

"How good you are!" rose to her lips, but the next instant came another thought, "He will be glad to get rid of me." She said nothing, but glanced at her father. It was too dark to see his face, so she learned nothing. She could not understand him.

"It is growing damp," he said the next minute, "you had better go in."

She moved a few yards toward the house and then stopped and looked back to where her father seemed a dark shadow against the foliage. Should she go back and say the words that were in her heart, "you are my father; I will not leave you, only let us learn to understand each other better."

A few moments of indecision, and then she ran swiftly toward the house. At the door she paused again, and took two steps as if to return, but altering her mind she went in.

Milward stood by the gate with his arms crossed on the top and stared before him into the darkness. This was only another of his blunders, but like a former one—the memory of which was very vivid now—it was not to be undone without a severe mental struggle. He was no longer young he thought. A few years more and he would be growing old. He would have liked this one young face in the house for a time. She would have married, perhaps, but then he might have what he always wanted, little children about him, little feet running in the garden.

Must he give it all up as he had given it up before? Must he, all his life, be shut out from the brightness of a home circle, such as that of which he had been a part in his boyhood?

Emily's sad, pale little face and listless air rose up before him and displaced the vision of what might have been. He could only keep her with that imprisoned look. Perhaps some day she might be glad to come home; who could tell?

III.

The next day Emily was absent-minded and very thoughtful. She had slept little, for a conflict was going on within her that was now almost decided. She would be in no hurry to put it into words, but in her heart she had resolved to stay.

To stay in spite of Aunt Azubah. For the discontented girl and the practical elderly spinster were not on the best of terms. Azubah was devoted to her brother in her undemonstrative way. Before Emily came she had felt jealous of her anticipated influence and position with him. Now that she was there, Azubah was growing to dislike her because of her indifference to his affection.

Emily only returned the dislike in a half-hearted fashion. She avoided Miss Milward when she could, and on the Monday afternoon, to get away from her, she provided herself with a basket and wandered out into the lanes.

She was too absorbed in thought to look about her as she went, and scarcely noticed where her footsteps

tended. In imagination she was back among her old friends, in that happy life of visiting and being visited, of occasional theaters or "at homes," with her mother for her constant companion.

How pleasant it had been! How dreary and blank her life had become!

"Miss Milward! How fortunate!" broke in on her reflections, and she started and raised her eyes to see Edgar Burnet advancing.

"I scarcely hoped for such good fortune," he continued, as he held her hand, "are you going anywhere, may I accompany you?"

Her negative movement was so faint that he went on by her side.

"I am only botanizing," said Emily, "or rather looking for specimens to study in the evening. I am not especially fond of botany, but it gives me something to do."

"You must be very hard up for amusement," he continued, sympathetically, "I never could see what pleasure there could be in learning the Latin name of every weed that grows. Have you no books?"

"Oh, yes! Mrs. Blakely sends me plenty; but one can not always read."

"I wish I were not obliged to go back to town. It is a shame that you should be buried out here."

They wandered on for some distance, the conversation soon gliding to topics of mutual interest, music, theaters and other common subjects of small talk in the circle in which they had both revolved. Emily grew animated and laughed, as she had almost forgotten how to do of late.

This unwonted sound greeted the ears of Tom Blakely, as he leaped over a stile that terminated a woodland pathway, and saw their retreating figures in the distance. He stood still for a minute, gazing after the pair in blank astonishment, then followed with a gloomy brow.

Directly after Emily stopped, for she began to think she had gone far enough. They began to retrace their steps, seeing which Blakely turned aside and passed through a cornfield to avoid them. He did not go far, but sat on a gate and became moodily thoughtful. After awhile he, too, retraced his steps, and came out again upon the road.

Meanwhile, Burnet and Emily neared the farm, their steps slackening as the end of the walk seemed at hand. They stopped at the gate, and then Emily looked into her basket and laughed.

"There!" she said. "That is all your fault, Mr. Burnet! I have no weeds, as you call them, to study to-night."

"I am sorry, but talking is better than botanizing. It has been a delightful walk. Can't we repeat it? Are you going again to-morrow morning? Let us arrange to meet."

"Oh, no!—I don't know!" stammered Emily, shrinking from the idea of making anything approaching an assignment.