

unconscious of Nina's confidences, hastened toward home. The frosty October air painted roses on her cheeks, as she stepped briskly along, until she had turned into the lane leading to her home. There she walked slowly, while the falling oak leaves rustled around her feet. She took out her letter, and, impatiently opening it, read:

New York, Oct. 20, 18—

*My own dear Laura:*

At last! Look for me on Wednesday's stage. I have news, which, like all things in this life, is both sweet and bitter. Taken all in all—including anticipations and expectations—it may be called good news. I am very busy, concluding some business, so, until Wednesday, *au revoir*.

With love,

Your own HUGH.

Laura folded the letter thoughtfully, and walked on a little faster. The golden rays of the setting sun, flickered through the nearly bare branches and touched her glossy braids, and glanced up and down her tasteful, brown cloth suit as she walked. As she thought, she sighed, wearily:

"O, I wish mother and Louise would be kinder to poor Hugh. I shall be true to him anyway, in spite of their possible better matches."

But she had reached home—a large, low cottage, embowered in vines and shaded by oaks, whose leaves, of varied tints, were falling and forming a brilliant carpet, to succeed the velvety green of summer. As she came up the steps of the broad portico, her mother opened the door, and said, in a tender, half-reproachful tone:

"Late, my daughter."

"Yes, mamma," responded Laura, in her usual happy tone, "the mail came in just as I was passing, and I waited until it was distributed."

"Well—" observed Mrs. Linton, as Laura, having entered the cosy sitting room, laid aside her hat and jacket.

"I had a letter from Hugh; no other mail," replied Laura, sinking into her especial chair, between the window and the cheery fire.

"And what did Hugh say?" demanded Louise, languidly, from the sofa.

"He is coming home Wednesday; has good news, he says," answered her sister.

"I hope so," retorted Louise, in a tone that carried insult to the loving girl, who loved Hugh. Laura quieted herself and said:

"A stranger came on the coach to-day."

"A gentleman?" asked Louise.

"Yes, he seemed so. He waited for the mail to be distributed."

"Tea!" announced the maid of all work, and the ladies adjourned to the little dining room.

Meanwhile, Mr. Clarence Carroll, in his room, where a fire had been started, read his bundle of letters. The last one he opened was from Harold Gray, a college friend:

New York, Oct. 15, 18—

*Dear Old Fellow:*

Just got back from my business trip, and find you are off on one of your sketching tours, "after autumn among the hills," as Harry put it. Well, I've discovered your address, and remember that Albert Linton's widow and daughters live in the little village you make your headquarters. The girls are twins, and both very pretty, and may prove companionable to you. Thank me when we meet. I would wish you success in your art, only you have more money than you can use, and it really don't make any difference with your head and heart, whether you are a credit to your profession, or a dabbler. Hoping to see you before holidays, I remain,

Yours, etc.,

HAROLD GRAY.

Clarence Carroll folded the letter, thoughtfully, thinking of the pretty girl who had taken his fancy, but who was bound to another.

"I'll go and see them, anyway," he exclaimed, half aloud, and he proceeded to make a careful toilet.