

Woolson Constance Fenimore

For the Major: A Novelette



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CHAPTER I

EDGERLEY the first lay on the eastern flank of Chillawassee Mountain; Edgerley the second six hundred feet above. The first Edgerley, being nearer the high civilization of the state capital, claimed the name, and held it; while the second Edgerley was obliged to content itself with an added "far." Far Edgerley did not object to its adjective so long as it was not considered as applying especially to the distance between it and the lower town. It was "far," if you pleased – far from cities, far from traffic, from Babylon, from Zanzibar, from the Pole – but it was not "far" from Edgerley. Rather was Edgerley far from it, and – long may she keep so! Meanwhile Edgerley the first prospered, though rather plebeianly. She had two thousand inhabitants, cheese factories, saw-mills, and a stage line across Black Mountain to Tuloa, where connection was made with a second line, which went eastward to the railway. An Edgerley merchant, therefore, could reach the capital of his state in fifty-five hours: what could man want more? The merchants were of the opinion that they wanted nothing; they fully appreciated their advantages, and Edgerley. But their neighbors on top of the mountain, who looked down upon them in more senses than one, did not agree with them in their opinion; they infinitely preferred their own village, though it had no factories, no saw-mills, no stage line to Tuloa, and no necessity for one, and no two thousand inhabitants – hardly, indeed, and with stretching, a bare thousand. There would seem to have been little in these lacks upon which to found a pride, if the matter had been viewed with the eyes of that spirit of progress which generally takes charge of American towns; but, so far at least, the Spirit of Progress had not climbed Chillawassee Mountain, and thus Far Edgerley was left to its prejudiced creed.

The creed was ancient – both towns boasting an ante-Revolutionary origin – but, though ancient, Madam Carroll of the Farms had been the first to embody it in a portable phrase; brief (for more words would have given too much importance to the subject), calmly superior, as a Carroll phrase should be. Madam Carroll had remarked that Edgerley seemed to her "commercial." This was excellent. "Commercial!" Nothing could be better. Whatever Far Edgerley was, it certainly was not that.

Madam Carroll of the Farms, upon a certain evening in May, 1868, was sitting in her doorway, her eyes fixed upon the dull red line of a road winding down the mountain opposite. This road was red because it ran through red clay; and a hopelessly sticky road it was, too, at most seasons of the year, as the horses of the Tuloa stage line knew to their cost. But the vehicle now coming through the last fringes of the firs was not a stage; and it was drawn, also, by two stout mules that possessed a tenacity of purpose greater even than that of red clay. It was the carriage of Major Carroll of the Farms, Far Edgerley, and at the present moment it was bringing home his daughter from the western terminus of the railway.

A gentleman's carriage drawn by mules might have seemed something of an anomaly in certain localities farther eastward. But not here. Even Edgerley regarded this possession of its rival with a respect which included the mules, or rather, which effaced them in the general aroma of the whole, an aroma not actual (the actual being that of ancient leather not unacquainted with decay), but figurative – the aroma of an undoubted aristocracy. For "the equipage," as it was called, had belonged to the Carrolls of the Sea Islands, who, in former days of opulence, had been in the habit of spending their summers at the Farms. When their distant cousin, the Major, bought the Farms, he bought the carriage also. This was as well. The Sea Island Carrolls had no longer any use for a carriage. They had not even mules to draw it, and, as they lived all the year round now upon one of their Sea Islands, whose

only road through the waste of old cotton-fields was most of the time overflowed, they had nothing to draw it upon; so the Major could as well have the benefit of it. This carriage with its mules now came into sight on the zigzags of the mountain opposite; but it had still to cross the lower valley, and climb Chillawassee, and night had fallen before the sound of its wheels was heard on the little bridge over the brook which crossed what was called Carroll Lane, the grassy avenue which led from Edgerley Street up the long knoll to Carroll Farms.

"Chew up, Peter! chew up, then. Chew!" Inches, the coachman, said to his mules: Inches wished to approach the house in good style. The mules, refusing to entertain this idea, came up to the door on a slow walk. Inches could, however, let down the steps with a flourish; and this he proceeded to do by the light of the candle which Madam Carroll had brought with her to the piazza. The steps came down with a long clatter. And they had clanked in their imprisonment all the way from Tuloa. But no one in Far Edgerley would have sacrificed them for such trifles as these; they were considered to impart an especial dignity to "the equipage" (which was, indeed, rather high-hung). No other carriage west of the capital had steps of this kind. It might have been added that no other carriage east of it had them either. But Chillawassee did not know this, and went on contentedly admiring. As to the clatter made when the steps were let down – at the church door, for instance, on Sunday mornings – did it not announce that the Major and his wife had arrived, that they were about to enter? And were not people naturally glad to know this in time? They could be all ready, then, to look.

Upon this occasion the tall girl who had arrived, scarcely touching the unfolded steps, sprang lightly to the ground, and clasped the waiting lady in her arms. "Oh, mamma, how glad I am to see you again! But where is my father?"

"He felt very tired, Sara, and as it is late, he has gone to his room. He left his love for you. You know we expected you two hours ago."

"It is but little past ten. He must be still awake. Could I not slip in for a moment, just to speak to him? I would not stay."

"He has been asleep for some time. It would be better not to disturb him, wouldn't it?"

"If he is asleep – of course," answered Sara Carroll. But her tone was a disappointed one.

"You will see him in the morning," said the elder lady, leading the way within.

"But a whole night to wait is so long!"

"You do not intend, I presume, to pass this one in wakefulness?" said Madam Carroll.

Sara laughed. "Scar, too, is asleep, I suppose?"

"Yes. But Scar you can waken, if you like; he falls asleep again readily. He is in the first room at the head of the stairs."

The girl flew off, coming back with a bright face. "Dear little fellow!" she said, "his hands and cheeks are as soft as ever. I am so glad that he has not grown into a great, rough boy. It is a year and a half since I have seen him, and he seems exactly the same."

"He is the same," said Madam Carroll. "He does not grow."

"I am delighted to hear it," replied Sara, answering stoutly the mother's implied regret. And then they both laughed.

Judith Inches, sister of the coachman, now served a light repast for the traveller in the dining-room. But when it was over, the two ladies came back to the door-way.

"For I want to look out," Sara said. "I want to be sure that I am really at home at last; that this is Chillawassee, that the Black Range is opposite, and that there in the west the long line of Lonely Mountain is rising against the sky."

"As it is dark, perhaps you could see them as well from a comfortable chair in the library," suggested Madam Carroll, smiling.

"By no means. They will reveal themselves to me; you will see. I know just where they all ought to be; I made a map from the descriptions in your letters."

She had seated herself on the door-step, while Madam Carroll sat in a low chair within. Outside was a broad piazza; beyond it an old-fashioned flower-garden going down the slope of the knoll. All the earlier summer flowers were out, their presence made known in the warm, deep darkness by perfume only, save for a faint glimmer of white where the snow-ball bushes stood.

"And so, as I told you, I have decided to give an especial reception," said Madam Carroll, returning to a subject begun in the dining-room. "I shall have it on Monday; from five to eight."

"I am sorry you took the trouble, mamma. It is pleasure enough for me simply to be at home again."

"My receptions are seldom for pleasure, I think," said Madam Carroll, thoughtfully. "In this case it seemed proper to announce the fact that you had returned to us; that Miss Carroll would be henceforth a member of her father's household at the Farms."

"Happy girl!" interpolated Sara. She was leaning back in the door-way, her hands clasped behind her head, her eyes looking into the soft darkness of the garden.

"This was, in my opinion, a not unimportant event," continued Madam Carroll. "And it will be so estimated in Far Edgerley. There are, you know, in every society certain little distinctions and – and differences, which should be properly marked; the home-coming of Miss Carroll is one of them. You have, without doubt, an appropriate dress?"

"All my gowns are black, of course. There is one I call best; but even that is severely plain."

"On the whole, you will look well in it," answered Madam Carroll, after a moment's consideration of the figure in the door-way; "and it will have the added advantage of being a contrast. We have few contrasts in Far Edgerley, and, I may say, no plainness – no plainness whatever. Rather, a superabundance of trimming. The motive is good: I should be the last to underrate it. But even with the best intentions you cannot always construct new costumes from changes of trimming merely; there comes a time when the finest skill will not take the place of a little fresh material, no matter how plain it may be. The Greers, for instance, have made over their green poplins twice a year now for five years, and have done it well. But, after all, we remain conscious that they are still the same green poplins. Miss Corinna Rendlesham, too, and her sisters, have accomplished wonders with different combinations of narrow black velvet ribbon and fringe on their black silks – so much so, indeed, that the material is now quite riddled with the old lines of needle-holes where trimmings formerly ran. They wear them to church with Stella shawls," pursued the lady, meditatively; "and to receptions, turned in at the neck, with white lace."

"Do the other people here give receptions also?" asked Sara, from the door-step.

"They would never dream of it," replied the elder lady, with serenity.

But was she the elder? No sign of age was visible in all her little person from head to foot. She was very small and slight. Her muslin gown, whose simple gathered waist was belted by a ribbon sash, had a youthful, almost childlike, aspect, yet at the same time a pretty quaintness of its own, like that of an old-fashioned miniature. The effect of this young-old attire was increased by the arrangement of the hair. It was golden hair, even and fine, and it hung in curls all round her head – long curls that fell below the waist. These curls were distinct and complete spirals, each one perfect in itself, not intertwining with the next; a round stick passed through any one of them would not have been visible from bottom to top. "Now *that* is what I call a curl!" old Senator Ashley was wont to remark. But though this golden hair curled so definitively when it once began to curl, it lay smooth and straight as the hair of a nun over the top of the little head, and came down evenly also over the corners of the forehead, after that demure old fashion which made of every lady's brow a modest triangle, unambitious alike of a too intellectual height or a too pagan lowness.

What was it that this little *grande dame*, with her curls, her dress, and her attitudes, resembled? Some persons upon seeing her would have been haunted by a half-forgotten memory, and would at last (if clever) have recalled the pictures in the old "Annuals" and "Keepsakes" of fair ladies of the days of the Hon. Mrs. Norton and L. E. L. The little mistress of Carroll Farms needed but a scarf

and harp, or a gold chain round her curls, with an ornament reposing classically in the centre of her forehead, to have taken her place among them. But upon a closer inspection one difference would have made itself apparent, namely, that whereas the lovely ladies of the "Annals" were depicted with shoulders copiously bare (though much cloth had been expended in sleeves), the muslin gown of little Madam Carroll came up to her chin, the narrow ruffles at the top being kept in place by a child's old-fashioned necklace of coral, which fitted closely over them.

Madam Carroll's eyes were blue, large, and in expression tranquil; her features were small and delicate, the slender little lips like rose leaves, the upper one rather long, coming straight down over childlike teeth of pearl. No; certainly there was no sign of age. Yet it might have been noticed, also, by an acute observer, how little space, where such signs would have been likely to appear, was left uncovered: the tell-tale temples and outside corners of the eyes, the throat, with its faint, betraying hue, the subtly traitorous back of the neck, the texture of the wrists and palms, all these were concealed by the veil of curls and the close ruffles of the dress, the latter falling over the hands almost to the knuckles. There was really nothing of the actual woman to be seen save a narrow, curl-shaded portion of forehead and cheek, two eyes, a little nose and mouth, and the small fingers; that was all.

But a presence is more than an absence. Absent as were all signs of age in Madam Carroll, as present were all signs of youth in the daughter who had just arrived. Sara Carroll was barely twenty. She was tall and slender; she carried herself well – well, but with a little air of pride. This air came from the poise of her head: it was as noticeable when one saw her back only as when one saw her face. It seemed a pride personal, not objective, belonging to herself, not to her surroundings; one could imagine her with just the same air on a throne, or walking with a basket on her arm across a prairie. But while it was evident that she was proud, it would have been difficult to have stated correctly the nature of the feeling, since it was equally evident that she cherished none of the simple little beliefs often seen in girls of her age before contact with the world has roughly dispelled them – beliefs that they are especially attractive, beautiful, interesting, winning, and have only to go forth to conquer. But she herself could have stated the nature of it confidently enough: she believed that her tastes, her wishes, her ideas, possessed rather a superior quality of refinement; but far beyond this did her pride base itself upon the fact that she was her father's daughter. She had been proud of this from her birth. Her features were rather irregular, delicate. Ordinarily she had not much color. Her straight, soft thick hair of dark brown was put plainly back from her oval face, and this face was marked by the slender line of eyebrows of the same dusky hue, and lighted by two gray eyes, which were always, in their fair, clear color, a sort of surprise when the long, dark lashes were lifted.

"I wonder that you take the trouble," she said, referring to the proposed reception.

The blue orbs of Madam Carroll dwelt upon her for a moment. "We must fill our position," she answered. "We did not make it; it has been allotted to us. Its duties are therefore our duties."

"But are they real duties, mamma? May they not be fictitious ones? If we should drop them for a while – as an experiment?"

"If we should drop them," answered Madam Carroll – "if we should drop them, Far Edgerley, socially speaking, would disappear. It would become a miscellaneous hamlet upon a mountain-top, like any other. It would dissolve into its component parts, which are, as you know, but ciphers; we, of the Farms, hold them together, and give them whatever importance they possess."

"In other words, we, of the Farms, are the large figure. One, which, placed before these poor ciphers, immediately turns them into wealth," said Sara, laughing. "Precisely. The receptions are part of it. In addition, the Major likes them."

Sara's eyes left the soft darkness of the garden, and rested upon the speaker. "If my father likes them, that is enough. But I thought he did not; he used to speak of them, when we met at Baltimore, as so wearisome."

"Wearisome, perhaps; but still duties. And of late – that is, since you last saw him a year and a half ago – he has come to make of them a sort of pastime."

"That is so like my father! He always looks above everything narrow and petty. He can find even in poor little Far Edgerley something of interest. How glad I am to be at home again, mamma, where I can be with him all the time! I have never met any one in the world who could approach my father." She spoke warmly; her gray eyes were full of loving pride.

"He appreciates your affection. Never doubt it, in spite of what may seem to you an – an increase of reticence," said Madam Carroll.

"Father was never talkative."

"True. But he is more easily fatigued now than formerly – since his illness of last winter, you know. But it is growing late; I must close the house."

"Do you do that yourself?"

"Generally. I seldom keep Judith Inches up after half-past nine. And on ordinary occasions I am in bed myself soon after ten. Your home-coming is an extraordinary one."

"And extraordinarily glad it makes me," said Sara. "I wonder, mamma, if you know how glad? I have fairly pined during this last year and a half at Longfields – yes, in spite of all Uncle John's kindness. Do you think me heartless?"

"No," said Madam Carroll, as they went up the stairs together. "You loved your uncle, I know. You did your best to make him happy. But your father, Sara – your father, you have always adored."

"And I continue to do it," answered the daughter, gayly. "I shall be down early, early in the morning to see him."

"He does not come to breakfast at present. His strength has not yet fully returned. I have written you of this."

"Not that he did not come to breakfast, mamma. That is so unlike him; he was always so cheerful and bright at the breakfast-table. But at least I can take his breakfast in to him?"

"I think he would rather see you later – about ten, or half-past."

A flush rose in Sara's face: no one would have called her colorless now. She looked hurt and angry. "Pray, who does take in his breakfast, then?" she asked. "I should think I might be as welcome as Judith Inches."

"I take it," replied Madam Carroll, gently.

"Very well, mamma; I will not begin by being jealous of you?"

"You never have been, my daughter. And I – have appreciated it." Madam Carroll spoke in low tones: they were approaching the Major's door. She pointed towards it warningly. "We must not waken him," she said. She led her daughter in silence to the room she had fitted up for her with much taste and care. They kissed each other, and separated.

Left alone, Sara Carroll looked round her room. As much had been done to make it bright as woman's hands, with but a small purse to draw upon, could accomplish. The toilet-table, the curtains, the low lounge, with its great, cool, chintz-covered pillows, the hanging shelves, the easy-chair, the writing-table – all these were miracles of prettiness and ingenuity. But the person for whom this had been done saw it but vaguely. She was thinking of only one thing – her father; that he had not waited to welcome her; that she should not see him until half-past ten the next morning. What could this mean? If he were ill, should not his daughter be the first to see him, the first to take care of him? She had told Madam Carroll that she would not begin the new home life by being jealous of her. But there was something very like jealousy in the disappointment which filled her heart as she laid her head upon the pillow. She had looked forward to her home-coming so long; and now that she held it in her grasp it was not at all what she had been sure it would be.

Upon this same Saturday evening, at dusk, light was shining from the porch and windows of St. John in the Wilderness, the Episcopal church of Far Edgerley. This light shone brightest from the porch, for there was a choir rehearsal within, and the four illuminating candles were down by the door, where stood the organ. Two of the candles illumined the organist, Miss Rendlesham the second, that is, Miss Millie; the others lighted the high music-stand, behind which stood the choir in two rows,

the first very crowded, the second looking with some difficulty over the shoulders of the first at the lighted books which served for both, little Miss Tappen, indeed, who was short, being obliged to stand on four unused chant-books, piled. In the front row were the soprani, eight in number, namely, Miss Rendlesham the elder, and her sister; the three Misses Greer; Miss Dalley and her two cousins, the Farrens, who were (which was so interesting) twins. In the back row were the two contralti, Miss Bolt and the already-mentioned Miss Tappen on her books, together with the tenor, Mr. Phipps; there, too, was the basso, Mr. Ferdinand Kenneway, a bachelor of amiable aspect, but the possessor also, in spite of amiability, of several singularly elusive qualities which had tried the patience of not a few.

The music-stand, no doubt, was very much too short for this company. But then it was intended for a quartette only, and had served without question for four estimable persons during the long, peaceful rectorship of good old Parson Montgomery, who had but recently passed away. Since the advent of his successor, the Reverend Frederick Owen, three months before, the choir had trebled its size without trebling that of the stand; the result was naturally that which has been described.

The Reverend Frederick Owen was an unmarried man.

St. John in the Wilderness had as its rector's study a little one-story building standing in the church-yard, not far from the church; on Saturday evenings the rector was generally there. Upon the present evening Miss Rendlesham the elder, that is, Miss Corinna, sent the juvenile organ-blower, Alexander Mann by name, across to this study for the numbers of the hymns, as usual. But the rector did not return with Alexander Mann, as usual, bringing the hymns with him: he sent the numbers, written on a slip of paper. Under these circumstances the choir began its practising. And its practising was, on the whole, rather spiritless. That is, in sound, but not in continuance; for, two hours later, they were still bravely at work. The time had been principally filled with *Te Deums*. During the past three months the choir had had a new *Te Deum* every Sunday – to the discomfiture of Senator Ashley, who liked to join in "old Jackson's."

This gentleman, who was junior warden, had dropped in, soon after Alexander Mann's departure with the hymns, to talk over some church matters with the rector. The church matters finished, he remained a while longer to talk over matters more secular. The junior warden had a talent for talking. But this gift (as is often the case with gifts) was not encouraged at home, Miss Honoria Ashley, his daughter, not being of a listening disposition. The junior warden was therefore obliged to carry his talent elsewhere. He was a small old gentleman, lean and wizened, but active, and even lively, in spite of his age, save for a harassing little cough, which could, however, end with surprising adaptation to circumstances in either a chuckle or a groan. The possessor of this cough wore an old-fashioned dress-coat, with a high stock and very neat, shining little shoes. He had always in his button-hole a flower in summer, and in winter a geranium leaf.

The chanting of the choir came through the open windows. "I should think they would be exhausted over there," he said. "How long do they keep it up? Ferdinand Kenneway must be voiceless by this time. He has only a thread of a voice to begin with."

"He sings with unusual correctness, I believe," said the rector.

"Oh, he's *correc t*—very! It's his only characteristic. I don't know of any other, unless you include his health: he lives principally for the purpose of not taking cold. Your choir is rather predominately feminine just now, isn't it?" added the old gentleman, slyly.

"Choirs are apt to be, are they not? I mean the volunteer ones. For the women everywhere come to church far more than the men do. It is one of the problems with which clergymen of the present day find themselves confronted."

"That the women come?"

"That the men do not." The rector spoke gravely. He was but little over thirty himself, yet he had been obliged more than once to put a mildly restraining pressure upon the somewhat too active gay-mindedness of his venerable junior warden.

"What's that thing they're trying now?" said this official, abandoning his jocularly. "Dull and see-saw it sounds to me; dull and see-saw."

"It's a *Te Deum* I selected for Trinity Sunday."

"Ah, if *you* selected it – But it can never equal 'old Jackson's,' never! That's Sophy Greer on the solo. She can no more do it than a consumptive hen. But, sir, I'll tell you who can – Sara Carroll. They expect her home to-night."

"Madam Carroll's daughter?"

"No, the Major's. Madam Carroll is the Major's second wife – didn't you know that? Sara Carroll, sir, can never hope to equal her step-mother in beauty, grace, or charm. But she is a fine girl in her way – as indeed she ought to be: her mother was a Witherspoon-Meredith."

The rector looked unimpressed. The junior warden, seeing this, drew up his chair. "The Witherspoon-Merediths, Mr. Owen, are one of our oldest families." (The rector resigned himself.) "When Scarborough Carroll married the beautiful Sara of that name, a noble pair they were, indeed, as they stood at the altar. I speak, sir, from knowledge: *I was there*. Their children – two boys – died, to their great grief. The last child was this daughter Sara; and the accomplished mother passed away soon after the little thing's birth. Sir, Major Carroll, your senior warden, has always been one of our grandest men; in personal appearance, character, and distinguished services, one of the noblest sons of our state. Of late he has not, perhaps, been *quite* what he was physically; but the change is, in my opinion, entirely due – entirely – to his own absurd imprudences. For he is still in the prime of life, the very prime." (Major Carroll was sixty-nine; but as the junior warden was eighty-five, he naturally considered his colleague still quite a boy.) "Until lately, however, he has been undeniably, I will not say one of nature's princes, because I do not believe in them, but one of the princes of the Carrolls, which is saying a vast deal more. His little girl has always adored him. He has been, in fact, a man to inspire admiration. To give you an idea of what I mean: a half-brother of his, much older than himself, and broken in health, lost, by the failure of a bank, all he had in the world. He was a married man, with a family. Carroll, who was at that time a young lieutenant just out of West Point, immediately shared his own property with this unfortunate relative. He didn't dole out help, keeping a close watch over its use, or grudgingly give so much a year, with the constant accompaniment of good advice; he simply deeded a full half of all he had to his brother, and never spoke of it again. Forty-five years have passed, and he has never broken this silence; the brother is dead, and I doubt if the children and grandchildren who profited by the generous act even know to whom they are indebted. Such, sir, is the man, chivalrous, unsullied, true. In 1861 he gave his sword to his state, and served with great gallantry throughout the war. He was twice severely wounded; you may have noticed that his left arm is stiff. When our Sacred Cause was lost, with the small remains of his small fortune he purchased this old place called the Farms, and here, sir, he has come, to pass the remainder of his days in, as I may well say, the Past – the only country left open to him, as indeed to many of us." And the old gentleman's cough ended in the groan.

"And Miss Carroll has not been with them here?" asked the rector, giving the helm of conversation a slight turn from this well-beaten track.

"No, she has not. But there have been good reasons for it. To give you the causes, I must make a slight detour into retrospect. At a military post in Alabama, when Sara was about seven years old, the Major met the lady who is now Madam Carroll; she was then a widow named Morris, with one child, a little girl. You have seen this lady for yourself, sir, and know what she is – a domestic angel, yet a very Muse in culture; one of the loveliest women, one of the most engaging, upon my word, that ever walked the face of this earth, and honored it with her tread." (The junior warden spoke with enthusiasm.) "She is of course very much younger than her husband, *thir-ty* three or four years at the least, I should say; for Carroll was fifty-six at the time of his second marriage, though no one would have suspected it. I saw Madam Carroll very soon afterwards, and she could not have been then more

than twenty one or two; a little fairy-like girl-mother. She must have been married the first time when not more than sixteen. Later they had a son, the boy you know, who is now, save Sara, the only child."

"Ah, I see; I understand," said the rector.

But the junior warden did not; his understanding was that there was more to tell. He drew up his chair again. "Sara Carroll, sir, is a remarkable girl." (The rector again resigned himself.) "She is, as I may say, one-ideaed. By that I mean that she has had from childhood one feeling so predominant that she has fairly seemed to have but the one, which is her devotion to her father. She had scarcely been separated from him (save, as it happens, during the very summer when he met and married the present Madam Carroll) until she was a tall girl of thirteen. This was in 1861. At that time, before the beginning of actual hostilities, her uncle, John Chase – he had married her mother's sister – offered to take her and have her educated with his own daughter Euphemia during the continuance of the troubled times. For John Chase had always been very fond of the little Sara; he fancied that she was like his wife. And, cold New-Englander though he was, he had worshipped his wife (she was Juliet Witherspoon-Meredith), and seemed to be always thinking of her, though she had been dead many years. The Major at first refused. But Madam Carroll, with her exquisite perception, perfect judgment, and beautiful goodness" (the junior warden always spoke in at least triplets of admiration when he mentioned the Major's wife), "explained to him the benefit it would be to Sara. Her own lot was cast with his; she would not have it otherwise; but in the wandering life she expected to lead, following his fortunes through the armed South, what advantages in the way of education should she be able to secure for his little daughter, who was now of an age to need them? Whereas her uncle, who was very fond of her, would give her many. The Major at last yielded. And then Sara was told. Well as they knew her, I think they were both alarmed at the intensity of her grief. But when the poor child saw how it was distressing her father, she controlled it, or rather the expression of it; and to me her self-control was more touching even than her tears had been, for one could see that her innocent heart was breaking. The parting was a most pathetic sight – her white cheeks, silence, and loving, despairing eyes, that never left her father's face – I don't know when I have been more affected. For I speak from personal remembrance, sir: *I was there*. Well, that little girl did not see her father again for four long years. She lived during that time with her uncle at Longfields – one of those villages of New England with still, elm-shaded, conscientious streets, silent white houses, the green blinds all closed across their broad fronts, yet the whole pervaded too, in spite of this quietude, by an atmosphere of general, unresting *interrogativeness*, which is, as I may say, sir, *strangling* to the unaccustomed throat. I speak from personal remembrance; I have been *personally* there."

"I do not think there is now as much of – of the atmosphere you mention, as there once was," said the rector, smiling.

"Perhaps not, perhaps not. But when I was there you breathed it in every time you opened your mouth – like powdered alum. But to ree-vee-nir (I presume you are familiar with the French expression). In those four years Sara Carroll grew to womanhood; but she did not grow in her feelings; she remained one-ideaed. Mind you, I do not, while describing it, mean in the least to commend such an affection as hers; it was unreasonable, overstrained. I should be very sorry indeed, extremely sorry, to see my daughter Honoria making such an idol of me."

The rector, who knew Miss Honoria Ashley, her aspect, voice, and the rules with which she barred off the days of the poor old junior warden, let his eyes fall upon his well-scrubbed floor (scrubbed twice a week, under the personal supervision of Mrs. Rendlesham, by the Rendleshams maid-of-all-work, Lucilla).

"But the Ashleys are always of a calm and reasonable temperament, I am glad to say," pursued the warden, "a temperament that might be classified as judicial. Honoria is judicial. To ree-vee-nir. Sara was about seventeen when her father bought this place, called the Farms, and nothing, I suppose, could have kept her from coming home at that time but precisely that which did keep her – the serious illness of the uncle to whom she owed so much. His days were said to be numbered, and he wanted

her constantly beside him. I am inclined to suspect that his own daughter, Euphemia, while no doubt a highly intellectual person, may not have a – a natural aptitude for those little tendernesses of voice, touch, and speech – unprescribed if you like, but most dear – which to a sick man, sir, are beyond rubies, far beyond." The old man's eyes had a wistful look as he said this; he had forgotten for the moment his narrative, and even Miss Honoria; he was thinking of Miss Honoria's mother, his loving little wife, who had been long in paradise.

He went on with his story, but less briskly. "Sara, therefore, has remained at Longfields with her uncle. But every six months or so she has come down as far as Baltimore to meet her father, who has journeyed northward for the purpose, with Madam Carroll, the expense of these meetings being gladly borne by John Chase, whose days could not have been so definitely numbered, after all, as he supposed, since he has lingered on indefinitely all this time, nearly three years. During the last year and a half, too, he has been so feeble that Sara could not leave him, the mere thought of an absence, however short, seeming to prey upon him. She has not, therefore, seen her father since their last Baltimore meeting, eighteen months back, as the Major himself has not been quite well enough to undertake the long journey to Connecticut. Chase at length died, two months ago, and she has now come home to live. From what I hear," added the warden, summing up, "I am inclined to think that she will prove a very fair specimen of a Witherspoon and Meredith, if not quite a complete Carroll."

"And she could sing the solo for us on Trinity Sunday?" said the rector, giving the helm a turn towards his anthem.

"She *could*," said the warden, with impartial accent, retreating a little when he found himself confronted by a date.

"Do you mean if she would?"

"Well, yes. She is rather distant – reserved; I mean, that she seems so to strangers. You won't find *her* offering to sing in your choir, or teach in your Sunday-school, or bring you flowers, or embroider your book-marks, or make sermon-covers for you, or dust the church, or have troubles in her mind which require your especial advice; *she* won't be going off to distant mission stations on Sunday afternoons, walking miles over red-clay roads, and jumping brooks, while you go comfortably on your black horse. She'll be rather a contrast in St. John's just now, won't she?" And the warden's cough ended in the chuckle.

It was now after ten, and the choir was still practising. Mr. Phipps, indeed, had proposed going home some time before. But Miss Corinna Rendlesham having remarked in a general way that she pitied "poor puny men" whose throats were always "giving out," he knew from that that she would not go herself nor allow Miss Lucy to go. Now Miss Lucy was the third Miss Rendlesham, and Mr. Phipps greatly admired her. Ferdinand Kenneway, wiser than Phipps, made no proposals of any sort (this was part of his correctness); his voice had been gone for some time, but he found the places for everybody in the music-books, as usual, and pretended to be singing, which did quite as well.

"I am convinced that there is some mistake about this second hymn," announced Miss Corinna (after a fourth rehearsal of it); "it is the same one we had only three Sundays ago."

"Four, I think," said Miss Greer, with feeling. For was not this a reflection upon the rector's memory?

"Oh, very well; if it *is* four, I will say nothing. I *was* going to send Alexander Mann over to the study to find out – supposing it to be three only – if there might not be some mistake."

At this all the other ladies looked reproachfully at Miss Greer.

She murmured, "But your fine powers of remembrance, dear Miss Corinna, are *far* better than mine."

Miss Corinna accepted this; and sent Alexander Mann on his errand. Ferdinand Kenneway, in the dusk of the back row, smiled to himself, thinly; but as nature had made him thin, especially about the cheeks, he was not able to smile in a richer way.

During the organ-boy's absence the choir rested. The voices of the ladies were, in fact, a little husky.

"No, it's all right; that's the hymn he meant," said Alexander Mann, returning. "An' I ast him if he weern't coming over ter-night, an' he says, 'Oh yes!' says he, an' he get up. Old Senator Ashley's theer, an' *he* get up too. So I reckon the parson's comin', ladies." And Alexander smiled cheerfully on the row of bonnets as he went across to his box beside the organ.

But Miss Corinna stopped him on the way. "What could have possessed you to ask questions of your rector in that inquisitive manner, Alexander Mann?" she said, surveying him. "It was a piece of great impertinence. What are his intentions or his non-intentions to you, pray?"

"Well, Miss Corinna, it's orful late, an' I've blowed an' blowed till I'm clean blowed out. An' I knewed that as long as the parson stayed on over theer, you'd all – "

"All what?" demanded Miss Corinna, severely.

But Alexander, frightened by her tone, retreated to his box.

"Never mind him, dear Miss Corinna," said little Miss Tappen, from behind; "he's but a poor motherless orphan."

"Perhaps he is, and perhaps he is *not*" said Miss Corinna. "But in any case he must finish his sentence: propriety requires it. Speak up, then, Alexander Mann."

"I'll stand by you, Sandy," said Mr. Phipps, humorously.

"You said," pursued Miss Corinna, addressing the box, since Alexander was now well hidden within it – "you said that as long as the rector remained in his study, you knew – "

"I knewed you'd all hang on here," said Alexander, shrilly, driven to desperation, but safely invisible within his wooden retreat.

"Does he mean anything by this?" asked Miss Corinna, turning to the soprani.

"I am sure we have not remained a moment beyond our usual time," said Miss Greer, with dignity.

"I ask you, does he *mean* anything?" repeated Miss Corinna, sternly.

"Oh, dear Miss Corinna, I am sure he has no meaning at all – none whatever. He never has," said good-natured little Miss Tappen, from her piled chant-books. "And he weeds flower-beds *so* well!"

Here voices becoming audible outside, the ladies stopped; a moment later the rector entered. His junior warden was not with him. Having recollected suddenly the probable expression upon Miss Honoria's face at this hour, the junior warden had said good-night, paced down the knoll and up Edgerley Street with his usual careful little step until the safe seclusion of Ashley Lane was reached, when, laying aside his dignity, he took its even moonlit centre, and ran, or rather trotted, as fast as he could up its winding ascent to his own barred front door, where Miss Honoria let him in, candle in hand, and on her head the ominous cap (frilled) which was with her the expression of the hour. For Miss Honoria always arranged her hair for the night and put on this cap at ten precisely; thus crowned, and wrapped in a singularly depressing gray shawl, she was accustomed to wait for the gay junior warden, when (as had at present happened) he had forgotten her wishes and the excellent clock on her mantel that struck the hours. Meanwhile the rector was speaking to his choir about the selections for Trinity Sunday. He addressed Miss Corinna. At rehearsals he generally addressed Miss Corinna. This was partly due to her martial aspect, which made her seem the natural leader far more than Phipps or Kenneway, but principally because, being well over fifty, she was no longer troubled by the flutter of embarrassment with which the other ladies seemed to be oppressed whenever he happened to speak to them – timid young things as they were, all of them under thirty-five.

Miss Corinna responded firmly. The other ladies maintained a gently listening silence. At length the rector, having finished all he had to say, glanced at his watch. "Isn't it rather late?" he said.

And they were all surprised to find how late it was.

Like a covey of birds rising, they emerged from the pen made by the music-stand and organ, and moved in a modest group towards the door. The rector remained behind for a moment to speak

to Bell-ringer Flower. When he came out, they were still fluttering about the steps and down the front path towards the gate. "I believe our roads are the same," he said.

As indeed they were: there was but one road in Far Edgerley. This was called Edgerley Street, and all the grassy lanes that led to people's residences turned off from and came back to it, going nowhere else. There were advantages in this. Some persons had lately felt that they had not sufficiently appreciated this excellent plan for a town; for if any friend should happen to be out, paying a visit or taking the air, sooner or later, with a little patience, one could always meet her (or him); she (or he), without deliberate climbing of fences, not being able to escape.

The little company from the church now went down the church knoll towards this useful street. Far Edgerley was all knolls, almost every house having one of its own, and crowning it. The rector walked first, with Miss Corinna; the other ladies followed in a cluster which was graceful, but somewhat indefinite as to ranks, save where Mr. Phipps had determinedly placed himself beside Miss Lucy Rendlesham, and thus made one even rank of two. Ferdinand Kenneway walked by himself a little to the right of the band; he walked not with any one in particular, but as general escort for the whole. Ferdinand Kenneway often accompanied Far Edgerley ladies homeward in this collective way. It was considered especially safe.

Flower, the bell-ringer, left alone on the church steps, looked after their departing figures in the moonlight. "A riddler it is," he said to himself – "a riddler, and a myst'rous one, the way all womenkind feels itself drawn to parsons. I suppose they judge anything proper that's clirrycal." He shook his head, locked the church door, and went across to close the study.

Flower was a Chillawassee philosopher who had formerly carried the mail on horseback over Lonely Mountain to Fox Gap. Age having dimmed somewhat his youthful fires, lessening thereby his interest in natural history, as exemplified by the bears, wolves, and catamounts that diversified his route, he had resigned his position, judging it to be "a little too woodsy," on the whole, for a man of his years. He then accepted the office of bell-ringer of St. John's, a place which he had been heard to say conferred a dignity second only to that of mails. He was very particular about this dignity, and the title of it. "Item," he said, "that I be not a sexton; for sexton be a slavish name for a free-born mountaineer. Bell-ringer Flower I be, and Bell-ringer Flower you may call me."

Now the bell of St. John's was but a small one, suspended rustically, under a little roof of thatch, from the branch of an old elm near the church door; to ring it, therefore, was but a slight task. But Flower made it a weighty one by his attitude and manner as he stood on Sunday mornings, rope in hand, hat off, and eyes devotionally closed, beside his leafy belfry, bringing out with majestic pull the one little silver note.

He now re-arranged the chairs in the study, and came upon a framed motto surrounded by rosebuds in worsted-work, a fresh contribution to the rector's walls from the second Miss Greer. "Talk about the mil'try – my! they're nothing to 'em – nothing to these unmarried reverints!" he said to himself, as he surveyed this new memento. He hung it on the wall, where there was already quite a frieze of charming embroidery in the way of texts and woollen flowers. "Item – however, very few of them *is* unmarried. Undoubted they be drove to it early, in self-defence."

CHAPTER II

"YOU are a little tired, Major?"

"Possibly. Somewhat. Sara has been reading aloud to me from the *Review*. She read all the long articles."

"Ah – she does not know how that tires you. I must tell her. She does not appreciate – she is still so young, you know – that with your extensive reading, your knowledge of public affairs and the world at large, you can generally anticipate, after the first few sentences, all that can be said."

The Major did not deny this statement of his resources.

"I am going to the village for an hour or two," continued Madam Carroll; "I shall take Sara with me." (Here the Major's face seemed to evince a certain relief.) "We must call upon Miss Honoria Ashley. And also at Chapultepec, upon Mrs. Hibbard."

"Yes, yes – widow of General Hibbard, of the Mexican War," said the Major, half to himself.

"I do not pay many visits, as you know, Major; our position does not require it. We open our house – that is enough; our friends come to us; they do not expect us to go to them. But I make an exception in the case of Mrs. Hibbard and of Miss Ashley, as you have advised me to do; for the Ashleys are connected with the Carrolls by marriage, though the tie is remote, and Mrs. Hibbard's mother was a Witherspoon. I know you wish Sara to understand and recognize these little distinctions and differences."

"Certainly. Very proper," said the Major.

"We shall be gone an hour and a half, perhaps two hours. I will send Scar to you for his lessons; and I shall tell Judith Inches to allow no one to disturb you, not even to knock at this door. For Scar's lessons are important, Major."

"Yes, very important – very."

"Good-bye, then," said his wife, cheerfully, resting her hand on his shoulder for a moment, as she stood beside his chair. The Major drew the slender hand forward to his gray moustache.

"Fie, Major! you spoil me," said the little woman, laughing.

She left the room, making, with her light dress and long curls, a pretty picture at the door, as she turned to give him over her shoulder a farewell nod and smile. The Major kept on looking at the closed door for several minutes after she had gone.

Not long after this the same door opened, and a little boy came in; his step was so light and his movements so careful that he made no sound. He closed the door, and laid the book he had brought with him upon a table. He was a small, frail child, with a serious face and large blue eyes; his flaxen hair, thin and fine, hung in soft, scanty waves round his little throat – a throat which seemed too small for his well-developed head, yet quite large enough for his short, puny body. He was dressed in a blue jacket, with an embroidered white collar reaching to the shoulders, and ruffles of the same embroidery at the knee, where his short trousers ended. A blue ribbon tied his collar, and his slender little legs and feet were incased in long white stockings and low slippers, such as are worn by little girls. His whole costume, indeed, had an air of effeminacy; but he was such a delicate-looking little fellow that it was not noticeable. From a woman's point of view, he was prettily dressed.

He crossed the room, opened a closet door, and took from a shelf two boxes, which he carried to the table, making a separate journey with each. He arranged these systematically, the book in the centre, a box on each side; then he pushed the table over the carpet towards the Major's chair. The table was narrow and light, and made no sound. He moved onward slowly, his hands, widely apart, grasping its top, and he paused several times to peer round the corner of it so as to bring it up within an inch of the Major's feet, yet not to touch them. This accomplished, he surveyed the position gravely. Satisfied with it, he next brought up a chair for himself, which, while not the ordinary high-chair of a child, seemed yet to have been made especially for him on account of his low stature. He drew

this chair close to the table on the opposite side, climbed into it, and then, when all was prepared, he spoke. "I am quite ready now, papa, if you please." His slender little voice was clear and even, like his mother's; his words followed each other with slow precision.

The Major woke, or, if he had not been asleep, opened his eyes. "Ah, little Scar," he said, "you here?" And he patted the child's hand caressingly. Scar opened his book; then one of the boxes, which contained white blocks with large red letters painted upon them. He read aloud from the book a sentence, once, twice. Then he proceeded to make it from memory with the blocks on the table, working slowly, and choosing each letter with thoughtful deliberation.

"Good – blood – can – not – lie," he read aloud from his row of letters when the sentence was completed. "I think that is right. Your turn, papa."

And then the Major, with almost equal slowness, formed, after Scar had read it, the following adage: "A brave father makes a brave son." "That's you and I, Scar."

"Yes, papa. And this is the next: 'The – knights – are – dust. – Their – good – swords – rust. – Their – souls – are – with – the – saints – we – trust.' That is too long for one. We will call it three."

Father and little son completed in this slow way eight of the sentences the little book contained. It was a small, flat volume in manuscript, the letters clearly printed with pen and ink. The Major's wife had prepared it, "from the Major's dictation," she said. "A collection of the fine old sayings of the world, which he greatly admires, and which he thinks should form part of the preliminary education of our son."

"Eight. The lesson is finished, papa," said Scar. "If you think I have done sufficiently well, I may now amuse myself with my dominoes." As he spoke he replaced the letters in their box, put on the cover, and laid the manuscript book on the top. Then he drew forward the second box, and took out his dominoes. He played by himself, one hand against the other. "You will remember, papa, that my right hand I call Bayard and my left Roland."

"Yes," answered the Major, looking on with interest.

Roland won the first game. Then the second. "The poor chevalier seems to have no luck to-day. I must help him a little," said the Major. And he and Scar played a third game.

While they were thus engaged, with Bayard's fortunes not much improved as yet, the door opened, and Sara Carroll came in. The Major was sitting with his spectacles on and head bent forward, in order to read the numbers on the dominoes; his hand, poised over the game while he considered his choice, had the shrivelled appearance, with the veins prominent on the back, which more than anything else betrays the first feebleness of old age. As his daughter came in he looked up, first through his spectacles, then, dropping his head a little, over them, after the peering fashion of old men. But the instant he recognized her his manner, attitude, even his whole appearance, changed, as if by magic; his spectacles were off; he had straightened himself, and risen. "Ah! you have returned?" he said. "Scar had his lessons so well that I have permitted him to amuse himself with his dominoes for a while, as you see. You are back rather sooner than you expected, aren't you?"

"We had to postpone our visit to Mrs. Hibbard," said Sara.

The Major's lips formed, "of the Mexican War;" but he did not utter the syllables aloud, and immediately thereafter seemed to take himself more vigorously in hand, as it were. He walked to the hearth-rug, and took up a position there with his shoulders back, his head erect, and one hand in the breast of his frock-coat. "It is quite proper that you should go to see those two ladies, my daughter; the Ashleys are connected with the Carrolls by marriage, though the tie is a remote one, and the mother of Mrs. – Mrs. – the other lady you were mentioning; her name has just escaped me –"

"Hibbard," said Sara.

"Yes, Mrs. Hibbard of the Mex – I mean, that Mrs. Hibbard's mother was a Witherspoon. It is right that you should recognize these – ah, these little distinctions and differences." He brought out the last words in full, round tones. The Major's voice had always been a fine one.

He was a handsome, soldierly-looking man, tall, broad-shouldered, with noble bearing, and bold, well-cut features. He was dressed in black, with broad, stiff, freshly starched white cuffs, and a high standing collar, round which was folded a black silk cravat that when opened was three-quarters of a yard square. His thin gray hair, moustache, and imperial were cut after the fashion affected by the senior officers of the old army – the army before the war.

"They are not especially interesting in themselves, those two ladies," remarked his daughter, taking off her little black bonnet. "Miss Honoria cares more about one's shoes – whether or not they are dusty enough to injure her oiled floors – than about one's self; and Mrs. Hibbard talks all the time about her ducks."

"True, quite true. Those ducks are extremely tiresome. I have had to hear a great deal about them myself," said the Major, in an injured tone, forgetting for a moment his military attitude. "What do I know of ducks? Yet she *will* talk about them."

"Why should you listen?" said Sara, drawing off her gloves.

"Ah, we must not forget that her mother was a Mex – I mean, a Witherspoon. It is not necessary for us, for you, to pay many visits, my daughter; our position does not require it. We – ah – we open our house; that is enough; our friends come to us; they do not expect us to go to them."

Sara was now taking off her mantle; he watched to see whether she would keep it or put it down. She threw it over her arm, and she also took up her bonnet and gloves. "You will let me come back and read to you, father?"

"Thank you, my dear; but it is not necessary. I have still another of Scar's lessons to attend to, and Scar's lessons are important, very important. There are, besides, various other little things which may require my attention. In short, my – ah – mornings are at present quite filled. Besides, reading aloud is very fatiguing, very; and I do not wish you to fatigue yourself on my account."

"Nothing I was doing for you could fatigue me, father. You don't know how I have longed to be at home again so that I *could* do something for you." She spoke warmly.

The Major looked perturbed. He coughed, and glanced helplessly towards the door. As if in answer to his look, the door at that moment opened, and his wife came in.

"Mr. Owen is in the drawing-room, Sara," she said. "Will you go in and see him, please? I will follow you in a moment. I met him on his way here, and offered him your vacant place in the carriage."

"He comes rather often, doesn't he?" said Sara, her eyes still on her father's face.

"Yes, he comes often. But it is natural that he should wish to come. As the Major has observed before this, the rector of St. John's must always rely for his most congenial society, as well as for something of guidance, too, upon Carroll Farms."

"Certainly," said the Major. "I have often made the remark."

"I suppose he comes more especially to see you, father," Sara said.

"Mr. Owen knows that he must not expect to see the Major in the morning," said Madam Carroll. "The Major's mornings are always occupied, and he prefers not to be interrupted. In fact, it is not Mr. Owen, but you and I, Sara, who have been the chief sinners in this respect of late; we must amend our ways. But come, you should not keep the rector waiting too long, or he will think that your Northern education has relaxed the perfection of your Carroll manners."

She took her daughter's arm, and they left the room together. But only a few minutes had elapsed when the little wife returned. "Go get your father's glass of milk, my pet," she said to Scar.

The boy climbed down from his place at the table, and left the room with his noiseless step. The Major was leaning back in his easy-chair, with his eyes closed; he looked tired.

"We went to the Ashleys'," said his wife, taking a seat beside him. "But there we learned that Mrs. Hibbard was confined to her bed by an attack of rheumatism, brought on, they think, by her having remained too long in the duck-yard; and so we were obliged to postpone our visit to Chapultepec. I then decided to take the time for some necessary household purchases, and as Sara knows as yet but little of my method of purchasing, I arranged to leave her at Miss Dalley's (Miss

Dalley has been so anxious to talk over Tasso with her, you know), and call for her on my return. But she must have soon tired of Miss Dalley, for she did not wait; she walked home alone."

"Yes, she came in here. She has been here a long time," answered the Major. Then he opened his eyes. "It was in the midst of Scar's lessons," he said, as if explaining.

"Ah, I see. That must not happen again. She will at once understand – that is, when I explain it – that Scar's lessons should not be interrupted. She is very fond of Scar. You will have your lunch in here to-day, won't you, Major? I think it would be better. It is Saturday, you know, and on Saturdays we all rest before the duties of Sunday – duties which, in your case especially, are so important."

But the Major seemed dejected. "I don't know about that – about their being so important," he answered. "Ashley is always there."

"Oh, Major! Major! the idea of your comparing yourself with Godfrey Ashley! He is all very well in his way – I do not deny that; but he is not and never can be *you*. Why, St. John's would not know itself, it would not be St. John's, if you were not there to carry round the plate on Sunday mornings. And everybody would say the same." She laid her hand on his forehead, not with a light, uncertain touch, but with that even pressure which is grateful to a tired head. The Major seemed soothed; he did not open his eyes, but he bent his head forward a little so that his forehead could rest against her hand. Thus they remained for several minutes. Then Scar came back, bringing a glass of milk, with the thick cream on it; he placed this on the table beside his father, climbed into his chair, and went on with his game, Bayard against Roland. The Major took the glass and began to sip the milk, at first critically, then appreciatively; he had the air of a connoisseur over a glass of old wine. "How is it this morning?" asked Madam Carroll, with interest. And she listened to his opinion, delivered at some length.

"I must go now," she said, rising; "Sara will be expecting me in the drawing-room."

She had taken off her gypsy hat and gloves, and put on a little white apron with blue bows on the pockets. As she crossed the room towards the door, with her bunch of household keys at her belt, she looked more like a school-girl playing at housekeeping than the wife of a man of the Major's age (or, indeed, of a man much younger than the Major), and the mother of Scar. But this was one of the charms among the many possessed by this little lady – she was so young and small and fair, and yet at the same time in other ways so fully "Madam Carroll" of "The Farms."

The Reverend Mr. Owen thought of this as she entered the drawing-room. He had thought of it before. The Reverend Mr. Owen greatly admired Madam Carroll.

When he had paid his visit and gone, Sara Carroll went up-stairs to her own room. She had her mantle on her arm, her bonnet in her hand, for she had not taken the trouble to go to her room before receiving his visit, as Madam Carroll had taken it: Madam Carroll always took trouble.

Half an hour later there was a tap upon her door, and her step-mother, having first waited for permission, entered. Sara had taken the seat which happened to be nearest the entrance, an old, uncomfortable ottoman without a back, and she still held her bonnet and mantle, apparently unconscious that she had them; the blinds had not been closed, and the room was full of the noon sunshine, which struck glaringly against the freshly whitewashed walls. Madam Carroll took in the whole – the listless attitude, the forgotten mantle, the open blinds, the nearest chair. She drew the blinds together, making a cool, green shade in place of the white light; then she took the bonnet and mantle from the girl's passive hand, folded the mantle, and placed the two carefully in the closet where they belonged.

"I can do that. You must not give yourself trouble about my things, mamma," Sara said.

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