

"Away from here, aunt. Don't be vexed. I am only a trouble and anxiety to him. He suggested it himself. It will be better for all of us. I thought you would be glad."

"Who suggested it? For heaven's sake speak plainly, Emily."

Miss Milward sank into a chair, and stared at her niece, who shrank beneath her amazed looks in intense discomfiture.

"My father. He told me to take my choice—whether I would stay here or go where they want me, in New York, and abroad. And I told him I should like to go just before he left this morning. It will be better so, indeed, Aunt Azubah."

"I don't think I understand you, Emily," said her aunt, coldly. "Do you mean to leave your father—for good?"

"I don't know," faltered the girl, giving the pipe a final rub, and then laying it down. "We should see after awhile how things turned out."

Miss Milward gazed fixedly at nothing for full five minutes in silence.

"Poor John!" she cried, with an odd catching of the breath; and without another glance at Emily, she went up to her own room.

Emily felt quenched and miserable. She went into the garden and gathered some flowers to arrange for the table, there being the while a mist between her and the trees and hedges, and dew on the flowers she held that was not there before they were gathered.

"Poor John!" Those two words rang in her ears all morning; and though at dinner Miss Milward scarcely spoke, her red eyes and nose repeated "Poor John," plainly enough for Emily.

During the duration of daylight Emily could manage to avoid much intercourse with her aunt, but when the lamp was lighted, it was impossible to escape the long *tele-a-tele* before bedtime.

The elder lady brought out her knitting, not having enough heart for anything that required more thought and attention. Emily took a book and made a pretense of reading, her eyes following every word without her mind, and leaving her at the end of a page in complete ignorance of its drift.

"Shall I read to you, aunt?" she asked, nervously, after an unsociable half hour.

"No, thank you," said her aunt, and another silence ensued.

"Aunt Azubah," cried Emily, at last, shutting up her book in despair, "I wish you would scold me, sooner than go on like this. It is so dreadfully silent everywhere, I can't bear it. I don't see why you should be angry—you have never seemed to like having me here."

The reproach cut Miss Milward more keenly than the girl guessed, for she only said quietly—

"I am not angry, nor sorry, on my own account. I am only thinking of your poor father."

"You are rather hard on me," said Emily, letting a tear fall on the cover of the book, and then carefully

removing it with her handkerchief. "You've always kept me at a distance, while I have been so lonely without mamma, and now you are surprised that I am glad to get away."

"Perhaps you will say next that your father has kept you at a distance, too."

"He can't miss me much. All these years he has done without me."

"Yes, poor fellow," sighed Miss Milward. "As you say, perhaps it will be for the best. You have given him nothing but anxiety ever since you entered the house, just as your mother did twenty years ago."

"My mother! Oh, aunt! do tell me how it all happened. Why did they live apart? Why did they ever marry? They were so different."

"Ah! Why, indeed! It was a great mistake."

"Who was my mother—how did they meet?"

Emily drew her chair closer, and her aunt's austerity began to relax.

"Mamma would never talk about her past, but I think there was something in it for which she was sorry," continued Emily.

"Do you mean to say she never told you about your father?"

"No, nothing."

"Humph! She was a teacher to the children at the minister's house—all married, now, poor things!"

"And were they fond of each other?"

"He was," said Miss Milward, vaguely. "She married him for the sake of a home; and it didn't answer. I never thought it would. Poor John! For the first week after they were married he looked perfectly contented; then he began to look—oh, she did just as she you have been doing, only ten times more so—worried the life out of him with her discontented, despondent ways. She had been better off—a lawyer's daughter—and when he died, had to teach for a living, and she looked down on John and made herself wretched thinking she had married beneath her. Beneath her! Why, it was just the opposite way on, if you come to that."

"Poor mamma!" said Emily, "I dare say she was very unhappy."

"Unhappy! and what do you think he was, then? Do you think it can be pleasant for a man to have his wife always telling him that she made a mistake in marrying him? I don't mean telling him in words, but by looks and actions. After a time you were born, but even with a baby to amuse her she was no better. She thought the place so dull, she said, though your father brought her books of all kinds, and took her for long drives, and did everything to amuse and please her. Then by degrees she brooded herself ill, went away for a change, came back better, and went back to her old state in a week. I can't tell you all the ins and outs of it. I never knew exactly how it came to the point, but somehow they decided between them that it could not go on. She thought she should go melancholy mad if she remained here. So she went away, and took with her the little baby girl that was all he had, and I came to