

Miss Roberts was in the hotel parlor. She had some bright netting in her hands, and was quietly absorbed in that.

Hall walked straight up to her.

"I have come for good-bye; I am called away on important and immediate business."

A little circle gathered about him. There was much shaking of hands and many exclamations of regret. He touched Irene's hand the last of all, but he did not speak.

There was a buzz after he had gone.

"Who was the young man?" some one asked.

"Mrs. Hall's brother," Miss Roberts answered, unconcernedly.

"Is Dr. Hall married?" in chorus.

"Oh, yes;" with a quiet smile.

The train slowed down at the Clairview station. Dr. Hall roused himself and gathered up his belongings. All through the ride he had sat speechless, leaning against the window with closed eyes. Brainerd tried to talk at first, being one of those people whose speech must babble on incessantly. He got the shortest answers, or none at all, and gave it up finally.

The dull, chilly twilight was settling down. The station lamps were lighted. As they stepped down on the platform a woman seized Hall, and whispered historically, with a semi-regard for appearances—

"She has gone."

"Gone!"

"Oh, not so loud. Come over here and let me tell you."

She drew him away into the obscurity of the farther end of the platform.

"She drove away this afternoon, she and Stacy. She said she was going to visit Grace, in Upland, you know; but Frank says he met her on the Rushville road."

"I understand," standing quietly a minute.

Then he turned toward the train that had given its warning whistle and was just then moving again.

"Where are you going?"

"After them."

He stepped on the already moving car; there was no time for further words. Mrs. Brainerd turned slowly away, with tears, toward the doctor's deserted home.

Seven years ago, the winter that George Hall was twenty years old, and a raw, green country boy, he was teaching school and boarding with a sister of Mrs. Brainerd. Alice Brainerd, three years younger, pretty, silly and vain, had been getting herself talked about by accepting and reciprocating the attentions of a wild young agent of a city firm. George Hall was the oldest son of a rich farmer, who opposed the boy's fancy of studying medicine, after the good old pig-headed country fashion; and, to further the chances of renunciation of his purpose, had cut off supplies. But Mrs. Eddy, and Mrs. Brainerd with her, remembered the paternal

riches, and if George did cling to his crazy fancy for medicine, he would be the first Hall who had departed from the traditions of the fathers. George was easily caught by a pretty face; he was too young to see through the wiles of the two artful women; he saw Alice only under judicious circumstances, and the end of it was that the next news the Hall family received was that George had added to his enormities by marrying Alice Brainerd, nominally without the knowledge of her family.

It was rather a dangerous experiment. George worked and saved, and borrowed money and went away to his studies. The Brainerds acknowledged that they had made a mistake. A country doctor was not such a brilliant prospect. He was starving and pinching himself through a thorough course of training, instead of going back to the plentiful pork and cabbage of the parental roof, for the same grain of determination to carry his point existed in son as well as father.

Alice stayed at home; the Halls would never recognize her. George spent his short and infrequent vacations with her, at every visit growing more and more "city-fied." At the end of three years he came back for good—a resolute, keen-witted, widely-developed man. The end of his first year of practice proved that he had entered the high road to success.

Meantime, Alice had retrograded as much as he had advanced. She had grown peevish and ill-tempered; she had never been a brilliant girl intellectually; she showed positive feebleness of judgment in some directions. Dr. Hall found, after awhile, that there was something louder than whispers against her propriety of conduct. Her mother came to him and begged him to make a home, if it was ever so humble, where he could have her under his direct care and influence. With such a weight as that, George Hall began his career.

What the last three years had been to him nobody but himself knew. She was not only weak and silly, but she had fits of rage that seemed little less than insanity. The last recollection of her that he had carried away with him, as he went away to the South, was that she lay screaming on the floor of her mother's house, because he insisted on leaving her there instead of taking her back to town. He simply dared not do it, for her own sake. But she had gone afterward, in spite of everything; and her mother, unable to control her, had followed her, hoping to keep up at least a show of the proprieties.

And this was his home-coming.

He had thought rapidly after Mrs. Brainerd's story. A branch road connected Rushville with the city, from whence several main lines ran to the great towns of the country. If they really contemplated flight, they would be almost certain to start from this place, having thrown off suspicion by going to Rushville.

The event proved him right. Almost the first face he saw was Stacy's evil, handsome countenance in the