

In the GARDEN
OF DELIGHT

✻ L·H·HAMMOND ✻

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OF DELIGHT ***

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IN THE GARDEN OF
DELIGHT

BY

L. H. HAMMOND

AUTHOR OF "THE MASTER-WORD," "IN BLACK AND
WHITE," ETC.

NEW YORK

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To

LUCY AND CALDWELL

IN MEMORY OF THE WHEELED-CHAIR SUMMER

AT PEN-Y-BRYN

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I

A Country Child

There is one thing, at least, in this puzzling world which, though everything changes it, nothing can spoil: and that is out-of-doors. Long ago, when this place was stately old Cedarhurst instead of home-y Bird Corners, and I a wilful small girl climbing trees and tearing my frocks whenever Great-aunt Virginia and Great-aunt Letitia were both looking the other way at the same time—a coincidence as blissful as it was infrequent—I thought being outdoors was heaven enough for anybody.

In the long winter afternoons I sat by the big wood fire in the back parlor and hemmed towels and napkins—when I wasn't pulling out yesterday's work because Great-aunt Virginia found the stitches too big: and I looked out at the cold, bare hills, blue and beautiful against the pale sky, and longed to play over them like the winds, and to be whirled up into the air like the brown leaves which scurried about them all winter long. And in the spring, when the budding branches draped the trees with jewelled mists, all silver and green and gold and ruby-red, I wished the great-aunts had learned to play on the grass with their whole selves, instead of just with their fingers on the big old rosewood piano, which stood stiff and square in the front parlor, an instrument of torture to rebellious hands that longed to be pulling wild-flowers, and to ears tuned to catch the songs of birds. And in summer time, when the rain blotted out the hills, and every leaf of every tree sang the Song of the Rushing Winds; when the lightning ran zig-zag all over the sky and the thunder jarred the house—oh, why should great-aunts call one indoors, and shut the free winds out, and put cotton in their ears, and make little girls come away from the windows, and the chimneys, and every place where they wanted to be, instead of leaving them out in the rain to be drenched like the flowers and shake themselves dry like the birds?

And in autumn—but those memories are too painful! On frosty days the house was shut tight, the log fires kindled, and my small person swathed in insufferable flannels—flannels!—in a Tennessee October! And when I rebelled, there were fearsome tales of children who had died of pneumonia, or gone into consumption, because their misguided relatives had allowed them to play

outdoors in the cold.

And yet outdoors was never more beautiful. Some of the hills were far and blue, and some were near and green, or brown with stubble, or yellow with stalks of corn. The grass in the pasture was greenest green; and when I slipped out on the back porch the sycamores down by the brook rustled their drying leaves and called me as loud as they dared. And the doves flew by in flocks, and the killdeers whirred up from the valley with wild, free cries, and the field-larks sang on the fence-posts, or lighted on the short, sweet grass, the white of their outer tail feathers shining in the sun. But Great-aunt Letitia would call me back to the parlor, where she made tea, which she and Great-aunt Virginia drank, sitting in rosewood arm-chairs, dressed in soft shimmering silks, with cobwebby lace about their throats.

I myself balanced unhappily upon one of the big square ottomans, too small to get far enough back on it to have any purchase against the slippery horsehair, and painfully conscious of Great-aunt Virginia's eyes on my awkwardly swinging feet. I kept my place as best I could, holding a bit of egg-shell china, and sipping my odious cambric tea.

This was the chosen time to instill proper principles of conduct into my callous little soul. The gentle old aunts made a duet of it, and I always thought they practiced it together beforehand, like a "piece" on the piano. It was really very easy not to hear!

I always sat on the ottoman nearest the center table. The other was nearer the east window, and showed the long front drive bordered by the stiff lines of cedars, which gave Cedarhurst its name before the great-aunts were born. But the one by the table had the double advantage of giving me a dutiful appearance, being equally distant from both of the arm-chairs, and of allowing me, by an almost imperceptible sliding to one corner, to look out of the silver-maple window to the jug of water I kept in the center of the seven trunks, a drinking fountain for all the birds of the place. I sat very still during the duet, my head raised a little to see the lowest branches, where the birds always alighted; and I often quite forgot my cambric tea until Great-aunt Letitia gently reminded me of it. My docility touched them very much. I heard Great-aunt Letitia tell Great-aunt Virginia one day that she was afraid I would never live to grow up, my expression was so rapt when they urged my duty upon me; and she felt as though there were an invisible halo above my little brown head. I was running in through the hall when I heard this and stopped in breathless amazement. I had

through the hall when I heard this, and stopped in breathless amazement. I had no thought of eavesdropping, but I saw Great-aunt Virginia wipe her eyes; and Great-aunt Letitia almost sniffed. I sat stiller than ever after that, and rolled my eyes a little; and Great-aunt Letitia sent for the doctor, who said I needed calico dresses and mud pies. The great-aunts were shocked at first, but the doctor was firm. And after that I played outdoors unless the thermometer was very unkind and the wind in an especially dangerous quarter.

There are really two of the-most-beautiful-place-in-the-world. One of them is the real outdoors; and the other is outdoors in the Land of Make-Believe. The advantage of the real outdoors is that its loveliness is ready-made. One invents nothing; one merely opens eyes and ears and soul to drink in beauty and joy, and learns, almost without knowing it, the most curious and interesting things. The advantage of Make-Believe is that when things are as they shouldn't be, one can instantly step over into that blessed country and make them be exactly what they should. No one ever sees you do it, either, or guesses that you can make a world in a twinkling, out of dreams. It has all the charm and mystery of a fairy ring, or fern seed, or Aladdin's lamp. One's body can perch on a horsehair piano stool, twisting one's two little meat legs about its one fat leg of rosewood, and great-aunts may be sure you are practising scales most faithfully; and all the time you are really running races in the wind with charming, dirty children who tear their dresses all day long, and never had their hair in curl-papers in their lives.

And that is only the beginning. For one can learn so well the road to that dear land that one never forgets it, even in grown-up days. There is never any sickness in Make-Believe. One can walk and run there always, though one's body lies weak and helpless, or drags slowly about, year after year, in a world that is full of pain. One can slip away from the long, black, sleepless nights into a lovely world where imagination is the motive power, and all one needs and all one longs for lie ready to one's hand.

It was the January after I was sixteen that Cedarhurst burned down. It was a bitter cold time; and the heaviest snow I had ever seen turned my familiar world into fairyland under the winter moon.

It was Great-aunt Letitia who found the fire. She had been looking for it all her life. One of the most familiar memories of my childhood is the waking at night to hear a soft rustle past my open door—the doors were always left open that we might smell the fire when we really had one—and to see Great-aunt Letitia, her white hair streaked with gray, and the light of her eyes

white hair tucked away under a dainty nightcap and the light of her candle bringing out soft gleams in her flowered silk dressing gown, as she followed her highbred nose to the spot where it assured her a fire had broken out. It used to frighten me at first; but I grew too accustomed to it even to wake. So it taxed my credulity to the utmost when, on that bitter night, she roused me to tell me with tense white lips that Cedarhurst was in flames.

How the fire started, we never knew. It burst through the floor of the empty guest room first, and the ceiling of the dining-room below it. But however it started, it was there; and there was no one to fight it but two fragile old ladies, a half-grown girl, and the terrified Negroes. It was before the days of rural telephones, and the house was in ruins before any one in the village knew our need. We carried the news ourselves when we drove into Chatterton in the gray dawn, shivering with cold. We were all fully dressed, of course; the great-aunts would have perished in the flames before they would have shocked the stars of heaven by appearing outdoors in the mildest disarray. And we saved the family silver, a portrait or two, great-grandmother's sewing table, a few books, and the clothes upon our backs.

On the way to the village Great-aunt Virginia said we had much to be thankful for in that our lives were spared; but hers, had we known it, was already lost. She had stood in the snow after the flames barred all access to the house, until the roof fell in and her birthplace was a mass of ruins; and before we had been a week at the home of her nephew, Cousin William Wrenn, she had died of pneumonia, leaving Great-aunt Letitia and me, as she told us in the parting, alone and unprotected save for the Father of all, to whom she trusted us.

But Great-aunt Letitia, whom every one expected to wither and droop without her sister's sheltering care, developed an amazing power of decision. She seemed crushed at first. But on the fourth day after Great-aunt Virginia had been laid to rest in the hillside burial ground at home, she came into the family sitting room, looking, in her deep mourning, very tall and white and frail, and announced that she had decided not to rebuild Cedarhurst, but to go to the city to live.

I could scarcely believe my ears. The city's outmost edge was only fifteen miles away, but even the village of Chatterton, peopled largely by our own relatives, seemed crowded and bustling after the wide quiet of the fields at home. That this frail, retiring old lady should contemplate a plunge into the vortex of a city whose inhabitants were numbered by tens of thousands—really several tens—

seemed madness. But her determination was fixed.

“This dear child needs the advantages of city life,” she declared. “I always found the country exceedingly quiet myself, and—er not altogether—progressive. But I deferred to Sister Virginia’s judgment. Now, however—” her voice trembled a moment, and then went on quite steadily—“the responsibility is mine, and I cannot shirk it. I think Lydia should have city advantages. I shall go there and devote myself to her education, and prepare for her entrance into society at the proper time.”

Argument was of no avail. When I avouched my preference for the country she said quietly that I knew nothing of the city yet, and that every one should try more than one side of life before making a final choice. She was very gentle, but Great-aunt Virginia herself could not have been more inflexible. We went, to the envy of my cousin, Billy Wrenn, and to my own silent and passionate grief.

As I grew older, Aunt Letitia grew younger—younger, that is, in her ideas and in her desires for me. She cared far more than I about my clothes, and took a livelier interest in possible lovers. I understood, beneath this late blossoming of pleasure in what she called gay life, the starved aspirations of her own youth, shut away in the seclusion of her beautiful home during the many years of her widowed mother’s invalidism and morbid grieving for her husband. There were times when her dead-and-gone girlhood rose to life in her eyes, and a soft color tinged her delicate cheeks, as she imagined for me some small social triumph or admired me in some new dress. I divined that she was immensely interested in my men friends, though her shyness in discussing them was even greater than her interest. I wondered often if she had a love-story of her own; but I never knew. My own love-story, when it came, gave her great happiness; and for three years after my marriage she lived with us in great content, and passed out at last in utter peace.

My husband is known in our family circle as the Peon, since he entered into a contract to work for me without wages for life. He brought into our home at our marriage his brother’s orphaned child, David Bird, a little fellow four years of age, who flatly refused to call me auntie and dubbed me Mammy Lil. That was many years ago; and as the time has passed the Peon and I have realized with deepening gratitude our debt to the little child who has given our home its crowning joy. But for David we would have been childless, growing old alone; for we owe Caro to David, too. I have never flattered myself that we could have captured and held the heart of that tricksey birdling if David had not added to

captured and held the heart of that creature, showing it David had not added to our attractions childhood's lure to a child.

For our years in the city, however, we found David sufficient in himself. He has grown up like the Peon's own son, sturdy, steady, large of body and of heart. He has stood well in his classes without much effort; but more because it is his disposition to do thoroughly whatever he does at all than because of any great love for books. He is deliberate in manner, and somewhat slow of speech; and his steady gray eyes seem made to look facts in the face. He has always moved in straight lines, mentally and physically, cutting through obstacles which Caro would flutter around in a twinkling; yet somehow he arrived at the goal in time to secure whatever he set out to obtain. He was rather too solemn as a child, and regarded me, apparently, somewhat as the Peon did at times, with an air of amused and affectionate tolerance. I used to hunt through his small personality for the spark of fun I was sure lay hidden there, and as the years passed I caught the glint of it more and more frequently; but it was really Caro who brought it out into the open, and set it, a perpetual signal, in his eyes.

I found it easy to awaken in him my own love of outdoors, and together we made friends with such birds as could be enticed to our shady yard in the city's outer circle. We were sworn comrades in our enmity to the English sparrows, and the bond of a common foe was one of the many things that drew us into a fellowship unusually close. The Peon used to say that no boy came to genuine manhood without something in the way of an evil to hate and to fight; and for my part I joyfully set up the English sparrows as the embodiment of all wickedness, to be destroyed beak and tail. My own objections to them were the result of long watching; but David's hatred sprang to life full-fledged the morning we found four of the wretched bullies fighting one small chickadee, which hung head downward from a twig of privet, his eyes shut tight, his claws clenched, and his throat and breast exposed to his enemies' vicious bills. I think some deep thirst for justice seized the child's soul at sight of the helpless victim, and ever since he has been mindful of weak things in a way surprising in a boy so ruggedly strong.

He has been wonderfully mindful of me, always. Long before we left the city I had learned to enjoy outdoors from a cot under the trees in the back yard. The pain which was to be by turns my companion, my jailer, and my emancipator had already laid upon me an iron hand. I was up and about when the Peon was at home; but when he came in unexpectedly he learned to look for me under the drooping silver maples in the yard; and my old-time love of birds was an easy

explanation of the many-cushioned cot and the long hours I daily spent upon it.

David filled the birds' drinking fountain for me when he came home to leave his books and get his bat or his football; and I would lie there, watching my visitors, wondering at the variety of birds to be seen in a city yard, and wishing the sparrows' duels were less on the harmless French order. They never fought because they needed to do it; it was always for something perfectly futile and foolish. They would leave all the food I could scatter to tear one crumb from a neighbor. For it is English sparrow nature never to be satisfied with what they have, to want only what some one else is enjoying, and to get it for themselves if they can. David and I were fully agreed that if anything more hateful was ever created we wished to be spared acquaintance with it.

II

Bird Corners

It is to Uncle Milton that I owe our return to the country, and all the delights of Bird Corners.

Uncle Milton is an inheritance from my great-aunts and Cedarhurst, where he had the finest flowers and the most flourishing vegetable garden in the country. He is a lean old Negro, tall, and straight as a pine. His features are finely cut; and with his gray hair, long gray moustache, regular features, and skin like polished bronze, he makes a distinguished appearance, even in his old blue jeans. He is a real lover of the outdoor world, and the earth and the plants know it. He bends over the flower-beds lovingly, with eyes that see, not dirt, but all dirt's possibilities of beauty and life. There is never a plant set carelessly nor a seed that falls by chance. No wonder all he touches grows!

That he went to town with Great-aunt Letitia, and stayed there afterward with me, spoke eloquently of the strength of affection between us. But after my great-aunt's death he did not accept the situation without constant protests, and the advice which my youth and ignorance demanded.

"You ain't got no mo' business in de city dan I is, Miss Lil," he said spring after spring, as I sat on the grass by the flower-beds and watched his fork go in and out like clock-work, leaving behind it long rows of fresh-turned earth. "You done los' all dem roses you had in yo' face at home. Ef Miss Ferginny done lived she wouldn' put up wid dis foolishness not er minute."

"But the city is more convenient for Mr. Bird," I would explain. "Some day when he is rich enough he expects to give up business, and then we will go back."

"He'll be givin' up his wife fus' news you know," growled the old man, stopping to thin the thick border of violets. "An' he'll be goin' to bury you dar by Miss Ferginny and Miss 'Titia befo' he goes retirin' from business ef he don' look out. We-all got er plenty ter live on now—you got er plenty widout his'n; en ef you ain't, I kin make er plenty outen dat groun'. Hit's de riches' lan' in David's country. I made hit now befo' an' I kin do hit agin, ef I durn' see it on

Davis son county. I made int pay befo , en I kin do int agin, sudder was int it on po' white-trash renters like you all do. But I 'clare to gracious, Miss Lil, ef you-all don' go, I will. I been mixin' up wid town niggers till I'm plumb wo' out wid 'em. Dis is de las' spring Milton'll fix yo' flowers in dis mizzable little cramped-up lot."

He had said this so often that I regarded it as one of Nature's regular spring processes; and beyond a sudden deeper stirring of my constant homesickness, his threats passed unnoticed. But one February morning he came out and stood by my cot under the trees with a face at once elated and downcast.

"Are you going to begin the spring work today?" I asked in delight.

He looked embarrassed.

"Hit's sorter early to rake dem leaves offen de beds yit," he said. Then he hesitated. "I 'spec I ain't gwinter be able ter do de wuk no mo'."

"Are you sick?" I asked anxiously. Then I saw the new look in his face, and gasped. "You're going to the country!" I cried.

"Yassum, I is. I can't stan' it yere no longer, Miss Lil: I'm er gittin' too ole fer town; I des bleege ter go out whar God made de worl' en breathe free en be er man ergin, befo' I die."

The years had slipped from him like a cloak. I looked at him enviously—just as an English sparrow might look at some bird of stronger flight, I reflected suddenly, and scowled at one of my greedy kinsman in the walk, trying to gobble all the best crumbs at once.

"I'm glad for you," I said honestly. "When do you go?"

"When my mont's out. But I hates ter go, Miss Lil."

"What am I to do here?" I demanded, the sparrow in me refusing to be quenched altogether.

"I'll do de bes' I kin," he said. "I been lookin' roun' fer you all winter. But dese town niggers is a onery set, fer sho'. When you-all comes home Milton's comin' back."

“Never mind,” I said; “we’ll manage somehow.”

I closed my eyes because they were getting full of tears. He moved away, and I let the tears come. I wanted the country, too; and more and more as my illness grew, and it became increasingly difficult to take my part in the busy city life. The more one’s bodily freedom is restricted by weakness and pain, the more one longs for the unconfined spaces of earth and air, for wide horizons and sweeping winds, and wings that flash far up into the sunshine, above the shadows where one must lie, conning the hard lesson of patient idleness. And I wanted Uncle Milton—the visible link between me and that dear world of hill and sky for which I longed. Return to it seemed so bright a possibility while another heart, even this old Negro’s, held it as dear as I. If he went from me he would leave my hope bereft. I lay with closed eyes, absorbed in longing for that dear receding vision of delight.

“Don’ you see how bad she wanten go, Marse John?” said Uncle Milton again, close beside me. I sprang up in amazement, to find him and the Peon by my cot. “She ain’t gwine ter say a word ef she think hit’ll discommerdate you; but de chile’s e’en erbout breakin’ her heart fer de country, same as I is.”

“Uncle Milton,” I began indignantly; but the old man brushed my words aside.

“You en Marse John fight hit out, honey,” he said. “Mek ’er tell de trufe, Marse John. Hit’s you en her fer it now; Milton’s done his bes’.”

He turned deliberately and walked out of the yard.

It did not take the Peon long to get the facts, to answer all my objections as to the inconvenience to himself, and to settle finally our immediate return. We would rebuild Cedarhurst at once.

“Oh, no,” I cried, “not Cedarhurst! Let us build our own home, all sunshine and out-of-doors! It isn’t the old house that I love; it was too cold and stately and dark—such an indoors kind of house. It’s the hills I’m homesick for, and the sky, and the biggest maple, and the pasture, and the sycamores down by the brook.”

“But we can’t sleep in the maple,” objected the Peon, “nor eat in the pasture when it rains. There must be a house.”

“Oh, of course. But let it be our house, not Great Aunt Virginia’s. You may

Oh, of course. But let it be our house—not Great-aunt Virginia’s. You may really build it any way you please if only you will have porches enough, and so many windows that wherever you sit you can lift your eyes and look right out, miles and miles and miles. And I’d like all the rooms to have a southern exposure, of course, on account of the breeze and the sun, and east windows for winter mornings, and west windows for the sunsets. I don’t care about the rest.”

“I insist upon bath-rooms and a kitchen,” said the Peon; “mere scenery is not a sufficient sanitary basis for life. But what shall we call it—Cedarhurst?”

“Oh, no! Just a plain, every day, home-y name—something that belongs to us and the birds. Why, we’re Birds ourselves, Peon, dear. Let’s be sociable and call it Bird Corners.”

“But there aren’t any corners,” said the practical Peon; “the place lies straight along the pike.”

That is a man’s way. He thinks he must face facts and shape his course accordingly, poor slave to the visible that he is. But a woman conquers facts by turning her back upon them, and playing they are something else.

“The birds will make the corners,” I explained patiently. “Before I’ve been putting out crumbs a month there’ll be bird pikes cutting through the place at every conceivable angle, and crossing each other under that seven-trunked maple where my cot will be. And if that won’t be bird corners, what will?”

So we prepared for our homing flight. Uncle Milton went out at once to trim the trees and prune the shrubbery and vines; and the occasional days he bestowed on us in town were full of delight for me, filled as they were with reports of progress at home. For it was home, before dirt had been broken for the house; the city dwelling was a mere temporary shelter.

“De jonquils out home is showin’ up fine,” he announced one morning in mid-February; “hit’s time to sorter stir up dese yere lazy town flowers. En I’ll trim de trees, too, seein’ I’m ’bout done wid ’em out home. I ’spec de city folks what’ll live yere atter we-all gone’ll want what little dab er trees dey got in dis yard.”

He looked scornfully at the back yard, generous in size, after the fashion of our Southern cities, and shaded with fine old trees. But a little later, high in the hackberry, his love of all earth-rooted things swept contempt from his heart, and his dark old face shone with happiness as he wielded the hatchet with rhythmic

his dark old face shone with happiness as he wielded the hatchet with rhythmic strokes.

That is always the beginning of the spring work—the severance of death from life, that life may rise again, even out of death. Where would life draw this dead matter next? To darkness first, to growth most surely, and perchance, some day, to wings. And the dark old man with the happy face was servitor of life—life for the dead as for the living; for death is but the underside of life.

We went home early in May. The house would not be finished until October; but outdoors was all ready for us, and we could not waste the summer for lack of a house.

“You know,” I argued to the Peon, “we had a beautiful time in the mountains last summer; and we slept in a two-roomed cottage with only weather-boarding between us and the trees outside. Why can’t we have a shed with a gasoline stove, and a couple of tents to live in?”

So we had them. The Peon and David drove in to Chatterton daily and took the train for business and school; and I fed the birds and followed Uncle Milton, and drank in the changing beauties of earth and sky. And all summer we watched our home grow, from cellar to roof-tree, till it became a thing complete, and fitted into the landscape for which it was designed.

We set it on the old home’s hill, which overlooked the countryside, and faced it toward the sunrising. The dark lines of cedars which had bordered the approach to the old house were left at one side, and the road, curving from their upper end, swept into full sunshine and passed under a great beech, which spread its tiers of leaves above the doorway. It is an unpretentious house, rambling about pretty much as it pleases in its efforts to give southern and eastern and western exposures to all the rooms. Porches are everywhere, and the windows either open on them, like doors, or stop a little above the floor at low, cushioned seats, which tempt one to sink down and wonder once again at the beauty of this fair country of middle Tennessee. There are no curtains at the windows, nor mats of vines outside. But up the widely-separated columns of the porches run clematis and jasmines which cross the great openings in narrow bands, above and below. So all summer the fretwork of green leaves frames the landscape, a perfect, yet everchanging picture in each of the wide spaces. The east end of the living-room is of glass, and my flowers flourish there in winter time. In my own room the bed stands in a deep recess formed all of windows on the three sides. A low seat

bed status in a deep recess formed all of windows on the three sides. A low seat runs under them within reach of the bed. All through the dark, sleepless night I can lie there and watch for the first paling of the eastern sky, and follow the level light as it moves softly along the southern hills, creating the shadows which make the light so clear.

It must be confessed that some of the kin at Chatterton thought my wits astray that first summer, and the Peon but a soft-headed, poor-spirited creature for giving way to my whimsies. Camping out was not as popular then as it is now; and the older members of the family did not hesitate to commiserate the Peon and David. That they professed to enjoy our long picnic only added to the heinousness of my folly.

Cousin Chadwell Grackle and his wife were among my first callers. Cousin Chad is always to the front when anything new crops up in the family. He has cried the sins and shortcomings of the whole usual order so long that even he is half bored with them, and the prospect of something new to criticise whets his social appetite to the keenest possible edge. Cousin Jane is his reflection and echo. If she were not, even her stolid nerves could scarcely have endured his painful type of piety without disaster.

They drove up one sunshiny morning, after they had seen the Peon and David pass on their way to town. I was on the cot under the biggest maple. Its seven trunks fall apart like long-stemmed flowers in a vase, spreading into a great green tent whose leafy curtains droop in a circle full seventy feet across.

The blackbirds were my principal guests that morning, a sanctimonious crew in sleek black coats, solemn, censorious, and self-satisfied to the last degree. All birds which walk instead of hopping are awkward-looking; but none are as preposterous as the blackbirds, because none of them put on such sanctified airs. As they moved about this morning, their heads thrust meekly forward, ducking modestly as they stepped, they appeared to be meditating on their neighbors' sins. But they had their tribe's keen eye for the main chance, and it was a swift bird and a wary one which secured a big crumb with these feathered Chadbands in the yard.

I looked up at the sound of wheels and nearly choked with swallowing my laughter. Cousin Chad and Cousin Jane did look so sleek and proper, that as I rose to meet them I could not refrain from throwing some extra crumbs on the grass for possible additions to my breakfasting guests.

They descended ponderously and looked at me with the apprehensive scrutiny one might bestow on a lunatic who is liable to break out immediately in a fresh place.

“How are you, Lyddy?” inquired Cousin Jane, with sepulchral anxiety. Cousin Chad, busy with the hitching-post, listened with his back as well as with his ears. They both know perfectly that I have always been Lil to everyone except the great-aunts, and that Lyddy has been an abomination to the entire family connection, and especially to me, since they first invented it in my childhood. That is why they stick to it. They believe in chastenings, do my cousins, the Grackles—particularly when they are the chasteners.

“I’m perfectly well,” I answered, with added emphasis to my usual formula. “Come and sit down. There’s no need to ask how you and Cousin Chad are; you look the picture of health.”

“Appearances don’t do to go by, Lyddy,” she answered solemnly, sinking ponderously on a creaking campstool. “Chadwell’s been havin’ sciatica, and I’ve stayed awake nights with him till I’m just about worn out. But I’ve never made my afflictions an excuse for shirkin’ my duty. We came over to say that as you seem to be without a roof over your heads we’d take you to board till your house is finished—if it ever is.”

She glanced contemptuously at the amorphous piles of building material just beyond us.

“You can have the second spare bed-room upstairs,” put in Cousin Chad. “It’s more to my interest to put you in the front one; but livin’ comes high any way you take it, and I want to consider you. I reckon John ain’t able to spend much, with all this building on hand. The back room’s small, but you three can make out in it. If you want the other, of course it will cost more. You can come over this evening after John gets home, and he and I can settle the terms after supper.”

I kept my face quite straight, and made a handsome contribution to current fiction.

“It’s so kind of you. John will appreciate it as much as I. But we really enjoy camping, and would not give it up even for those lovely rooms of yours, Cousin Chad. Thank you so much.”

Cousin Jane's rubicund complexion assumed a purplish hue.

"Do you intend to kill that delicate child of Henry Bird's, making him sleep out in the weather all summer?" she demanded.

"No," I said, considering; "I don't intend to kill him, exactly. And he isn't at all delicate."

"Well, he will be by the time you get through with him—if he ain't dead," broke in Cousin Chad. "Lyddy, it's my duty to speak plainly, and I'll not shirk it. Letitia spoiled you from the time you were born, and John Bird seems bent on keeping it up. David will pay the penalty for it. We do a very different part by the orphan the Lord made it our duty to take charge of, I can assure you. Caroline Wrenn's health is taken care of, with a view to her future usefulness as a Christian. But of course you'll stick to your own ways.—Well, I've warned you: my conscience is clear. Come, Jane: we'd better be going."

"I'm glad your conscience is clear, Cousin Chad. I know that's a comfort to you, if I'm not. But we can be good friends, can't we, even though our ideas are different?"

"I shall not turn my back upon you if you're in trouble, Lyddy, if that's what you mean," he answered. "I hope I know my duty better than that. But when you want help again you must ask for it. I don't intend to offer it."

"That's a bargain, then," I said; "and we must both remember it."

Cousin Jane looked at me sharply, but Cousin Chad was already heaving her into the buggy, and she turned to get a good grip on the side. The vehicle creaked as she settled in it, and groaned when Cousin Chad sank beside her.

"Good-bye, Lyddy," she said. "We've done our best. I hope you won't regret it."

This quite upset me, and after the cedars hid them I lay laughing until the thought of poor little Caro suddenly sobered me. What were they doing to Billy's child? I must make friends with Cousin Jane, somehow, and entice the little thing over to Bird Corners as much as possible.

There was no one else whom our erratic manner of life really scandalized, except Cousin Jason Blue; and he, as he took occasion to tell me when he met me out driving one day with Caro, never made a fool of himself like Chad Grackle by

driving one day with Caro, never made a fool of himself like Chad Grackie by meddling. If a woman wanted to follow her nature and behave like a lunatic, and her husband chose to allow it, it was none of his business; so he shrugged his shoulders and passed on.

Cousin Jason and the Grackles are the only kin I have in all Chatterton whose kinship I would discount if I could; but there is no denying they belong in the family. Cousin Chad's father was my grandmother's third half-cousin on my father's side; and Cousin Jason's mother was Cousin Lysander Hilliard's step-daughter by his second marriage: there could scarcely be anything plainer than that.

And if Cousin Jason had his drawbacks, there are none about his half-sister, Grace, fifteen years his junior, and, except Ella, the dearest friend I have. She married George Wood soon after I married the Peon, and they have a daughter, Milly, about the age of Caro Wrenn.

David took kindly to country life, and to his numerous cousins-by-marriage. There were plenty of boys among them; and though at first they resented David's city ways, their respect for him grew immensely when they found how far he could bat a ball; and after he had whipped Bob White in single combat he was admitted to Chatterton boydom as a comrade in full fellowship. There was no particular reason for his fighting Bob, so far as we dull grown-ups could discover, except that Bob was the leader of his set, and a fight was considered the necessary initiation to membership. As soon as this was made clear to him, David had painstakingly trodden on Bob's toes, and the preliminaries were arranged at once. The boys were excellent friends, before and afterward; and the Peon would not allow me to discuss the matter with David. They talked it out in private, and reached some amicable male conclusion of their own.

Of the girl cousins David was loftily tolerant, excepting Caro Wrenn. She was five years old the spring we came back to the country, when David was half-past nine. Her mother had died when she was born, and her father, Billy Wrenn, had gone to Colorado three years afterward, to die there of consumption. He made Cousin Chad Caro's guardian before he died, knowing, as we all did, Cousin Chad's remarkable ability in reaping financial harvests from even the smallest investments; but he left the child herself with her mother's sister, Sally Martin, never dreaming that death would again bereave the little creature of a mother's love. Sally died, quite suddenly, less than a year after Billy; and Cousin Chad and Cousin Jane, intent, as usual, on doing their impeccable duty, assumed sole

care of the little heiress, and installed her in their own childless and virtuous home.

A more incongruous setting for her could scarcely have been found. She was a tiny creature, with rose-leaf skin, great hazel eyes, a mop of red-brown curls, and a mouth where laughter bubbled all day long. Quick and bird-like in all her movements, she flitted in and out of the most unexpected recesses in the twinkling of an eye, with endless flutterings of hands and skirts and sweet gurglings of suppressed laughter. Almost from her cradle she sang—queer little soft croonings which slipped into tunes before she could speak their words. Cousin Jane scarcely knew what to make of her, and was torn between a sincere desire to do her Spartanly-Christian duty by her, and her solemn puzzlement over what she considered the child's combination of depravity and charm. Even Cousin Jane could not be very severe with her; but she had an uneasy sense of spoiling her every time she forebore the rod, so that I found her more than willing to turn the child over to me for the greater part of the time.

This arrangement gave my revered relative ample warrant for looking closely into my household affairs and reproving me for everything she did and didn't discover; it was her duty to know all about a place where dear Caroline spent so much of her time. And when Caro departed from Cousin Jane's ideals, as she did with every movement of body and mind, it was a great relief to my pious cousin to be able publicly to disavow all responsibility for the child's shortcomings. What, as she constantly inquired, could one expect of Caroline when that scatter-brained Lyddy would persist in encouraging the child in her flightiness? She published abroad her own powerlessness to control either Caro or the situation, and openly washed her hands of the consequences.

Caro and I bore up as best we could, and the Peon and David stood by us nobly. David, indeed, was ready to fight his idol's battles with Cousin Jane herself. In fact, he grew up with a lack of respect for that excellent lady which tempted her to assume the role of a prophet, in which capacity she dwelt at large on the penitentiary as David's ultimate place of residence. Caro always responded to these prognostications that, if Davy went to the penimtentium, she would go, too, as soon as she was big enough, and keep house for him, and make the cook give them ice-cream every day that came. And so the matter rested.

III

In Make-Believe

It is four years since I wrote those last words. Not long after, Caro went away to school. David went North to college that year, and was only coming home for the regular holidays. He still held to his boyhood preference, and was determined to be a scientific farmer: and since the Peon and I were to have him with us always, we wanted him to have a few years quite away from us in which to make his own adjustments to life. So they left us the same week, David with all a boy's love to hold him back, and a young man's eagerness to urge him away; and Caro in as nearly easterly weather as her sunny nature ever experienced.

It was Cousin Jane who first decided on Caro's banishment. For the sake of her own peace of mind she had of late years resigned the child almost entirely to me; but every now and then she had what Caro called a "qualm spell." During these painful periods Caro resided with the Grackles, strictly, not even coming over to take lunch with me. She arose at five and extinguished her light at nine; and pinned on the wall beside her bureau, in Cousin Jane's firm handwriting, was a schedule of useful occupations for each of the intervening sixteen hours.

She had so much time for devotions, so much for meals, so much for school, for study, for "domestic occupations," for "improving and useful reading," and for "practical sewing." Cousin Jane never allowed precious time wasted on fancy work; and if she thought it was all like the awful things she had in her parlor I don't in the least blame her for thinking it wicked.

However, Caro's time was laid out for her as exactly as the squares on a checker-board. She fed the chickens, argued with the old biddies who wanted to "set" in the wrong place, and wheedled the arrogant old Buff Orpington, who ruled the hens and Cousin Jane with ease and contempt, into doing whatever she wanted of him. She made butter that drew near-smiles to Cousin Jane's stiff lips, and evolved cakes that called forth lectures to Cousin Chad on the sin of gluttony. She sewed, without a murmur, or a particle of trimming, undergarments of good, reliable, ever-wearing domestic. She was always foresighted enough to make ample allowance for their shrinking when washed; whereby she both pleased Cousin Jane and insured an excellent fit for little black

Josie when she returned to us with a halo of virtue above her red-brown curls. She read history till she could put me to the blush. She washed the best tea-cups and the Persian cat. She dusted the parlor daily. And from her early childhood she made irreproachable jam.

It really was excellent training for her; thorough good discipline, as Cousin Jane would say; especially as it was interspersed with “spells of Bird-Cornering,” during which she sojourned with the Peon and me. For the period of discipline always followed an accustomed round. It began with a Cousin Jane all severity, lynx-eyed to drag poor Caro’s delinquencies to light and overcome them by unsparing criticism. But Caro has always made play of everything, finding by the talisman of her own happy heart the hidden beauty, or laughter, of the ugliest and solemnest things. She did all Cousin Jane found for her to do—which is saying a good deal—not only cheerfully, but with whole-souled delight, as if it were her very meat and drink. Doing it that way, she did it beyond criticism; and Cousin Jane would begin to relax, unwillingly, unable to find a flaw, yet with an uneasy feeling that something must be wrong, or Caro couldn’t possibly be enjoying herself so much. When she set herself to mortify Caro’s girlish vanity the child met her more than half-way. She did her best to “slick” her curls, and donned shapeless gingham aprons as joyously as though they were made of jewels and lace. Cousin Jane would find herself being mollified to the point of indulgence in spite of herself; and about that time Caro would come flying into the yard at Bird Corners and drop fluttering beside me, her eyes shining with the pure joy of living and the love of living things.

“I’m back again, Mammy Lil,” she would laugh, whirling about on one toe. “Cousin Jane hasn’t scolded me for four days, and yesterday she almost patted my head; so I knew she thought I’d had training enough for the present, and I’d be coming back home in a jiffy. They’re so good to me in their funny way I’m most ashamed to be glad to come home to you—but I am, all the same. Where’s Josie? I’ve made three new petticoats and a night gown for her, out of muslin strong enough to climb trees.”

The truth was that when Caro came back to me it was because Cousin Jane had detected in her own soul symptoms of the child’s being made an idol: she had to get rid of her to recover her own moral poise. But she still intended to do her full duty by her: so when Caro was fifteen she was sent to boarding school, to remain at least five years. By that time Cousin Jane hoped to have re-established her own imperturbability without unduly exposing her charge to the dangerous influences of Bird Corners

.....

We had a battle royal concerning the school she should go to, and to this day Cousin Jane thinks she won. She really has no more idea about schools than a chinquapin worm, living fat and contented in its own sufficient little world; and I knew she'd be for sending the child to some fifth-rate country "college" where she'd be taught poor music and worse French, and be worked to death learning things the way they aren't. So I wrote, ostentatiously, for the catalogue of one of the most exclusive, nonsensical, and extravagant "finishing schools"; and privately ordered sent to Cousin Jane one from the school I wished Caro to attend. It was a sensible place where she'd be taken care of, and given a chance to grow up to the best of herself in body and mind. I plead for the finishing school, and sniffed diligently at the other, even advocating the dreaded "college" as preferable; whereby I had the comfort of having Caro sent where I wanted her, with Cousin Jane's mind so definitely set on keeping her there that I knew her education was provided for.

Caro rebelled against going. For the first time in her life she did not want to please us.

"You're not well enough to do without me and David, too, Mammy Lil," she insisted; "it's just a pretense that you don't need me; and I don't care whether I'm educated or not."

She yielded to the inevitable between tears and laughter.

"Anyway," she reflected, "there's Make-Believe left: you'll never get rid of me there, will you? I'll come there every day of the world, and David, too: and ten times a day if you want me."

It was a genuine relief to have her go; it was becoming most difficult to blind her bright eyes to my illness. It was much simpler to keep up appearances with the Peon, who left home early and returned late, and who was often called away for days together. If I sat up as usual when he was in the house it was becoming necessary to lie quite still all day.

For weeks after the children left I enjoyed being alone, and the freedom from effort which it brought. But as the winter wore on, the loneliness proved a lure to introspection and self-pity—those quicksands of despair which encircle the country of enforced idleness; and as I lay under my windows or beneath the trees I began, for pleasure and companionship, to write the story of our happy life and

— began, for pleasure and companionship, to write the story of our happy life and of the children's growing up. But the note-book proved desperately heavy, and the few pages I filled took weeks instead of days; until at last I ceased the effort until I should be stronger, as I had ceased so many other things in this journeying into the Land of Idleness.

I made a new acquaintance that winter—a wretched little blue devil to whom I gave the name of Grumpy, and with whom I battled from morning till night, and especially from night till morning. It is not pain that blue devils thrive on—I had proved that all these many years; it is idleness that gives them their chance for mischief—the helpless idleness of utter exhaustion, when one's thoughts hang vacant, and body nor mind can longer force its way past the wall of pain to move, however slowly, in the beautiful outside world of human effort and achievement.

So Grumpy came to Bird Corners. Satan himself knows no self-respecting devil would have stayed on the premises after the way I treated the creature; but blue devils respect neither themselves nor anybody else. An hour after I had flung him out by the heels he would bob up by the sofa in the finest fettle imaginable, grinning at my exhaustion from our late encounter. The most I ever could be sure of doing was keeping him invisible to every one else; but he made up for that in the nights. Still, one adjusts one's self to the inevitable in time; and blue devils are all in the day's work, I suppose, like the dentist or a cold in one's head. One gets through with the visitation somehow, and laughs afterward because, for the time, at least, it is over.

When the children came home in the summer there was trouble, of course. Doctors came and went, though I had privately done my full duty by them long before; and I swallowed a deal of nasty stuff which did absolutely no good, except that it soothed the feelings of the family.

By the end of the summer David was insisting on something radical; and when he went back to college he took me with him, and deposited me in a northern sanitarium, where I was to lie flat on my back three months, and be made over as good as new.

This was not only radical, but revolutionary. Chatterton had never before furnished an inmate for a sanitarium. The word, indeed, was commonly understood as a polite euphemism for a lunatic asylum. The sentiments of the kin ranged all the way from Grace Wood's anxious hopefulness to Cousin Jane's frank curiosity concerning what new kind of craziness I yddy had been up to

Frank curiosity concerning what new kind of craziness Lyddy had been up to now, to make John Bird feel like she had to be shut up in a private mad-house. She took my part, however, so far as to say, both to my face and behind my back, that I wasn't a mite crazier than I'd been all my life; and if folks could get along with me this long it did look like a pity they couldn't put up with me a while longer, and save disgracing the family. There was nothing the matter with me, Cousin Jane opined, beyond being spoiled to death, and lazy; and, anyway, it was flying in the face of Providence to go on living if your time had come to die.

As to going North, she never did believe in wasting money on conceited Yankee doctors when there were so many struggling physicians at home, to say nothing of the heathen in foreign lands who were dropping into hell-fire so many a minute for lack of any kind of doctors, good or bad, to keep them alive until the missionaries could get to them.

"But it's no use preachin' to selfish ears," she concluded, drawing her heavy silk wrap about her ample shoulders and settling her bonnet strings. "I've been wastin' my breath, of course."

It seemed a pity that she should, whether from my point of view or her own; so I smiled as sympathetically as I could, and offered my cheek for her farewell salute. She bestowed it impressively.

"Well, good-bye, Lyddy. I suppose I won't see you again in this life; an' in the other one failin' wits won't trouble us, I trust. I want you to know I don't hold any of your foolishness against you, child: I reckon you never did have sense like the rest of us."

She went out with her ponderous, firm tread, and Caro flitted to my side, her head thrown up, ruffling like an angry wren.

"Mammy Lil, its a shame you made me promise to be good! Do let me run after her and——" She caught my eye and broke into bubbling laughter, dropping her head on my pillows and snuggling her little nose under my chin.

"Of course it's funny," she admitted presently; "and if you will laugh, I have to. But I can't see how she can be so wooden-headed and yet be alive."

"She isn't alive very much, poor soul!" I answered, soberly enough. "I don't think anvbody really lives excent so far as they understand life—and people

...than anybody really lives except so far as they understand me — and people. When you think of it in that way, Cousin Jane has lived in a closer confinement all her life than I'll be when I get to the asylum."

That was three years ago, and more, and I am here at the sanitarium yet, though the Peon is coming to take me home next month. It was I who set the limit of my stay at three months, when I came; I was determined to be well by that time. I even had Caro put my note-book in my trunk, because I expected to fill it before I came back. That is why I am writing this chapter, a few lines at a time, on good days: I am determined to do something that I planned doing, before I go back.

It would take more note-books than my trunk could hold to tell the story of the kindness shown me here; of the patience, skill, and resourcefulness which have fought for me when I could no longer fight for myself. And it is good to be in a place like this for awhile, to learn what human nature is capable of under racking, tearing strain. The courage one finds, the high-hearted endurance of plain, ordinary people, the brave good cheer of men and women whose pain-lined faces choke one's throat with tears! I have seen these things so often these last eighteen months—or at least in so much of them as I could be carried, lying flat in a wheeled-chair, out on one of the balconies, where I could catch glimpses of the struggles that were going on around me.

It is not all loss, this suffering. Sickness does bring out hidden ugliness and weakness, for it searches soul and body to the inmost core. But there is more good hidden than there is evil; and in the stress of suffering the most ordinary people blossom into a loveliness of soul which reveals them as of the company of the saints. Life is so narrow and commonplace to the average experience that it can only make a narrow and commonplace appeal. "The trivial round, the common task" has, for so many, no large connections; and the depths of their natures are never stirred until their every-day world lies in ruins about them, and to live at all they must discover new resources in

"—that true world within the world we see,"

and gain a true perspective and a new horizon.

And the funny folk in a place like this—they would fill volumes, too! Of course they are pitiful; but I never could see the harm of laughter over pitifulness, if only one doesn't laugh unkindly. For some of them never find new resources.

Disaster leads them, not to discovery, but to an impasse; and they revenge themselves on the inexplicable by endless incongruities of thought and action.

The patient who really helped me most was a dear old lady who, though forbidden, like the rest, to talk to me, felt it her heaven-sent mission to cheer me up. Whenever she saw me deposited on the porch she flew out, wringing her hands in sympathy, and exclaiming, "Oh, what is life without health!" It really is a good deal when you come to think of it; and the old lady's reiterations elicited a string of mental replies as long as from western New York to Bird Corners, and kept me in ammunition for Grumpy.

For Grumpy has been at this sanitarium for three years and seven weeks. But the Peon has been here, too, and David—and Cousin Jane! Caro I have not seen in all these years: Cousin Jane doesn't consider it decent for a young girl to be allowed in a place where women may be seen in the halls in kimonos, and men are allowed to sit in wheeled-chairs on the balconies, shamelessly clad in their bath robes, with heaven knows what garments, or lack of garments, underneath. Caro should not set foot in the place; and no entreaties could move her. But Caro has written, every week of the world; and, to make up for my not having her, Cousin Jane paid me a visit herself. She felt it her duty, she said, to find out what kind of a place it was that John Bird had shut Lyddy up in; and if the rest of the family wouldn't look after me, she would. So she came, suspicious and inquisitorial, and melted visibly under the tactful suavity of the physician in charge,—“the Head,” as we called him. She even began to help him, ministering to the patients after a fashion all her own. She had it out with one of them, a metaphysical lady, a very unorthodox person, and left her in a state of collapse. In no uncertain tones she expressed her views on hen-pecking to another, an elderly lady with a liver and a youthful husband. I don't know what would have happened further if I had not been inspired to beguile her into going down into the treatment rooms for a Turkish bath. She came up purple with wrath, and began to pack her trunk, declaring that she washed her hands of the place forever; and if I wanted to stay there and have my morals corrupted, I could; but for her part she was going back to her own bathtub, and the religion she was brought up in. And so she did, that night.

For myself, these three years must remain in the silence in which they have been spent. The pain I wish to forget; today's pain is enough. And the helplessness and idleness, so much worse than the pain—that too, I would shut from my memory. But the kindness which has filled these years—that is an eternal possession. And the loveliness of this little valley is mine always, cut off as it is

possession. And the loveliness of this little valley is mine always, cut off as it is in my thoughts as a place apart from all my real world and life, shut in and hidden by its beautiful circling hills. I have called it the Enchanted Valley, because it seemed sometimes as if some spell had caught and bound me to it forever. But now that I am to go free at last I can forget all that, and remember only the enchantment of its beauty, and the kindness of those who dwell in it. The Land of Make-Believe, too, is as near me as under the trees at home. I have had beautiful times in Make-Believe, day and night, and especially at night. I have seen Caro there, you may be sure! I made a jingle about it not long ago which tells the real story of these long years better than anything else I could write.

IN MAKE-BELIEVE

Oh, beautiful country of Make-Believe,

Where in childhood I learned to play!

I'm not bound fast to a bed—not I!

Nor racked with pain till I want to cry:

I'm over the hills and away!

Poor body that lies here and cannot sleep,

I'm sorry to leave you so;

But the children are calling from far away;

In Make-Believe, where it's time to play,

And you can't walk, you know.

I fly on the wings of thought, myself,

While the wind shrieks behind me "Wait!"

For he never can fly as fast as thought,

And, he howls because he thinks he ought;—

But here I am at the gate.

No narrow, smothering walls for me,
Nor life shut in from the sky,
When Make-Believe is all outdoors,
With beautiful grass instead of floors,
And to reach it one needs but try.

There is ice back there; but in Make-Believe
There's just what you happen to choose:
Soft spring-time colors with silver sheen,
Or cool wood-reaches of summer green,
Or the sparkle of autumn dews.

Oh, the woodland rambles in Make-Believe!
The fields where daisies grow!
The level light on the evening hills,
The wild bird-song that leaps and thrills,
And the rose of the sunset's glow!

How the children chatter in Make-Believe,
Just as at home they do!
How close they cuddle, with laugh and kiss,

To tell their secrets, nor ever miss
Aught else if they have but you!

All the people you love are in Make-Believe,
The living, and those called dead;
And all the people you'd like to know—
The wise of the earth, both high and low,
And the heroes of days long fled.

And they know what's worth while in Make-Believe
That to give is the blessed way;
That courage, and laughter, and love, are wise;
That the sun shines back of the cloudiest skies;
That there's end to the longest day.

They talk of high things in Make-Believe,
And they love e'en the tiniest joke
And they take you sailing o'er land and sea;
And they'd know all the places you'd like to be
If never a word you spoke.

But the sun is up in that wintry world;

And the nurse will put in her head

And ask, “Is the pain any better, my dear?

Did you sleep a little? The doctor’s here.”—

Well, so am I here——in bed!

And now it is mid-November, for the weeks have passed by as I lay here, writing a bit as I could; and I am to be home Thanksgiving morning; not home in Make-Believe, but home in real Bird Corners, down in Tennessee! David is there, for good, now, running the farm as he planned, but helping the Peon in his office, too; and Caro is coming home for Christmas, and to stay “forever,” she says, in June; and I am to get well—some day—at home. I can walk quite a little already—twenty yards sometimes; and the bad days are better than they used to be, and farther apart. Even Grumpy must admit that good bad days are encouraging!

All the people you love in Make-Believe? Not quite all—not Ella. Somehow I can’t look for her there any more; not since the day the letter came back unopened. We were together in Make-Believe always before that. But when I see her again it will be when Make-Believe will have disappeared, with the world we see, and the real world will be plain to sight. But everybody else was there—even pious, pompous Cousin Chad, and foolish, kind-hearted, exasperating Cousin Jane.

And now it’s day after tomorrow, and the Peon is coming in four days!

IV

The Dark O' the Year

November 30th. The deepest joys can never be put into words; but lying here in my own dear room, close under the long windows which form its eastern side, and looking out across the valley to the familiar hills beyond, I know there is one spot on the map more beautiful than anything Make-Believe can show. The Peon and David left me only an hour ago—the real ones, I mean; and out on the lawn Uncle Milton is pretending to rake invisible leaves, looking towards my windows every few minutes to assure himself that I am really here.

Near the wall of honeysuckle along the pasture fence the cardinal and his wife are flitting about, just as I left them three years ago; and in the lilac outside my window, where all the spring-time beauty sleeps safe in the sheltering buds, a Carolina wren proclaims the triumph of days to come. His spring song is a bubbling rhapsody of present love and delight; but his winter song is vibrant with the joy of things unseen. He sings as one who carries spring in his heart always, as vivid a reality in December as when all the woods are green. To doubts, questions and hopes he has one answer, and he gives it joyously under the darkest skies. Will earth awake again? Will sunshine come? Will life reign in evident triumph, and winter and darkness pass? Sur-e-ly, sur-e-ly, sur-e-ly, sure! The rich notes thrill with the joy of assurance, and shake him bodily as he stands with up-thrown head and pulsing throat, wagging from beak to tail.

But like many another of the sons of the prophets, his gift of open vision lies close to his love of fun. His tail jerks with a wildness suggestive of broken gearings in his little insides, as he dashes into his score again *accelerando*, singing it *da capo* with a comical exaggeration of his former style. Sure-ly, sure-ly, sure-ly, sure! He cocks his head, flirts his tail, gives me a sharp look from his sharper eye, and whisks around the house in a twinkling.

And Grace Wood is coming to see me tomorrow! I have been good and waited until I am quite rested, and now I am to have my reward. But I did not know until I came home that George died two years ago. There were never two people happier together than they; and yet she has gone on writing to me all this time, the same sunshiny, hopeful, heartening letters she sent me when I first left home.

That was always Grace's way; everything that came to her, hurt or pleasure, went out from her again only as help to somebody who needed it.

I haven't seen Cousin Jane yet, and David says she's been simmering for days and is liable to boil over any minute. She came an hour after I reached home, though requested to stay away until I sent for her; but the Peon caught her at my door and turned her back. She insisted she had something of the greatest importance to explain to me; but the Peon is an awesome person when he does lay down the law, and she hasn't been back since. I can't help wondering if it is something about Caro—though it can't be, for I've been Caro's "mother-confessor" too long to be learning anything about her from Cousin Jane. Besides, Caro will be here herself in three more weeks—after all these years and years!

December 9th. Grace came, her old dear self, unchanged except that the look of detachment from herself was deepened in her clear, sweet eyes, and about her smiling, tender mouth.

We spoke of George as if he were still with her—as indeed I think he is—and of Milly, now quite grown, and sharing with Caro the honors of Chatterton belledom.

We had a beautiful time together, and chatted and giggled as we have done these forty years whenever occasion offered; and she went away promising to come soon again if I would keep on getting better. And so I would have done but for Cousin Jane. She was driving down the pike and saw Grace, with her own eyes, coming through the gate. She drove on down the road a bit till Grace was out of sight, and then swooped down on me like a blackbird on a worm. Josie tried to stop her at the front door; but she had known Josie from her pickaninny days; and if she hadn't, it wouldn't have mattered, for Cousin Jane is not a person to be frustrated by darkies.

She knocked once, sepulchrally, on my door, and opened it on the instant. She wore her best Sunday air, and eyed me like a familiar of the Holy Office about to put a heretic through a course of sprouts.

"Well, Lyddy," she began, settling weightily into Grace's chair, "so you lived to get back home, after all. I hope you're as grateful to Providence as you ought to be."

Her tone made it evident that, though she might hope it, she certainly didn't expect it.

"You've gone off mightily in your looks," she continued; "not that you weren't always sorter peaked an' skinny-lookin'—'slender,' Letitia used to call it! Do you think your mind's gettin' straight any?"

"It's straight, what there is of it," I said; "but I'm tired just now, Cousin Jane; I can't talk very well. You see Grace has been here——"

"Didn't I see her?" she demanded indignantly. "That's why I came. If you can see a chatterer like her, I reckon you can see me. I told John Bird I wanted to see you about Caroline."

My tired eyes opened at once.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Caroline is gettin' grown-up; she was nineteen last June. I've tried my best to keep beaux and foolishness away from her, but everything in town, looks like, was after her last summer; and the worst of it was, Caroline liked it."

The corners of my mouth took an upward curve.

"You wait till I get through, missy, an' you'll be laughin' the other side of your mouth. Caroline is hail-fellow-well-met with every boy in this town except David Bird; and she knows perfectly well, for I told her, that Chadwell and I and you and John Bird intend her to marry David."

The room swam round, and I closed my eyes. Speech was impossible.

"Good land, Lyddy! Don't go to faintin'—I didn't know you were such a baby. You needn't get so scared, child. Jane Grackle is pretty safe to get her own way, and long as your way's my way you'll get yours, too. She'll marry him yet; young folks haven't any sense; they need managin', and I——"

"For heaven's sake don't try to manage Caro," I gasped. "And as for telling her I intended her to marry David—go, before you say something else that will make forgiveness impossible!"

Cousin Jane turned purple. I saw that as my eyes closed again. She rose stiffly.

Cousin Jane turned purple. I saw that as my eyes closed again. She rose sunny, with rustling skirts.

“If I didn’t know you’d lost what little sense the Lord gave you, Lyddy Bird, I’d box your ears for your impudence. I’ll go when I get ready, miss. I didn’t tell Caroline you said you intended her to marry David—I know you’ve never said a word about it: I just took it as a matter of course. Chadwell and I feel it our duty to provide for her—not in money, of course; she has quite a tidy little fortune of her own, and of course you and John Bird expect to leave David all you’ve got; they won’t need anything from us. But we want to see her settled: an’ David’s steady an’ reliable an’ a real good business boy, for all you’ve raised him so harum-scarum; an’ it stands to reason, with your keepin’ Caroline all the time like you did, an’ throwin’ away the good stout clothes I provided for her to waste your own money in fol-de-rols, an’ good as adoptin’ her, you might say, that you’d picked her out for David an’ meant to leave them your money. Don’t you?”

I swept together my floating wits, steadied them with a supreme effort, and considered for an instant, while I felt Cousin Jane’s angry stare battering at my closed lids. I must tell her something, and nothing.

“Caro and David are like our own children,” I said weakly; “we want their happiness, and nothing else. If they love one another as brother and sister, it’s quite to be expected, don’t you think? Whatever made you think we wanted a marriage, brought up as they have been?”

“Do you mean you won’t leave them the money?”

“I mean money has nothing to do with it. We expect to do all we can for them, and to let them be happy in their own ways, not in ours.”

“Well, any way suits Caroline that’s not my way an’ that makes mischief—I can see that plain enough, an’ I told her so. I scolded her good. An’ it’s my opinion David’s in love with her. I caught him lookin’ at her one day when they were fishin’ down by the mill, an’ I just happened to go by in the buggy. I couldn’t get a word out of him when I asked him about it; an’ when I told him I’d given Caroline a talkin’-to, an’ I’d set my head on his havin’ her, he glared at me as if I was tryin’ to murder him, an’ told me to let Caroline alone, an’ let her marry whoever she wanted to. He ain’t been near me since, an’ won’t hardly speak to me; an’ Caroline behaved like a spitfire when I went to her about it. But I believe David’s willin’ if she’d be—but she ain’t yet. You may as well know

believe David's worth it, she'd be — but she ain't, yet. You may as well know there's goin' to be trouble when she comes home. It ain't like it used to be; an' you'd better get up out of that bed an' be gettin' ready to help straighten things out."

How much longer she would have stayed there I don't know. Her voice, near and strident as it was, was drifting off into a world that seemed far away, when the door opened with soft quickness and David was in the room.

Before he could speak Cousin Jane was lumbering away, his eyes driving her like bayonets. He poured out something and held it to my lips, and then sat stroking my hand as gently as Caro could have done. And for days and nights I lay here in the clutch of the old weakness and the old pain, and scarcely heeding either in the blackness of this new fear. I have been trying for days to write it all down, thinking maybe I could face it better so, and find some way of deliverance from Cousin Jane's cataclysmic diplomacy.

That Caro should marry David! Has there ever been a time when I didn't hope for it? And I have never said it, even to the Peon himself, for fear the very walls should carry the secret and make the hope impossible: and now! If Jane Grackle—but there's no use railing; when one's hopes are in ruins it takes all one's strength to face the disaster; if I waste mine in reproaches I shall turn coward, and then Grumpy will rule my world.

December 17th. Gray days, with sullen skies which will neither shine nor storm. The mocking-birds have entered their winter silence, and eye me indifferently as they hop about under my windows picking up the crumbs which Josie scatters daily for my feathered guests. They never come together at this time of the year. Each goes his own path in solitude as well as in silence. But the flickers are more sociable, and the wrens are always in pairs. The cardinal and his wife come together every morning, she gently indifferent as usual, and he the devoted lover of all the year around.

Over in the pasture the meadow-larks sing half-heartedly, and a titmouse protests sturdily against their sentimental pathos. He is pecking at a magnolia seed tucked under his toes as he sits in the beech at breakfast. "Here! Here! Here! Here!" he exclaims. He believes in making the best of things, does the titmouse, and holds his crest as high these dark, raw days as when he goes courting in a world that is in gala attire for the occasion.

And if the pain isn't better yet, the weakness is; and that is always the worst part of it. I shall be out in my wheeled-chair yet, by the time Caro comes. And as to Cousin Jane's nonsense, she may make mischief—has made it, evidently; but if they're really made for each other, as I have hoped for so long, surely an old woman's foolish tongue can never ruin their lives. Sur-e-ly, sur-e-ly, sur-e-ly, sure! Oh, bless the little red-brown seer! He tilts on the lilac bush a second, winks at me distinctly, and is off with a whisk of his tail which says plainly, "Don't be more of a fool than you must be, old pal!" and I won't.

December 24th. How full of happiness one's world can be! Caro is not much bigger than her feathered namesake out of doors, but the place overflows with her presence.

I was afraid Cousin Jane wouldn't let her stay here after the late unpleasantness, and was lying on the south porch the other day, trying to devise some way to make my peace with her, when she drove around the house and over the grass, and stopped her buggy close to my chair.

"Oh, Cousin Jane, I'm so glad to see you!" I exclaimed. "I've been wanting to ask you to let Caro come straight to me and stay with us while she's at home. I haven't had her for three years, Cousin Jane; and I can make it all right with her about David, I'm sure."

"I knew you could do something if you were a mind to try," she said, with her severest kiss-of-peace manner, which always aroused an unreasonable combativeness in my unregenerate soul. "I am perfectly willing, Lyddy, to let by-gones be by-gones. I never bear malice, even against ill-tempered folks. I came over to say if you'd do what you could with Caroline, I'd let her stay here. She always was keen to please you—why, I never could see; but she is; and I'll not let my personal feelin's stand in the way when it comes to dischargin' my duty to that poor motherless girl. She can come."

"Thank you, Cousin Jane," I said heartily.

"You're welcome, Lyddy, you're welcome: I don't hold anything against you. I want to set you a Christian example: maybe it'll have some effect on you, now you're all broken down with havin' too much of your own way. Looks like, with all the afflictions the Lord's sent on you, an' old as you are, you might be learnin' better."

I suppose I am a sinner; but somehow, all my life, whenever Cousin Jane takes her religion in both hands and tries to ram it into me in her best pile-driver manner, my own scuttles off and dives into the first rat-hole it can find; and I have a dreadful time dragging it out again and making it help me behave. So I took a long look at the blackbirds under the maple, piously jabbing the English sparrows to discourage their greediness about crumbs, before I said soberly:

“I don’t believe the Lord sent me any afflictions. I think He just tries to teach me how to get the good out of what comes, and to rise by it. I think that’s one of His special jobs in this world—trying to turn our afflictions into wings.”

“Well, we all know you’re sorter half-cracked, Lyddy,” said Cousin Jane, with a manner intended to be genial. She was evidently bent on not quarreling. “Just do your best for Caroline.” She gathered up the reins.

“Cousin Jane,” I said quickly, “don’t say a word more to Caro about—those things. Please.”

“I’ll do as I see fit, Lyddy,” she answered stiffly. “Bein’ willin’ to let you help don’t mean I can trust you to manage things. Well, good-bye. Do try to get up an’ take some exercise; it’ll do you good. I’m a worker, myself, an’ always was; an’ you see how strong I am—not but what I could complain if I wanted to, like some.” She disappeared around the house, tucking her buggy-robe closely around her with one hand as she drove.

So yesterday morning I was out on the front porch, watching the road with my glasses; and there they came, whirling in from the pike in the open car, the top being down that I might see her afar off. Caro was driving, and David beamed beside her, while the Peon beamed on the back seat.

The whole place feels her presence, and overflows with her music, her laughter, her sweet and tricky ways. She is off with the young folks in Chatterton now, helping with the Christmas tree at the church; but before she left she wheeled me out to my cot under the maple tree—or superintended Uncle Milton’s doing it, while she fluttered about with the pillows, and scolded us for letting her do all the work. She scattered crumbs for the birds, just as she used to, and then cuddled down on the same little stool where she used to sit, her curly brown head on my pillows. Not Make-Believe any more, thank heaven, but Caro, and the real Bird Corners!

We were silent awhile, and then she began to talk—all the loving nonsense and little intimate confidences that had always come when we were alone. But not a word of David, nor of Cousin Jane. I could not let our first talk begin a silence between us, so I told her what had happened. She had flushed a little at first, but her laughter bubbled as she kissed me.

“Sweet Mammy, don’t you think I know Cousin Jane? I knew you never said it, nor meant it. And I’m sure you’d let me marry the man in the moon, if I wanted to. I did get mad with her for talking to David—that rather passed bounds. But David’s a darling, and as sensible as can be. We thrashed it all out afterwards, and we aren’t going to make ourselves unhappy because Cousin Jane’s a born donkey and can’t help it. Don’t you bother about it a minute. We’ll both of us get married some of these days, and you’ll have four children to love you instead of two.”

“And there isn’t anybody else yet?” I asked, my face turning to hers as I lay, and her clear eyes looking into mine.

“I don’t think there is with David,” she said, considering; “but as for me—Mammy Lil, would you rather be a young man’s darling, or marry a very old and rich and apoplectic gentleman, worry him to death fast, and be happy and independent forever after?”

“Who is the young man?”

“Oh, anybody; I haven’t decided; but I suppose I could get one. You know I wrote you about the boys last summer, and how wild Cousin Jane was. She was more fun than the boys. You don’t really want me to marry, do you? I’m having such a good time.” She sat up and waved her hand. “There’s Milly, and I must go. Now, lie here and be good till I get back, and I’ll never marry anybody you don’t want me to.” And she ran down to the gate, pinning her hat on as she went.

December 30th. Note-books are superfluous when I can have Caro. It is so good to see one so pretty, so eager, so joyous, so young in body and soul. She is the very spirit of youth, with her swift, outgoing life, her quick response to it on all sides, her gay resourcefulness in the little emergencies of her small world. I forget my body, and all its pain-worn helplessness, while she dances through the house. It doesn’t matter so much that I must watch in idleness while the life I

love sweeps by, if somebody else has my own vivid joy in it—a joy unhampered by weariness or pain. No wonder the girls can't stir without her, nor resent it that she draws the boys as honey draws flies.

I can't see that she cares to draw any one of them yet, though she dearly loves to draw them all. She is in that kitten stage which comes to every girl alive. She wants to play, and she finds the new game fascinating. What the boys find it doesn't concern her yet; she is exploring the possibilities of the game.

How David feels toward her is more than I can tell. He is as frankly fond of her as when he used to carry her across the muddy places down by the brook, and tell her fairy tales while they popped corn by the winter fire. But as to that look in his eyes whereof Cousin Jane prated—well, I've never seen it; and I rather doubt if she did either.

Yet somehow I can't help the uneasy feeling that she has hoodooed my secret hopes. She never had influence enough to counteract anything other members of the family might elect to do; but whomever she sided with was a subject for condolence. She could never be suppressed when she espoused a cause, and her well-meant activities were invariably fatal to the best-laid plans. What have I done that, in addition to all my other afflictions, Cousin Jane should thrust herself upon me as an ally? I had counted so comfortingly upon her opposition. David was never fond of her, and it is only of late years that she has ceased to predict for him a future of State support. It isn't that she's fond of the boy now; it's because Cousin Chad found out how he managed that affair for the Peon last winter, and because the farm here at Bird Corners is becoming one of the show places, agriculturally, of this part of the State. And if a richer suitor appears she'll discard David like an old shoe.

I confess I am taking great comfort in the very apparent devotion of David's old antagonist, Robert White. He is older than David, and is advancing rapidly in one of the largest banks in the city, of which his father is an important director. Bob is a nice fellow, little spoiled by prosperity, and his prospective fortune quite overshadows David's—in fact, he is one of the "catches" of this part of the State. He has been staying out here at his father's ever since Caro came home, and makes no secret of the reason. If Cousin Jane becomes aware of him she will espouse his cause, con amore, and my own hopes will have a rosier appearance. Poor Bob! I don't bear him a bit of malice; but I must shunt Cousin Jane off on somebody!

January 5th. Caro left us last night, protesting as she went, and insisting that she would come home in defiance of everybody if I had any more backsets. But we all want her to finish the year under her new singing-master: her voice is really wonderful, and she ought not to stop yet. The six months will be gone before we know it; and then she will come to stay.

For myself, I have stored up delight enough in these ten days to brighten this dark January weather for weeks to come. And the days are already lengthening. Spring is on the way, in fact—and summer won't be far behind.

January 10th. What winter colors could bedeck the world I never knew until today!

First came the rain—a soft, misty down-dropping which fell noiselessly on the half-frozen earth, softening the icy ridges in the road beyond the porch, till they crunched under Uncle Milton's heavy feet and splashed into the water collecting in their ruts. Long before sunset they wheeled me back to my room, where the thickening clouds shut us into a twilight gloom, through which the north wind's voice cut icily.

By morning the clouds were gone, and with them had vanished the work-a-day earth. In its place is a world of faery, of glitter, of fire, of pallid white. Over all the fields the snow lies thick, down to the very edge of the brook. But above the snow, from the smallest weed whose skeleton shakes in the bitter wind to the topmost twig of the tallest tree, is silver and fire and ice. The stubble is all one elfin glitter; and beyond the gate, along the pike, where dried golden-rod, poke-berry, mustard, and all earth's wild outcast beauty blossomed months before, are billows of frost-wrought loveliness as pure as pearls and as delicate as the fronds of ferns.

Overhead the sky is deepest blue, rich foil and background for the trees, all silver here, all glitter there, and everywhere starred with flashing points of red and blue and orange, as some jagged point of ice catches the sunlight and tears it into dazzling shreds of color.

Deep blue, overhead; but everywhere along the horizon a soft, colorless, distant sky, across which the half-congealed moisture of the air draw its dimming yet invisible veil. The hills are pale, aloof; but here and there the low sun strikes

them and smites the glory of their tree-tops into a halo of pearl and fire about their brows. And what may be the beauty of life more abundant when the beauty of life withdrawn clutches the heart like this?

January 13th. There is nobody to fellowship with today but the blackbirds and the English sparrows. David is off lecturing at some farmers' institutes, and the Peon left this morning for a week's trip. Grumpy is here, as usual, and the pain in my spine; but I am not of a mind to fellowship with them; they can sulk together in the corner if they want to.

Eh, but when the dark shuts out even the scandal-mongering sparrows, the room is a bit empty and lonesome-looking! Grumpy and the back don't count; they are both in the skeleton-closet. But the key seems lost, and they have an unpleasant way of peeping through the crack of the door. There's no sense in staying here this night, so it's ho, for Make-Believe for me!

January 15th. When one can't have the big things one wants, one can at least play with the little things one has; and in doing so may learn with growing thankfulness how great a resource a little thing may become.

There are so many playthings in the world—no need is left unsupplied. When one is too ill to think and too weak to look, there are fleeting glimpses, through half-shut lids, of blue sky beyond one's windows, of a drifting cloud, a flash of wings, or the waving of boughs in the wind; beautiful pictures which return uncalled-for to float above that sea of pain wherein one rocks, and to steady one with a half-consciousness of an upper world of beauty and peace, real, though beyond one's reach.

And when one can think a little—oh, so many things! One cannot possibly be cut off from life if one's heart be in it. It isn't the moving of one's body that counts, but the clasping of life with the heart. We really live to the exact extent we care, and so find the interest with which every atom and phase of life is stored.

“He brought an eye for all he saw.”

Was ever anything more beautiful said of any one than that? And that is what I pray for—the seeing eye; that, whether my body be well or ill, I may enter in at the open doors which swing wide on every hand, and see, and love, and rejoice; understanding where I may, and happy where I may not to watch, to learn, to wonder like a child.

January 15th. The real freedom of life is measured not by one’s liberty to do as one likes, but by the things one can afford to do without. And there is no poverty in such freedom: it is through the enrichment of the inner life that one’s resources grow great enough to enable one to dispense with the outward things once so necessary.

V

Premonitions

January 21st. This is one of those beautiful, balmy days which sometimes come, late in January, to convince the veriest blind pessimist that spring is on the way. The chickadees are half mad, flying headlong from tree to tree, and singing their gay little winter score with an abandon unknown before. The titmice are whistling cheerily; and the jays, though not a hint of spring sweetness softens their harsh tones, are dancing a little in the hackberry as they squawk. The wren is singing rapturously, as he has done all these sunless weeks, not because of spring-time and April air, but because love and life are always present with him, and nothing else matters.

The mocking-bird is still solitary, wrapped in contemplation, like some prophet of old. Nor is the cardinal singing yet. But his not singing is no sign of faint-heartedness. Yesterday he perched in the tulip-tree and said “Cheer! Cheer! Cheer!” soberly, decidedly, as if the sweet reasonableness of good cheer had grown upon him through the dark January weather. He will be singing it soon.

There! I’ve been out on the porch, and written in my note-book on a bad day—the best bad day I’ve had yet; and when bad days are best bad days Grumpy may as well take a back seat.

January 28th. Best bad days are all very well; but a combination of best bad days and Cousin Jane is more grandeur than my feeble frame can live up to. It has taken me a week to catch up.

She drove up just as I closed my note-book—quite in time to catch me in the act.

“Tsch!” she said in disgust, as she whirled my chair about with a strong hand and wheeled me unceremoniously into the house. “I suppose you want to put your eyes out next, and have everybody pityin’ your afflictions when you’ve made yourself blind layin’ flat on your back an’ scribblin’ nonsense—poetry, like enough!” Contempt could no further go.

“I’m sure you never heard of my writing poetry in your life, Cousin Jane.” I

I'm sure you never heard of my writing poetry in your life, Cousin Jane," I protested meekly.

"No, an' I don't want to. I know just the kind of stuff it 'ud be. But I don't see what else you get to write layin' out there all by yourself, with nothin' to see, an' no sensible occupation to keep you busy. I never could abide an idler."

"When did you hear from Caro?" I inquired. In the interest of peace, a change of subject seemed advisable.

"Why, Caroline's careless about writin'—which of course I might have expected, seein' the way you brought her up. But Bob White's been up there lately, an' I saw him when I went to town yesterday. I met him on the street, while I was goin' to get my new glasses, an' he took me up to the new hotel to lunch."

She bridled with pleasure, and I coughed to strangle my laugh of delight. Bob White paying court to Cousin Jane, without my meddling the least little bit!

"We had four courses," she went on in happy retrospection. "I didn't know there was such a nice place in town. I don't eat much lunch usually when I go—looks like it ain't right to waste the Lord's money just pamperin' the flesh, as you might say; an' besides, I'd rather save it. I never did hold by spendin' money for foolishness like you an' John Bird."

I'm sure the Peon and I haven't been on the simplest kind of a lark for years; and when we went it was usually a picnic in the woods with the children, and the plainest of home-made lunches; but I received this snub in silence. Cousin Jane plunged on with her news.

"Bob's heels over head in love with Caroline—that's easy to see. It 'ud be a good match for her, too."

"But you said you wanted David for her," I objected in as dolorous a voice as I could muster.

"I ain't so favorable to David as I was," she answered frankly. "He's got a mighty ugly temper. He flared up at me downright impudent that time I spoke to him about Caroline; an' he good as turned me out of your room one day, without opening his mouth. He'd lead Caroline a hard life. Of course I didn't say a word to Bob, but I saw by the way he went on how it was. A keen business man like

him don't go a hundred miles out of his way to visit a girl for nothin'. I know."

"But you thought David cared," I pleaded.

"If he does, let him do somethin' to prove it, 'stead o' settin' like a bump on a log. I ain't goin' to help him another mite."

Cousin Jane's visits certainly add to one's list of mercies. I've been telling Grumpy all the week that nothing can be very bad as long as she no longer smiles on David, but afflicts Bob White with her disastrous friendship. My clouds are silver-lined indeed!

January 29. The first spring signs the birds give us: we must look skyward for them, past earth altogether. The next spring signs are hidden deep, in those dark places where sunlight never comes. For the violets which empurple the long borders, like the song of the Carolina wren, are not a sign of spring, but a constant witness to ever-present life. They bloom every month of the winter, just as the bird sings. The spring-time message is brought by something of a frailer courage than theirs—something which must needs retrace steps the violets have never taken.

So today, as the Peon wheeled me out to the maple, he stopped at one of the jonquil beds while I climbed down to brush aside the leaves which protect the bulbs from frost, and to stir the earth with loving fingers. Not yet. Life is at work, I know, but too deep down to be seen as yet. I drew the leaves back again, my hands shaking a little with the joy of grubbing in the dirt again—real outdoor dirt, that runs clear through to blue sky on the other side, instead of stopping at a saucer six inches from the top of a pot. How many years! Would I ever make up for the lost years, I wondered, and then caught my breath and the Peon's hand with a laugh. For the cardinal was singing again—Cheer! Cheer! Cheer! A-wet-year! A-wet-year! Cheer! Cheer!

It was a dull, cloudy day; but vision had come to him, and what he saw he would live up to. He sat on the grape arbor, back of the jonquil bed, and sang, deliberately at first, stout-heartedly, but with a rising tide of joy—A-wet-year! Cheer! Cheer! A wet year seems to be his idea of heaven and spring-time rolled into one. Rain—and swelling life! The lost years will be made good yet. And shall one grudge the time for rain?

January 30th. I ventured on the subject of Caro with David last night, and find myself wondering many things. The fact that I have always admitted the children's full right to reserve from me any secret they wished to keep largely accounts, I believe, for the closeness of their confidence. And I didn't intend to pry now—only to open a way in case he chose to take it, as I used sometimes to make confidences easy for him as a child.

“Bob White is laying siege to Cousin Jane's favor, Davy, dear,” I said, using the baby name he still loves in our private talks. “She has sold him her good-will for a four-course lunch.”

David laughed a little.

“Worst affliction could happen to him, I should think. What on earth does he want with it?”

“She thinks he's in love with Caro.”

“Probably is. Most of the fellows are; and Bob's nobody's fool.”

He had cuddled his brown head under my hand as he sat on a stool by my bed, and I couldn't see his face. His voice was so very natural that it suggested an effort to make it so.

“Well, I doubt if he displayed any special wisdom when he tried to win Cousin Jane over—if he tried,” I said. “When you go courting, I don't think you'll spend much time on the girl's guardians.”

“Not much time on anybody, you mean, till I get things settled.”

“And you'd rather I waited with the rest, dear, wouldn't you?”

He lifted his head and sat facing me, stroking my hand.

“I couldn't talk about it, little Mammy, even to you. But I wouldn't mind your knowing about it if you could understand without words. You have always done that when I couldn't talk.”

His eyes met mine fully, his heart unveiled behind them. That is one of the beautiful things about David's reserve—the secret door he opens into it for one

whom he truly loves.

“I do understand,” I said slowly. “But, remember, dear, a woman loves to be loved. You musn’t have any reserves with her when the time comes. Let her understand your love is great enough to justify the demands it makes upon her. If she hurts you at first, don’t try to shield her by letting her think it’s a light matter. Be as honest with her as you are with yourself. And you’ll win her, dear; I know you will. And you’ll do it all by yourself, with no meddling nor helping from anybody.”

He straightened his broad shoulders.

“I’ll do it that way or not at all, little Mammy. Suppose somebody else—even you—helped me to win her; it would be up to me to hold her, wouldn’t it? And how could I ever be sure of doing it if I hadn’t been enough for her at the start, by myself? If I’m not enough—if I can’t make myself enough—I couldn’t afford to have her at all.”

He rose to his full six feet of height and stretched his clenched hands above his head.

“That stool cramps my legs these days,” he said. “I remember how proud I was when I found I could sit on it squarely and get my toes to the floor. Legs change, don’t they? But the only way I change is to love more the folks I love at all. Goodnight, you sweetest mother a boy ever had.”

He bent down, rubbing his cheek against mine in the dear caress of his baby days, and went out. He never was a boy to kiss one; but he always loved to stroke my hand, and to touch my cheek with his. He always loved, too, for me to receive his caresses passively; it is only when he tucks his close-cropped head under my hand that petting from me is in order.

So he loves Caro. Half of my hope has come true. And here I lie, trembling with fear. Is there any greater mockery than a hope wrecked by a half fulfilment? If Caro—Now isn’t Grumpy a clever imp? I’ve faced him down and out about the pain for nearly three weeks, and shut him up in the skeleton-closet with all the gruesome things I’m determined not to be nagged about; and so he sneaks out on an entirely new tack, and flaunts David and Caro at me instead of my own spinal column, which is his customary trade-mark! But if I don’t want him associating

with my own anatomy, which heaven knows is too depraved to be further contaminated, why should he aspire to the children's company? And if David loves Caro, isn't that proof I was right in thinking they were made for each other, and that Caro's love will answer his? Sur-e-ly, sur-e-ly, sur-e-ly, sure! Just hear her bird-double out of doors: Grumpy as a prophet isn't in it with the little red-brown wren!

February 7th. Milly came to see me today. Grace has been for more than a month with George's mother, who has been very ill. I was lying here thinking of her as I watched the jays outside, and of what Caro said when she was at home.

Caro never could stand Cousin Jason, and has called him Cousin Jay ever since the first summer we came to Bird Corners. I took her to spend the day at Grace's, and she went with Milly and her nurse down to the brook to wade. The brook divides Cousin Jason's land from theirs; and the children, finding some of his hogs in Grace's pasture, drove them before them with much laughter and little clods of earth. Cousin Jason, hearing his squealing beasts, came charging down the hill in a fury and jabbed his petty wrath straight to poor little Milly's heart. She was always a timid creature, like her mother, and, like her mother, unkindness made her physically ill; so she wept miserably, poor baby, while her half-uncle stormed. But Caro flamed into wrath as fierce as his own. She had been feeding the birds that morning, and had jumped from the stool by my cot afterward a dozen times to scatter the jay-birds, who were out in unusual force, and bent on pecking off the head of any other bird who ventured to take a crumb. She sprang in front of Milly now, ruffling like an angry wren.

"Go home, you horrid—jay-bird!" she shrieked; "you peck, an' peck, an' peck, all the time! I hate you! Cousin Jay, Cousin Jay!"

He stared at the mite, speechless, with purpling face. Milly gasped with fright, and old Aunt Susan, as she afterwards declared, "done choke herse'f 'mos' ter death swallerin' her laff."

Caro took Milly by the hand.

"Let's go home an' play party," she proposed calmly; "we don't like pigs and jay-birds." And back they went.

Cousin Jason was immensely impressed. He told me about it afterwards, himself,

and declared that he wished Milly had a little of Caro's "spunk."

He even tried, in his not very happy fashion, to be friends with the child, and has always treated her with more consideration than any one else he knows. But Caro will have none of him, and to this day calls him Cousin Jay to his face. He is a man of large bulk, with a face at once sharp and heavy, as unlike Grace in body as he is in soul. And I'm afraid he makes life pretty hard for her.

When her husband died, Grace was left sole mistress of his estate—which included, according to our beautiful state law, the plantation she inherited from her father. But her brother calmly assumed the management of everything. Cousin Jason is really a Mohammedan born out of due place. He cannot conceive of a woman's having mind or soul of her own, much less rights; and he proposes, in all honesty, to do his next-of-kin duty by the widowed family fool. Grace, I suppose, was too broken by grief to realize what she was doing; but in any event she would probably have given way to him; she spent her girlhood, as she now spends her widowhood, trying to keep her half-brother in a good humor. She yielded to him absolutely, even to giving him power of attorney over all her belongings, and to vacating her own pretty rose-colored bed-room, with its private bath, on the first floor of her home. Cousin Jay never liked to sleep upstairs; it was too far from his work, he said.

He has certainly, the Peon says, made everything pay well; he has Cousin Chad's own genius for money-making. But he does not believe in spending money, nor, of course, in giving it; nor in being bothered with "idle gossiping women who ought to be at home minding their husbands' affairs." (He is never conscious of a woman except as the appendage of some man.) So Grace controls neither her own money nor her own home. All her gracious hospitality, her wise open-handedness to those in need, is a thing of the past. It is difficult for Milly even to have ordinary visitors, except in the afternoons; and if it were not for the child's other-worldly beauty, before which the judgments applied to most girls are abashed, one would almost call her dresses shabby. But it is not easy to think of her dress, the girl herself so charms one.

She has been telling me a little of her troubles, poor child; they have been hard to manage in her mother's absence. Chief among them, as I infer, mainly from what she did not say, is the difficulty of being properly courteous to Robert Lincoln, without calling down Cousin Jason's boorish wrath on the young man's head, as well as her own.

“You see it isn’t as if he were one of us, Cousin Lil,” she said, her soft cheeks flushed, her eyes large with unshed tears: “he’s a Northerner, you know, a New Englander. He’s interested in the interurban lines they’re building and projecting here in Tennessee, and he really lives in the city—I mean his headquarters are there. And when he comes down here to see us, why, it isn’t real Southern hospitality not to ask him to a single meal. But I daren’t. And once Uncle Jason came right into the parlor and banged the fire-irons around and glared and kept looking at his watch. And it was only half-past nine, Cousin Lil. That was just after Caro went back; and he really hasn’t been here since. I do hate for Northern people to think——” a tear slid down one cheek; but the slight shrinking of her pretty hand showed me she could not bear to be petted just now; she did not want sympathy, but help. She swallowed hard and went on.

“And you know next morning at breakfast I spoke to him—not to criticise, you know, nor anger him, of course. I told him not to be afraid that I would forget his wishes; that I told every one it kept him awake to have anyone stirring after ten o’clock at night, and that Mother and I always closed the house then; and I said it was only half-past nine last night.”

“What did he say?”

“Why, he just stormed, like he always does, you know. He said he wanted to go to bed early. And he got up without eating his breakfast, and slammed the door and went out. I had to run clear to the barn after him and beg and beg, before he would come back.”

“What on earth did you want him back for?” I inquired.

“Why, to eat his breakfast. He hadn’t had his coffee, and he’d have had a headache without it.”

“Milly Wood!” I gasped.

“Mother always coaxes him back,” said Milly, with gentle finality; “at least, she always tries. Sometimes he won’t come, and then she takes it to him herself. You know he has terrible headaches sometimes.”

“But, dear, if you would only face him down just once.”

“Oh, I couldn’t,” said Milly, shrinking. “And Mother would never get over it.

You don't know how she feels about Uncle Jason. She says he's never had the best of life, because he never has known the love that can give its all. She's sorry for him, and she wants us to make up to him for what he has missed."

"Well, you'll never do it," I said. "Nobody but Jason Blue can ever make good that loss to him."

"Sometimes I think Mother ought to require some things of him," she said; "but she won't; and I know I'll never make it harder for her by doing what she doesn't want. But I wish he didn't live at home."

She kissed me, smiling rather forlornly, and went away, while I lay here wondering about Mr. Lincoln, whom I have never seen. But David and Caro liked him, which is sufficient passport to my favor.

February 12th. The mocking-birds have a constant fascination for me—the charm of a complex nature which touches life on many sides. One can know a robin by heart in a single season, and predict with one's eyes shut the doings of any one of the tribe; but a mocking-bird is a different proposition.

His song throbs with the pure joy of living. It is the song of one in the world and of it, and rejoicing so to be; yet there is in it a haunting suggestion of aloofness, of mystery, of something beyond one's ken. It is as if his joy had deeper foundations than sunshine and plenty; as if he had lived through pain, clear to the other side of it, and learned that it, too, is good.

His powers of mimicry, I think, are greatly exaggerated. He does not really sing other birds' songs, as his cousin, the catbird, does; he merely experiments with their notes—a stave from a thrasher here, a light-flung oriole measure there, a thrush note, piercing sweet, a bit of the wren's summer trill. It is as if he would try life on all sides and look at it from every point of view; his ear is keen for the music from every throat. But always, through all this imaginative performance, he clings to the integrity of his own message. One may hear a catbird for an hour, and, unless one sees the blithe gray mime among the leaves, never suspect his real identity. But all a mocking-bird's borrowed notes are woven into the texture of his own song, which wholly claims him as the melody rises, sweeping him with it bodily up to heaven, and carrying the listener's heart with him. His is the rapture of open vision, feathered mystic that he is.

Next - bird like that - would expect to be - - - - -

NOW, a bird like that one would expect to be a recluse, dwelling apart in cloistered green, afar from his fellows and from mankind; but the mocking-bird flatly declines that rôle. He is a bird of affairs, friendly and neighborly withal, a haunter of men's doorways and house-vines, and a public-spirited citizen who rejoices to succor the oppressed. For he has a fine, full-fledged temper of his own, and any amount of fighting blood. He rarely seeks a quarrel; but if one be thrust upon him, either by aggressions attempted upon his own rights or by the call of another bird in distress, he accepts the combat with alacrity, and carries it joyously to a triumphant conclusion. And three minutes after the enemy is routed his voice floats down from the highest perch in the vicinity as if he were singing at heaven's gate. He has fought for all he is worth, yet not a feather of his spirit is ruffled.

February 15th. When I can catch Grumpy and call him to his face by his right name, he always disappears; but blue devils are so very clever at disguising themselves, and at concentrating one's attention on their instruments of torture!

This morning, for instance, he hid under the foot of my bed, and kept poking up all sorts of things where I couldn't help seeing them; the things the Peon and David need me to get well for; the things I long to do; the idleness I so desperately hate—for he can make even an abstraction visible, being a very clever devil indeed. Then he held up the pain, turning it round and round, and counting off the time like a clock—minutes, hours, days, months, years, and never an end in sight. I had to look out of the window in self-defense; and there I saw a kinglet.

Except the winter wren and the humming-bird, the kinglets are the smallest birds we have. But they make up in energy what they lack in size; and this one dashed about as if his very life depended on his getting his breakfast in ten seconds and catching the seven-thirty breeze to Somewhere. Grayish-olive, of course; but was his crown of ruby-red, or of orange, crimson and black? And why should a mite of the tree-tops be so inconsiderate as to carry his trade-mark on the top of his head?

I was almost in despair about him—for when you meet a bird, it is of consuming importance to know whose acquaintance you have the pleasure of making—when he took pity on me of his own sweet will. Perhaps the breeze was a thought late, and he had a moment to spare: but he perched on a twig just outside the window, bowed his tiny head toward me, thrust one claw up between his

wing and his body, and scratched the back of his neck for the whole of one second and a half!

Golden-crowned! The cunningest striped pate, red in the middle, with a yellow band on each side, a black band next the yellow, and a white line over his eye. Then he flung up his head as boldly as though it were mountain-high, jerked his wee tail-feathers frantically, and squeaked in the finest and most wiry of voices, the astonishing information that it was only Grumpy under the bed, at his old tricks—a creature for nobody to pay attention to. And as soon as he found himself discovered, my blue devil took himself off.

February 20th. If I can't go outdoors, outdoors can come to me! The windows are all open this morning, and my bed so close under them that I can lie here and stretch my hand into the outside world, where the lilac is rapidly leafing and the elms and maples are all abloom. A moment ago Uncle Milton stepped into view, one hand holding his hat and the other filled with jonquils.

“Is you gittin’ er little better, honey?” he inquired. “Hit’s gittin’ spring-time now, en Milton wants ter see you ridin’ roun’ in dat ar cheer you got. Ef we-all puts er mattress in it, don’ you reckon we kin git you down ter de holler by de gate? Des see what come f’um down dat er way dis mawnin’—dem holler jonquils allus did beat dese yere up on de hill.”

He reached the flowers through the window and laid them upon the bed—the first flowers of the awakening year; for the violets are ageless, belonging neither to the new year nor to the old. I caught up the golden beauty with a gasp of joy.

“Oh, thank you, Uncle Milton! I knew spring was coming true before long! And I’ll be walking down there when they bloom again: don’t think I’m going to live in beds and wheeled-chairs forever.”

His brown old face beamed.

“Dat’s de talk!” he exclaimed gleefully. “Ef dat ain’t de Forest sperrit my name ain’t Milton, sho’! You look like yo’ pa endurin’ er de war. You keep talkin’ dat erway, honey, en feelin’ dat erway, too. Hit’s sperrit en spunk what cyores folks a sight mo’ dan doctors en physicin, I lay my little Missy gwinter be runnin’ roun’ yere yet, makin’ ole Milton hop.” He walked off, chuckling to himself.

Josie brought me a vase, and I set the flowers in it as flowers should be set, lovingly, and one by one. It has been years since I have been down in that hollow, just this side of where the road turns out into the pike; but I can see it as if I were there this minute—the maples blooming overhead, the meadow-larks flashing the white of their tail-feathers as they fly, singing, on the hill beyond; the twigs in the strip of woodland down the road, shining yellow, tan, and red with the rising sap. The blue-grass is under foot, soft and thick, and all through it rise the spears of the jonquil leaves, and the swinging, golden bells. Along the fence runs the broad band of iris, matted close, the pointed leaves already taller than the jonquils. Cardinals and mocking-birds are calling all up the hillside; and down under the willows and sycamores at the water's edge the myrtle warblers are swarming, and thinking of donning their gay spring suits. Oh, I can see it all, all! A little wind is dancing along the hillside, and the branches touch one another softly, the dry, scraping, winter sound all gone. The wren's spring song is in full blast, the bluebirds are twittering, and even the jays' voices are turning sweet. The breath of life is everywhere, and the joy of it. I can feel the wind in my hair, and the grass under my flying feet—My flying feet! For a moment I had forgotten. But here are the four close walls, the narrow bed, the endless, wrenching pain. And I could not walk even to my sofa today, though the Peon's life were my reward.—Eh, well, and what of that? Did I not run in Make-Believe? And shall I shut my eyes to joy and beauty because my locomotive apparatus is laid up for a few repairs? I may be walking clear out to the hall again before the week is out, and be out in my chair on the porch tomorrow. Love and sunshine really are enough, no matter what Grumpy says—even love without the sunshine: and here are both, and flowers besides, and the spring-time everywhere out of doors.

February 25th. Grace was here yesterday. She has a way of dropping in when she is most wanted and leaving a trail of sunshine behind her. She is a quiet little body, never hurried or fretted, and she has a genius for discovering, in the most unlikely places, virtues invisible to the naked eye. She sees the wrong and mean things, too—she's not at all a goody-goody person; but she keeps the wrong and the wrong-doers so entirely distinct and separate that you wonder how you were ever so stupid as to confuse them. She's really devoted to that cranky old half-brother of hers. She is always commiserating him because he did not have her mother, and his own died when he was born. She'll explain and expound him till you think he really is noble, only he never had a chance to learn how to do noble things.

It is certainly a pity, however, that his education is in such a backward stage. Robert Lincoln and Milly are becoming much more than friends; and Cousin Jason's infantile ignorance of other people's rights is anything but conducive to comfort under the circumstances. But Grace's one idea, as usual, is that dear brother Jason must not be crossed. He takes it so hard, poor fellow, when things don't go as he wishes. And if Mr. Lincoln is as seriously fond of Milly as he professes to be, he may as well make up his mind to be satisfied with winning her, if he can succeed in doing it, and not be too exacting with her relatives.

Poor Grace! As if I don't know the kind of young-ladyhood she believes in Milly's having, and is simply aching to give her! But evidently Cousin Jason's will is to be law.

The truth is, as I told Grace, Cousin Jason is just like Cousin Chad—though they'd both foam at the mouth to hear me say it. But they've neither of them any sense of proportion. That's why they have no sense of humor, nor power to get their own personalities in proper perspective with other people and their rights. But why, asks Grace calmly, shouldn't we be as sorry for a person born with no sense of proportion as for a person born with only one eye? Of course the lack of a sense of humor is harder on the kin than the lack of an eye would be—Grace admitted that handsomely; but in neither case was the afflicted party to blame. And didn't one really deserve more sympathy when his affliction necessitated his also being a bore?

We fell to giggling as we discussed this knotty point; and I was so far converted to Grace's charitable views that I had Uncle Milton get a basket of double jonquils for her to take to Cousin Jane. Cousin Jane always did admire my double jonquils, and somehow her own never succeed. I like the single ones much better myself; the others, like my revered relative, are too clumsy and fat. I told Grace to say I sent them to her on the principle of sweets to the sweet. And now I'll be having another visitation, for my sins!

February 27th. Pitch dark when I woke this morning; and pain to make one clench one's teeth. Grumpy is not hilarious company at such times, but occasionally he helps by overdoing things.

This morning, for instance, he began about the unendingness of things—sickness, and the long night, and all that—till it struck me all at once it really was morning that second, and only looked like night. Besides, the pain is like

this, often, when I don't feel blue a bit: so it isn't the pain that makes me miserable—it's my own mood about the pain; and if a seasoned old party like me can't manage her own moods, what's the world coming to?

Only, sometimes I can't manage them, and I don't know why. They sweep over me like the waves of the sea, and trample me like wild horses. It isn't often like that; but when it is, I know I'm in for it—and also that I'm dead sure to get out of it after a while. I'm lying here—this racketty old body, with a piece of me, myself, inside it, just about as miserable as such a combination can get to be. And the rest of me is hanging around outside, looking on, and saying, "Just lie low and keep quiet, old lady. It's tough, but it won't last. Lay your nose to the wind and let it howl. If it blows you even on both sides, you'll get out of it without being crank-sided, and that's the best you can do." So I lie here; and after awhile the comfort of knowing it's just a mood soaks in till I can feel it and get the good of it—and then the storm is past. I come out of it, too, with my self-respect unimpaired; because, no matter how it raged inside, I did keep quiet on the outside till it blew over.

So it blew over this time also. And after awhile even Grumpy was forced to admit that it was morning, for all the world was drenched with light. The long, level beams slipped across the hills as the sun rose, and touched the tree-tops, one by one; and behold, life had risen—in the night. Every twig of the tulip-tree was tipped with green where the great terminal buds had burst their sheaths; and down by the brook a fairy mist of color clung tenuously about the willows. The mocking-bird was in a rapture of prophecy in the maple; and the English sparrows were actually housebuilding in a beautiful hole in the scarlet oak.

Nobody else thinks of nest building yet; but among the birds, as among humans, the increase of population is most rapid where one would fain find it least. These sparrows will be rearing half a dozen families before the year is out—good, large families, too; and it behooves them to select their apartment early in the season. That hole belongs to the wrens, but that's of no consequence to the sparrows, who have the pleasant habit of taking whatever they want.

It must be owned they are a hardworking tribe, even though their works be evil. If the fathers left their wives to do all the work, after the bluebirds' fashion, some of the broods would surely starve; the mothers would succumb to nervous prostration before all the mouths could be filled. But the head of the family rolls up his feathers and pitches right in, from nest building days until frost.

Nuisances though they be, there isn't a childer among them; and they will drop

nuisances though they be, were isn't a smiter among them, and they will drop their petty personal squabbles instantly, to make common cause against any bird, big or little, not of sparrow feather. But they shall not have the wren's hole for all that—not while Uncle Milton can climb a tree for me.

March 6th. The blackbirds are falling in love. Even sensible, lovely creatures are a bit comical when hard hit by the tender passion. In its first inflammatory stages it so utterly destroys the patient's sense of proportion that one smiles even when one's heart is aglow with sympathy. But a blackbird lover, a sleek, slick gentleman, oppressed with more dignity than an archbishop could carry gracefully, trying to unlimber enough to convince his inamorata that he desires her favor when he merely wishes to air his perfections for her dazzlement!

One flies to a branch in plain sight of the greedy black gang, gobbling crumbs below, and meditates. Shall he condescend, or shall he not? Well, maybe she is worth it; and it will display his feathers to an admiring world. He ducks a little, spreads wings and tail, rises a-tiptoe, and says something through his nose to call attention to his noble self, though a compliment may be tacked on in the last note. I know that's just the way Cousin Chad did it when he courted Cousin Jane. And think of the laughterless depths of Cousin Jane's soul that she found it a performance to take seriously! Things are pretty much evened up in this life, after all. It is true Cousin Jane has no back; but think of a blackbird husband—and of me with the Peon!

March 10th. Rain, rain, rain. I've been examining my mercies this morning to see which of them can stand the strain of a three-days' cold down-pour, a week of almost utter sleeplessness, and a spine that is conducive to profanity. The mercies look badly frazzled; but they were all right the other day, and couldn't possibly wear out as fast as this. I suppose it's the same old trouble—my eyes are moth-eaten, and need to be done up in camphor at once.

Anyway, it's a piece of a mercy that if I had to get so much worse I did it in weather when I couldn't go outdoors if I were able. It is awfully cold. Grumpy says it will frost when it clears off, and all the peaches will be killed. Cheerful, isn't it, when David's pet peach-orchard experiment is in full bloom for the first time? But the peach trees are like us humans: they never can tell what is ahead of them. They have to go on in the dark with such capital of good-will and ignorance as they possess, and take the consequences without kicking.

I think the titmice might be counted as mercies today. The other birds have disappeared, but the titmice are as jaunty as possible in their trim gray rain coats, whistling like boys calling dogs.

And pray, if a titmouse can keep his crest starched in this down-pour, why should the spirit of mortal be limp?

March 12th. If one be born a coward, one cannot help that; and what one cannot help is no disgrace, but a burden to be carried in patience to the end of life.

But in my childhood it came to me that though one be born a coward beyond escape, it is never necessary to behave like one. That has been my comfort a thousand times, and it is my comfort tonight—a comfort great enough to hold me steady in the iron grip of pain.

Coward I am, and will be, to the end of life. But I have not behaved like a coward this day! And now the day is ended—lived through forever. And I can remember it unashamed.

VI

Before the Dawn

March 18th. If the outward pressure of necessity for self-control be great enough to balance the inward pressure of pain, one can keep fairly steady. But a week after the Peon left on one of those long western trips something came up that made it necessary for David to drop everything and go to Atlanta. He was detained there beyond his expectations, and then wrote me he must go to New York before returning home. He begged me again, as when he first left, to send for Grace; but I did not want her. At first it was a relief to be alone, with no need for effort or concealment. Afterwards, I did not want her because her sympathy would have been more than I could bear.

It wasn't just the day's pain, or the night's—one can usually manage that somehow. What Grumpy did was to set today's pain by that of yesterday, and the day before that; to add last week's to last year's, to the pain of ten years, twenty years, back. He applied his recollections like a mustard plaster, and rubbed them in like a liniment. Then he took tomorrow, and next year, and the year after that, and built them all into one long *via dolorosa*—a life-time path of pain. I might have stood that; I have before. But beside the pain he set the idleness—this horrible, useless idleness. That is the killing part! He set it all before me, as plain in the black and sleepless nights as in the day: and while I cowered, he gibed and threatened till I feared to look ahead and dared not hope. And when I tried to run away to Make-Believe, for the first time in all my life I could not find the way! That finished everything.

So I lay still and silent one age-long night, shut fast in my body at last, the slow tears dripping on my pillow on either side. Suddenly, in the dawning, a purpose leaped within me; Ella should come to me—here, in this very room, from which I could no longer escape. If Make-Believe were closed to me, I would command her here. I would tell her everything: I could not bear it in silence any more.

Since we first went to the city I had loved her. And after Great-aunt Letitia died, until she went North to live, she had been constantly in my home. And after that—oh, we knew the way to Make-Believe, we two! Never a day but we met there, for many a year. She knew all about the pain, though we never spoke of it. It

wasn't merely that words were unnecessary, but that pain, in her presence, seemed so small a part of life. Nothing really mattered but love and kindness and happy human laughter.

Yet she had never had a real home, nor even a care-free childhood. Her life had been one long sacrifice for those who took her bounty as their right. But the laughing blue eyes, the heart of kindness, the sturdy, sensible, joyous spirit of her, blended of love and humor and common sense! The children in the streets ran after her, and tired faces brightened as she passed.

For three years and a half now I had not seen her, even in Make-Believe, where I met every one else I love, both living and dead. Somehow I could not pretend about her any more, after that strange day when my letter came back unopened—the happy letter I had written to tell her I was going to a sanitarium to be made over new, so that I could come and pay her a “really truly” visit on my way home. She never saw the letter. They sent it back unopened; and I could not play about her any more.

But now, if I must stay shut in my body, she must come. She should never leave me. I would tell her every day just how hard life was. And she would be sorry for me; she would understand. I reached out with all the life left in me to draw her out of Make-Believe, now shut against me, and bring her to share my prison, and to hear my complaints.

I turned my head upon the pillow and lifted my heavy lids. She was coming toward the bed. I raised my arms feebly, and her own were round me. My head fell on her breast, and I lay there, drawing long, sobbing breaths, while she stroked my hair with firm and gentle fingers. There was no need for speech: her touch was always plainer than other people's words.

But presently I was aware of a difference in her touch, a something new and strange. I whispered weakly, without opening my eyes.

“What is it dear? What troubles you? Why don't you speak to me?”

Silence. Only that tender, pitying touch.

“I knew you'd be sorry for me,” I whispered on; “and oh, I want you to be! I wouldn't have called you if it were real, you know—I wouldn't hurt you for the world. But something has happened to me. I've come plain to you, and the end of

world. But nothing can hurt you now. Isn't Love so plain to you, and the end of things, and the reasons why they must be—isn't all that so shining clear to you that even my being like this can't hurt? Tell me about it. I want to know it is clear to somebody—I'm so far gone in the dark."

Still no answer.

"Then be sorry for me," I went on, dashing my desperate pleading against that strange, disquieting silence. "I've borne so much. I must tell somebody, and it isn't fair to talk about it to them here at home. I've never talked to anybody before, even to you. I've never even cried, never once, except all by myself in the dark. And I'm such a coward about everything, and specially about pain; I've been so afraid of it all my life. And it never stops. It's been years, Ella, years and years. And oh, I can't bear it any more! You don't know what it's like just to be still and suffer when you can't do anything. It wasn't so bad when I could keep going; I could fight. But now I can't fight any more. I want to die. I think God ought to let me die.—I've tried; I've tried my best so long. And I can't try any more."

The words were scarcely breathed, and I stopped in exhaustion, the slow tears dropping on her breast.

Still she did not speak. Deeper and deeper sank her silence, pressed in by that strange, tender touch.

Suddenly I shivered, and my eyes flew wide. Her own were full of love and sorrow—a sorrow that looked past all my complaints to something deeper and more vital. I shrank away from her.

"I can't," I said. "I can't any more; I can't."

Behind the sorrow in her eyes a light was kindled; but it only frightened me the more.

"I have tried," I protested. "I've done nothing else the most of my life. Is there no pity, even in you?"

Still she gazed; and something in her look called to something dead in me. I shook my head feebly and closed my eyes; but through the shut lids her gaze commanded.

“I have come to the end,” I persisted; “and if you do not understand, there is nothing left. I can’t try any more, and I won’t. Go away.”

I gasped as I said it, and opened my eyes again. Her look pierced and held me like the point of a sword. I turned my head from side to side, shivering, but there was no escape. The dead thing in me stirred to life and dragged itself up to look truth in the face once more.

“Yes,” I said, “It is true. I can’t because I won’t. I thought I wouldn’t because I couldn’t, but that is a lie. I can endure if I will—and if I can, I must. But will it never end?”

She lifted her head a little. Her eyes shone, and a smile curved the sweet corners of her mouth. It was not the old, brave, happy laughter, but something wiser and more compelling—the overflow of an exhaustless joy.

“You know,” I whispered. “You learned it even in your life down here. And to keep on trying is to conquer, isn’t it?—even though one fails with every breath. And the only irreparable calamity is to turn coward and quit.”

Her face was heavenly sweet.

“I must never send for you again?” I asked, like a child. “Not to say things are hard, or to cry?—But if I play, in the real Make-Believe, will you talk to me there as you used? If I see you there I won’t need you this way again. Good-bye.”

Her fingers brushed my hair once more as I lay back on the pillow; and then I knew she was gone.—O bravest friend! Not even in my own coward thoughts could your courage be bent to the service of fear; to think of you was to find strength, even against my will!

For a long time I lay there, while the slow day passed and twilight deepened again into night. All her life passed before me—its selflessness, its courage, its joy. No creature that knew her went unblessed of her. What gifts pain brought, what power of helpfulness, what fullness of life and love!

Suddenly, there in the deep stillness, it was as if the night were drawn away like a veil; and I saw out to the very edges of the world, and back into far-off ages, and on into days that are yet to be; and everywhere was light. And the light came

from countless faces; and I knew that to each one pain had come—pain of body or pain of soul—and because of the pain they had found the light. And down, under the light, looking up to it, drawn by it, stumbling forward by it, were those to whom the vision had not come. And I—was I offered such a fellowship only to run away in fear?

The veil of night fell dark again, but a song was in my heart. When daylight came I wrote it down—the song my friend had given me. It is called

THE INITIATES

Wide as the world their company,

Many the paths they tread;

Here may a toil-worn peasant be,

Yonder a crownèd head.

Famed or unknown, each one must fare

Forth on a bidden way;

That which awaits no man may share,

Lonely 'mid throngs are they.

Yet comrades all they come to be:

Far-sundered, yet one line,

They march in this great company,

Deep in their souls its sign.

How shall ye know them? Some there be

So wasted and worn and weak,

So anguished in body, ye all may see

They bear the sign ye seek.

But some in this brotherhood there be

Who in such secret wise
Meet suffering, no man may see
Wherein their sorrow lies.
Their laughter rings out true and free,
Ye look for the sign in vain,
Nor guess they are of this company,
Marked with the mark of pain.

Thus shall ye know them: On their eyes
Falls the light of things unseen;
Their pain-cleared vision sweeps the skies
And the hearts of men, I ween;
The things that pass, and the things that remain,
Lie open to their sight,
And that which they learn as they dwell with pain
Gives strength to the world, and light.
Patient, and wise, and glad they be,
Rich with love's own increase—
They of this world-wide company
Who suffer, and find peace.

Freed as by fire? Yet the fire shall pass,
And the freedom shall stand for aye;
And what would be the hope for the mass
If these should shrink in dismay?
So may I cast aside all fear;
So may my soul aspire;
So may I climb pain's pathway drear
To heights of my soul's desire.
And there, with heart grown wise to see,
Counting nor loss nor gain.
May I serve with this brave company
Who bear the mark of pain!

VII

Spring Magic

April 2nd. The Peon came home ten days ago, and David a day later. They looked as solemn as owls, and developed a tendency to neglect their business and sit in my room which was fast getting on my nerves. So I rose up and put a stop to it. You simply can't lie still in peace when your eyes won't stay open, if you have any consciousness that somebody is watching you while he's pretending to read a book. And I don't need a doctor. I've been like this, and worse, a thousand times, and the Head said when I came home I was bound to get well crab-fashion—going backward lots of the time. So I laid down the law that if my eyes were shut and I didn't speak when they opened the door, my family was to be sensible and go away.

That was why I didn't look when the door opened one day last week. I was thinking of all the Head had said about backsets, and how, when they ended, I would come out of them more and more quickly, and they'd be farther and farther apart; and I was wondering how fast I'd go, once I had finished with this one. When the door opened I hadn't the energy to spare for talking—I needed it for my cheerful speculations. But, instead of going away, my visitor came quietly in. Then I heard a little gasp, a soft rustle beside me, and little warm hands caught mine—Caro's hands! She was there on her knees, her face hidden in the bedclothes, and crying as if her heart would break! Caro crying was a sight to galvanize a graven image: I sat up straight in the bed and drew her to me.

“Dear, what is it?” I implored. “Tell me quick: I'll fix it!”

She bubbled with laughter as she caught me in her arms and eased me back on the pillow, dropping a tear and a kiss on my nose.

“You darling! If you were at your own funeral and heard one of us crying, you'd hop right up and straighten things out for us, wouldn't you? There's not a thing the matter with me except I've been so homesick for you all winter I couldn't stand it any longer: and now I'm crying because I'm so glad I'm home.”

“But Caro——”

“Don’t ‘Caro’ me and don’t ‘but’ me, for I’ve come to stay. Mammy Lil, you’re an accomplished liar; but when your writing kept looking like chicken-tracks, I knew better than to believe a word of your sprawly, rickety tales that trailed all over the sheet. And I hate music. And besides, I can drive the family to drink with what I know already.”

“But Daddy Jack, dear, and Cousin Jane.”

Caro laughed again.

“Daddy Jack says he wrote for me yesterday—after I’d started, all by my smart self. And I’ll tell Cousin Jane after a while. She’ll have something brand-new to lecture us about for the next twenty-five years. I feel like Carnegie and Rockefeller rolled into one: it isn’t often she gets the benefaction of an enormity like this, is it?”

It had been a cloudy morning, dark, and wet with the night’s rain; but now the sunlight swept across the hills and up from the branch, and struck through the soft colors shimmering about the trees like rainbows in a mist. The Peon and David tiptoed in, beaming.

“You’d better let us go by and break the news to them at Cousin Chad’s,” said David; “you’ll get a shock over the ’phone if they aren’t prepared.”

“I’m going over there this afternoon,” said Caro calmly. “I’m going all by myself and engineer Cousin Jane through the boiling-over process; she’ll be all right when she settles down to a simmer. Now get out, both of you: Mammy Lil and I want to rest.”

She slipped into her kimono and stretched herself beside me, holding my arm across her breast and stroking it with a light touch which expressed everything without words. Once in awhile she talked a little in her own sweet, whimsical way, and then lapsed again into the silence of utter content.

I turned my head to speak to her presently, and found her gone. The shadows, which had been dancing up toward the house when the sun came out, had lengthened all down the lawn to the valley, and across it to the hills on the other side. I lay watching them with that long-lost sense of refreshment which follows unbroken sleep. Down by the gate David was letting in Caro’s pony-cart and climbing to a seat beside her. Presently their laughter floated through the

windows, and then she was in the room again, perched on the window-seat by the bed.

“I’m trying not to be proud, Mammy Lil,” she observed in a chastened voice; “but Cousin Jane is done to a turn, and almost cool enough to set away in the cellar. She’s pleased with me, too; she said if she just could have kept Lyddy from meddlin’ she believed she could have raised me up to be a real comfort to her. Why didn’t you let her? She gave me some outing cloth to make into petticoats for a missionary box that’s to go west. Who but Aunt Jane would bestow fuzzy petticoats on missionaries in the spring? But she bought the stuff at a bargain sale for four cents a yard, and feels that it’s providential; and we can put in plenty ourselves to make up for it.”

“And she won’t fuss about your staying here?” I asked anxiously.

“Why, of course she’ll fuss; how could she get any fun out of it if she didn’t? But she’s fussed all she’s going to right now; and next time I’ll make some more petticoats, or cut down her fifth-best winter coat for one of the little missionaries to wear on the Fourth of July. —Don’t look so horrified, Mammy Lil; you know I’ll never let it get in the box! Now lie still like a good child till I fix your supper. I’m going to feed you myself,” and she fluttered away, singing under her breath.

April 5th. Caro is in the window-seat, feather-stitching the missionary petticoats, with one eye on the birds in the yard. The jays have always roused her special ire; and yesterday one flew to the hackberry, in plain sight, with a little naked nestling dead in his wicked bill, tucked it coolly under his toes against the bark, and devoured it before our eyes. This morning, in the intervals of courtship, they have diverted themselves with crumb-snatching. They sit on a limb above the scattered morsels where a dozen or more birds are feasting. There is bread in abundance for all, but the jays love hectoring even better than eating. One will watch till some bird picks up a crumb, and then drop like lead upon his astonished victim. The unfortunate drops the crumb, of course; and before he collects his scattered wits the jay is back aloft with the morsel safe under his toes, picking leisurely. Caro sat laughing and scolding till a little red-brown wren flew down and was pounced upon in a twinkling. The wren dropped his crumb, but turned upon the bully with lightning quickness and a volcanic explosion of wrath utterly out of proportion to his size. The big bird, amazed at the onset,

flew up to his perch in a panic, and Caro clapped her hands.

“Oh, grand! grand!” she cried; “don’t I wish Milly Wood were here to see! I told her yesterday if she’d lay Cousin Jason out she could manage him: and just look at that blessed wren.”

“Milly isn’t a wren, though,” I said: “she hasn’t a glimmering of the wren’s gift of speaking his mind. Look at the wood-thrush, dear; you see the difference? When the wood-thrush turns on a jay, I’ll have hopes of Grace and Milly—and not before.”

The two wood-thrushes have been in the yard for days, the shyest, gentlest of creatures, ready to fly off at the flutter of a leaf. They have not touched the crumbs yet, but hop nearer every day. The jay watched one of them extract a worm from the soil, however, and lit upon him plummet-fashion. The wood-thrush dropped his half-swallowed morsel and fled in a panic to the black ash, where my glasses revealed him, his breast feathers bristling with terror, a mere puff-ball of fear.

“That’s Milly,” I said.

“But, Mammy Lil, anything can run a jay if it will only stand up to him,” persisted Caro; “I don’t see why Milly submits to it. She can’t ask Mr. Lincoln to a single meal. When he comes out in the afternoon he has to motor all the way to Chatterton for his supper and then go back; and Cousin Jay goes in the parlor when he does come, and glares at him and looks at his watch, and yawns—he’s simply insufferable. I’ve asked them both over here; Milly can stay all night, you know. But she says she won’t dare to come often, or Uncle Jason won’t like it. Not like it, indeed! I wish he belonged to me—I’d ‘uncle’ him!—There, that petticoat’s all ready to proclaim Cousin Jane’s thriftiness in clothing our dear missionaries on the frontier. I’ll make them for the sake of family peace: but I’m blessed if I’ll take them to church to be packed: she can escort her offering herself.”

April 8th.

COMPANIONSHIP

Afar in heaven is Love? Ah, no!
Follow the path where wild-flowers blow;
Store in thy heart the songs which swell
From wayside hedgerow, wood and fell;
Mark where the young year's opening leaf
Answers the wail of doubt and grief,
And where, fresh burgeoning after rain,
Life learns the inner heart of pain.
Let care and passion sink to rest,
Calmed 'neath wide skies on earth's green breast;
And hearken while the steadfast hills
Breathe strength to fainting human wills.
And through this changing, fair disguise
Know thou Love's voice, and meet Love's eyes!

April 10th. Out on the porch again, in the warm, sweet air, with all birddom for company. Caro has gone driving with Bob White, after wheeling me here for my own pleasure and for the Peon's astonishment when he comes home.

The robins have a secret in the seven-trunked maple. The leaves are so thick no one could guess it except by their vigilance in guarding the tree. They have made a law that no jay, of any age, sex, or size, shall alight in it, nor poke his bill among its branches, nor brush it with his wings in flight; and the law they have promulgated they are ready to enforce. Dark and bloody tales are told of jays—tales of cast-out eggs, of murdered babies, and stolen nests; wherefore no jay shall frequent that maple, “then, since nor henceforward.” Hence, wild curiosity among the jays, agitated caucuses in the pasture oak, and unanimous decision to

visit that maple at all hazards, singly, and in groups. They watch till the robins are at some distance, and fly up to the tree on the far side, three or four strong, while the robins, their backs to their threatened castle, drag forth reluctant worms by the middle. They seem absorbed in their hunt, but they know! In the twinkling of an eye they are at the maple, and no jay may abide their coming.

Nor will the robins, after these aggressions, tolerate the jays elsewhere. They may be pecking at the foot of a tree when a jay alights noiselessly in its topmost branch. They see, apparently, through the top of their skulls; and one jay or six, it is all the same to them. They dash up with the élan of a picked regiment, and again the jays shriek and fly. Not a jay has pecked on this lawn this whole afternoon, nor roosted while the robins pecked. Time and again they have sallied in from the pasture, and as often they have dashed squawking back. It is a strenuous life for the blue-coats: but it certainly keeps things peaceful for the rest. The wood-thrushes have ventured near today, and a pair of chippies have come up on the porch, almost to my chair.

Yesterday evening a dozen mocking-birds were here on the lawn, singing singly, answering one another, and joining again and again in choruses that whelmed the grove in melody.

I lay in the growing twilight listening to them and thinking once more of all that passes, and of all that can never pass, when suddenly through the closing dark came the wild, sweet song of the wood-thrush, the first I had heard this year: U-o-lee! U-o-lee! The three notes form a perfect minor chord; and at their end a sudden spray of rapid tinkling notes, and the song again repeated, and again.

They say the thrushes have two sets of vocal chords, long and short, and the double vibration accounts for the splendid richness of their tones. But when those wild, appealing notes call through the gathering darkness one thinks, not of anatomy, but of the Sursum Corda in a church, and of all the souls who shrink before some cup of suffering and yet accept it, not merely with courage, but with clear vision of the joy beyond.

Up from the brook the song came, and far out on the road it was answered: U-o-lee! U-o-lee! What magic fills the haunting notes with subtle suggestions of human weakness, of trembling courage, of faith no suffering can slay? And when they ceased, the mocking-birds took up the theme and carried it, far into the moonlit night, to its inevitable and triumphant conclusion—the song of the

victor on the heights who has conquered in the lowest depths.

April 19th. Cousin Jane insisted on Caro's going to town with her yesterday, ostensibly to do some shopping, but really, I think, to give Bob White a chance to take them both to lunch. Bob comes out pretty often, and is as assiduous in his attentions as Caro will permit. I cannot see that she especially favors either him or David. She goes more with David, but her attitude toward him is so frankly affectionate that it is not as encouraging as it might be. He meets her quite on her own ground, and appears entirely satisfied. Everybody, in fact, seems contented except Bob White and Cousin Jane, to whom Bob pays strenuous court. Caro went with her to town with her usual light-hearted acquiescence in any plan proposed. She takes life as it comes, and makes a joyful occasion of the most commonplace happenings. But before she would agree to go she made Milly promise to come and spend the day with me: and this morning the two of them, with the Peon's and David's assistance, escorted me out to the maple tree in a triumphal procession, and established me on a cot in the real outdoors.

Milly scattered the crumbs for me, and sat by my cot with her embroidery. I thought the others were off for the station when Caro came flying back, pinning her hat on as she ran.

"Mammy Lil, Milly needs some lessons in ornithology. Prod some of the birds till they chase the jay: and be sure you tell her what turncoats the rice-birds are." Her eyes danced.

"The rice-birds?" I inquired stupidly. "Why should I tell her about them? They're not here anyway."

"One of them's here," she said gravely; "I've seen him.

'Robert of Lincoln is gaily dressed'—

"Beware of bobolinks, Milly: they're worse than jabberwocks;" and she dabbed a little kiss on the end of my nose and was off.

Milly flushed to the roots of her hair, looking at me shyly.

"He and Caro are great friends," she said; "you know she'd never joke about him if she didn't like him. She calls him Reedbird, Rice-bird, and Bobolink, and says

that so many aliases are sure proof of villainy. Sometimes when she begins to discourse on birds before Uncle Jason she scares me out of my wits. But luckily he doesn't know one bird from another, except the ones that bother his crops. To think how he has lived in the country, all his life, and never seen anything in earth or sky except crops and money! I do feel sorry for him, Cousin Lil; but I can't feel as sorry as mother does, because I get so angry with him. He's—he's insufferable sometimes."

"Why don't you make him behave?" I asked.

Her face paled.

"Make him?" she repeated wonderingly. "How on earth could anybody make Uncle Jason do anything? Caro calls him jay-bird, and that's just what he is.—Look there!"

The thrushes were actually breaking bread with me this morning; and as Milly spoke a jay dropped from his hiding-place overhead, and managed to light on both of them at once as they pecked peacefully side by side. They dashed madly away and dropped under the beech, panting, their breast-feathers bristling with fear.

Milly was quite white.

"That is what he is like, even when you're trying so hard to please him," she said. "I can't imagine what would happen if you opposed him." Her underlip quivered a little, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I'll show you what would happen if that jay will just hang around here till a catbird comes," I said. "There are plenty of them about, and a catbird stands no nonsense from anybody."

The jay elected to remain. He chased the cardinal, and tormented the thrushes till they flew away to the brook. Then he perched overhead, preened his feathers, and surveyed the world with an air of impeccable virtue,—tyrant and Pharisee in one. Presently, after the fashion of his kind, he began to peer and pry, leaning forward and thrusting his bill out with an evident intention to stick it into the business of the first neighbor who happened in reach.

It was just then that the catbird came for his lunch. The jay perked his head

eagerly, thrust out his meddlesome beak, dropped to the innocent's back, and lit there with vicious pecks. The catbird, panic-stricken, scrambled out and dashed to the hackberry, while the jay gobbled in true jay fashion, and I lay feeling that Providence had slapped me in the face—an overhasty conclusion, as our criticisms of Providence frequently are. The catbird, after due meditation, came back to the maple, and delivered his opinion of the jay in vitriolic language. The jay, scornfully unheeding, flew to a neighboring limb, tucked a big crumb under his toes, and proceeded to eat it. The catbird returned to his lunch; and when the jay dropped again, he hopped sideways, turned, and faced his tormentor. He spread out his wings and tail and began dancing furiously up and down, as if he were set on springs, not moving an inch from his place, and uttering discordant cries. The jay gave back amazedly. The catbird hopped a hop nearer, resumed his dance, and repeated his former remarks. The jay backed; the catbird hopped nearer, and danced. The jay dashed up against the maple trunk, where he clung to the bark like a woodpecker, looking down apprehensively, while the catbird continued his dance and his deliverance on jay manners. It was more than the bully's nerves could stand. In another moment he was off to the pasture, and the catbird's ruffled plumage lay sleek again as he turned back to the crumbs.

Milly was pale with excitement, her eyes wide.

“Do you think—” she breathed, and paused, afraid of her own question.

“I know it,” I said confidently. “Just try it awhile.”

“But mother,” objected Milly; “you know he'd take it out on her.”

“Isn't your mother going to stay with your grandmother some time next month, while your uncle and aunt take that trip North they're planning? Do it then.”

The child was absolutely white.

“I—oh, I couldn't, Cousin Lil! If I began, I'd be afraid to go on. He'd make me give in.”

“Your mother won't go for several weeks,” I said easily; “don't look so frightened. There's nothing to be done today.—What a pretty pattern that is you're working; let me see.”

We sheered away from Cousin Jason, and took up the subject of Robert Lincoln's perfections, which proved numerous. Then we had lunch under the

LINCOLN'S PERFECTIONS, WHICH PROVED NUMEROUS. THEN WE HAD LUNCH UNDER THE MAPLE; AND WHEN THE PEON CAME HOME MILLY WENT BACK.

April 21st. Caro telephoned me she would stay all night at Cousin Jane's, and did not come home till yesterday noon. I was out under the maple again, and watched her through my glasses, as she drove in from the pike in Cousin Jane's buggy, with a small darkey beside her to take the horse back. The buggy was loaded with bundles, which she toppled out on the grass beside me before jumping after them herself. She sat on the edge of the cot, and plunged into her tale and her packages together.

“Do you know what took Cousin Jane up to town, Mammy Lil? She'd seen an advertisement of one of those cheap stores down on Union Street about a sale of all-linen handkerchiefs for three-and-a-half cents, only twelve to a customer. And she traipsed all the way to town to invest forty-two cents in handkerchiefs for the missionary box—two for the mama missionary and two each for the five kids. Wouldn't you just love, if you were a little kid missionary, to have two whole three-and-a-half-cent handkerchiefs of your very own—a fresh one every week of the world? Mammy Lil, sometimes I'm real fond of Cousin Jane, cranky as she is, and sometimes I want to slap her. But I didn't: I just bought some decent handkerchiefs, so they can use Cousin Jane's for window screens—they're coarse enough. Then Bob White turned up and we went to lunch. They both pretended it was an accident, but I don't believe it; and Cousin Jane frisked like a rhinoceros, and was so pleased 'over our little tête-a-tête,' as she was pleased to call our triangular lunch, that I nearly died. And Bob was—no, it wasn't Bob; it was I. I was just cross. So I wasn't a bit nice—you know I really can be horrid, Mammy Lil, when I put my mind to it. I'm sorry; I'll make it up to Bob next time I see him; but Cousin Jane is such a donkey! Goodness knows, though, I paid for that in full!”

She broke into rippling laughter.

“What did you do?”

“Why, she was just huffy—awfully. She'd hardly speak to me; and I was in such a good humor again! We'd gone back to the stores, and I'd bought some lovely lawns—one for you, and one for me, and one for Mrs. Missionary. Let me show you.”

She jerked a bundle out of the pile and displayed her purchases, her head cocked

She jerked a bundle out of the pile and displayed her purchases, her head cocked meditatively on one side.

“Yours is lavender and mine pale green. They’ll have lots of lace on them, and we’ll both look ravishing. I got Mrs. Missionary a blue. My instinct is that she’s sallow and red-headed; so I resisted the blandishments of a pink one that was two cents a yard cheaper, and bought this. Cousin Jane says it will fade. But that was after I pacified her: she wouldn’t speak before.”

“How did you manage it?”

“Why, I told her I was sorry I was cross—I really was—and I said I’d go home with her and make Cousin Chad one of those frozen puddings. I didn’t dare offer to make it for her, but she eats as much of it as he does, which is saying a good deal. She softened visibly; so we hurried for the first train, and I worked like a black slave to get it done in time. They ate like anything, and I let them both give me good advice till bedtime; and this morning I made the butter for her, and we parted like twins.”

I laughed and patted her hand. She raised one eyebrow and looked thoughtful.

“Cousin Jane and Cousin Chad think it’s time I was married,” she observed.

“To whom?”

“That’s a secondary consideration, though important. But Cousin Jane was married at sixteen. I’m already an old maid of twenty—or will be next month; and if I go off in my looks, I won’t find it so easy to go off matrimonially. Besides, I’m flighty and bad tempered, and a husband will be good discipline. And Bob White is a very nice young man who would probably put up with my temper more than most. And he’s rich. And Cousin Jane thinks if I try hard enough maybe I can get him. What do you think of it, Mammy Lil?” She pursed her mouth and frowned judicially.

“I think Jane Grackle’s a goose—and you’re another,” I said, laughing. “There comes David. Call him to wheel me back to the porch.”

April 29th. Summer is coming everywhere. The pasture fence is a long wall of bloom, and the odor of honeysuckle fills the air. A wonderful place for bird-

babies that will be soon! For ten days the roses have been blossoming, and Uncle Milton's flower-beds are beautiful to see. And I—the earth isn't the only dead thing that rises into life! There's another miracle coming to pass: for I am getting well!

All this month I've held my breath like a coward, and turned my head, afraid to look joy in the face. It has come near so often before; and each time the pain has snatched me back and bound me hand and foot. So I said I would never inflict on myself the agony of disappointment again. But I just can't live up to that foolishness, and I'm so glad I can't. If this isn't the ending, but just a blossoming oasis in a desert way, shall I miss the joy of that? It's nearer the end than the last one was, anyway, and better and brighter and bigger. If it isn't fulfillment, it is prophecy, and that's the next best thing. Some day it will come—the Head said so. I am to be part of life again—I! I! Some day I shall go in and out again among my kind, with power enough of living in me to make hours atone for days, and months for years. Nothing shall pass me that is mine! It is human life I want, not birds and trees and flowers: they're beautiful, but they aren't enough—I can afford to let myself say it now, because the other is so near, so near! I used to be part of life here, long, long after I was sick: there was nothing I couldn't help about, nobody who didn't smile at me as I passed: in every face I saw a memory of kindness given and received. And I'm going back to it, to my real life.—Ah, soon or late, what matter? I'm going back! Though a thousand downfalls be in the way, I'll make it yet: and be this fulfilment, or only prophecy, I open my heart to joy!

VIII

Blackbird Diplomacy

May 9th. Something is dreadfully wrong with Caro, and for once she does not give me her confidence. She went to Milly's night before last quite her own bright self, and came back to lunch yesterday another creature. A shower came up just after lunch, so I lay on my porch sofa until it passed, with David and Caro for company. I imagine things had gone wrong at the table. I saw, by Caro's bright color and the high way she carried her pretty head when she came home, that trouble was brewing for somebody, and she probably found David's sunny and unsuspecting good humor the negative complement of her own surcharged spirit. There had been at least a minor explosion; for when they came out to me they were both making an effort to appear quite like themselves. But Caro's eyes were danger-signals; and, though David smiled and his voice had its usual deep evenness, his eyes kept a furtive and brooding watch on hers. She seemed in the gayest of spirits, yet there was some jangle in the mirth which had always rung sweet and true before.

The thunder was rattling overhead, and the wind-blown curtains of the rain shut out the hills beyond. David walked to the end of the porch and studied the clouds for a little before he came back.

"I was afraid this storm would spoil the drive you promised me yesterday,—” he began.

Caro's eyes sparkled.

"You need not resort to the weather as an excuse,” she said, "I don't want to go at all.”

David stared, and a slow color burned under his tanned skin. Then he looked half-amused.

"Caro must have been having some kind of an extra tilt with Cousin Jason, Mammy Lil,” he said, "and she thinks I'm an old jay, too, and keeps ruffling her feathers at me.—I was about to say that the sun would be out inside of an hour, and by five o'clock the roads will be in the pink of condition. I'll show you what

and by five o'clock the roads will be in the pink of condition. I'll show you what Peggy can really do in the way of speed."

"I told you I don't want to go," said Caro, angrily.

"I beg pardon," said David easily; "you told me you would go. I couldn't possibly be mistaken."

I was looking at Caro in open-eyed amazement. She had never spoken to David that way in her life—nor to any one since she had ceased to be a child. She caught my look, and colored deeply. Then she cuddled her face against mine so that neither David nor I could see it.

"Dear Mammy Lil, don't look as if you didn't know me," she said, with a sudden little catch in her voice; "I've always told you I'm hateful, and you won't believe it; when I convince you, don't quit loving me."

"You silly child," I answered, patting the red-brown coil of curls; "I'll never quit loving you, whether I'm dead or alive. But I was afraid you weren't well."

She laughed and pecked my cheek.

"I'm well as ever was.—Have Peggy ready, David: I'd like to go sixty miles an hour.—Oh, dear, I'm losing all my hairpins!"

She wasn't at all. But she caught her hair with both hands, and vanished through one of the long windows. David looked after her with the set look which I had learned to know when he was little more than a baby. Then he, too, kissed me, and walked away, after putting the stand with my bell and a plate of biscuits on it close beside me.

I lay there puzzled and troubled. The rain stopped presently, and I crumbled the biscuits and flung them out on the grass, watching the birds idly.

Promptly at five David drove round with Peggy, his favorite mare, her beautiful head held as high as Caro's own, and as free from torments of check-rein and blinders. She shone like satin, and stepped with a proud consciousness of her own worth and her master's confidence in her. David sat chatting with me during the ten minutes Caro kept him waiting. She had on the pale green lawn when she came out, and a most fetching hat which she had herself concocted to go with it. I beheld her adornment with dismay. The lawn was more lace than lawn, and I

knew she had planned it for what she called a “partyfied” dress. She usually went driving with David bareheaded, and in whatever garments she happened to have on. Her finery boded him no good; and I realized with a sinking heart that if I had had the wit to keep my astonishment out of my face she would have stuck to her first refusal, and the drive would have been postponed to a more auspicious day. David was riding to disaster—and I had opened the way.

It was almost dark when they came home, and I had been back in bed for some time. Caro came in looking distractingly pretty, and sweeter than a naughty child should. I knew by the lavish bounty of her caresses that she had treated David very badly indeed, and was torn between a desire to take her in my arms and get the whole story out of her, and a wish to set her in the corner till she should return to her normal state of mind. But I remembered what I had promised David months ago, and repressed my itch to meddle. She had always confided in me before, and unless she did now I must be dumb.

David, I did not see until morning. He had brought Caro home and had returned at once to Chatterton, sending me word he had an engagement and would not be at home until after I was asleep. It was after midnight when I heard him come in. This morning he came to my room as usual, but his eyes looked as if he had not slept. I pretended to see nothing, because he wished it.—But what had happened to Caro? If she had been at Cousin Jane’s I might have suspected some mischief-making; but she went only to Grace’s. Whatever caused the change, it goes deep. She has been in her own room all day, and I have not even heard her sing.

May 12th. Caro has left us and gone to Cousin Jane’s—gone there to live. She went day before yesterday, and I have felt too stunned to think.

She stayed in her room all day, except at lunch time, and came out late in the afternoon, looking white and tired, but with that same danger signal in her eyes. I was under the maple, and she sat on the stool beside my cot.

“Mammy Lil,” she began, with a forced lightness, as though she spoke only of trifles, “I’ve been packing my traps today. You’re so much better now, you don’t really need me all the time, and I think I ought to go to Cousin Jane. Cousin Chad’s my real guardian, you know; and they’ve been awfully good about lending me to you when you were so sick.”

I felt blinded at first by the blow. “Lending” me Caro—when she had never

stayed a whole month together away from me since she was seven years old, except for the years at boarding school! My head swam, and there was such a roaring in my ears I couldn't hear all she said. She wasn't looking at me, but her voice went on with the foolish words, till I pulled myself together.

"Has Cousin Jane been trying to make you think it's your duty to go and wait on her, Caro, after you've grown up in this, your real home? She doesn't need you, child; there's no call for such a sacrifice."

"She hasn't said a word about needing me," protested Caro. "I just think I ought to go."

"Are you sure—forgive me, dearie—but do you really think she wants you there to live—for always?"

"I telephoned her this morning. I'm sure she's delighted. She does love me,—only it's in her queer way."

"Caro—" I said, and stopped. We had lived in her and for her so many years. I could not suggest that she owed us anything. The tears came to my eyes, but I held them back.

"Dear," I went on, "I've never tried to force your confidence, and I can't now. Something is wrong, I know—some trifle, probably, that a little honest frankness would set right. But I know when we are young we come to a place where we must manage our own affairs, no matter how we bungle them or how many hearts we break; it's the way we all learn at times. But darling, remember that my love waits to help you, if you ever want its service. And, whatever you do, Caro, don't do it in anger like a child. It is the mark of a woman to walk in love, and to serve love only, even where she must give the deepest hurt."

She sat looking across the hills, only her profile toward me, but I saw her lip quiver. She dropped her head on my shoulder and snuggled her face under my chin.

"You're the sweetest mammy! You know I love you—more than ever I did in my life. And I'm coming to see you so often you'll think I'm living here. But I'm sure I ought to go. There's the buggy now; Cousin Jane said she'd send it over. My trunk is all ready; she'll send for that, too. I thought I'd rather you'd tell Daddy Jack and David good-bye for me. Won't you let me take you back to

the house first?"

"No," I said; "David will help me, and your Daddy Jack. It isn't time yet."

She caught her breath a little, kissed me with a sorry effort at playfulness, and went towards the buggy. I watched it driving out the gate to the pike.

Neither David nor the Peon came, and after awhile Josie came out to say that "Mr. John" had telephoned he would have to spend the night in the city. She wheeled me to the porch, and I was back in bed before David came in. I was thankful for once that the Peon was away.

David went to his solitary dinner, and then sat by me in the twilight, stroking my hand.

"What struck Caro to go off again?" he asked, in a tone he tried hard to make casual. "Josie says she told her she was off for a visit."

"She went to Cousin Jane's—went to stay, I mean. She'll change her mind in a few days, I suppose. She has been upset for a day or two."

"To Cousin Jane's—to stay?" he repeated in bewilderment. "And left you here—like this?" he added in indignant unbelief.

"Dear, something drove her. She's unhappy about something—there's some mistake: and the need to keep it to herself is on her. It makes me feel—oh, Davy, boy, I've always thought I was a real mother to you children; but I'm only the best substitute for a mother you've known. If I were truly Caro's mother—if I had done all I thought I was doing—the child would have told me. You are both suffering for nothing—because I failed."

He bent his cheek to mine.

"You've never failed in anything, sweetest mother in the world. And Caro loves you just as I do—I'd swear it. Sometimes you can't help hurting the people you love best. I—I'm hurting you myself; and I can't help it. I'd give my right hand to help it; but I can't—yet."

"There's no need, Davy, dear," I said steadily, glad that the dark had fallen to curtain my eyes. "Don't try to be anything with me, or to say anything, but what is natural and right to you. The one thing I couldn't get over, dear, would be

is natural and right to you. The one thing I couldn't get over, dear, would be your playing a part with me. I understand; and I can wait—a life-time, if you wish."

He kissed my hand, and sat there till the moon rose over the eastern hills and strewed the lawn with shadows. A mocking-bird stirred in his sleep and sang softly to himself. I could not speak. I lay straining my eyes through the dark to see his face, but it was all in the shadow. He rose to go at last, and, before I knew it, unbidden words had risen from some subconscious depth and uttered themselves through my lips.

"David," I said, with a sudden, foolish up-lift of my heart, "I'm going to be walking all about by Thanksgiving; and before the year is out I will help with my own hands to decorate this house for your and Caro's wedding. I don't know how I know it; but I do!"

"Amen," said David solemnly. "Mammy Lil, you're a corker when it comes to prophesying. Keep up the habit; it's sure comforting; and you always could see further through a stone wall than anybody else."

He had—or feigned—more faith in my prophecy than I had myself. I felt like a fool who has published his folly to the world. And as I lay there, tearless and sleepless the long night through, I had no hope for David, and only a dull anguish at thought of the girl I had called my daughter so long.

May 13th. The world is all in a mist this morning as the sky blossoms above the eastern hills. The wren sings first, bringing the tears for which my lids have burned all night. A cardinal calls somewhere—Cheer! Cheer!—no, it is a mocking-bird, for his own notes bubble out after his cardinal call, before he wanders into a thrasher's song, repeating his notes as carefully as "the wise thrush" himself. There he is, on the topmost twig of that mist-dimmed oak. He has tuned his voice to the oriole's carol now, but again his own notes bubble through. Now he scolds like an angry wren, following the tirade with harsh cries and the blackbird's censorious tsck! Then he slips into a catbird melody—a jumble of music, jeering, and captious squawks. Gradually the music overflows all else. Clearer and sweeter grow the notes, slow, soft, and wondrous pure. His head is thrown up in rapture while the flood of melody rises and swells till it sweeps him bodily into air. He opens his mist-gray wings and tail, spreading to the light the gleaming white of the in-folded feathers, and rises through the

vapors to clearer air, singing as one to whom all mists are crystal clearness, all darkness as the light. He trembles at the height an instant, poised above the vapor-shrouded earth, while his song floats upward to the heaven of which it speaks,—a blending of calm and rapture, of aspiration and peace. Back to his perch he falls, still singing, content with earth as with heaven, and rises once again, to poise an instant, to fall, to rise, again and yet again.

It is the Song of the Open Vision. Haunting, appealing, alluring, the rapturous notes search the listener's heart to draw response from every memory of mist-drenched darkness dissolved in growing light.

May 14th. The Peon is the comfort of my life. I dreaded telling him about Caro, and behold, he knew all about it!

Cousin Chad had been in town and came out on the same train with him yesterday afternoon. He couldn't refrain from crowing a little about Caro and his dear Jane—so capable and sensible, so equal to every emergency. And it was her doing, after all: I know she never intended for me to know it. But she met Caro in the road on her way back from Grace's that day, and made the child go by home with her. Then she—to quote Cousin Chad—"was able to make her see the indelicacy of her establishing herself in the same house with a young man whom gossips were accusing her of trying to capture!" The Peon at this point expressed polite dissent from Cousin Chad's approval of his wife's tactful performance; and my pious relative waxed righteously indignant, and assumed the air of a protector of the defenceless orphan. Whereupon the Peon took refuge in his paper and Cousin Chad simmered in that condemnatory silence of his which always seemed to me worse than any possible swear-words.

But the Peon doesn't feel at all upset about Caro and David; the only thing that troubles him is that I should be left alone again during the day. So far as David is concerned, the Peon thinks Caro would never have gone if she hadn't cared for him, to some extent, at least, in the way Cousin Jane accused her of doing—which is certainly reasonable enough. And as to her loving David and yet treating him as I'm sure she did, the Peon begs me to remember some rather cold-blooded performances of my own in our courting days.

"Do you remember the night after Jessie Martin's wedding?" he demanded. "After that night, and your marrying me six months later, I lost my faith in a girl's 'no.' If I had it to go over again, I'd not lose a night's sleep on account of

it, my lady: and so I told David as he drove me home from the station.”

“Oh, you told him, then?”

“I did. And I told him to give Caro plenty of rope, and your Cousin Jane would soon hang herself with it.”

“What did he say?”

“Not much of anything. He seems to think Mrs. Grackle only furnished the occasion for Caro’s real feeling toward him to come to the front. He’s pretty sore, I imagine. But don’t you worry your dear head. Lovers would miss half the fun of the game if they couldn’t be drowned in misery now and then. Just let them alone and let them get all that’s coming to them. They’ll work through it somehow, and straighten it out to their perfect satisfaction when they get ready—and not before.”

“You didn’t let it alone,” I said reproachfully.

“No,” he said; “that’s why I’m so well posted about the course to pursue. I’ve done all that’s necessary myself.”

His eyes laughed a little, and I laughed back. Maybe I was a true prophet after all. Anyway, I musn’t look like a graveyard just because we’re all lonesome, and David is so quiet as he comes and goes. And if I’m not to look like a graveyard, the best way is not to feel like one.

May 17th. Things are happening so fast they make my head swim. David is gone, too; and I feel like an old hen who has raised a pair of wild geese and seen them go flying out of sight in opposite directions.

He fixed it all with the Peon before he said a word to me. Then he sat by my cot, with those coaxing ways of his—I knew some kind of a wrench was coming. He wanted to go out to Washington and take charge of the Peon’s apple orchard there and finish planting the land. He’d been thinking of it for some time. The only reason he hesitated about going was the leaving me alone: but I needed Caro more than I needed him; and if he went—

“But oh, my dear, I don’t!” I cried. “You are my first, my best of children! And

as for having Caro—I'll have her when the time comes of which I told you the other night. I don't want her before."

"Then you'd rather I wouldn't go?" he asked, trying to keep the disappointment out of his voice. "You've had such an awful pull, little mother, and been so brave about it: and I know Caro and I helped to drain the life out of you before you went away. I'll stay if you want me to." He bent his head above my hand, and I saw his mouth was set.

"I'd not hold you a minute, boy," I said; "distance can't separate us. I've never been separated from you yet, and never will be while you love me. It isn't your being near me that I want: it's your emancipation, through life, into freedom of life. The more living you do, the closer we'll come together, though the living be done on the other side of the globe. When would you like to start?"

"Tonight?" he said, inquiringly.

"Tonight," I answered. "And the farm here?"

"Uncle Milton knows what to do. And I've made Uncle Jack a schedule to follow. It will be all right."

"And you're going for how long?"

"Forever and a day. Tell Caro so."

"Very well," I said, "I'll tell Caro forever and a day. But what shall I tell this old lady who loves you so?"

"Tell her I'll come at the drop of a hat or the click of a telegraph, day or night, whenever she wants me—forever and a day. And Mammy Lil—what's the use of talking? You understand."

He pushed his head up under my hand as a signal that one of the rare pettings was in order: and presently he picked me up in his strong arms and carried me to his room, where I lay on the bed and watched him pack his trunk in utter defiance of all known principles of the art.

He found some comfort in doing it, too. His face shows care and lack of sleep, but he whistled a bit as he dropped his shooting boots on the bosom of a shirt, and made a soft place for the butt of his gun with a felt hat. He isn't entirely

hopeless about the outcome, no matter how miserable he is: it is poor little Caro who will get the heaviest end of the mischief Cousin Jane's meddling has produced. And that thick-headed, thick-skinned old Pharisee will go scot free herself. Oh, dear! I'd like to be good! But it is such a strenuous undertaking with Cousin Jane in the family: St. John himself couldn't manage it; and I never was cut out for a saint.

IX

The Proof of Courage

May 20th. Caro did not come back until yesterday, though she called the Peon up daily to ask how I was and to send her love. She did not allude to David, and the Peon volunteered no information. But yesterday she dashed in at the gate, driving like a young Jehu, flung the reins to Uncle Milton, who was at work among the roses at the other end of the house, and came flying across the lawn to my cot.

“Oh, Mammy Lil, are you all alone? Has David really gone—to stay, I mean?”

I told her his plans.

She sat on the edge of the cot, her head held high, her eyes sparkling.

“It’s a shame!” she exclaimed indignantly; “how could he have the heart to leave you so?”

I looked at her quizzically. I had been feeling rather forlorn; but suddenly the comical side of my woes presented itself, as it so kindly and so often does, and I wanted to laugh.

“Who ran first?” I inquired.

She flushed to the roots of her curly hair and slipped to the grass beside me, her pretty head on my shoulder.

“We’re pigs, both of us,” she averred contritely. “But, Mammy Lil, David is the worst pig. He really could have stayed: and I—couldn’t. Anyway, I’m glad he’s gone; it’s just about the decenter thing he’s done.”

“You are a consistent child,” I observed, stroking her hair; “but, Caro dear, I’m not accustomed to hearing David criticized from the standpoint of decency, and we won’t begin now. And I wanted him to go very much.”

“Well, anyway, I can come back. I’ll never leave you here by yourself. I’ll go

back and pack up this evening, and come home first thing in the morning.”

I shook my head. I had been thinking about it all these long, lonesome days. They are both my children, but David has the first right to our home; and with Caro installed here he will not come back to it. Besides, it isn't fair. And if they will fight at cross-purposes we must all take the consequences together. I know I am rather a dishevelled shuttle-cock to do duty between their clashing wills; but they will have to have it out, now that they have begun it. And if that hard-hearted little sinner came back here, she'd convince herself in no time that David is the sinner and she is the one and only saint. It never did take long for staying at Cousin Jane's to pall on Caro; and she'll probably see things from various points of view before she concludes her experiment.

Poor little soul, she cried dreadfully. She even tried to work on my sympathies by telling me how Cousin Jane serves up Bob White's perfections morning, noon, and night. This was welcome news to me, and helped me to disguise the very fluid condition of my supposedly hard heart. I must confess we both cried before she went back: but Caro owned it was fair.

I feel like a yellow dog, of course. One always does when one stands for a painful justice—it's part of the job. I felt the same shame when she was a little thing and I let her bite the red pepper she snatched in the garden the minute I told her not to touch it. It burns my own mouth to this day. But Caro never snatched against orders again.

And there's no sense in listening to Grumpy's prophecies. Where is the pleasure of growing old if one can't learn to distil from one's experiences the essential oil of hope? When the Peon and I fell out, hopelessly, desperately, eternally, about six months before we were married, I was just a young thing, and quite pardonable in my belief that my life was ruined forever by the cataclysm. But from the vantage-ground of twenty-odd years of additional living I should be able to detect the flimsiness of the average impenetrable barrier. I don't think Caro cares for any one else, at least; and if they're not meddled with they'll work it out their own way, which must be the best way for the Peon and me. And if he and I can't enjoy ourselves very much just now, why, we don't want to when the children are miserable; so that's all right, of course.

As to their misery, I have at least come far enough in life myself to know that it has—or will have—its mitigations. I never yet have been in a hole—and heaven knows life has been a procession of holes these last years—that I didn't get out

of it with some added capacity of living that made being in holes worth while. Why should I begrudge the children their own hole-adventures and discoveries, their own enrichment of life?

May 22nd. The Peon comes home early these days and takes me out for a ride. I can sit in my chair or lie down at will; and he wheels me over the soft grass to all the places I've been longing to see and have only beheld in Make-Believe. We go down to the brook nearly every day about sunset and watch the birds quenching their thirst before bedtime. There are many song sparrows down there; and the killdeers haunt the banks at all time, whirring up when startled with wild cries, their breasts and lifted wings flashing snow-white beneath, and the rich salmon of the lower back gleaming as they rise from the valley into the level sunlight along the brow of the hill. The Peon flattens my chair to a couch, and throws himself on the grass or sits on the roots of a sycamore, while we talk of all the years that the children have been growing up with us, and of what the future is to bring. We are both very strenuously cheerful. And indeed, in our hearts, we do hope honestly to have them both at home again some day. Only it seems rather a long way off sometimes; and the house is so very quiet when we go back.

Sometimes we go back to the spot we picked out years ago as the one where we thought David might like to build his home some day; for though we always hoped to have him with us, we never wanted to rob him of a home of his own. We had never said to one another that we hoped for Caro to make the home for him—to put it into words seemed to infringe on their right to settle that great matter, each to their own heart's wish: but we had hoped it without words. We go there now, and hope for it openly, bridging our separation with happy dreams, and comforting one another with assurances it is not always easy to feel.

David has not been long enough at his journey's end for a letter mailed there to reach us; but it seems as if he had been gone for months. And poor little Caro looks so wistful when she starts back to Cousin Jane's that I feel as though I have been turning her out of doors for the most of my life. It is really not to be borne very much longer. The Peon's sister wants us to go to her next month, at her summer home in the mountains of Pennsylvania; and Caro will have to come home in time to get me ready. We can spend the summer together, at least.

But before I go I want to see plainer sailing for Milly and Bobolink, as Caro disrespectfully styles Mr. Lincoln. Grace was here for a little while today to tell

unrespectably styles Mr. Lincoln. Grace was here for a little while today to tell me good-bye. She is off to stay with George's mother while the old lady's daughter takes a trip. Milly was with her, and promised to come back soon. She said she wanted to talk to me, and from the anxious air with which she said it, I'm hoping she is seriously thinking of turning on that jay-bird uncle of hers and teaching him a few of the things he needs to learn.

May 25th. A golden day, after a night of drenching rain. The sky is like October, and under it the winds are at play. And why, when sunshine fills the world, should one suffer one's eyes to be blinded to it by any mote of pain or trouble held close enough to shut out all the light? I will keep mine at arm's length, if I die for it, and see around it and over it, yes, and through it, into this beautiful, wonderful world! If one's feet can't travel, aren't one's eyes an open road of escape?

May 27th. Three sleepless nights, a dead weight of weariness, loneliness to the heart's core, and pain that wrings the flesh—these are among Grumpy's stock-in-trade this morning, and he flaunts them and a dozen other things, wherever I turn my thoughts. He has heaped up, mountain high, the things I want and can't have; and there he sits, grinning at the void they leave in my idle, useless life. I must fill that hole, or go under. What have I left?

First, the Peon's love, and the children's, and that of my friends. Love: and the Love from which love came. By the time all that is stowed away in the void, it has rather a "gone" look about it—for a void. And Grumpy's grin has a tuck in it.

Then a sense of humor—the most blessed thing, save love itself, ever given to human kind. It keeps one sane and balanced where without it one would go mad. A source of justice it is, a bond of sympathy, a destroyer of egotism, a solace in suffering, a staff to courage, an open door of escape from all that is unbearable in life.

Next, the power to hold my tongue when things hurt, and to keep the whine out of my voice when I'm nothing but whine inside.

There are love, laughter, and silence; and as void-fillers they go a long way. But there are other things for the chinks. For I can read a little and write a little, and think a little, as against the black idleness of those three years. And beauty—

think a little, as against the black richness of those three years. And beauty—wind in the tree-tops, the arching blue, the flicker of light and shade—beauty everywhere, in fact; and back of beauty the Thought that designed both it and the eyes to see it. Oh, it is a beautiful world! And though one's body lies idle, one's thoughts may go everywhere, and are everywhere at home. And may not endurance itself, however passive, yet rise to the point of achievement, if only one endure in the right way? And if liberty be measured by one's capacity to do without—oh, how can any walls of suffering shut one in when the way up is always open—up, to the presence of God?

May 28th. Whenever I think I've overcome a temptation, and can afford to rest, something else comes pouncing and catches me napping. This time it was Cousin Jane. I'm not a bit sorry I sent her home—it was high time for her to go. But I needn't have been so blazing mad when I did it.

She hasn't been near me for ages, but she came at last, exactly when she very specially should have kept away. So as I lay there on the porch sofa—for I couldn't get out in the yard this week—I heard the familiar pile-driver tread, and opened my eyes to behold her at the corner of the porch, personified virtue, somewhat overheated by the afternoon sun, and looking rather limp about the collar. But there was nothing limp about her stolid mouth, nor in her hard black eyes. She had come for a purpose, and was not displeased to think I wouldn't enjoy it.

I've been afraid of Cousin Jane all my life. I used to run at the sound of her voice when I was a child at Cedarhurst. More than once I have been gently, but firmly, extracted from a closet by Great-aunt Letitia, and led to her presence to perform the rites required by politeness to even the most unpleasant kin. Somehow it all came back to me—the childish, unreasoning fear. I was so weak, the pain so biting sharp; I could not bear unkindness, too. I turned my head toward the long windows with a wild thought of escape; but when my heart is like this, I can scarcely walk, and I could never have reached my room. Besides, she would come after me: so I made a virtue of necessity and lifted my hand. She saved me the trouble of speaking.

“Good land alive, Lyddy! Are you mopin' around yet, makin' out like you're half dead? I wonder John Bird doesn't go crazy! I heard you were rompin' all over the place, throwin' the birds enough biscuit to feed all the poor folks in town, if you only had religion enough to think about them instead of your own

silly whims.”

She came close and settled herself heavily in the Peon’s chair, waving her fan vigorously. She reached across me to the stand on the other side, and rang my bell sharply. Josie appeared at once.

“Go draw me some fresh water, straight out of the well,” she commanded. It was one of her hobbies to ignore the Peon’s water system, and to assume that we depended on a well and a windlass, as she boasted that she still did herself.

“Wouldn’t you rather have a glass of lemonade?” I inquired. “And bring some wafers, Josie.”

Josie’s mother makes wonderful old-time wafers, as thin as paper and as crisp as frosty air. They are beautifully rolled, and melt in one’s mouth: no other cook in the county can achieve them. Cousin Jane ate the entire plateful, and her manner, as she turned to me once more, was a shade less like that of a regiment charging a redoubt.

“What did David go off for?” she demanded. “Have you and John Bird turned him loose? I can’t get a thing out of Caroline, and I know something’s wrong somewhere. What is it?”

“He went to look after some business,” I said.

“Oh, you can tell that to the neighbors that ain’t kin,” she said scornfully. “I want to know what’s wrong. He’s done somethin’, I know, an’ Caroline’s ashamed of it. I can’t get a thing out of her, but she’s a changed girl. An’ more than that, she’s standin’ in her own light. She’s that flighty an’ cross Bob White looks like he don’t know what to make of it. Men ain’t goin’ to stand too much foolishness, an’ first news you know, Caroline can’t get him if she wants him. I’m talkin’ plain, but it’s time.”

“Why don’t you talk to Caro?” I suggested.

“Good land, Lyddy, do you reckon I ain’t? But it’s like water on a duck’s back—in one ear and out the other. An’ besides”—with a sudden deep craft in her beady eyes—“you have to be careful with girls—at least, a person with tact does. I don’t come right out with things to Caroline, like you would. But I just thought I’d get together all the things David’s been doin’ an’ lay ’em before her. I don’t suppose you let her know the half of it, whatever it was. Was it somethin’

I don't suppose you let her know the half of it, whatever it was. Was it something about money, or has he been getting into fast ways, drinkin', or playin' cards, or—worse? I always knew he would get into mischief sooner or later—he pretends to be so steady: I've just been waitin' for it to come. Why, what's the matter, Lyddy? What do you want?"

I sat straight up and rang the bell. Josie ran out.

"Get me my chair, Josie, quick," I said. She whirled it to my side, and I stepped in unaided.

"Take me to my room," I told her, "and leave me there while you tell Uncle Milton to get Mrs. Grackle's buggy and to open the gate for her. She is going home at once. Then come back and help me to bed. Do not come back until I send for you, Cousin Jane: I am not well."

She stared at me, speechless and apoplectic, and as Josie arranged my pillows I saw her driving between the cedars. And above all my anger about David and my consciousness that Great-aunt Letitia would be ashamed of me, above the weakness, and above the tearing, throbbing pain, is the exhilaration of knowing that for once in my life I wasn't afraid of Cousin Jane. I never will be afraid of her again!

May 31st. Trying all one's life to see things from other peoples' point of view has this advantage in sickness: it helps one to stand apart from the suffering and to look at it from without, even when whelmed in it, and almost overwhelmed. One sees it as if it were someone else's sickness, taking the long view of it, as a doctor does. He is sorry for the pain, of course; he knows it is bad. But he expects it. And he expects the backsets, and the blues, and the can-I-ever-get-wells, and all the rest of it. Those things are part of the process of recovery, and do not affect the final outcome. Once past a certain point, the road leads inevitably to one sure goal; the windings in and out don't count, nor the ups and downs; one is advancing all the time. Now, if a doctor, who doesn't need it, can get that comfort out of my aches and pains, why shouldn't I get it, who need it so much?

June 1st. Out under the maple again today, and the stars in their courses fighting for me! And why, when a miracle like this happens for Milly and Bobolink,

should I despair of David and Caro?

Milly came to see me to have that long talk she spoke about. She had been telephoning every day to know when she could come, so I had Josie call her the moment I found I could go out. And just suppose I had been well enough yesterday—what a misfortune that would have been!

She scattered the crumbs for me, and settled beside me to pour out what Caro calls “her uncle-ish woes;” and while she was doing it, the wood-thrush flew down, only to be shouldered away from the feast by a mannerless jay. Somehow it made me feel perfectly hopeless about Milly, poor little soft, sweet thing, and my eyes filled up with tears; but when I had winked them dry, the thrush went back. The jay pecked at him savagely, and he dashed half-way round the hydrangeas in terror. Milly saw him and caught her breath.

“Uncle Jason is like that,” she said, with a little catch in her voice; “and I can’t stand against him—I can’t! Don’t you see how helpless the thrush is, Cousin Lil?”

But the thrush had stopped in mid-flight. His breast was puffed out like a tiny balloon, the trembling of his legs plain to be seen; he quivered from head to foot. But he turned slowly, his legs shaking under him, and hopped deliberately toward his tormentor, his head high, his swollen breast making a ruff of feathers visible on either side of his back. He went close to the jay and pecked toward him in the air. The jay, startled, gave back an inch. The thrush, still trembling, hopped nearer and pecked, as steadily as if his legs were in their normal condition. The bully backed again. The thrush hopped and pecked.

Milly had leaned forward, her hand on mine. Her face was white and she was breathing quickly.

The jay continued to back. The wood-thrush followed him, inch by inch, unyielding, yet in mortal fear. At last the big coward could stand it no longer. He spread his wings and vanished across the brook. The thrush stood trembling a moment, his feathers slowly flattening along his sides, and then returned quietly to his lunch. Milly rose, a new light in her soft eyes.

“If he can, I can,” she said steadily. “I don’t need to talk any more, Cousin Lil: I’m going home and do.”

X

The Routing of Uncle Jason

June 2nd. I'm afraid I haven't inherited the family grace of hospitality; for the further I get from Cousin Jane's visit the more glad I am that I sent her home. And it isn't all on David's account either, though I could never have done it but for what she said of him. Yet since it is done I remember her life-time disregard of the small courtesies of life. I wonder if it were not more cowardice in me than kindness that for so long I meekly allowed it, and thereby encouraged her, so far as lay in my power, to ride rough-shod over all the rules of politeness.

I do believe that decent manners, even to one's junior kinfolks, are an essential part of decent morals; one can commit as dastardly crimes with an ill-tempered tongue as with a lying one. And what right has she to plume herself on her frankness, as if that were a justification for such ill manners as cut the joy and fellowship of life at the root? I think our ideas of morals need standardizing, at least to the point where we can no longer, by bad temper and worse behavior, inflict misery at will on those about us, sowing on every side the seeds of anger or contempt, and yet remain a highly respected member of society and a shining light in the church.—Yet, after all, I'm making a deal of a pother about trifles. It is what we do ourselves that counts, not what is done to us. In the face of the void, at the land's end, the hurts one has suffered will disappear; it is the hurts one has inflicted that will be lions in the way. And if I have really hurt Cousin Jane—well, when I'm a little stronger I'll try my best to get straight with her. For the present, I am here in bed again, with the birds outside for company—and a visit from Caro to look forward to. She telephoned a while ago that she had been spending the night with Milly and would be over before lunch. So Cousin Jason hasn't annihilated the child, at least.

June 3rd. Milly really did go home and begin. She went by for Caro yesterday afternoon on her way home, and they found Cousin Jason in a thunderous mood. Milly was quietly determined. He had left the breakfast table that morning in a temper, after his frequent fashion: and Milly, in her brand-new fashion, had refrained from running after him and imploring him to have pity on his poor head, and drink his coffee. He had fumed around on the porches for some time,

waiting for her to take her cue, and had finally disappeared. He came back at eleven with a headache, slamming all the doors, notwithstanding, and demanded hot coffee at once. Milly, however, had foreseen this contingency and prepared for it. The cook's daughter was ill, and she had allowed her to go down there as soon as breakfast was over and stay until time to cook dinner. It was the housemaid's regular day off, and she had already departed, not to return until the late afternoon. As Uncle Jason had ordered cold lunches for the summer, the girl had fixed everything for him, and left it in the refrigerator. Joe, the house man, would serve it. Milly herself, who was just leaving the house as her uncle came in, had an engagement in Chatterton for lunch and must hurry; but if he wanted coffee Joe could make a fire for him, though he could not brew any drinkable beverage. But Uncle Jason had always said he could make better coffee than her mother's cooks, and it would take only a few minutes. It was too bad about the headache; he should have taken his coffee at breakfast. And Milly drove off, a vision of gentle serenity, and left him gasping in the hall.

Caro went back with her in time for dinner. Milly had passed the pale stage and was in unwonted and most becoming excitement. Caro, of course, was enraptured with the whole situation. She is the only soul alive who ever held Cousin Jason in check; and now she infuriated him with her innocent remarks, and made him laugh the next moment in spite of himself, which made him more furious still. After dinner they retired to Milly's room and discussed Bobolink's perfections—and David's, I wonder?—until the latest of late bedtimes.

At breakfast Cousin Jason was more than crabbed; but he drank the last of his coffee, and made quite a hearty meal before pronouncing the very excellent waffles unfit for human consumption and slamming the dining-room door after him as he went out. Caro had then seen Milly off to the city, where she was to do a little shopping and "take a bobolink lunch," and would go back to spend the night with her.

Caro will stay there all the time Grace is away. She is in the highest of spirits over the prospect, not only because a battle with Cousin Jason has been one of her life-long desires; but because she is more than weary of Cousin Jane, and her blunderbuss manner of forcing conversation anent Bob White. Caro won't say much about it—for fear, I devoutly hope, that I may draw inferences in David's favor; but she is unconcealably bored with Bob, and his money, and his pedigree and connections, clear back to Noah. I doubt if the boy ever had a chance with her; but if he had—or would have had without Cousin Jane's disastrous approval of him—it is only a might have been henceforth. I feel a little sorry for him, but

of him—it is only a might-have-been henceforth. I feel a little sorry for him, but not much. He was crazy about Olive Wilson last year, and will be crazy about somebody else before long. He's one of those fellows who find a pretty girl a necessary adjunct to life, and if one can't be had, he will cheerfully and wholeheartedly look for another. When he gets her, he will settle down with her contentedly, and make a devoted and exemplary spouse.

Of course I keep David posted. And of course he wants me to. But he never alludes to Caro in his letters, which are long and interesting, and determinedly cheerful. The little sinner asks for them unblushingly every time she comes over, and is delighted that “dear David” is enjoying himself so, and is so in love with the West. She is ostentatiously fond of him, in a lofty, elder-sisterly manner, and makes frequent inquiries about his health, which appears to be unromantically robust. I cannot see the slightest change in her, except for a wistfulness in her pretty eyes, when she has to say good-bye and go away; and sometimes a fleeting quiver in her smile when she finds me back in bed, as she has done so often of late. I am glad we are to leave together soon, for I can scarcely bear this continual sending her away. I don't think she can mind going, busy and active as she is, as I mind having her go. I really am a very old lady to be so upset with youthful love affairs: I'm positively decrepit. But if one will have the fun of having children, I suppose one must pay the piper sometimes.

June 6th. I think I am learning the art of living; and isn't that worth a bit of pain? It is to discover the best in the present moment, though it be no larger than a needle in a haystack, and getting the good of it while one has it. One can relax one's mind by force of will, and hold it open to small pleasures and tiny interests; and such little things may become one's salvation in desperate straits! I think that is one of life's greatest needs, especially as one grows older, or if one is ill—that one should guard and cherish the capacity for enjoyment of trifles. It is to the soul what elasticity of the arteries is to the body; for through it the currents of our thoughts and feelings run in swift and wholesome tides, to the upbuilding of the inner life.

And there's always something. Though the children have run away, I have the birds.

June 7th. Milly has crossed her Rubicon, sure enough. I was propped up in bed yesterday evening, with my tray before me, and the Peon was eating his dinner

from a flower-garnished table beside me, when there came a sudden gust of laughter in the hall, and a moment later she and Caro came in the room.

“Oh, Mammy Lil, won’t you please give us something to eat?” Caro besought. “Just a bite of your fried chicken, Daddy Jack, for two beautiful damsels in distress; and a pinch of oats or something for a poor little pin-feathered bird we’ve got in the hall that’s most mad enough to chew nails—or would be if he were not a saint.”

“Mr. Lincoln is in the parlor, Cousin John,” said Milly. “We don’t want any dinner, of course—he’s going back to town in a few minutes; he just drove us over from home. We want to stay all night—Caro and I.”

The Peon was already in the hall. Milly looked wonderfully pretty, with that light in her eyes, and a soft color in her cheeks, like fire behind a pearl.

“Indeed we do want dinner!” exclaimed Caro. “Come along and help me forage. There’s no use in Bobolink’s going back. He can stay at the hotel in Chatterton tonight, and get back in plenty of time for his business in the morning.—Poor Mammy Lil! We’re not telling you a thing; but I’ll come back in a minute with the whole tale, as soon as I get dinner started.”

She dropped a kiss on the end of my nose—her favorite spot for such attentions—and went out, drawing Milly after her. I heard them in the dining-room with the servants, and then Caro’s gay voice in the parlor a moment; and then she came back to me. She picked a drumstick from the Peon’s dish, and sat on my bed gnawing it, joyfully reminiscent of her recent adventures.

“Mammy Lil,” she began impressively, “jay-baiting is the grandest sport ever invented. Milly doesn’t appreciate the fun of it as much as she might, but she’s dead game; and I’ve been having the time of my life.”

“It’s too bad that Mr. Lincoln couldn’t have been kept free from it, dear. How did that happen?”

“Why, that wasn’t our fault at all. He often comes out in the afternoon and takes Milly out in his car. Then he goes to the hotel in Chatterton for supper, and comes back for the evening. He hardly ever sees Cousin Jay, and when he does, there’s never been any trouble since that time Milly told you about; she’s made him leave at half-past nine ever since.

“They came back early from their drive because I was to be there, and he stopped for a little visit before dinner. He doesn’t stop usually—they stay out till the last minute; and Cousin Jay just jumped to the conclusion Milly had asked him to dinner. We have been teaching Cousin Jay to eat all the breakfast he wants before he leaves the table, and one or two other things, too. If he’s too horrid at dinner we go to our room afterward, and leave him all the evening with nobody to quarrel at. And I suppose he just meant to get even. He came out and told Milly and me to go in the house and get ready for dinner, for he was tired of waiting for us. And then he turned around to Mr. Lincoln—he hadn’t spoken to him at all—and said, ‘It’s time for you to be going, young man, and you needn’t come back after supper. I’m tired of your hanging around here.’ And then he turned on his heel and walked to the house. Oh, I was so mad I could hear my hair crackle! Just feel how crisped-up and woolly it is.”

She bent forward on the bed and pushed her soft curls under my hand, burrowing her nose in the covers.

“What did Mr. Lincoln do?”

“Just behaved like an angel. He didn’t have a thought but for Milly. He forgot all about me, and spoke to her as if they were alone. Mammy Lil, that man’s sweet. He’ll do for Milly, and I told him so afterwards. But Milly was a perfect joy. She gave Bobolink one adoring look. It went to my very toes, so I don’t know what it did to him; and then she said, in the quietest way:

“Won’t you stay here for a few minutes and wait for me? I’m coming back.”

“And he said he’d wait till doomsday, of course! and she took my hand without a word, and into the house we went. It wasn’t nearly dinner time. We went by the back way, and she stopped in the kitchen long enough to tell Jule she wouldn’t be home for several days, and what to do for Cousin Jason. Then we went upstairs and packed a couple of suitcases, and I called Joe to take them down stairs. We all went down the front way, and there he was in the hall.”

“ ‘What the deuce are you doing?’ he snapped.

“ ‘I’m going out of this house,’ said Milly, as quietly as if she’d said she were going out on the porch; ‘and I’m not coming back till you learn your place in it.’

“ ‘I reckon you’ll learn some sense when your mother comes home,’ he sneered.

‘Go play the fool if you want to.’

“Milly didn’t seem to hear him; and somehow that still, deep anger of hers made me ashamed to sputter, so I never said a word. He slammed the door behind us, and we all got in Bobolink’s car and came over.

“Milly told him what she had said to Cousin Jay, and they fixed everything in two minutes. Milly won’t write a word to Cousin Grace, because she’s just obliged to stay with old Mrs. Wood till her daughter gets back, and there’s no use in worrying her. I know you’ll let Milly stay here; and when Cousin Grace comes back, if she’ll make Cousin Jay behave, or go away, Milly will go home and wait to be married till her mother wishes. But if Cousin Grace won’t stop him, Milly’s going to marry Bobolink right off, in church, with just the clothes she has. And I think she’s exactly right.”

“She’s right to come here and wait for Grace to settle it,” I said; “and Grace will settle it right, I know.”

But I was half afraid, even as I said it. Cousin Jason has bent Grace like a reed from her babyhood, and almost—perhaps not quite—broken her. Could she stand against him, even if she would?

June 9th. Could she indeed? As if love couldn’t set the gentlest face like a flint!

We were all in here this morning, Milly and Caro both busy with a lace-y frock for the bride-to-be—“just in case she has to be a bride next week”—when I saw Grace driving up. I did not tell them she was coming, and her arms were around Milly before the child knew she was there.

“You darling!” said Grace; “you’ll have to forgive me dear, as Robert has done. He’s coming out this afternoon to take dinner and spend the night.”

Milly gave a little gasp, and then dropped her head on her mother’s shoulder and began to cry. Caro snatched up the filmy stuff they were working on, threw it over Milly like a bridal veil, and pirouetted around the two, crooning the dolefullest tune imaginable, her eyes dancing with fun. Grace looked up.

“Don’t stop petting Milly a minute,” Caro exhorted; “she’s a perfect heroine, and Bobolink’s a dear. I’m just singing a requiem for my jay-bird kin.”

“But, Mother,” asked Milly, sitting up, “how ever did you hear about it? And how did you happen to come home so soon? And when did you see—Robert?” She blushed beautifully as she called his name.

“Your uncle telephoned me night before last. I knew he had everything wrong, of course; but I was sure that enough was the matter for me to come home and see about it. It was all right to leave Mother, for Annie promised to stay, and Mary is coming the last of the week. So I telephoned Robert to meet me in town yesterday at twelve o’clock. I stayed there last night because there were several things to do in taking business affairs into my own hands again; and before I saw Brother Jason I had to think out clearly what I wished to say.”

“Have you seen him?”

“Yes, I went there first this morning.” She hesitated, a troubled look in her eyes. Milly drew her closer.

“Poor mother!” she said.

“It is your uncle who needs sympathy, dear, though he will not have it. And I know it is partly my fault, and partly the whole family’s, as well as his. We have all given up to him all our lives, under color of being kind and patient and magnanimous, and all that, when at the bottom we were just afraid to oppose him; and he—suffers.”

“O, Mother, I’m sorry!” cried Milly. “I’ll give up!”

“Now, Cousin Grace, I call that a shame,” broke in Caro. “No matter what you and Milly do, you make a fault and a penance out of it to shield him and hurt yourselves. It isn’t fair. He knows he’s outrageous, and he doesn’t care; and I just think he ought to be hurt, to find out what he’s been doing to other people. If he’s gone, do let Milly enjoy herself, for once. But is he gone, really?”

“He’s going,” said Grace. “I wanted him to stay, as my guest, and not as the master of the house. But he—he was very angry. He is to leave this morning, while I am here. He’s going back to his own house and live there all alone.”

“And a mighty good thing for him,” declared Caro. “When I used to indulge in tantrums like his, Mammy Lil always made me go stay by myself till I was what she called a social creature. I think I’ll go over and see Cousin Jason and tell him

about it. I could always come back the second I was willing to be polite, and so can he. Think of Cousin Jason's emerging a social creature! Butterflies and caterpillars won't be in it. But if Milly isn't to be married next week, when do we begin on the trousseau?"

The talk passed into a discussion of clothes, and drifted about that interesting topic till time for them to go home. They found their house empty, except for the servants. Cousin Jason had gone, as he said, without eating again beneath his sister's roof.

June 16th. I suppose the excitement of Cousin Jason's deposition was a little too much for me: I've been curled up dead-'possum-fashion for a week. Now I'm uncurling again, and showing that, like the 'possum, I'm not so dead as I look. Caro came back, whether or no, and took charge of me. It is a great comfort to have her.

June 19th. A slow pull and a hard one. But I make it, inch by inch.

June 21st. Courage, patience and laughter—life would be impossible without them. Yet the first necessity, and the last, is love. If one only loves enough, one can fight anything, and fight always, while breath and consciousness last.

June 24th.

WHEN WINGS GO BY

A flash of wings across my window-pane!

Fallen these narrow walls; and sky-arched plain,

Fern-haunted pool, white foam of summer seas,

Blue, dawn-steeped mountains, dusk of forest trees—

All things free wings may seek, or near or far—

Sweep round this bed, where pain and stillness are.

A prisoned life? When any moment brings

A far horizon, and the sense of wings?

XI

Where the Battle was Fought

July 7th. I have seen the woods in summer time again! It was winter when I left home for those three years, and winter when I went back; and, though one does not think of the country passed in a winter journey as dead—for the winter's story of life reserved is as vivid as the summer one of life out-poured—yet one longs to see, far out-spread in breeze and sunshine, the close-shut life of the winter buds.

As soon as the doctor would allow it, the Peon and Caro brought me here. We came through the mountains nearly all the way—one long splendor of rhododendrons, wild phlox, azaleas, laurel, and briar rose, all in glorious bloom; and above them the green billows of the trees, with great masses of chestnut blooms for foam. And everywhere the mountains themselves, green and dark near at hand, and blue and faint in the distance; and between them the valleys, heaped with beauty and over-flowing with life.

The Boss and the Madam met us in Baltimore, and brought us to this heavenly place. My room is downstairs, with windows on three sides, and wide doors opening on a quiet end of the wide piazza, which nearly encircles the house. I can be wheeled there, straight from the bed, to a couch-like hammock, where a cranky back may be as comfortable as its own bad temper will allow; and my bed is under a long row of windows, just as it is at home. I can look out across the small plateau, occupied by the cottage grounds, to mountains, near and far, and to the glory of the sunset skies. And again, from the porch, on mountains, and slopes where the summer cottagers have set their beautiful homes.

I was ashamed to come here in this battered condition; when the Madam wrote for us I expected to be walking all about by the time I came. But they would have me, and the Peon and Caro were of the same mind. For myself, I can scarcely imagine a lovelier place to get well in; the loving-kindness indoors is as fine a tonic as the mountain air outside.

I have not seen any of the Peon's family in all these years of my invalidism, but I find them in spirit just where I left them—and in body, too, for that matter; for

health and love and happiness are a combination to defy time, and the heads of the household are still a bridal pair. Their youthful names for one another, long since adopted by the rest of us, suit their sunny middle-age as well as ever; so the “Boss” and the “Madam” they remain.

One of the daughters is married, and will make but a brief visit this summer. The other, known as Hazel-eyes, is the light of the big house; a quiet little body, wonderfully pretty, her mother’s shadow and her father’s adorer.

The Peon stayed only a couple of days, and went back to our empty nest. He is to go West before long, and will come here on his return to tell me all about David.

Caro is restless and unusually silent, not doing herself justice among strangers. The child has been severely taxed in the last few weeks, and shows it plainly. The roses are all gone, and her eyes are tired and sad. She seems like a new Caro whom I must learn to know. I know I was ill for awhile, though not as ill as they thought; and she never saw me suffer that way before. But it isn’t that which clouds her bright eyes—it can’t be, no matter what she says, now that I am past the worst of it. I wonder will she ever open her heart to me about David. She used to tell me everything. I always said the test of my success in mothering her would come with her falling in love; if she came to me with that, I would know I had done my work aright. And now I see that I have failed. If I had been her real mother I would have known better how to reach her. It is a real motherhood to me, of course, but not to Caro—and perhaps not even to David. So I must lie here and wait, like any other outsider, till everybody knows how it turns out.

July 9th. Yesterday Caro wheeled me out to the line of locusts, which cuts this plateau in half and divides the Boss’s grounds from his neighbor’s. A song sparrow came to call at once, a dear little fellow, all streaks and music. They sing here all day long—they and the winter wrens.

A flicker has a clamorous brood in the tallest locust; they cry every moment, except when their wail is gagged by a worm. Their parents toil incessantly, but I should think their nerves would be on edge. The bluebird mothers, too, are hard at work, for there are dozens of bluebird babies to feed, and bluebird fathers never turn a wing or lend a bill to their upbringing. The babies are cunning, speckled things, their big round eyes ringed with white, giving them an expression of child-like wonder.

This afternoon I am out on my end of the porch, in the hammock. Caro has gone with Hazel-eyes and a party of young folks on an expedition to Bare Rock—a great shelf of granite which juts out near the top of the mountain to the north of us, and from which there is a wonderful view. The Madam is entertaining visitors on the other side of the porch, and I am finding the solitude I need a constant temptation to Grumpyish thoughts.

When one wants to bog down, there are always such unassailable reasons for doing it! I have faced Grumpy down and out about the pain. And I've done fairly well about the idleness; that isn't a losing fight, at least. But I'm just bowled over about the children. And it isn't altogether that they're suffering, though that hurts. It's because they're suffering away from me, and I can't do anything until they choose to take me into their confidence.

I've been lying here thinking how Grumpy must be enjoying my back-sliding till I've made up my mind to fight him to a finish on this also. They have a right to their secrets and to their own lives; it's the right and natural way. I never repaid Great-aunt Letitia's love to her, any more than she repaid her mother's. You don't pay love back; you pay it forward. The great-aunts paid their love-debt, not to their mother, but to me; and I've paid what I owed them to David and Caro; and Caro and David won't pay to me—they can't; they'll pay it to children yet unborn. Why can't I accept the law, and be glad? It's trying to grab what isn't one's share that makes all the trouble in life, anyway. I've always said the most secure possession was the one carried in an open handle and free to fly at a breath: I'll carry the children that way now. And for amusement, there are still the birds.

July 10th. As I lay on the porch this afternoon, facing the great mountain to the north, the long fingers of the westering light touched the foamy white tops of the chestnut trees, still crowned with their mist of bloom. The light slid across the hollows of the mountain-side, filling the long curves with dark green shadows, a soft, deep background for the maples of the nearer lawns, all golden green in the full sunlight, and for the silver of the wind-ruffled poplars. Locust trees are on every side, a survival of the native forests. Where the light is reflected from their leaves, they are a dark bluish green; but where the sun strikes through them, each leaflet is shining gold, and the long leaves sway at the end of every branch like giant fronds gleaming under some Midas touch.

But even the locusts are far away across the many-acred lawn. The trees near

But even the locusts are far away, across the main road. The trees near the house are too young and small to shelter birds; and if I go out to the locusts their foliage is too light and too high to shade my eyes from the glare: so I have been missing the birds. If I could stay with the others it wouldn't matter; but I must lie alone, and in silence, resting between lines when I write; and Grumpy is boring company. So I've been casting envious looks at a place across the road. A long hedge of blossoming privet hides everything but the tree-tops, but there are dozens of them; and wings flash in and out. It is a large place, larger than this; I know there's a corner in it there I wouldn't be in the way. The sense of something near and unknown, yet knowable, draws me daily. The Garden of Delight I call it, and listen for the songs which float from it, and long for its shade and sunshine.

When the Madam came to sit with me I confessed my daft condition to her, and she went across the road to the Garden's owners—two ladies who are friends of hers—and returned presently with the freedom of the Garden for me and my chair. I am to go tomorrow.

I wonder sometimes if people dream of the pleasure they can give through little things. To these ladies I suppose their bit of hospitality is a trifle soon forgotten; but to me it is pure delight. It will hearten me for my fight a thousand times, and lift me clear above the pain a thousand more. It is hard to keep steady when one is so happy. The long, filmy curves of wind-swept silver in the evening sky grow suddenly dim; and when they wheel me back to bed I am "fair lifted," as the Scotch say, and wait joyfully in the darkness for such sleep as night may bring.

July 11th. The Garden of Delight! A close-shaven sward from which the tiniest bird stands up distinctly; and trees, and trees, and trees! Shrubs and vines, rose-beds, azaleas, tall altheas, clumps of iris, masses of old-fashioned lilies, tangles of honeysuckles on the fences, beds of early phlox, ragged robins, larkspur, and ferns—all things cool and quiet and sweet. In the dense shade of tall shrubs they have left me, the feathery locusts waving overhead, and before me a hitherto unsuspected vista of beauty—the long, long valley which leads to Gettysburg, with the mountains guarding it on either side.

Beyond the greensward lies a beautiful bit of wilderness—ferns and wild flowers under thick-set trees; beyond that, close-shaven grass again, then a bit of clover, and a tangle out of the very heart of the woods. And everywhere are birds. And I, who have longed for the woods for years, and who have never dreamed of

finding them outside of the land of Make-Believe, I am here, far off, a thousand miles from everywhere, alone with the sky and the winds and the wild mountains, in a silence of upper air! One can bear one's body in a place like this: it doesn't matter that it cannot run, nor walk. One's mind can run, and fly, and rise so high that the pain lies far below, lost, vanished, like a pebble in the valley when one looks from a free mountain peak against the sky. For one glorious hour I have run away from it—this pain that wrenches and grips; I have been free, free! And so my hope grows bold, and I reach out to touch that happy future when I shall be free in body as well as in mind: it will come—some day!

And oh, foolish one, remember, and learn! For the Garden of Delight was close at hand all the time, only I hadn't the wit to reach it till my body was carried thither. But there is always a Garden, if one can find it—a Garden of Delight, hidden behind the hedge!

July 15th. The birds are not kind today, even here in the Garden. It is a grey evening, for one thing, and the light is bad for spying out secrets among the leaves. The weather is misty and damp, promising the rain we need; but everything is dry from recent heat, and the insects may be less juicy than usual, and not very tempting eating. Anyway, the birds are not here.

The mist, with the dim light of the evening sun upon it, spreads a film of silver over the blues and greens of the mountains. Down in the valley it deepens till all the colors are faint and soft, from the pale stubble of the nearer wheatfields all up the long valley between the mountains, to where the dim blue of the great battlefield melts into the dim blue of the sky above it.

It was down this Valley, over the road at my feet, that the men of the Southern army tramped after the battle was lost. My own kinsmen were there, following their great leader with the rest, as he passed through the Valley of Defeat. How much seemed lost to them, who can say? But to us of a later generation how plain it is that nothing was lost at Gettysburg which it were well to keep. The really priceless thing they brought away unharmed—the courage which could accept defeat, and turn, without a murmur, in the wreck of the old order, to the upbuilding of a new world. That was a struggle which the world even now knows little of, though it was as wide as the South and as long as a generation's life-time. It was fought singly, and in silence, in each individual life. Each soul bled inwardly, and only God saw the wounds. But I have sprung from men who fought that fight. Let me look at the Valley, and learn.

July 18th. The wind is at play in the mountains today, and sweeps up the Valley with a sound as of rushing waters, bending the trees before it. The long shadows under the swaying branches know not a moment's rest; and the racing clouds shift the shafts of sunlight so rapidly from place to place that the very earth seems moving, like the lightest leaf. Few birds are abroad, save the robins, which battle against the unseen powers of the air, only to be blown like autumn leaves. A thrasher, dashed suddenly in front of me, began at once a philosophic hunt for worms—one place was as good as another, no doubt; but a young robin, the black of his crown still separated from the dark ear-coverts by bands of gray, crouches frightened where he falls. His half-drooped wings show a power which explains his venturing abroad; he is full grown, though not yet in full robin dress. He is learning the old lesson of the young: that there are things in life which not even grown-ups can do; and that his liberty is merely a liberty to adjust himself to forces which he cannot hope to control. No wonder he looks a bit dazed!

The Mistress of the Garden comes out presently to look after her flowers. Her face is good to see, and her voice to listen to. Her eyes have the look of one who dwells in that place of peace where happiness and sorrow are fused into one, and are known as equal essentials of the highest joy. She is a lover of Nature, too. One inevitably comes to be, I think, as one travels the long road to serenity of soul. One may observe Nature in youth, no doubt, and love it, too, somewhat; but the real sense of kinship with it is a matter of living, and of growth.

July 25th. Blessed be trees and sunshine, the open sky, and the free winds which fill it! And blessed be the freshness and promise of the new day, coming alike to the light-hearted and to those pain-weary and discouraged.

And the promise never fails. For, whether the new day brings escape or courage, relief or a growing power of patience, whether it means joy or peace, it brings good, and only good; and so through all the soul its sursum corda rings with sweetness and command.

July 28th. After wheeling me over to the Garden yesterday afternoon, Caro left me, to join in an expedition to Bare Rock. When she had gone, I discovered to my horror that I had been deposited beneath the branch of a poplar tree on which some hundreds of caterpillars had just been hatched out. They were so thick that

heads, tails and sides touched everywhere, as they lay on leaves and stems; not one could move a hair's breadth without knocking off the others or climbing over them. What they thought of my proximity I had no means of finding out; but for me it was not a joyful occasion. I could move neither my chair nor myself; so I lay there, gazing up at the wretched things till I began turning into a caterpillar myself, and felt fuzz and wriggles sprouting all over me. But before the transformation was too far advanced to be checked, I heard Caro's voice behind me.

"Mammy Lil, I don't want to go walking. May I stay and talk to you?"

I had been feeling specially lonesome of late. I kept telling myself I was getting morbid from long illness and solitude; but it seemed to me that Caro almost avoided me. She waited on me most thoughtfully; but her errands done, she disappeared. There was no more of that dear companionship, when she used to sit near me, reading, or embroidering, while she sang dreamily to herself, or cuddled her head against mine on the pillows in a fellowship which needed no words. Children can't possibly understand how bereft one feels, shut out. I knew she loved me too well to hurt me; yet I had missed her, under the same roof with her, more than I had missed David far away: the boy had never shut me out like that.

But her voice was different as she asked her question now. I remembered how, years ago, she used to come out of her periods of seclusion in the parlor "nice and social," as she would sweetly announce, and confess her little soul inside out, clear to her very toes. Before I saw her face I knew the barrier was gone, and I was to have her confidence at last.

But, first of all, I craved deliverance from the caterpillars. Some of them had hunched themselves up ominously, as if they were about to jump down and float across my nose on silken threads. I was very unhappy indeed.

Caro squealed in horror when she saw my plight, and snatched me back from my impending doom. She wheeled me across the shaven grass to the edge of the wood-tangle, and sat on a rock beside me, facing the long Valley once filled with marching men—men who marched from the disaster of outward defeat to the victory of inner conquest.

"Mammy Lil," she inquired presently, "do you love me any more at all?"

I turned my face to her without speaking. Her eyes filled with sudden tears, and she laid her cheek against my hand.

“You’re the darlinest mother! If you weren’t, I’d be ashamed to tell you. Mammy Lil, I’ve wished sometimes I could murder myself, this last year; I’ve been so cross. It began last summer while I was home on vacation. Everybody in Chatterton made love to Milly or me last summer, except David. He was just as he always was—sweet to both of us, but specially careful of me because he was my brother. And I didn’t feel the same to him at all. I—Mammy Lil, I was as foolish about David as those boys were about us two girls: I was in love with him, over head and ears.” She paused while I stroked her hair.

“You can’t think how ashamed I was. And of course I treated him like a yellow dog. And he behaved perfectly. I was sure, though, that he didn’t suspect—he, nor any one else. And then, at the end of the summer, Cousin Jane told me that David and I were to marry. I didn’t believe you’d ever talked to her about it, of course; but I saw in a flash what it would mean to you—and that David might do it to please you. And I was afraid Cousin Jane suspected what a fool I was. And she went to David, too, and told me that, and told him she’d told me. I did want to wring Cousin Jane’s neck; and I think yet she deserved it!

“David and I had a talk. She just butted our heads together till we had to. He said he’d always cared; but he had made up his mind to wait till I was through school and you were at home again: it wasn’t fair not to. He was lovely. But he was so quiet—and so confident, it seemed to me. I tried to lay him out; I was mad. And he wouldn’t blame me a bit for being mad; but he said he hadn’t asked for any answer yet, and wouldn’t take one till he did ask for it; and that we mustn’t worry you with Cousin Jane’s nonsense, and all that.

“Things rocked along at Christmas, except that I cared more than ever. But when I came back last spring to stay, as soon as you were really better, David began to show me that he—you know, Mammy Lil, how much little things can be made to mean. And I began to see he did care just as I did. We were so happy in April! Only, I kept staving the end of it off. I didn’t want to be pinned down too soon. But David—he understood.

“Then Cousin Jane had to take a hand again. She’d found out Bob White wanted to marry me—or thought he did; and Bob is what she calls a ‘catch.’ She nabbed me that day, as I was coming home from Milly’s, and said the hatefulest things you ever heard in your life—that everybody said I was ‘setting my cap’ for

David and pretending to be taking care of you when I was just running after him; and that David had given her to understand he felt very badly about it, because he knew you and I wanted it so much!

“I knew as well as I knew my name that was a lie out of whole cloth; but I was just as angry as if it were true. I never had been reconciled to caring about him before he spoke, anyway. So I went to Cousin Jane’s, as she told me to, and listened to Bob White’s praises till I was sick of everything under the sun. And when David and I went out that afternoon—Mammy Lil, can’t you understand?”

“Dear, I did it myself, once; I ought to understand. But I paid for it afterwards, as you have done. When you’re an old lady like me you’ll know better.”

“I know better now,” she said, with a sudden quiver in her voice. “I—I killed David’s respect for me that afternoon.”

“Nonsense, child,” I exclaimed, “he knows you—and loves you—too well for that.”

“He doesn’t love me at all; he can’t. I let him think—I pretended—I’d just been flirting with him; to lead Bob on.” Her voice died in a shamed silence.

This was serious news, considering David’s nature. If he believed she really cared for some one else, I knew it would take a long time for the notion to work out of his head; and while it was in there he wouldn’t stir. And I had promised not to interfere. I stroked her soft hair in silence for a minute.

“David will never change in his love for you, dear,” I said; “it’s too truly a part of him for that. And when people really love one another, they come together, somehow, soon or late; your Daddy Jack and I were hopelessly separated for weeks.”

“We’ve been separated nearly three months,” said Caro, dolefully; “eleven weeks and four days today. But I’m not going to talk about David any more. What hurts me most of all is the way I’ve treated you. You ought to hate me if you don’t. I—”

I laid my hand over her mouth.

“What’s the use of being older than you if I can’t understand, child? And I’ve

travelled every step of the way before. Everything that isn't right will come right between you and David; but with you and me everything is right already. Just drop your troubles under the trees, dearie, as I do, and open your heart to the hills and the sky. Isn't today worth yesterday's storm?"

She sat up and looked across the Valley. The mountains stood out in the afternoon sunlight all the clearer for the long shadows already gathering in the hollows; each leaf and grass blade was shining fresh after the rain, and everywhere was a flutter and stir of wings. A nuthatch crept down a locust trunk before us, a yellow-billed cuckoo slipped by overhead; and all down the hillside the swallows swept in long, beautiful curves, their bright breasts shining against the sun.

"Dear," I said presently, "don't you see, out of doors here, how wise it is to take the long look at life? The mountains make me ashamed of my fretting. And life is working toward this beauty all the time; the winters in the way don't matter; they pass. And yet before they pass they teach us to love life better when it reappears. When your happiness is safe in your hands once more, you won't hurt it again for a child's anger or a fool's speech. I know; for I learned it, too."

She laid her cheek against my hand in silence, and we watched together while the sun went down. The blue shadows overflowed the hollows of the mountains and met across the green ridges on their sides. Against that shadowed background the poplars of the Garden, smitten by the last rays of sunlight, shone like silver, and the locusts like fronds of gold.

Far below, in the Valley, lay the peace of the coming twilight, and all about us were the soft murmuring of birdlings settling down to rest, and of mothers crooning over them as they slept. And at last the gardener came over from the Madam's, and wheeled me back, with Caro by my side.

August 2nd. The Peon is with David now, and I shall soon be having news. He did not start as early as he hoped, and was detained on the way; but being there at last, he will soon be able to tell me something definite about David's coming home. I haven't meddled a meddle: not that I've earned any frill to my halo thereby; it's just that I know by my own past Caro would catch up with me if I tried it, even if I hadn't promised David. So I'm pinning my hopes to the Peon: he has been so very non-committal that he must have something on his mind. But I can't share these hopes with Caro, and they wouldn't help her if I could:

she is in that stage of penitence where it is against her principles for her to accept consolation, so far as David is concerned. Her misery, poor little soul, is the only comfort she can allow herself; and if her happiness is to have a thorough recovery, the process cannot be hurried.

August 5th. I woke at half-past four this morning to find a fat white cloud sitting on the lawn outside, as if he owned the premises. Not a mountain visible; and beneath the locusts' misty arches the trees on the neighboring lawn gleam pale and uncertain, mere grey-green ghosts of living things.

The cloud isn't altogether outside. My books on the stand beside me are arching their covers with the dampness, and my field-glasses are moist to the touch; the room feels dank and uncanny, and the heavy air is hard to breathe. One needs a mental rain-coat on a day like this—especially when no letters come from a sky-larking Peon!

August 8th. Days of rain on the parched earth. Gray days, with soft mists heaped against the mountains, blending earth and sky in one. Days when one's horizon is lost—not gone, but withdrawn from sight; days when the mountains have vanished and the valleys melted away, and nothing is very clear to consciousness but this small bed and the pain which lies upon it. If mists crept as close about one's inner vision, doubt would seem normal on days like this, and despair the quintessence of common sense. Yet under the veiling vapors the brown grass is growing green again, the hard earth soft, instinct with power, and prodigal of gifts once more.

Now comes a distant roll of thunder, a wind that sweeps the vapors from the grass as tears are wiped from sodden eyes, a flash of blinding light, a bending and tossing of leaf-laden boughs; and over the mountain the storm-cloud rises, black against the pale gray of the sky. Then up the valley comes the wall of water; and behind it the world is new.

A special delivery letter from the Peon! Caro stood by while I opened it, asking nothing, but her color coming and going. It was only a few lines; but it said he would be here on the tenth. He has written not a word since he has been out there about the things nearest to all our hearts; but at least we shall know something in two days more.

XII

In the Garden of Delight

August 10th. They are having a picnic supper on Bare Rock this evening, from which nobody in the house is excused but myself. I am glad they are all gone, for I need a little solitude, in this sudden whirlwind of happiness, to catch my breath and take a twist on my emotions.

For the Peon, who is so literally truthful that nobody dares to suspect him of juggling with words, deliberately stole a march on us and walked in twenty-four hours ahead of time—with David! Caro and I were over in the Garden. I was just where I am now, between the altheas and the locusts; but Caro, who had been wandering restlessly about, had gone down the hillside, out of sight, following an unknown bird-note. I was looking at the poplar branch where the caterpillars had clustered. They had left it stripped of everything but the leaf-stalks, which stood out now from the bare twigs at every angle, like drunken pins in a cushion. But the birds had days ago avenged both the branch and me, for not a crawler was visible on the tree. I was looking at it idly when the Peon and David suddenly stood under it, coming round the big bed of hydrangeas between it and the gate!

I scarcely saw the Peon for looking at David; but David was looking for somebody else.

“Where’s Caro?” he demanded, as he kissed me. “They said at the house she was over here with you.”

“She’s beyond that little corner of woods,” I said; “go around there and you’ll see her.”

As he went I fell upon the Peon, and extracted the hitherto suppressed information that Bob White’s engagement to some visitor from Kentucky had been announced last month. The Peon had forgotten her name; but he carried the news to David, who decided it was time for him to see Caro at once. And the mischief of a time he was taking about it, too, the Peon observed impatiently; didn’t they intend to take us into the secret before midnight?

As it was still half an hour to sunset, I reproved him properly; but I was myself beginning to fear something had gone wrong when they appeared at last. The dusk had fallen, and I could not see their faces clearly; but I heard a soft, happy laugh from Caro before they came around the corner of the woods, and I knew everything was all right.

David had certainly not wasted his time. They were already considering the house that must be built on the knoll the Peon and I had selected years ago. It seems he had picked it out himself, and Caro had agreed to it, in her mud-pie days. Now, having waited so long, and finding Caro in a mood of undreamed-of submissiveness, he had taken matters into his own hands, and decided that he would go home as soon as they could settle on the plans, and begin the house at once.

“We’ll need it, even so, before we can possibly get into it,” he observed to me. “Do you remember what you said to me that night about our wedding? I told Caro about it this afternoon, and she couldn’t deny that we ought not to start out in life by disgracing you as a prophet. So it’s to be before Christmas—in September, I think.”

“I think you’ve lost your wits,” replied Caro. “It won’t be Christmas if Mammy Lil isn’t walking about everywhere by Thanksgiving. She needn’t expect us to live up to her prophecies if she won’t do it herself.”

“But I will,” I replied cheerfully; “I feel it in my bones.”

“It’s surely time,” said David, turning my chair to the gate. The Peon and Caro walked on ahead, and the boy bent down and rubbed my cheek with his.

“Sweet Mammy, I know I’ve been hard on you these months; but we’ll both make it up to you now. Forgive us this time, and let us help to make you well at last.”

August 22nd. What beautiful, happy days we have had! I showed the Peon all the wonders of the Garden; and David and Caro strayed in and out, sometimes with the Madam and her other guests, and sometimes in that dual solitude lovers crave.

I told the Peon about Grumpy one day. I never had mentioned him before,

because I never had been quite sure, if I did, that it wouldn't break the spell I had woven, and allow him to appear to others as well as to me. But I'm not afraid of him any more.

The Peon is so satisfactory! He never thought of laughing at me, but took in the situation at once. He said the best way to make sure of getting rid of the wretch was for him to carry Grumpy away when he went. He could put him in his suitcase—for Grumpy really is the tiniest creature imaginable to make all the trouble he does; and he could throw him out of the car window as they were crossing some deep gorge in the mountains where no human habitation had ever been. A blue devil can't possibly live where there are no people; so there'd be an end of his mischief forever.

Wasn't that the cleverest scheme? We caught him together yesterday afternoon, and rammed him into the suit-case, good and tight. And I told the Peon, before he went, that if he did many more stunts like that, he'd be a very satisfactory playmate for me when the children are grown up and in their own house.

And that is the end of Grumpy.

August 23rd. They have gone back, taking the plans for the house with them. Caro and David sketched them together, and he will have them worked out at home.

I think Caro half envies him the pleasure of beginning the nest building, and wants to be there to see; but nobody is willing for me to go back before the first of October; and the child has a deal of shopping to do. I will wait here; and Caro will go to New York and visit Edith Mason, while she selects her bridal plumage.

I find the birds most joyful company these days, and am planning to cultivate their acquaintance in a less formal manner; for I intend to get out of this chair.

A wheeled-chair is really an exasperating place to study birds from: I wonder I never realized it before. This very day the trees are full of them—new birds, many of them, gathering for the fall migration. They have been playing hide-and-seek with me all the afternoon—a charming game if one can do one's own part of it, and go seeking when the other hides; but if you can't, it's not so hilarious. They poke unknown heads through the leaves, and survey me coolly.

They whisk tails I can't even guess at from behind a limb, and are gone. They sing high overhead, with only a bit of their under feathers visible, or flirt a half-seen wing behind an opening in the leaves. Sorting heads, tails, and middles is a hopeless job when you haven't an idea which belongs to which. If it were only a Chinese puzzle, you'd know when it was solved; but a tail with any other head would look as sweet! I've thought all summer that if a hyper-developed sense of touch can serve the blind for eyes, surely time and patience could do the work of feet for me; but I'm thinking patience may cease to be a virtue soon!

August 26th. We have had two days of storm. They mark both a beginning and an end; for a subtle change has passed over the mountains and lingers, though wind and rain be gone. A tinge of brown, merely suspected before, has deepened and spread until it challenges and commands the eye. Some of the nearer trees look seared, and the poplars, especially, look withered and old. But there is a beauty of soul deeper than that of the flesh and of youth: and the depth and power of Nature's charm, like the freedom of our own souls, can be best measured by the number and splendor of the things which can be laid aside. All the glamour of the young spring, the splendid lavishness of summer days, the riot of color and sunshine—these things, which yearly draw us with new fascination and delight, are but the brodered outer curtain of the temple. They lure us past them, into the inner court, to a strength which knows no defeat, to an abundance which can afford to be stripped; to Law which cannot be thwarted nor checked; and beyond Law to a Power which reason can neither explain nor explain away.

For myself, I have my message; the hills have spoken it. And the pain which wrenches is back where it belongs, in the second place—or the twentieth. Moreover, it will pass—tomorrow, or next year, or in a life-time: it is not of the things which remain.

And now the clouds are breaking for a sunset glory, and the porch where I lie, and the lawn beyond it, even the shadowed mountains—all, all, are flooded with splendid light.

August 29th. A letter from Cousin Jane at last! Caro and I both wrote to her while David was here, but she had not vouchsafed a reply. David had a satisfactory interview with Cousin Chad, after his return, but reported Cousin Jane's reception of him as one befitting an unrepentant prodigal who had

brought his swine home with him. So we have been looking forward to the reception of a letter from her as a very solemn occasion indeed. She seems inclined, however, to temper her disapproval to Caro. She doesn't expect her to be happy long, she says; and she handsomely offers not to disturb her present dreams, but to wait until Caro is disillusioned, when she hopes her "I told you so" will do some good. She does not intend, however, to cause any breach in the family, her principles forbidding her to quarrel even with me; and she is perfectly willing to continue her efforts to set me a proper example.

I suppose, on the whole, that's doing pretty well for Cousin Jane. I don't intend to have any breach in the family, myself, especially over the children's wedding; and Caro and I will find some way to appease her when we go home.

August 30th. What bird is that? He is in the locust yonder, only his breast visible. It is a vivid yellow, with four irregular scarlet spots—three on one side and one on the other—and across his breast a long zig-zag line of scarlet like a jagged wound. There isn't any bird like that: I know it; and if he doesn't, he ought to. Yet there he sits, as calm as if he were in all the books and had as much right in the Garden as I. I have watched him, and recorded him, yet he doesn't move.

Well, I'll just make him: I'm not tied to this chair!

A scarlet tanager, moulting! No wonder I never saw that before. He is always scarlet-and-black when he goes through Tennessee in the spring, and yellow and olive when he goes back in the fall. He looks like the clown in a circus now, and I don't wonder that he seeks the seclusion of the mountains to change his clothes. He is gone, of course, before I can apologize for my intrusion; and I suppose his opinion of me is scarcely fit to print.

September 18th. Caro is back from New York, and we leave a week from today. We have decided to shave a few days off the limit set by the Peon: if we don't hurry, David will have that house half finished before we get there, and we want to see it go up from the beginning ourselves. Besides, Caro wants a little time with Milly. Her wedding is set for the last of October, and Caro's is to be six weeks later. I'm afraid it will take strenuous work to get Cousin Jane where we want her by that time; but if we go home and start on her at once, the thing may

be done.

September 24th. The last day in the Garden! The Mistress has been out, and I have been trying, in rather a bungling way, to make her understand what she has done for me. Neither she nor the Madam can know the whole of it, and I hope they never will; for they would have to live in the same prison-house to understand what a door of escape means.

Eh, but the summer is over, and I count my stay by hours!—Yes; but the summer will never end. Even when the prison is lost sight of, the door of escape will remain a delight. The things that hurt pass, and are forgotten; things not understood change and grow clear: but joy does not change, not kindness, nor anything that makes life worth while. And so, good-bye to the Garden.

XIII

While the Nest was Building

September 30th. We reached home three days ago, having forestalled the possibility of orders not to come by concealing our plans until we were on the way.

The house is no house at all yet, of course. Caro calls it the Perchery at present, and says she will give it a name when we can all sit in it, instead of roosting on stones outside and staring at the place where it is going to be. But the cellar is finished, anyway, and is of ample proportions, as a country cellar should be; and until we get something else to admire, we find it an absorbing subject of contemplation. Even Cousin Jane was delighted with it, and still more with Caro's promise to go home with her and stay until after the wedding.

Caro went over there as soon as I was settled in bed for a rest, and came back glowing with triumph. Cousin Jane was coming in the morning to spend the day, and to take the child back home with her in the evening.

“And oh, Mammy Lil, she's perfectly charmed with David, and quite certain she picked him out for me! The shock of it nearly bowled me over for a minute. You know that big New York bank that failed a week or two ago? Everybody thought Bob's father's bank was mixed up in it, and there was a regular run on it. David and Daddy Jack were too full of the Perchery to mention it; but it converted Cousin Jane straight through. The bank's all right—I asked David about it, driving home—but you can't make Cousin Jane believe it. She thinks a bank should be above suspicion by anybody, and if it isn't, it's a whited sepulchre forevermore. So she's delighted that she had the good sense to pass over a fellow like Bob, who comes from a family of speculators, and choose for me a good, steady, kind, reliable business man like David Bird, instead. I wish you could hear her, Mammy Lil; she's downright edifying. And she fairly beamed on David, though he hadn't been near her for weeks. Everything's all right, if only the hot weather doesn't make you sick. If they'd told us how hot it was, I wouldn't have brought you home.”

The heat was extraordinary for the time of the year, and still continues so; but it

didn't keep Cousin Jane at home, though usually she won't budge unless it's cool.

She was in high good humor, and evidenced it by a peck on my cheek and the remark that I must be getting better, for I really didn't look so very many years older than I was. She approved of the plans for the house, especially when she found it was to be our wedding gift to Caro; and she went out "to perch," at Caro's invitation, and admired every stone in the foundations. Then she came in and settled seriously down to the subject of clothes.

It seems that Grace is lavishing on Milly's outfit all the pretty things Cousin Jason prevented her from giving the child in her girlhood; and Cousin Jane's family pride has risen in a most desirable and unexpected manner to demand that Caro shall be as well provided for as her cousin; so Caro can prepare in peace. Cousin Jane even proposes to help her, tooth and nail. Caro and I are a little daunted by this excess of zeal, Cousin Jane's taste—or lack of it—being a byword in the family. But Caro will find a way to manage her; and we have already settled the question of the dress she is to wear at the wedding. I had Caro buy it for me in New York—a soft, rich, silken fabric—and it is to be made by the best dressmaker in the city. If we left it to Cousin Jane, she would get old black Sally to make it, at seventy-five cents a day; she says it's sinful to waste money on town dress-makers.

But she doesn't mind my wasting it for her. If there was a corner of her heart still congealed it melted when she took the silk between her finger and thumb, and fully tested its quality.

"It's an elegant present, Lyddy," she declared graciously, "an' I don't mind taking it from you one mite. I've always said you meant well; an' it ain't your fault if you're foolish."

Could I ask for a handsomer coat of white-wash than that?

October 2nd. Last night was sticky, hot, and still, with the stars flaming overhead, as though they were trying to burn the heavens. I fell asleep at last, to be wakened suddenly by a sound as if the wind were ripping the sky off the earth, and ten million tons of water were sluicing through the hole. The world was all one glare of light, with sudden, momentary breaks of darkness, while a roar as of a thousand batteries surged up from every quarter of the heavens, and

filled to bursting the black void above our heads. I sprang up to close the windows, my ankles brushed by quick, ghostly touches, as loose papers skittered over the floor.

The Peon and David came in, in hastily donned attire, for the storm was altogether out of the ordinary. The house trembled like a living thing, and in the air about us we could feel the crackle of the blinding light. Then came a crash that split the earth. A moment later, through the surging billows of water hurled through the wind-rent air, we saw a sudden, leaping light, red in the white electric glare. A huddled company of straw-stacks had been struck by the descending bolt, and not even that flood of water could quench the flames. The heavy clouds, weighted almost to earth, caught the sullen glow beneath them, and as they were flung onward and upward by the screaming wind, carried the lurid colors of destruction far into the blackness overhead. One moment a world of blinding white, as the lightning blotted out everything but its own wild glare. The next, a red and lowering world, sullen, portentous, with the evil color spreading, climbing, licking out on all sides in an orgy of ruin and waste whose greed defied the cataracts of water, and made the wild wind its minister and slave.

The air rocked with the thunderous down-pour under the crashing clouds. One of the maples fell prone in the lightning's glare; and from every side came the sound of rending wood as branches were wrenched and split and hurled across the lawn. The house shook, while around us and above us the Titans fought. In the presence of that unveiled power one's own small life dwindled to nothingness. One marveled that human feebleness yet held a place in a world so charged with forces, the least of which could wipe out all human effort and leave the earth as bare as a new-sponged slate.

Yet the fury passed. The Titans screamed and fought, but their power waned. The wind wavered and sank, sobbing like a beaten child; the rain splashed dully, dripping from porches and eaves; the thunder died on distant hills, and the lightnings grew fitful and weak. Even the storm-born flames were spent, until only a hot coal of light glowed under the breaking clouds. A star shone here and there, mirrored in the rain-pools of the drenched fields.

David opened the windows, and we drank in the freshness of the storm-cleansed air. The new-washed leaves, still green with summer time, whispered in the quietness, and here and there a cricket chirped, or a night-bird called to its mate. Power was veiled again, withdrawn, and life that had trembled in the balance

flower was veiled again, withdrawn, and the ball that had trembled in the balance resumed its wonted course.

October 9th. I asked Grace today about Cousin Jason. I knew she was worrying over something. Milly might be happy, but she wasn't. So I asked her how he did.

"He won't speak to me, Lil, at all. I have been there two or three times; but he wouldn't see me."

"Isn't he coming to the wedding?" I asked.

"I wrote to ask him that—to show him we really wanted him; but he sent the letter back."

Her eyes filled with unwonted tears, and I had a sudden desire to jerk my jay-bird cousin's feathers out by the roots.

"You'll just have to train your thoughts to keep away from him, Grace," I said. "I know you can, for I've steered my own clear of a lot of things I simply don't dare to fool with. Don't shake your head at me, madam! Do you think Milly doesn't see that look in your eyes when you sit and think about Cousin Jason? Are you going to let him hurt her?"

"No, I'm not," she said firmly. "I'll make my eyes behave."

"Then you'll have to make your thoughts behave behind your eyes. You let Cousin Jason alone. If you'll quit paying attention to him long enough, he'll come round; but as long as you give him a chance to rebuff you, he'll amuse himself doing it."

Grace laughed.

"Shall I follow your advice or your example—you door-mat for Cousin Jane?"

I laughed myself.

"Never mind. We can find out how to do a thing perfectly, many a time, just by doing it the way it shouldn't be done. And I did send Cousin Jane home once. I know the recording angel put that down to my credit."

We fell to talking of her plans. Milly and her husband are to live with her, he going in to his business daily, like the Peon. But Grace wants them to have this first winter alone together. So as soon as they get back from their wedding trip, and Caro is married, she expects to go away with George's niece, and spend the winter travelling.

The Peon and I will stay at Bird Corners. The children will be gone for five or six weeks, and by the time they come home the Perchery will almost be ready for them to begin feathering their nest—And to think it's the real Bird Corners, and not Make-Believe at all!

October 16th. The young mocking-birds are learning to sing, and their efforts are altogether charming. They sit apart, crooning, each to himself, trying their score over and over, thoughtfully, with pauses in which they seem to search their memories for forgotten notes. It is as if melody had come with them from the land of dreams, and they were trying to catch and hold the elusive sweetness, and teach it to come at their command. The soft, dreamy music floats through the October sunshine, at once a memory and a hope. It is a song of the garnered years, an inheritance from old days of love and aspiration, and it presages days of love and aspiration yet to be. But more than both of these, it voices the peace of autumn days, when the earth has finished the long year's toil, and turns to its hard-won rest in the quiet of the misty sunshine.

October 20th. I don't need my note-book these days. When one can do so much living with people the birds are no longer a necessity. I hear their songs and calls, and know them for the voices of my friends—real friends for life. But Caro comes over nearly every day, and always there is so much to talk about. And often Cousin Jane comes too; and it's positively exhilarating to see the way Caro and I are corrupting her morals. That old lady is getting as worldly-minded as if there were not a blackbird saint in existence.

The dressmaker made her get a modern corset to be fitted in, and she's so pleased with herself in it that she wears it all the time. She really looks like another person, for Caro has coaxed her into curl-papers o' nights, and the soft gray fluff around her face is amazingly different from the wide part with the flat straight bands plastered over her temples and ears. The old Buff Orpington doesn't know her any more, and Caro says he shrieks and runs at the sight of her.

Everybody in Chatterton notices the change, and tells her she looks years younger—as she does; and the other evening Cousin Chad took up the tale, and grew positively sentimental, right before Caro. Cousin Jane blushed and bridled as she must have done over forty years ago, and next day she bought the prettiest stuff for a house dress, and carried it to the wedding-gown dressmaker to make! She says it's every woman's Christian duty to be attractive in her own home, and that if Chadwell will be a boy and like frippery, she'll have to give in to him; the Lord didn't give men much sense anyway, and you just have to humor them along, like children.

I feel rather ashamed of myself, I must confess. I've been laughing at her all these years, like all the rest of the family, and been cross with her inside, often. And what she needed most was for somebody to see the simple human need for praise and petting under all her strident aggressiveness; for as soon as she got it she blossomed out like this! I said as much to Caro today, and she cocked her head suddenly to one side as if she heard someone calling her. Then she jumped up, laughing, spun around on one toe, and caught me in her arms. She said I'd given her such a big idea I'd taken her breath away. She wouldn't tell me what it was, but ran off to the buggy and drove singing down to the gate.

October 24th. Caro has given me the shock of my life. I've seen she had some kind of bee in her bonnet for three or four days, but she was bent on being mysterious, so I didn't tease.

Yesterday, as I sat on the side porch, whipping lace, I saw her buggy coming out from between the cedars, and Cousin Jason was in it! Caro was beaming, as usual, and Cousin Jason looked as if he were having a good time, and embarrassed to know what to do with it. I went to meet them as they drove toward the Perchery.

He greeted me awkwardly, and explained that Caro wanted him to see her house, and that he'd had no more sense than to give in to her and come. Caro dashed at him at once.

"You mean you had sense enough to come," she corrected. "Cousin Jason really has lots of sense, Mammy Lil, only he thought it was nonsense and tried his best to hide it. We're going up to town together tomorrow on a lark—just we two."

"I haven't promised yet," he growled.

“You needn’t promise,” said Caro sweetly. “I told you it wasn’t necessary. All you need to do is to go.”

She made him admire the house and the plans; and when he objected to her numerous closets she assured him that his ideas were all wrong, and that the lack of closets in his own house was the root of most of his troubles; he needed them to pack his skeletons in, instead of entertaining them in public. They went off together presently; but Caro promised to come back this evening and spend the night. I knew I should have the tale then.

She came, and the three of us had dinner together, the Peon being in town. And now that she and David are at the piano in the next room, I must finish the story.

She went straight from here the other day to Cousin Jason’s, and told him she wanted him to come to Milly’s wedding and give the bride away. He was too amazed to be angry at first; and when he did get angry, Caro stood her ground, kept her temper, and gave him what she called a preachment—a mixture of fun, coaxing, and straight-from-the-shoulder talking. She made no impression, apparently, so when she was ready to go she left, assuring him cheerfully that she would be back in the morning and take the matter up with him again.

He had always liked Caro, and her sheer audacity pleased him. She took her work the next morning and spent the day. When Cousin Jason grew weary of argument, he went out on the farm; but Caro was there when he came back. She had carried over various good things to eat, and gave him a lunch such as he hadn’t enjoyed since he left Grace’s. She argued, coaxed, ridiculed, and scolded. And by the time David, who was sworn to secrecy, came by to take her driving, Cousin Jason had promised to think the matter over.

I don’t believe it was what the child said that impressed his stubborn nature; he simply found Caro herself irresistible.

When she left him that day, his anger with Grace, she said, was really a crumbling ruin; but he didn’t realize it; so she went back next morning to topple it to its fall. By the middle of the afternoon he had said that if he could be convinced Grace really wanted him, he would go. Caro immediately challenged him to go there with her to dinner that night, take Grace by surprise, and see for himself. When he refused she taunted him with backing out of his own test, and dared him to the scratch. She telephoned Grace finally that she wanted to bring a

friend to dinner, and they drove over together.

“Milly and Bobolink were out in his car,” she said; “and Cousin Grace didn’t see us coming. We walked right in on her in the living-room before she knew he was there.” Caro paused to wipe her eyes. “I’ll cry for six months whenever I think about it. I don’t see how Cousin Grace can care so much—he’s been so hateful to her. I thought she was going to faint at first. Then she stood there speechless, her hands stretched out, and her face the most beautiful thing I ever saw. He called her name and went toward her, and she just slipped into his arms with one long sob, as if her heart were breaking. And I went out and shut the door.”

When Milly came in she was plainly overjoyed, for her mother’s sake, if not for his; and Bobolink, Caro declared, behaved like an archangel. She inconsistently elucidated this remark by explaining that he had been brought up on a farm and was as crazy about the country as I am myself; and he has always kept up his knowledge of agriculture and his interest in it. Cousin Jason, who had taken him for what he politely terms a city fool, thawed visibly toward him during the evening. And before he left he had promised to give the bride away.

Caro, who believes in striking while the iron is hot, offered to go to town with him the next day to order his dress-suit for the occasion. As the wedding is to be on the twenty-ninth, there is certainly no time to lose. But Cousin Jason, who has scorned conventionality all his life, balked instantly, and declared that if he had to make a fool of himself to do it he wouldn’t come to the wedding at all.

Grace agreed at once to his wearing anything he chose; but Caro was resolved to carry her point.

“You see, Mammy Lil, he was just in retreat, and I had to rout him. If I had let him make a stand about the clothes he’d wear I’d have been throwing away my victory. So I told him he had to have a dress-suit. He’d need it for my wedding as well as Milly’s. I didn’t tell him before Cousin Grace; I waited till he drove me back to Cousin Jane’s. And next day I went over again to sit up with him about it.”

“He ought to have admired your persistence.”

“That’s just what I told him. He began to weaken a little, so I brought him over and showed him the Perchery as a reward. And he went this very day. The tailor said he couldn’t make it in time, and Cousin Jason crowed and said he’d told me

so. But I explained to the tailor that he could make it, and that he had it to do. So he agreed. We bought gloves, and a tie, and everything; and I made him get his hair cut, and he's going to look scrumptious. You really haven't an idea what can be done with an old relation till you begin to furbish him up."

October 30th. Milly was married in church, and she and Cousin Jason and Grace stopped by here on their way to the wedding for me to see them. Milly was beautiful, and no bride but Caro could be sweeter; and Grace, all in silvery gray, with that deep light in her eyes, was like nothing but the Moonlight Sonata. As to Cousin Jason, he was furbished almost past recognition; and my admiration pleased him like a boy.

Caro fluttered about them, radiant in her bridesmaid's dress, and followed by David's adoring eyes. The Peon escorted Grace; and after awhile I watched the carriages coming back. Before they left for the station Caro telephoned me, and Uncle Milton wheeled me down to the gate, where I waved my handkerchief and cast my handful of rice as they drove by, Milly's exquisite face alight with a look her husband may well carry in his heart always.

November 29th. How fast the days slip by! Milly came home early in the week, and yesterday was the Thanksgiving I prophesied about to David last spring.

Certainly I am going all about the house; and to emphasize my success as a seer we had a family gathering at Thanksgiving dinner. The bride and groom were here, of course, and Grace, who leaves as soon as Caro is married, and Cousin Jason—resplendent, by the way, in his dress-suit, which he considered a capital joke on Caro. Cousin Jane looked not a day over fifty, and Cousin Chad had done some furbishing himself to keep her company.

To think of a dinner party at Bird Corners again, after all these years! The Peon and I beamed at one another from the ends of the table; and in the centre, the bride and groom faced the bride-and-groom-to-be, with the older people tucked in at the corners. And it was all so good to see and hear—such a fairy tale come true—that, as I lie here today resting, I am just too happy for words.

David and Caro are to be married next Wednesday—married here, at Bird Corners. I dare not risk going to the church yet, and Cousin Jane's is quite as far away. Besides, both the children want it here, and it is and always has been

Caro's home as well as David's. Cousin Jane has really been sweet about it; and it is all settled that she and Caro are to come over in time for me to help dress the bride. Grace is coming tomorrow, and will stay with me until it is all over and she goes away herself.

December 9th. The wedding day was perfect—cloudless blue, and the little red wren singing his matins in the lilac almost before it was light. I am glad the child is a winter bride. She can afford to ignore the seasons, for she carries spring-time in her heart, like her namesake out of doors.

It was all beautiful, and I with my own hands helped to make it so. But nothing about it is very clear to me except the look in the children's eyes—our children, both of them, at last. Caro's joy had sobered her, so that she walked the earth in radiance, instead of fluttering, light-winged, above it; but David's joy had set him on the heights. Oh, my son, my son, child of my soul always! I could not have borne the look upon his face if I had not known Caro through and through. But now I am not afraid.

Grace went the day after the wedding, and left me in a world where real and Make-Believe are blended into one. The Peon comes home early, and together we walk across the grass to the Perchery, and talk of how he wheeled me there in those sorrowful days last spring, when it seemed the knoll would never know the nest we longed to see there. And in the evening we sit in the firelight together, and hear the childish voices of long ago in the room, and childish feet in the hall. And we laugh over the good old days, and smile over the new days, which are better. And before I go to bed we go to the window and look at the children's house, standing clear against the stars. And they come and stand beside us there, their tiny hands in ours—the dear, long-ago little children, who will be with us always, though the big children, dearer still, come and go across the grass between their home and ours.

THE END

Transcriber's Notes:

Punctuation and obvious typesetting errors have been corrected without note. When variation in spelling or hyphenation occurred, majority use has been employed.

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