?"

"No, I can't," Helen returned gently. "Mrs. Van Dorn was going to drive round a little – "

"She could have come in," snapped Aunt Jane. "We could have had the horse put out and you could both have stayed to supper. I dare say we have as good things to eat as Mrs. Dayton. She

doesn't refuse our butter and eggs nor chickens when we have 'em to spare."

"They all think the butter splendid, Aunt Jane. And Mrs. Disbrowe wishes they could get such eggs in the city. She is sure what they get must be a month old," said Helen, with an attempt at gayety.

"I *do* make good butter. Mrs. Dayton's folks are not the first to find it out," bridling her head. "And I'll say for Mrs. Dayton she's willing to pay a fair price. But I s'pose that old woman pays well?"

Helen wondered how the woman in the carriage would look if she heard that!

"I'd like to know the prices myself. Haven't you heard Mrs. Dayton say? I might want to keep boarders, some day."

"No," answered Helen. "But there are a good many boarders at North Hope, and some of them look as if they didn't mind about money."

"Carriage has come," announced Nathan, running in. Aurelia had finished the potatoes and put them on to cook and now stood with one arm around Helen's neck.

"Stay! stay! Can't you stay?" cried a chorus of voices in various keys.

"I am not my own mistress," answered Helen, cheerfully. "And when you are paid to do a certain thing, paid for your time, it belongs to someone else."

She loosened the children's arms and rose.

"Well it is a mean little call," said her aunt, "and your uncle will be awful disappointed. But when you live with grand people I s'pose you must be grand. Do come when you can stay longer," with a sort of sarcasm in her tone.

"I'll try." Helen kept her temper bravely, left her love for Jenny and Uncle Jason. Aunt Jane had gone at making shortcake. The children followed their cousin out to the gate and showered her with good-bys, staring hard at the old lady in the carriage.

CHAPTER V

A GIRL'S DREAMS

Helen's face was flushed as she stepped into the carriage, but she held her head up with dignity and smiled. The curious two sides of her, was it brain, or mind, or that perplexing inner sight? saw the wide difference between Mrs. Van Dorn and Aunt Jane. And she liked the Van Dorn side a hundred times better than the Mulford side. The delicacy, the ease, the sort of graciousness, even if it was a garment put on and sometimes slipped off very easily. Mrs. Van Dorn was never quite satisfied. She was always reaching out for something, a pleasure and entertainment. Aunt Jane was thoroughly satisfied with herself. She scolded Uncle Jason and insisted that he lacked common sense, energy, and a host of virtues, yet she often said of her neighbors' husbands: "Well, if I had that man I'd ship him off to the Guinea Coast," though she hadn't the slightest idea of its location. She often held him up to the admiration of her friends, though she always insisted she had been the making of him. And she would not admit that there was a smarter girl in Hope Center than Jenny.

The peculiar contrast flashed over Helen. What made the complacency – content?

"Did you have a pleasant call?" When Mrs. Van Dorn didn't feel cross her voice had a certain sweetness. Helen thought the

word mellifluous expressed it. She was fond of pretty adjectives.

"Aunt Jane was very busy and they all set in for me to stay. The children do miss me."

"And did you want to stay?" with the same sweetness.

"No," said Helen, honestly, while the color deepened in her cheeks. "Oh, dear! I think I am getting spoiled, citified, and North Hope isn't a city either," with a half rueful little laugh, yet not raising her eyes.

"She isn't of their kind," thought Mrs. Van Dorn. "And her courage, her truthfulness, are quite unusual. She is very trusty, there is the making of something fine in her."

"You are not fond of country life, farm life," correcting herself.

"I am quite sure I shouldn't be, and yet I like the country so much, the space, the waving trees, the great stretches of sky. I should stifle in a place where there were rows and rows of houses and paved streets everywhere."

"But not where there were palaces, and villas, and parks, and gardens, and beautiful equipages, and elegantly dressed women."

Helen shook her head, "I shall never have the chance to like or dislike that. Oh, yes," brightening, "I can read it in a book and imagine myself in the midst of it."

"I thought you were planning to teach school, and save up money, and take journeys."

"Oh, I do, and all manner of extravagant things. But I am afraid they are air castles." For somehow the reality of her life

had come over her again. She belonged to Hope Center, not to North Hope. And maybe she never could get over there.

Mrs. Van Dorn thought of herself at Helen's age. Where would her ambitions lead her. *She* had had no ambitions to rise in life. How gladly she would have married her first common-place lover, and accepted a life of drudgery. What queer things girls were! and how strange that when she was tired and worn out, and almost desperate, the best of fortune should come to her. It seldom happened, she knew. The old life was a vague dream, she had only lived since her marriage. In a way she coveted this girl's freshness and energy. To have someone to really and truly love her – was there any such thing in life, to old age?

She had coveted Clara Gage with the same desire of possession. She had persuaded her to give up home, mother, three sisters and one brother. But she had never ceased to love them. And they had nearly outweighed a journey to Europe. Perhaps they would. Clara was about eighteen when she took her, this girl was fourteen. She would be more pliable, and she was not really in love with her people. But there would be years of training, and there was a certain strength in the girl. Sometimes they might clash, and she did not want to be disturbed at her time of life. Then too – there were certain adventitious aids to ward off the shadow of coming years. Clara knew about them, and she had grown used to her. *She* would be getting older every year.

They were a little late at dinner. How delightful and orderly and refined everything was! Helen luxuriated in it. And yet it was

only ordinarily nice living. Helen could see the table at home. The kitchen was large and the table at one end, and they always had meals there except when there was company, and often then the children were kept out there. The smells of the cooking did not give it the savory fragrance she read about in books. It was hot and full of flies, for the door was always on the swing.

They were around the table, everyone wanting to tell father that Helen had been to see them in a carriage, at that.

"Do hush, children!" began Aunt Jane, sharply. "You haven't any more manners than a lot of pigs, everyone squealing at once. Yes, I think we made a great mistake letting Helen go over to Mrs. Dayton's. We couldn't well refuse an old neighbor, I know. But she's that full of airs, and so high-headed that she could hardly talk. I don't see how she could make up her mind to come round to the kitchen door."

Aurelia giggled. "Wouldn't it have been funny to have her knock at the front door!" and all the children laughed.

"'Twould be a good thing to bring her back now. There's so much to do, and fruit to put up all the time. And she'd get in a little decent training before she went in the shop."

"She'll soon get the nonsense knocked out of her there," said Jenny. "You needn't feel anxious about that."

"Sho, mother, that girl's good enough where she is, an' a bargain's a bargain. She was to stay till the first of September. And when you're in Rome you do as the Romans do, I've heard. It's natural, she should get polished up a little over there."

"I'm as good as Mrs. Dayton, if I don't keep city boarders," flung out Aunt Jane, resentfully. "And I've the best claim on Helen when we've taken care of her all these years."

"I d'know as she'd earned twenty-four dollars at home," said Uncle Jason.

"I s'pose not in money," admitted Aunt Jane, who down in her heart had no notion of bringing Helen home. "But I feel as if I had earned half that money doing without her."

"Twenty-four dollars. Phew! Pap, suppose you had to pay me that!" exclaimed Sam.

"You get your board and clothes," said his mother.

So they were mapping out Helen's life, and she was thinking whether she could have the courage to fight it out. She could not go back to the farm. That she settled definitely.

She picked up Mrs. Van Dorn's wraps and her three letters and carried them upstairs.

"I'm going to rest a while," said the lady. "You may come up in – well, half an hour. Will you push the reclining chair over by the window?"

Helen did that and laid the fleecy wrap within reach, smiled and nodded and ran lightly downstairs. In a moment she was helping Mrs. Dayton take out the dishes to the kitchen, and then dried them for Joanna.

"Now Miss Helen, if you wanted a situation, I'd give you a good recommend," exclaimed Joanna, smilingly.

Then she went out on the stoop, for it still wanted ten minutes

to the half hour.

Mrs. Van Dorn had taken up her letters rather listlessly. One from her lawyer concerning some reinvestments, one from a charity for a subscription. The thick one with the delicate superscription from Clara Gage.

It was long, and about family affairs. They had been a good deal worried over a mortgage that the holder had threatened to foreclose. But her sister's lover had insisted upon taking it up, and would come home to live. Her brother had obtained a good position as bookkeeper in a mill. The youngest girl would always be an invalid from a spinal trouble; Margaret, the eldest, sang in church and gave music lessons, and thus had some time for home occupations. Mrs. Gage was quite disabled from rheumatism at times. But now Clara felt the dependent ones were in good hands, and she would not only go abroad cheerfully, but gladly. Her hesitation had been because she felt they might need her at home, or near by, where they could call upon her in illness or misfortune. "You have been very kind to wait until I could see my way clear," she wrote, "and my gratitude in time to come will be your reward."

Mrs. Van Dorn felt a little pricked in her conscience. She could have settled all this herself, and made things easy for them, but Clara had not suggested any money trouble. Mrs. Van Dorn paid her a generous salary. Down in her heart there had been a jealous feeling that her money could not buy everything, could not buy this girl from certain home obligations.

But the letter pleased her very much in its frankness and its acknowledgment of favors. Yet her old heart seemed strangely desolate. How could she obtain the love she really desired? For if you did favors there was gratitude, but was that love?

Did anybody care to love an old woman? She sometimes longed to have tender arms put about her neck, and fond kisses given. But her cheeks were made up with the semblance of youth, her lips had a tint that it was not well to disturb. Oh, to go back! To be fifty only, and have almost fifty more years to live. The money would last out all that time, even.

But here was a chance with this new girl. Clara might marry. She, Mrs. Van Dorn, had been rather captious about admirers. It wasn't given to every girl to make a good marriage at five and thirty. In three years Helen would be seventeen, and with a good education, very companionable. It would be best not to lead her to hope for anything beyond the education, she might grow vain and be puffed up with expectations of great things to come. Let the great things be a surprise.

There was a little tap at the door.

"Do you want me?" inquired the cheerful voice. "It is a full half hour."

"No, yes. I'll be made ready for bed if you please, little maid," and her tone was full of amusement. "Then I'll dismiss you and lie here by the window a while, as I have something to think about, until I get sleepy. Bring the jewel case."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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