

muttered aloud. "All my own to enjoy as long as I have my home here."

"Only one thing lacking," said his mother's voice, close beside him.

"And what is that?" asked Hal gaily, putting his arm around her. "I must confess I find nothing lacking this evening."

"A wife," said Mrs. Thornton gravely.

"A wife!" echoed Hal. "And what in the world do I want a wife for, with a dear, good mother, a charming sister, and our efficient Randall?"

"After all," said his mother, "'a good wife is from the Lord,' and I shall be glad to know you have one, even though I am less to my noble boy," she added, fondly.

Hal laughed, and said: "Well, when I find the right girl, I'll try to deserve and win her."

"You will deserve her at any rate," said Mrs. Thornton, as they gave one look at the scene without, and entered the house.

And so the summer slipped away, and it was haying time. On the Saturday before they expected to begin cutting, Jim and Mike were sharpening the sickles and oiling the machine, and otherwise getting ready, and Hal went into the railroad field where he was to begin haying, and walked around it to judge of the quantity and quality of the crop. In one spot he came upon a heap of stones, which would interfere with the machine, so he commenced throwing them out toward the river bank. As he picked up one, of a smooth, round appearance, his eye caught a glimpse of what seemed to be writing, but the stone was thrown, from impulse, before he realized his desire to examine it. He hunted it up, and—yes, there was writing on it, in one of the purple, indelible pencils. Looking closely, he read:

Hugh Gordon, Laura Linton, Delta, Va.

Hal sat down on a big rock, and regarded the autograph stone with interest and curiosity. He turned it over and soliloquized aloud—

"Well, now, I suppose some one walking along the railroad has sat down here to rest, and carelessly scribbled his name and—Hugh Gordon!" he exclaimed, with a gasp. "Why, that is the name of the poor chap who got killed in the snow slide last spring! And here is an address—some friend or relative. Strange, it should come to me."

He rose to his feet, and hesitated, then started for home, carrying the stone with him. "I'll ask mother what to do," he thought, for it seemed to him that he ought to write to this Laura Linton, and tell her of Hugh Gordon's fate. She might be waiting, even now, for his return.

Hal found his mother and Alice in the shady sitting room, busy with the needle. He showed them the stone, telling them where he found it, and his theory about how it came there. They were greatly interested, but when he told them the first name was that of his chance acquaintance who was lost in the snow slide, they were as excited as himself.

"You ought to write to Laura Linton right away," cried Alice.

"Ought I, mother?" queried Hal.

"I think so," she answered slowly—

"Yes," she added decisively.

"And right away," put in Alice.

Hal arose. "I don't know how to say it," he declared helplessly.

"It is difficult," admitted Mrs. Thornton.

"I'll try it now," he said, and went to his room; but when he had arranged paper, and sat down, it seemed impossible to write a word. Long he sat and thought and mentally composed a dozen letters. At last, in desperation, he drew a sheet of paper toward him and wrote: