Woolson Constance Fenimore

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Woolson C.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

IN a mountain village of North Carolina, in the year 1873, the spring had opened with its accustomed beauty. But one day there came a pure cold wind which swept through the high valley at tremendous speed from dawn to midnight. People who never succumb to mere comfort did not relight their fires. But to the Franklin family comfort was a goddess, they would never have thought of calling her "mere"; "delightful" was their word, and Ruth would probably have said "delicious." The fire in Mrs. Franklin's parlor, therefore, having been piled with fresh logs at two o'clock as an offering to this deity, was now, at four, sending out a ruddy glow. It was a fire which called forth Ruth's highest approbation when she came in, followed by her dog, Petie Trone, Esq. Not that Ruth had been facing the blast; she never went out from a sense of duty, and for her there was no pleasure in doing battle with things that were disagreeable for the sake merely of conquering them. Ruth had come from her own room, where there was a fire also, but one not so generous as this, for here the old-fashioned hearth was broad and deep. The girl sat down on the rug before the blaze, and then, after a moment, she stretched herself out at full length there, with her head resting on her arm thrown back behind it.

"It's a pity, Ruth, that with all your little ways, you are not little yourself," remarked Dolly Franklin, the elder sister. "Such a whalelike creature sprawled on the floor isn't endearing; it looks like something out of Gulliver."

"It's always so," observed Mrs. Franklin, drowsily. "It's the oddest thing in the world – but people never will stay in character; they want to be something different. Don't you remember that whenever poor Sue Inness was asked to sing, the wee little creature invariably chanted, 'Here's a health to King Charles,' in as martial a voice as she could summon? Whereas Lucia Lewis, who is as big as a grenadier, always warbles softly some such thing as 'Call me pet names, dearest. Call me a bird.' Bird! Mastodon would do better."

"Mastodon?" Ruth commented. "It is evident, His Grand, that you have seen Miss Billy to-day!"

Ruth was not a whale, in spite of Dolly's assertion. But she was tall, her shoulders had a marked breadth, and her arms were long. She was very slender and supple, and this slenderness, together with her small hands and feet, took away all idea of majesty in connection with her, tall though she was; one did not think of majesty, but rather of girlish merriment and girlish activity. And girlish indolence as well. Mrs. Franklin had once said: "Ruth is either running, or jumping, or doing something in such haste that she is breathless; or else she is stretched out at full length on the carpet or the sofa, looking as though she never intended to move again!"

The girl had a dark complexion with a rich color, and hair that was almost black; her face was lighted by blue eyes, with long thick black lashes which made a dark fringe round the blue. The persons who liked Ruth thought her beautiful; they asserted that her countenance had in it something which was captivating. But others replied that though her friends might call her captivating if they pleased, since that word denotes merely a personal charm, they had no right to say that she was beautiful; for as regards beauty, there are well-defined rules, and, with the exception of her wonderful eyes, the face of the second Miss Franklin transgressed every one of these canons. Ruth's features were without doubt irregular. And especially was it true that her mouth was large. But the lips were exquisitely cut, and the teeth very white. Regarding her appearance as a whole, there was a fact which had not as yet been noticed, namely, that no man ever found fault with it; the criticism came always from feminine lips. And these critics spoke the truth; but they forgot, or rather they did not see, some of the compensations. There were people not a few, even in her own small circle, who did not

look with favor upon Ruth Franklin; it was not merely, so they asserted, that she was heedless and frivolous, caring only for her own amusement, and sacrificing everything to that, for of many young persons this could be said; but they maintained in addition that hers was a disposition in its essence self-indulgent; she was indolent; she was fond of luxuries; she was even fond of "good eating" – an odd accusation to be brought against a girl of that age. In this case also the charges were made by feminine lips. And again it may be added that while these critics spoke the truth, or part of the truth, they did not, on the other hand, see some of the compensations.

"Why do you say '*poor* Sue Inness,' His Grand?" inquired Dolly, in an expostulating tone. "Why do people always say '*poor*' so-and-so, of any one who is dead? It is an alarmingly pitying word; as though the unfortunate departed must certainly be in a very bad place!"

"Here is something about the bishop," said Mrs. Franklin, who was reading a Raleigh newspaper in the intervals of conversation. Her tone was now animated. "He has been in Washington, and one of his sermons was – "

But she was interrupted by her daughters, who united their voices in a chant as follows:

"Mother Franklin thinks,
That General Jackson,
Jared the Sixth,
Macaroon custards,
And Bishop Carew,
Are per-*fec*-tion!"

Mrs. Franklin made no reply to these Gregorian assertions (which she had often heard before), save the remark, "You have torn your skirt, Ruth."

"Oh, please don't look at me over your glasses, His Grand. It spoils your profile so," answered Ruth; for Mrs. Franklin was surveying the skirt with her head bent forward and her chin drawn sharply in, so that her eyes could be brought to bear upon the rent over her spectacles.

She now drew off these aids to vision impatiently. "Whether I look through them or over them doesn't matter; you and Dolly are never satisfied. I cannot read the paper without my glasses; do you wish me to know nothing of the news of the world?"

"We'll *tell* you," responded Dolly, going on busily with her knitting. "For instance, to-day: Genevieve has had *all* the paint cleaned and *all* the windows washed; she is now breathing that righteous atmosphere of cold, fireless bleakness and soap which she adores. Miss Billy Breeze has admired everything that she can think of, because admiration is so uplifting. And she has written another page about the primeval world; now she – "

Here the door which led to the entrance-hall was opened with a jerk by Linda, a plump negro girl, who bounced in, ejaculated "Lady!" in a congratulatory tone, and then bounced out to act as usher for the incoming guest.

"Billy herself, probably," said Mrs. Franklin. "Ruth, are you stretched out there under the plea that you are not yet fully grown?"

But Ruth did not deem it necessary to leave her couch for Miss Billy Breeze. "Hail, Billy!" she said, as the visitor entered. "Mother thinks that I ought to be seated politely on the sofa; will you please imagine that I am there?"

"Oh, certainly," replied Miss Breeze, in a conciliatory tone. Miss Breeze lived under the impression that the members of this family quarrelled with each other almost incessantly; when she was present, therefore, she did her best to smooth over their asperities. "It is rather good for her, you know," she said reassuringly to Mrs. Franklin; "for it is a windy day, and Ruth is not robust." Then to Ruth: "Your mother naturally wishes you to look your best, my dear."

"Do you, His Grand?" inquired Ruth. "Because if you do, I must certainly stay where I am, so that I can tuck under me, very neatly, this rip in my skirt, which Miss Billy has not yet seen. Petie Trone, Esq., shake hands with the lady." The dog, a small black-and-tan terrier, was reposing on the rug beside Ruth; upon hearing her command, he trotted across to the visitor, and offered a tiny paw.

"Dear little fellow," said Miss Breeze, bending, and shaking it gently. "His Grand must allow that he looks extremely well?"

For the circle of friends had ended by accepting the legend (invented by Ruth) that Mrs. Franklin was Petie Trone's grandmother, or "His Grand." The only person who still held out against this title was Genevieve, the daughter-in-law; Mrs. Franklin the younger thought that the name was ridiculous. Her husband's family seemed to her incomprehensibly silly about their pets.

Miss Wilhelmina Breeze was thirty-five; but no one would have thought so from her fair pink-and-white complexion, and young, innocent eyes. From her earliest years she had longed to hear herself called "Wilhelmina." But the longing was almost never gratified; the boyish name given to her in joke when she was a baby had clung to her with the usual fatal tenacity.

"Miss Billy, have you seen mother to-day?" Dolly inquired.

"Not until now," answered the visitor, surprised.

"Well, then, have you thought of mastodons?"

"Certainly I have; and if you yourself, Dolly, would think more seriously of the whole subject, the primeval world – you would soon be as fascinated with it as I am. Imagine one of those vast extinct animals, Dolly, lifting his neck up a hill to nibble the trees on its top!" said Miss Breeze with enthusiasm. "And birds as large as chapels flying through the air! Probably they sang, those birds. What sort of voices do you suppose they had? The cave-lion was twenty-nine feet high. The horned tryceratops was seventy-five feet long! It elevates the mind even to think of them."

"You see, His Grand, that she *has* thought of mastodons," commented Dolly. "Your unexpected mention of them, therefore, is plainly the influence of her mind acting upon yours from a distance – the distance of the Old North Hotel."

"Have you really thought of them, dear Mrs. Franklin? And do you believe there can be such a thing as the conscious – I mean, of course, *un*conscious – influence of one mind upon another?" inquired Miss Billy, her face betraying a delighted excitement.

"No, no; it's only Dolly's nonsense," answered Mrs. Franklin.

"It's easy to say nonsense, His Grand. But how, then, do you account for the utterances of my planchette?" demanded Dolly, wagging her head triumphantly.

Dolly, the second of Mrs. Franklin's three children, was an invalid. The Franklins, as a family, were tall and dark, and Dolly was tall and dark also; her face, owing to the pain which frequently assailed her, was thin, worn, and wrinkled. She sat in a low easy-chair, and beside her was her own especial table, which held what she called her "jibs." These were numerous, for Dolly occupied herself in many ways. She sketched, she carved little knick-knacks, she played the violin; she made lace, she worked out chess problems, and she knitted; she also scribbled rhymes which her family called poetry. The mantel-piece of this parlor was adorned with a hanging which bore one of her verses, stitched in old English text, the work of her mother's needle:

"O Fire! in these dark frozen days
So gracious is thy red,
So warm thy comfort, we forget
The violets are dead."

The family thought this beautiful. Dolly's verses, her drawing and wood-carving, her lace-making and chess, were amateurish; her violin-playing was at times spirited, and that was the utmost that could be said of it. But her knitting was remarkable. She knitted nothing but silk stockings, and

these, when finished, had a wonderful perfection. Dolly was accustomed to say of herself that in the heels of her stockings was to be found the only bit of conscience which she possessed.

When she mentioned planchette, her mother frowned. "I do not approve of such things."

"Yes, because you are afraid!" chuckled Dolly.

"Oh, anything that dear Mrs. Franklin does not approve of – " murmured Miss Billy.

Mrs. Franklin rose.

"His Grand is fleeing!" Dolly announced, gleefully.

"I must make the salad-dressing, mustn't I? Ruth will not touch Zoe's dressing. Billy, Mr. Chase is to dine with us to-day, informally; don't you want to stay and help us entertain him?" added the mistress of the house as she left the room.

"Dolly," suggested Ruth, from her place on the rug, "set planchette to work, and make it tell us secrets; make it tell us whether Miss Billy understands the *true* character of Achilles Larue!"

"She does not; I can tell her that without planchette," replied Dolly. "Only one person in the world has ever fully understood Achilles – had the strength to do it; and *he* died!"

"Yes, I know; I have heard Mr. Larue speak of that one friend," said Miss Billy, regretfully. "How unfortunate that he lost him!"

"Yes, baddish. And the term is quite in his own line," commented Dolly. "With him it is never warm, but warmish; the bluest sky is bluish; a June day, fairish; a twenty-mile walk, longish. In this way he is not committed to extravagant statements. When he is dead, he won't be more than deadish. But he's that now."

Mrs. Franklin, having made the salad-dressing (when she made it, it was always perfection), returned to the parlor. "Ruth, go and change your dress. Take Miss Billy with you, but take her to my room, not yours. For of course you will stay, Billy?"

"I don't think I'd better; I'm not dressed for the evening; and I said I should be back," answered Miss Breeze, hesitatingly.

"To whom did you say it? To the Old North? Run along," said Mrs. Franklin, smiling. "If it is shoes you are thinking of, as yours are muddy, Ruth can lend you a pair."

"That she cannot," remarked Dolly. "Buy Ruth six pairs of new shoes, and in six days all will be shabby. But you can have a pair of mine, Miss Billy."

When she was left alone with her elder daughter, Mrs. Franklin said: "Poor Billy! She is always haunted by the idea that she may possibly meet Achilles Larue here. She certainly will not meet him at the Old North, for he never goes near the place, in spite of her gentle invitations. But here there is always a chance, and I never can resist giving it to her, although in reality it is folly; he has never looked at her, and he never will."

"No. But you need not be anxious about her," replied Dolly; "she has the happy faculty of living in illusions, day after day. She can go on hopefully admiring Achilles to the last moment of her life, and I dare say she even thinks that he has a liking for her, little as he shows it. She has occult reasons for this belief; she would find them in a kick."

"Goose!" said Mrs. Franklin, dismissing Billy's virginal dreams with the matron's disillusioned knowledge. "Aren't you going to change your dress, Dolly?"

"Why? Am I not tidy as I am? I thought you considered me too tidy?" And it was true that the elder Miss Franklin was always a personification of rigid neatness; from the dark hair that shaded her tired face, to the shoes on her feet, all was severely orderly and severely plain.

"Oh, go, go!" answered her mother, impatiently.

Dolly screwed up her mouth, shook her head slowly, and laid her work aside; then she rose, and with her cane walked towards the door. On her way she stopped, and, bending, kissed her mother's forehead. "Some of these days, mother, I shall be beautiful. It will be during one of our future existences somewhere. It must be so, dear; you have earned it for me by your loving pity here." Nothing could exceed the tenderness of her tone as she said this.

Mrs. Franklin made no response beyond a little toss of her head, as though repudiating this account of herself. But after Dolly had left the room, a moisture gathered in the mother's eyes.

Ruth, meanwhile, had conducted Miss Billy to her own chamber.

"But Mrs. Franklin said I was to go to *her* room?" suggested the guest.

"She doesn't mind; she only meant that Bob is probably here," answered Ruth, as she opened the windows and threw back the blinds; for the afternoon was drawing towards its close.

Miss Billy took off her bonnet, and, after a moment's thought, hung it by its crown on a peg; in that position it did not seem possible that even Bob could make a resting-place within it. Bob was young and very small. He was beautiful or devilish according to one's view of flying-squirrels. But whether you liked him or whether you hated him, there was always a certain amount of interest in connection with the creature, because you could never be sure where he was. Miss Billy, who was greatly afraid of him, had given a quick look towards the tops of the windows and doors. There was no squirrel visible. But that was small comfort; Bob could hide himself behind a curtain-ring when he chose. One of the blinds came swinging to with a bang, and Ruth, reopening the window, struggled with it again. "There is Mr. Hill coming along the back street on Daniel," she said, pausing. "He is beckoning to me! What can he want? You will find shoes in the closet, Miss Billy, and don't wait for me; I am going down to speak to him." Away she flew, running lightly at full speed through the upper hall and down the back stairs, closely followed by Petie Trone, Esq.

Miss Billy closed the window and stood there for a moment looking out. Presently she saw Ruth at the stone wall at the end of the garden. She also recognized (with disapproving eyes) the unclerical hat of the Rev. Malachi Hill, who had stopped his horse in the road outside. He was talking to Ruth, who listened with her chin resting on her hands on the top of the wall, while the wind roughened her hair wildly, and blew out her skirts like a balloon. Miss Billy watched her for a while; then, after making her own preparations for the evening, she seated herself by the fire to wait. For no one could make Ruth come in one moment before she chose to do so; it seemed better, therefore, not to call attention to her absence by returning to the parlor alone, lest Mrs. Franklin should be made uneasy by knowing that the girl was out, bareheaded, in the cold wind. Having made her decision (Billy was always troubled, even upon the smallest occasion, by four or five different theories as to the best course to pursue), she looked about the room with the same wonder and gentle dislike which she had often felt before. The necessary articles of furniture were all set closely back against the wall, in order that the central space of the large chamber should be left entirely free. For Ruth did not like little things – small objects of any kind which required dusting, and which could be easily upset. Miss Billy, who adored little things, and who lived in a grove of them, thought the place dreadfully bare. There were no souvenirs; no photographs of friends in velvet frames; there were no small tables, brackets, screens, hanging shelves, little chairs, little boxes, little baskets, fans, and knick-knacks; there was not even a wall-calendar. With Miss Billy, the removal of the old leaf from her poetical calendar, and the reading of the new one each morning, was a solemn rite. And when her glance reached the toilet-table, her non-comprehension reached its usual climax. The table itself was plain and unadorned, but on its top was spread out a profuse array of toilet articles, all of ivory or crystal. That a girl so wholly careless about everything else should insist upon having so many costly and dainty objects for her personal use in the privacy of her own room seemed remarkable. "Give Ruth her bath in scented water, and all these ivory and crystal things to use when she dresses, and she is perfectly willing to go about in a faded, torn old skirt, a hat entirely out of fashion, shabby gloves, and worn-out shoes; in short, looking anyhow!" mused Billy, perplexed.

Down-stairs Mrs. Franklin was receiving another visitor. After Dolly's departure, Rinda had made a second irruptive entrance, with the announcement, "Gen'lem!" and Mr. Anthony Etheridge came in. Etheridge was a strikingly handsome man, who appeared to be about fifty-eight. He entered with light step and smiling face, and a flower in his coat.

"Ah, commodore, when did you return?" said Mrs. Franklin, giving him her hand.

"Two hours ago," answered Etheridge, bowing over it gallantly. "You are looking remarkably well, my dear madam. Hum-ha!" These last syllables were not distinct; Etheridge often made this little sound, which was not an ahem; it seemed intended to express merely a general enjoyment of existence – a sort of overflow of health and vitality.

"Only two hours ago? You have been all day in that horrible stage, and yet you have strength to pay visits?"

"Not visits; *a* visit. You are alone?"

"Only for the moment; Dolly and Ruth are dressing. We are expecting some one to dine with us – a new acquaintance, by-the-way, since you left; a Mr. Chase."

"Yes, Horace Chase; I knew he was here. I should like to kick him out!"

"Why so fierce?" said Mrs. Franklin, going on with her lamplighters. For the making of lamplighters from old newspapers was one of her pastimes.

"Of course I am fierce. We don't want fellows of that sort here; he will upset the whole place! What brought him?"

"He has not been well, I believe" ("That's one comfort! They never are," interpolated Etheridge), "and he was advised to try mountain air. In addition, he is said to be looking into the railroad project."

"Good heavens! Already? The one solace I got out of the war was the check it gave to the advance of those horrible rails westward; I have been in hopes that the locomotives would not get beyond Old Fort in my time, at any rate. Why, Dora, this strip of mountain country is the most splendid bit of natural forest, of nature undraped, which exists to-day between the Atlantic Ocean and the Rockies!"

"Save your eloquence for Genevieve, commodore."

"Hum-ha! Mrs. Jared, eh?"

"Yes; she knew Mr. Chase when he was a little boy; she says she used to call him Horrie. As soon as she heard that he was here, she revived the acquaintance; and then she introduced him to us."

"Does she *like* him?" asked Etheridge, with annoyance in his tone.

"I don't know whether she likes him or not; but she is hoping that he will do something that will increase the value of property here."

"It is intelligent of Mrs. Jared to be thinking of that already," said Etheridge, softening a little. "Perhaps if I owned land here, I should take another view of the subject myself! You too, Dora – you might make something?"

"No; we have no land save the garden, and the house is dreadfully dilapidated. Personally, I may as well confess that I should be glad to see the railroad arrive; I am mortally tired of that long jolting stage-drive from Old Fort; it nearly kills me each time I take it. And I am afraid I don't care for nature undraped so much as you do, commodore; I think I like draperies."

"Of course you do! But when you – and by you I mean the nation at large – when you perceive that your last acre of primitive forest is forever gone, then you will repent. And you will begin to cultivate wildness as they do abroad, poor creatures – plant forests and guard 'em with stone walls and keepers, by Jove! Horace Chase appears here as the pioneer of spoliation. He may not mean it; he does not come with an axe on his shoulder exactly; he comes, in fact, with baking-powder; but that's how it will end. Haven't you heard that it was baking-powder? At least you have heard of the powder itself – the Bubble? I thought so. Well, that's where he made his first money – the Bubble Baking-Powder; and he made a lot of it, too! Now he is in no end of other things. One of them is steamships; some of the Willoughbys of New York have gone in with him, and together they have set up a new company, with steamers running south – the Columbian Line."

"Yes, Genevieve explained it to us. But as he does not travel with his steamers round his neck, there remains for us, inland people as we are, only what he happens to be himself. And that is nothing interesting."

"Not interesting, eh?" said Etheridge, rather gratified.

"To my mind he is not. He is ordinary in appearance and manners; he says 'yes, ma'am,' and 'no, ma'am,' to me, as though I were a great-grandmother! In short, I don't care for him, and it is solely on Genevieve's account that I have invited him. For she keeps urging me to do it; she is very anxious to have him like Asheville. He has already dined with us twice, to meet her. But to-day he comes informally – a chance invitation given only this morning (and again given solely to please *her*), when I happened to meet him at the Cottage."

"How old is the wretch?"

"I don't know. Forty-four or forty-five."

"Quite impossible, then, that Mrs. Jared should have known him when he was a boy; she was not born at that time," commented Etheridge. "What she means, of course, is that she, as a child herself, called him 'Horrie.'"

Mrs. Franklin did not answer, and at this moment Dolly came in.

"Yes, I am well," she said, in reply to the visitor's greeting; "we are all well, and lazy. The world at large will never be helped much by us, I fear; we are too contented. Have you ever noticed, commodore, that the women who sacrifice their lives so nobly to help humanity seldom sacrifice one small thing, and that is a happy home? Either they do not possess such an article, or else they have spoiled it by quarrelling with every individual member of their families."

"Now, Dolly, no more of your sarcasms. Tell me rather about this new acquaintance of yours, this bubbling capitalist whom you have invented and set up in your midst during my unsuspecting absence," said Etheridge.

"You need not think, commodore, that you can make me say one word about him," answered Dolly, solemnly; "for I read in a book only the other day that a tendency to talk about other persons, instead of one's self, was a sure sign of advancing age. Young people, the book goes on to say, are at heart interested in nothing on earth but themselves and their own affairs; they have not the least curiosity about character or traits in general. As I wish to be considered young, I have made a vow to talk of nothing but myself hereafter. Anything you may wish to hear about *me* I am ready to tell you." Dolly was now attired in a velvet dress of dark russet hue, like the color of autumn oak leaves; this tint took the eye away somewhat from the worn look of her plain thin face. The dress, however, was eight years old, and the fashion in which it had been made originally had never been altered.

"The being interested in nothing but themselves, and their own doings and feelings, is not confined to young people," said Mrs. Franklin, laughing. "I have known a goodly number of their elders who were quite as bad. When these gentry hold forth, by the hour, about their convictions and their theories, their beliefs and disbeliefs, their likings and dislikings, their tastes and their principles, their souls, their minds, and their bodies – if, in despair, you at last, by way of a change, turn the conversation towards some one else, they become loftily silent. And they go away and tell everybody, with regret of course, that you are hopelessly given to gossip! Gossip, in fact, has become very valuable to me; I keep it on hand, and pour it forth in floods, to drown those egotists out."

"When you gossip, then, I shall know that *I* bore you," said Etheridge, rising, "I mustn't do so now; I leave you to your Bubble. Mrs. Jared, I suppose, will be with you this evening? I ask because I had thought of paying her a how-do-you-do visit, later."

"Pay it here, commodore," suggested Mrs. Franklin. "Perhaps you would like to see her 'Horrie' yourself?"

"Greatly, greatly. I am always glad to meet any of these driving speculators who come within my reach. For it makes me contented for a month afterwards – contented with my own small means – to see how yellow they are! Not a man jack of them who hasn't a skin like guinea gold." Upon this point the commodore could enlarge safely, for no color could be fresher and finer than his own.

After he had gone, Mrs. Franklin said: "Imagine what he has just told me – that Genevieve could not possibly have known Horace Chase when he was a boy, because she is far too young!" And then mother and daughter joined in a merry laugh.

"It would be fun to tell him that she was forty on her last birthday," said Dolly.

"He would never believe you; he would think that you fibbed from jealousy," answered Mrs. Franklin. "As you are dressed, I may as well go and make ready myself," she added, rising. "I have been waiting for Ruth; I cannot imagine what she is about."

This is what Ruth was about – she was rushing up the back stairs in the dark, breathless. When she reached her room, she lit the candles hastily. "You still here, Miss Billy? I supposed you had gone down long ago." She stirred the fire into a blaze, and knelt to warm her cold hands. "Such fun! I have made an engagement for us all, this evening. You can never think what it is. Nothing less than a fancy-dress procession at the rink for the benefit of the Mission. A man is carrying costumes across the mountains for some tableaux for a soldiers' monument at Knoxville; his wagon has broken down, and he is obliged to stay here until it is mended. Mr. Hill has made use of this for the Mission. Isn't it a splendid idea? He has been rushing about all the afternoon, and he has found twenty persons who are willing to appear in fancy dress, and he himself is to be an Indian chief, in war-paint and feathers."

"In war-paint and feathers? *Oh!*"

"Yes. It seems that he has a costume of his own. He had it when he was an insurance agent, you know, before he entered the ministry; he was always fond of such things, he says, and the costume is a very handsome one; when he wore it, he called himself Big Moose."

"Big Moose! It must be stopped," said Miss Billy, in a horrified voice. For Miss Billy had the strictest ideas regarding the dignity of the clergy.

"On the contrary, I told him that it would be a great attraction, and that it was his duty to do all he could," declared Ruth, breaking into one of her intense laughs. Her laugh was not loud, but when it had once begun it seemed sometimes as if it would never stop. At present, as soon as she could speak, she announced, "We'll *all* go."

"Do not include me," said Miss Billy, with dignity. "I think it shocking, Ruth. I do indeed."

"Oh, you'll be there," said Ruth, springing up, and drawing Miss Billy to her feet. "You'll put on roller-skates yourself, and go wheeling off first this way, then that way, with Achilles Larue." And, as she said this, she gleefully forced her visitor across the floor, now in a long sweep to the right, now to the left, with as close an imitation of skating as the circumstances permitted.

While they were thus engaged, Mrs. Franklin opened the door. "What are you doing? Ruth – not dressed yet?"

"I'm all ready, His Grand," responded Ruth, running across the room and pouring water into the basin in a great hurry. "I have only to wash my hands" (here she dashed lavender into the water); "I'll be down directly."

"And we shall all admire you in that torn dress," said her mother.

"Never mind, I'll pin it up. Nobody will see it at dinner, under the table. And after dinner my cloak will cover it – for we are all going out."

"Going out this windy evening? Never! Are you ready, Billy? And Ruth, you must come as you are, for Mr. Chase is already here, and Rinda is bringing in the soup."

"Never fear, His Grand. I'll come."

And come she did, two minutes later, just as she was, save that her wind-roughened hair had been vaguely smoothed, and fastened down hastily with large hair-pins placed at random. Owing to her hurry, she had a brilliant color; and seeing, as she entered, the disapproving expression in her mother's eyes, she was seized with the idea of making, for her own amusement, a stately sweeping courtesy to Horace Chase; this she accordingly did, carrying it off very well, with an air of majesty just tempered at the edges with burlesque.

Chase, who had risen, watched this salutation with great interest. When it was over, he felt it incumbent upon him, however, to go through, in addition, the more commonplace greeting. "How do you do, Miss Ruth?" he said, extending his hand. And he gave the tips of her fingers (all she yielded to him) three careful distinct shakes.

Then they went to dinner.

CHAPTER II

THE meal which followed was good; for Zoe, the cook, was skilful in her old-fashioned way. But the dinner service was ordinary; the only wine was Dry Catawba; Rinda's ideas of waiting, too, were primitive. The Franklins, however, had learned to wait upon themselves. They had the habit of remaining long at the table; for, whether they were alone or whether they had a guest, there was always a soup, there was always a salad, there were always nuts and fruit, followed by coffee – four courses, therefore, in addition to the two which the younger Mrs. Franklin, whose household was managed in a very different way, considered all that was necessary "for the body."

"A serious rice pudding, Genevieve, no doubt *is* enough for the body, as you call it," Dolly had once said. "But *we* think of the mind also; we aim at brilliancy. And no one ever scintillated yet on cod-fish and stewed prunes!"

"Mrs. Jared Franklin is well, I hope?" Chase asked, when the last course was reached. He was not fond of nuts or figs, but he was playing his part, according to his conception of it, by eating at intervals one raisin.

"Quite well; thanks. I have never known her to be ill," replied Dolly.

"Mr. Chase, I am going to suggest something: as mother and my sister-in-law are both Mrs. Jared, and as mother has no burning desire to be called 'old Mrs. Franklin' just yet, why don't you say 'Mrs. G. B.' when you mean the younger matron?"

Chase would never have thought of calling either the one or the other a matron, his idea of the word being the female superintendent of a public institution. "G. B. – are those her initials?" he said. "Yes, of course; G. for Genevieve, or Gen, as I used to call her."

"And B. for Beatrice; isn't that lovely? Our own names, unfortunately, are very plain – Ruth, Dolly, and Jared; Genevieve has taken pity upon the Jared, and changed it to Jay. Mother, however, actually likes the name Jared. She is weak enough to be proud of the fact that there have been six Jared Franklins in the direct line, from eldest son to father, going back to colonial days. People are *very* sorry for this delusion of hers; they have told her repeatedly that the colonial period was unimportant. Genevieve, in particular, has often explained to her that modern times are far more interesting."

"I guess there isn't much question about that, is there?" said Chase. "No doubt they did the best they could in those old days. But they couldn't do much, you see, because they had nothing to work with, no machinery, no capital, no combinations; they couldn't hear anything until long after it had happened, and they couldn't go anywhere except on horseback. I've always been glad *I* didn't serve my time then. I guess I should have found it slow."

"You must find Asheville rather slow?" remarked Dolly.

"It is more than slow, Miss Franklin; it has stopped entirely. But it has great natural advantages – I have been surprised to see how many. I like new enterprises, and I've been thinking about something." Here he paused and ate one more raisin, balancing it for a moment upon the palm of his hand before he swallowed it. "I've been thinking of picking up that railroad at Old Fort and pushing it right through to this place, and on to Tennessee; a branch, later, to tap South Carolina and Georgia. That isn't all, however." He paused again. Then with a glance which rested for a moment on each face, and finally stopped at Mrs. Franklin's, "What do you say," he added, with an hospitable smile, "to my making a big watering-place of your hilly little village?"

"*Asheville* watered? What next!" said Dolly.

"The next is that the stock won't be," replied Chase, laughing. "I mean, the stock of the company that undertakes the affair, if it does undertake it. You'd better apply for some right off; all of you. Shall I tell you how the thing strikes me, while you are finishing your nuts? Well, then, this is about it. The whole South is a hot place in summer, ladies; from Baltimore down to the end of Florida and Louisiana they simply swelter from June to October, and always must swelter. If you will look at a

map, you can see for yourselves that the only region where the people of all this big section can get fresh air during the heated term, without a long journey for it, is this one line of mountains, called Alleghanies in the lump, but in reality including the Blue Ridge, the Cumberlands, your Smokies and Blacks, and others about here. For a trip to the southern sea-coast isn't much relief; a hot beach is about the hottest place I know! Now, then, what is the best point among these mountains? The Alleghanies lie *this* way." (He made the Alleghanies with a table-spoon.) "Then *there* is the Blue Ridge." (A nut-cracker.) "And here you get your Smokies and so forth." (Almonds taken hastily from a dish and arranged in a line.) "And I'll just indicate the Cumberlands with this orange. Very well. Now where are the highest peaks of these lines? Let us follow the range down. Do we find them in Pennsylvania? No, sir. Do we find them in Virginia? We do not. Are they over there among the Cumberlands? Not by a long shot. Where are they, then? Right here, ladies, at your own door; right here, where I make a dot this minute." And taking a pencil from his pocket, he made a small mark on the table-cloth between the spoon and the nut-cracker. "In this neighborhood," he went on, emphasizing his statement by pointing his pencil at Miss Billy, "there are thirteen nearly seven thousand feet high. It seems to me, therefore, that in spite of all the jokes about talking for buncombe, the talk for Buncombe has not been half tall enough yet. For this very Buncombe County is bound to be the favorite watering-place for over twelve millions of people, some day or other."

"Watering-place?" commented Dolly. "Well, we *have* the two rivers, the French Broad and the Swannanoa. But the Swannanoa is small; if the millions should all drink at once, it would soon go dry."

"I meant summer resort, Miss Franklin, not watering-place," said Chase, inwardly entertained by the quickness bordering on the sharp with which "the sickly one," as he called her, always took him up. "Though there are sulphur springs near by too: I have been out to look at them. And it isn't only the Southerners who will come here," he went on. "Northerners will flock also, when they understand what these mountains are. For, in comparison with them, the Catskills are a suburb; the White Mountains, ornamental rock-work; and the Adirondacks, a wood-lot. *Here* everything is absolutely wild; you can shoot because there are all sorts of things *to* shoot, from bears down. And then there's another point – for I haven't got to the bottom of the sack yet. This mountain valley of yours, being 2400 feet above the sea, has a wonderfully pure dry air, and yet, as it is so far south, it is not cold; its winter climate, therefore, is as good as its summer, and even better. So here's the situation: people who live in hot places will come here from June to October, and people who live in cold places will come from October to June." He returned the orange and the almonds to their dishes, replaced the table-spoon and nut-cracker, and then, looking at Mrs. Franklin, he gave her a cheerful nod. "That's it, ma'am; that's the whole in a nutshell."

Ruth gravely offered him an empty almond shell.

"We'll have something better than that, Miss Ruth – a philopena." And taking a nut-cracker, he opened several almonds. Finding a double kernel, he gave her one of the halves. "Now, if I win, I should be much favored if you would make me something of worsted – a tidy is the name, I think?"

Ruth began to laugh.

"Well, then, a picture-frame of cones."

And now the other ladies joined in Ruth's merriment.

"We must decline such rare objects," said Mrs. Franklin. "But we have our own small resources, Mr. Chase." And, leading the way back to the parlor, she showed him the mantel-cover with Dolly's verse.

"Why, that's beautiful, Miss Franklin," said Chase, with sincere admiration, when he had read the lines. "I didn't know you could write poetry."

"Oh yes," answered Dolly. "I think in elegies as a general thing, and I make sonnets as I dress. Epics are nothing to me, and I turn off triolets in no time. But I don't publish, Mr. Chase, because I don't want to be called a *minor* poet."

Here Rinda came in like a projectile, carrying a large box clasped in her arms. "Jess lef'! 'Spress!" she exclaimed excitedly.

"Express?" repeated Mrs. Franklin, trying to make out the address without her glasses. "Read it, Ruth."

Ruth looked at the label, and then broke into another laugh. She had hardly recovered from the preceding one, and Chase, with amusement, watched her start off again. But he soon found himself surrounded by laughers a second time.

"Why, what's wrong with it?" he asked, seeing that it was the label which excited their mirth. And in his turn he examined it. "Miss Ruth Franklin, Lommy Dew, Asheville? That's right, isn't it? Isn't Lommy Dew the name of your place?"

Rinda meanwhile, wildly curious, had been opening the box by main force with the aid of the poker. She now uncovered a huge cluster of hot-house roses, packed in moss.

"Flowers? Who could have sent them?" said Mrs. Franklin, surprised. She had no suspicion of her present guest; her thoughts had turned towards some of their old friends at the North. But Ruth, happening to catch the look in Horace Chase's eyes as he glanced for an instant at the blossoms, not so much admiringly as critically, exclaimed:

"*You* sent them, Mr. Chase. How perfectly lovely!"

"I'm afraid they're not much," Chase answered. "I thought they'd send more." He had wished to show that he appreciated the invitations to L'Hommedieu, and as, according to his idea, it was the young lady of the family to whom it was proper to pay such attentions, he had ordered the box to be sent to Ruth rather than to Mrs. Franklin or Dolly.

Ruth's laugh had stopped. She was passionately fond of hot-house flowers, and now both her hands together could hardly encircle even the stems alone of these superb tea-roses, whose gorgeous masses filled her arms as she raised them. With a quick movement she buried her face in the soft petals.

"But, I say, what was wrong with this?" asked Chase a second time, as he again looked at the label.

"L'Hommedieu is a French name – " began Dolly.

But Ruth interrupted her: "It is an ugly old French name, Mr. Chase, and as it is pronounced, in America at least, exactly as you wrote it, I think it might as well be spelled so, too. At present, however, this is the way – the silly way." And holding her flowers with her left arm, she detached her right hand, and scribbled the name on the edge of the Raleigh paper.

"Ah!" said Chase, looking at it. "I don't speak French myself. I thought perhaps it had something to do with dew." And frowning a little, a frown of attention, he spelled the word over.

An old negro woman, her head covered with a red kerchief folded like a turban, now came stiffly in with the coffee-tray, her stiffness being an angry dignity. It was Zoe, the cook, tired of waiting for Rinda, who, still in the parlor, was occupied in gazing with friendly interest at the roses. "Lawdy – ef I ain't clean ferget!" remarked the waitress, genially, to the company in general.

"You clar out, good-fer-nutt'n nigger!" muttered the offended cook, in an undertone to her coadjutor.

With the tray, or rather behind it, a lady came in.

"Just in time for coffee, Genevieve," remarked Dolly, cheerfully.

"Thanks; I do not take it at night," Genevieve answered.

This was a dialogue often repeated in one form or another, for Dolly kept it up. The younger Mrs. Franklin did not like evening dinners, and Dolly even maintained that her sister-in-law thought them wicked. "She sees a close connection between a late dinner with coffee after it, and the devil." The Franklins had always dined at the close of the day, for the elder Jared Franklin, having been the editor of a daily paper, had found that hour the most convenient one. The editor was gone; his family

had moved from the North to the South, and life for them was changed in many ways; but his habit of the evening dinner they had never altered.

The younger Mrs. Franklin greeted Chase cordially. Dolly listened, hoping to hear her call him "Horrie." But Genevieve contented herself with giving him her hand, and some frank words of welcome. Genevieve was always frank. And in all she said and did, also, she was absolutely sincere. She was a beautiful woman with golden hair, fair skin, regular features, and ideally lovely eyes; her tall figure was of Juno-like proportions. Chase admired her, that was evident. But Dolly (who was noting this) had long ago discovered that men always admired her sister-in-law. In addition to her beauty, Genevieve had a sweet voice, and an earnest, half-appealing way of speaking. She was appealing to Chase now. "There is to be an entertainment at the rink to-night, Horace, for the benefit of the Mission; won't you go? I hope so. And, mamma, that is what I have come over for; to tell you about it, and beg you to go also." She had seated herself beside Chase; but, as she said these last words, she put out her hand and laid it affectionately on Mrs. Franklin's shoulder.

"I believe I am to have the pleasure of spending the evening here?" Chase answered, making a little bow towards his hostess.

"But if mamma herself goes to the rink, as I am sure she will, then won't you accompany her? The Mission and the Colored Home, Horace, are – "

But here Chase, like a madman, made a sudden bound, and grasped the top of Miss Billy Breeze's head.

Quick as his spring had been, however, Ruth's was quicker. She pulled his hands away. "Don't hurt him! *Don't!*"

But the squirrel was not under Chase's fingers; he had already escaped, and, running down the front of Miss Billy's dress (to her unspeakable terror), he now made another leap, and landed on Dolly's arm, where Ruth caught him.

"What in creation is it?" said Chase, who had followed. "A bird? Or a mouse?"

"Mouse!" said Ruth, indignantly. "It's Bob, my dear little flying-squirrel; I saw him on the cornice, but I thought he would fly to me. It's amazing that any one can possibly be afraid of the darling," she added, with a reproachful glance towards Miss Billy, who was still cowering. "I had him when he was nothing but a baby, Mr. Chase – he had fallen from his nest – and I have brought him up myself. Now that he is getting to be a big boy, he naturally likes to fly about a little. He cannot be always climbing his one little tree in the dining-room. He is so soft and downy. Look at his bright eyes." Here she opened her hand so that Chase could see her pet. "Would you like to hold him for a moment?"

"Oh, I'll look at *you* holding him," answered Chase. "Hollo! here's another." For Petie Trone, Esq., his jealousy roused by his mistress's interest in the squirrel, had come out from under the sofa, and was now seated on his hind-legs at the edge of her dress, begging. "Wouldn't you like an owl?" Chase suggested. "Or a 'possum? A 'coon might be tamed, if caught young."

Ruth walked away, offended.

This made him laugh still more as he returned to his place beside Genevieve.

"She is only eighteen," murmured the younger Mrs. Franklin, apologetically. Her words were covered by a rapturous "Gen'lem!" from Rinda at the door. For Rinda was always perfectly delighted to see anybody; when, therefore, there were already two or three guests, and still another appeared, her voice became ecstatic. The new-comer was Anthony Etheridge.

"How fortunate!" said Genevieve. "For it makes another for our little charity party. There is to be an impromptu entertainment at the rink to-night, commodore, for the benefit of the Mission, and mamma is going, I hope. Won't you accompany her? Let me introduce Mr. Chase – a very old friend of mine. Mr. Chase, Commodore Etheridge."

"Happy to meet you," said Chase, rising in order to shake hands.

"Gen'lem!" called Rinda again; this time fairly in a yell.

The last "gen'lem" was a slender man of thirty-five, who came in with his overcoat on. "Thanks; I did not take it off," he said, in answer to Mrs. Franklin, "because I knew that you were all going to the" – (here Ruth gave a deep cough) – "because I thought it possible that you might be going to the rink to-night," he went on, changing the form of his sentence, with a slight smile; "and in that case I hoped to accompany you."

"Yes," said Genevieve, "mamma is going, Mr. Larue. I only wish I could go, also."

The cheeks of Miss Billy Breeze had become flushed with rose-color as the new-comer entered. Noticing instantly the change he had made in his sentence when Ruth coughed, she at once divined that the girl had gone, bareheaded and in the darkness, to his residence during that long absence before dinner, in order to secure his co-operation in the frolic of the evening. Ruth had, in fact, done this very thing; for nothing amused her so much as to watch Billy herself when Larue was present. The girl was now wicked enough to carry on her joke a little longer. "I am *so* sorry, Miss Billy, that you do not care to go," she said, regretfully.

Miss Billy passed her handkerchief over her mouth and tried to smile. But she was, in fact, winking to keep back tears.

And then Mrs. Franklin, always kind-hearted, came to the rescue. "Did you tell Ruth that you could not go, Billy? Change your mind, my dear; change it to please *me*."

"Oh, if *you* care about it, dear Mrs. Franklin," murmured Billy, escaping, and hurrying happily up the stairs to put on her wraps.

The rink was a large, bare structure of wood, with a circular arena for roller-skating. This evening the place was lighted, and the gallery was occupied by the colored band. The members of this band, a new organization, had volunteered their services with the heartiest good-will. It was true that they could play (without mistakes) but one selection, namely, "The lone starry hours give me, love." But they arranged this difficulty by playing it first, softly; then as a solo on the cornet; then fortissimo, with drums; by means of these alterations it lasted bravely throughout the evening. Nearly the whole village was present; the promenade was crowded, and there were many skaters on the floor below. The Rev. Malachi Hill, the originator of the entertainment, was distributing programmes, his face beaming with pleasure as he surveyed the assemblage. Presently he came to the party from L'Hommedieu. "Programmes, Mrs. Franklin? Programmes, gentlemen?" He had written these programmes himself, in his best handwriting. "The performance will soon begin," he explained. "The procession will skate round the arena five times, and afterwards most of the characters will join in a reel – " Here some one called him, and he hastened off.

Chase, who had received a programme, looked at it in a business-like way. "Christopher Columbus," he read aloud; "Romeo and Juliet; the Muses, Calliope, and – and others," he added, glancing down the list.

His Calliope had rhymed with hope, and a gleam of inward entertainment showed itself for one instant in the eyes of Etheridge and Larue. Ruth saw this scintillation; instantly she crossed to Chase's side, as he still studied the programme, and bending to look at it, said, "Please, may I see too?"

"Oh! I thought you had one," said Chase, giving her the sheet of paper.

"The Muses," read Ruth again, aloud. "Cally-ope," she went on, giving the word Chase's pronunciation. "And Terp-si-core." She made this name rhyme with "more." Then, standing beside her new acquaintance, she glared at the remainder of the party, defiantly.

Mrs. Franklin was so much overcome by this performance of her daughter's that she was obliged to turn away to conceal her laughter.

"What possesses her – the witch!" asked Etheridge, following.

"It is only because she thinks I don't like him. He has given her those magnificent roses, and so she intends to stand up for him. I never know whom she will fancy next. Do look at her now!"

"I am afraid you have spoiled her," commented Etheridge, but joining in the mother's laugh himself, as he caught a glimpse of Ruth starting off, with high-held head and firm step, to walk with Chase round the entire promenade.

Owing to this sudden departure, Miss Billy Breeze found herself unexpectedly alone with Larue. She was so much excited by this state of things that at first she could hardly speak. How many times, during this very month, had she arranged with herself exactly what she should say if such an opportunity should be given her. Her most original ideas, her most beautiful thoughts (she kept them written out in her diary), should be summoned to entertain him. The moment had come. And this is what she actually did say: "Oh!" (giggle), "how pretty it is, isn't it?" (Giggle.) "Really a most beautiful sight. So interesting to see so many persons, and all so happy, is it not? I don't know when I've seen anything lovelier. Yes, indeed —*lovely*. But I hope you won't take cold, Mr. Larue? Really, now, do be careful. One takes cold so easily; and then it is sometimes so hard to recover." With despair she heard herself bringing out these inanities. "I hope you are not in a draught?" she wandered on. "Colds are *so* tiresome."

And now, with a loud burst from the band, the procession issued from an improvised tent at the end of the building. First came Christopher Columbus at the head; then Romeo and Juliet; the Muses, three and three; George Washington and his wife, accompanied by Plato and a shepherdess; other personages followed, and all were mounted on roller-skates, and were keeping time to the music as well as they could. Then the rear was closed by a single American Indian in a complete costume of copper-colored tights, with tomahawk, war-paint, and feathers.

This Indian, as he was alone, was conspicuous; and when he skated into the brighter light, there came from that part of the audience which was nearest to him, a sound of glee. The sound, however, was instantly suppressed. But it rose again as he sailed majestically onward, in long sweeps to the right and the left, his head erect, his tomahawk brandished; it increased to mirth which could not be stifled. For nature having given to this brave slender legs, the costume-maker had supplied a herculean pair of calves, and these appendages had shifted their position, and were now adorning the front of each limb at the knee, the chieftain meanwhile remaining unconscious of the accident, and continuing to perform his part with stateliness at the end of the skating line. Ruth, with her hands dropping helplessly by her side, laughed until her mother came to her. Mrs. Franklin herself was laughing so that she could hardly speak. But Ruth's laughs sometimes were almost dangerous; they took such complete possession of her.

"Give her your arm and make her walk up and down," said Mrs. Franklin to Etheridge.

And Etheridge took the girl under his charge.

Chase, who had grinned silently each time the unsuspecting Moose came into view (for the procession had passed round the arena three times), now stepped down to the skating-floor as he approached on his fourth circuit, and stopped him. There was a short conference, and then, amid peals of mirth, the Moose looked down, and for the first time discovered the aspect of his knees. Chase signalled to the band to stop.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "this Indian was not aware of his attractions." (Applause.)

"But now that he knows what they are, he will take part in the reel (which he had not intended to do), and he will take part *as he is*! For the benefit of the Mission, ladies and gentlemen. The hat will be passed immediately afterwards." Signing to the musicians to go on again, he conducted the chief to the space which had been left free for the reel, and then, when the other couples had skated to their places, he led off with his companion in a sort of quickstep (as he had no skates); and it is safe to say that North Carolina had never beheld so original a dance as that which followed (to the inexhaustible "Starry Hours" played as a jig). Chase and the Indian led and reled. Finally Chase, with his hat tilted back on his head, and his face extremely solemn, balanced with his partner, taking so much pains with remarkable fancy steps, which were immediately imitated by the Indian's embossed legs, that the entire audience was weak from its continuous mirth. Then removing his hat, Chase

made the rounds, proffering it with cordial invitation to all: "For the Mission, ladies and gentlemen. For *Big Moose's* Mission."

Big Moose, on his way home later (in his clergyman's attire this time), was so happy that he gave thanks. He would have liked, indeed, to chant a gloria. For the Mission was very near his heart, and from its beginning it had been so painfully fettered by poverty that, several times, he had almost despaired. But now that magic hat had brought to the struggling little fund more than it had ever dreamed of possessing; for underneath the dimes and the quarters of Asheville had laid a fat roll, a veritable Golconda roll of greenbacks. But one person could have given this roll, namely, the one stranger, Horace Chase.

CHAPTER III

MRS. FRANKLIN was a widow, her husband, Jared Franklin, having died in 1860. Franklin, a handsome, hearty man, who had enjoyed every day of his life, had owned and edited a well-known newspaper in one of the large towns on the Hudson River. This paper had brought him in a good income, which he had spent in his liberal way, year after year. The Franklins were not extravagant; but they lived generously, and they all had what they wanted. Their days went on happily, for they were fond of each other, they had the same sense of humor, and they took life easily, one and all. But when Jared Franklin died (after a sudden and short illness), it was found that he at least had taken it too easily; for he had laid aside nothing, and there were large debts to pay. As he had put his only son, the younger Jared, into the navy, the newspaper was sold. But it did not bring in so much as was expected, and the executors were forced in the end to sell the residence also; when the estate was finally cleared, the widow found herself left with no home, and, for income, only the small sum which had come to her from her father, Major Seymour, of the army. In this condition of things her thoughts turned towards the South.

For her mother, Mrs. Seymour, was a Southerner of Huguenot descent, one of the L'Hommedieu family. And Mrs. Seymour's eldest sister, Miss Dora L'Hommedieu, had bequeathed to the niece (now Mrs. Franklin), who had been named after her, all she had to leave. This was not much. But the queer, obstinate old woman did own two houses, one for the summer among the mountains of North Carolina, one for the winter in Florida. For she believed that she owed her remarkable health and longevity to a careful change of climate twice each year; and, accompanied by an old negress as cross-grained as herself, she had arrived in turn at each of these residences for so many seasons that it had seemed as if she would continue to arrive forever. In 1859, however, her migrations ceased.

At that date the Franklins were still enjoying their prosperity, and this legacy of the two ramshackle L'Hommedieu abodes, far away in the South, was a good deal laughed at by Jared Franklin, who laughed often. But when, soon afterwards, the blow came, and his widow found herself homeless and bereft, these houses seemed to beckon to her. They could not be sold while the war lasted, and even after that great struggle was over no purchasers appeared. In the meantime they were her own; they would be a roof, two roofs, over her head; and the milder climate would be excellent for her invalid daughter Dolly. In addition, their reduced income would go much further there than here. As soon after the war, therefore, as it could be arranged, she had made the change, and now for seven years she had been living in old Dora's abodes, very thankful to have them.

Mrs. Franklin herself would have said that they lived in North Carolina; that their visits to Florida were occasional only. It was true that she had made every effort to dispose of the Florida place. "For sale – a good coquina house on the bay," had been a standing advertisement in the St. Augustine *Press* year after year. But her hopes had been disappointed, and as the house still remained hers, she had only once been able to withstand the temptation of giving Dolly the benefit of the Florida climate in the winter, little as she could afford the additional expense; in reality, therefore, they had divided their year much as Miss L'Hommedieu had divided hers.

The adjective ramshackle, applied at random by Jared Franklin, had proved to be appropriate enough as regarded the North Carolina house, which old Dora had named L'Hommedieu, after herself. L'Hommedieu was a rambling wooden structure surrounded by verandas; it had been built originally by a low-country planter who came up to these mountains in the summer. But old Miss L'Hommedieu had let everything run down; she had, in truth, no money for repairs. When the place, therefore, came into the hands of her niece, it was much dilapidated. And in her turn Mrs. Franklin had done very little in the way of renovation, beyond stopping the leaks of the roof. Her daughter-in-law, Genevieve, was distressed by the aspect of everything, both without and within. "You really

ought to have the whole house done over, mamma," she had said more than once. "If you will watch all the details yourself, it need not cost so very much: see what I have accomplished at the Cottage.

"In time, in time," Mrs. Franklin had answered. But in her heart she was not fond of Genevieve's abode; she preferred the low-ceilinged rooms of L'Hommedieu, shabby though they might be. These rooms had, in fact, an air of great cheerfulness. Anthony Etheridge was accustomed to say that he had never seen anywhere a better collection of easy-chairs. "There are at least eight with the long seat which holds a man's body comfortably as far as the knees, as it ought to held; not ending skimpily half-way between the knee and the hip in the usual miserable fashion!" Mrs. Franklin had saved three of these chairs from the wreck of her northern home, and the others had been made, of less expensive materials, under her own eye. Both she and her husband had by nature a strong love of ease, and their children had inherited the same disposition; it could truthfully be said that as a family they made themselves comfortable, and kept themselves comfortable, all day long.

They did this at present in the face of obstacles which would have made some minds forget the very name of comfort. For they were far from their old home; they were cramped as to money; there was Dolly's suffering to reckon with; and there was a load of debt. The children, however, were ignorant in a great measure of this last difficulty; whatever property there was, belonged to Mrs. Franklin personally, and she kept her cares to herself. These fresh debts, made after the estate had finally been cleared, were incurred by the mother's deliberate act – an act of folly or of beauty, according to the point from which one views it; after her husband's death she had borrowed money in order to give to her daughter Dora every possible aid and advantage in her contest with fate – the long struggle which the girl made to ignore illness, to conquer pain. These sums had never been repaid, and when the mother thought of them, she was troubled. But she did not think of them often; when she had succeeded (with difficulty) in paying the interest each year, she was able to dismiss the subject from her mind, and return to her old habit of taking life easily; for neither her father, the army officer, nor her husband, the liberal-handed editor, had ever taught her with any strictness the importance of a well-balanced account. Poor Dolly's health had always been uncertain. But when her childhood was over, her mother's tender help from minute to minute had kept her up in a determined attempt to follow the life led by other girls of her age. A mother's love can do much. But heredity, coming from the past, blind and deaf to all appeal, does more, and the brave effort failed. The elder Miss Franklin had now been for years an invalid, and an invalid for whom no improvement could be expected; sometimes she was able, with the aid of her cane, to take a walk of a mile's length, or more, and often several weeks would pass in tolerable comfort; but sooner or later the pain was sure to come on again, and it was a pain very hard to bear. But although Dolly was an invalid, she was neither sad nor dull. Both she and her mother were talkers by nature, and they never seemed to reach the end of their interest in each other's remarks. Ruth, too, was never tired of listening and laughing over Dolly's sallies. The whole family, in fact, had been born gay-hearted, and they were always sufficiently entertained with their own conversation and their own jokes; on the stormy days, when they could expect no visitors, they enjoyed life on the whole rather more than they did when they had guests – though they were fond of company also.

One evening, a week after the masquerade at the rink, Mrs. Franklin, leaning back in her easy-chair with her feet on a footstool, was peacefully reading a novel, when she was surprised by the entrance of Miss Breeze; she was surprised because Billy had paid her a visit in the afternoon. "Yes, I thought I would come in again," began Billy, vaguely. "I thought perhaps – or rather I thought it would be better – "

"Take off your bonnet and jacket, won't you?" interposed Ruth.

"Why, how smart you are, Billy!" remarked Mrs. Franklin, as she noted her guest's best dress, and the pink ribbon round her throat above the collar.

"Yes," began Billy again; "I thought – it seemed better – "

"Dolly," interrupted Ruth, "get out planchette, and make it write Billy a love letter!" And she gave her sister a glance which said: "Head her off! Or she will let it all out."

Dolly comprehended. She motioned Miss Breeze solemnly to a chair near her table, and taking the planchette from its box, she arranged the paper under it.

"I don't like it! I don't like it!" protested Mrs. Franklin.

"His Grand, if you don't like it, beat it," said Ruth, jumping up. "Give it a question too hard to answer. Go to the dining-room and do something – anything you like. Then planchette shall tell us what it is – aha!"

"A good idea," said Mrs. Franklin, significantly. And with her light step she left the room. The mother was as active as a girl; no one was ever deterred, therefore, from asking her to rise, or to move about, by any idea of age. She was tall, with aquiline features, bright dark eyes, and thick silvery hair. As she was thin, her face showed the lines and fine wrinkles which at middle age offset a slender waist. But, when she was animated, these lines disappeared, for at such moments her color rose, the same beautiful color which Ruth had inherited.

Dolly sat with her hands on the little heart-shaped board, pondering what she should say; for her familiar spirit was simply her own quick invention. But while it would have been easy to mystify Miss Billy, it was not easy to imagine what her mother, a distinctly hostile element, might do for the especial purpose of perplexing the medium; for although Mrs. Franklin knew perfectly well that her daughter invented all of planchette's replies, she remained nevertheless strongly opposed to even this pretended occultism. Dolly therefore pondered. But, as she did so, she was saying to herself that it was useless to ponder, and that she might as well select something at random, when suddenly there sprang into her mind a word, a word apropos of nothing at all, and, obeying an impulse, she wrote it; that is, planchette wrote it under the unseen propelling power of her long fingers. Then Ruth pushed the board aside, and they all read the word; it was "grinning."

"Grinning?" repeated Ruth. "How absurd! Imagine mother grinning!"

She opened the door, and called, "What did you do, His Grand?"

"Wishing to expose that very skilful pretender, Miss Dora Franklin, I did the most unlikely thing I could think of," answered Mrs. Franklin's voice. "I went to the mirror, and standing in front of it, I grinned at my own image; grinned like a Cheshire cat."

Miss Billy looked at Dolly with frightened eyes. Dolly herself was startled; she crumpled the paper and threw it hastily into the waste-basket.

Mrs. Franklin, returning through the hall, was met by Anthony Etheridge, who had entered without ringing, merely giving a preliminary tap on the outer door with his walking-stick. Dolly began to talk as soon as they came in, selecting a subject which had nothing to do with planchette. For the unconscious knowledge which, of late years, she seemed to possess, regarding the thoughts in her mother's mind, troubled them both.

"Commodore, I have something to tell you. It is for you especially, for I have long known your secret attachment! From my window, I can see that field behind the Mackintosh house. Imagine my beholding Maud Muriel opening the gate this afternoon, crossing to the big bush in the centre, seating herself behind it, taking a long clay pipe from her pocket, filling it, lighting it, and smoking it!"

"No!" exclaimed Etheridge, breaking into a resounding laugh. "Could she make it go?"

"Not very well, I think; I took my opera-glass and watched her. Her face, as she puffed away, was exactly as solemn as it is when she models her deadly busts."

"Ho, ho, ho!" roared Etheridge again. "Ladies, excuse me. I have always thought that girl might be a genius if she could only get drunk! Perhaps the pipe is a beginning."

While he was saying this, Horace Chase was ushered in. A moment later there came another ring, and the Rev. Mr. Hill appeared, followed by Achilles Larue.

"Why, I have a party!" said Mrs. Franklin, smiling, as she welcomed the last comer.

"Yes, His Grand, it *is* a party," said Ruth. "Now you may know, since they are here, and you cannot stop it. I invited them all myself, late this afternoon; and it is a molasses-candy-pulling; Dolly and I have arranged it. We did not tell you beforehand, because we knew you would say it was sticky."

"Sticky it is," replied Mrs. Franklin.

"Vilely sticky!" added Etheridge, emphatically.

"And then we knew, also, that you would say that you could not get up a supper in so short a time," Ruth went on. "But Zoe has had her sister to help her, and ever so many nice things are all ready; chicken salad, for instance; and – listen, His Grand – a long row of macaroon custards, each cup with *three* macaroons dissolved in madeira!" And then she intoned .ning in from her easy-chair:

"Mother Franklin thinks,
That General Jackson,
Jared the Sixth,
Macaroon custards,
And Bishop Carew,
Are per-*fec*-tion!"

"What does she mean by that?" said Chase to Miss Billy.

"Oh, it is only one of their jokes; they have so many! Dear Mrs. Franklin was brought up by her father to admire General Jackson, and Dolly and Ruth pretend that she thinks he is still at the White House. And Jared the Sixth means her son, you know. And they say she is fond of macaroon custards; that is, *fondish*," added Miss Billy, getting in the "ish" with inward satisfaction. "And she is much attached to Bishop Carew. But, for that matter, so are we all."

"A Roman Catholic?" inquired Chase.

"He is our bishop – the Episcopal Bishop of North Carolina," answered Miss Breeze, surprised.

"Oh! I didn't know. I'm a Baptist myself. Or at least my parents were," explained Chase.

The kitchen of L'Hommedieu was large and low, with the beams showing overhead; it had a huge fireplace with an iron crane. This evening a pot dangled from the crane; it held the boiling molasses, and Zoe, brilliant in a new scarlet turban in honor of the occasion, was stirring the syrup with a long-handled spoon. One of the easy-chairs had been brought from the parlor for Dolly. Malachi Hill seated himself beside her; he seemed uneasy; he kept his hat in his hand. "I did not know that Mr. Chase was to be here, Miss Dolly, or I would not have come," he said to his companion, in an undertone. "I can't think what to make of myself – I'm becoming a regular cormorant! Strange to say, instead of being satisfied with all he has given to the Mission, I want more. I keep thinking of all the good he might do in these mountains if he only knew the facts, and I have fairly to hold myself in when he is present, to keep from flattering him and getting further help. Yes, it's as bad as that! Clergymen, you know, are always accused of paying court to rich men, or rather to liberal men. For the first time in my life I understand the danger! It's a dreadful temptation – it is indeed. I really think, Miss Dolly, that I had better go."

"No, you needn't; I'll see to you," answered Dolly. "If I notice you edging up too near him, I'll give a loud ahem. Stay and amuse yourself; you know you like it."

And Malachi Hill did like it. In his mission-work he was tirelessly energetic, self-sacrificing, devoted; on the other hand, he was as fond of merrymaking as a boy. He pulled the candy with glee, but also with eager industry, covering platter after platter with his braided sticks. His only rival in diligence was Chase, who also showed great energy. Dolly pulled; Mrs. Franklin pulled; even Etheridge helped. Ruth did not accomplish much, for she stopped too often; but when she did work she drew out the fragrant strands to a greater length than any one else attempted, and she made wheels of it, and silhouettes of all the company, including Mr. Trone. Miss Billy had begun with much interest; then, seeing that Larue had done nothing beyond arranging the platters and plates in

mathematical order on the table, she stopped, slipped out, and went up-stairs to wash her hands. When she returned, fortune favored her; the only vacant seat was one near him, and, after a short hesitation, she took it. Larue did not speak; he was looking at Ruth, who was now pulling candy with Horace Chase, drawing out the golden rope to a yard's length, and throwing the end back to him gayly.

Finally, when not even the painstaking young missionary could scrape another drop from the exhausted pot, Dolly, taking her violin, played a waltz. The uncarpeted floor was tempting, and after all the sticky hands had been washed, the dancing began – Ruth with Chase, Etheridge with Miss Billy; then Etheridge with Mrs. Franklin, while Miss Billy returned quickly to her precious chair.

"But these dances do not compare with the old ones," said Mrs. Franklin, when they had paused to let Dolly rest. "There was the mazurka; and the varsovienne – how pretty that was! La-la-la, la, *la*!" And humming the tune, she took a step or two lightly. Etheridge, who knew the varsovienne, joined her.

"Go on," said Ruth. "I'll whistle it for you." And sitting on the edge of a table she whistled the tune, while the two dancers circled round the kitchen, looking extremely well together.

"Whistling girls, you know," said Chase, warningly.

He had joined Ruth, and was watching her as she performed her part. She kept on, undisturbed by his jests, bending her head a little to the right and to the left in time with the music; her whistling was as clear as a flute.

"And then there was the heel-and-toe polka. Surely you remember that, commodore," pursued Mrs. Franklin, with inward malice.

For the heel-and-toe was a very ancient memory. It was considered old when she herself had seen it as a child.

"Never heard of it in my life," answered Etheridge. "Hum – ha."

"Oh, I know the heel-and-toe," cried Ruth. "I learned it from mother ages ago, just for fun. Are you rested, Dolly? Play it, please, and mother and I will show them."

Dolly began, and then Mrs. Franklin and Ruth, tall, slender mother, and tall, slender daughter, each with one arm round the other's waist, and the remaining arm held curved above the head, danced down the long room together, taking the steps of the queer Polish dance with charming grace and precision.

"Oh, *dear* Mrs. Franklin, so young and cheerful! So pleasant to see her, is it not? So lovely! Don't you think so? And dancing is so interesting in so many ways! Though, of course, there are other amusements equally to be desired," murmured Miss Billy, incoherently, to Larue.

"Now we will have a quadrille, and I will improvise the figures," said Ruth. "Mother and the commodore; Miss Billy and Mr. Larue; Mr. Chase with me; and we will take turns in making the fourth couple."

"Unfortunately, I don't dance," observed Larue.

"Spoil-sport!" said Ruth, annihilatingly.

"You got it that time," remarked Chase, condolingly, to the other man.

"Miss Ruth, I can take the senator's place, if you like," said Malachi Hill, springing up, good-naturedly.

Since the termination of the candy-pulling, he had been sitting contentedly beside Dolly, watching her play, and regaling himself meanwhile with a stick of the fresh compound, its end carefully enveloped in a holder of paper.

"Excellent," said Ruth. "Please take Miss Billy, then."

Poor Miss Billy, obliged to dance with a misguided clergyman! This time there was not the excuse of the Mission; it was a real dance. He already smoked; the next step certainly would be cards and horse-racing! While she was taking her place, Rinda ushered in a new guest.

"Maud Muriel – how lucky!" exclaimed Ruth. "You are the very person we need, for we are trying to get up a quadrille, and have not enough persons. I know you like to dance?"

"Yes, I like it very much – for hygienic reasons principally," responded the new-comer.

"Please take my place, then," Ruth went on. "This is Mr. Chase, Miss Maud Mackintosh. Now we will see if our generic geologist and sensational senator will refuse to dance with *me*." And sinking suddenly on her knees before Larue, Ruth extended her hands in petition.

"What is all that she called him, Miss Maud?" inquired Chase, laughing.

"Miss Mackintosh," said his partner, correctively. "They are only alliterative adjectives, Mr. Chase, rather indiscriminately applied. Ruth is apt to be indiscriminate."

Larue had risen, and Ruth triumphantly led him to his place. He knew that she was laughing at him; in fact, as he went through the figures calmly, his partner mimicked him to his face. But he was indifferent alike to her laughter and her mimicry; what he was noticing was her beauty. If he had been speaking of her, he would have called her "prettyish"; but as he was only thinking, he allowed himself to note the charm of her eyes for the moment, the color in her cheeks and lips. For he was sure that it was only for the moment. "The coloring is evanescent," was his mental criticism. "Her beauty will not last. For she is handsome only when she is happy, and happiness for her means doing exactly as she pleases, and having her own way unchecked. No woman can do that forever. By the time she is thirty she may be absolutely plain."

Maud Muriel had laid aside her hat and jacket. She possessed a wealth of beautiful red hair, whose thick mass was combed so tightly back from her forehead that it made her wink; her much-exposed countenance was not at all handsome, though her hazel eyes were large, calm, and clear. She was a spinster of thirty-six – tall and thin, with large bones. And from her hair to her heels she was abnormally, extraordinarily straight. She danced with much vigor, scrutinizing Chase, and talking to him in the intervals between the figures. These intervals, however, were short, for Ruth improvised with rapidity. Finally she kept them all flying round in a circle so long that Mrs. Franklin, breathless, signalled that she must pause.

"Now we are all hungry," said Ruth. "Zoe, see to the coffee. And, Rinda, you may make ready here. We won't go to the dining-room, His Grand; it's much more fun in the kitchen."

Various inviting dishes were soon arrayed upon a table. And then Ruth, to pass away the time until the coffee should be ready, began to sing. All the Franklins sang; Miss Billy had a sweet soprano, Maud Muriel a resonant contralto, and Malachi Hill a tenor of power; Etheridge, when he chose, could add bass notes.

"Hark, the merry merry Christ-Church bells,
One, two, three, four, five, six;
They sound so strong, so wondrous sweet,
And they troll so merrily, merrily."

Horace Chase took no part in the catch song; he sat looking at the others. It was the Franklin family who held his attention – the mother singing with light-hearted animation; Dolly playing her part on her violin, and singing it also; and Ruth, who, with her hands clasped behind her head, was carolling like a bird. To Chase's mind it seemed odd that a woman so old as Mrs. Franklin, a woman with silver hair and grown-up children, should like to dance and sing. Dolly was certainly a very "live" invalid! And Ruth – well, Ruth was enchanting. Horace Chase's nature was always touched by beauty; he was open to its influences, it had been so from boyhood. What he admired was not regularity of feature, but simply the seductive sweetness of womanhood. And, young as she was, Ruth Franklin's face was full of this charm. He looked at her again as she sat singing the chorus:

"Hark, the first and second bell,
Ring every day at four and ten" —

Then his gaze wandered round the kitchen. From part of the wall the plastering was gone; it had fallen, and had never been replaced. The housewives whom he had hitherto known, so he said to himself, would have preferred to have their walls repaired, and spend less, if necessary, upon dinners. Suppers, too! (Here he noted the rich array on the kitchen table.)

This array was completed presently by the arrival of the coffee, which filled the room with its fragrant aroma, and the supper was consumed amid much merriment. When the clock struck twelve, Maud Muriel rose. "I must be going," she said. "Wilhelmina, I came for you; that is what brought me. When I learned at the hotel that you were here, I followed for the purpose of seeing you home."

"Allow me the pleasure of accompanying you both," said Chase.

"That is not necessary; I always see to Wilhelmina," answered Miss Mackintosh, as she put on her hat.

"Yes; she is so kind," murmured Miss Billy. But Miss Billy in her heart believed that in some way or other Achilles Larue would yet be her escort (though he never had been that, or anything else, in all the years of their acquaintance). He was still in the house, and so was she; something might happen!

What happened was that Larue took leave of Mrs. Franklin, and went off alone.

Then Billy said to herself: "On the whole, I'm glad he didn't suggest it. For it is only five minutes' walk to the hotel, and if he had gone with me it would have counted as a call, and then he needn't have done anything more for a long time. So I'm glad he did not come. Very."

"Maud Muriel," demanded Dolly, "why select a *clay* pipe?"

"Oh, did you see me?" inquired Miss Mackintosh, composedly. "I use a clay pipe, Dolly, because it is cleaner; I can always have a new one. Smoking is said to insure the night's rest, and so I thought it best to learn it, as my brother's children are singularly active at night. I have been practising for three weeks, and I generally go to the woods, where no one can see me. But to-day I did not have time."

Chase broke into a laugh. Etheridge had emitted another ho, ho, ho! Then he gave Maud a jovial tap. "My dear young lady, don't go to the woods. Let *me* come, with another clay pipe, and be your protector."

"I have never needed a protector in my life," replied Miss Mackintosh; "I don't know what that feeling is, commodore. I secrete myself simply because people might not understand my motives; they might think that I was secretly given to dissolute courses. Are you ready, Wilhelmina?"

As the two ladies opened the outer door and stepped forth into the darkness, Chase, not deterred by the rebuff he had received from the stalwart virgin, passed her, and offered his arm to the gentler Miss Billy. And then Malachi Hill, feeling that he must, advanced to offer himself as escort for the remaining lady.

"Poor manikin! Do you think I need *you*?" inquired the sculptress sarcastically, under her breath.

The young clergyman disappeared. He did not actually run. But he was round the corner in an astonishingly short space of time.

Etheridge was the last to take leave. "Well, you made a very merry party for your bubbling friend," he said to Mrs. Franklin.

"It wasn't for *him*," she answered.

"He is not mother's bubbling friend, and he is not Dolly's, either," said Ruth; "he is mine alone. Mother and Dolly do not in the least appreciate him."

"Is he worth much appreciation?" inquired Etheridge, noting her beauty as Larue had noted it. "How striking she grows!" he thought. And, forgetting for the moment what they were talking about, he looked at her as Chase had looked.

Meanwhile Ruth was answering, girlishly: "Much appreciation? *All*, commodore – all. Mr. Chase is *splendid*!"

CHAPTER IV

NOTHING could exceed the charm of the early summer, that year, in this high valley. The amphitheatre of mountains had taken on fresher robes of green, the air was like champagne; it would have been difficult to say which river danced more gayly along its course, the foam-flecked French Broad, its clear water open to the sunshine, or the little Swannanoa, frolicking through the forest in the shade.

One morning, a few days after the candy-pulling at L'Hommedieu, even Maud Muriel was stirred to admiration as she threw open the blinds of her bedroom at her usual early hour. "No humidity. And great rarefaction," she said to herself, as she tried the atmosphere with a tentative snort. Maud Muriel lived with her brother, Thomas Mackintosh; that is, she had a room under his roof and a seat at his table. But she did not spend much time at home, rather to the relief of Mrs. Thomas Mackintosh, an easy-going Southern woman, with several young children, including an obstreperous pair of twins. Maud Muriel, dismissing the landscape, took a conscientious sponge-bath, and went down to breakfast. After breakfast, on her way to her studio, she stopped for a moment to see Miss Billy. "At any rate, I *walk* well," she had often thought with pride. And to-day, as she approached the hotel, she was so straight that her shoulders tipped backward.

Miss Billy was staying at the inn. This hotel bore the name "The Old North State," the loving title given by native North-Carolinians to their commonwealth – a commonwealth which, in its small long-settled towns, its old farms, and in the names of its people, shows less change in a hundred years than any other portion of the Union. The Old North, as it was called, was a wooden structure painted white, with outside blinds of green; in front of it extended a row of magnificent maple-trees. Miss Billy had a small sitting-room on the second floor; Maud Muriel, paying no attention to the negro servants, went up the uncarpeted stairway to her friend's apartment, and, as she opened the door, she caught sight of this friend carefully rolling a waste bit of string into a small ball.

"Too late – I saw you," she said. (For Miss Billy had nervously tried to hide the ball.) "I know you have at least fifty more little wads of the same sort somewhere, arranged in graded rows! A new ball of string of the largest size – enough to last a year – costs a dime, Wilhelmina. You must have a singularly defective sense of proportion to be willing to give many minutes (for I have even seen you taking out knots!) to a substance whose value really amounts to about the thousandth part of a cent! I have stopped on my way to the barn to tell you two things, Wilhelmina. One is that I do *not* like your 'Mountain Walk.'" Here she took a roll of delicately written manuscript, tied with blue ribbons, from her pocket, and placed it on the table. "It is supposed to be about trees, isn't it? But you do not describe a single one with the least accuracy; all you do is to impute to them various allegorical sentiments, which no tree – a purely vegetable production —*ever* had."

"It was only a beginning – leading up to a study of the pre-Adamite trees, which I hope to make, later," Miss Billy answered. "Ruskin, you know – "

"You need not quote Ruskin to me – a man who criticises sculpture without any practical knowledge whatever of human anatomy; a man who subordinates correct drawing in a picture to the virtuous state of mind of the artist! If Ruskin's theory is true, very good persons who visit the poor and go to church, are, if they dabble in water-colors, or pen-and-ink sketches, the greatest of artists, because their piety is sincere. And *vice versa*. The history of art shows that, doesn't it?" commented Maud, ironically. "I am sorry to see that you sat up so late last night, Wilhelmina."

"Why, how do you know?" said Miss Billy, guiltily conscious of midnight reading.

"By the deep line between your eyebrows. You must see to that, or you will be misjudged by scientific minds. For marked, lined, or wrinkled foreheads indicate criminal tendencies; the statistics of prisons prove it. To-night put on two pieces of strong sticking-plaster at the temples, to draw the skin back. The other thing I had to tell you is that the result of my inquiries of a friend at the North

who keeps in touch with the latest investigations of Liébeault and the Germans, is, that there may, after all, be something in the subject you mentioned to me, namely, the possibility of influencing a person, not present, by means of an effort of will. So we will try it now – for five minutes. Fix your eyes steadily upon that figure of the carpet, Wilhelmina" – she indicated a figure with her parasol – "and I will do the same. As subject we will take my sister-in-law. We will will her to whip the twins. Are you ready?" She took out her watch. "Begin, then."

Miss Billy, though secretly disappointed in the choice of subject, tried hard to fix her mind upon the proposed castigation. But in spite of her efforts her thoughts would stray to the carpet itself, to the pattern of the figure, and its reds and greens.

"Time's up," announced Maud, replacing her watch in the strong watch-pocket on the outside of her skirt; "I'll tell you whether the whipping comes off. Do you think it is decent, Wilhelmina, to be dressing and undressing yourself whenever you wish to know what time it is?" (For Miss Billy, who tried to follow the fashions to some extent, was putting her own watch back in her bodice, which she had unbuttoned for the purpose.) "Woman will never be the equal of man until she has grasped the conception that the position of her pockets should be unchangeable," Maud went on.

"I think I will go with you as far as L'Hommedieu," suggested Billy, ignoring the subject of the watch-pocket (an old one). "I have some books to take, so I may as well." She put on her hat, and piled eight dilapidated paper-covered volumes on her arm.

"Are you still collecting vapid literature for that feather-headed woman?" inquired Maud. For Billy went all over Asheville, to every house she knew, and probed in old closets and bookcases in search of novels for Mrs. Franklin. For years she had performed this office. When Mrs. Franklin had finished reading one set of volumes, Billy carried them back to their owners, and then roamed and foraged for more.

"If you do go as far as L'Hommedieu, you must stop there definitely; you must not go on to the barn," Maud Muriel announced, as they went down the stairs. "For if you do, you will stay. And then I shall be going back with you, to see to you. And then you will be coming part way back with me, to talk. And thus we shall be going home with each other all the rest of the day!" She passed out and crossed the street, doing it in the face of the leaders of a team of six horses attached to one of the huge mountain wagons, which are shaped like boats tilted up behind; for two files of these wagons, heavily loaded, were coming slowly up the road. Miss Billy started to cross also, but after three or four steps she turned and hurried back to the curb-stone. Then suddenly she started a second time, running first in one direction, then in another, and finally and unexpectedly in a third, so that the drivers of the wagons nearest to her, and even the very horses themselves, were filled with perplexity as to the course which she wished to pursue. Miss Billy, meanwhile, finding herself hemmed in, began to shriek wildly. The drivers in front stretched their necks round the corners of the canvas hoods erected, like gigantic Shaker bonnets, over their high-piled loads, in order to see what was the matter. And the drivers who were behind stood up and peered forward. But they could make out nothing, and, as Miss Billy continued her yells, the whole procession, and with it the entire traffic of the main street, came slowly to a pause. The pause was not long. The energetic Maud Muriel, jerking up the heads of two of the leaders, made a dive, caught hold of her frightened friend, and drew her out by main strength. The horses whom she had thus attacked, shook themselves. "Hep!" called their driver. "Hep!" called the other drivers, in various keys. And then, one by one, with a jerk and a creak, the great wains started on again.

When the friends reached L'Hommedieu, Billy was still trembling.

"I'd better take them in for you," said Maud Muriel, referring to the load of books which Billy was carrying for her companion. They found Dolly in the parlor, winding silk for her next pair of stockings. "Here are some volumes which Wilhelmina is bringing to Mrs. Franklin," said Maud Muriel, depositing the pile on a table.

"More novels?" said Dolly. "I'm so glad. Thank you, Miss Billy. For mother really has nothing for to-day. The one she had yesterday was very dull; she said she was 'worrying' through it. It was a story about female suffrage – as though any one could care for that!"

"Care for it or not, it is sure to come," declared Miss Mackintosh.

"Yes, in A.D. 5000."

"Sooner, much sooner. *We* may not see it," pursued Maud Muriel, putting up her finger impressively. "But, mark my words, our *children* will."

Miss Billy listened to this statement with the deepest interest.

"Well, Maud Muriel – Miss Billy, yourself, and myself as *parents*– that certainly is a new idea!" Dolly replied.

Ruth came in. At the same moment Maud Muriel turned to go; and, unconsciously, Billy made a motion as if about to follow.

"Wilhelmina, you are to *stay*," said Maud, sternly, as she departed, straighter than ever.

"Yes, Miss Billy, please stay," said Ruth. "I want you to go with me to see Genevieve."

"Genevieve?" repeated Dolly, surprised.

"Yes. She has bought another new dress for me, and this time she is going to fit it herself, she says, so that there may be no more bagging," answered Ruth, laughing. "I know she intends to *squeeze* me up. And so I want Miss Billy to come and say it's dangerous!"

Ruth was naturally what is called short-waisted; this gave her the long step which in a tall, slender woman is so enchantingly graceful. Genevieve did not appreciate grace of this sort. In her opinion Ruth's waist was too large. If she had been told that it was the waist of Greek sculpture, the statement would not have altered her criticism; she had no admiration for Greek sculpture; the few life-sized casts from antique statues which she had seen had appeared to her highly unpleasant objects. Her ideas of feminine shape were derived, in fact, from the season's fashion plates. Her own costumes were always of one unbroken tint, the same from head to foot. To men's eyes, therefore, her attire had an air of great simplicity. Women perceived at once that this unvarying effect was not obtained without much thought, and Genevieve herself would have been the last to disclaim such attention. For she believed that it was each woman's duty to dress as becomingly as was possible, because it increased her attraction; and the greater her attraction, the greater her influence. If she had been asked, "influence for what?" she would have replied unhesitatingly, "influence for good!" Her view of dress, therefore, being a serious one, she was disturbed by the entire indifference of her husband's family to the subject, both generally and in detail. She had the most sincere desire to assist them, to improve them; most of all she longed to improve Ruth (she had given up Dolly), and more than once she had denied herself something, and taken the money it would have cost, to buy a new costume for the heedless girl, who generally ruined the gifts (in her sister-in-law's opinion) by careless directions, or no directions at all, to the Asheville dressmaker.

Ruth bore Miss Billy away. But as they crossed the garden towards the cottage she said: "I may as well tell you – there will be no fitting. For Mr. Chase is there; I have just caught a glimpse of him from the upper window."

"Then why go now?" inquired Miss Billy, who at heart was much afraid of Genevieve.

"To see Mr. Chase, of course. I wish to thank him for my philopena, which came late last night. Mother and Dolly are not pleased. But *I* am, ever so much." She took a morocco case from her pocket, and, opening it, disclosed a ring of very delicate workmanship, the gold circlet hardly more than a thread, and enclosing a diamond, not large, but very pure and bright.

"Oh-ooh!" said Miss Billy, with deep admiration.

"Yes; isn't it lovely? Mother and Dolly say that it is too much. But I have never seen anything in the world yet which I thought too much! I should like to have ever so many rings, each set with one gem only, but that gem perfect. And I should like to have twenty or thirty bracelets, all of odd patterns, to wear on my arms above the elbow. And I should like close rows of jewels to wear round

my throat. And clasps of jewels for the belt; and shoe-buckles too. I have never had an ornament, except one dreadful silver thing. Let me see; it's on now!" And feeling under her sleeve, she drew off a thin silver circlet, and threw it as far as she could across the grass.

"Oh, your pretty bracelet!" exclaimed Miss Billy.

"Pretty? Horrid!"

Horace Chase had called at the Cottage in answer to a note from Genevieve, offering to take him to the Colored Home. "As you have shown so much kindly interest in the Mission, I feel sure that this second good work of ours will also please you," she wrote.

"I think I won't go to-day, Gen, if it's all the same to you," said Chase, when he entered. "For my horses have come and I ought not to delay any longer about making some arrangements for them."

"Any other time will do for the Home," answered Genevieve, graciously. "But can't you stay for a little while, Horace? Let me show you my house."

Chase had already seen her parlor, with its velvet carpet, its set of furniture covered with green, its pictures arranged according to the size of the frames, with the largest below on a line with the eye, and the others above in pyramidical gradations, so that the smallest were near the cornice. At that distance the subjects of the smaller pictures were more or less indistinguishable; but at least the arrangement of the frames was full of symmetry. In the second story, at the end of the house, was "Jay's smoking-room." "Jay likes to smoke; it is a habit he acquired in the navy; I have therefore fitted up this room on purpose," said Jay's wife.

It was a small chamber, with a sloping ceiling, a single window overlooking the kitchen roof, oil-cloth on the floor, one table, and one chair.

"Do put in *two* chairs," suggested Chase, jocularly. For though he thought the husband of Genevieve a fortunate man, he could not say that his smoking-room was a cheerful place.

"Oh, *I* never sit here," answered Genevieve. "Now come down and take a peep at my kitchen, Horace. I have been kneading the bread; there it is on the table. I prefer to knead it myself, though I hope that in time Susannah will be able to do it according to my method" (with a glance towards the negro servant, who returned no answering smile). "And this is my garden. I can never tell you how glad I am that we have at last a fixed home of our own, Horrie. No more wandering about! Jay is able to spend a large part of his summers here, and, later, when he has made a little more money, he will come for the whole summer – four months. And I go to Raleigh to be with him in the winter; I am hoping that we can have a winter home there too, very soon. We are *so* much more comfortable in every way than we used to be. And looking at it from another point of view, it is inexpressibly better for Jay himself to be out of the navy. It always disturbed me – such a limited life!"

Jared Franklin, when an ensign, had met Genevieve Gray, fallen in love with her, and married her, in the short space of three months. He had remained in the navy throughout the war, and for two years longer; then, yielding at last to his wife's urgent entreaties, he had resigned. After his resignation he had been for a time a clerk in Atlanta. Now he was in business for himself in a small way at Raleigh; it was upon his establishment there that Genevieve had started this summer home in Asheville. "Our prospects are much brighter," she went on, cheerfully; "for at present we have a future. No one has a future in the navy; no one can make money there. But now there is no reason why Jay should not succeed, as other men have succeeded; that is what I always tell him. And I am not thinking only of ourselves, Horrie, as I say that; when Jay is a rich man, my principal pleasure in it will be the power which we shall have to give more in charity, to do more in all good works." And in saying this, Genevieve Franklin was entirely sincere.

"You must keep me posted about the railroad," she went on, as she led the way across the garden.

"Oh yes; if we decide to take hold of it, you shall be admitted into the ring," answered Chase – "the inside track."

"I could buy land here beforehand – quietly, you know?"

"You've got a capital head for business, haven't you, Gen! Better than any one has at your mother-in-law's, I reckon?"

"They are not clever in that way; I have always regretted it. But they are very amiable."

"Not that Dolly!"

"Oh, Dolly? My principal feeling for poor Dolly, of course, is simply pity. This is my little dairy, Horrie; come in. I have been churning butter this morning."

Ruth and Miss Billy, finding no one in the house, had followed to the dairy; and they entered in time to hear this last phrase.

"She does churning and everything else, Mr. Chase, at three o'clock in the morning," said Ruth, with great seriousness.

"Not quite so early," Genevieve corrected.

The point was not taken up. The younger Mrs. Franklin, a fresh, strong, equable creature, who woke at dawn as a child wakes, liked an early breakfast as a child likes it. She found it difficult, therefore, to understand her mother-in-law's hour of nine, or half-past nine. "But you lose so much time, mamma," she had remarked during the first weeks of her own residence at Asheville.

"Yes," Dolly answered. (It was always Dolly who answered Genevieve; Dolly delighted in it.) "We *do* lose it at that end of the morning – the raw end, Genevieve. But when we are once up, we remain up, available, fully awake, get-at-able, until midnight; we do not go off and seclude ourselves impregnably for two hours or so in the middle of the day." For Dolly was aware that it was her sister-in-law's habit to retire to her room immediately after her one o'clock dinner, and take a nap; often a long one.

"Do you wish to see something pretty, Genevieve?" said Ruth, giving her the morocco case. "Thank you, Mr. Chase; I have wanted a ring so long; you can't think how long!"

"Have you?" said Chase, smiling.

"Yes. And this is such a beauty."

"Well, to me it seemed rather small. I wrote to a friend of mine to get it; it was my partner, in fact, Mr. Willoughby. I told him that it was for a young lady. That's his taste, I suppose."

"The taste is perfect," said Miss Billy. For poor Miss Billy, browbeaten though she was by almost everybody, possessed a very delicate and true perception in all such matters.

"I have been *perfectly* happy ever since it came," Ruth declared, as she took the ring, slipped it on her finger, and looked at the effect.

"You make me proud, Miss Ruth."

"Don't you want to be a little prouder?" and she came up to him coaxingly. "I am sure Genevieve has been asking you to go with her to the Colored Home?" This quick guess made Chase laugh. "For it is the weekly reception day, and all her old women have on their clean turbans. The Colored Home is excellent, of course, but it won't fly away; there'll be more clean turbans next week. Meanwhile, *I* have something very pressing. I have long wanted Miss Mackintosh to make a bust of Petie Trone, Esq. And she won't, because she thinks it is frivolous. But if *you* will go with me, Mr. Chase, and speak of it as a fine thing to do, she will be impressed, I know; for she has a sort of concealed liking for you." Chase made a grimace. "I don't mean anything fiery," Ruth went on; "it's only a reasonable scientific interest. She is at the barn now: won't you come? For Petie Trone, Esq., is not a young dog any longer. He is more than eight years old," concluded the girl, mournfully.

Genevieve, who had been greatly struck by the ring, glanced at Chase with inward despair, as her sister-in-law made this ineffective conclusion. They had left the dairy, and were standing in the garden, and her despair renewed itself as, in the brighter light, she noted Ruth's faded dress, and the battered garden hat, whose half-detached feather had been temporarily secured with a large white pin.

But Chase was not looking at the hat. "Of course I'll go," he answered. "We'll have the little scamp in bronze, if you like. Don't worry about his age, Miss Ruth; he is so tremendously lively that he will see us all out yet."

"Come, then," said Ruth, exultingly. She linked her arm in Miss Billy's. "You must go, too, Miss Billy, so that you can tell mother that I did not tease Mr. Chase *too* hard."

Maud Muriel's studio was in an unused hay-barn. Here, ranged on rough shelves, were her "works," as Miss Billy called them – many studies of arms, and hands, and a dozen finished portrait-busts in clay. The subjects of the busts appeared to have been selected, one and all, for their strictly commonplace aspect; they had not even the distinction of ugliness. There were three old men with ordinary features, and no marked expression of any kind; there were six middle-aged women, each with the type of face which one forgets the moment after seeing it; and there were three uncompromisingly uninteresting little boys. The modelling was conscientious, and it was evident in each case that the likeness was faithful.

"But Petie Trone, Esq., is a *pretty* dog," objected the sculptress, when Ruth had made her request, backed up by Chase, who described the "dogs and animals of all sorts" which he had seen in bronze and marble in the galleries abroad. No one laughed, as the formal title came out from Maud's lips, Asheville had long ago accepted the name; Petie Trone, Esq., was as well known as Mount Pisgah.

"Don't you like pretty things?" Chase asked, gazing at the busts, and then at the studies of arms and hands – scraggy arms with sharp elbows and thin fingers, withered old arms with clawlike phalanges, lean arms of growing boys with hands like paws, hard-worked arms with distorted muscles – every and any human arm and hand save a beautiful one.

"Prettiness is the exception, not the rule," replied Maud, with decision. "I prefer to model the usual, the average; for in that direction, and in that only, lies truth."

"Yes; and I suppose that if I should make a usual cur of Petie Trone, Esq., cover him with average mud, and beat him so that he would cower and slink in his poor little tail, *then* you would do him?" said Ruth, indignantly.

"See here, Miss Mackintosh, your principles needn't be upset by one small dog. Come, do him; not his bust, but the whole of him. A life-sized statue," added Chase, laughing; "he must be about eleven inches long! Do him for me," he went on, boldly, looking at her with secret amusement; for he had never seen such an oaken bearing as that of this Asheville spinster.

Maud Muriel did not relax the tension of her muscles; in fact, she could not. The condition called "clinched," which with most persons is occasional only, had with her become chronic. Nevertheless, somehow, she consented.

"I'll get the darling this minute," cried Ruth, hurrying out. And Chase followed her.

"Well, here you are again! What did I tell you?" said the sculptress to Miss Billy, when they were left alone.

"I did not mean to come, Maud Muriel. I really did not intend – " Billy began.

"What place, Wilhelmina, is *paved* with good intentions? Now, of course, we shall be going home with each other all the rest of the day!" declared the sculptress, good-humoredly.

Meanwhile, outside, Ruth was suggesting to Horace Chase, coaxingly, that he should wait until she could find her dog, and bring him to the barn. "Because if *you* are not with me, Maud Muriel will be sure to change her mind!"

"Not she. She is no more changeable than a telegraph pole. I am afraid I must leave you now, Miss Ruth; for the men are waiting to see me about the horses."

"Whose horses?"

"Mine."

"Did you send for them? Oh, *I* love horses too. Where are they?"

"At the Old North stables. So you like horses? I'll drive the pair round, then, in a day or two, to show them to you." And after shaking hands with her – Chase always shook hands – he went towards the village; for Maud Muriel's barn was on the outskirts. In figure he was tall, thin, and muscular. He never appeared to be in haste; all his movements were leisurely, even his words coming out with

deliberation. His voice was pitched in a low key; his articulation was extremely distinct; sometimes, when amused, he had a slight humorous drawl.

Ruth looked after him for a moment. Then she went in search of her dog.

A little later Anthony Etheridge paid his usual morning visit to the post-office. On his return, when near his own abode, he met Horace Chase.

"A mail in?" inquired Chase, quickly, as he saw the letters.

"No; they came last night. *I* am never in a hurry about mails," answered Etheridge. "You younger fellows have not learned, as I have, that among every six letters, say, four at least are sure to be more or less disagreeable. Well, have you decided? Are you coming to my place?" For Etheridge had rooms in a private house, where he paid for a whole wing in order that his night's rest should not be disturbed by other tenants, who might perhaps bring in young children; with his usual thriftiness, he had offered his lower floor to Chase.

"Well, no, I guess not; I'm thinking of coming here," Chase answered, indicating the hotel near by with a backward turn of his thumb. "My horses are here; they came last night. I'm making some arrangements for them, now."

Anthony Etheridge cared more for a good horse than for anything else in the world. In spite of his title of Commodore, sailing had only a second place in his list of tastes. He had commanded a holiday squadron only, a fleet of yachts. Some years before, he had resigned his commandership in the Northern club. But he was still a commodore, almost in spite of himself, for he had again been elected, this time by the winter yacht club of St. Augustine. At the word "horses" his face had lighted up. "Can I have a look at them?" he said, eagerly. "Did they stand the journey well?"

"O. K. They're round in the stable, if you want to come."

The three horses were beautiful specimens of their kind. "The pair, I intend to drive; I found that there was nothing in Asheville, and as I'm going to stay awhile longer (for the air is bringing me right up), I had to have something," Chase remarked. "The mare is for riding."

"She looks like a racer?"

"Well, she *has* taken one prize. But I shall never race her again; I don't care about it. I remember when I thought a race just heaven! When I wasn't more than nineteen, I took a prize with a trotter; 'twas a very small race, to be sure; but a big thing to me. Not long after that, there was another prize offered for a well-matched pair, and by that time I had a pair – temporarily – bays. One of them, however, had a white spot on his nose. Well, sir, I painted his nose, and won the premium!" He broke into a laugh.

"Was that before you invented the Bubble Baking-powder?" inquired Etheridge.

In this question, there was a tinge of superciliousness. Chase did not suspect it; in his estimation, a baking-powder was as good a means as anything else, the sole important point being its success. But even if he had perceived the tinge, it would only have amused him; with his far-stretching plans – plans which extended across a continent – his large interests and broad ambitions, criticism from this obscure old man would have seemed comical. Anthony Etheridge was not so obscure a personage as Chase fancied. But he was not known in the world of business or of speculation, and he had very little money. This last fact Chase had immediately divined. For he recognized in Etheridge a man who would never have denied himself luxury unless forced to do it, a man who would never have been at Asheville if he could have afforded Newport; the talk about "nature undraped" was simply an excuse. And he had discovered also another secret which no one (save Mrs. Franklin) suspected, namely, that the handsome commodore was in reality far older than his gallant bearing would seem to indicate.

"*I* didn't invent the Bubble," he had said, explanatorily. "I only bought it. Then the inventor and I ran it together, in a sort of partnership, as long as he lived. 'Twas as good as a silver mine for a while. Nothing could stand against it, sir – nothing."

But Etheridge was not interested in the Bubble. "I should like greatly to see your mare go," he said. "Here, boy, isn't that track in the field in pretty fair condition still?"

"Yes, boss," answered the negro, whom he had addressed.

"Why not let her go round it, Chase? It will do her good to stretch her legs this fine morning."

Here a shadow in the doorway caused them both to turn their heads. It was Ruth Franklin.

"Good heavens, Ruth, what are you doing here in the stables?" asked Etheridge, astonished.

"I have come to see the horses," replied Ruth, confidently. She addressed Chase. She had already learned that she could count upon indulgence from him, no matter what fancies might seize her.

"Here they are, then," Chase answered. "Come closer. This is Peter, and that is Piper. And here is the mare, Kentucky Belle. Your friend, the commodore, was urging me, as you came in, to send Kentucky round a race-course you have here somewhere."

"Yes, I know; the old ring," said Ruth. "Oh, please do! Please have a real race."

"But there's nothing to run against her, Miss Ruth. The pair are not racers."

"You go to Cyrus Jaycox," said Etheridge to the negro, "and ask him for – for" (he could not remember the name) – "for the colt," he concluded, in an enraged voice.

"Fer Tipkinoo, sah? Yassah."

"Tell him to come himself."

"Yassah." The negro started off on a run.

"It's the landlord of the Old North," Etheridge explained. "He has a promising colt, Tippecanoe" (he brought it out this time sonorously). "No match, of course, for your mare, Chase. Still, it will make a little sport." His color had risen; his face was young with anticipation. "Now, Ruth, go home; you have seen the horses, and that is enough. Your mother would be much displeased if she knew you were here."

For answer, Ruth looked at Chase. "I won't be the least trouble," she said, winningly.

"Oh, do be! I like trouble – feel all the better for lots of it," he answered. "Come along with me. And make all the trouble you can!"

Three little negro boys, highly excited, had already started off to act as pilots to the field. Ruth put her hand in Chase's arm; for if the owner of Kentucky Belle wished to have her with him, or at least if he had the appearance of wishing it, there was less to be said against her presence. They led the way, therefore. Then came Chase's man with the mare, Etheridge keeping close to the beautiful beast, and watching her gait with critical eyes. All the hangers-on of the stable brought up the rear. The field, where an amateur race had been held during the preceding year, was not far distant; its course was a small one. Some minutes later their group was completed by the arrival of Cyrus Jaycox with his colt, Tippecanoe.

"But where is Groves?" said Chase to his men. "Groves is the only one of you who can ride her properly." It turned out, however, that Groves had gone to bed ill; he had taken a chill on the journey.

"I didn't observe that he wasn't here," said Chase. (This was because he had been talking to Ruth.) "We shall have to postpone it, commodore."

"Let her go round with one of the other men just once, to show her action," Etheridge urged.

"Yes, please, please," said Ruth.

The mare, therefore, went round the course with the groom Cartright, followed by the Asheville colt, ridden by a little negro boy, who clung on with grins and goggling eyes.

"There is Mr. Hill, watching us over the fence," said Ruth. "How astonished he looks!" And she beckoned to the distant figure.

Malachi Hill, who had been up the mountain to pay a visit to a family in bereavement, had recognized them, and stopped his horse in the road to see what was going on. In response to Ruth's invitation, he found a gate, opened it by leaning from his saddle, and came across to join them. As he rode up, Etheridge was urging another round. "If I were not such a heavy weight, I'd ride the mare myself!" he declared, with enthusiasm. Cyrus Jaycox offered a second little negro, as jockey. But

Chase preferred to trust Cartright, unfitted though he was. In reality he consented not on account of the urgency of Etheridge, but solely to please the girl by his side.

There was trouble about this second start; the colt, not having been trained, boggled and balked. Kentucky Belle, on her side, could not comprehend such awkwardness. "I'll go a few paces with them, just to get them well off," suggested Malachi Hill. And, touching Daniel with his whip, he rode forward, coming up behind the other two.

Mr. Hill's Daniel was the laughing-stock of the irreverent; he was a very tall, ancient horse, lean and rawboned, with a rat tail. But he must have had a spark of youthful fire left in him somewhere, or else a long-thwarted ambition, for he made more than the start which his rider had intended; breaking into a pounding pace, he went round the entire course, in spite of the clergyman's efforts to pull him up. The mare, hearing the thundering sound of his advance behind her, began to go faster. Old Daniel passed the Asheville colt as though he were nothing at all; then, stretching out his gaunt head, he went in pursuit of the steed in front like a mad creature, the dust of the ring rising in clouds behind him. Nothing could now stop either horse. Cartright was powerless with Kentucky Belle, and Daniel paid no heed to his rider. But, the second time round, it was not quite clear whether the clergyman was trying to stop or not. The third time there was no question – he would not have stopped for the world; his flushed face showed the deepest delight.

Meanwhile people had collected as flies collect round honey; the negroes who lived in the shanties behind the Old North had come running to the scene in a body, the big children "toting" the little ones; and down the lane which led from the main street had rushed all the whites within call, led by the postmaster himself, a veteran of the Mexican War. After the fourth round, Kentucky Belle decided to stop of her own accord. She was, of course, ahead. But not very far behind her, still thundering along with his rat tail held stiffly out, came old Daniel, in his turn ahead of Tippecanoe.

As Daniel drew near, exhausted but still ardent, there rose loud laughter and cheers. "Good gracious!" murmured the missionary, as he quickly dismounted, pulled his hat straight, and involuntarily tried to hide himself between Etheridge and Chase. "What *have* I done!"

His perturbation was genuine. "Come along," said Chase, who had been laughing uproariously himself; "we'll protect you." He gave his arm to Mr. Hill, and with Ruth (who still kept her hold tightly) on his left, he made with his two companions a stately progress back to the hotel, followed by the mare led by Cartright, with Etheridge as body-guard; then by Cyrus Jaycox, with Tippecanoe; and finally by all the spectators, who now numbered nearly a hundred. But at the head of the whole file (Chase insisted upon this) marched old Daniel, led by the other groom.

"Go round to the front," called Chase. And round they all went to the main street, amid the hurrahs of the accompanying crowd, white and black. At the door of the Old North, Ruth escaped and took refuge within, accompanied by the troubled clergyman; and a moment later Chase and Etheridge followed. Ruth had led the way to Miss Billy's sitting-room. Miss Billy received her guests with wonder; Maud Muriel was with her (for her prophecy had come true; the two had already begun the "going home" with each other).

"We have had the most exciting race, Miss Billy," explained Ruth. "A real horse-race round the old track out in the field. And Mr. Hill came in second on Daniel!"

The eyes of Miss Billy, turning to the clergyman with horror, moved Chase to fresh laughter. "I say – why not all stay and dine with me?" he suggested. "To celebrate Daniel's triumph, you know? I am coming here to stay, so I might as well begin. The dinner hour is two o'clock, and it is almost that now. We can have a table to ourselves, and perhaps they can find us some champagne."

"That will be great fun; *I'll* stay," said Ruth. "And the commodore will, I'm sure. Mr. Hill, too."

"Thanks, no. I must go. Good-day," said the missionary, hastening out.

Chase pursued him. "Why, you are the hero of the whole thing," he said; "the man of the hour! We can't bring old Daniel into the dining-room. So we must have you, Hill."

"I am sorry to spoil it; but you will have to excuse me," answered the other man, hurriedly. Then, with an outburst of confidence: "It is impossible for me to remain where Miss Mackintosh is present. There is something perfectly awful to me, Mr. Chase, in that woman's eye!"

"Is that all? Come back; I'll see to her," responded Chase. And see to her he did. Aided by Etheridge, who liked nothing better than to assail the sculptress with lovelorn compliments, Chase paid Maud Muriel such devoted attention that for the moment she forgot poor Hill, or rather she left him to himself. He was able, therefore, to eat his dinner. But he still said, mutely, "Good gracious!" and, taking out his handkerchief, he furtively wiped his brow.

The Old North had provided for its patrons that day roast beef, spring chickens, new potatoes, and apple puddings. All the diners at the other tables asked for "a dish of gravy." A saucer containing gravy was then brought and placed by the side of each plate. Small hot buscuits were offered instead of bread, and eaten with the golden mountain butter. Mrs. Jaycox, stimulated by the liberal order for champagne, sent to Chase's table the additional splendors of three kinds of fresh cake, peach preserves, and a glass jug of cream.

CHAPTER V

THE spring deepened into summer, and July opened. On the 10th, the sojourners at the Warm Springs, the beautiful pools that well up in the valley of the French Broad River, were assembled on the veranda of the rambling wooden hotel, after their six o'clock supper, when they saw two carriages approaching. "Phew! who can they be?" "What horses!"

The horses were indeed remarkably handsome – two bays and a lighter-limbed pair of sorrels; in addition there was a mounted groom. The housekeeper, who had come out on the veranda, mentioned in a low tone that a second groom had arrived, three hours earlier, to engage rooms for the party, and make preparations. "They are to have supper by themselves, later; we're to do our best. Extras have been ordered, and they've sent all sorts of supplies. And champagne!"

"Chase, did you say the name was? That's a hoax. It's General Grant himself, I reckon, coming along yere like a conqueror in disguise," said a wag.

The bays were Horace Chase's Peter and Piper, attached to a two-seated carriage which was a model as regarded comfort; Anthony Etheridge was driving, and with him were Mrs. Franklin, Dolly, and Ruth. Horace Chase himself, in a light vehicle for two, which he called his cart, had the sorrels. His companion was a gaunt, dark man, who looked as though he had been ill. This man was Mrs. Franklin's son Jared.

Franklin had been stricken by that disheartening malady which is formed by the union of fever and ague. After bearing it for several weeks, and sending no tidings of his condition to his family (for he considered it a rather unmasculine ailment), he had journeyed to Asheville with the last remnants of his strength, and arriving by stage, and finding no one at the cottage (for it was his wife's day at the Colored Home), he had come with uncertain steps across the field to L'Hommedieu, entering the parlor like a yellow spectre, his eyes sunken, his mind slightly wandering. "Ye-es, here I am," he said, vaguely. "I was coming next week, you know. But I – I didn't feel well. And so I've – come now."

His mother had given a cry; then, with an instinctive movement, her tall figure looking taller than ever, she had rushed forward and clasped her dazed, fever-stricken son in her arms.

The mountain air, prompt remedies, and the vigilant nursing of Genevieve, soon routed the insidious foes. Routed them, that is, for the moment; for their strength lies in stealthy returns; as Jared said (he made jokes even at the worst stages), they never know when they are beaten. But as soon as there was even a truce, their victim, though still yellow and weak, announced that he must return to his business immediately.

"But I thought you spent your summers here, Mr. Franklin?" remarked Horace Chase, inquiringly.

"Yes, that is the plan, and I have been here a good deal for the past three seasons. But this year I can't stay," Jared answered.

This was said at L'Hommedieu. Ruth was sitting beside her brother on the sofa, her arm in his. "But you must stay," she protested. "You are not strong yet; you are not strong at all." She put her other arm across his breast, as if to keep him. "I shall not let you go!"

Jared Franklin was tall and broad-shouldered, with dark eyes whose expression was always sad. In spite of this sadness, he had Dolly's habit of making jocular remarks. But he had not Dolly's sharpness; where she was sarcastic, the brother was only ironical. In looks Jared did not resemble his mother or Dolly. But there was a strong likeness between his face and Ruth's; they had the same contours, the same mouth.

While Ruth was protesting, Mrs. Franklin, making no pretence of busying herself with anything, not even with lamplighters, sat looking at her son with eyes which seemed to have grown larger, owing to the depth of love within them. Chase, who had happened to be at L'Hommedieu when Jared arrived, had never forgotten that rush of the mother – the mother whose easy indolence he had,

up to that moment, condemned. So now he said, with his slight drawl: "Oh, you want to give the fever another round of shot before you go back, Mr. Franklin. Why not take a few days more, and drive with me over the Great Smokies into Tennessee?" And the result was the party already described.

The evening before the start, Ruth had come out on the veranda of L'Hommedieu. Chase and her brother had been smoking there (for Jared had not shown any deep attachment to his smoking-room), and Dolly, who loved the aroma of cigars, had seated herself near them. Jared had now strolled off with his mother, and Genevieve, coming over from the cottage, had taken her husband's place. As she approached, Chase had extinguished his cigar and tossed it into the grass; for tobacco smoke always gave the younger Mrs. Franklin a headache.

Ruth had walked up to Chase's chair. "No, please don't rise; I am only looking at you, Mr. Chase. You are so wonderful!"

"Now don't be *too* hard on me!" interposed the visitor, humorously.

"First, you are making my brother take this long drive," Ruth went on; "the very thing of all others that will do him good – and I could go down on my knees to you just for that! Then you have sent for that easy carriage, so that Dolly can go, too. Then you are taking *me*. The commodore also, who would rather drive Peter and Piper than go to heaven! I have always wanted to see somebody who could do *everything*. It must be very nice to have money," she concluded, reflectively.

"And to do so much good with it," added Genevieve. Genevieve had insisted that her mother-in-law should take the fourth place in the carriage; for the drive would be excellent for Mrs. Franklin, who was far from strong; whereas, for herself, as she was in perfect health, no change was necessary. Genevieve might have mentioned, also, that she had had change enough for her whole life, and to spare, during the years which her husband had spent in the navy; for the younger Mrs. Franklin did not enjoy varying scenes. A house of her own and everything in it hers; prearranged occupations, all useful or beneficent, following each other regularly in an unbroken round; a leading place in the management of charitable institutions; the writing and despatching of letters, asking for contributions to these institutions; the general supervision of the clergy, with an eye to dangerous ritualistic tendencies; the conscientious endeavor to tell her friends on all occasions what they ought to do (Genevieve was never angry when they disagreed with her, she only pitied them. There was, in fact, no one she knew whom she had not felt herself competent, at one time or another, to pity) – all this gave her the sense of doing good. And to Genevieve that was more precious than all else – the feeling that she was doing good. "Ruth is right; it must be enchanting to have money," she went on. "I have often planned what I should do myself if I had a fortune. I think I may say that I can direct, administer; I have never seen or read of any charitable institution, refuge, hospital, home, asylum, or whatever it may be, which seemed too large or too complicated for me to undertake. On the contrary, I know I should like it; I feel that I have that sort of capacity." Her face kindled as she spoke; her genius (for she had a genius, that of directorship) was stirring within her.

"You certainly have one part of the capacity, and that is the despotism," remarked Dolly, laughing. "The other members of your Board of Managers for the Colored Home, for instance – Mrs. Baxter, Miss Wynne, Miss Kent – they haven't a voice in even the smallest matter, poor souls! You rule them with a rod of iron – all for their good, no doubt."

"As it is," continued the younger Mrs. Franklin, combating not Dolly's sarcasms (to which she had paid no attention), but her own sincere longings – "as it is, I cannot build a hospital at present, though I don't give up hope for the future. But I can at least give my prayers to all, and that I do; I never ring a door-bell without offering an inward petition that something I may say will help those whom I shall see when I go in."

"Now that's generous," commented Dolly. "But don't be too unselfish, Genevieve; think of yourself occasionally; why not pray that something *they* may say will be a help to *you*?"

After the arrival of his party at the Warm Springs, Chase devoted a half-hour to a brief but exhaustive examination of the site, the pool, and the buildings. "When we have made a Tyrol

of Buncombe, we'll annex this place as a sort of Baden-Baden," he said. "Thirty-five miles from Asheville – that will just do. Ever tried the baths, commodore?"

"You must apply to somebody who has rheumatism, Mr. Chase," answered Etheridge, loftily.

"The pool has an abundant supply at a temperature of 104 Fahrenheit," Chase went on, with the gleam of a smile showing itself in his eyes for a moment (for the commodore's air of youth always amused him; it was so determined). "Baden-Baden was one of the prettiest little places I saw over there, on the other side of the big pond. They've taken lots of pains to lay out a promenade along a stream, and the stream is about as big as one from a garden-hose! But here there could be a walk worth something – along this French Broad."

They were strolling near the river in the red light of the sunset. "Their forest that they talk about, their Black Forest, is all guarded and patrolled," Chase continued; "every tree counted! I don't call that a forest at all. Now *these* woods are perfectly wild. Why – they're as wild as Noah!"

"Don't you mean old as Noah?" inquired Ruth, laughing.

"Certainly not," commented Jared. "Noah was extremely wild. And not in his youth only; in his age as well."

"The first thing, however, would be the roads," Chase went on. "I never thought I should have to take a back seat about the United States of America! But I returned from Europe singing small, I can tell you, about our roads. Talk about the difficulty of making 'em? Go and look at Switzerland!"

"By all means," said Ruth, promptly. "Only tell us how, Mr. Chase. We'll go at once." She was walking with her brother, her hat dangling by its elastic cord from her arm.

Chase came out of his plans. "So you want to see Switzerland, do you?" he said, in an indulgent tone.

Ruth lifted her hat, and made with it a gesture which took in the entire horizon. "I wish to see everything in the world!" Jared took her hat away from her, put it on her head and secured it, or tried to secure it. "Will you take me, Jared? I mean some day?" she said, as he bungled with the cord, endeavoring to get it over her hair. "That's not the way." She unbuttoned the loop and adjusted it. It was a straw hat (thanks to Genevieve, a new one), which shaded her face, but left free, behind, the thick braids which covered her small head from crown to throat.

"Once, pussy, I might have answered yes. But now I'm not so sure," replied Jared, rather gloomily.

"I don't want to go, I wasn't in earnest; I only want to stay where you are," exclaimed his young sister, her mood changing. "But if only you had never left the navy! If only you were not tied down in that horrid, horrid Raleigh!"

"Is Raleigh so very horrid?" inquired Chase.

"Any place is horrid that keeps Jared shut up in a warehouse all day," announced Ruth, indignantly.

Mrs. Franklin, who was behind with Etheridge, came forward, took Ruth's arm, and led her back.

"She is sorry that you left the service?" Chase inquired of the brother.

Ruth overheard this question. "Jared was always well when he was in the navy," she called out. "No, His Grand, I *will* say it: he was always well, and he was happy too; Dolly has told me so. Now he is never well; he is growing so thin that I can't bear to see it. And as for happiness – he is *miserable*!" Her voice broke; she stood still, her breast heaving.

Jared strolled on, his hands in the pockets of his flannel coat. "It's nothing," he said to Chase, who was looking back; "she'll get over it in a moment. She says whatever comes into her head; we have spoiled her, I suppose. She was so much younger, you see; the last of my mother's six children. And the three who came before her had died in infancy, so there was a great to-do when this one lived."

Chase glanced back a second time. Ruth, Mrs. Franklin, and Etheridge had turned, and were going towards the hotel. "She appears to wish that you had remained in the navy; isn't that rather

odd?" he inquired, the idea in his mind being simply the facilities that existed for seeing this idolized brother, now that Raleigh was his home instead of the ocean.

"Odd?" repeated Jared. And his tone had such a strange vibration that his companion turned and looked at him.

They continued their walk for an hour longer. When they came back, they found the commodore seated on the veranda of the cottage which had been arranged for their use by Chase's courier. Ruth and Mrs. Franklin were his companions, and Dolly was also there, resting on a sofa which had been rolled out from the room behind. Chase and Jared lighted cigars; Etheridge took out a cigarette.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.