

Warner Susan

Diana



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Susan Warner Diana

CHAPTER I. THE SEWING SOCIETY

I am thinking of a little brown house, somewhere in the wilds of New England. I wish I could make my readers see it as it was, one June afternoon some years ago. Not for anything very remarkable about it; there are thousands of such houses scattered among our hills and valleys; nevertheless one understands any life story the better for knowing amid what sort of scenes it was unfolded. Moreover, such a place is one of the pleasant things in the world to look at, as I judge. This was a small house, with its gable end to the road, and a lean-to at the back, over which the long roof sloped down picturesquely. It was weather-painted; that was all; of a soft dark grey now, that harmonized well enough with the gayer colours of meadows and trees. And two superb elms, of New England's own, stood beside it and hung over it, enfolding and sheltering the little old house, as it were, with their arms of strength and beauty. Those trees would have dignified anything. One of them, of the more rare weeping variety, drooped over the door of the lean-to, shading it protectingly, and hiding with its long pendant branches the hard and stiff lines of the building. So the green draped the grey; until, in the soft mingling of hues, the light play of sunshine and shadow, it seemed as if the smartness of paint upon the old weather-boarding would have been an intrusion, and not an advantage. In front of the house was a little space given to flowers; at least there were some irregular patches and borders, where balsams and hollyhocks and pinks and marigolds made a spot of light colouring; with one or two luxuriantly-growing blush roses, untrained and wandering, bearing a wealth of sweetness on their long, swaying branches. There was that spot of colour; all around and beyond lay meadows, orchards and cultivated fields; till at no great distance the ground became broken, and rose into a wilderness of hills, mounting higher and higher. In spots these also showed cultivation; for the most part they were covered with green woods in the depth of June foliage. The soft, varied hilly outline filled the whole circuit of the horizon; within the nearer circuit of the hills the little grey house sat alone, with only one single exception. At the edge of the meadow land, half hid behind the spur of a hill, stood another grey farm-house; it might have been half a mile off. People accustomed to a more densely populated country would call the situation lonesome; solitary it was. But Nature had shaken down her hand full of treasures over the place. Art had never so much as looked that way. However, we can do without art on a June afternoon.

The door of the lean-to looked towards the road, and so made a kind of front door to the kitchen which was within. The door-sill was raised a single step above the rough old grey stone which did duty before it; and sitting on the doorstep, in the shadow and sunlight which came through the elm branches and fell over her, this June afternoon, was the person whose life story I am going to try to tell. She sat there as one at home, and in the leisure of one who had done her work; with arms crossed upon her bosom, and an air of almost languid quiet upon her face. The afternoon was quiet-inspiring. Genial warm sunshine filled the fields and grew hazy in the depth of the hills; the long hanging elm branches were still; sunlight and shadow beneath slept in each other's arms; soft breaths of air, too faint to move the elms, came nevertheless with reminders and suggestions of all sorts of sweetness; from the leaf-buds of the woods, from the fresh turf of the meadows, from a thousand hidden flowers and ferns at work in their secret laboratories, distilling a thousand perfumes, mingled and untraceable. Now and then the breath of the roses was quite

distinguishable; and from fields further off the delicious scent of new hay. It was just the time of day when the birds do not sing; and the watcher at the door seemed to be in their condition.

She was a young woman, full grown, but young. Her dress was the common print working dress of a farmer's daughter, with a spot or two of wet upon her apron showing that she had been busy, as her dress suggested. Her sleeves were still rolled up above her elbows, leaving the crossed arms full in view. And if there is character in faces, so there is in arms; and everybody knows there is in hands. These arms were after the model of the typical woman's arm; not chubby and round and fat, but moulded with beautiful contour, showing muscular form and power, with the blue veins here and there marking the clear delicate skin. Only look at the arm, without even seeing the face, and you would feel there was nervous energy and power of will; no weak, flabby, undecided action would ever come of it. The wrist was tapering enough, and the hand perfectly shaped, like the arm; not quite so white. The face, – you could not read it at once; possibly not till it had seen a few more years. It was very reposeful this afternoon. Yet the brow and the head bore tokens of the power you would expect; they were very fine; and the eyes under the straight brow were full and beautiful, a deep blue-grey, changing and darkening at times. But the mouth and lower part of the face was as sweet and mobile as three years old; playing as innocently and readily upon every occasion; nothing had fixed those lovely lines. The combination made it a singular face, and of course very handsome. But it looked very unconscious of that fact.

Within the kitchen another woman was stepping about actively, and now and then cast an unsatisfied look at the doorway. Finally came to a stop in the middle of the floor to speak.

"What are you sittin' there for, Diana?"

"Nothing, that I know of."

"If I was sittin' there for nothin', seems to me I'd get up and go somewheres else."

"Where?" said the beauty languidly.

"Anywhere. Goodness! it makes me feel as if nothin' would ever get done, to see you sittin' there so."

"It's all done, mother."

"What?"

"Everything."

"Have you got out the pink china?"

"Yes."

"Is your cake made?"

"Yes, mother; you saw me do it."

"I didn't see you bakin' it, though."

"Well, it is done."

"Did it raise light and puffy?"

"Beautiful."

"And didn't get burned?"

"Only the least bit, in the corner. No harm."

"Have you cut the cheese and shivered the beef?"

"All done."

"Then I think you had better go and dress yourself."

"There's plenty of time. Nobody can be here for two hours yet."

"I wouldn't sit and do nothin', if I was you."

"Why not, mother? when there is really nothing to do."

"I don't believe in no such minutes, for my part. They never come to me. Look at what I've done to-day, now. There was first the lighting the fire and getting breakfast. Then I washed up, and righted the kitchen and set on the dinner. Then I churned and brought the butter and worked *that*. Then there was the dairy things. Then I've been in the garden and picked four quarts of ifs-and-ons

for pickles; got 'em all down in brine, too. Then I made out my bread, and made biscuits for tea, and got dinner, and eat it, and cleared it away, and boiled a ham."

"Not since dinner, mother?"

"Took it out, and that; and got all my pots and kettles put away; and picked over all that lot o' berries, I think I'd make preserves of 'em, Diana; when folks come to sewing meeting for the missionaries they needn't have all creation to eat, seems to me. They don't sew no better for it. *I* believe in fasting, once in a while."

"What for?"

"What for? Why, to keep down people's stomach; take off a slice of their pride."

"Mother! do you think eating and people's pride have anything to do with each other?"

"I guess I do! I tell you, fasting is as good as whipping to take down a child's stomach; let 'em get real thin and empty, and they'll come down and be as meek as Moses. Folks ain't different from children."

"You never tried that with me, mother," said Diana, half laughing.

"Your father always let you have your own way. I could ha' managed *you*, I guess; but your father and you was too much at once. Come, Diana do – get up and go off and get dressed, or something."

But she sat still, letting the soft June air woo her, and the scents of flower and field hold some subtle communion with her. There was a certain hidden harmony between her and them; and yet they stirred her somehow uneasily.

"I wonder," she said after a few minutes' silence, "what a nobleman's park is like?"

The mother stood still again in the middle of the kitchen.

"A park!"

"Yes. It must be something beautiful; and yet I cannot think how it could be prettier than this."

"Than what?" said her mother impatiently.

"Just all this. All this country; and the hayfields, and the cornfields, and the hills."

"A park!" her mother repeated. "I saw a 'park' once, when I was down to New York; you wouldn't want to see it twice. A homely little mite of a green yard, with a big white house in the middle of it; and homely enough *that* was too. It might do very well for the city folks; but the land knows I'd be sorry enough to live there. What's putting parks in your head?"

But the daughter did not answer, and the mother stood still and looked at her, with perhaps an inscrutable bit of pride and delight behind her hard features. It never came out.

"Diana, do you calculate to be ready for the sewin' meetin'?"

"Yes, mother."

"Since they must come, we may as well make 'em welcome; and they won't think it, if you meet 'em in your kitchen dress. Is the new minister comin', do you s'pose?"

"I don't know if anybody has told him."

"Somebody had ought to. It won't be much of a meetin' without the minister; and it 'ud give him a good chance to get acquainted. Mr. Hardenburgh used to like to come."

"The new man doesn't look much like Mr. Hardenburgh."

"It'll be a savin' in biscuits, if he ain't."

"I used to like to see Mr. Hardenburgh eat, mother."

"I hain't no objection – when I don't have the biscuits to make. Diana, you baked a pan o' them biscuits too brown. Now you must look out, when you put 'em to warm up, or they'll be more'n crisp."

"Everybody else has them cold, mother."

"They won't at my house. It's just to save trouble; and there ain't a lazy hair in me, you ought to know by this time."

"But I thought you were for taking down people's pride, and keeping the sewing society low; and here are hot biscuits and all sorts of thing," said Diana, getting up from her seat at last.

"The cream'll be in the little red pitcher – so mind you don't go and take the green one. And do be off, child, and fix yourself; for it'll be a while yet before I'm ready, and there'll be nobody to see folks when they come."

Diana went off slowly up-stairs to her own room. There were but two, one on each side of the little landing-place at the head of the stair; and she and her mother divided the floor between them. Diana's room was not what one would have expected from the promise of all the rest of the house. That was simple enough, as the dwelling of a small farmer would be, and much like the other farm-houses of the region. But Diana's room, a little one it was, had one side filled with bookshelves; and on the bookshelves was a dark array of solid and ponderous volumes. A table under the front window held one or two that were apparently in present use; the rest of the room displayed the more usual fittings and surroundings of a maiden's life. Only in their essentials, however; no luxury was there. The little chest of drawers, covered with a white cloth, held a brush and comb, and supported a tiny looking-glass; small paraphernalia of vanity. No essences or perfumes or powders; no curling sticks or crimping pins; no rats or cats, cushions or frames, or skeletons of any sort, were there for the help of the rustic beauty; and neither did she need them. So you would have said if you had seen her when her toilette was done. The soft outlines of her figure were neither helped nor hidden by any artificial contrivances. Her abundant dark hair was in smooth bands and a luxuriant coil at the back of her head – woman's natural crown; and she looked nature-crowned when she had finished her work. Just because nature had done so much for her and she had let nature alone; and because, furthermore, Diana did not know or at least did not think about her beauty. When she was in order, and it did not take long, she placed herself at the table under the window before noticed, and opening a book that lay ready, forgot I dare say all about the sewing meeting; till the slow grating of wheels at the gate brought her back to present realities, and she went down-stairs.

There was a little old green waggon before the house, with an old horse and two women, one of whom had got down and was tying the horse's head to the fence.

"Are you afraid he will run away?" said the voice of Diana gaily from the garden.

"Massy! no; but he might hitch round somewheres, you know, and get himself into trouble. Thank ye – I am allays thankful and glad when I get safe out o' this waggin."

So spoke the elder lady, descending with Diana's help and a great deal of circumlocution from her perch in the vehicle. And then they went into the bright parlour, where windows and doors stood open, and chairs had been brought in, ready to accommodate all who might come.

"It's kind o' sultry," said the same lady, wiping her face. "I declare these ellums o' yourn do cast an elegant shadder. It allays sort o' hampers me to drive, and I don't feel free till I can let the reins fall; that's how I come to be so heated. Dear me, you do excel in notions!" she exclaimed, as Diana presented some glasses of cool water with raspberry vinegar. "Ain't that wonderful coolin'!"

"Will the minister come to the meeting, Diana?" asked the other woman.

"He'd come, if he knowed he could get anything like this," said the other, smacking her lips and sipping her glass slowly. And then came in her hostess.

If Mrs. Starling was hard-favoured, it cannot be denied that she had a certain style about her. Some ugly people do. Country style, no doubt; but these things are relative; and in a smart black silk, with sheer muslin neckerchief and a close-fitting little cap, her natural self-possession and self-assertion were very well set off. Very different from Diana's calm grace and simplicity; the mother and daughter were alike in nothing beyond the fact that each had character. Perhaps that is a common fact in such a region and neighbourhood; for many of the ladies who now came thronging in to the meeting looked as if they might justly lay claim to so much praise. The room filled up; thimbles and housewives came out of pockets; work was produced from baskets and bags; and tongues went like mill-clappers. They put the June afternoon out of countenance. Mrs.

Barry, the good lady who had arrived first, took out her knitting, and in a corner went over to her neighbour all the incidents of her drive, the weather, the getting out of the waggon, the elm-tree shadow, and the raspberry vinegar. Mrs. Carpenter, a well-to-do farmer's wife, gave the details of her dairy misfortunes and success to *her* companion on the next seat. Mrs. Flandin discussed missions. Mrs. Bell told how the family of Mr. Hardenburgh had got away on their journey to their new place of abode.

"I always liked Mr. Hardenburgh," said Mrs. Carpenter.

"He had a real good wife," remarked Miss Gunn, the storekeeper's sister, "and that goes a great way. Mrs. Hardenburgh was a right-down good woman."

"But you was speakin' o' *Mr.* Hardenburgh, the dominie," said Mrs.

Salter. "He was a man as there warn't much harm in, I've allays said.

'Tain't a man's fault if he can't make his sermons interestin', I s'pose."

"Mr. Hardenburgh preached real good sermons, now, always seemed to me," rejoined Mrs. Carpenter. "He meant right; that's what he did."

"That's *so*!" chimed in Mrs. Mansfield, a rich farmer in her own person.

"There was an owl up in one of our elm-trees one night," began Mrs.

Starling.

"Du tell! so nigh's that!" said Mrs. Barry from her corner.

" – And I took up Josiah's gun and *meant* to shoot him; but I didn't."

"He was awful tiresome – there!" exclaimed Mrs. Boddington. "What's the use of pretendin' he warn't? Nobody couldn't mind what his sermons was about; I don't believe as he knew himself. Now, a minister had ought to know what he means, whether any one else does or not, and I like a minister that makes *me* know what he means."

"Why, Mrs. Boddington," said Mrs. Flandin, "I didn't know as you cared anything about religion, one way or another."

"I've got to go to church, Mrs. Flandin; and I'd a little rayther be kep' awake while I'm there without pinching my fingers. I'd prefer it."

"Why, has anybody *got* to go to church that doesn't want to go?" inquired Diana. But that was like a shell let off in the midst of the sewing circle.

"Hear that, now!" said Mrs. Boddington. "Ain't that a rouser!" Mrs. Boddington was a sort of a cousin, and liked the fun; she lived in the one farm-house in sight of Mrs. Starling's.

"She don't mean it," said Mrs. Mansfield.

"Trust Di Starling for meaning whatever she says," returned the other.

"You and I mayn't understand it, but that's all one, you know."

"But what *do* she mean?" said Mrs. Salter.

"Yes, what's the use o' havin' a church, ef folks ain't goin' to it?" said Mrs. Carpenter.

"No," said Diana, laughing; "I only asked why any one *must* go, if he don't want to? Where's the *must*?"

"When we had good Mr. Hardenburgh, for example," chimed in Mrs. Boddington, "who was as loggy as he could be; good old soul! and put us all to sleep, or to wishin' we could. My! hain't I eaten quarts o' dill in the course o' the summer, trying to keep myself respectably awake and considerin' o' what was goin' on! Di says, why *must* any one eat all that dill that don't want to?"

"Cloves is better," suggested Miss Gunn.

Some laughed at this; others looked portentously grave.

"It's just one o' Di's nonsense speeches," said her mother; "what they mean I'm sure I don't know. She reads too many books to be just like other folks."

"But the books were written by other folks, mother."

"La! some sort, child. Not our sort, I guess."

"Hain't Di never learned her catechism?" inquired Mrs. Flandin.

"Is there anything about going to church in it?" asked the girl.

"There's most all sorts o' good things in it," answered vaguely Mrs. Flandin, who was afraid of committing herself. "I thought Di might ha' learned there something about such a thing as we call *duty*."

"That's so," said Mrs. Mansfield.

"Just what I am asking about," said Di. "That's the thing. Why *is* it duty, to go to church when one don't want to go?"

"Well, I'm sure it was time we had a new minister," said Mrs. Salter; "and I'm glad he's come. If he's no better than old Mr. Hardenburgh, it'll take us a spell to find it out; and that'll be so much gained. He don't *look* like him any way."

"He *is* different, ain't he?" assented Mrs. Boddington. "If we wanted a change, we've got it. How did you all like his sermon last Sabbath?"

"He was very quiet –" said Mrs. Flandin.

"I like that," said Diana. "When a man roars at me, I never can tell what he is saying."

"He seemed to kind o' know his own mind," said Mrs. Salter.

"I thought he'd got an astonishin' knowledge o' things in the town, for the time he's had," said Mrs. Mansfield.

"I wisht he had a family," remarked Miss Gunn; "that's all I've got agin him. I think a minister had allays ought to have a family."

"He will, – let him alone a while," said Mrs. Boddington. "Time enough.

Who have we got in town that would do for him?"

The fruitful topic of debate and discussion here started, lasted the ladies for some time. Talk and business got full under weigh. Scissors and speeches, clipping and chattering, knitting and the interminable yarn of small talk. The affairs, sickness and health, of every family in the neighbourhood, with a large discussion of character and prospects by the way; going back to former history and antecedents, and forward to future probable consequences and results. Nuts of society; sweet confections of conversation; of various and changing flavour; suiting all palates, and warranted never to cloy. Then there were farm prospects and doings also, with household matters; very interesting to the good ladies, who all had life interest in them; and the hours moved on prosperously. Here a rocking-chair tipped gently back and forward, in harmony with the quiet business enjoyment of its occupant; and there a pair of heels, stretched out to the farthest limit of their corresponding members, with toes squarely elevated in the air, testified to the restful condition of another individual of the party. See a pair of toes in the air and the heels as nearly as possible straight under them, one tucked up on the other, and you may be sure the person they belong to feels comfortable – physically. And Mrs. Starling in a corner, in her quiet state and black-silk gown, was as contented as an old hen that sees all her chickens prosperously scratching for themselves. And the June afternoon breathed in at the window and upon all those busy talkers; and nobody knew that it was June. So things went, until Diana left them to put the finishing touches of readiness to the tea-table. Her going was noticed by some of the assembly, and taken as a preparatory note of the coming entertainment; always sure to be worth having and coming for in Mrs. Starling's house. Needles and tongues took a fresh stir.

"Mis' Starling, are we goin' to hev' the minister?" somebody asked.

"I don't know as anybody has told him, Mis' Mansfield."

"Won't seem like a meetin', ef we don't hev' him."

"He's gone down to Elmfield," said Miss Gunn. "He went down along in the forenoon some time. Gone to see his cousin, I s'pose."

"They've got their young soldier home to Elmfield," said Miss Barry. "I s'pect they're dreadful sot up about it."

"They don't want *that*," said Mrs. Boddington. "The Knowltons always did carry their heads pretty well up, in the best o' times; and now Evan's got home, I s'pose there'll be no holding 'em in. There ain't, I guess, by the looks."

"What'll he do now? stay to hum and help his gran'ther?"

"La! no. He's home just for a visit. He's got through his education at the Military Academy, and now he's an officer; out in the world; but he'll have to go somewhere and do his work."

"I wonder what work they do hev' to do?" said Mrs. Salter; "there ain't nobody to fight now, is there?"

"Fight the Injuns," said Mrs. Boddington; "or the Mexicans; or the English may be; anything that comes handy."

"But we hain't no quarrel with the English, nor nobody, hev' we? I thought we was done fightin' for the present," said Miss Barry in a disturbed tone of voice.

"Well, suppos'n we be," said Mrs. Boddington; "somebody might give us a slap, you know, when we don't expect it, and it's best to be ready; and so, Evan Knowlton'll be one o' them that has to stand somewhere with his musket to his shoulder, and look after a lot o' powder behind him all the while."

"Du tell! if it takes four years to learn 'em to du that," said Miss Babbage, the doctor's sister.

"The Knowltons is a very fine family," remarked Miss Gunn.

"If the outside made it," said Mrs. Boddington. "Don't they cut a shine when they come into meetin', though! They *think* they do."

"It takes all the boys' attention off everything," said Mrs. Flandin, who was an elderly lady herself.

"And the girls" – added Mrs. Starling. But what more might have been said was cut short by Miss Barry's crying out that here was the minister coming.

CHAPTER II. THE NEW MINISTER

The little stir and buzz which went round the assembly at this news was delightful. Not one but moved excitedly on her seat, and then settled herself for an unwonted good time. For the new minister was undiscovered ground; an unexamined possession; unexplored treasure. One Sunday and two sermons had done no more than whet the appetite of the curious. Nobody had made up his mind, or her mind, on the subject, in regard to any of its points. So there were eyes enough that from Mrs. Starling's windows watched the minister as he dismounted and tied his horse to the fence, and then opened the little gate and came up to the house. Diana had returned to the room to bid the company out to supper; but finding all heads turned one way, and necks craned over, and eyes on the stretch, she paused and waited for a more auspicious moment. And then came a step in the passage and the door opened.

Mr. Hardenburgh, each lady remembered, used to make the circuit of the company, giving every one a several clasp of the hand and an individual word of civility. Here was a change! The new minister came into the midst of them and stood still, with a bright look and a cheery "Good afternoon!" It was full of good cheer and genial greeting; but what lady could respond to it? The greeting was not given to *her*. The silence was absolute; though eyes said they had heard, and were listening.

"I have been down at Elmfield," the new-comer went on, not at all disturbed by his reception; "and some one informed me I should find a large circle of friends if I came here; so I came. And I find I was told truly."

"I guess we'd most given you up," said the mistress of the house, coming out of her corner now.

"I don't know what reason you had to expect me! Nobody asked me to come."

"We're real glad to see you. Take a chair," said Mrs. Starling, setting one for his acceptance as she spoke.

"Mr. Hardenburgh allays used to come to our little meetin's," said Mrs. Mansfield.

"Thank you! – And you expect me to do all that Mr. Hardenburgh did?"

There was such a quaint air of good-fellowship and simplicity in the new minister's manner, that the little assembly began to stir anew with gratification and amusement. But nobody was forward to answer. In fact, they were a trifle shy of him. The late Mr. Hardenburgh had been heavy and slow; kind, of course, but stiff; you knew just what he would do and how he would speak beforehand. There was a delightful freshness and uncertainty about this man. Nothing imposing, either; a rather small, slight figure; with a face that might or might not be called handsome, according to the fancy of the speaker, but that all would agree was wonderfully attractive and winning. A fine broad brow; an eye very sweet; with a build of the jaw and lines of the mouth speaking both strength and the absolute calm of the mental nature.

"I was afraid I should be late," he went on, looking at his watch, – "but the roads are good. How far do you call it from Elmfield?"

"All of five miles," said Mrs. Starling.

"Yes; and one hill to cross. Well! I came pretty well. The long June afternoon favoured me."

"Mr. Hardenburgh used to drive a buggy," remarked Miss Barry.

"Yes. Is that one of the things you would like me to do as he did?"

"Well, none of our ministers ever went such a venturesome way before," said the timid little old lady.

"As I do? But if *I* had been in a buggy, Miss Barry, this afternoon, I am afraid you would have got through supper and been near breaking up before I could have joined your society."

"How long was you comin', then?" she asked, looking startled.

"And there's another thing, Mr. Masters," said Mrs. Mansfield; "why *do* the days be so much longer in summer than in winter? I asked Mr. Hardenburgh once, but I couldn't make out nothin' from what he told me?"

Sly looks and suppressed laughter went round the room, for some of Mrs. Mansfield's neighbours were better informed than she in all that lay above the level of practical farming; but Mr. Masters quite gravely assured her he would make it all clear the first time he had a quiet chance at her house.

"And will you walk out to supper, friends?" said Mrs. Starling. "Here's Di been standin' waitin' to call us this half hour."

The supper was laid on a long table in the lean-to, which was used as a kitchen; but now the fire was out, and the tea-kettle had been boiled and was kept boiling in some unknown region. Doors and windows stood open, letting the sweet air pass through; and if the floor was bare and the chairs were wooden, both one and the other were bright with cleanliness; and the long board was bright in another way. Yet the word is not misapplied. Such piles of snowy bread and golden cake, such delicate cheeses and puffy biscuits, and such transparencies of rich-coloured preserves, were an undoubted adornment to Mrs. Starling's deal table, and might have been to any table in the world. The deal was covered, however, with white cloths. At the upper end the hostess took her place behind a regiment of cups and saucers, officered by great tin pots which held the tea and coffee. Diana waited.

Everybody had come expecting a good supper and primed for enjoyment; and now the enjoyment began. Mrs. Starling might smile grimly to herself as she saw her crab-apples and jellies disappear, and the piles of biscuits go down and get heaped up again by Diana's care. Nobody was at leisure enough to mark her.

"Eat when you can, Mr. Masters," said Mrs. Boddington; "you won't get hot biscuits anywhere in Pleasant Valley but here."

"Why not?" said Mr. Masters.

"It ain't the fashion – that's all."

"I s'pose you've seen the fashions to-day down at Elmfield, Mr. Masters," said Mrs. Salter. "They don't think as we hev' no fashions, up here in the mountains."

"Their fashions is ridiculous!" said Mrs. Flandin. "Do you think it's becomin', Mr. Masters, for Christian women to go and make sights of themselves?"

"In what way, Mrs. Flandin?"

"Why, goodness! you've seen 'em. Describin's impossible. Euphemie Knowlton, she came into church last Sabbath three yards in extent, ef she was a foot. It beat me, how she was goin' to get in. Why, there warn't room for but three of 'em in the slip, and it took 'em somethin' like half an hour to get fixed in their places. I declare I was ashamed, and I had to look, for all."

"So had I," assented Miss Carpenter. "I couldn't fairly keep my eyes off of 'em."

"And I'm certain she couldn't go agin the wind, with her bonnet; it stuck just right up from her face, and ended in a pint, and she had a hull garden in the brim of it, *I* think ministers had ought to preach about such doin's."

"And you don't know what ministers are good for if they don't?" said Mr. Masters.

"Did *you* ever see a minister that could get the better of 'em?" said Mrs. Boddington. "'Cos, if you did, I would like to go and sit under his preachin' a spell, and see what he could do for me."

"Does that express the mind of Pleasant Valley generally?" asked the minister, and gravely this time.

"La! we ain't worse than other folks," said Mrs. Salter. "There's no harm in dressin' one's self smart now and then, is there? And we want to know how, to be sure."

"I hope you don't think Euphemie Knowlton knows how? 'Tain't a quarter as becomin' as the way we dress in Pleasant Valley. There ain't the least bit of prettiness or gracefulness in a woman's bein' three yards round; anyhow we don't think so when it's nature." So Mrs. Salter.

"What do you think o' lettin' your hair down over the shoulders, as if you were goin' to comb it?" said Mrs. Boddington; "and goin' to church so?"

"But how ever *did* she make it stand out as it did," asked Miss

Carpenter. "It was just like spun glass, nothin' smooth or quiet about it. Such a yellow mop I never did see. And it warn't a child neither.

Who is she anyhow?"

"Not she. It is a grown woman," said Mrs. Flandin; "and she looked like a wild savage. Don't the minister agree with me, that it ain't becomin' for Christian women to do such things?"

It was with a smile and a sigh that the minister answered. "Where are you going to draw the line, Mrs. Flandin?"

"Well! with what's decent and comfortable."

"And pretty?"

"La! yes," said Mrs. Salter. "Do let us be as nice as we kin."

"I think people had ought to make themselves as nice-lookin' as they can," echoed one of the younger ladies of the party; and there was a general chorus of agreeing voices.

"Well!" said the minister; "then comes the question, what is nice-looking? I dare say the young lady with the flowing tresses thought she was about right."

"She thought she was the only one," said Mrs. Boddington.

A subject was started now which was fruitful enough to keep all tongues busy; and whether biscuits or opinions had the most lively circulation for some time thereafter it would be hard to say. Old and young, upon this matter of town and country fashions, and fashion in general, "gave tongue" in concert; proving that Pleasant Valley knew what was what as well as any place in the land; that it was doubtful what right Boston or New York had to dictate to it; at the same time the means of getting at the earliest the mind of Boston or New York was eagerly discussed, and the pretensions of Elmfield to any advantage in that matter as earnestly denied. The minister sat silent, with an imperturbable face that did him credit. At last there was a rush of demands upon him for his judgment. He declared that so much had been said upon the subject, he must have time to think it over; and he promised to give them some at least of his thoughts before long in a sermon.

With this promise, highly satisfied, the assembly broke up. Mrs. Starling declared afterwards to her daughter, that if there had been any more fashions to talk about they would never have got done supper. But now bonnets were put on, and work put up, and one after another family party went off in its particular farm waggon or buggy. It was but just sundown; the golden glory of the sky was giving a mellow illumination to all the land, as one after another the horses were unhitched, the travellers mounted into their vehicles, and the wheels went softly rolling off over the smooth road. The minister stood by the gate, helping the ladies to untie and mount, giving pleasant words along with pleasant help, and receiving many expressions of pleasure in return.

"Dear me, Mr. Masters!" said Miss Barry, the last one, "ain't you afraid you'll catch cold, standing there with no hat on?"

"Cold always attacks the weakest part, Miss Barry. My head is safe."

"Well, I declare!" said Miss Barry. "I never heerd that afore."

And as she drove off in her little green waggon, the minister and Diana, who had come down to the gate to see the last one off, indulged in a harmless laugh. Then they both stood still by the fence a moment, resting; the hush was so sweet. The golden glory was fading; the last creak of

Miss Barry's wheels was getting out of hearing; the air was perfumed with the scents which the dew called forth.

"Isn't it delicious?" said the minister, leaning on the little gate, and pushing his hair back from his forehead.

"The stillness is pleasant," said Diana.

"Yet you must have enough of that?"

"Yes – sometimes," said the girl. She was a little shy of speaking her thoughts to the minister; indeed, she was not accustomed to speak them to anybody, not knowing where they could meet entertainment. She wondered Mr. Masters did not go like the rest; however, it was pleasant enough to stand there talking to him.

"What do you do for books here?" he went on.

"O, I have all my father's books," said Diana. "My father was a minister, Mr. Masters; and when he died his books came to me."

"A theological library!" said Mr. Masters.

"Yes. I suppose you would call it so."

"Have you it *here*?"

"Yes. I have it in my room up-stairs. All one end of the room full."

"Do you read these books?"

"Yes. They are all I have to read. I have not read the whole of them."

"No, I suppose not. Do you not find this reading rather heavy?"

"I don't know. Some of the books are rather heavy; I do not read those much."

"You must let me look at your library some day, Miss Diana. It would be certain to have charms for me; and I'll exchange with you. Perhaps I have books that you would not find heavy."

Diana's full grey eyes turned on the minister with a gleam of gratitude and pleasure. Her words were not needed to say that she would like that kind of barter.

"So your father was a clergyman?" Mr. Masters went on.

"Yes. Not here, though. That was when I was quite little. We lived a good way from here; and I remember very well a great many things about all that time, till father died, and then mother came back here."

"Came *back*, – then your mother is at home in Pleasant Valley?"

"O, we're both at home here – I was so little when we came; but mother's father lived where Nick Boddington does, and owned all this valley – I don't mean Pleasant Valley, but all this hollow; a good large farm it was; and when he died he left mother a nice piece of it, with this old house."

"Mr. Boddington, – is he then a relation of yours?"

"No, not exactly; he's the son of grandpa's second wife; we're really no relations, but we call each other cousin. Grandpa left the most of his land to his wife; but mother's got enough to manage, and nice land."

"It's a beautiful place!" said the minister. "There is a waggon coming; I wonder if any of our friends have forgotten something? That is – yes, that *is* farmer Babbage's team; isn't it? What is the matter?"

For something unusual in the arrangements of the vehicle, or the occupants of it, was dimly yet surely to be discerned through the distance and the light, which was now turning brown rather than grey. Nothing could be seen clearly, and yet it came as no waggon load had gone from that door that evening. The minister took his hand from the gate, and Diana stepped forward, as the horses stopped in front of the lean-to; and a voice called out:

"Who's there to help? Hollo! Lend a hand."

The minister sprang down the road, followed by Diana. "What do you want help for?" he asked.

"There's been an accident – Jim Delamater's waggon – we found it overturned in the road; and here's Eliza, she hasn't spoke since. Have you got no more help?"

"Where's Jim?" asked Mrs. Starling, coming herself from the lean-to.

"Staid with his team; about all he was up to. Now then, – can we get her in? Where's Josiah?"

But no more masculine help could be mustered than what was already on hand. Brains, however, can do much to supplement muscular force. The minister had a settee out from the house in two minutes and by the side of the waggon; with management and care, though with much difficulty, the unconscious girl was lifted down and laid on the settee; and by the aid of the women carried straight into the lean-to, the door of which was the nearest. There, by the same energetic ordering, well seconded by Diana, a mattress was brought and laid on the long table, which Mrs. Starling's diligence had already cleared since supper; and there they placed the girl, who was perfectly helpless and motionless in their hands.

"There is life yet," said the minister, after an examination during which every one stood breathless around. "Loose everything she has on, Miss Diana; and let us have some hartshorn, Mrs. Starling, if you have got any. Well, brandy, then, and cold water; and I'll go for the doctor."

But Mr. Babbage represented that he must himself 'go on hum,' and would pass by the doctor's door; so if the minister would stay and help the women folks, it would be more advisable. Accordingly the farmer's waggon wheels were soon heard departing, and the little group in the lean-to kitchen were left alone. Too busy at first to think of it, they were trying eagerly every restorative and stimulant they could think of and command; but with little effect. A little, they thought; but consciousness had not returned to the injured girl, when they had done all they knew how to do, and tried everything within their reach. Hope began to fade towards despair; still they kept on with the use of their remedies. Mrs. Starling went and came between the room where they were and the stove, which stood in some outside shed, fetching bottles of hot water; I think, between whiles, she was washing up her cups and saucers; the other two, in the silence of her absences, could feel the strange, solemn contrasts which one must feel, and does, even in the midst of keener anxieties than those which beset the watchers there. The girl, a fair, rather pretty person, pleasant-tempered and generally liked, lay still and senseless on the table round which she and others a little while ago had been seated at supper. Very still the room was now, that had been full of voices; the smell of camphor and brandy was about; the table was wet in one great spot with the cold water which had been applied to the girl's face. And through the open door and windows came the stir of the sweet night air, and the sound of insects, and the gurgle of a brook that ran a few yards off; peaceful, free, glad, as if all were as it had been last night, or nature took no cognizance of human affairs. The minister had been very active and helpful; bringing wood and drawing water and making up the fire, as well as anybody, Mrs. Starling said afterwards; he had taken his part in the actual nursing, and better than anybody, Diana thought. Now the two stood silent and grave by the long table, while they still kept up the application of brandy to the face and heat to the extremities, and rubbing the hands and wrists of the patient.

"Did you know Miss Delamater well?" asked the minister.

"Yes – as I know nearly all the girls," Diana answered.

"Do you think she is ready for the change – if she must make it?"

Diana hesitated. "I never heard her speak on the subject," she said.

"She wasn't a member of the church."

Silence followed, and they were two grave faces still that bent over the table; but there was the difference between the shadow on a mountain lake where there is not a ripple, and the dark stir of troubled waters. Diana's eye every now and then glanced for an instant at the face of her companion; it was very grave, but the broad brow was as quiet as if all its questions were answered, and the mouth was sweet and at rest in its stillness. She wished he would speak again; there was something in him that provoked her curiosity. He did speak presently.

"This shows us what the meaning of life is," he said.

"No," said Diana, "it doesn't – to me. It is just a puzzle, and as much a puzzle here as ever. I *don't* see what the use of life is, or what we all live for; I don't see what it amounts to."

"What do you mean?" asked her companion, but not as if he were startled, and Diana went on.

"I shouldn't say so if people were always having a good time, and if they were just right and did just right. But they are not, Mr. Masters; you know they are not; even the best of them, that I see; and things like *this* are always happening, one way or another. If it isn't here, it is somewhere else; and if it isn't one time, it is another; and it is all confusion. I don't see what it all comes to."

"That is the thought of a moment of pain," said the minister.

"No, it is not," said Diana. "I think it often. I think it all the while. Now this very afternoon I was sitting at the door here, – you know what sort of a day it has been, Mr. Masters?"

"I know. Perfect. Just June."

"Well, I was looking at it, and feeling how lovely it was; everything perfect; and somehow all that perfection took a kind of sharp edge and hurt me. I was thinking why nothing in the world was like it, or agreed with it; nothing in human life, I mean. This afternoon, when the company was here and all the talk going on —*that* was like nothing out of doors all the while; and *this* is not like it."

There was a sigh, deep drawn, that came through the minister's lips; then he spoke cheerfully – "Ay, God's works have parted company somehow."

"Parted – ?" said Diana curiously.

"Yes. You remember surely that when he had made all things at first, he beheld them very good."

"Well, they are not very good now; not all of them."

"Whose fault is that?"

"I know," said Diana, "but that does not help me with my puzzle. Why does the world go on so? what is the use of my living, or anybody's? What does it amount to?"

"That's your lesson," the minister answered, with a quick glance from his calm eyes. Not a bit of sentiment or of speculative rhapsody there; but downright, cool common sense, with just a little bit of authority. Diana did not know exactly how to meet it; and before she had arranged her words, they heard wheels again, and then the doctor came in.

The doctor approved of what had been done, and aided in renewed application of the same remedies. After a time, these seemed at last successful; the girl revived; and the doctor, after administering a little tea and weak brandy and water, ordered that she should be kept quiet where she was, the room be darkened when daylight came on, the windows kept open, and handkerchiefs wet with cold water be laid on her head. And then he took his departure; and Diana went to communicate to her mother the orders he had left.

"Keep her there!" echoed Mrs. Starling. "In the lean-to! She'd be a deal better in her bed."

"We must make her bed there, mother."

"There! On the table do you mean? Diana Starling, you are a baby!"

"She mustn't be stirred, mother, he says."

"That's the very thing!" exclaimed Mrs. Starling. "She had ought to ha' been carried into one of the bed-chambers at the first; and I said so; and the new minister, he would have it all his own way."

"But she must have all the air she could, mother, you know."

"Air!" said Mrs. Starling. "Do you s'pose she would smother in one of the chambers, where many a one before her has laid, sick and well, and got along too? Air, indeed! The house ain't like a corked bottle, I guess."

"Not much," said Diana; "but Mr. Masters said, and the doctor says, that she cannot have too much air."

"O well! Eggs can't be beat too much, neither; but it don't follow you're to stand beating 'em for ever. I've no patience. Where am I going to do my ironing? I should like the minister for to tell me; – or get meals, or anything else? I don't see what possessed Josiah to go and see his folks to-night of all nights."

"We have not wanted him, mother, after all, that I see."

"I have wanted him," said Mrs. Starling. "If he had been home I needn't to have had queer help, and missed knowing who was head of the house. Well, go along and fix it, – you and the minister."

"But, mother, I want to get Eliza's things off, and to make her bed comfortably; and I can't do it without you."

"Well, get rid of the minister then, and I'll come. Him and me is too many in one house."

The minister would not leave the two women alone and go home, as Diana proposed to him; but he went to make his horse comfortable while they did the same for the sick girl. And then he took up his post just outside the door, in the moonlight which came fitfully through the elm branches; and he and Diana talked no more that night. He was watchful and helpful; for he kept up the fire in the stove, and once more brought wood when it was needed. Moonlight melted away at last into the dawn; cool clear outlines began to take place of the soft mystery of night shadows; then the warm glow from the east, behind the house, and the glint of the sunbeams on the tops of the hills and on the racks of cloud lying along the horizon. Diana still kept her place by the improvised bed, and the minister kept his just outside the door. Mrs. Starling began to prepare for breakfast; and finally Josiah, the man-of-all-work on the little farm, came from his excursion and from the barn, bringing the pails of milk. Then the minister fetched his horse, and came in to shake hands with Diana. He would not stay for breakfast. She watched him down to the gate, where he threw himself on his grey steed and went off at a smooth gallop, swift and steady, sitting as if he were more at home on a horse's back than anywhere else. Diana looked after him.

"Certainly," she thought, "that is unlike all the other ministers that ever came to Pleasant Valley."

"He's off, is he?" said Mrs. Starling as her daughter came in. "Now Diana, take notice; don't you go and take a fancy to this new man; because I won't favour it, nor have anything of the kind going on. I tell you beforehand."

"There is very little danger of his taking a fancy to me, mother."

"I don't know about that. He might do worse. But you couldn't; for I'll never have anything to say to you if you do."

"Why, mother?" inquired Diana in much surprise. "I should think you'd like him. I should think everybody would. Why don't you like him?"

"He's too masterful for me. Mind what I tell you, Diana."

"It's absurd, mother! Such a one as Mr. Masters never would think of such a one as I am. He's a very cultivated man, mother; and has been accustomed to very different society from what he'll find here. I don't seem to him what I seem to you."

"I hope not!" said Mrs. Starling, "for you seem to me a goose. Cultivated! Who is cultivated, if you are not? Weren't you a whole year at school in Boston? I guess my gentleman hasn't been to a better place. And warn't you for ever reading those musty old books, that make you out of kilter for all *my* world. If you don't fit his neither, I'm sorry. Society indeed! There's no better society than the folks of Pleasant Valley. Don't you go and set yourself up; nor him neither."

Diana knew better than to carry on the discussion.

Meanwhile the grey horse that bore the minister home kept up that long smooth gallop for a half mile or so, then slackened it to walk up a hill.

"That's a very remarkable girl," the minister was saying to himself; "with much more in her than she knows."

The gallop began again in a few minutes, and was unbroken till he got home. It was but a piece of a home. Mr. Masters had rooms in the house of Mrs. Persimmon, a poor widow living among the hills. The rooms were neat; that was all that could be said for them; little and dark and low, with bits of windows, and with the simplest of furnishing. The sitting-room was cheerful with books, however – as cheerful as books can make a room; and the minister did not look uncheerful, but very grave. If his brow was neither wrinkled nor lined, the quiet eyes beneath it were deep with thought. Mr. Masters' morning was spent on this wise.

First of all, for a good half hour, his knees were bent, and his thoughts, whatever they were, gave him work to do. That work done, the minister threw himself on his bed and slept, as quietly as he did everything else, for an hour or two more. Then he rose, shaved and dressed, took such breakfast as Mrs. Persimmon could give him; mounted his grey again, and was off to a house at some distance where there was a sick child, and another house where there dwelt an infirm old man. Between these two the hours were spent till he rode home to dinner.

CHAPTER III. HARNESSING PRINCE

The improvement of the sick girl was better than had been hoped; it was but a day or two before Mrs. Starling's heart's desire could be effected and her kitchen cleared. Eliza was moved to another room, and at the week's end was taken home.

It was the next day after this had been done; and Diana was sitting again in the elm shadow at the door of the lean-to. Not idly this time; for a pan of peas was in her lap, and her fingers were busy with shelling them. Still her eyes were very much more busy with the lovely light and shade on meadow and hill; her glances went up and down, from her pan to the sunny landscape. Mrs. Starling, bustling about as usual within the house and never looking out, presently hearing the gate latch, called out – "Who's that?"

"Joe Bartlett, mother," Diana answered without moving.

It was not the gate that led to the flower patch and the front door. That was some distance off. Another little brown gate under the elm-tree opened directly in front of the lean-to door; and the patch between was all in fleckered sunlight and shadow, like the doorway where Diana sat.

The little gate opening now admitted a visitor who was in appearance the very typical Yankee of the story books. Long in the limbs, loose in the joints, angular, ungainly, he came up the walk with a movement that would tempt one to think he had not got accustomed to his inches and did not yet know quite what to do with them all. He had a long face, red in colour; in expression a mixture of honest frankness, carelessness, and good humour.

"Mornin'!" said he as he came near. "How's your folks, this forenoon?"

"Quite well – all there are of us, Joe," said Diana, shelling her peas as she looked up at him. "How's your mother?"

"Well, she's pretty smart. Mother seems to be allays just about so. I never see the beat of her for keepin' along. You've had quite a spell o' nursin' folks, hain't you, down this way? Must ha' upset you quite considerable."

"We didn't have the worst of the upsetting."

"That's a fact. Well, she's gone, ain't she?"

"Who, Eliza Delamater? Yes; gone yesterday."

"And you hain't nobody else on hand, have ye?"

"No. Why?"

"Mother's took a lonesome fit. She says it's quite a spell that you hain't ben down our way; and I guess that's so, ain't it?"

"I couldn't help it, Joe. I have had other things to do."

"Well, don't you think to-day's a good sort for a visit?"

"To-day?" said Diana, shelling her peas very fast.

"You see, it's pretty silent down to our place. That is, when I ain't to hum; and I can't be there much o' the time, 'cept when I'm asleep in my bed. I'm off as soon as I've done the chores in the mornin'; and I can't get hum nohow sooner than to do up the chores in the evenin'; and the old lady has it pretty much her own way as to conversation the rest o' the time. She can talk to what she likes; but there ain't nothin' as can make a remark back to her."

"It's too bad, Joe!"

"Fact!" said Joe seriously; all the rest had been said with a smile; "but you know mother. Come! put on your bonnet and run down and set with her a spell. She's took a notion to have ye; and I know she'll be watchin' till you come."

"Then I must go. I guess I can arrange it, Joe."

"Well, I'll get along, then, where I had ought to be. Mis' Starling cuttin' her hay?"

"Yes, this week and more."

"It's turnin' out a handsome swath; but it had ought to be all down now. Well, good day! Hurry up, now, for down yonder."

Diana brought in her pan of peas.

"Mother, where's Josiah Davis?"

"Where should he be? He's up in the hill lot, cuttin' hay. That grass is all in flower; it had ought to been cut a week ago; but Josiah always has one of his hands behind him."

"And he won't be in till noon. I must harness the waggon myself."

"If you can catch the horse," said her mother. "He's turned out in the lot. It's a poor job, at this time o' day."

"I'll try and make a good job of it," said Diana. So she took her sun-bonnet and went out to the barn. The old horse was not far off, for the "lot" in this case meant simply the small field in which the barn and the barnyard were enclosed; but being a wary old animal, with a good deal of experience of life, he had come to know that a halter and a pan of corn generally meant hard work near at hand, and was won't to be shy of such allurements. Diana could sometimes do better than anybody else with old Prince; they were on good terms; and Prince had sense enough to take notice that she never followed the plough, and was therefore a safer venture than his other flatterers. With the corn and the halter Diana now sought the corner where Prince was standing whisking his tail in the shade of a tree. But it was a warm morning; and seeing her approach, Prince quietly walked off into the sun on the other side of the tree, and went on to another shady resting-place some distance away. Diana followed, speaking to him; but Prince repeated his ungallant manoeuvre; and from tree to tree across the sunny field Diana trudged after him, until she was hot and tired. Perhaps Prince's philosophy came in play at last, warning him that this game could not go on for ever, and would certainly end in his discomfiture some time; for, with no apparent reason for his change of tactics, he stood still at length under the tree farthest from the barn, and suffered himself to be made captive. Diana got the halter on, and, flushed and excited with the chase, led him back over the lot and out to the road, where Josiah had very culpably left the little waggon standing in the shade of the elm, close by the lean-to gate. Just as she got there, Diana saw a stranger who had his hand on the gate, but who left it now and came forward to speak to her.

Diana stood by the thills of the waggon, horse in hand, but, to tell the truth, forgetting both. The stranger was unlike anything often seen in Pleasant Valley. He wore the dark-blue uniform of an army officer; there was a stripe of gold down the seam of his pantaloons and a gold bar across his shoulders, and his cap was a soldier's cap. But it was not on his head just now; it had come off since he quitted the gate; and the step with which he drew near was the very contrast to Joe Bartlett's lounging pace; this was measured, clean, compact, and firm, withal as light and even as that of an antelope. His hair showed the regulation cut; and Diana saw with the same glance a pair of light, brilliant, hazel eyes and a finely trimmed mustache. *She* stood flushed and still, halter in hand, with her sun-bonnet pushed a little back for air. The stranger smiled just a little.

"May I ask how far I am from a place called Elmfield?"

"It is" – Diana's thoughts wandered, – "It is five miles."

"I ought not to need to ask – but I have been so long away. – Do you know how or where I can get a horse, or any conveyance, to bring me there? I have ridden beyond this, and met with an accident."

Diana hesitated. "Is it Lieut. Knowlton?" she said.

"Ah, you know me?" said he. "I forgot that Pleasant Valley knows me better than I know Pleasant Valley. I did not count on finding a friend here." His eye glanced at the little brown house.

"Everybody knows Elmfield," said Diana; "and I guessed –"

"From my dress?" said Mr. Knowlton, following the direction of her look. "This was accident too. But which of my friends ought I to know here, that I don't know? Pardon me, – but is this horse to be put to the waggon or taken away from it?"

"O, I was going to put him in."

"Allow me" – said the young man, taking the halter from Diana's willing hands; "but where is the harnessing gear?"

"O, that is in the barn!" exclaimed Diana. "I will go and fetch it."

"Pray no! Let me get it," said her companion; and giving the end of the halter a turn round one of the thills, he had overtaken her before she had well taken half a dozen steps. They went together through the barnyard. Diana found the harness, and the young officer threw it over his shoulder with a smile at her which answered her deprecating words; a smile extremely pleasant and gentlemanly, if withal a little arch. Diana shrank back somewhat before the glance, which to her fancy showed the power of keen observation along with the habit of giving orders. They went back to the elm, and Mr. Knowlton harnessed the horse, Diana explaining in a word or two the necessity under which she had been acting.

"And what about my dilemma?" said he presently, as his task was finished.

"There is no horse or waggon you could get anywhere, that I know of," said Diana. "The teams are apt to be in use just now. But I am going down to within a mile of Elmfield; and I was going to say, if you like, I can take you so far."

"And who will do me such kindness?"

"Who? O – Diana Starling."

"Is that a name I ought to know?" inquired Mr. Knowlton. "I shall know it from this day; but how about before to-day? I have been gone from Pleasant Valley, at school and at the Military Academy, four, five, – ten years."

"Mother came back here to live just ten years ago."

"My conscience is clear!" he said, smiling. "I was beginning to whip myself. Now are we ready?"

Not quite, for Diana went into the house for her gloves and a straw hat; she made no other change in her dress, having taken off her apron before she set out after Prince. She found her new friend standing with the reins in his hand, as if he were to drive and not she; and Diana was helped into her own waggon with a deferential courtesy which up to that time she had only read of in books; nor known much even so. It silenced her at first. She sat down as mute as a child; and Mr. Knowlton handled Prince and the waggon and all in the style of one that knew how and had the right.

That drive, however, was not to be silent or stiff in any degree. Mr. Knowlton, for his part, had no shyness or hesitation belonging to him. He had seen the world and learnt its freedom. Diana was only a simple country girl, and had never seen the world; yet she was as little troubled with embarrassment of any sort. Partly this was, no doubt, because of her sound, healthy New England nature; the solid self-respect which does not need – nor use – to put itself in the balance with anything else to be assured of its own quality. But part belonged to Diana's own personality; in a simple, large nature, too simple and too large to feel small motives or to know petty issues. If her cheeks and brow were flushed at first, it was because the sun had been hot in the lot and Prince tiresome. She was as composedly herself as ever the young officer could be. But I think each of them was a little excited by the companionship of the other.

"Do you drive this old fellow yourself?" asked Mr. Knowlton, after a little. "But I need not ask! Of course you do. There's no difficulty. And not much danger," he added, with a tone so dry and comical that they both burst into a laugh.

"I assure you I am very glad to have Prince," said Diana. "He is so old now that they generally let him off from the farm work. He takes mother and me to church, and stands ready for anything I want most of the time."

"Lucky for me, too," said Mr. Knowlton. "I am afraid you will find the sun very hot!"

"I? O no, I don't mind it at all," said Diana. "There's a nice air now.

Where is your horse, Mr. Knowlton? you said you had an accident."

"Yes. That was a quarter of a mile or so beyond your house."

"And is your horse there?"

"Must be, I think. I shall send some people to remove him."

"Why, is he *dead*?"

"I should not have left him else, Miss Starling."

Diana did not choose to go on with a string of questions; and her companion hesitated.

"It's my own fault," he said with a sort of displeased half laugh; "a piece of boyish thoughtlessness that I've paid for. There was a nice red cow lying in the middle of the road" —

"Where?" said Diana, wondering.

"Just ahead of me; a few rods. She was lying quite quietly, taking her morning siesta in the sun; plunged in ruminative thoughts, I supposed, and the temptation was irresistible to go over without disturbing her."

"Over her?" said Diana in a maze.

"Yes. I counted on what one should never count on — what I didn't know."

"What was that?"

"Whether it would occur to her to get upon her legs, just at that moment."

"And she did?" inquired Diana.

"She did."

"What did that do, Mr. Knowlton?"

"Threw my poor steed off *his* legs forever!" And here, in despite of his vexation, which was real and apparent, the young man burst into a laugh. Diana had not got at his meaning.

"And where were you, Mr. Knowlton?"

"On his back. I shall never forgive myself for being such a boy. Don't you understand? The creature rose up just in time to be in the way of my leap, and we were thrown over — my horse and I."

"Thrown! You were not hurt, Mr. Knowlton?"

"I deserved it, didn't? But I was nothing the worse — except for losing my horse, and my self-complacency."

"Was the horse killed?"

"No; not by the fall. But he was injured; so that I saw the best thing to do would be to put him out of life at once; so I did it. I had my pistols; I often ride with them, to be ready for any sport that may offer. I am very much ashamed, to have to tell you this story of myself!"

There was so much of earnestness in the expression of the last sentence, it was said with such a deferential contrition, if I may so speak, that Diana's thoughts experienced a diversion from the subject that had occasioned them. The contrition came more home than the fault. By common consent they went off to other matters of talk. Diana explained and commented on the history and features of Pleasant Valley, so far at least as her companion's questions called for such explanation, and that was a good deal. Mr. Knowlton gave her details of his own life and experience, which were much more interesting, she thought. The conversation ran freely; and again and again eyes met eyes full in sympathy over some grave or laughing point of intelligence.

And what is there in the meeting of eyes? What if the one pair were sparkling and quick, and the brow over them bore the fair lines of command? What though the other pair were deep and thoughtful and sweet, and the brow one that promised passion and power? A thousand other eyes might have looked on either one of them, and forgotten; these two looked — and remembered. You cannot tell why; it is the old story; the hidden, unreadable affinity making itself known to its counterpart; the sign and countersign of nature. But it was only nature that gave and took; not Diana and Mr. Knowlton.

Meanwhile Prince had an easy time; and the little waggon went very gently over the smooth roads past one farm after another.

"Prince *can* go faster than this," Diana confided at last to her companion.

"He doesn't want to, does he?"

Diana laughed, and knew in her heart she was of Prince's mind.

However, even five miles will come to an end in time if you keep going even slowly; and in time the little brown house of Mrs. Bartlett appeared in the distance, and Prince drew the waggon up before the door. Diana alighted, and Mr. Knowlton drove on, promising to send the waggon back from Elmfield.

It was coming down, in more ways than one, to get out of the waggon and go in to make her visit. Diana did not feel just ready for it. She loosened the strings of her hat, walked slowly up the path between the hollyhocks that led to the door, and there stopped and turned to take a last look at Mr. Knowlton in the distance. Such a ride as she had had! Such an entertainment! People in Pleasant Valley did not talk like that; nor look like that. How much difference it makes, to have education and to see the world! And a military education especially has a more liberalizing and adorning effect than the course of life in the colleges; the manner of a soldier has in it a charm which is wanting in the manner of a minister. As for farmers, they have no manners at all. And the very faces, thought Diana.

Well, she could not stand there on the door-step. She must go in. She turned and lifted the latch of the door.

The little room within was empty. It was a tiny house; the ground floor boasted only two rooms, and each of those was small. The broad hearth of flagstones took up a third of the floor of this one. A fire burned in the chimney, though the day was so warm; and a straight-backed arm-chair, with a faded cushion in it, stood by the chimney corner with a bunch of knitting lying on the cushion. Diana tapped at an inner door at her right, and then getting no answer, went across the kitchen and opened another opposite the one that had admitted her.

CHAPTER IV. MOTHER BARTLETT

The little house, unpainted like many others, had no fenced enclosure on this side. A wide field stretched away from the back door, lying partly upon a hill-side; and several cattle were pasturing in it. Farm fields and meadows were all around, except where this one hill rose up behind the house. It was wooded at the top; below, the ranks of a cornfield sloped aspiringly up its base. A narrow footpath, which only the tread of feet kept free from weeds and grass, went off obliquely to a little enclosed garden, which lay beyond the corner of the house in some arbitrary and independent way, not adjoining it at all. It was a sweet bit of country, soft and mellow under the summer sun; still as grasshoppers and the tinkle of a cowbell could make it; and very far from most of the improvements of the nineteenth century. But the smell of the pasture and the fragrance that came from the fresh shades of the wood, and the freedom of the broad fields of pure ether, made it rich with some of nature's homely wealth; which is not by any means the worst there is. Diana knew the place very well; her eyes were looking now for the mistress of it. And not long. In the out-of-the-way lying garden she discerned her white cap; and at the gate met her bringing a head of lettuce in her hands.

"I knew you liked it, dear," she said, "and I had forgot all about it; and then it flashed on me, and I thought, Diana will like to have it for her dinner; and I guess it'll have time to cool. Just put it in a tin pail, dear, and hang it down in the well; and it'll be fresh."

This was done, and Diana came in and took a seat by her old friend.

"You needn't do that for me, Mother Bartlett. I don't care what I have to eat."

"Most folks like what is good," said the old lady; "suppos'n they know it."

"Yes, and so do I, but" —

"I made a pot-pie for ye," the old lady went on contentedly.

"And I suppose you have left nothing at all for me to do, as usual. It is too bad, Mother Bartlett."

"You shall do all the rest," said her friend; "and now you may talk to me."

She was a trim little old woman, not near so tall as her visitor; very wrinkled, but fresh-skinned, and with a quick grey eye. Her dress was a common working dress of some dark stuff; coarse, but tidy and nice-looking; her cap white and plain; she sat in her arm-chair, setting her little feet to the fire, and her fingers merrily clicking her needles together; a very comfortable vision. The kitchen and its furniture were as neat as a pin.

"I don't see how you manage, Mother Bartlett," Diana went on, glancing around. "You ought to have some one to live with you and help you. It looks as if you had half a dozen."

"Not much," said the old lady, laughing. "A half dozen would soon make a muss, of one sort or another. There's nothin' like having nobody."

"But you might be sick."

"I might be; — but I ain't," said Mrs. Bartlett, running one end of a knitting-needle under her cap and looking placidly at Diana.

"But you might want somebody."

"When I do I send for 'em. I sent for you to-day, child; and here you are."

"But you are quite well to-day?" said Diana a little anxiously.

"I am always well. Never better."

"How old are you, Mother Bartlett?"

"Seventy-three years, child."

"Well, I do think you oughtn't to be here alone. It don't seem right, and I don't think it is right."

"What's to do, child? There ain't nary one to come and live with me. They're all gone but Joe. My Lord knows I'm an old woman seventy-three years of age."

"What then, Mother Bartlett?" Diana asked curiously.

"He'll take care of me, my dear."

"But then, we ought to take care of ourselves," said Diana. "Now if Joe would marry somebody" —

"Joe ain't lucky in that line," said the old lady laughing again. "And may be what he might like, I mightn't. Before you go to wishin' for changes, you'd better know what they'll be. I'm content child. There ain't a thing on earth I want that I haven't got. Now what's the news?"

Diana began and told her the whole story of the sewing meeting and the accident and the nursing of the injured girl. Mrs. Bartlett had an intense interest in every particular; and what Diana failed to remember, her questions brought out.

"And how do you like the new minister?"

"Haven't you seen him yet?"

"Nay. He hain't been down my way yet. In good time he will. He's had sick folks to see arter, Joe told me; old Jemmy Claflin, and Joe Simmons' boy; and Mis' Atwood, and Eliza."

"I think you'll like him," said Diana slowly. "He's not like any minister ever *I* saw."

"What's the odds?"

"It isn't so easy to tell. He don't look like a minister, for one thing; nor he don't talk like one; not a bit."

"Have we got a gay parson, then?" said the old lady, slightly raising her eyebrows.

"Gay? O no! not in the way you mean. In one way he *is* gay; he is very pleasant; not stiff or grum, like Mr. Hardenburgh; and he is amusing too, in a quiet way, but he *is* amusing; he is so cool and so quick. O no, he's not gay in the way you mean. I guess he's good."

"Do you like him?" Mrs. Bartlett asked.

"Yes," said Diana, thinking of the night of Eliza Delamater's accident.

"He is very queer."

"I don't seem to make him out by your telling, child. I'll have to wait, I guess. I've got no sort of an idea of him, so far. Now, dear, if you'll set the table — dinner's ready; and then we'll have some reading."

Diana drew out a small deal table to the middle of the floor, and set on it the delf plates and cups and saucers, the little saltcellar of the same ware, and the knives and forks that were never near Sheffield; in fact, were never steel. But the lettuce came out of the well crisp and fresh and cool; and Mrs. Bartlett's pot-pie crust came out of the pot as spongy and light as possible; and the loaf of "seconds" bread was sweet as it is hard for bread to be that is not made near the mill; and if you and I had been there, I promise you we would not have minded the knives and forks, or the cups either. Mrs. Bartlett's tea was not of corresponding quality, for it came from a country store. However, the cream went far to mend even that. The back door was open for the heat; and the hill-side could be seen through the doorway and part of the soft green meadow slope; and the grasshopper's song and the bell tinkle were not bad music.

"And who was that came with you, dear?" Mrs. Bartlett asked as they sat at table.

"With me? Did you see me come?"

"Surely. I was in the garden. What should hinder me? Who was it druv you, dear?"

"It was an accident. Young Mr. Knowlton had got into some trouble with his horse, riding out our way, and came to ask how he could get home. So I brought him."

"That's Evan Knowlton! him they are making a soldier of?"

"He's made. He's done with his education. He is at home now."

"Ain't goin' to be a soldier after all?"

"O yes; he *is* a soldier; but he has got a leave, to be home for awhile."

"Well, what sort is he? I don't see what they wanted to make a soldier of him for; his grand'ther would ha' been the better o' his help on the farm, seems to me; and now he'll be off to the ends o' the earth, and doin' nobody knows what. It's the wisdom o' this world. But how has he turned out, Die?"

"I don't know; well, I should think."

"And his sisters at home would ha' been the better of him. By-and-by Mr. Bowdoin will die; and then who'll look after the farm, or the girls?"

"Still, mother, it's something more and something better to be educated, as he is, and to know the world and all sorts of things, as he does, than just to live on the farm here in the mountains, and raise corn and eat it, and nothing else. Isn't it?"

"Why should it be better, child?"

"It is nice to be educated," said Diana softly. And she thought much more than she said.

"A man can get as much edication as he can hold, and live on a farm too. I've seen sich. Some folks can't do no better than hoe – corn like my Joe. But there ain't no necessity for that. But arter all, what does folks live for, Diana?"

"I never could make out, Mother Bartlett."

The old lady looked at her thoughtfully and wistfully, but said no more. Diana cleared the table and washed the few dishes; and when all was straight again, took out a newspaper she had brought from home, and she and the old lady settled themselves for an afternoon of enjoyment. For it was that to both parties. At home Diana cared little about the paper; here it was quite another thing. Mrs. Bartlett wanted to hear all there was in it; public doings, foreign doings, city news, editor's gossip; and even the advertisements came in for their share of pleasure-giving. New inventions had an interest; tokens of the world's movements, or the world's wants, in other notices, were found suggestive of thought or provocative of wonder. Sitting with her feet put towards the fire, her knitting in her hands, the quick grey eyes studied Diana's face as she read, never needing to give their supervision to the fingers; and the coarse blue yarn stocking, which was doubtless destined for Joe, grew visibly in length while the eyes and thoughts of the knitter were busy elsewhere. The newspaper filled a good part of the afternoon; for the reading was often interrupted for talk which grew out of it. When at last it was done, and Mrs. Bartlett's eyes returned to the fire, there were a few minutes of stillness; then she said gently,

"Now, our other reading, dear?"

"You like this the best, Mother Bartlett, don't you?" said Diana, as she rose and brought from the inner room a large volume; *the Book*, as any one might know at a glance; carefully covered with a sewn cover of coarse cloth. "Where shall I read now?"

The place indicated was the beginning of the Revelation, a favourite book with the old lady. And as she listened, the knitting grew slower; though, true to the instinctive habit of doing something, the fingers never ceased absolutely their work. But they moved slowly; and the old lady's eyes, no longer on the fire, went out of the open window, and gazed with a far-away gaze that went surely beyond the visible heaven; so wrapt and steady it was. Diana, sitting on a low seat at her feet, glanced up sometimes; but seeing that gaze, looked down and went on again with her reading and would not break the spell. At last, having read several chapters without a word of interruption, she stopped. The old lady's eyes came back to her knitting, which began to go a little faster.

"Do you like all this so much?" Diana asked. "I know you do; but I can't see why you do. You can't understand it."

"I guess I do," said the old lady. "I seem to, anyhow. It's queer if I don't."

"But you can't make anything of all those horses?"

"Why, it's just what you've been readin' about all the afternoon."

"In the newspaper!" cried Diana.

"It's many a year that I've been lookin' at it," said the old lady; "ever sen I heard it all explained by a good minister. I've been lookin' at it ever sen." She spoke dreamily.

"It's all words and words to me," said Diana.

"There's a blessin' belongs to studyin' them words, though. Those horses are the works and judgments of the Lord that are goin' on in all the earth, to prepare the way of his comin'."

"Whose coming?"

"The Lord's comin'," said the old lady solemnly. "The white horse, that's victory; that's goin' on conquering and to conquer; that's the truth and power of the Lord bringin' his kingdom. The red horse, that's war; ah, how that red horse has tramped round the world! he's left the marks of his hoofs on our own ground not long sen; and now you've been readin' to me about his goin's on elsewhere. The black horse, that's famine; and not downright starvation, the minister said, but just want; grindin' and pressin' people down. Ain't there enough o' that in the world? not just so bad in Pleasant Valley, but all over. And the pale horse – what is it the book calls him? – that's death; and he comes to Pleasant Valley as he comes everywhere. They've been goin', those four, ever sen the world was a world o' fallen men."

"But what do they do to prepare the way for the Lord's coming?" said

Diana.

"What do I know? *That'll* be known when the book shall come to be read, I s'pose. I'm waitin'. I'll know by and by" —

"Only I can seem to see so much as this," the old lady went on after a pause. "The Lord won't have folk to settle down accordin' to their will into a contented forgetfulness o' him; so he won't let there be peace till the King o' Peace comes. O, I'd be glad if he'd come!"

"But that will be the end of the world," said Diana.

"Well," said Mrs. Bartlett, "it might be the end of the world for all I care; if it would bring Him. What do I live for?"

"You know I don't understand you, Mother Bartlett," said Diana gently.

"Well, what do you live for, child?"

"I don't know," said Diana slowly. "Nothing. I help mother make butter and cheese; and I make my clothes, and do the housework. And next year it'll be the same thing; and the next year after that. It don't amount to anything."

"And do you think the Lord made you – you pretty creatur!" – said the old lady, softly passing her hand down the side of Diana's face, – "for nothin' better than to make cheese and butter?"

Diana smiled and blushed brightly at her old friend, a lovely child's smile.

"I may come to be married, you know, one of these days! But after all, *that* don't make any difference. It's the same thing, married or not married. People all do the same things, day after day, till they die."

"If that was all" – said the old lady meditatively, looking into the fire and knitting slowly.

"It *is* all; except that here and there there is somebody who knows more and can do something better; I suppose life is something more to them. But they are mostly men."

"Edication's a fine thing," Mrs. Bartlett went on in the same manner; "but there's two sorts. There's two sorts, Diana. I hain't got much, – o' one kind; I never had no chance to get it, so I've done without it. And now my life's so near done, it don't seem much matter. But there's the other sort, that ain't learned at no 'cademy. The Lord put me into *his* school forty-four years ago – where he puts all his children; and if they learn their lessons, he takes 'em up and up, – some o' the lessons is hard to learn, – but he takes 'em up and up; till life ain't a puzzle no longer, and they begin to know the language o' heaven, where his courts be. And that's edication that's worth havin', – when one's just goin' there, as I be."

"How do you get into that school, Mother Bartlett?" Diana asked thoughtfully, and yet with her mind not all upon what she was saying.

"You are in it, my dear. The good Lord sends his lessons and his teachers to every one; but it's no use to most folks; they won't take no notice."

"What 'teachers'?" said Diana, smiling.

"There's a host of them," said Mrs. Bartlett; "and of all sorts. Why, I seem to be in the midst of 'em, Diana. The sun is a teacher to me every day; and the clouds, and the air, and the colours. The hill and the pasture ahint the house, – I've learned a heap of lessons from 'em. And I'm learnin' 'em all the time, till I seem to be rich with what they're tellin' me. So rich, some days I 'most wonder at myself. No doubt, to hear all them voices, one must hear the voice o' the Word. And then there's many other voices; but they don't come just so to all. I could tell you some o' mine; but the ones that'll come to you'll be sure to be different; so you couldn't learn from *them*, child. And folks thinks I'm a lonesome old woman!"

"Well, how can they help it?" said Diana.

"It's nat'ral," said Mrs. Bartlett.

"I can't help your seeming so to me."

"That *ain't* nat'ral, for you had ought to know better. They think, folks does, – I know, – I'm a poor lone old woman, just going to die."

"But isn't that nearly true?" said Diana gently.

There was a slight glad smile on the withered lips as Mrs. Bartlett turned towards her.

"You have the book there on your lap, dear. Just find the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of John, and read the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth verses. And when you feel inclined to think that o' me agin, just wait till you know what they mean."

Diana found and read: —

"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die."

CHAPTER V. MAKING HAY

June had changed for July; but no heats ever withered the green of the Pleasant Valley hills, nor browned its pastures; and no droughts ever stopped the tinkling of its rills and brooks, which rolled down, every one of them, over gravelly pebbly beds to lose themselves in lake or river. Sun enough to cure the hay and ripen the grain, they had; and July was sweet with the perfume of hayfield, and lovely with brown hayricks, and musical with the whetting of scythes. Mrs. Starling's little farm had a good deal of grass land; and the haying was proportionally a busy season. For haymakers, according to the general tradition of the country, in common with reapers, are expected to eat more than ordinary men, or men in ordinary employments; and to furnish the meals for the day kept both Mrs. Starling and her daughter busy.

It was mid-afternoon, sunny, perfumed, still; the afternoon luncheon had gone out to the men, who were cutting then in the meadow which surrounded the house. Diana found her hands free; and had gone up to her room, not to rest, for she was not tired, but to get out of the atmosphere of the kitchen and breathe a few minutes without thinking of cheese and gingerbread. She had begun to change her dress; but leisure wooed her, and she took up a book and presently forgot even that care in the delight of getting into a region of *thought*. For Diana's book was not a novel; few such found their way to Pleasant Valley, and seldom one to Mrs. Starling's house. Her father's library was quite unexhausted still, its volumes took so long to read and needed so much thinking over; and now she was deep in a treatise more solid and less attractive than most young women are willing to read. It carried her out of the round of daily duties and took her away from Pleasant Valley altogether, and so was a great refreshment. Besides, Diana liked thinking.

Once or twice a creak of a farm waggon was heard along the road; it was too well known a sound to awake her attention; then came a sound far less common – the sharp trot of a horse moving without wheels behind him. Diana started instantly and went to a window that commanded the road. The sound ceased, but she saw why; the rider had reined in his steed and was walking slowly past; the same rider she had expected to see, with the dark uniform and the soldier's cap. He looked hard at the place; could he be stopping? The next moment Diana had flown back to her own room, had dropped the dress which was half off, and was arraying herself in a fresh print; and she was down-stairs almost as soon as the visitor knocked. Diana opened the door. She knew Mrs. Starling was deep in supper preparations, mingled with provisions for the next day's lunches.

Uniforms have a great effect, to eyes unaccustomed to them. How Lieut. Knowlton came to be wearing his uniform in the country, so far away from any post, I don't know; perhaps he did. He *said*, that he had nothing else he liked for riding in. But a blue frock, with gold bars across the shoulders and military buttons, is more graceful than a frieze coat. And it was a gracious, graceful head that was bared at the sight of the door-opener.

"You see," he said with a smile, "I couldn't go by! The other day I was your pensioner, in kindness. Now I want to come in my own character, if you'll let me."

"Is it different from the character I saw the other day?" said Diana, as she led the way into the parlour.

"You did not see my character the other day, did you?"

"I saw what you showed me!"

He laughed, and then laughed again; looking a little surprised, a good deal amused.

"I would give a great deal to know what you thought of me."

"Why would you?" Diana said, quite quietly.

"That I might correct your mistakes, of course."

"Suppose I made any mistakes," said Diana, "you could only tell me that you thought differently. I don't see that I should be much wiser."

"I find I made a mistake about you!" he said, laughing again, but shaking his head. "But every person is like a new language to those that see him for the first time; don't you think so? One has to learn the signs of the language by degrees, before one can read it off like a book."

"I never thought about that," said Diana. "No; I think that is true of *some* people; not everybody. All the Pleasant Valley people seem to me to belong to one language. All except one, perhaps."

"Who is the exception?" Mr. Knowlton asked quickly.

"I don't know whether you know him."

"O, I know everybody here – or I used to."

"I was thinking of somebody who didn't use to be here. He has only just come. I mean Mr. Masters."

"The parson?"

"Yes."

"I don't know him much. I suppose he belongs to the *parson* language, to carry on our figure. They all do."

"He don't," said Diana. "That is what struck me in him. What are the signs of the 'parson' language?"

"A black coat and a white neckcloth, to begin with."

"He dresses in grey," said Diana laughing, "or in white; and wears any sort of a cravat."

"To go on, – Generally a grave face and a manner of great propriety; with a square way of arranging words."

"Mr. Masters has no manner at all; and he is one of the most entertaining people I ever knew."

"Jolly sort, eh?"

"No, I think not," said Diana; "I don't know exactly what you mean by jolly; he is never silly, and he does not laugh much particularly; but he can make other people laugh."

"Well, another sign is, they put a religious varnish over common things. Do you recognise that?"

"I recognise that, for I have seen it; but it isn't true of Mr. Masters."

"I give him up," said young Knowlton. "I am sure I shouldn't like him."

"Why, do you *like* these common signs of the 'parson language,' as you call it, that you have been reckoning?"

The answer was a decided negative accompanied with a laugh again; and then Diana's visitor turned the conversation to the country, and the place, and the elm trees; looked out of the window and observed that the haymakers were at work near the house, and finally said he must go out to look at them nearer – he had not made hay since he was a boy.

He went out, and Diana went back to her mother in the lean-to.

"Mother, young Mr. Knowlton is here."

"Well, keep him out o' *my* way; that's all I ask."

"Haven't you got through yet?"

"Through! There was but one single pan of ginger-bread left this noon; and there ain't more'n three loaves o' bread in the pantry. What's that among a tribe o' such grampuses? I've got to make biscuits for tea, Di; and I may as well get the pie-crust off my hands at the same time; it'll be so much done for to-morrow. I wish you'd pick over the berries. And then I'll find you something else to do. If I had six hands and two heads, I guess I could about get along."

"But, mother, it won't do for nobody to be in the parlour."

"I thought he was gone?"

"Only gone out into the field to see the haymakers."

"Queer company!" said Mrs. Starling, leaving her bowl of dough, with flowery hands, to peer out of a window. "You may make your mind easy, Di; he won't come in again. I declare! he's got his coat off and he's gone at it himself; ain't that him?"

Diana looked and allowed that it was. Mr. Knowlton had got a rake in hand, his coat hung on the fence, and he was raking hay as busily as the best of them. Diana gave a little sigh, and turned to her pan of berries. This young officer was a new language to her, and she would have liked, she thought, to spell out a little more of its graceful peculiarities. The berries took a good while. Meantime Mrs. Starling's biscuit went into the oven, and a sweet smell began to come thereout. Mrs. Starling bustled about setting the table; with cold pork and pickles, and cheese and berry pie, and piles of bread brown and white. Clearly the haymakers were expected to supper.

"Mother," said Diana doubtfully, when she had washed her hands from the berry stains, "will you bring Mr. Knowlton out *here* to tea, if he should possibly stay?"

"He's gone, child, this age."

"No, he isn't."

"He ain't out yonder any more."

"But his horse stands by the fence under the elm."

"I wish he was farther, then! Yes, of course he'll come here, if he takes supper with *me* to-night. I don't think he will. I don't know him, and I don't know as I want to."

But this vaguely expressed hope was disappointed. The young officer came in, a little while before supper; laughingly asked Diana for some water to wash his hands; and followed her out to the lean-to. There he was introduced to Mrs. Starling, and informed her he had been doing her work, begging to know if that did not entitle him to some supper. I think Mrs. Starling was a little sorry then that she had not made preparations to receive him more elegantly; but it was too late now; she only rushed a little nervously to fetch him a finer white towel than those which usually did kitchen duty for herself and Diana; and then the biscuits were baked, and the farm hands came streaming in.

There were several of them, now in haying time, headed by Josiah Davis, Mrs. Starling's ordinary stand-by. Heavy and clumsy, warm from the hay-field, a little awkward at sight of the company, they filed in and dropped into their several seats round one end of the table; and Mrs. Starling could only play all her hospitable arts around her guest, to make him forget if possible his unwonted companions. She served him assiduously with the best she had on the table; she would not bring on any dainties extra; and the young officer took kindly even to the pork and pickles, and declared the brown bread was worth working for; and when Mrs. Starling let fall a word of regretful apology, assured her that in the times when he was a cadet he would have risked getting a good many marks for the sake of such a meal.

"What are the marks for?" inquired Mrs. Starling curiously.

"Bad boys," he told her; and then went off to a discussion of her hay crop, and a dissertation on the delights of making hay and the pleasure he had had from it that afternoon; "something he did not very often enjoy."

"Can't you make hay anywheres?" Mrs. Starling asked a little dryly.

He gravely assured her it would not be considered military.

"I don't know what military means," said Mrs. Starling. "*You* are military, ain't you?"

"Mean to be," he answered seriously.

"Well, you are. Then, I should think, whatever you do would be military."

But at this giving of judgment, after a minute of, perhaps, endeavour for self-control, Mr. Knowlton broke down and laughed furiously. Mrs. Starling looked stern. Diana was in a state of indecision, whether to laugh with her friend or frown with her mother; but the infection of fun was too much for her – the pretty lips gave way. Maybe that was encouragement for the offender; for he did not show any embarrassment or express any contrition.

"You do me too much honour," he said as soon as he could make his voice steady; "you do me too much honour, Mrs. Starling. I assure you, I have been most unmilitary this afternoon; but really I am no better than a boy when the temptation takes me; and the temptation of your meadow and those long windrows was too much for me. I enjoyed it hugely. I am coming again, may I?"

"You'll have to be quick about it, then," said Mrs Starling, not much mollified; "there ain't much more haying to do on the home lot, I guess. Ain't you 'most done, Josiah?"

"How?" said that worthy from the other end of the table. Mrs. Starling had raised her voice, but Josiah's wits always wanted a knock at the door before they would come forth to action.

"Hain't you 'most got through haying?"

"Not nigh."

"Why, what's to do?" inquired the mistress, with a new interest.

"There's all this here lot to finish, and all of Savin hill."

"Savin hill ain't but half in grass."

"Jes' so. There ain't a lock of it cut, though."

"If I was a man," said Mrs. Starling, "I believe I could get the better o' twenty acres o' hay in less time than you take for it. However, I ain't. Mr. Knowlton, do take one o' those cucumbers. I think there ain't a green pickle equal to a cucumber – when it's tender and sharp, as it had ought to be."

"I am sure everything under your hands is as it ought to be," said the young officer, taking the cucumber. "I know these are. Your haymakers have a good time," he added as the men rose, and there was a heavy clangour of boots and grating chairs at the lower end of the table.

"They calculate to have it," said Mrs. Starling. "And all through Pleasant Valley they do have it. There are no poor folks in the place; and there ain't many that calls themselves rich; they all expect to be comfortable; and I guess most of 'em be."

"Just the state of society in which – There's a sweet little stream running through your meadow, Miss Diana," said the young officer with a sudden change of subject. "Where does it go to?"

"It makes a great many turns, through different farms, and then joins your river – the Yellow River – that runs round Elmfield."

"That's a river; this brook is just what I like. I got tired with my labours this afternoon, and then I threw myself down by the side of the water to look at it. I lay there till I had almost forgotten what I was about."

"Not in your shirt sleeves, just as you was?" inquired Mrs. Starling. The inquiry drew another laugh from her guest; and he then asked Diana where the brook came from. If it was pretty, followed up?

"Very pretty!" Diana said. "As soon as you get among the hills and in the woods with it, it is as pretty as it can be; not a bit like what it is here; full of rocks and pools and waterfalls; lovely!"

"Any fish?"

"Beautiful trout."

"Miss Diana, can you fish?"

"No. I never tried."

"Well, trout fishing is not exactly a thing that comes by nature. I must go up that brook. I wish you would go and show me the way. When I see anything pretty, I always want some one to point it out to, or I can't half enjoy it."

"I think it would be the other way," said Diana. "I should be the one to show the brook to you."

"You see if I don't make you find more pretty things than you ever knew were there. Come! is it a bargain? I'll take my line and bring Mrs. Starling some trout."

"When?" said Diana.

"Seems to me," said Mrs. Starling, "I could keep along a brook if I could once get hold of it."

"Ah," said Mr. Knowlton, laughing, "you are a great deal cleverer than I am. You have no idea how fast I can lose myself. Miss Diana, the sooner the better, while this lovely weather lasts. Shall we say to-morrow?"

"I'll be ready," said Diana.

"This weather ain't goin' to change in a hurry," remarked Mrs. Starling.

But the remark did not seem to be to the purpose. The appointment was made for the following day at three o'clock; and Mr. Knowlton's visit having come to an end, he mounted and galloped away.

"Three o'clock!" said Mrs. Starling. "Just the heat o' the day. And trout, indeed! Don't you be a silly fish yourself, Diana."

"Mother!" said Diana. "I couldn't help going, when he asked me."

"You could ha' helped it if you'd wanted to, I s'pose."

Which was no doubt true, and Diana made no response; for she wanted to go. She watched the golden promise of dawn the next morning; she watched the cloudless vault of the sky, and secretly rejoiced within herself that she would be ready.

CHAPTER VI. MR. KNOWLTON'S FISH

Doubtless they were ready, those two, for the brook and the afternoon. The young officer came at half-past three; not in regimentals this time, but in an easy grey undress and straw hat. He came in a waggon, and he brought his fishing-rod and carried a basket. Diana had been ready ever since three. They lost no time; they went out into the meadow and struck the brook.

Now the brook, during its passage through the valley field, was remarkable for nothing but a rare infirmity of purpose, which would never let it keep one course for many rods together. It twisted and curled about, making many little meadow promontories on one side and the other; hurrying along with a soft, sweet gurgle that sounded fresh, even under the heat of the summer sun. It was a hot afternoon, as Mrs. Starling had said; and the two excursionists were fain to take it gently and to make as straight a course across the fields as keeping on one side of the brook left possible. They could not cross it. The stream was not large, yet quite too broad for a jump; and not deep, yet deep enough to cover its stony bed and leave no crossing stones. So sometimes along the border of the brook, where a fringe of long grass had been left by the mowers' scythes, rank and tangled; sometimes striking across from bend to bend over the meadow, where no kindly trees stood to shade them, the two went – on a hunt, as Mr. Knowlton said, after pretty things.

After a mile or more of this walking, the scenery changed. Mown fields, hot and fragrant, were left behind; almost suddenly they entered the hills, where the brook issued from them; and then they began a slower tracking of its course back among the rocks and woods of a dell which soon grew close and wild. The sides of the dell became higher; the bed of the stream more steep and rough; the canopy of trees closed in overhead, and showed the blue through only in broken patches. The clothing of the hill-sides was elegant and exquisite; oaks, and firs, and hemlocks, with slender birches and maples, lining the ravine; and under them a free growth of ferns, and fresh beds of moss, and lovely lichens covered the rocks and dressed the ground. The stream rattled along at the bottom; foaming over the stones and leaping down the rocks; making the still, deep pools where the fish love to lie; and in its way executing a succession of cascades and tiny waterfalls that wanted no picturesque element except magnitude. And a good imagination can supply that.

And how went the afternoon? How goes it with those who have just received a new sense, or found a sudden doubling of that which they had before? Nay, it was a new sense, a new power of perception, able to discern what had eluded all their previous lives. The brook in the meadow had been to Diana's vision until now merely running water; whence had come those delicious amber hues where it rolled over the stones, and the deep olive shadows where the water was deeper? She had never seen them before. Now they were pointed out and seen to be rich and clear, a sort of dilution of sunlight, with a suggestion of sunlight's other riches of possibility. The rank unmown grass that fringed the stream, Diana had never seen it but as what the scythe had missed; now she was made to notice what an elegant fringe it was, and how the same sunlight glanced upon its curving stems and blades, and set off the deep brown stream. Diana's own eyes began to be quickened, and her tongue loosed. The lovely outline of the hills that encircled the valley had never looked just so rare and lovely as this afternoon when she pointed them out to her companion, and he scanned them and nodded in full assent. But when they got into the ravine, it was Diana's turn. Mosses, and old trees, and sharp turns of the gorge, and fords, where it was necessary to cross the brook and recross on stepping stones just lifting them above the water, here black enough, – Diana knew all these things, and with secret delight unfolded the knowledge of them to her companion as they went along. And still the bits of blue sky overhead had never seemed so unearthly blue; the drapery of oak and hemlock boughs had never been so graceful and bright; there was a presence

in the old gorge that afternoon, which went with them and cleared their eyes from vapour and their minds from everything, it seemed, but a susceptibility to beauty and delight in its influence. Perhaps the young officer would have said that this presence was embodied in the unconscious eyes and fair calm brow which went beside him; I think he saw them more distinctly than anything else. Diana did not know it. Somehow she very rarely looked her companion in the face; and yet she knew very well how his face looked, too; so well, perhaps, that she did not need to refresh her memory. So they wandered on; and the fords were pleasant places, where she had to be helped over the stones. Not that Diana needed such help; her foot was fearless and true; she never had had help there before: was that what made it so pleasant? Certainly it did seem to her that it was a prettier way of going up the brook than alone and unaided.

"I am not getting much fish at this rate," said young Knowlton at length with a light laugh.

"No," said Diana. "Why don't you stop and try here? Here looks like a good place. Right in that still, deep spot, I dare say there are trout.

"What will you do in the meantime, if I stop and fish? It will be very stupid for you."

"For me? O no. I shall sit here and look on. It will not be stupid. I will keep still, never fear."

"I don't want you to keep still; that would be very stupid for me."

"You can't talk while you are fishing; it would scare the trout, you know."

"I don't believe it."

"I have always heard so."

"I don't believe it will pay," said Knowlton as he fitted his rod – "if

I am to purchase trout at the expense of all that."

All what? Diana wondered.

"Suppose we talk very softly – in whispers," he went on, laughing. "Do you suppose the trout are so observant as to mind it? If you sit here, – on this mossy stone, close by me, can't I enjoy two things at once?"

Diana made no objection to this arrangement. She took the place indicated, full of a breathless kind of pleasure which she did not stop to analyze; and watched in silence the progress of the fishing. In silence, for after Mr. Knowlton's arrangement had been carried into effect, he too subsided into stillness; whether engrossed with the business of his line, or satisfied, or with thoughts otherwise engaged, did not appear. But as presently and again a large trout, speckled and beautiful, was swung up out of the pool below, the two faces were turned towards each other, and the two pairs of eyes met with a smile of so much sympathy, that I rather think the temporary absence of words lost nothing to the growth of the understanding between them.

The place where they sat was lovely. Just there the bank was high, overhanging the brook. A projecting rock, brown and green and grey, with lichen and mosses of various kinds, held besides a delicate young silver birch, the roots of which found their way to nourishment somehow through fissures in the rock. Here sat Knowlton, with Diana beside him on a stone, just a little behind; while he sat on the brink to cast, or rather drop, his line into the little pool below where the trout were lurking. The opposite side of the stream was but a few yards off, thick with a lovely growth of young wood, with one great hemlock not far above towering up towards the sky. The view in that direction went up a vista of the ravine, so wood-fringed on both sides, with the stream leaping and tumbling down a steep rocky bed. Overhead the narrow line of blue sky.

"Four!" whispered Diana, as another spotted trout came up from the pool.

"I wonder how many there are down there?" said Knowlton as he unhooked the fish. "It makes me hungry."

"Catching the trout?" said Diana softly.

He nodded. "Here comes another. I wish we could make a fire somewhere hereabouts and cook them."

"Is that a good way?"

"The best in the world," he said, adjusting his fly, and then looking with a smile at her. "There is no way that fish taste so good. I used to do that, you see, in the hills round about the Academy; and I know all about it."

"We could make a fire," said Diana; "but we have no gridiron here."

"I had no gridiron there. Couldn't have carried a gridiron in my pocket if I had had one. Here's another" —

"You had not a gridiron, of course."

"Nor a pocket either."

"But did you eat the trout all alone? without bread, I mean, or anything?"

"No; we took bread and salt, and pepper and butter, and a few such things. There were generally a lot of us; or if only two or three we could manage that. The butter was the worst thing to accomplish — Here's another!"

"Such beauties!" said Diana. "Well, Mr. Knowlton, if you get *too* hungry, we'll cook you one at home, you know."

"Will you?" said he. "I wish we had salt and bread here! I should like to show you how wood cookery goes, though. But I'll tell you! we'll get Mrs. Starling to let us have it out in the meadow — that won't be bad."

Diana thought of her mother's utter astonishment and disapprobation at such a proposal; and there was silence again for a few minutes, while the line hung motionless over the pool, and Diana's eyes watched it movelessly, and the liquid sweetness of the water's talk with the stones was heard, — as one hears things when the senses are strung to double keenness. Diana heard it, at least, and listened to something in it she had never perceived before; something not only sweet and liquid and musical, but in some odd sense admonitory. What did it say? Diana hardly questioned, but yet she heard, — "My peace never changes. My song never dies. Listen, or not listen, it is all the same. You may be in twenty moods in a year. In my depth of content I flow on for ever."

A slight rustling of leaves, a slight crackling of stems or branches, brought the eyes of both watchers in another direction; and before they could hear a footfall, they saw, above them on the course of the brook, a figure of a man coming towards them, and Diana knew it was the minister. Swiftly and lightly he came swinging himself along, bounding over obstacles, with a sure foot and a strong hand; till presently he stood beside them. Just then Mr. Knowlton's line was swung up with another trout. Diana introduced the gentlemen to each other.

"Fishing?" said the minister.

"We have got all there are in this place, I'm thinking," said Knowlton, shutting up his rod.

"You *had* not, two minutes ago," said the other. "What do you judge from? It doesn't do to be so easily discouraged as that."

"Discouraged?" said Knowlton. "Not exactly. Let us see. Four, five, six — seven — eight. Eight, out of this little one pool, Mr. Masters. Do you think there are any more?"

"I always get all I can out of a thing," said the minister. And his very cheery tone, as well as his very quiet manner, seemed to say he was in the habit of getting a good deal out of everything.

"I don't know about that," answered the young officer in another tone. "Doesn't always pay. To stay too long at one pool of a brook, for instance. The brook has other pools, I suppose."

"I suppose it has," said the minister, with a manner which would have puzzled any but one that knew him, to tell whether he were in jest or earnest. "I suppose it has. But you may not find them. Or by the time you do, you may have lost your bait. Or you may be tired of fishing. Or it may be time to go home."

"I am never tired," said Knowlton, springing up; "and I have got a guide that will not let me miss my way."

"You are fortunate," said the other. "And I will not occupy your time."

Good afternoon! I shall hope to see more of you."

With a warm grasp of the young officer's hand, and lifting his hat to Diana, the minister went on his way. Diana looked after him, wondering why he had not shaken hands with her too. It was something she was a little sorry to miss.

"Who is that?" Knowlton asked.

"Mr. Masters? He's our minister."

"What sort of a chap is he? Not like all the rest of them?"

"How are all the rest of them?" Diana asked.

"I declare, I don't know!" said Knowlton. "If I was to tell the truth, I should say they puzzle all my wits. See 'em in one place – and hear 'em – and you would say they thought all the business of this world was of no account, nor the pleasure of it either. See 'em anywhere else, and they are just as much of this world as you are – or as I am, I mean. They change as fast as a chameleon. In the light that comes through a church window, now, they'll be blue enough, and make you think blue's the only wear – or black; but once outside, and they like the colour that comes through a glass of wine or anything also that's jolly. One thing or the other they don't mean – that's plain."

"Which do you think they don't mean?" said Diana.

"Well, they're two or three hours in church, and the rest of the week outside. I believe what they say the rest of the time."

"I don't think Mr. Masters is like that."

"What *is* he like, then?"

"I think he means exactly what he says."

"Exactly," said the young officer, laughing; "but which part of the time, you know?"

"All times. I think he means just the same thing always."

"Must see more of him," said Knowlton. "You like him, then, Miss Starling?"

Diana did like him, and it was quite her way to say what she thought; yet she did not say it. She had an undefined, shadowy impression that the hearing would not be grateful to her companion. Her reply was a very inconclusive remark, that she had not seen much of Mr. Masters; and an inquiry where Mr. Knowlton meant to fish next.

So the brook had them without interruption the rest of the time. They crept up the ravine, under the hemlock branches and oak boughs; picking their way along the rocky banks; catching one or two more trout, and finding an unending supply of things to talk about; while the air grew more delicious as the day dipped towards evening, and the light flashed from the upper tree-tops more clear and sparkling as the rays came more slant; and the brook's running commentary on what was going on, like so many other commentaries, was heard and not heeded; until the shadows deepening in the dell warned them it was time to seek the lower grounds and open fields again. Which they did, much more swiftly than the ascent of the brook had been made; in great spirits on both sides, though with a thought on Diana's part how her mother would receive the fish and the young officer's proposition. Mrs. Starling was standing at the back door of the kitchen as they came up to it.

"I should think, Diana, you knew enough to remember that we don't take visitors in at this end of the house," was her opening remark.

"How about fish?" inquired Mr. Knowlton, bringing forward his basket.

"What are you going to do with 'em?" asked Mrs. Starling, standing in the door as if she meant he should not come in.

"We are going to eat them – with your leave ma'am, and by your help; – and first we are going to cook them."

"Who?"

"Miss Starling and myself. I have promised to show her a thing. May I ask for the loan of a match?"

"A match!" echoed Mrs. Starling.

"Or two," added Mr. Knowlton, with an indescribable twinkle in his eye; indescribable because there was nothing contrary to good breeding in it. All the more, Diana felt the sense of fun it expressed, and hastened to change the scene and put an end to the colloquy. She threw down her bonnet and went for a handful of sticks. Mr. Knowlton had got his match by this time. Mrs. Starling stood astonished and scornful.

"Will this be wood enough?" Diana asked.

Mr. Knowlton replied by taking the sticks out of her hand, and led the way into the meadow. Diana followed, very quiet and flushed. He had not said a word; yet the manner of that little action had a whole small volume in it. "Nobody else ever cared whether I had sticks in my hands or not," thought Diana; and she flushed more and more. She turned her face away from the bright west, which threw too much illumination on it; and looked down into the brook. The brook's song sounded now unheard.

It was on the border of the brook that Lieut. Knowlton made his fire. He was in a very jubilant sort of mood. The fire was made, and the fish were washed; and Diana stood by the column of smoke in the meadow and looked on, as still as a mouse. And Mrs. Starling stood in the door of the lean-to and looked on too, from a distance; and if she was still, it was because she had no one near just then to whom it was safe to open her mind. The beauty of the picture was all lost upon her: the shorn meadow, the soft column of ascending smoke coloured in dainty hues from the glowing western sky, the two figures moving about it.

"Now, Miss Diana," said the young officer. "If we had a little salt, and a dish – I am afraid to go and ask Mrs. Starling for them!"

Perhaps so was she; but Diana went, and got them without asking. She smiled at the dishing of the trout, it was so cleverly done; then she was requested to sprinkle salt on them herself; and then with a satisfied air, which somehow called up a flush in Diana's cheeks again, Mr. Knowlton marched off to the house with the dish in his hands. Mrs. Starling had given her farm labourers their supper, and was clearing away relics from the board. She made no move of welcome or hospitable invitation; but Diana hastened to remove the traces of disorder, and set clean plates and cups, and bring fresh butter, and bread, and make fresh tea. How very pleasant, and how extremely unpleasant, it was altogether!

"Mother," she said, when all was ready, "won't you come and taste Mr. Knowlton's fish?"

"I guess I know how fish taste. I haven't eaten the trout of that brook all my life, without."

"But you don't know my cookery," said Mr. Knowlton; "*that's* something new."

"I don't see the sense of doing things in an outlandish way, when you have no need to. Nor I don't see why men should cook, as long as there's women about."

"What *is* outlandish?" inquired Mr. Knowlton.

"What you've been doing, I should say."

"Come and try my cookery, Mrs. Starling; you will never say anything against men in that capacity again."

"I never say anything against men anyhow; only against men cooking; and that ain't natural."

"It comes quite natural to me," said the young officer. "Only taste my trout, Mrs. Starling, and you will be quite reconciled to me again."

"I ain't quarrelling with nobody – fur's I know," said Mrs. Starling; "but I've had my supper."

"Well, we haven't had ours," said the young man; and he set himself not only to supply that deficiency in his own case, but to secure that Diana should enjoy and eat hers in spite of all hindrances. He saw that she was wofully annoyed by her mother's manner; it brought out his own more in contrast than perhaps otherwise would have been. He helped her, he coaxed her, he praised the trout, and the tea, and the bread, and the butter; he peppered and salted anew, when he

thought it necessary, on her own plate; and he talked and told stories, and laughed and made her laugh, till even Mrs. Starling, moving about in the pantry, moved softly and set down the dishes carefully, that she too might hear. Diana sometimes knew that she did so; at other times was fain to forget everything but the glamour of the moment. Trout were disposed of at last, however, and the remainder was cold; bread and butter had done its duty; and Mr. Knowlton rose from table. His adieux were gay – quite unaffected by Mrs. Starling's determined holding aloof; and involuntarily Diana stood by the table where she could look out of the window, till she had seen him mount into his waggon and go off.

"Have you got through?" said Mrs. Starling.

"Supper?" said Diana, starting. "Yes, mother."

"Then perhaps I can have a chance now. Do you think there is anything in the world to do? or is it all done up, in the world you have got into?"

Diana began clearing away the relics of the trout supper, in silence and with all haste.

"That ain't all," said Mrs. Starling. "The house don't stand still for nobody, nor the world, nor things generally. The sponge has got to be set for the bread; and there's the beans, Diana; to-morrow's the day for the beans; and they ain't looked over yet, nor put in soak. And you'd better get out some codfish and put that on the stove. I don't know what to have for breakfast if I don't have that. You'd best go and get off your dress, first thing; that's my counsel to ye; and save washing *that* to-morrow."

Diana went into no reasoning, on that subject or any other; but she managed to do all that was demanded of her without changing her dress, and yet without damaging its fresh neatness. In silence, and in an uncomfortable mute antagonism which each one felt in every movement of the other. Odd it is, that when words for any reason are restrained, the feeling supposed to be kept back manifests itself in the turn of the shoulders and the set of the head, in the putting down of the foot or the raising of the hand, nay, in the harmless movements of pans and kettles. The work was done, however, punctually, as always in that house; though Diana's feeling of mingled resentment and shame grew as the evening wore on. She was glad when the last pan was lifted for the last time, the key turned in the lock of the door of the lean-to, and she and her mother moved into the other part of the house, preparatory to seeking their several rooms. But Mrs. Starling had not done her work yet.

"When's that young man comin' again?" she asked abruptly at the foot of the stairs, stopping to trim the wick of her candle, and looking into the light without winking.

"I don't know – " Diana faltered. "I don't know that he is ever coming again."

"Don't expect him either, don't you?"

"I think it would be odd if he didn't," said Diana bravely, after a moment's hesitation.

"Odd! why?"

Diana hesitated longer this time, and the words did not come for her waiting.

"Why odd?" repeated Mrs. Starling sharply.

"When people seem to like a place – they are apt to come again," said

Diana, flushing a little.

"*Seem to*," said Mrs. Starling. "Now, Diana, I have just this one thing to say. Don't you go and give that young fellow no encouragement."

"Encouragement, mother!" repeated Diana.

"Yes, encouragement. Don't you give him any. Mind my words. 'Cause, if you do, I won't!"

"But, mother!" said Diana, "what is there to encourage? I could not help going to show the brook to him to-day."

"You couldn't?" said Mrs. Starling, beginning to mount the stairs. "Well, it is good to practise. Suppose'n he asked you to let him show you the Mississippi – or the Pacific Ocean; couldn't you help that?"

"Mother, I am ashamed!" said poor Diana. "Just think. He is educated, and has every advantage, and is an officer in the United States army now; and what am I?"

"Worth three dozen of him," said Mrs. Starling decidedly.

"He wouldn't think so, mother, nor anybody else but you."

"Well, *I* think so, mind, and that's enough. I ain't a goin' to give you to him, not if he was fifty officers in the United States army. So keep my words, Diana, and mind what I say. I never will give you to him, nor to any other man that calls himself a soldier and looks down upon folks that are better than he is. I won't let you marry him; so don't you go and tell him you will."

"He won't ask me, mother. You make me ashamed!" said Diana, with her cheeks burning; "but I am sure he does not look down upon me."

"Nobody shall marry you that sets himself up above me," said Mrs.

Starling as she closed her door. "Mind!"

And Diana went into her own room, and shut her door, and sat down to breathe. "Suppose he should ask you to let him show you the Mississippi, or the Pacific?" And the hot flush rushed over her and she hid her face, as if even from herself. "He will not. But what if he should?" Mrs. Starling had raised the question. Diana, in very maidenly shame, tried to beat it down and stamp the life out of it. But that was more than she could do.

CHAPTER VII. BELLES AND BLACKBERRIES

In the first flush of Diana's distress that night, it had seemed to her that the sight of Lieut. Knowlton in all time to come could but give her additional distress. How could she look at him? But the clear morning light found her nerves quiet again, and her cheeks cool; and a certain sweet self-respect, in which she held herself always, forbade any such flutter of vanity or stir even of fancy as could in any wise ruffle the simple dignity of this country girl's manner. She had no careful mother's training, or father's watch and safeguard; the artificial rules of propriety were still less known to her; but innate purity and modesty, and, as I said, the poise of a true New England self-respect, stood her in better stead. When Diana saw Mr. Knowlton the next time, she was conscious of no discomposure; and *he* was struck with the placid elegance of manner, formed in no school, which was the very outgrowth of the truth within her. His own manner grew unconsciously deferential. It is the most flattering homage a man can render a woman.

Mrs. Starling had delivered her mind, and thereafter she was content to be very civil to him. Further than that a true record cannot go. The young officer tried to negotiate himself into her good graces; he was attentive and respectful, and made himself entertaining. And Mrs. Starling was entertained, and entertained him also on her part; and Diana watched for a word of favourable comment or better judgment of him when he was gone. None ever came; and Diana sometimes sighed when she and her mother had shut the doors, as that night, upon each other. For to *her* mind the favourable comments rose unasked for.

He came very often, on one pretext or another. He began to be very much at home. His eye used to meet her's, as something he had been looking for and had just found; and the lingering clasp of his hand said the touch was pleasant. Generally their interviews were in the parlour of Diana's home; sometimes he contrived an occasion to get her to drive with him, or to walk; and Diana never found that she could refuse herself the pleasure, or need refuse it to him. The country was so thinly settled, and their excursions had as yet been in such lonely places, that no village eyes or tongues had been aroused.

So the depth of August came. The two were standing one moonlight night at the little front gate, lingering in the moonlight. Mr. Knowlton was going, and could not go.

"Have you heard anything about the Bear Hill party?" he asked suddenly.

"O yes; Miss Delamater came here a week ago to speak about it."

"Are you going?"

"Mother said she would. So I suppose I shall."

"Where is it? and what is it?"

"The place? Bear Hill is a very wild, stony, bare hill – at least one side of it is bare; the other side is covered with trees. And the bare side is covered with blackberry bushes, the largest you ever saw; and the berries are the largest. We always go there every summer, a number of us out of Pleasant Valley, to get blackberries."

"How far is it?"

"Fifteen miles."

"That's a good way to go a-blackberrying," said the young man, smiling.

"People hereabouts must be very fond of that fruit."

"We want them for a great many uses, you know; it isn't just to eat them. Mother makes jam and wine for the whole year, besides what we eat at once. And we go for the fun too, as well as for the berries."

"So it is fun, is it?"

"I think so. We make a day of it; and everybody carries provisions; and we build a fire, and it is very pleasant."

"I'll go," said Mr. Knowlton. "I have heard something about it at home. They wanted me to drive them, but I wanted to know what I was engaging myself to. Well, I'll be there, and I'll take care our waggon carries its stock of supplies too. Thursday, is it?"

"I believe so."

"What time shall you go?"

"About eight o'clock – or half-past."

"*Eight!*" said the young officer. "I shall have to revive Academy habits. I am grown lazy."

"The days are so warm, you know," Diana explained; "and we have to come home early. We always have dinner between twelve and one."

"I see!" said the young man. "I see the necessity, and feel the difficulty. Well, I'll be there."

He grasped her hand again; they had shaken hands before he left the house, Diana remembered; and this time he held her fingers in a light clasp for some seconds after it was time to let them go. Then he turned and sprang upon his horse and went off at a gallop. Diana stood still at the gate where he had left her, looking down the road and listening to the diminishing sound of his horse's hoofs. The moonlight streamed tenderly down upon her and the elm trees; it filled the empty space where Knowlton's figure had been; it flickered where the elm branches stirred lightly and cast broken shadows upon the ground; it poured its floods of effulgence over the meadows and distant hills, in still, moveless peace and power of everlasting calm. It was one of the minutes of Diana's life that she never forgot afterwards; a point where her life had stood still – still as the moonlight, and almost as sweet in its broad restfulness. She lingered at the gate, and came slowly back again into the house.

"What are you going to take to Bear Hill, mother?" inquired Diana the next day.

"I don't know! I declare, I'm 'most tired of picnics; they cost more than they come to. If we could tackle up, now, and go off by ourselves, early some morning, and get what we want – there'd be some fun in that."

"It's a very lonely place, mother."

"That's what I say. I'm tired o' livin' for ever in a crowd."

"But you said you'd go?"

"Well, I'm goin'!"

"Then we must take something."

"Well; I'm goin' to. I calculated to take something."

"What?"

"Somethin' 'nother nobody else'll take – if I could contrive what that'd be."

"Well, mother, I can tell you. Somebody'll be sure to carry cake, and pies, and cold ham and cheese, and bread and butter, and cold chicken. All that's sure."

"Exactly. I could have told you as much myself, Diana. What I want to know is, somethin' nobody'll take."

"Green corn to boil, mother?"

"Well!" said Mrs. Starling, musing, "that *is* an idea. How'd you boil it?"

"Must take a pot – or borrow one."

"Borrow! Not I, from any o' the Bear Hill folks. I couldn't eat corn out o' *their* kettles. It's a sight o' trouble anyhow, Diana."

"Then, mother, suppose I make a chicken pie?"

"Do what you've a mind to, child. And there must be a lot o' coffee roasted. I declare, if I wasn't clean out o' blackberry wine, I'd cut the whole concern. There'll be churning just ready Thursday; and Josiah had ought to be sent off to mill, we're 'most out o' flour, and he can't go to-morrow, for he's got to see to the fence round the fresh pasture lot. And I want to clean the kitchen

this week. There's no sittin' still in this world, I do declare! I haven't set a stitch in those gowns o' mine since last Friday, neither; and Society comes here next week. And if I don't catch Josiah before he goes out to work in the morning and get the stove cleaned out – the flues are all choked up – it'll drive me out o' the house or out o' my mind, with the smoke; and Bear Hill won't come off then."

Bear Hill did "come off," however. Early on the morning of Thursday, Josiah might be seen loading up the little green waggon with tin kettles and baskets, both empty and full. Ears of corn went in too, for the "idee" had struck Mrs. Starling favourably, and an iron pot found its way into one corner. Breakfast was despatched in haste; the house locked up and the key put under the door-stone for Josiah to find at noon; and the two ladies mounted and drove away while the morning light was yet fresh and cool, and the shadows of the trees lay long in the meadow. August mornings and evenings were seldom hotter than was agreeable in Pleasant Valley.

For some miles the road lay through the region so denominated. Then it entered the hills, and soon the way led over them, up and down steep ascents and pitches, with a green woodland on each side, and often a look-out over some little meadow valley of level fields and cultivation bordered and encircled by more hills. The drive was a silent one; Mrs. Starling held the reins, and perhaps they gave her thoughts employment enough; Diana was musing about another waggonful, and wondering whereabouts it was. Till at a turn of the road she discerned behind them, at some distance, a vehicle coming along, and knew, with a jump of her heart, the colour of the horse and the figure of the driver. Even so far off she was sure of them, and turned her sun-bonnet to look straight forward again, hoping that her mother might not by any chance give a look back. She did not herself again; but Diana's ears were watching all the while after that for the sound of hoofs or wheels coming near; and her eyes served her to see nothing but what was out of her field of vision. The scenery grew by degrees rough and wild; cultivation and civilisation seemed as they went on to fall into the rear. A village, or hamlet, of miserable, dirty, uncomely houses and people, was passed by; and at last, just as the morning was wakening up into fervour, Mrs. Starling drew rein in a desolate rough spot at the edge of a woodland. The regular road had been left some time before, since when only an uncertain wheel track had marked the way. Two or three farm waggons already stood at the place of meeting; nobody was in them; the last comer was just hitching his horse to a tree.

"Here's Mis' Starling," he called out. "Good day! good-day to 'ye. Hold on, Mis' Starling – I'll fetch him up. Goin' to conquer all Bear Hill, ain't ye, with all them pails and kettles? Wall – blackberries ain't ripe but once in the year. I've left all *my* business to attend upon the women folks. What's blackberries good for, now, when you've got 'em?"

"Don't you like a blackberry pie, Mr. Selden?"

"Bless you!" said the farmer, "I kin live without it; but my folks can't live 'thout comin' once a year to Bear Hill. It is a wonder to me why things warn't so ordered as that folks could get along 'thout eatin'. It'd save a sight o' trouble. Why, Mis' Starlin', we're workin' all the time to fill our stomachs; come to think of it, that's pretty much what life is fur. Now I'll warrant you, they'll have a spread by and by, that'll be worth all they'll get here to-day."

"Who's come, Mr. Selden?"

"Wall, they ain't all here yet, I guess; my folks is up in the lot, hard to work, I s'pose. Mis' Seelye's gals is here; and Bill Howe and his wife; and the Delamaters; that's all, I guess. He's safe now, Mis' Starlin'."

This last remark had reference to the horse, which farmer Selden had been taking out of the shafts and tethering, after helping the ladies down. Mrs. Starling got out her pails and baskets destined for the berry-picking, and gave some of them to her daughter.

"They'll be all flocking together, up in the thickest part of the lot," she whispered. "Now, Diana, if you'll sheer off a little, kind o', and keep out o' sight, you'll have a ventur'; and we can

stand a chance to get home early after dinner. I'll go along ahead and keep 'em from comin' where you are – if I can."

Diana heard with tingling ears, for she heard at the same time the sound of the approaching waggon behind her. She did not look; she caught up her pail and basket and plunged into the wood path after her mother and Mr. Selden; but she had not gone three yards when she heard her name called.

"You are not going to desert us?" cried young Knowlton, coming up with her. "We don't know a step of the way, nor where to find blackberries or anything. I have been piloting myself all the way by your waggon. Come back and let me make you friends with my sister."

Blushing and hesitating, Diana had yet no choice. She followed Mr. Knowlton back to the clearing, and looked on, feeling partly pleased and partly uncomfortable, while he helped from their waggon the ladies he had driven to the picnic. The first one dismounted was a beautiful vision to Diana's eyes. A trim little figure, robed in a dress almost white, with small crimson clusters sprinkled over it, coral buckle and earrings, a wide Leghorn hat with red ribbons, and curly, luxuriant, long, floating waves of hair. She was so pretty, and her attire was so graceful, and had so jaunty a style about it, that Diana was struck somehow with a fresh though very undefined feeling of uneasiness. She turned to the other lady. Very pretty she was too; smaller even than the first one, with delicate, piquant features and a ready smile. Daintily she also was dressed in some stuff of deep green colour, which set her off as its encompassing foliage does a bunch of cherries. Her face looked out almost like one, it was so blooming, from the shadow of a green silk sun-bonnet; and her hands were cased in green kid gloves. Her eyes sought Diana.

"My sister, Mrs. Reverdy," said young Knowlton eagerly, leading her forward. "Miss Starling, Genevieve; you know who Miss Starling is."

The little lady's answer was most gracious; she smiled winningly and grasped Diana's hand, and was delighted to know her. "And we are so glad to meet you; for we are strangers here, you know. I never was at Bear Hill in my life, but they told us of wonderful blackberries here, and such multitudes of them; and we persuaded Evan to drive us – you know we don't often have him to do anything for us; so we came, but I don't know what we should have done if we had not met you. Gertrude and I thought we would come and see what a picnic on Bear Hill meant." And she laughed again; smiles came very easily to her pretty little face. And then she introduced Miss Masters. Knowlton stood by, looking on at them all.

"These elegant women!" thought Diana; "what must I seem to him?" And truly her print gown was of homely quality and country wear; she did not take into the account a fine figure, which health and exercise had made free and supple in all its movements, and which the quiet poise of her character made graceful, whether in motion or rest. For grace is no gift of a dancing-master or result of the schools. It is the growth of the mind, more than of the body; the natural and almost necessary symbolization in outward lines of what is noble, simple, and free from self; and not almost but quite necessary, if the further conditions of a well-made and well-jointed figure and a free and unconstrained habit of life are not wanting. The conditions all met in Diana; the harmony of development was, as it always is, lovely to see.

But a shadow fell on her heart as she turned to lead the way through the wood to the blackberry field. For in the artistic elegance of the ladies beside her, she thought she recognised somewhat that belonged to Mr. Knowlton's sphere and not to her own – something that removed her from him and drew them near; she thought he could not fail to find it so. What then? She did not ask herself what then. Indeed, she had no leisure for difficult analysis of her thoughts.

"Dear me, how rough!" Mrs. Reverdy exclaimed. "Really, Evan, I did not know what you were bringing us to. Is it much farther we have to go?"

"It is all rough," said Diana. "You ought to have thick shoes."

"O, I have! I put on horridly thick ones, – look! Isn't that thick enough? But I never felt anything like these stones. Is the blackberry field full of them too? Really, Evan, I think I cannot get along if you don't give me your arm."

"You have two arms, Mr. Knowlton – can't I have the other one?" cried

Miss Masters dolefully.

"I have got trees on my other arm, Gatty – I don't see where I should put you. Can't you help Miss Starling along, till we get out of the woods?"

"Isn't it very impertinent of him to call me Gatty?" said the little beauty, tossing her long locks and speaking in a half aside to Diana.

"Now he would like that I should return the compliment and call him Evan; but I won't. What do *you* do, when men call you by your Christian name?"

She was trying to read Diana as she spoke, eyeing her with sidelong glances, and as they went, laying her daintily gloved hand on Diana's arm to help herself along. Diana was astounded both at her confidence and at her request for counsel; but as to meet the request would be to return the confidence, she was silent. She was thinking, too, of the elegant little boot Mrs. Reverdy had displayed, and contrasting it with her own coarse shoes. And how very familiar these two were, that he should speak to her by her first name so!

"Miss Starling!" cried the other lady behind her, – "do you know we have been following your lead all the way we were coming this morning?"

"Mr. Knowlton said so," Diana replied, half turning.

"Aren't you very much flattered?"

This time Diana turned quite, and faced the two.

"My mother was driving, Mrs. Reverdy."

"Ah?" said the other with a very amused laugh. "But you could have done it just as well, I suppose."

What does she mean? thought Diana.

"Can you do anything?" inquired the gay lady on her arm. "I am a useless creature; I can only fire a pistol, and leap a fence on horseback, and dance a polka. What can you do? I dare say you are worth a great deal more than me. Can you make butter and bread and pudding and pies and sweetmeats and pickles, and all that sort of thing? I dare say you can."

"I can do that."

"And all I am good for is to eat them! I can do that. Do you make cheeses too?"

"I can. My mother generally makes the cheese."

"O, but I mean you. What do people do on a farm? women, I mean. I know what the men do. You know all about it. Do you have to milk the cows and feed everything? – chickens and pigs, you know, and all that?"

"The men milk," said Diana.

"And you have to do those other things? Isn't it horrid?"

"It is not horrid to feed the chickens. I never had anything to do with the pigs."

"O, but Evan says you know how to harness horses."

Does he? thought Diana.

"And you can cut wood?"

"Cut wood!" Diana repeated. "Did anybody say I could do that?"

"I don't know – Yes, I think so. I forget. But you can, can't you?"

"I never tried, Miss Masters."

"Do you know my cousin, Mr. Masters? – the minister, you know?"

"Yes, I know him a little."

"Do you like him?"

"I like him, – yes, I don't know anything against him," said Diana in great bewilderment.

"O, but I do. Don't you know he says it is wicked to do a great many things that we do? he thinks everybody is wicked who don't do just as he does. Now I don't think everybody is bound to be a minister. He thinks it is wicked to dance; and I don't care to live if I can't dance."

"That is being very fond of it," said Diana.

"Do you dance her, in the country?"

"Sometimes; not very often."

"Isn't it very dull here in the winter, when you can't go after blackberries?"

Diana smiled. "I never found it dull," she said. Nevertheless, the contrast smote her more and more, between what Mr. Knowlton was accustomed to in his world, and the very plain, humdrum, uneventful, unadorned life she led in hers. And this elegant creature, whose very dress was a sort of revelation to Diana in its perfection of beauty, she seemed to the poor country girl to put at an immense distance from Mr. Knowlton those who could not be charming and refined and exquisite in the like manner. Her gloves, – one hand rested on Diana's arm, and pulled a little too; – what gloves they were, for colour and fit and make! Her foot was a study. Her hat might have been a fairy queen's hat. And the face under it, pretty and gay and wilful and sweet, how could any man help being fascinated by it? Diana made up her mind that it was impossible.

The rambling path through the woods brought the party out at last upon a wild barren hill-side, where stones and a rank growth of blackberry bushes were all that was to be seen. Only far off might be had the glimpse of other hills and of patches of cultivation on them; the near landscape was all barrenness and blackberries.

"But where are the rest of the people?" said Mrs. Reverdy with her faint laugh. "Are we alone? I don't see anybody."

"They are gone on – they are picking," Diana explained.

"Hid in this scrubby forest of bushes," said her brother.

"Have we got to go into that forest too?"

"If you want to pick berries."

"I think we'll sit here and let the rest do the picking," said Mrs. Reverdy, looking with charming merriment at Gertrude. But Gertrude was not so minded.

"No, I'm going after berries," she said. "Only, I don't see where they are. I see bushes, and that is all."

"Just here they have been picked," said Diana. "Farther on there are plenty."

"Well, you lead and we'll follow," said Mr. Knowlton. "You lead, Miss

Starling, and we will keep close to you."

Diana plunged into the blackberry bushes, and striking off from the route she guessed the other pickers had taken, sought a part of the wilderness lower down on the hill. There was no lack of blackberries very soon. Every bush hung black with them; great, fat, juicy beauties, just ready to fall with ripeness. Blackberry stains spotted the whole party after they had gone a few yards, merely by the unavoidable crushing up against the bushes. Diana went to work upon this rich harvest, and occupied herself entirely with it; but berry-picking never was so dreary to her. The very sound of the berries falling into her tin pail smote her with a sense of pain; she thought of the day's work before her with revulsion. However, it was before her, and her fingers flew among the bushes, from berry to berry, gathering them with a deft skilfulness her companions could not emulate. Diana knew how they were getting on, without using her eyes to find out; for all their experience was proclaimed aloud. How the ground was rough and the bushes thorny, how the berries blacked their lips and the prickles lacerated their fingers, and the stains of blackberry juice were spoiling gloves and dresses and all they had on.

"I never imagined," said Mrs. Reverdy with a gay laugh, "that picking blackberries was such a serious business. O dear! and it's only just eleven o'clock now. And I am so hungry!"

"Eat blackberries," said Gertrude, who was doing it diligently.

"But I want to carry some home."

"You can buy 'em. We came for fun," was the cool answer.

"Fun?" said Mrs. Reverdy with another echoing, softly echoing, laugh; "it's the fun of being torn and stained and scratched, and having one's hat pulled off one's hair, and the hair off one's head."

Diana heard it all, they were not far from her; and she heard, too, Mr. Knowlton's little remarks, half gallant, half mocking, but very familiar, she thought. No doubt, to his sister; but how to Miss Masters too? Yet they were; and also, she noticed, he kept in close attendance upon the latter young lady; picking into her basket, getting her out of her numerous entanglements with the blackberry branches, flattering and laughing at her; Gertrude was having what she would call a good time; why not? "And why should I?" thought Diana to herself as she filled her pail. "It is not in my line. What a goose I was, to fancy that this young man could take pleasure in being with me. He *did*; but then he was just amusing himself; it was not I; it was the country and the fishing, and so on. What a goose I have been!"

As fast as the blackberries dropped into the pail, so fell these reflections into Diana's heart; and when the one was full, so was the other. And as she set down her pail and began upon a fresh empty one, so she did with her thoughts; they began all over again too.

"Miss Starling, it is twelve o'clock," cried Mrs. Reverdy; "where are all the rest of the people? Do you work all day without dinner? I expected to see a great picnic out under the trees here."

"This is not the picnic place," said Diana. "We will go to it."

She went back first to the waggons; put her berries in safe keeping, and got out some of the lunch supplies. Mr. Knowlton loaded himself with a basket out of his waggon; and the procession formed again in Indian file, everybody carrying something, and the two ladies grumbling and laughing in concert. Diana headed the line, feeling very much alone, and wishing sadly it were all over and she at home. How was she to play her part in the preparations at hand, where she had always been so welcome and so efficient? All spring and life seemed to be taken out of her, for everything but the dull mechanical picking of berries. However, strength comes with necessity, she found.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW RICHES OF THE OLD WORLD

There was quite a collection of people on Bear Hill to-day, as could be seen when they were all gathered together. The lunching place was high on the mountain, where there was a good outlook over the surrounding country; and here in the edge of the woods the blackberry pickers were scattered about, lying and sitting on the ground in groups and pairs, chatting and watching the preparations going on before their eyes. Pretty and wild the preparations were. Under a big tree just at the border of the clearing a fire was kindled; a stout spike driven into the trunk of the tree held a tea-kettle just over the blaze. Wreaths of blue and grey smoke curling up above the tea-kettle made their way through the tree branches into the upper air, taking hues and colours and irradiations from the sunlight in their way. The forest behind, the wilderness of blackberry bushes in front; the wide view over the hills and vales, without one spot of cultivation anywhere, or a trace of man's habitation; the scene was wild enough. The soft curling smoke, grey and embrowned, gave a curious touch of homeliness to it. From two fires it went, curling up as comfortably as if it had been there always. The second fire was lit for the purpose of boiling green corn, which two or three people were busy getting ready, stripping the green husks off. Other hands were unloading baskets and distributing bread and butter and cups, and unpacking ham and chickens. Meanwhile, till the fires should have done their work, most of the party were comfortably awaiting the moment of enjoyment, and taking some other moments, as it seemed, by the way. Mrs. Carpenter in one place was surrounded by her large family of children; all come to pick blackberries, all heated with work and fun, and eager for the dinner. Miss Barry, quite tired out, was fanning herself with her sun-bonnet, and having a nice bit of chat with Miss Babbage, the schoolmaster's sister. Mrs. Mansfield and farmer Carpenter were happily discussing systems of agriculture. Mrs. Boddington was making a circle merry with her sharp speeches. Younger folks here and there were carrying on their own particular lines of skirmishing operations; but there were not many of these; the company had come for business quite as much as for play. Indeed, Miss Gunn's array of baskets and tin pails suggested that she was doing business on her brother's account as much as on her own; and that preserves and blackberry wine would be for sale by and by on the shelves of the store at the "Corner."

The little party that came up with Diana melted away as it met the rest. Mrs. Reverdy glided into the group gathered about Mrs. Boddington, and slid as easily into the desultory gossip that was going on. Diana had instantly joined herself to the little band of workers at the camp fire. Only one or two had cared to take the trouble and responsibility of the feast; it was just what Diana craved. As if cooking had been the great business of life, she went into it; making coffee, watching the corn, boiling the potatoes; looking at nothing else and trying to see nobody, and as far as possible contriving that nobody should see her. She hid behind the column of smoke, or sheltered herself at the further side of the great trunk of a tree; from the fire, she said to herself. But her face took on a preternatural gravity at those times, whenever she knew it was safe. She thought she did not look at anybody; yet she knew that Miss Masters had joined none of the groups under the trees, and seemed instead to prefer a solitary post in front of them all, where her pretty figure and dainty appointments were displayed in full view. Was she looking at the landscape? Diana did not in the least believe it. But she tried to work without thinking; that vainest of all cheateries, where the conclusions of thought, independent of the processes, force themselves upon the mind and lay their full weight upon it. Only one does not stop anywhere to think about them, and the weight is distributed. It is like driving fast over thin ice; stay a minute in any one place, and you would break through. But that consciousness makes unpleasant driving.

The corn gave forth its sweet smell, and Diana dished it up. What was the use of taking so much trouble, she thought, as ear after ear, white and fair, came out of the pot? Yet Diana had enjoyed the notion of making this variety in the lunch. The coffee steamed forth its fragrance upon the air; and Diana poured it into prepared cups of cream and sugar which others brought and carried away; she was glad to stand by the fire if only she might. How the people drank coffee! Before the cups were once filled the first time, they began to come back for the second; and the second, Diana knew, would not satisfy some of the farmers and farmers' wives there. So pot after pot of the rich beverage had to be made. It wearied her; but she would rather do that than anything else. And she had expected this picnic to be such a pleasant time! And it had turned out such a failure. Standing by her camp fire, where the ascending column of grey smoke veiled her from observation, Diana could look off and see the wide landscape of hill and valley spread out below and around. Not a house; not another wreath of smoke; not a cornfield; hollows of beauty with nothing but their own green growth and the sunshine in them; hill-tops fair and lovely, but without a fence that told of human ownership or a road that spoke of human sympathy. Was life like that, Diana wondered? Yet surely that landscape had never looked dreary to her before.

"Mrs. Starling will have another cup of coffee, Miss Diana."

Diana started. What should bring Mr. Knowlton to wait upon her mother's cups of coffee? She sugared and creamed, and poured out in silence.

"May I come presently and have some?"

"Haven't you had any?"

"Just enough to make me want more. I never saw such good coffee in my life."

"You are accustomed to West Point fare."

"It's not that, though. I know a good thing when I see it."

"When you taste it, I suppose," said Diana; preparing his cup, however, she knew, with extra care.

"I assure you," said Mr. Knowlton expressively, as he stirred it, "*I have* appreciation for better things than coffee. I always want the best, in every kind; and I know the thing when I see it."

"I make no doubt you can have it," said Diana coolly, turning away.

"Hullo, Diany!" said Mr. Carpenter on the other side, – "you're coming it strong to-day. Got no one to help ye? Sha'n't I fetch 'Lizy? she's big enough to do som'thin'. I vow I want another cup. You see, it's hard work, is picking blackberries. I ain't master here; and my wife, she keeps me hard at it. Can't dewolve the duty on no one, neither; she sees if I ain't got my pail filled by the time she's got her'n, and I tell you! I catch it. It makes me sweat, this kind of work; and that makes me kind o' dry. I'll be obleeged to you for another cup. You needn't to put no milk into it!"

"It's strong, Mr. Carpenter."

"Want it, I tell you! working under orders this way makes a man feel kind o' feeble."

"How do you think we women get along, Mr. Carpenter?" said Mrs Boddington, coming up with her cup.

"How, Mis' Boddington?"

"Yes, I'm asking that. A little more, Diana; it's first-rate, and so's the corn. It takes you and your mother! – How do you think we women feel, under orders all the time?"

"Under orders!" said Mr. Carpenter.

"Yes, all the time. How d'you think we feel about it?"

"Must be uncommon powers of reaction," said the farmer. "My wife a'n't anywheres near killed yet."

"Think any one'll ever get that piece of mantua-making under orders?" said Mrs. Boddington, looking towards the place where the frills and rufflings of Miss Masters' drapery stirred in the breeze, with the long light tresses of her unbound hair. The breeze was partly of her own making,

as she stirred and turned and tossed her head in talking with Mr. Knowlton; the only one of the company whom she would talk with, indeed. The farmer took a good look at her.

"Wall," said he, – "I should say it was best to do with that kind of article what you would do with the steam from your tea kettle; let it go. 'Tain't no use to try to utilize everything, Mis' Boddington."

"Evan Knowlton acts as if he thought differently."

"Looks is enough, with some folks," said the farmer; "and she's a pretty enough creatur', take the outside of her. Had ought to be; for I guess that sort o' riggin' costs somethin' – don't it, Mis' Boddington?"

"Cost?" said the lady. "Evan Knowlton is a fool if he lets himself be caught by such butterfly's wings. But men *are* fools when women are pretty; there's no use reasoning against nature."

"Wall, Diany," exclaimed Joe Bartlett, now drawing near with *his* coffee cup, – "how comes you have all the work and other folks all the fun?"

"Want some coffee, Joe?"

"Fact, I do; that is, supposin' you have got any."

"Plenty, Joe. That's what I am here for. Hold your cup. Who are you picking for to-day?"

"Wall, I ain't here for fun," said Joe; "there's no mistake about that. I b'lieve in fun too; I do sartain; but I *don't* b'lieve in scratchin' it into you with blackberry brambles, nor no other. Thank'e, Diany; maybe this'll help me get along with the afternoon."

"I never thought you would mind blackberry thorns, Joe."

"No more I don't, come in the way o' business," said Joe, sipping his coffee. "Guess I kin stand a few knocks, let alone scratches, when I calculate to have 'em. But I don' know! my notion of pleasure's sun'thin' soft and easy like; ain't your'n? I expect to take scratches – bless you! but I don't call 'em fun. That's all I object to."

"Then how come you here, Joe?"

"Wall, – " said Joe slowly, – "I've got an old mother hum."

"And she wanted some berries?"

"She wanted a lot. What the women does with 'em all, beats me. Anyhow, the old lady'll have enough this time for all her wants."

"How is she, Joe, to-day?"

"Days don't make no difference to my mother, Diany. You know that, don't ye? There don't nothin' come wrong to her. I vow, I b'lieve she kind o' likes it when things is contrairy. I never see her riled by no sort o' thing; and it's not uncommon for *me* to be as full's I kin hold; but she's just like a May mornin', whatever the weather is. There ain't no scarin' her, either; she'd jest as lieves die as live, I b'lieve, any day."

"I daresay she would," said Diana, feeling at the moment that it was not so very wonderful. Life in this world might be so dull as to be not worth living for.

"It's a puzzle to me," Joe went on, "which is right, her or the rest on us. Ef she is, we ain't. And her and the rest o' the world ain't agreed on nothin'. But it is hard to say she ain't right, for she's the happiest woman that ever I see."

Diana assented absently.

"Wall," said Joe, "I'm a little happier for that 'ere cup o' coffee. I'll go at it agin now. Who's that 'ere little bundle o' muslin ruffles, Diany? she's a kind o' pretty creatur', too. She hain't sot down this hull noonspell. Who is it?"

"Miss Masters."

"She ain't none o' the family o' our parson?"

"A cousin, I believe."

"Cousin, eh," said Joe. "She hain't set down once. I guess she's afeard o' gettin' the starch out somewhere. The captain's sweet on her, ain't he? I see he tuk a deal o' care o' her eatin'."

"Mr. Knowlton is not a captain yet, Joe; he is only a lieutenant."

"Want to know," said Joe. "Wall, I kin tell ye, she likes him."

And Joe strolled off, evidently bent on doing his best with the blackberry bushes. So must Diana; at least she must seem to do it. There was a lull with the coffee cups; lunch was getting done; here and there parties were handling their baskets and throwing their sun-bonnets on. The column of smoke had thinned now to a filmy veil of grey vapour, slowly ascending, through which Diana could look over to the round hill-tops, with their green leaves glittering in the sun; and farther still, to the blue, clear vault of ether, where there was neither shine nor shadow, but the changeless rest of heaven. Earth with its wildness of untrodden ways, its glitter and flutter; heaven, – how did that seem? Far off and inscrutable, though with an infinite depth of repose, an infinite power of purity. The human heart shrank before both.

"And I had thought to-day would be a day of pleasure," Diana said to herself. "If I could get into the waggon and go home – alone – and get the fire started and the afternoon work done ready for supper before mother comes! – They will not need me to pilot them home at any rate."

But things have to be faced, not run away from, in life; and trials take their time and cannot be lopped into easier length. Diana did what she could. She caught up her basket very quietly, carrying it and her sun-bonnet in one hand, and slipped away down the hill under cover of the trees till she was out of sight of everybody; then plunged into the forest of high bushes and lost herself. She began to pick vigorously; if she was found, anybody should see what she was there for. It was a thicket of thorns and fruit; the berries, large, purple, dewy with bloom, hung in quantities, almost in masses, around her. It was only needful sometimes to hold her basket underneath and give a touch to the fruit; and it dropped, fast and thick, into her hands. But she felt as if the cool soft berries hurt her fingers. She wondered whereabouts was pretty Miss Masters now, making believe pick, and with fingers at hand to supplement her, and looks and words to make labour sweet, even if it were labour. "But *she* will never do any work," said Diana to herself; "and he will be quite willing that she should not." And then she noticed her own fingers; a little coarsened with honest usefulness they were – a little; and a little embrowned with careless exposure. Not white and pearly and delicate like those of that other hand. And Diana remembered that Mr. Knowlton's own were delicate and white; and she could understand, she thought, that a man would like in a woman he loved, all daintinesses and delicacies, even although they pertained to the ornamental rather than to the useful. It was the first time Diana had ever wished for white hands; she did wish for them now, or rather regret the want of them, with a sharp, sore point of regret. Even though it would have made no difference.

Picking and thinking and fancying herself safe, Diana made a plunge to get through an uncommonly tangled thicket of interlacing branches, and found herself no longer alone. Miss Gunn was three feet off, squatting on the ground to pick the more restfully; and on the other side of her was Diana's cousin, Nick Boddington.

"Hullo, Di!" was his salutation, "where have you left my wife and the rest of the folks?"

"I don't know, Nick; I haven't left them at all."

"What did you come here for, then?"

"What did you?"

"I declare! I came to have the better chance, me and Miss Gunn; I thought where nobody was, I'd have it all to myself. I'll engage you are disappointed to find us – now, ain't you?"

"The field is big enough, cousin Nick."

"Don't know about that. What is become of your fine people?"

"I haven't any fine people."

"What's become o' them you *had*, then? You brought 'em here; have you deserted 'em?"

"I came to do work, Nick; and I'm doing it."

"What did they come for? have you any guess? 'Tain't likely they come to pick blackberries."

"I told Mis' Reverdy," said Miss Gunn smotheredly from the depths of a blackberry bush and her sun-bonnet, "that we'd have plenty for ourselves and Elmfield too to-morrow. I will, I guess."

"They'll want 'em, Miss Gunn," said Mr. Boddington. "They'll not carry home a pint, you may depend. Di, did they come after you, or you come after them, this morning?"

Diana answered something, she hardly knew what, and made a plunge through the bushes in another direction. Anything to get out of *this* neighbourhood. She went on eagerly, through thicket after thicket, till she supposed she was safe. And as she stopped, Mr. Knowlton came round from the other side of the bush. The thrill of pain and pleasure that went through the girl gave no outward sign.

"Met again," said the gentleman. "What has become of you? I have lost sight of you since dinner."

"One can't see far through these bushes," said Diana.

"No. What a thicket it is! But at the same time, people can hear; and you never know who may be a few feet off. Does anybody ever come here, I wonder, when we are gone? or is this wild fruitful hill bearing its harvest for us alone?"

"Other parties come, I daresay," said Diana.

She was picking diligently, and Mr. Knowlton set himself to help her. The berries were very big and ripe here; for a few minutes the two hands were silently busy gathering and dropping them into Diana's pail; then Mr. Knowlton took the burden of that into his own hand. Diana was not very willing, but he would have it.

"One would think blackberries were an important concern of life," he said presently, "by the way you work."

"I am sure, you are working too," said Diana.

"Ah, but I supposed you knew what it is all for. Now I have not the faintest idea. I know what I am after, of course; but what you are after is a puzzle to me."

"Things are very often a puzzle to me," said Diana vaguely; and having for some reason or other a good deal of difficulty in commanding herself.

"Aren't you tired?"

"No – I don't know," said Diana. "It does not signify."

"I don't believe you care, any more than a soldier, what you find in your way. Do you know, you said something, up yonder at the camp fire, which has been running in my head ever since? I wish you would explain it."

"I?" said Diana. "I said something? What?"

"I told you what I wanted, – and you said you had no doubt I could get it."

"I have no recollection of one thing or the other, Mr. Knowlton. I think you must have been speaking to somebody else at the time – not me. If you please, I will try the bushes that way; I think somebody has been in this place."

"Don't you remember my telling you I always want the best of everything?" he said as he followed her; and Diana went too fast for him to hold the briary branches out of her way.

"There are so many other people who are of that mind, Mr. Knowlton!" —

"Not yourself?"

"I want the best berries," said Diana, stopping before a cluster of bushes heavily laden.

"How about other things?"

Diana felt a pang at her heart, an odd desire to make some wild answer.

But nothing could be cooler than what she said.

"I take them as I find them, Mr. Knowlton."

He was helping her now again.

"What did you suppose I was thinking of, when I told you I wanted the best I could have?"

"I had no right to suppose anything. No doubt it is true of all sorts of things."

"But I was thinking of *one*— did you guess what?"

Diana hesitated. "I don't know, Mr. Knowlton, — I might guess wrong."

"Then what made you say, 'no doubt' I could have it?"

"I don't know, Mr. Knowlton," said Diana, feeling irritated and worried almost past her power to bear. "Don't you always have what you want?"

"Do you think I can?" he said eagerly.

"I fancy you do."

"What *did* you think I meant by the 'best' thing, then? Tell me — do tell me?"

"I thought you meant Miss Gertrude Masters," Diana said, fairly brought to bay.

"You did! And what did you think I thought of Miss Diana Starling?"

He had stopped picking blackberries now, and was putting his questions short and keenly. Diana's power of answering had come to an end.

"Hey!" said he, drawing her hand from the bush and stopping her work; "what did you think I thought of *her*?— I have walked with her, and driven with her, and talked with her, in the house and out of the house, now all summer long; I have seen what she is like at home and abroad; what do you think I think of *her*?"

Baskets and berries had, figuratively, fallen to the ground; literally too, in Mr. Knowlton's case, for certainly both his hands were free, and had been employed while these words were spoken in gently and slowly gathering Diana into close bondage. There she stood now, hardly daring to look up; yet the tone of his questions had found its way to her inmost heart. She could not refuse one look, which they asked for. It gave her what she never forgot to her latest day.

"Does she know now?" he went on in a tone of mixed tenderness and triumph, like the expression of his face. "My lily! — my Camellia flower! — my sweet Magnolia! — whatever there is most rare, and good, and perfect. My best of all things. Can I have the best, Di?"

Miss Gertrude Masters would have been equal to the situation, and doubtless would have met it with great equanimity; Diana was unused to most of the world's ways, and very new to this. She stood in quiet dignity, indeed; but the stains of crimson on cheek and brow flushed and paled like the lights of a sunset. All at the bottom of her deep sun-bonnet; was Mr. Knowlton to blame if he gently pushed it back and insinuated it off, till he had a full view?

"You know what is my 'best' now," he said. "Can I have it, Diana?"

She tried to break away from him, and on her lip there broke that beautiful smile of hers; withal a little tremulous just then. It is rare on a grown woman's lip, a smile so very guileless and free; mostly it belongs to children. Yet not this smile, either.

"I should think you must know by this time," she whispered.

I suppose he did; for he put no more questions for a minute or two.

"There's one more thing," he said. "Now you know what I think of you; what do you think of me, Diana?"

"I think you are very imprudent," she said, freeing herself resolutely, and picking up her sun-bonnet. "Anybody might come, Mr. Knowlton."

"Anybody might! But if ever you call me 'Mr. Knowlton' again — I'll do something extraordinary."

Diana thought he would have a great many things to teach her, beside that. She went at her fruit-picking with bewildered haste. She did not know what she was doing, but mechanically her fingers flew and the berries fell. Mr. Knowlton picked rather more intelligently; but between them, I must say, they worked very well. Ah, the blackberry field had become a wonderful place; and while the mellow purple fruit fell fast from the branches, it seemed also as if years had reached their fruition and the perfected harvest of life had come. Could riper or richer be, than had fallen into Diana's hands now? than filled them now? So it was, she thought. And yet this was not life's harvest, only the bloom of the flower; the fruit comes not to its maturity with one sunny day, and it

needs more than sunshine. But let the fruit grow; it will come in time, even if it ripens in secret; and meanwhile smell the flower. It was the fragrance of the grape blossom that filled the blackberry field; most sweet, most evanishing, most significant. Oddly, many people do not know it. But it must be that their life has never brought them within reach of its charm.

Two people in the field never knew how the shadows grew long that day. No, not even though their colloquy was soon interrupted, and by Gertrude Masters herself. She thenceforth claimed, and received, Mr. Knowlton's whole services; while Diana in her turn was assisted by Will Flandin, a young farmer of Pleasant Valley, who gave his hands and his arms to her help. It did not make much difference to Diana; it might have been an ogre, and she would not have cared; so she hardly noticed that Will, who had a glib enough tongue in ordinary, was now very silent. Diana herself said nothing. She was listening to hidden music.

"There's a wonderful lot o' blackberries on Bear Hill," Will remarked at last.

"Yes," said Diana.

"Well, I guess we've cleaned 'em out pretty well for this time," pursued he.

"Have we?" said Diana.

"Why, all these folks ha' been pickin' all day; I should *think* they'd ha' made a hole in 'em."

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