

AUNT JANE'S ONLY OFFER.

The three Misses Tibbs were, without doubt, in a fever of delight. Simply an event was about to happen, which, though it may more than once in a woman's life, on its first happening is especially fraught with excitement.

One of the Misses Tibbs, the eldest, Jennie, a very pretty blonde of twenty-two, was about to be married, and naturally the talk and thought all ran to matters matrimonial.

The three Misses Tibbs were very busy, intensely so, not really making up the trousseau, for that important matter had been entrusted to the hands of Madame Lollipop, the eminent modiste of Fifth avenue and Twenty-third street, but in evolving the hundred little nothings that are supposed to appertain to a wedding, and that must, in the majority of cases, emanate from the home circle or near it.

At this employment the three misses were busy, assisted by their Aunt Jane, who, as far as a surname went, might as well have had none, for Aunt Jane she was to everybody, even those who could not even claim a ninety-ninth cousinship, though really, Aunt Jane's name was Hopkinson.

The three girls—Jennie, the eldest, named after her aunt; Josephine, the second, aged twenty, named after her Uncle Joseph, and Maud, the "baby," aged sixteen, and named after nobody, had often discussed Aunt Jane's charming qualities and how pretty she must once have been, but it had never occurred to them to think of why Aunt Jane, still at the age of fifty, remained a maiden, with no apparent aspirations toward changing that condition. But now, brought forth by what was soon to happen to one of the trio, everything that bore upon the subject came prominently forward, and every acquaintance of the female persuasion became subject to discussion.

"Do you know," said Josie, "what was the reason that Tillie Smith did not marry John Penn?"

"No!" was Jennie's response. "I've always wondered, but never knew."

"I'll tell you. It was because when John went off, as he did after his engagement, to Chicago on business, and, of course, had to write Tillie letters, for the first time she discovered that not only did he not write good grammar, but did not know how to use the capital letter, and so she broke off the engagement. You know Tillie is very particular and teaches in a public school."

"Why, how absurd!" said Jennie. "I don't think my Tom is perfect in his letters, but I love 'em, and I'm as glad to get 'em as though they were classically correct. I think it was a fortunate escape for Mr. Penn."

"So do I," said Maud. "I'll never put on such nonsensical airs as that with anybody. You know I'm too infatigable—you all say so—to think of getting married, and I think so myself, but I can't help it if I don't like everybody that likes me. Now, you know, you wanted me to explain why it was that I wouldn't come down stairs the other evening, when young Charley Keeler called. Well, I'll tell you. It was because when he came last Wednesday evening, just a week ago to-day, he leaned back in his chair against the wall, over in that corner, and he left that grease spot that you see there from the back of his head. Now, girls, even if I was ten years older, I wouldn't want anybody coming to see me that greased his hair so as to leave a spot on the new wall paper."

"Well, I don't know, Maudie, but what you may be right," said Jennie, thoughtfully. "But I don't think I would send my Tom away for that. I'd try and clean the spot, and if I couldn't I'd show it to him, and tell him he must be careful the next time."

"Aunt Jane," said Jennie, impatiently, "as if the idea had just reached her, 'how was it that you never married?'"

"Perhaps it was because I had no offer," said the old maid with a smile.

"Oh, that's impossible," said the three Misses Tibbs in chorus.

"Why impossible, my dear girls? Everything is possible," replied Miss Hopkinson gravely.

"Yes, auntie, but I know that you had everything attractive about you to draw the best of offers. Mamma says that you were one of the most charming girls she ever knew."

"Your mamma, my dear, is very kind, but you must remember that she speaks with the prejudice of a sister, and besides that a woman does not look upon these things with the eyes of a man."

"Oh, but, auntie, I know for myself. I can see how very pretty you have been, and I can see that you have not lost it yet. One can grow gracefully old, and keep all their good looks to those who love them, even though they be a little shoddy by age."

"Yes!" put in Josephine, "and there's one thing ordained by Providence on that point, which is that we do not see those we are with every day getting old. We never notice age creeping on them unless our attention is particularly called to it."

"I think that may be no in some cases," said Aunt Jane, smiling, "but it could hardly be, girls, in your cases with me. I have watched you from the cradle up, and could almost count every day. It may hold good with those who are about the same age as yourself. Now, I confess that I have never thought of age as regards your mother, and yet I am seven years older than she is."

"Oh, no; mamma is just as young and beautiful as ever," said "The Baby," enthusiastically, "and I remember her for twelve years. No, I think we notice the advances of age upon ourselves more than we do on others. I know that I think of it every day I look in the glass and recognize that I am getting old."

They all laughed at this, and Maud had to laugh a little herself, but she turned it off with:

"Well, this isn't what we were talk-

ing about, girls. Jennie you just asked auntie how it was that she never got married. Let's hear about that."

"Well, girls," said Aunt Jane slowly, "that seems an unanswerable question, but I'll try to answer it. Perhaps it was upon the same principal that some men never get rich no matter how much they try, it is so ordained that they shall always be poor, while others reach wealth and honors, not only without effort, but with positively everything against them."

"Well, I don't think I made any very great effort to get my Tom," said Jenny thoughtfully, "and, really, when I come to think of it, I don't think he has asked me right out. I believe it was understood between us perfectly before anything was said on the subject, and when we did talk about it I took it as a matter of course."

"I believe that is the way in a majority of cases," said Aunt Jane, laughing, "and this mythical idea of popping the question is something that very rarely occurs. As Jenny says, its all understood without it. Now, for myself, I've been the same as engaged three or four times, and yet I never received but one formal offer in my life."

"Oh! tell us all about it, auntie," said the three Misses Tibbs, hatching their chairs up a little closer to Aunt Jane.

"Well, it's hardly anything to tell, girls, but if you desire to hear it, I must tell it. But to explain what I say about being engaged without receiving a formal offer, I will cite a case or two within my own experience. My first was when I was seventeen, and, as I then thought, as much a woman as I am now. I was spending the summer on the seashore with my Aunt Margaret, and Aunt Margaret, having made a successful marriage, financially speaking, herself, was intent on having her nieces do the same, for she had no children, and so every summer she took to fashionable places, and every winter to all the halls and parties."

"This particular summer she chose the seashore, and there I met Harvey Gray, who, though seven years my senior, and who had been traveling for three years in Europe, was, really, as innocent as a child. We fell in love, as it is called, at first sight, and were infatuated with each other. Of course, out of this grew the usual sweet courtships, moonlight walks, boating, gunniting, singing, and all the inevitable things appertaining to lovers, ever since the world began."

"Aunt Margaret recognized the matter, and it suited her—too well, as I afterward thought. Gray was rich, highly connected, handsome and of irreproachable character, therefore a very desirable match. I say it all suited Aunt Margaret too well, and I'll explain that by saying that while men are always ready to take advantage of being left by the parents and guardians of the girl they are in love with alone and uninterrupted in their wooing, yet there is such a thing as overdoing this, so as to rather turn him against it. He would really be better pleased with a little opposition. I think Aunt Margaret slightly overdid it."

"However, the summer passed, and we were happy, and I felt as much engaged to Harvey as though the actual words had been spoken, and I am as sure as we can be of anything in this life that Harvey felt the same way. In fact we talked freely of what we were to do in the future, and there was nothing wanting but the setting of the day, when Aunt Margaret stepped in, which I have always thought was unfortunate, to say the least of it, for I am a decided advocate of early marriages. Well, we were to start for the city early the next morning, and for what occurred the previous evening I am indebted to Aunt Margaret's own recital. I was detained in my own room packing, but was to meet Harvey on the piazza at 9 o'clock. He was to go with us to the city the next day, and I left him after dinner promading with my aunt. When I returned at 9 o'clock he was not there, and Aunt Margaret made his apologies by saying that he was indisposed and had retired. The next day when he did not appear to go with us to the city, Aunt Margaret was forced to an explanation. She had asked Harvey what his intentions were, and he had revolted."

"I thought my heart was broken, but Aunt Margaret said she had done right, and that the man who after three months of unlimited courtship, as she looked upon it, that could not explain his intentions had better be got rid of. I never saw Harvey again until he was married, three years after, when we met, as they say in France, with elevated politeness. He married one of the great belles of society, and in two years he was living a bachelor life in Paris and she was living in New York City. Perhaps Aunt Margaret was in the right; I do not know."

But the three Misses Tibbs declared that Aunt Margaret was not right, but emphatically wrong, and after discussing the matter a while Maud said:

"But, auntie, you haven't told us about the one real offer that you did have."

"Very well," said Aunt Jane, laughing, "I'll skip the offers I didn't have then, and tell of the ones I did have, if you say so. You all remember Underwood, of course. Your grandfather bought it, Jennie, when you were a baby, and we all spent our summer's there. That's twenty years ago, and I was then what society calls passe—in fact, I had before that made up my mind to a life of old maidism."

"One day I had taken a fancy to go into the kitchen and make a cake. I did this because everybody except the hired men and one of the chambermaids had gone to the city, even the cook being away for the day, the hired men off in the fields, and Mary and I the only occupants of the house. I had begun my cake-making when I discovered the want of certain spices, and Mary volunteered to go to the store to obtain them. She had hardly got away when I heard a step, and raised my eyes to see a man standing at the kitchen door, which opened into the path that led to the road."

"My heart was in my throat in an instant, and I remembered how utterly alone I was. We were not afraid of traps in those days as now, but I think a better specimen of that genus I never saw. It was dissipation itself,

and as I looked at him in a dazed, frightened way, he whined:

"Lady, I'm very hungry. Won't you give me something to eat?"

"As scared as I was I reasoned. I would feed him and talk to him until Mary returned, and I would then send her for the hired men, and so I bade him come in and I sat before him the contents of the kitchen pantry, with an abundance of warm coffee from the stove. He ate like one who had not seen food for over a month, and as he ate poured forth the tale of his troubles. He had been a prosperous shoe-maker, having at one time had as much as \$400 in the savings bank; but, as he declared, he had been ruined by a bad wife, who would not bear with his little foibles, one of which was his conviviality, and so she left him, and he became a wanderer."

"Of course I sympathized with him in his troubles, and under this the stimulation of the coffee, as soon as he could eat no more, I found him on his knees before me, pouring out his admiration. Oh, if he had but such a wife as I was, what a different man he might have been. A millionaire, perhaps—Oh, will that girl, Mary, ever return?—but it was not too late yet. His wife was not dead, but he was not afraid of her. Would I marry him?"

"I don't know how I found words, in my fright, but I saw that I must temporize, and I told him that the offer was too sudden, that I was unable to decide at once; that at any moment my father or brothers might come down stairs, and I would rather keep it a secret from them. If he would go away now and return the next day at the same hour he should have my answer. He promised he would, and very candidly confessed that he did not know where he should sleep that night, whereat I took out my purse and gave him what money I had, about two dollars, and he departed, and that's the only direct offer, girls, I have ever received in my life."

"Oh, Auntie!" went up in chorus from the three girls. "How terrible! Did he come back?"

"Oh, no! I never saw him again, and as I did not know his name, you know, girls, I could not hunt him up. When Mary came back she found me stretched upon the kitchen floor, where I had chosen to drop in a faint, and after she had brought me back to life she wanted to send one of the hired men after my visitor, but I refused to allow her, for what had the man done? Nothing! He was civil and quiet, and had gone away at my request, and had left it in my power to say that I had received one offer at least in my life."

Facts and Fancies.

"Conductor," said a Chicago man on board an Illinois Central train, in a loud tone of voice, "are you sure we haven't passed St. Louis?" "Yes; we are twenty miles this side yet." "This train stops there doesn't it?" "Yes." "Well, don't fail to let me know when you get there." Then he settled himself back in his seat and smiled, when a St. Louis citizen leaned across the aisle and asked him if any new buildings had been put up in Chicago since the fire.—Kansas City Times.

Some United States coins of rare value are found in a catalogue issued by a Philadelphia collector. A silver dollar of 1804 is valued at \$600, a Carolina copper is rare at \$150. A brass coin struck about 1816, said to be the first one ever struck in America, and one of the three existing, is worth \$100. On the one side are two ships and on the other the figure of a wild boar surrounded by the words "Island Sommer."

First bridesmaid—"You never tell?" Second bridesmaid—"Of course not; I never do, you know." First bridesmaid—"Well, she told me in strict confidence, understand, that though Jack was poor they were going to travel all summer and stop at the best hotels, and that they got the money by selling their duplicate wedding presents. I wonder whether my spoons are paying part of the expenses."

This is how one of the great social problems is treated by the Chester Citizen, Henderson, Tenn.: "Henderson is getting too utterly stylish for its ability. Lots of people here who haven't got \$200 worth of things go dressed like they had the bulge on all the corners lots. Now we noticed a lot of little wee lots of girls going to school the other day. The fathers of some of these girls were not earning over \$600 a year, and, besides having to supply a family of six, these girls must be dressed as Princesses. Their isn't any sense in it. There was a day when a calico dress and a sun-bonnet were good enough for a school dress, and if finer togery was put on the wearer was sent home with instructions to change. It is very painful for a little child to go out in company dressed poorly when the majority are clad in finery."

Bursting of Bubbles.

We have our seasons of speculation, but the famous South Sea bubble craze raging from 1711 to 1720 was probably the most delirious affair of the kind that the world has ever seen. When the speculative fever was at its height, stock jobbing became the sole business of all classes in London. A multitude of stock companies sprang up like mushrooms. Companies were started for the assurance of seamen's wages, for a wheel for perpetual motion, for improving gardens, for insuring and increasing children's fortunes, for making looking-glasses, for improving malt liquors, for informing against robbers, for the fattening of hogs, etc., etc. Shares rose to amazing prices, and it was no uncommon thing to see them start at four pounds a share and rise to fifty pounds. When these speculative bubbles burst thousands of families were reduced to beggary. A few prudent men realized great fortunes, but the general result was disastrous in the extreme. From that day to this it has been found that great and widespread speculation demoralizes business and labor unsettles finances and is always followed by a period of prostration.

ROMULUS.

Chicago Tribune Prize Story.

It was a sunny evening in June, and Romulus Corners looked its best. Not that its best was anything to boast of, for it was not much of a place, consisting only of a dozen or so straggling houses, two "general stores," and a meeting house, on a line of the Boshawa and St. Paul railway. All the buildings were of wood, and most of them painted a dark and hideous brown though here and there a verandah of vivid green or a brilliant blue doorstep marked the dwelling of some unusually ambitious Cornerer. All dwellers at the Corners agreed that old Deacon Tiffany's house was "the smartest in the lot," and this certainly could not be denied; it stood on a small piece of rising ground overlooking the railway track, a somewhat conspicuous position, where the eleven different colors which ornamented its front could not fail to be observed of all travelers. These eleven colors were the pride of the deacon's heart; he would stand by the hour and contemplate with placid satisfaction and modest pride the green and yellow stripes of the veranda, the slate-colored cornice, or, best of all, the gorgeous new bow window "to Miranda's room." The deacon certainly had, as was said admiringly at the Corners, "an eye for colors." Even his bee-hives were all painted either yellow or blue, and instead of being clustered together in a corner, as is generally the case, were scattered promiscuously about the garden, according to a new and original plan received by their owner, to whom their appearance afforded the keenest satisfaction. It was his greatest pleasure in life to stand at the gate of a summer evening, attired in a striped flannel shirt, a palm-leaf hat and a pair of trousers depending on the apparently frail support of one suspender, luxuriously smoking a long-stemmed corncob pipe, and contemplating with innocent and profound admiration his many colored domicile and its surrounding beehives. The prospect might have been slightly marred for some people by the effect of Mrs. Tiffany's "washings," which were invariably in full view on either side of the house—it was a peculiarity of Mrs. Tiffany always to have something "on the line." But the deacon didn't mind; on the contrary, he rather enjoyed the sight of a few lilac calico gowns and "rising sun" counterpanes flapping in the breeze. "It kinder brightens things up, ye see," he used to say. But fond as he was of bright colors and generously as he had been able to gratify his taste it did one's heart good to see how careful the deacon was of his less fortunate neighbors' feelings. He would stroll down to the village of an evening, and, gazing mildly at the particular dull and dingy shade of brown which ornamented the residence of his friend, the blacksmith, would hypocritically remark that he "didn't know but what such a color as that wasn't best for the eyes after all," and that "if it hadn't bin for Mirandy's coming home he didn't know as he would hev put that thar shade of blue onto the bow-window; but gals generally has a leanin' to blue."

Miranda had been away for four years. First at school in a far-distant eastern city, and then without coming home she went to Europe for a year, partly as governess to the two little sisters of a former schoolmate, partly as companion for their fussy invalid mother. Mrs. Tiffany strongly disapproved of these proceedings. She was not Mirandy's own mother, and naturally hee own girls, Ag and Liz, took precedence in her eyes. She "didn't see why that pale-faced Mirandy should have all the book-larnin' and travelin' thar was goin'." But on this point the deacon, usually mild and yielding, had been firm and loyal to the memory of his first wife, the pretty, gentle, eastern girl, whose "book-larnin'" had been almost her only consolation in the pine solitudes of Romulus, and who had begged of him "not to let Miranda grow up West." And the deacon had promised and bravely kept his word, in spite of the scoldings and lachrymose complainings of Mrs. Tiffany the second and her girls.

Twice during the four years did the deacon visit her at school, and now at last Miranda is coming home. It is the 14th of June, and she is to sail for America the 15th, and the deacon stands at the gate and lets his pipe out half a dozen times as he thinks of his "little gal," and wonders how she will like the new paper in her room, and whether "thet thar mosquitue-curtain hadn't oughter abeen blue instead o'pink."

Far away in the smoke and noise of London, Miranda is parting with Fitzgerald.

"You know," he says, "I shall be back in New York next year, probably for good—and then I shall pay a visit, to—what is it?" smiling. "Remus?—no, Romulus, and carry you off like the knight in the fairy tale, I hope."

"You won't like it—Romulus, I mean"—she answers, the corners of her mouth trembling; "it—it is so different—I hate it!" with quick passion, "and yet," dropping her voice, "I hate myself more for feeling so. O, help me, help me bear it all!" she cries suddenly, turning to him with a piteous little gesture. He soothes her half impatiently—is it a shade of annoyance which crosses his face? And then, "you must be brave, Miranda," he says. She moves away from him, pushing the hair back from her forehead and looking up steadily. "Yes," she answers.

"I will be brave and patient." Then presently, as if longing to be assured, "You—you will come, I know you will, with a little break in the voice she tries to keep so steady. "Of course," he says, lightly. She looks at him half wondering. This parting, which was so terrible to her, can it be but a small thing to him?

A dreadful feeling of doubt and loneliness comes over her. She turns to the window in dumb agony and gazes into the crowded street. Fitzgerald paces the room a few moments. Then he comes up to her. "Miranda," he says, "this sort of thing is awful, you know. We had far better cut it short." He takes both her hands. She is quite calm and passive now. It seems to her that all feeling has left her. Through intense suffering she has almost passed into unconsciousness of pain; her face is white and still. Fitzgerald looks at her curiously. "Miranda, listen," he says gently, "we can write, you know." A little gleam of eagerness passed over her face. "Yes," she answers. "I had not thought of that." Then the strange, cool apathy returns. She lets him hold her in his arms and press his lips upon her brow without a sign or word. She hears him say that he "will surely come next year," she sees the puzzled look with which he regards her, she says "Good-by" in an odd, hard sort of voice, which sounds strange to her own ears, and then—it is all over and she is alone.

A little more than two weeks later the deacon stands on the little wooden platform of Romulus station waiting for an incoming express train. His scanty gray locks are combed carefully over his sun-burned neck; the palm-leaf hat has been discarded in favor of a very stiff, very high, very uncomfortable beaver; the one suspender is lidden by a Sunday coat of supernatural blackness and shiniess. Altogether the deacon is "gotton up smart" according to Mrs. Tiffany, who has snorted contemptuously at the idea of "all this fuss" made for that Mirandy. Mrs. Tiffany, however, is in a high state of suppressed excitement herself, as are also the girls. Ag has purchased the gayest bonnet to be had at the Corners (blue satin and yellow feathers), with the express and declared purpose of "takin' the shine out of Mirandy's furrin' fixin's," and Liz has spent the greater part of three days in perfecting wonderful arrangements of her molasses-candy colored locks which arrangement is declared by her friend, Miss Price, who has lately visited Chicago, to be the "latest European" style. It is a fearfully hot afternoon and there has been no rain for a fortnight. The little grass plot is brown and dusty; the sun beats down fiercely on the yellow, sandy path. Inside the house an early supper is set on the table, flies are buzzing about the wire-gauze cover which protects some sticky-looking "preserves," and a big bumble-bee, which has come in through the window, and accidentally tumbled into the pewter milk-jug, has managed to get out of it again, much to his own astonishment, and is slowly traveling across the table, leaving little droppings of cream to mark his progress. Mrs. Tiffany, her cork-screw curls gathered into a knot behind one ear, her sleeves tucked well up to the elbow, displaying a liberal expanse of red arm, is standing on the doorstep, Liz, attired in a pink gown and a profusion of cheap jewelry, is looling on the horse hair sofa reading a dime novel.

And the deacon brings Miranda home.

Slowly and wearily the days have become weeks, the weeks months, and the months have lengthened into years, and two years have gone by since Mirandy's home-coming. It is again an evening in June, and the deacon's palm-leaf hat is used vigorously to beat off the mosquitoes as he and Miranda stroll down the quiet deserted path. "Father, she began suddenly, I want you to do something for me." "Now, that's kind o' en'ous," remarks the deacon, "for I was just a thinkin' Mirandy, what thar was I could do fer to make yer happier." "Why, father," she cries, with a little attempt at a laugh "what has put it into your head to imagine that I'm not happy? Such a silly, old father!" "Mirandy," says the deacon, quietly, "I've knowed on it fer a long time—I've knowed on it fer months and months. Did ye think I couldn't see the look thet's bin a growin' in yer eyes? Did ye think I didn't know my gal was frettin'?"

"Oh, don't say that, don't say that!" she cries, with a sharp pain in her voice; "I didn't know you noticed—I have tried, I have tried so hard—"

"Thet's whar it is, Mirandy," says the deacon, tenderly. "You hev tried, and I can't abear to see ye tryin' to be happy. Don't ye try, Mirandy; don't ye, now. Thet was what killed yer mother." And the deacon sighs.

"Some folks," he continued, oracularly, "kin be happy agin' circumstances, and some folks can't. T'wan't in her natur, Mirandy, and it ain't in yours. Don't ye try, my pretty; don't ye try." "Father, father!" she sobs, and suddenly buries her quivering face upon his shoulder. The deacon gently strokes her hair. "Ef't would do ye any good to tell it, Mirandy," he says hesitating. "Yes, I will tell you," she answers quickly. "I meant to have told you long ago but, at first, I put it off, and afterward—somehow—I couldn't."

And then, with eyes on the ground and little but trembling hands clasped before her, she tells her story, how Fitzgerald was the uncle of her little charge—their mother's brother; how he had traveled with them all in Europe; how he had persistently sought her society, and how she had at first tried to repulse him; how at last, one night in Venice, he had asked her to be his wife, and she, loving him dearly, as indeed she had done all along consented; how they had been too very, very happy; how he had said that he was too poor to claim her for a long time yet, and bade her wait patiently until the time should come; how they had parted in London, and then how she had heard three times from him in the first six months, the last letter—from New York—promising a speedy visit; how she had answered it, and after months had written again, and how to answer had come, not even a line, not a word, in all the long months.

"I will be brave and patient." Then presently, as if longing to be assured, "You—you will come, I know you will, with a little break in the voice she tries to keep so steady. "Of course," he says, lightly. She looks at him half wondering. This parting, which was so terrible to her, can it be but a small thing to him?

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"Oh, don't say that, don't say that!" she cries, with a sharp pain in her voice; "I didn't know you noticed—I have tried, I have tried so hard—"

"Thet's whar it is, Mirandy," says the deacon, tenderly. "You hev tried, and I can't abear to see ye tryin' to be happy. Don't ye try, Mirandy; don't ye, now. Thet was what killed yer mother." And the deacon sighs.

"Some folks," he continued, oracularly, "kin be happy agin' circumstances, and some folks can't. T'wan't in her natur, Mirandy, and it ain't in yours. Don't ye try, my pretty; don't ye try." "Father, father!" she sobs, and suddenly buries her quivering face upon his shoulder. The deacon gently strokes her hair. "Ef't would do ye any good to tell it, Mirandy," he says hesitating. "Yes, I will tell you," she answers quickly. "I meant to have told you long ago but, at first, I put it off, and afterward—somehow—I couldn't."

And then, with eyes on the ground and little but trembling hands clasped before her, she tells her story, how Fitzgerald was the uncle of her little charge—their mother's brother; how he had traveled with them all in Europe; how he had persistently sought her society, and how she had at first tried to repulse him; how at last, one night in Venice, he had asked her to be his wife, and she, loving him dearly, as indeed she had done all along consented; how they had been too very, very happy; how he had said that he was too poor to claim her for a long time yet, and bade her wait patiently until the time should come; how they had parted in London, and then how she had heard three times from him in the first six months, the last letter—from New York—promising a speedy visit; how she had answered it, and after months had written again, and how to answer had come, not even a line, not a word, in all the long months.

"I will be brave and patient." Then presently, as if longing to be assured, "You—you will come, I know you will, with a little break in the voice she tries to keep so steady. "Of course," he says, lightly. She looks at him half wondering. This parting, which was so terrible to her, can it be but a small thing to him?

A dreadful feeling of doubt and loneliness comes over her. She turns to the window in dumb agony and gazes into the crowded street. Fitzgerald paces the room a few moments. Then he comes up to her. "Miranda," he says, "this sort of thing is awful, you know. We had far better cut it short." He takes both her hands. She is quite calm and passive now. It seems to her that all feeling has left her. Through intense suffering she has almost passed into unconsciousness of pain; her face is white and still. Fitzgerald looks at her curiously. "Miranda, listen," he says gently, "we can write, you know." A little gleam of eagerness passed over her face. "Yes," she answers. "I had not thought of that." Then the strange, cool apathy returns. She lets him hold her in his arms and press his lips upon her brow without a sign or word. She hears him say that he "will surely come next year," she sees the puzzled look with which he regards her, she says "Good-by" in an odd, hard sort of voice, which sounds strange to her own ears, and then—it is all over and she is alone.

And this is all. She does not speak of the sleepless nights and the wearying days, of the feverish eagerness for post-time, and the hopeless blank when it had passed—the quick bounding of her heart at every strange step, and the invariable sickening recoil which has followed, of the uncongenial conversations and surroundings which have made these things doubly hard to bear—of all this she is silent. She tells her story quietly and steadily, and the deacon listens without a word.

By and by he says slowly: "I've bin thinkin' for some time, my pretty, of goin' on a trips somewheres—just you and me together. Would ye like it Mirandy?"

She looked up in surprise, puzzled at his manner and almost wounded that he seems to take so little interest; then seeing that he is waiting for an answer, she says, trying to feign cheerfulness: "Yes, father, very much. Is it to Jacksonville?" naming a place some fifty miles distant, beyond which the deacon's little journeys seldom extend.

"N-no," says the old man, hesitatingly, "we'll go East, Mirandy. What would ye say to New York?" "O, father, no!" she cried, turning away and hiding her burning face in her hands. "Not that—I couldn't."

"Ye don't need to act so, Mirandy," he says, gently. "Would I ask ye to do anything ye hadn't oughter do? We'll go ter yer Aunt Libby's, my pretty; she'll be right glad to see ye fer yer mother's sake." Then in a low tone and hurriedly. "Thar's many things might hev happened—maybe he went away an never got yer letters—thar's no tellin'—pears as if 'would be more comfortable like to know fer sure—an' thar's that new reaper I was wartin'," raising his voice, "I'll be dead sure to get a better bargain up to New York. I kinder hated doin' the job in Jacksonville; 'aint much of a place, anyhow. Kin ye be ready in the mornin', Mirandy?" And the deacon assumes an air of pleased anticipation. Miranda's heart throbs wildly; she tries in vain to crush the unreasonable joy which fills her, and gives, against her will, lightness and buoyance to her steps and brightness to her dark eyes. She spends the first part of the night in hasty preparations, and afterwards, with no thought of sleep, sits at the open window of her room, her head buried in her hands, dreaming, perhaps, less of the future than of the past.

In the gray dawn of the next morning father and daughter are already on their way, and the evening of the second day finds them in New York. Aunt Libby receives them with open arms, and to Miranda the evening passes like a dream. Long afterwards little scraps of conversation and anecdotes of her dead mother came back to her, and when she tried to recall them more fully the stuffy, third-floor parlor of a second-class Brooklyn boarding house rose before her, and she saw again Aunt Libby's angular figure and kind, searching black eyes.

In the morning she wakes late from a heavy, dreamless sleep, and goes down stairs to find the deacon preparing for a day in the city. He calls her aside, and, without a word, she puts into his hand a scrap of paper upon which she has written the address Fitzgerald gave her. Her hand trembles a little as she does so, but otherwise she is outwardly calm and composed. The deacon glances at her with a look of tender anxiety, which soon changes to relief. "That's right, my pretty," he says, "true grit's what does it, Mirandy, under all circumstances." And then Aunt Libby comes in, and the deacon remarks that he is "as like as not to hev a 'arnation lot o' bother about thet reaper, and maybe he won't get back afore supper-time." Aunt Libby promises to "show Miranda 'round." And soon the old man leaves them.

Somehow the day, which has seemed interminable, draws to a close, and toward evening Miranda is seated by the window, a small cousin on her knee, for whose benefit she is improvising a fairy-tale. Each new word in her body thrills with intense though suppressed excitement. What is it that she expects she hardly knows and will not ask herself, but at every footfall on the steps outside she starts and clasps her hands more tightly together. A bright flush is on her cheek, her eyes are large with expectation. The fairy-tale in nearly ended: "So you see, after all," Miranda is saying, "the knight came back to the princess"—there is a step outside, the door opens, and the deacon comes in—alone. "Hev ye—hev ye had a pleasant day, Miranda?" he begins eagerly.

Miranda puts the child off her knee and he runs out of the room. Then, "What is it, father?" she says, quietly. The deacon gives a little uneasy cough. "Thet friend as we was speakin' of the other day," he says, slowly, "he's—married, Mirandy."