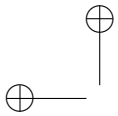
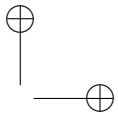
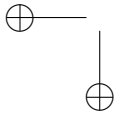
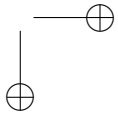



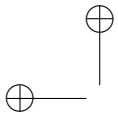
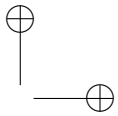
A Quiet Neighborhood

A Quiet Neighborhood

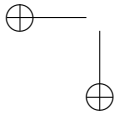
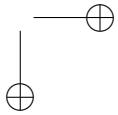
Anne Goodwin Winslow

IWP

2023
First Published by Knopf in 1947

Digital Typesetting by Isaac Waisberg

The old Thornton place had been vacant a good many years when, one summer in the late nineties, it was sold to some new people and began suddenly to emerge from the tide of greenery that had for some time threatened to engulf it. It was easy to imagine that the sunlight coming in through windows from which the shadows had been so recklessly pruned away must be painful to them.

It was a sweet old place: a frame house painted buff with white trimmings and set well back on a lawn with trees. It had a wide front porch, and through the door into the hall, now usually standing open, there was a clear view of another door opening on another porch at the back – a windswept arrangement that could only be appreciated in warm weather; but the weather at Cherry Station generally was warm.

The neighborhood was still called that, but the accommodation train that stopped there twice a day was no longer the only means of getting back and forth to town. The sociable hour gentlemen and ladies had once been required to spend in each other's company as a necessary part of the business or pleasure that took them into the

city could now be forgone in favor of something shorter, the city itself having come out to meet them in more ways than one. There was a trolley that stopped within easy walking-distance of practically all the houses, and the new gravel road was considered almost dangerously conducive to speed.

These improvements, as well as others of a less striking nature, were often mentioned in the hearing of the new people, whose name was Carter and whose interest in local history had proved very stimulating to reminiscence in the minds and conversation of the older residents. "You would think in a quiet neighborhood like this we wouldn't have changes, but we do," Mrs. Norman Williams, who lived two doors farther up the road in the house with the yellow jasmine over the porch, remarked to Mrs. Carter. "Not the houses themselves so much, maybe, but –"

"Tell me more about the people," Mrs. Carter encouraged her: "tell me about the ones in the big white house that hasn't been really white, I dare say, since any of you can remember – the Fairleighs. How many children did they have – four – six? – and how pretty she still is, with that lovely skin!"

Was she, still? Mrs. Williams did not answer for a moment. Her mind went back to a summer evening long ago when there had been a party at the house with the yellow jasmine over the porch, and Mrs. Fairleigh had been late. She had to get the baby to sleep, Judge Fairleigh explained. "She told me to tell you to start without her – she'd be here anyway long before Norman got the ducks carved. She must think he's slow." This was a joke – an old one. But they did start; they were at the table and the carver was at work on the ducks when

she came in, on tiptoe, and slipped up behind him and put both her hands over his eyes – to slow him down, she said. But it wasn't Mr. Williams; he had turned the job over to Maury Thornton, and Mrs. Williams had never forgotten the picture she made, standing there, laughing, in her white dress with a big bunch of pink ivy geraniums at her belt, and her arms around Maury's necks her cheeks were just the color of the geraniums.

"Six children," she told Mrs. Carter, "counting the one who died, David; he was the oldest – fifteen –"

"And the people who owned this house – the Thorntons," Mrs. Carter pursued. "Everybody speaks of Maury Thornton. I know his father was killed at Shiloh, and his mother died; but wasn't there someone else – an aunt or something – who lived here with him?"

"Yes, an aunt, Miss Rita Thornton. Something had happened to her – a love affair, everybody said. She was devoted to Maury; she really took his mother's place. Not a bit sociable, though. Whatever it was that had happened – nobody ever really knew anything; she never talked about it – must have turned her away from people. But Maury had a perfect gift for friends. . . "

1

Maury Thornton was reading his paper on Emerson to Mrs. Fairleigh out in the scuppernong arbor while she sewed. The scuppernong arbor was in the yard at the side of her house, and was her favorite sitting room. It had rustic chairs and a rustic table and, as a rule, a breeze. There was a delightful one this morning, causing a great contention of light and shadow overhead and throwing a dappled pattern down on everything: on the long pages of Maury's manuscript, and Mrs. Fairleigh's ruffled skirts, and the ground at their feet, which was trodden and smooth like the ground under a swing. He had to raise his voice a good deal, not because she was deaf or inattentive, but on account of the children.

" '– shall know that the Ought, that Duty, is one with Science, with Beauty, and with Joy,' " he concluded.

"Sadie-e-e," Mrs. Fairleigh called to the Negro woman who had just come out on the porch, carrying a baby, "come and take Bobby too." Bobby's choo-choo train had also become one with beauty and with joy and was drowning Emerson.

"I think it's lovely, Maury," she said when Bobby and the train had trailed away after Sadie and the baby. "You couldn't end it better than with that quotation. David, run in the house, son, and see if I left my scissors on the – no, never mind; here they are."

David had not minded; he had not even moved since Maury began to read his paper, which he would read again at the next meeting of the Waverley Club, but then David would not hear it. He was too young to belong to the Waverley Club, so this was his only chance. Of course if Maury left it for his mother to "go over quietly," as she generally asked him to do with the things he had written – there were parts of it David thought he would like to learn by heart. Emerson was new to him.

Emerson was new to him, just as Browning was, and Carlyle. Not that he hadn't seen them lying around all the time, and heard them holding their own in the conversation of his elders, with whom they were socially prominent: they were new to him in the sense of being for him at all. Having Maury home for good, instead of just home for the holidays, had shifted the weight of David's interest from the practical to the speculative almost too suddenly; he could hardly understand it himself.

"It's a perfect blessing to have you, Maury!" He had heard his mother say that many times, just as she said it now, taking the sheets of ruled legal-cap on which Maury had paid tribute to Emerson in his beautiful legal hand, and putting them under her workbasket. "Having you read to me this way is a real life-saver – a mind-saver, anyway. Babies are delightful – at least mine are – but nobody can claim they are intellectually uplifting." She laughed lightly. "Actually," she went on, "there is nothing

so stultifying as associating with the very young. Don't you think so, son? Poor Davie! – Go make Nellie get down from there before she falls."

The children were apt to prevail on these occasions. Reading to Mrs. Fairleigh was not like reading to anyone else; it was hardly an enterprise to be undertaken by one who expected to be listened to uninterruptedly or even to be always sure that he was heard at all; and it was with no such expectation that Maury kept on doing it. He was, just then, a tall young man with dark eyes, a pleasant, unfinished face, and a strong leaning toward philosophy, which is a more sociable leaning perhaps than it is supposed to be. Few men have ever cared to be philosophers alone. They may prefer not to be garrulous and dialectic like Socrates, but some form of audience they must have or their system shrivels. Philosophy without an ear fares as badly as beauty is said to do without an eye. Maury had not yet acquired a system, but he had always had Mrs. Fairleigh, who, he was sure, would like to listen if she could. He was even sure that, in a sense, she would get his meaning better than he did himself. And it was a curious thing that to look up from the page he was reading, whether it was one he had written himself or only one that he liked very much, and see her there, was to experience a marvel of transfusion: it was to have the idea in his mind made visible before him.

He had finished at the university that summer, and was, in addition to his other literary interests, reading law in Judge Fairleigh's office in the city; an informal apprenticeship that left him time for other things. No injunction had been laid on him to get ahead; advancement

in the legal profession did not, in Judge Fairleigh's opinion, proceed so much along a line as in an ever widening circle that might take in almost anything.

Among the things comprised in Maury's circle was to be counted the management of a considerable amount of unproductive real estate – an ebbing tide of family prosperity that he had been left to stem as best he could alone. His dogs and his gun were included too; and so, in a manner of speaking, was the Waverley Club.

The Waverley Club was in the habit of meeting once a month, usually on the first Saturday, in the evening, and in the home of each of the members in turn. It was, as its name was intended to suggest, a literary club; but Walter Scott, though favored in the index, was allotted no more than his casual space in the programs of entertainment. There was never a given author or a given subject. Why should there be? The Waverley Club did not function under the shadow of purpose, as clubs do now, even in rural communities. It was not progressive, nor conservative, nor even cultural, but just frankly literary, with nothing whatever up its sleeve – not even food. Twenty people or so, that late in the evening, with the servants gone! – Sometimes if it was very cold there might be coffee.

But this was summer. In the home of General (Attorney General) and Mrs. Peters many lamps were burning: globes of soft light were on the tables, pools of it on the floor; one could always tell in whose house the club was in session by this unusual expenditure of kerosene. Under a wide variety of decorated silk and porcelain shades it blazed away, warm and inviting. "The summer breezes wandered in through unscreened doors and windows, as

did the summer insects from the leafy world outside. Fans were a help, of course, and all the ladies had them. There was a general fluttering of wings.

In Paris it was, at the opera there –

Virginia Peters, in a white dress with a great deal of lace insertion and a wide blue sash, was reciting "*Aux Italiens*," by Owen Meredith. Virginia was seventeen and had had elocution lessons, in addition to having already had at an earlier period of her life a French governess, and she now gave the gestures and the foreign phrases as they had been given to her, with the native sweetness that had not been taken away.

"I was here and she was there,
And the glittering horseshoe curved between –"

said Virginia, finishing her piece and embracing the familiar faces round her with her familiar smile.

A selection from Poe's *Tales* followed. Mr. Williams read delightfully. In a low chair, strategically placed so that he could get the light on his book and still have the breeze on his back, he found it a simple matter to transport the audience from Virginia's glittering horseshoe to his own phantom-haunted House of Usher. Variety was a feature much stressed in the programs of the club; it was recognized as one of the leading advantages of literature as opposed to life.

Maury and Emerson came next. Taking Mr. Williams's chair, they claimed in their turn the attention of the audience; without, however, transporting it anywhere or opposing anything to life. For many people at that time Emerson was hardly literature, through being so

much more: “a voice of lofty cheer” among other things; a voice of prophecy. The shining sentences Maury quoted were as well known to many in his audience as if they had been taken from the Gospels, and somehow more believable. It was a backward time and place. Cherry Station had been darkened by war, narrowed by poverty: the members of the Waverley Club could not be assured too often that their welfare was “dear to the heart of being.”

One can hardly imagine a young man transmitting such a message under like social conditions today – if one can imagine the conditions: he would be embarrassed by its nobility; the etiquette of self-deprecation now in vogue would almost certainly lead him to indicate that he, and perhaps Emerson, did not expect to be taken seriously. But this comedy of negation was not then a feature of public appearances, and Maury was permitted to take himself quite as seriously as he would have taken anybody else.

The program closed with music: a duet for harp and piano, with a separate encore for each of the ladies. Men they could not have dreamed of being; music at Cherry Station was a feminine branch of art.

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David was too young to belong to the Waverley Club, but more and more, as the summer advanced, he managed to be comprised in Maury’ circle. He drove with him out to inspect the retrogressive activities on his plantation, the gun beside them in the buggy, and the two dogs leaning out and sniffing the air behind; and on Sun-

days or any other time when Maury was at home, David was almost sure to be there too; his thumb stuck in a book perhaps, but really bent on conversation. His youth had touched the miraculous moment, no less miraculous for being so common a part of experience, when words had suddenly taken charge and had him at their mercy. Nothing was real to him any more, nothing had form or substance, until language descended upon it.

The subjects they discussed were generally old, and the things they said about them could hardly have been new, except in the sense that every day's reflection in a stream is new; but they probably never thought of themselves as being unoriginal. It was not a time of great originality; not a creative time, even for the young; their toys, their tools, were those they had grown up with. It was not an adventurous locality. The war – their fathers' war – the only one outside of books – had ended dismally; that adventure had been tried and failed. Not only at Cherry Station but in other places, just then, young men who would be building had little besides old materials to do it with: old thoughts, old words.

"But what I would like to know," David said, "is why there has to be such a lot of declining and falling."

He laid his Gibbon, still open, on the porch beside him and looked at Maury, who was sitting on the bottom step cleaning his gun, under the unswerving eyes of the two black and white setters. "It seems such a waste of time – cosmic time. Rome, even at her best, was already a long way down from Athens. When we finally do work up to perfection, why can't it last?"

Maury held the gun up and squinted through one of the barrels. "Because it isn't perfection," he said.

"Not Plato? Not the Parthenon?"

"As far as they went, maybe; but suppose civilization had just kept on along those lines everywhere: no Jesus, no Gothic – romance, chivalry, love even – not as we understand it."

"In Greece? But you know there was; there had to be."

"Naturally; just as there was religion – or air, or water; I mean the form they took. Civilization, as we call it, is always seeking out different channels. You are coming to the place, in your book there, where they go pretty well underground for a while. It's when we get to the Middle Ages that they come up again – like fountains. Gibbon doesn't do much for the thirteenth century, but if I had my choice of a time to spend on earth –" he brushed his dark forelock back and looked off under the trees on the lawn.

David picked up his book again, but he was still looking at Maury. "I don't know what time I would choose," he said presently. "Maybe one that hasn't come along yet. I've been thinking a good deal about railroads – what they are doing in this country, I mean. They ought to do a lot for civilization; maybe they are a different kind of fountain –"

"Do you know," Maury said after thinking a little, "I believe something could be made out of that idea – the contrast between the sort of building we are doing now and what they did then: railroads as opposed to cathedrals – the Union Pacific versus the Way of Salvation."

"Still, you have to admit that railroads are more of a necessity these days than cathedrals are," David said.

"Even then, when they used to build them, they must have cost a lot more than the people could afford."

"They cost everything they had; more than their wars even."

"Who is it – Ruskin – that says beauty is always costly? In art, of course he means; but oughtn't religion to be more like nature? Do you think so much art ought to be put into religion?"

"Take it the other way round," Maury said: "ought so much religion to be put into art? But at that time, you see, it would never have occurred to them to ask the question. Religion went into the building they did then in exactly the same way that the law of gravitation did. That is what is so wonderful about it. It is the only time in history, as far as we know, when there was this sort of fusion in men's minds – when they could actually see with their eyes what they believed in. Just think for a minute, David, what that must have meant! Only I don't believe we can; I don't believe it's possible to even imagine it any more." He had closed the breech of his gun and was holding it across his knees, the dogs lying despairingly at his feet. "Did you ever read Malory's *Morte Darthur*, David?" he asked after a while.

"A little – not to hurt."

Maury smiled. "Well, that's one way of looking at it; but that's a very un-Hellenic book, and I believe it gives as good an idea as anything of what we might have missed without all the time we wasted, as you call it, in the Middle Ages: the crusades, and the shrines and grails, and all that passionate foolishness. Maybe the cosmos likes the pattern better the way it was. I do – or think I do."

David listened in silence. Maury didn't talk like that very often; he was afraid to ask him the questions he had in mind, for fear he would stop.

"There are some pretty things in Malory, David – when you get around to it; especially about love – when you get around to that. Love as an attribute of chivalry, he means – gentleness and sacrifice and so forth. 'True love that costs so much,' he says in one place – Expensive too, you see." He looked up, smiling.

"You sound as if you might have already got around to it," David said in so surprised a tone that Maury laughed, though his color deepened. "Well, in that case," he said, "you'd better pay attention to me when I get on the subject. But right now you can go on with your Gibbon; I'm going upstairs to see if I can borrow some of Aunt Rita's sewing-machine oil; this can is empty."

He got up and the dogs did too, trembling with false hopes. "Just look at them," Maury said; "and no way to tell them it's another three months till ducks! A waste of cosmic time, they call it."

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The summer darkness had been drawn across the open window where Judge Fairleigh and Maury sat, the question of riparian rights between them. The Judge's face had been for some time invisible, but his agreeable voice, which ever since supper had been "refreshing" his own mind and Maury's on the case that was coming up tomorrow, was itself as fresh as ever. It was Sunday evening; upstairs the children were being put to bed; shoes of varying heaviness were thumping down on the ceiling,

and voices of sleepy protest could be heard intermittently above the steady wail of Sadie's hymn. A muslin curtain, loose from its moorings, drifted in and out like an aimless ghost, unheeded by the legal minds. A lightning-bug caught in the ruffle, and unheeded too, kept flashing its small signal of distress or warning to the vibrant insect life outside. The day had been very warm, but now it seemed as if there might be rain.

Judge Fairleigh had already mentioned this possibility several times in the course of the evening, and now, as the curtain blew farther into the room, he mentioned it again. At Cherry Station the hope of rain was, during a large part of the year, as prevalent as the hope of salvation and much more freely expressed. It was not only the leading topic of conversation among friends, but became, in abbreviated form, a salutation to the passing stranger. "Looks like rain" may be as cheering in a drought as "God be with you," especially if there is the immediate evidence of clouds to point to. Clouds are a promise now and not a warning; the imagery has changed; being caught in the rain doesn't mean any longer what it did. Such words as "wet" and "muddy," as applied to roads and vegetation or even to human beings, cease to be derogatory and are merrily descriptive.

"But that's about enough for tonight," Judge Fairleigh said, rising. "If anything else comes to mind, we will have time to go over it at the office in the morning."

Mrs. Fairleigh, coming in from the lighted hall, paused in the doorway to get her bearings. "Where was Moses!" she exclaimed. "Are you two still sitting in the dark? – There, that's better."

Maury had produced a match and lighted the lamp on the center table, and she now sat down by it with her workbasket, Sunday though it was. "I believe it's going to rain," she said, glancing at the window.

"I have a little writing to do, if you will both excuse me," Judge Fairleigh said. "Sit down, Maury, and this time you may be entertaining." He went across the hall to his study – the only place in the house not subject to earthquakes, he was in the habit of explaining – and closed the door.

Maury stood looking down at the basket and the work. "Shall I read something to you?" he asked.

"Oh, please!" she said. "While I finish my Sabbath day's darning."

"What would you like?"

"Oh, anything," she said a little absently, sticking her finger through a very large hole in a very small sock. "Or no – suppose you read me some of those things Davie has been talking about – if he hasn't taken them all with him. Did you ever see so many books go off on a fishing trip? You have given him a tremendous push back into the Middle Ages, Maury. I wish you would push me; I never did know much about them; I'm not even sure which ones they were. I always imagined I wouldn't like them – in spite of the cathedrals. They probably seemed nice then because they were an improvement on the Dark Ages; but weren't they rather dark too?"

Maury looked at her bright head in the lamplight. She had on a blue dress, and the clear colors of the face she did not raise from her work as she talked to him seemed transparent in their fairness. He saw her with an arch

above her, as in his dreams. “I don’t believe so,” he said; “I believe they were full of light.”

He went over to the bookcase and found the book he wanted; then sitting down at the other side of the table, he found the place. “Suppose I just begin here,” he said.

“Lovely,” she agreed, and as the reading progressed she repeated it at intervals, fervently; listening without looking up; weaving her needle back and forth through the little socks she held, one after another, between her forefinger and her thumb.

“*. . . For I take record of God, in you I have had my earthly joy. Wherefore, Madam, I pray you, kiss me, and never do more.*”

“Lovely,” she breathed again.

Maury turned the pages in silence for a while, then closed the book and laid it on the table between them. “Did you know that I have given you my soul?” he said.

“Oh, you dear boy –” she cried, the color fading from her face, as if he had cut his finger and she saw the blood. He kept his eyes on her without speaking. “But you must remember how old I am,” she went on hurriedly, bringing him the first aid she could think of – “thirty-four on my last birthday! A middle-aged woman, Maury –”

“I know,” he said, smiling at her; “I helped Georgie fix the candles on your cake: three big ones and four little ones. The years don’t mean any more than the candles do.”

She shook her head; she was watching his face a little anxiously, her hands with the work in them lying still on her lap.

“But you mustn’t feel sorry for me,” he said; “I don’t want that. And please don’t let it make you unhappy; I want that less than anything.”

"Of course not," she said. "It doesn't – it couldn't – I just –"

Maury smiled. "You just have to get used to the idea? Well, you don't have to hurry; I am giving you all my life to do it in."

He was so composed – so different from the boy she had considered him. She looked at him in surprise.

"There are a lot of things I would like to say to you about that," he went on – "about giving you my life, I mean. I would like to have it make you happier in some way – even happier than you are now –"

"Oh, my dear –" she said.

"But I'm afraid about the best a man can do is not to hurt things by loving them. He can't safely promise more than that. You do believe I am never going to do anything to make you less happy – to cause you any trouble – any loss – even a moment's peace of mind? I can promise that, I know. I can promise it as if – almost as if I were God."

"I know," she said earnestly. "You don't have to promise anything. We will just go on as we were before – before you told me. It doesn't change anything a bit. We will not let it change anything."

She took up her work again to prove that nothing was changed, and presently, getting up to look for David's latest letter, she kept on out to the kitchen and came back with a pitcher of lemonade. "Let's take it in and interrupt the Judge," she said, with her light laugh. "It's too hot for him to be working in there. But I do believe it's going to rain –"

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On moonlight nights the yellow jasmine over the Williamses' front porch made a lace edging around the view of the lawn – black lace with silver showing through. It was an enchanting place to sit – facing the southern heavens, Mr. Williams said – "I don't believe it is possible to get a better view of the stars than the one we have right here." Mrs. Fairleigh had heard him say this many times. She was rocking gently in a willow chair, telling them about David's fishing trip, and found it a little difficult to be as much interested as she usually was when Mr. Williams showed her the firmament and its handiwork. He kept up with all the constellations: it was July now, and there was Scorpio, right over the oak tree where he belonged.

"Not that I don't miss him every minute," Mrs. Fairleigh said, going back to David after she had been polite about Scorpio; "but he is having such a good time! And such wonderful weather! Blankets every night – or maybe it was just *a* blanket; but even so, it's wonderful for him; especially right now. Davie has been growing like a bean-pole this summer."

"Stalk, Jennie," Judge Fairleigh said; "beanstalk. The stalks grow much faster than the poles do."

"Well, too fast anyway. Every time we've measured lately his head would be taller than mine by another inch."

"At that rate we ought to be able to tell you apart one of these days," Mr. Williams said. "How much longer did you expect to keep your two gilt tops on the same level?"

"Well, they're not on the same level any longer, outside or in. That's another reason I'm glad he's up there with

those boys, having his mind out of doors all the time instead of thinking about examinations. How do you feel about David entering the university at fifteen?" she asked Mr. Williams. "Do you think Ben ought to let him?"

"It's young," he said. "But a freshman always is that – at any age. If you think his mind is growing too fast, you certainly ought to let him go; the university is the best thing in the world for that. Gave us a wonderful backset, didn't it, Ben? Permanent in your case, I believe." This was a joke, so they laughed at it.

"If I were you, Jennie," Mrs. Williams said, "I would let David do exactly what he wants to about it. I believe he can always be trusted to do what is best for him. Look at the mother he chose in the first place!"

"And took whatever he could get in the way of a father, I suppose," Mr. Williams said.

"Well, he certainly chose to look like his mother, Norman; you just said that yourself," Mrs. Williams reminded him.

"And it's supposed to be good luck, isn't it, for a boy to look like his mother?" Mrs. Fairleigh said. "Davie always has been lucky – about games and everything. Fish too; how big did he say that one was, Ben, in his last letter?"

"I believe there's another name for that kind of luck, isn't there, Ben?" Mr. Williams said. "But whatever you both decide to do with him in the fall, my advice is let him stay as long as you can where he is at present. We may all have to shut up shop and go fishing before the summer's over. I see where there were three more cases of fever in town yesterday." Keeping up with the stars,

Mr. Williams was reminded now and then of other fatal courses.

There had been summers as hot as this one before at Cherry Station, and a case or two of yellow fever in the city was not an unusual occurrence – nothing like the way they had it farther south of course, in Cuba or New Orleans; nothing to put in the newspapers even. Now it was in the newspapers; as a topic it was sharing honors with the drought.

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Upstairs in her bedroom Miss Rita Thornton was making new summer curtains for the parlor windows. Around her on the Chinese matting pale, diaphanous billows rose and fell, and the clatter of her New Noiseless Wheeler & Wilson was continuous. It was a "light" sewing machine – a "ladies' machine" – and Miss Rita felt that she lost nothing in refinement while gaining immeasurably in speed by pedaling. Some things naturally, such as Maury's shirts and her own underclothes, she would never dream of making any way except by hand: nobody would want to wear machine stitching next to his skin; but it seemed to her sentimental and even silly to feel that way about window curtains. Hanging against the light, you could hardly tell the difference. There was, too, besides the sense of accomplishment, something exhilarating, almost lyrical, about working at such speed. In spite of appearances, it was the very opposite of a treadmill. Anyone who saw Miss Rita stitching by her open window in the cool light of the treetops would scarcely have taken her for a woman who had forgone happiness. Or it may

be something easier to do without than is commonly supposed. Certainly the values of unhappiness are not altogether negative; it has among other things a protective quality that may outlast its pain. Withdrawing from society for any reason, one is apt to learn the advantages of withdrawal.

Whatever Miss Rita's legend was, it had never reached her nephew's ears, nor had he ever thought of her as having one. Stopping now in the open door on his way downstairs and surveying the familiar scene with none of these suggestions in his mind, he did not think of her as either happy or unhappy, but merely as sewing. A young man may be devoted to his aunt, especially one who has taken his mother's place, but it is for some reason a relationship oddly unsentimental in character. Maury's aunt was older than his father, and he was apt to forget, especially since she hardly ever mentioned it, that she had once been young. There was, however, a photograph in the parlor in an oval frame, of a girl with a slim waist and wide spreading skirts, that he knew to be Aunt Rita. She had a white rose in her hair, and wore the ambiguous expression commonly achieved by photography at that early stage, but not a sign or token of the appearance she now wore. She had not been ambiguous or slim since Maury could remember.

She slowed down when she saw him and motioned to him to enter, then came to a full stop at the end of her seam. "Any news?" she asked him. "I see you have the paper."

"More cases; more quarantine." Stepping over the waves of dimity, he made his way to the window and sat down on the sill. "I came in to ask you if you didn't

think you had better make your visit to Cousin Susie a little earlier this year; while they will still let you get on a train – or off of it, for that matter."

She looked at him over her glasses, then through them again at the hem she was folding. "I'd just as soon not go this summer," she said.

"Well, Cousin Susie wouldn't just as soon not have you. Your visits are what she lives for," he said, and added: "I'm thinking of taking my own holiday a little sooner."

"Well, don't have me on your mind," Miss Rita said, starting up again on the Noiseless; then, raising her voice as Maury got up to go: "This won't be the first summer I've stayed here and kept well while people were making themselves sick running away from yellow fever."

But this was a different summer. Miss Rita had to admit there had never, to her knowledge, been another one when staying in the country and keeping out of the night air were not dependable observances in warding off contagion. It was plainly a different fever, one to be neither circumvented nor outwitted, and previous experience counted for very little in defining its causes or estimating its effects. Even the Negroes were afraid of it. A few of them actually had it, and this made life more complicated for the white people whether they had it or not. Especially in a place like Cherry Station, where everybody's house was suddenly full of company friends from the city who had been invited and who came under the odd impression that their danger ended where the fields began. The shock of discovering that this was not the case made the already complicated domestic situation worse, and hospitality in many instances was strained to the breaking-point. Even the most friendly presence

under such conditions could hardly be withdrawn without a sense of mutual relief.

"So now all we have to do is to get off ourselves," Mrs. Fairleigh said, sighing happily as the carriage containing the last visitor turned out of the shady yard and on to the road, where the dust lay thicker every day. It rose in white puffs under the horses' hoofs; it was already hanging like a cloud as far as she could see along what had become the line of a continuous retreat. Any time she looked out, it seemed to her, some vehicle was passing. Nobody wanted to go on the train if he had anything else to go in – with people locked in, the way they did them now, and sometimes the water giving out. All the same, it was the train they were going on – what with the children and the baggage and Sadie and the canary bird, driving was out of the question.

"And the train will get there," Judge Fairleigh said, "and I am by no means sure we would make it; it's uphill all the way, you know."

"Oh, the blessed mountains!" she said.

"And I wouldn't be surprised if David is there already," Judge Fairleigh said; "he wasn't far from Rogersville the last we heard. He might almost have tramped it – fished his way up. The Holston is a lovely stream."

"Don't talk about it – it makes me want to fly!" she said. "And to think he's been out of all this mess! I keep telling you he's lucky; one way or another Davie always escapes the family woes."

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As he walked beside the train that lay stretched and panting under the August sun in the last minutes before its departure, Judge Fairleigh might no longer have expressed himself so hopefully as to its chances of arrival. He was in a better position to estimate the weight and volume of a family and its possessions since stowing his own away in the scrambled interior of coach and baggage car. Multiplying now by all these other families, he was inclined to question the power of steam. The locomotive, noisy and blustering enough, was too far ahead to sound convincing; it looked diminished even in size. There was no actual station at Cherry Station – just a little shed; those who were there to say good-by were saying it from the cinder path that ran beside the track.

Judge Fairleigh walked along it too; he had gone in search of the conductor and any letters he might have brought out from town, and now made his way, retarded by familiar greetings, to where Maury stood looking up at one of the open windows. There were three heads in it looking down, and Sadie and the baby in the immediate background were looking too.

"No mail," Judge Fairleigh said. "The conductor says it didn't get in at all today, from any direction."

Maury, standing in the sun, his straw hat in his hand, the damp hair clinging to his forehead, looked up again at the window. "You mustn't worry," he said – "must she, Judge? You see how it is with letters."

"I do see," Mrs. Fairleigh said; "that's what makes me worry."

"For fear he didn't get yours? I know; but then he would be here! He would have been here before this if

he hadn't got the letters or the telegram, or something, heading him off. Wouldn't he, Judge?"

Judge Fairleigh smiled a little wearily. "By this time tomorrow she'll know it without any more telling," he said. "Provided that engine makes it."

Mrs. Fairleigh looked down at them without an answering smile. "All the same, Maury," she said, with a sort of final earnestness, "if for any reason he didn't hear, and he should come back before you leave, you will se to it that he gets off again, won't you – on the very next train?"

"That's the only one of our bridges we haven't been able to burn, Maury," Judge Fairleigh said – "and an imaginary one at that. But you are leaving right away yourself, aren't you?"

"Pretty shortly. I've got to find somebody to keep the dogs for me; they're my only remaining responsibility, with Aunt Rita gone and the servants about cleared out."

The train, presumably in the act of starting, had begun a broken series of jerks that were effectually putting an end to conversation. Those who were not going took the hint and stepped back, and those who were swung themselves up on to the platform. Judge Fairleigh's face appeared now among those at the window, and Maury, still looking up, was suddenly surprised to see all the faces beginning to move away. "Don't worry," he called again to one of them; "everything is going to be all right!"

Turning in at his own gate, he was conscious of an unwonted stillness. It would naturally seem that way, he supposed, after the departure of the train; a lot of people had gone, too, in the last few days. The Williamses' house, when he passed it just now, looked as if they

might have been gone all summer, with the shutters all fastened like that. He sat down on the porch steps and looked through the open door into the hall. The door at the other end was open too; he could see the servants' house in the back yard, but they were gone; Aunt Rita had taken the maid with her, and the cook had left that morning to stay with her daughter, who was "po'ly," she said – whatever that meant these days. The dogs – that was what made it so still! What he had told Judge Fairleigh about the dogs was just an excuse; he had already sent them off; he had meant to go himself in the morning, but he wasn't going now: until he heard definitely that everything was all right about David. He didn't see how it could possibly be anything else, but it wouldn't hurt to stay a day or so longer. He didn't feel much like going anyway. Closing his eyes and leaning back against the post behind him, Maury realized that he was tired. Seeing so many people off, he supposed.

An epidemic, like almost any other general misfortune, is so fraught with inconveniences of one kind or another that they are apt, up to a certain point at least, to obscure the real issue. It had not occurred to Maury that in his own case this point would ever be exceeded. He had expected to be worried about a variety of things until the yellow fever was over, but not once had he expected to have it himself. Even when he began to realize, as he did later on in the evening, that such a thing was at any rate possible, the inconvenience of it still loomed larger in his mind than anything else. He simply could not afford to be sick, the way things were now. He was willing enough, however, to admit that he needed a rest, and there was no immediate reason that

he could see why he shouldn't take one. He had been losing a lot of sleep lately.

He went upstairs to his room and lay down, intending to get up presently and find himself some supper; but it was nearer breakfast time before he woke up again, not in the least hungry; he was only thirsty, and glad to find the big china pitcher on his washstand full of water. He would go down after a while and get some ice, he thought, lying down again. How long he slept this time he had no way of knowing; he had not wound his watch, and was not particularly interested anyway; rest was what he needed.

It was not until, after a sleep much longer than the others had been and weighted with a different kind of dreams, he opened his eyes and saw David standing in the doorway that he realized with sudden clearness and an overwhelming sense of calamity what had befallen him.

"You must not come in," he said, raising himself on his elbow. "Stand right where you are, David, and I will tell you what you must do." Then, as David did not stand: "You must obey me, David!" he shouted with all the strength he had, and fell back on his pillows, realizing more from David's face than anything else his own helplessness.

"I will, Maury," he said, pushing up a chair and sitting down by the bed. "I will do everything you say; but first you must let me get somebody to look after you; I haven't been able to find a soul in this whole house. And anyhow, why should you think I would be afraid?"

Maury tried again to get up. "Go, I tell you – go!" he cried desperately, over and over. "You do not understand!"

"I will, Maury," David said again. "I promise you I will." But he did not move, and Maury, seeing that it was useless, buried his face in the pillow and lay shivering with sobs and with fever until unconsciousness again descended upon him.

This time when he woke, it was evening and David was still there, but now it had somehow ceased to concern him; and though, after that, other faces sometimes appeared to him – a doctor – a Negro nurse – as long as he saw anything, he saw David too.

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Nobody, the doctor told him when he pronounced him out of danger, had ever had a worse case of yellow fever, or one that lasted longer – counting his two distinct relapses. He said it in a *cum laude* manner, as if he were handing him a diploma. He did not mention the number of weeks it had taken him to accomplish this, and Maury did not ask; he had none the less an impression that much time had passed; he could have believed that it moved audibly, even visibly, in that room where he lay motionless. He would have known too by the way the trees looked, and the light. Summer was over, he knew that. One of the strangest things he noticed about himself was his willingness to know so little – only the things he didn't have to be told.

There were more of these, perhaps, than he would have told himself; his conscious mind may have instinctively

rejected what it was not yet strong enough to bear. He did not want to be told how many weeks he had lain there, nor to be reminded that while his "hopeless" case ran its long course and had its fortunate ending, other cases, briefer and more hopeful, might have ended differently. He did not want to be told about David, knowing perhaps already what he would hear.

A little "light entertainment" would be good for him now, the doctor said, and Mrs. Fairleigh, one Sunday morning, had come to read to him – "and let your Aunt Rita go to church," she said. "We can have a little private service right here in this room." She went over and got her Bible from the chair where she had laid it when she came in, under her white Leghorn hat.

"I'm just going to read you a few of my favorite parts. I don't know whether I ought to skip the way I always do when I read the Bible," she said, sitting down near the bed and beginning to turn the pages. "I'm going to read you about Lazarus."

He lay very still. Her chair was between him and the window, where the treetops that had changed so were gold behind her; and when she finished reading, he lay stiller yet.

"Did you ever think, Maury," she said, closing the book and laying it on the window sill, "how hard it must have been for Lazarus to come back like that, and be the only stranger in the midst of all those friends who were rejoicing over him, and take up his life again, after being so far away? It is even going to be a little hard for you, isn't it, to take up again where you left off? – No, don't answer," she said quickly. "You mustn't talk; just let me talk to you.

"It seems to me," she went on after thinking a little, "that in all the stories about people coming back from the dead – this one and the Alcestis are the ones I know the best – they say so much about the joy of the family and friends, and so little about the feelings of the ones who came back – whether they were glad or not. The more I think of it, the less it seems to me they could have been – at first, anyway. It would be a good deal like taking someone who had been blind and who had recovered his eyesight and making him go back to feeling his way once more, wouldn't it? – No, don't answer!" – she stopped him, holding up her hand.

"All of those things that are such a comfort to us," she began again after a moment, "that we are so dependent on, if we haven't been away – the things that people call their life, though they are nearly all of them material, when you come right down to it – would have been nothing but a trouble for him to get used to again. I can't help thinking that having their brother come back must have been a greater happiness to Mary and Martha than it was to him."

He knew now that he knew; and yet how openly she looked at him! The shadow of the name they had not spoken was nowhere on her face. She had turned a little away from him and was looking out of the window when he asked her suddenly: "Where are your blue dresses?"

"At home," she said, surprised. "Don't you like this one? White is supposed to be cooler – and hasn't it turned hot again, after that little make-believe frost!"

"Would you tell me the truth if you thought I was well enough?" he asked.

"Oh, my dear!" she cried, "that is all I have been waiting for! I have been so lonesome sitting here and not being able to talk about Davie – just to please the doctor! That must have seemed stranger to you than anything. Lie very still and I will tell you now."

The tale of broken communications, of miscalculations and mistakes and interminable delays, was still so present to her mind and so absorbing that she had to force herself to make it brief – leaning over now and then to put her finger on his wrist. And the end, since it was known already, she made briefer still. "You see there was not a soul to stay with you, Maury – not at first. He could not find anyone to do anything – even so much as hand you a glass of water. How could you think he would go and leave you alone in this empty house? If he had not stayed he would not have been David; you know that. And by the time his father could get here, and Miss Rita – and then of course I came –"

"And brought me back, like Lazarus," he said in a low voice, "to learn what I have done to you."

2

Where along the garden ways
On summer days
Rows of roses, two by two,
Used to walk, as ladies do,
With light skirts that swept the grasses,
Now only autumn passes.

Now the crimson and the white,
So brief, so bright,
So swiftly fled,
Have followed where the summer led;
Only lonely autumn goes
Where went the rose.

This little poem, entitled "November," was in the literary column of the Sunday paper. Judge Fairleigh had just read it aloud, charmingly, and now told his wife, who had written it, that it reminded him of Swinburne. Amy Gilbert, who was visiting Mrs. Fairleigh, said: "Sweet!" and went over and kissed her. Mrs. Fairleigh, with a shining look, said: "Bedtime, darling," and gathered up the nearest child. Maury did not say anything; he

had already been gathered up. Mrs. Fairleigh's poems, whatever they were about, made no appeal to any critical faculty he possessed; they reached him through senses that had little to do with either sight or hearing, and he could never compare them with anything.

"I tell Jennie she ought to make a selection of them, for a small volume of verse," Judge Fairleigh said, closing the door on the exodus to the nursery. It was November now, as the poem indicated, and doors were kept closed – when the children did not leave them open – so the rooms would stay warm. He came back to the fire and poked it genially before seating himself again in his chair. "She always says there are not enough of them, even putting in the bad ones," he continued with a smile. "She is entirely too modest about her unquestionable gift. I tell her it deserves a great deal more time than she gives to it." He said these things to Amy Gilbert; Maury knew them already.

"I wish while you are here, Miss Amy," he went on, "you would urge her to be more serious about her writing. Coming as you do from a different and so much broader environment, you could give her the sort of discriminating encouragement she could hardly expect to get from the rest of us. We are all too well acquainted with each other down here. Isn't that so, Maury?"

"I'd love to," Amy Gilbert said.

Maury looked at her with an inclination to be discriminating himself. It always surprised him for her to come out in this adequate way – at her age; he doubted if even the broader environment was entitled to confer such a degree of assurance in so short a time. Amy was twenty-three, she had told him frankly, and that had

surprised him too; the young ladies at Cherry Station were not apt to give their age, even to people who had it already; it was part of the mystery; and she looked even younger. Maury considered the almost childish contours of Amy's face and the way she wore her hair, combed back and doubled up in a braid on her neck – like the *jeunes filles* in the illustrations of Daudet's novels. Was that the broader environment too? Maybe girls didn't grow up so fast when they had so much more room to grow in.

"Amy is pretty – don't you think so, Ben? I was afraid she wouldn't be, coming from such a strong-minded family," Mrs. Fairleigh had said shortly after Amy's arrival. That had been some weeks ago; her looks, whether or not they fell below the Cherry Station standard, were now very generally taken for granted; she had other qualities, however, presumably more directly attributable to her strong-minded family, that continued to stir pleasantly the social atmosphere of that small community.

In the two years that had passed since the yellow fever epidemic, Cherry Station had been more than ever thrown back on its own resources, temporal and spiritual and, especially, financial. Not only death but the fear of death had taken people from their homes, and a number of those who had fled before the fever showed no indication of returning after it. The neighborhood was diminished as well as depressed, and visitors from the outside world were few. There was a natural hesitation about inviting guests when so little could be done for their entertainment (even the Waverley Club had not resumed its sessions), and during the larger part of the year if they had been invited they would have been afraid to come.

Amy Gilbert, however, in her capacity of visitor, was an exception to almost all of this. She had not been afraid to come, nor, strictly speaking, had she been invited, and she would not in any case have expected to be entertained. She had asked to come in the first place, presumably for her own pleasure, and had been asked to do so only in the second, from Mrs. Fairleigh's sense of duty.

"Father wouldn't speak to me on high if I missed a chance to do something for one of her father's children," she said when Amy's letter came. "You remember how he always felt about Mr. Gilbert, Ben."

"I believe I have a better recollection of how Mr. Gilbert ought to have felt about your father; it seems to me the shoe was on the other foot," Judge Fairleigh said. "How did he happen to come down here in the first place?"

Mrs. Fairleigh thought a minute. "I've forgotten," she said; "or maybe I never knew. Weren't people in all sorts of places right after the war? It seems to me he was already down here fighting us, and just stayed on. We'll ask Amy; maybe she can tell us." She put Amy's letter back in the envelope. "I must answer it right away."

As it turned out, Amy, when asked, could enlighten them not only on this point but on almost any other biographical detail concerning her father, and they soon learned a great deal more than they had ever expected to know about Mr. Gilbert, whose sojourn in the locality had been brief – whatever it may have been besides.

Amy thought it had been romantic. She had always wanted to come and see the place her father had told her so much about – "And the people, if there were still any of them here," she said, laying her hand on Mrs.

Fairleigh's knee. "Of course you know about the time your father saved his life? He admired your father more than any man he ever knew."

Amy was sitting between her host and hostess in a little chair belonging to one of the children, the firelight playing on her face, already animated by these memories and associations. It was easy for them to see, as she continued to evoke the past for them, that Mr. Gilbert had possessed among his other gifts the one of capturing his daughter's imagination. He had died five years before, when she was eighteen; she had already told them this; and Mrs. Fairleigh, putting her hand over the one that was lying on her knee, felt that she knew far better than Amy did the kind of immortality he had achieved for himself by doing it. "If only she doesn't keep on too long – looking back this way, just when she should be looking forward," she thought. "The past is a wonderful thing for young people to dip into, but they shouldn't be allowed to drown in it."

By a mild system of interrogation, which she called taking an interest, Mrs. Fairleigh had already done what she could to discover some evidence of other claims on Amy's allegiance than those of her strong-minded family; so far without result. Amy and a brother considerably older than herself were now that family's only living members, but even admitting, as Mrs, Fairleigh was obliged to do, that John Chamfort Gilbert was a paragon of brothers and very likely one of the most brilliant of the younger professors at Harvard, she would have been glad to see his ascendancy over Amy's admiration and affection a trifle less absolute. It was all right for him to take the place of the father she had lost and

the mother she could not remember, but – Again she reminded herself that this was the time for Amy to be looking forward; no brother, however admirable, should be allowed to obstruct that view.

She wondered if staying in one place as little as Amy had been allowed to do might not have been detrimental to her in some ways. It was not easy for a girl to form lasting attachments if she were being pulled around over Europe, learning different languages all the time. Friendship, it seemed to Mrs. Fairleigh, was essentially simple, growing in familiar soil and needing above all things a familiar speech. Love, of course, though it might be simpler still, was strong enough to do without the complicity of environment and circumstance; but first it had to be love.

When Judge Fairleigh put the Sunday paper down and retired to his study, Amy picked it up and read the poem over to herself. Maury, watching her from the other side of the hearth, hoped she was not going to begin at this point the work of criticism she had promised. He did not mean to be present at that operation, and to forestall it now, he reached for one of the books lying on the table and plunged into it. Amy, however, had already finished. She said: "Sweet!" again, and added: "I don't think it's like Swinburne, though; I think it is like her."

"Why keep comparing her to Swinburne?" Maury said.

"I'm not. I'm not comparing her to anybody. I think she's the loveliest thing I ever saw in my life, and I certainly don't think that about Swinburne. I've seen him too."

Maury was silent. "John – my brother –" she said presently, "wrote something about the rose as a symbol in

art. You would never imagine until you looked into it how far back it goes and how universal it is: in architecture, and painting, and literature – especially poetry; John said he didn't see how the poets could have got along without it. Fortunately, he said, it was one of the most vital images they had; they couldn't seem to kill it no matter how hard they tried."

"Kill it?" Maury asked her. "How did he mean?"

"He meant wear it out; make it too sweet – too pale."

"He wants it to be the 'red, red rose'?"

"Yes. But of course he went back to the beginning: to the rose windows in the cathedrals, and the way it was used as an emblem of the Virgin – *celle qui la rose est des roses.* It was one of the best things he ever wrote. We simply lived on roses there for a while – that summer he was writing it – *Forth, ballad, and take roses in both arms* – if you really want Swinburne," Amy said.

"Do you know the rest of it?" Maury asked her.

"Goodness yes! You don't know the rest of John or you wouldn't ask me:

Borgia, thy gold hair's color burns in me,
Thy mouth makes beat my blood in feverish rhymes:
Therefore so many as these roses be,
Kiss me so many times."

This incantation lost nothing by being repeated quite simply for what it was worth in Amy's clear voice. A young chorister chanting a credo may move his hearers just as much without having convictions of his own.

"Does your brother usually write on artistic subjects?" Maury asked her.

"More historical than artistic, I believe you would call them. John says his subjects always run into each other. Romance languages is the one he's teaching now. I wish you knew him – or he knew you, I suppose I should say. I am sure you would be friends."

"And how much older than you are did you say he is? Older than we both are – did you know you and I are the same age, Miss Amy? You have just made better use of your time, that's all."

Amy smiled. "John was thirty-one on his last birthday," she said; "and he really has made good use of his time. Except about getting married; I have been wishing he would, for years, and I am going to wish it more than ever after being here. I tell him all the time there can't be a real home without children. Falling in love doesn't seem to run in our family. Isn't Nellie a darling? Of course Bobbie and Binkie are too, but the one I am really going to miss is Nellie; she's so companionable."

Nellie was now ten, and not in the least intellectual, her mother said – "And of course that is a silly little school. When I think, Amy, of all she could learn from you while you are here! You could even give her a start in French. Children learn foreign languages with so little trouble – to themselves at least."

"But think of all I am learning from her!"

"How to skin the cat, I suppose," Mrs. Fairleigh said, laughing.

"Didn't you know Nellie is a perfect encyclopedia of natural history – not to mention botany? I am learning about all the things that will kill me if they bite me, and all the ones that will poison me if I bite them, and all

the stains that won't come out – I had no idea the world was such a dangerous place to live in."

"That's Sadie's world," Mrs. Fairleigh said; "but I'm sure Nellie prefers it to ours."

"I do too," Amy said; "even now; and I'm sure my childhood must have been terribly flat; that's another thing I've been learning."

The difference between Nellie's outlook and her own surprised her continually. She wondered what would become of Nellie when she grew up. "Did you have a nurse like Sadie when you were little?" she asked Maury.

"More than one of them; I had a whole series of Sadies, as I remember it. I wonder what you think of her – the generic Sadie – as an institution? Would you choose her as the closest companion for, say, your brother's children? Do you remember some poet writing about his nurse – she happened to be white – and calling her his second mother, his first wife? It's an intimate relationship, you know."

"And of course they are the first teachers, too," Amy said. "Nellie has been taught the most astonishing things. I was wondering at what age children who have had Negro nurses begin to outgrow it – their influence, I mean."

"I don't know when they begin; I know they never end by doing it. I sill cringe before a lot of things that you have always thought of as perfectly innocuous. And on the other hand I dare say you have lions in your path that my Sadies taught me how to settle with in my infancy."

"What were some of them?"

"Oh, various kinds of scruples – ethical I suppose you would call them. Suppose you don't make me testify out of court this way? I don't want you to learn too much

about us. You might start criticizing other things besides the way we write poetry." Maury looked at her, noticing with deepened amusement that she had missed the point, such as it was, of his answer. He had discovered before this that she frequently missed points, and even answers, because her mind was still back with some earlier aspect of the subject. He knew she had a sense of humor; Amy was too intelligent not to see the funny side of things; but it was not what she saw first, and she was not going to let herself be light-hearted over anything until whatever serious claims it might have on her had been disposed of. This attitude, for some reason, made him want to be as trivial as possible. It was the way Nellie made him feel – or would, if she turned up with all that erudition. Speaking of early influences – that's what they had done for her. He began wondering when she was likely to outgrow John.

Those twenty-three years that had been so negligent of Amy had rendered a stricter account where Maury's appearance was concerned. It would have been difficult for anyone not knowing him in the boyhood he had left so short a way behind him to imagine him as eagerly, impetuously young. The charm of youth, so much of which is promise and so much more uncertainty, hung about him nowhere; but even those who remembered it could scarcely have regretted its departure. His good looks were those of maturity; his voice, less animated now, was more assured, with a hopeful lightness sometimes at variance with the words, and his smile, even when delayed, was rewarding.

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Sadie lived "on the place"; which was to say she did not sleep under the same roof with the family who claimed her waking hours, but in a small house on the other side of the cow lot. The house had only two rooms, but since her family consisted only of herself and Willy Ed, her son, there was no reason why it should have more. Servants were supposed to live within calling-distance, and Sadie's house was easily that, but calling her was seldom necessary because as a rule she had already come, and calling Willy Ed was, as everybody knew, to call in vain.

Nellie had none the less been doing it, one afternoon when she had come home from school to find her mother gone in the barouche to make a visit and Sadie and the two younger children gone with her for the ride. That left only Amy for her to fall back on, and Amy, reading by the fire in the dining-room, did not seem to promise much as a source of entertainment, though she closed her book when Nellie came in and sat down and began to speak her mind on the subject of Willy Ed.

"But couldn't you tell his mother –" Amy ventured, when the subject had been pretty thoroughly gone into.

"Sadie is helpless where Willy Ed is concerned," Nellie informed her. "She simply adores him, and besides she raised him that way."

"Not to answer?"

"I mean to not be there. He is always gone off somewhere with his friends – fishing mostly, or shooting craps."

"Maybe Sadie was too busy raising you and Bobbie and Binkie to have much time for Willy Ed," Amy suggested.

"And now I suppose it's too late; he's grown now, isn't he?"

"I think he must be," Nellie said. "He's been the size he is now for a long while. Momma's mad at him too," she went on, "because he has practically quit weeding in the garden. Have you been out there lately? You never saw so many weeds since you were born."

Nellie expressed herself strongly on all subjects because to her they all seemed worth it; the red bows that tied her short plaits bobbed on her shoulders as she listed Willy Ed's shortcomings. She had none of her mother's blond loveliness, but her little face under the dark bang that fringed it had other ways of pleasing, and the dimples of its lighter moments left nothing to be desired.

"What did you want with Willy Ed?" Amy asked her.

"To crack me some walnuts. I thought if you would help me we could make some candy, now while there isn't anybody in the kitchen. Georgie is so apt to be cross. She's about the crossest cook we've ever had."

"Can't we crack them?"

Nellie shook her head. "You mash your fingers every time. You have to hold them on their side when you hit them, like this – or they don't come out right. They are not a bit like bought walnuts; they are the kind that grow on trees."

"Oh –" Amy said, feeling ignorant.

"I don't suppose there's anything much we can do till they come back." Nellie drooped a little in her chair, her bows hung dejectedly; then: "Listen!" she said, pricking them up again. "There's somebody now! I hear the water running in the kitchen."

When she opened the kitchen door, Willy Ed was standing by the sink drinking from the tin dipper, swal-

lowing fast, the way a dog does. He looked as if he had been running.

"Momma ain't here, is she?" he asked.

"She's gone for a ride in the barouche," Nelly told him, "I've been calling you to crack me some walnuts so I can make some candy before they get back."

Willy Ed hung the dipper back under the sink. "I ain't got time to do it now, Miss Nellie," he said. He turned to pick up his hat from a chair near the outside door and she saw as he reached for it that the cuff of his ragged sleeve was bloody.

"Have you hurt yourself?" she asked him.

He did not answer. He gave her a quick look and began turning the cuff in as he moved toward the door. "When Momma comes, tell her I'm gone," he said.

"Gone where?" Nellie asked him. "What's the matter, Willy Ed?"

He turned back into the kitchen. "Miss Nellie, could you let me have a little change?" he said. "As much as a dollar if you'se got it. Momma'll pay you back when Sat'day come. Git it for me quick, please, ma'm."

Nellie hesitated. "I'll see," she said.

Eighty cents was all she could find in the little box in the hall-table drawer, but even so, she didn't like to hand it over with such slight knowledge of the use to which it was to be applied. What it really amounted to, she reminded herself, was taking Sadie's wages and turning them over to Willy Ed, to get himself out of whatever scrape he had got into. Crap-shooting and perhaps a fight were the two most likely of a number of predicaments with which Willy Ed had made her familiar beyond her years.

He was standing by the stove eating a corn muffin when she went back. He took two more from the warmer and put them, with the nickels and dimes she handed him, in the pocket of his blue cotton pants. "Thank you, ma'm," he said, and was gone.

Nellie went back to the dining-room, eager to relate this new development in delinquency, but Amy had gone upstairs; again she had to sit down and wait. This she did so much against her inclination that if she had been told something could happen in the few minutes before Amy came down again to drive Willy Ed and his behavior completely out of her mind, she would certainly not have believed it. Yet she only had time to poke the fire and look up again at the clock, when the sound of wheels sent her flying to the door, and the sight of what the barouche contained, over and above the family personnel, was enough to make her forget everything that had ever happened in the world before. For there, asleep in Bobbie's arms, was a curly puppy. Those were the days when puppies were given away gladly and as gladly received. Children visiting a house that had been visited with puppies were seldom permitted to go home empty-handed. While Mrs. Fairleigh was calling in the parlor, Bobbie and Binkie, in other regions, had discovered and been discovered by the puppies, and when their mother next beheld them they had, advised by Sadie, already made their choice.

It was this turn of events that kept anybody from hearing about what had taken place in the kitchen until some days later, when it was again brought to Nellie's mind by having a new light turned on it.

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Another thing Amy wanted to see because her father had told her about it was the slave settlement of Nashoba. She had brought a book about it from his library, and had gone on wanting to see it even after everybody told her there was nothing there – not a stick nor a stone to show that such a settlement had ever existed.

"But you do know where it was, don't you?" she asked Maury. "You can find it, can't you?" She had already asked him if he would take her some day, if it was not too far, and this was the day; whether it was too far or not was now under consideration. They had come to the place where they would have to leave their horse and buggy and take to the woods, Maury told her; he knew that much anyhow.

"Is the weather always like this in November?" she asked, stopping to look up through the red boughs of an oak tree to the cloudless sky above them. "I like it better than anything I ever imagined. When are your 'melancholy days'?"

"Look – that must have been somewhere near the settlement," Maury said. He was pointing to the glint of water through the trees.

"I didn't know it was on the river," Amy said.

"It was in a swamp. That's a cypress lake over there. Maybe your book says something about it." He took it from her and began turning the pages as they walked. "But isn't it beautiful!" she exclaimed when they came out on the still, dark expanse of water lying there, so unreasonably, it seemed to Amy, reflecting those unreasonable trees. "They don't look like trees at all, Why do

they go up forever that way, before they begin branching out?"

"Because God planted them for telegraph poles," he said, still looking in the book. "The annexed plate gives a faithful view of the cleared space and buildings which form the settlement," he read. He turned the page and scrutinized the pallid little woodcut: a few log houses, innumerable stumps, a rail fence zigzagging into the distance, and a human figure or two in the foreground. "So that's Nashoba in its prime," he said. "I like it better the way it is now, don't you?" He glanced at the scene before them, and at Amy, who did not answer, and returned to the book.

"Let's sit down," she said, after looking around her for a while; "if you want to read."

"I beg your pardon!" He closed the book. "I was getting interested. Suppose we untie that boat and row over to the little island yonder – if it is an island; pretty, anyway; looks rather like a ship, doesn't it, with the trees rising straight up from it that way?"

"Do you suppose they had to cut down trees like that?" she asked him – "for the settlement, I mean."

"To make the stumps? I shouldn't be surprised. It takes work to make things look the way they do in that picture. Ugliness is as hard to create under some conditions as beauty is. And it's almost always the first 'improvement' we put in; it follows – it really precedes – civilization."

"I never thought of that before," Amy said.

"Well, think of it now. 'Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness!' The man who wrote that – who was he, by the way? – probably never thought of it either. He was

a poet, presumably, and not a woodcutter, but unless he was planning to lodge in a tree, or under it, the first thing he would have to do would be to cut it down."

Amy smiled – a thing she did not always do when he expected it. He had untied the rope that was looped around the root of a tree and pulled the boat in to the bank where he could step aboard. "Nice of them to leave the oars, along with these other conveniences." He pushed the empty bait cans and remnants of fishing tackle under the seat and held up his hand to Amy, glancing a little doubtfully at her flounces. "It's muddy, but the mud seems to be dry," he told her. "Hop in."

The island, which was less than a stone's throw away, turned out to be not an island but a narrow spit of land running out into the middle of the shallow lake, with a flat, sandy shore where the boat could be pulled up, dry enough to sit on. "You'll find this an exceedingly comfortable handkerchief," Maury said, spreading his down for her; "and now let's see what the book says about the lady who ran this little Nashoba enterprise – Miss Frances Wright. You say your father knew her; was that when she was here?"

"No; much later – in Paris; after all this had failed. She was old when my father knew her, but he said she was still handsome, and one of the most brilliant women he ever met. He was always very much in sympathy with her idea for freeing the slaves. He thought if people had only listened to her the war could have been avoided."

"What was her idea – in a nutshell, if you can give it to me that way? To buy them, I suppose – to beg, borrow, or steal them, and set them free out here in the woods? Rousseau's noble savages! Can't you see them!"

Amy apparently could not. "Why is it funny?" she asked, not as if she were offended, but as if she wanted to know.

"Because it's so incongruous – the whole thing. You say – this book says – she was not only highly educated but had all sorts of social distinctions: court society, a protégée of Lafayette, and goodness knows what. Doesn't it seem funny to you for her to be over here trying to do anything of any description in a place like this?"

"Even good? Oughtn't we to try to do that, no matter where?"

He shook his head. "Not that far from home. She was too far from where she belonged. How much good would you expect a fish to do if you took it out of water? I'm glad to hear she got back to Paris in the end. And Nashoba got back to nature; its nice to see that too.

"But I don't believe you think so," he went on, after waiting for her to speak. "I really believe you'd rather see it the way she had it. Maybe you are just a tourist at heart, in spite of being a reformer. Tourists are the real conservatives, you know; somebody has pointed that out. They want things left the way they were, for them to look at: ghettos and arenas – the Bastille and Bedlam –" He saw she was not listening.

"I was wondering," she said, "what difference you make between one way of helping people and another. You wouldn't want them to be kept ignorant, no matter where they were, and what is the difference between teaching them and improving them in other ways?"

"Reforming them, do you mean? There's not as much difference as there ought to be, I'm afraid – the way we teach. Education gets terribly mixed up with phi-

lanthropy. But I don't think either of them should be administered indiscriminately."

Amy thought this over. "You think charity not only ought to begin at home, but stay there," she said.

"Say end there. How are you going to confer a real final benefit on anybody unless you know something about him? I heard a man say once – he was running for office, but it's an idea all the same – that he considered it too big a risk to try to do good, or even harm, to his 'fellow man'; it was only when he did it to Bill or Henry that he knew what he was doing. He thought that both justice and mercy ought to be tempered with familiarity." Maury laughed. "He was joking, Miss Amy," he said.

"But still, what he was advocating would be partiality, wouldn't it? Oughtn't there to be such a thing as abstract justice?" Amy asked.

"For an abstract community – Miss Wright's Nashoba, for instance. It would be fine for a place like that; it's unwieldy, though, for the kind of places most of us live in. I'm talking about down here, of course."

"You sound so – so feudal," Amy said.

Maury looked at her with interest. "Perhaps I am: I believe the walled-town idea always has appealed to me. You see, Miss Amy, you have always lived in cities; you probably don't know very much about the kind of landlocked little places we have, here in the South. They are not small because they are young; most of them are fairly old, and will very likely never be much bigger than they are now. Whatever vitality they have goes into a sort of blind resistance to change."

"But is that right – is it possible to begin with – for places, or people either, not to change? I don't mean

grow bigger, but in other ways. I remember reading somewhere that being in time is like being in the ocean: we have to keep swimming in some direction or we go down."

"Where is down? That might be a direction too," Maury said, smiling. "Exploring the bottom might not be a bad idea. Not that I'm advocating pearl-diving for the people around here –"

Amy did not say anything.

"I expect you wonder what I am advocating," he began again after a while. "I know how narrow it must seem to you – the way we live, the things we are interested in, and manage to keep on being interested in – I suppose the only worthwhile attribute an ingrowing community ever does develop is a sort of social cohesion; and even that has a bad side as well as a good one. It's hard to define, too: at its best you might call it loyalty – not so much to each other as to the established claims we all recognize. A code, I suppose it amounts to – the values we would prefer to live by – or to hang by, as the case might be. But changing the subject – is that a man over there on the far bank sitting by a stump, fishing? Or are you near-sighted too?"

"Where?" Amy asked him.

"Watch – I'm going to skip this rock – not close enough to scare the fish, if there are any, and if that's what he's doing –"

"And if he is a man," Amy said, watching. "Of course he is! Why didn't we notice him sooner?"

"I've been noticing him all the time; it was when I noticed that he wasn't moving that I began to wonder about my eyes. I'm wondering now if he's gone to sleep over there."

"Skip another rock," she suggested; "closer this time. Let me see if I can do it."

She saw that she couldn't; but Maury's accurate missiles met with no more response from the figure by the stump than her scattered shots. "Let's let him sleep, then," she said, and turned her attention once more to the trees. "They are like a cathedral, aren't they? They give me the same feeling I used to have sitting in churches waiting for John to make sketches and measure things. I used to get terribly sleepy; I would look up into the vault and imagine what it would be like if he went home and left me there all night. You can make yourself feel ever so much more lost, looking up with something between you and the open sky."

"Do you like to feel lost?"

"If I'm sure of being found. But maybe we ought to be going. Look where the sun is."

Maury pulled out his watch. "It isn't late. The days are just so much shorter."

"What are those enormous birds over there?" she asked presently. "Eagles?"

Maury laughed. "No; the *Aquila americana* is not a resident of our swamps; they are just turkey buzzards."

"They must have a nest in one of those trees," she said, watching their slow circles over the denser growth of vines and branches that edged the shore on the other side of the lake. "Do you remember that line in Dante about the doves? Italian ought to be easy for you to understand, with all the Latin you know – and French."

"I remember the line you mean, in English, but I'm afraid it isn't their 'sweet nest' that is drawing those birds. It's more apt to be something like dead fish."

"Oh –" she said, continuing to watch them. Maury watched them too.

"Perhaps it is about time we were going," he said after a few minutes, standing up rather suddenly and holding his hands down to her.

He had pushed the boat out into the water, and Amy, her skirts furled about her ankles, was stepping into it when she unexpectedly drew back. "Maybe you ought to row over there and see about that man," she said. "Somehow I hate to go off and leave him asleep in a place like that. He might be sick or something."

"The chances are he's drunk," Maury said. "And anyhow he's not our man. Don't you think I'd better take you on home?"

She shook her head. "It won't take but a minute," she said.

He did not go all the way. She saw him turn the boat before he got to the bank and start back without saying anything to the man.

"He's all right" he said, bringing the boat in to where she stood. "Flop in. I expect we ought to hurry a little"

They were only a few minutes rowing back and tying up the boat again, but he noticed that she hardly spoke at all. "Tired?" he asked her as they started across the strip of wood to the road where they had left the horse and buggy.

"No," she said. "I am just wondering what you ought to do – what you would do if I were not along."

"About what?"

"Didn't you turn back that way because you saw he was dead?" she asked him. She looked a little pale but quite composed. "What do you think had happened to him?"

"Somebody had killed him – stabbed him," Maury told her. "He was sitting up that way because he was propped against the stump. The first thing we ought to do is to get word to the sheriff."

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"Amy has gone for a drive with Mrs. Peters and Virginia," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "She is tremendously in demand, Maury – since yesterday. Everybody wants to hear about her adventure, and she doesn't seem to mind talking about it in the least. Isn't it nice for her to be so calm about it? All the same, I'm glad the paper didn't say anything about her being there; they have such a way of finding out things; I hope they won't get her into it in any way."

"Would she mind that, do you think?" Maury asked.

"I would mind it. I don't know what her brother is going to think about it as it is, and if he saw her name in the papers –"

"I don't imagine there will be anything more about it," he said. "Apparently it was just two darkies fighting over a crap game; the dice were still lying there on the ground. They must have been over there fishing, and the one who did the killing probably came back in that boat we borrowed; just tied it up to the bank and took to his heels. With a head start like that, my guess is they will never even pick up the scent, much less catch him."

"Well, it was a dreadful thing for a girl to be brought in contact with," Mrs. Fairleigh said – "any way you look at it."

"I went back after I brought Miss Amy home," Maury said. "I drove out with the sheriff."

"But wasn't it night by that time?" she said with a little shiver.

"The moon was just coming up – enormous; and seen through the trunks of those trees – I thought of you," he said; "I almost wished you could be there. I don't believe you would have minded any of it. From where I sat – right where we were yesterday – watching those boats go by with lanterns tied to them, and listening to the oars, was really an impressive sight; like the crossing of the Styx. He made a classic exit, after that last throw of the dice, whoever he was."

She was listening, with the far look he knew. "It sounds like something in a dream," she said. "I'm so glad you saw it, Maury – after seeing the buzzard part of it. I wish Amy could have seen it too."

Maury did not say anything. "But I'm afraid," she went on, "if they let it all quiet down before they find whoever it was that killed him, she's going to mind that more than anything. She thinks we are taking it too much as a matter of course already."

"Very likely," he said. "When it comes to the administration of justice, Miss Amy is of the line and plummet persuasion; she was telling me about it yesterday. But I'm afraid she isn't going to get much satisfaction out of the Nashoba business; from all I can learn, the scent is cold. It seems the victim was a boy from another county – just stopping over long enough to get killed, presumably – and his friends and relatives so far have not rallied to avenge him. Leaving it for Miss Amy, I suppose."

Mrs. Fairleigh laughed. A thing did not have to be strictly humorous to provoke that light ripple of sound that never interrupted conversation; not even what she was saying herself. “Still, you have to admire the way she is taking it; so quietly and yet so seriously. And it is serious; it’s murder – in a way. We are just used to certain kinds of lawless behavior; I believe we aren’t ever surprised at it unless it gets out of what we consider its proper class. Her point of view is much more logical, and we ought to let her keep it as long as she can. It goes so well with youth to be logical.”

But in spite of being relegated to its proper class, the Nashoba business was slated to intrude once more upon the social scene. On the next afternoon, when Sadie and the children were in the front yard, a buggy drew up at the gate, from which the sheriff descended. Leaving the man who was with him in charge of the horse, he sauntered up the drive, glancing casually about him, then walked across the grass to where the children were playing with the puppy. “How long have you had him?” he inquired, snapping his fingers and getting them licked in return.

He addressed his question to Bobbie; Nellie was in the swing, a little way off, and Sadie had already turned toward the house, leading Binkie by the hand. “Wait a minute,” he said to her; “I want to talk to you.” Sadie came back.

“It’s about that boy of yours,” he said. “They tell me he hasn’t been seen around here lately. Sick or something?”

“No, sir, not as I knows of,” Sadie said. “Willy Ed ain’t been here for about a week now. I ain’t seed him since las’ Thu’sday.”

"Not worried about him?"

"No sir, I ain't worried. He's 'bout gone down to Mississippi where his auntie lives. What you want him for, Mr. Perry?"

"I heard he'd been in a fight. I thought I'd come by and see if he was laying over here hurt or something. That's all," he said, turning his attention to the swing. "Mother home, young lady?"

"I'll see," Nellie said politely, sliding out and leading the way to the house.

"It's Mr. Perry, Mamma," she announced as Mrs. Fairleigh came out on the porch to meet them, "He wants to find out where Willy Ed has gone." Then, since Mr. Perry was invited in and she was not, she went back to the swing. Bobbie and Binkie and the puppy were still there, but Sadie had gone.

"If I were you," Judge Fairleigh told his wife at dinner that evening, "I wouldn't start worrying about how you are going to get him off, until after they have caught him. Being sure he's the one they want doesn't make it any easier to find him, you know."

Mrs. Fairleigh said: "Poor Sadie!"

"She'd be a lot better off if she never laid eyes on him again," Judge Fairleigh said. "And so would we all, for that matter. Isn't that so, Miss Amy? Suppose we talk about something else at the table, anyway."

They did talk of something else while Georgie changed the plates and brought in the dessert. Then Nellie, looking up from her apple dumpling, said suddenly: "What day was it we got the puppy?"

"Wasn't it Friday?" her mother said. "Just a week tomorrow. Why?"

"Because I forgot to tell you Willy Ed was here that day," Nellie said; and having thus taken her story firmly by the middle, she went on after the usual method of childhood to develop it from both ends, interrupted but not diverted by the questions of her elders.

"We must tell Sadie," her mother said when she had finished. "Are you sure he didn't leave any other message for her, darling? Was that the only thing he told you to tell her – that he was gone? We must go tell her right away."

"And who is going to tell Mr. Perry right away?" Judge Fairleigh inquired. "We'd like to know that, wouldn't we, Miss Amy?"

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When Nellie and her mother went upstairs to tell Sadie, they found her still rocking Binkie to sleep. They knew he must be nearly off because she was singing so low, and just as they tiptoed in she carried him over and deposited him in his crib. Sadie was rather tall; she was thin too, and dark, and had, not only when she was with the children but all the time, the worn and patient look of a Madonna carved in wood with some ancient tool that made no lines, only hollows. "Sadie always looks sad," Mrs. Fairleigh had remarked many times, and it seemed strange to her, for in the children's company she was consistently amusing; she could set the nursery in a roar with no effort at all, not even the effort of a change in her expression. But now it changed: it was a surprising thing to see the light that came from somewhere and broke on Sadie's face as she finally grasped the full implication of Nellie's story and realized that Willy Ed, for whatever crime pursued, was so many days ahead of his pursuers.

"Thank the Lawd for that," she said, still in a low voice on account of Binkie, but with great fervor. "I made sho' he wasn't hidin' aroun' here like Mr. Perry said he

was. I spec' Willy Ed's 'bout 'cross the state of Arkansas by now. Mr. Perry an' them ain't goin' to lay eyes on that boy no mo'. Thank you, honey, for tellin' me." She put her hand on Nellie's hair in a caressing gesture that changed, from force of habit, into straightening her bows.

"It's such a relief!" Mrs. Fairleigh said to Maury. "And now if you can only fix it somehow so it won't look quite so bad to Amy! – No, don't laugh, Maury; I'm in earnest."

"That's why I'm laughing," he said. "What do you want me to say to her?"

"Explain it to her that being on the side of justice – she calls Mr. Perry that – wouldn't help him one bit in this case and would only worry Sadie. Show her what a mistake it would be to get everything all stirred up just for a matter of sentiment."

"Not of principle, by any means?"

"Either one you please – or she pleases," Mrs. Fairleigh laughed; "but if tomorrow is a pretty day, come and take her for a drive or something, can't you, Maury?"

He could, of course, and did, though it was not a pretty day, and certainly not with the idea of harmonizing Amy's interpretation of the law with any regional practices of which she disapproved. He was going to keep off that subject. Amy's theories seldom impressed him as being a fruitful seed of conversation; any girl, anywhere, with as bright a mind as hers, might be expected to formulate as good, or better. Her experiences, on the other hand, always entertained him, extending as they did so far beyond the boundaries of any he had ever imagined for himself; and to see the natural manner in which she

accepted her highly specialized upbringing entertained him still more.

"It seems to me you must have known just about all the famous people there are," he said to her once. "At least if they are famous enough for me to have heard about them. You have no idea how biographical you sound."

"Not known; just seen, in most cases," Amy said. "They wouldn't have wanted to know me; I was only taken along."

"By your father?"

"Or John. The wonderful thing is that they wanted to take me; most of the time I was so young."

"Well, don't forget any of it," he said, and made rather a point of reminding her of it afterward, when their conversation led in that direction. He reminded her again today, when the drive, much shortened by rain, was over and they were sitting comfortably by the fire in the parlor. "You really ought to write it down," he told her – "everything you remember about all these celebrities. But of course you have always taken such company for granted; you have no idea how remote and Olympian it sounds to me. What Emerson calls the defect of our too great nearness to ourselves is probably just as much of a defect in the case of other people – if we are too near to them. I expect you knew him too."

"Mr. Emerson? Father did." Amy had been looking at the fire, but she now turned her meditative gaze on Maury. "I believe he felt a little the way you do about things," she said.

"That might be because I've spent a good deal of my life trying to feel the way he did," Maury said. "Just what were you thinking of?"

"Well, for one thing, he didn't believe in what he calls miscellaneous charity – in 'loving people a thousand miles off,' as he says; and he talks about 'sitting solidly at home' and seeing what goes on everywhere else from his own standpoint. Isn't that the way you feel?"

"That's some of the way I feel," he said; "a part, you might say, of the way a man sets about making up his mind. You don't agree with Emerson?"

"John doesn't. About a lot of things; he admires the way he says them, though. John says it's amazing that what is so far from being true should be so luminous."

"True – in what sense?" Maury asked her. "Does your brother think Emerson's ideas are too transcendental, or just too optimistic – too hard to realize?"

"He says they are too easy to *think* we realize. John says most people have had to give up the idea that all they have to do is to just be themselves. I remember one lovely afternoon when we went out to Concord – a lovely day in autumn; you can imagine how peaceful everything looked – and John said that was at least one place where he could believe Mr. Emerson's philosophy. 'Why should I measure degrees of latitude, why should I count Egyptian years?' – do you remember that? Isn't it beautiful?"

"Beautiful. And don't you think such ideas are uplifting, even if they are only believable emotionally? After all, a large part of religion is like that –"

"But if you have to live in Concord or some other protected little place before they can have any meaning

for you at all?" she said. "John says in a place like Rome, for instance, where people have had to bear so much misery for ages and ages, those ideas would sound positively childish. And they would; even I can see that – like a child who has never been hurt. I'm sorry myself," she went on. "Anybody would like to believe those things; and of course I would have, if it hadn't been for Father and John."

Maury had listened with more interest than usual to this bit of reporting; not because John's ideas impressed him as forcibly as they did his sister, but because he realized better than he had done before how selective her intellectual development had been.

For rigorous teachers seized my youth
And purged its faith and trimmed its fire –

Her youth at the moment was very noticeable – sitting there in her dark red dress with a little white ruching under her round chin and her hair tied back with a ribbon, a good deal like Nellie's. Maybe she didn't have to do much thinking, with John to do it for her, and with a memory like that. She could just sit still and let her mind be formed by what went on around her – a little like Nellie too.

For some reason he took pleasure in making these comparisons; he might have gone on with them but for the arrival of Nellie herself, who came in just then with a plate of walnut candy. "Sadie cracked them and I picked them out," she said, offering it to Amy first.

"It's delicious!" Amy exclaimed, crunching down on her pice. "I never had any before."

"I knew you would like it." Nellie pulled up a little chair and sat down between them, for the convenience of further distribution. "Do you know," she said, addressing Maury, "I believe we get along just as well or better without Willy Ed? Even Sadie. For one thing, she don't have to be always apologizing for him any more; she can talk now like he had never been anything but good since he was born, and say things out of the Bible about him, the way they do in church. She was doing it all the while we were cracking the walnuts. She gets a lot more pleasure out of him than she used to when he was here."

Nellie's mind, it seemed, was being formed by what went on around her to accept an idea of considerable profundity. The obituary flavor of Sadie's conversation while cracking the walnuts had impressed her:

"The onliest son of his mother an' her a widder, jus' like the good book says, honey. You knows yo'self Willy Ed wa'n't no ninety an' nine black sheep; he was my one ewe lamb."

"Aunt Rita wants you to come to tea," Maury said as he was leaving. "She told me to ask you if you could come on Wednesday."

"Of course I can," Amy said. "I love going to tea. It's one of the things I miss the most when I am not in England."

"I'll tell her that," Maury said. "I think she's going to ask Virginia Peters," he added, taking his hat from the hall table.

"Lovely!" Mrs. Fairleigh exclaimed, coming downstairs when she heard the front door close; she had already heard the invitation from the upstairs hall. "But it won't be like an English tea; it will be more like supper. Miss

Rita has a party so seldom she doesn't want anybody to forget it."

"But is it going to be a party?" Amy asked. "Maury only said Virginia Peters –"

"Miss Rita will make it a party; you will see," Mrs. Fairleigh said.

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The lamp over the dining-room table pulled up and down like a well bucket, enlarging or diminishing the radius of illumination as one pleased. Miss Rita had pulled it low, so the corners of the room were in shadow and the table swam in light, reflected supernaturally back from her whitest tablecloth and her brightest spoons. The repast had moved from oyster bisque through chicken pie, and Amy, confronted now with wine jelly and coconut cream puffs, saw that it was not an English tea; the memory of scones and seed-cakes had been swallowed up. Still, there was tea; seated at the end of the oval table, Miss Rita had poured it from the white and gold teapot that had been Maury's grandmother's. Maury sat at the other end, and the two girls, one on either side, between. There was a very hot fire at Amy's back; Virginia had only the draft from the door on hers; but neither of them: minded. "Maybe you would like to change places before the dessert," Miss Rita had suggested, but they had not changed.

"What is the climate like in England?" she asked Amy. "A great deal of rain, I have always heard; and fog of course."

"Aunt Rita is giving you the climate in Dickens," Maury said. "There are brighter versions, I believe."

"It does rain a good deal, though," Amy said; "especially when you are visiting in the country and have no way to go home."

"But doesn't it usually do that everywhere?"

"Not as usually as it does in England," Amy said. "It's like the 'unusually usual grocer.' A friend of John's used to say he had even gone off in the baker's cart. That sounds like Dickens too, doesn't it? But he was real: Mr. Russell; we knew him in London."

Virginia Peters had not been interested in the English weather, but London reminded her of several things. "I suppose you have often seen the Queen," she said.

Virginia was now nineteen and a young lady not only in the sense of having beaux but in several other senses that have since vanished from the earth as beaux, except in name, have not: costume, for instance. There is nothing now that in the least resembles the silhouette Virginia's basque and bustle made, nor the attitudes imposed on her young limbs by those restraining garments, which must have had some reason of their own for being what they were, since there is none that can possibly be assigned to them. Superficially considered, she was in brown poplin with flounces; her hair, combed high and banged and curled, gleamed in the lighted circle. Amy, in her same red silk, looked very young indeed on the other side of the table.

They went across the chilly hall into the parlor, which was warm and glowing. Miss Rita's room had glowed too when the girls went up to take off their hats and cloaks and lay them on her wide white bed. Moving from

room to room in the winter at Cherry Station was a sort of Promethean progress: one was preceded by logs and coal-scuttles, by lamps and candles; all the instruments of fire; especially on hospitable occasions.

There was a lamp on the square piano, which stood open – another ceremonial gesture. "Maury has never told me whether you played," Miss Rita said to Amy. "I know Virginia does."

Amy, as it happened, didn't, and Virginia couldn't, very much, without her music; but she could play the accompaniment to things like *Flow Gently*, *Sweet Afton*, and *Bonnie Doon*, and sing them very sweetly. Miss Rita soon found it possible to slip out practically unnoticed and go back to the dining-room, where Maury's grandmother's teapot and various other things were waiting to be put away.

"Try some of Aunt Rita's songs," Maury suggested, bringing a bound volume and putting it up in front of Virginia. "There's sure to be something you know in all of these."

"When did she use to sing?" Virginia asked him, absently; she was turning the pages without recognition. "War songs. Did you ever see so many! – Here's *Kathleen Mavourneen*."

"Sing that," Maury said; he had gone back to his chair by the fire. But Virginia, with Amy looking over her shoulder, was still turning the pages. "*Unto the End*," she read; "Words from the Arabic" What an accompaniment! Do you suppose your Aunt Rita ever played this? Look, Amy –" she dropped her voice: there was something written in pencil under the florid lettering of the title; it was pale, but still legible: "*His song*." "Whose song, do you suppose?"

Virginia almost whispered, and anyway Maury was poking the fire. She tried the opening bars of the music, following the air with her right hand, following the words:

Unto the end, through a thousand kisses,
A thousand caresses, a thousand pains,
Till the roses of passion drop their petals
And only the perfume remains.

The echo she had wakened – or thought she had – from the past, from the Arabic – from the moon, as far as Virginia was concerned – stole through the room, perhaps for the last time, and stole away. Maury had poked the fire and was now looking into it, leaning forward, holding the poker still in his hand. He liked music to ramble on that way; it was nice to think by – to think of something else. Miss Rita, putting away the teacups and the spoons across the hall, was waking echoes of her own.

"Everything was perfectly lovely," Amy told Mrs. Fairleigh when she went home, "and I do like Maury's Aunt Rita – better and better all the time. She must be one of the Southern housekeepers I have always heard about. Isn't she rather famous?"

"She ought to be. Aren't they perfectly delicious!" Mrs. Fairleigh was eating one of the coconut cream puffs. "I wonder if I ought to eat another. It's a little late, I'm afraid." She glanced at the clock, putting the napkin back over the plate. "What did you do after supper? Miss Rita has some wonderful stories, if you can ever get her to tell them; exciting ones."

"Has she ever told you about what happened to her – what Virginia calls her romance?"

Mrs. Fairleigh shook her head. "I believe she doesn't ever talk about herself very much; not even to Maury."

"Virginia said it was something sad; tragic, she called it."

"Let's ask Virginia what she means by tragic," Mrs. Fairleigh said, smiling.

"Don't you suppose she means killed in the war?"

"Very likely. Did you ever think, Amy," she said, her eyes resting thoughtfully on Amy's face, "of how a war seems to stand as a sign – a sort of constellation of grief – for years and years after it happens? We think of it as representing all the troubles of a whole generation. And all the time there are so many other kinds of trouble that have nothing to do with war, even when wars are going on. Isn't it strange that anything as big as that should still not be big enough to drain off all the sorrow?"

Amy was listening. "But somehow I can't believe," she said after a while, "that Miss Rita's sorrow, whatever it was, has lasted all this time. She doesn't seem the least bit sad."

Mrs. Fairleigh smiled. "That is true," she said, getting up and taking the plate from the table. "I must put these away. I am so glad you like her, and I am sure she likes you or she would never have had the party."

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The Livingston place was occupied that winter for the first time since the yellow fever. It had not been for sale, or for rent – at least not publicly – and everybody hoped the Livingstons would be coming back. They had written now and then, from Louisville, where Mrs. Livingston's

family lived, to various friends in the neighborhood, always as if they meant to come home, but the place had remained shut up. Only about once or twice a year an agent or somebody would come to see about repairs. It was a one-story house and would probably for that reason alone be called a bungalow now, but it was called a cottage then – a white cottage with green blinds, and a trellis for a Maréchal Niel rose to climb on over the door – the kind of place that looks forlorn with nobody in it, and cheers up immediately as soon as the shutters are thrown open.

This had already happened, and smoke was rising from all the chimneys before anyone at Cherry Station even knew that tenants were expected, but even so, with nothing to go on, everybody was delighted; and when a dray loaded with boxes came along the road and turned in at the gate, those who saw it pass were conscious of a pleasant breath of expectation. An arrival of any kind was something to look forward to.

Nobody, however, happened to be looking when the actual arrival took place. A lady and gentleman, attended by a dog, were already in the house – or, strictly speaking, had been in it and come out again and were doing things in the yard – before anybody knew they were there. They must have come in a carriage, for no one had seen them get off the train, and it must have been late in the evening, since no one had seen the carriage. There they were, however, and seemingly quite at home, training the rose up on its trellis and throwing sticks for the dog: a white dog with black spots, of a breed hitherto unknown at Cherry Station.

Mrs. Williams, as the nearest neighbor – the Livingston place was up the road a little from most of the houses – was the first to go over in the name of friendliness, to proffer assistance and find out what was going on. It was astonishing, she reported, how little assistance they seemed to need; or, she might have added, how little she seemed to find out. Aside from the fact that their name was Cameron and that they had taken the house for the winter without knowing anything about it, or knowing the Livingstons either, Mrs. Williams learned practically nothing from this visit, nor from the two or three others she made within the next few days. Yet on the whole the impression she got was an agreeable one. They were nice young people, she told Mr. Williams; she could see that right away; and both very good-looking.

She could also see right away that they were from Cincinnati, because it was written on the packing cases that had come on the dray and been put on the porch until Mr. Cameron could unpack them. "Mostly pictures," she reported later when this had been done. "Oil paintings – a lot of them not even framed. Do you suppose they paint, themselves? That would account for him not being in any kind of business, wouldn't it?"

Mr. Williams didn't seem to know whether it would or not. His wife was beginning to suspect him of having sources of information concerning the Camerons that were independent of her own discoveries. "I believe if I were you I'd let them work things out to suit themselves," he said cheerfully. "You've sent them a cook and told them where you live, and told the milkman where they live – I don't see that there's very much more you can do."

Amy had wondered several times, and meant to ask, who lived in the white cottage. It was pretty, she thought, and looked more homelike – more like England, or at least New England – than the other houses at Cherry Station. She had already walked by it several times, in the early weeks of her visit, but never with anyone who could tell her about it. Never with anyone at all, in fact. She had discovered almost immediately that her pedestrian excursions were regarded locally as perhaps her most exotic preference. Walking just to be walking was held an irrational thing to do, and she found herself going about it as inconspicuously as possible.

She had walked considerably beyond the cottage, one still November afternoon, and had turned off the main road into a dusty wagon track, bordered with flaming sumac and sweet-gum bushes, that led across the fields. The sun had gone under a cloud or she would not have left the more shaded thoroughfare – the weather was still so warm. She would go as far as the one big tree she could see ahead of her – it was a walnut tree, Nellie could have told her – and then turn back. The air felt different, as if it might be going to rain.

She had noticed from the road a horse and a small vehicle drawn up under the tree; it would be a pony cart, she thought, if that were an English field; and as she came nearer she saw there was a lady sitting on the other side of it, painting. She was sitting on a folding stool with a portable easel in front of her and was working as rapidly as possible, looking up now and then at the sky, from which the light was being as rapidly withdrawn. Amy was not an artist, but she had been more than once as near as she was now to an artist in just this sort

of predicament, and not for the world would she have gone any nearer; she knew too well the value of those fleeting moments. She had already turned to go back when the lady called to her. “Could you help me just a minute, please?” she said without looking round as Amy approached. “If you would untie him, please, and turn the cart around. There is an umbrella under the seat. We are going to have to make a dash for it, I am afraid.”

The last strokes of her brush – whatever they amount to in such cases – were in this case already mixed with rain, and by the time everything was in the cart the downpour was upon them. Amy held the big red cotton umbrella with both hands; the artist held her picture with one of hers, the reins with the other, and the horse trotted back to the road. “That is where I live,” she said, with a motion of her head toward the white cottage. “I am Mrs. Cameron; I will take you home as soon as this is over.” The horse turned in at the gate.

The pleasure of that hour spent in the Camerons’ little parlor waiting for the rain to stop was greatly increased for Amy by the feeling of discovery that accompanied it: the discovery not of something new, but of something familiar in a new place. No doubt she would have said it seemed like home if that figure of speech had not been put a little out of reach for her by the circumstances of her life. As it was, she still managed to convey, in describing it to Mrs. Fairleigh, her delighted sense of recognition.

“Her pictures are good, too. She is the one who paints; Mr. Cameron writes. He knew a lot about John. Isn’t it wonderful for me to have met them – so completely by accident that way – and for us to have so much

in common?" Amy's cheeks were flushed and her eyes shining. She had not changed her wet shoes or even taken off her wet hat; she had just sat down in the chair nearest to Mrs. Fairleigh and begun the account of her adventure.

Listening was one of Mrs. Fairleigh's gifts. The look of sympathy and understanding that rarely left her face when she was being told things did not leave it now, though she was wondering what she was going to say when her own turn for telling came. It could not fail to be a shock, no matter what she said, for Amy to learn the truth about the Camerons. It was going to be a dreadful disappointment too, when she realized that in spite of all those nice things she had found out about them, it would be impossible for her to go on with the acquaintance. Fortunately she was too intelligent not to grasp the situation, once it had been made clear to her. So Mrs. Fairleigh reflected.

Amy's grasp of the situation did not, however, measure up to her expectations. Even after she had made it clear – or as clear as the situation itself permitted – she still looked bewildered. "But I don't understand," was all she said. al

"What, dear?" Mrs. Fairleigh asked her. "You don't understand what I mean by the relation between them being irregular – is that it? I mean they are not really married; at least so far as anyone –"

Amy made an impatient movement. "I don't mean that," she said. "I've known people before who were not married – the Seifferts; and Violet Dowson – Madame de Clermont everybody called her; nobody was unkind about it. And here you are all so sweet to each other, and

make excuses for everything – is it because they haven't been here long enough – because they are strangers –?"

"I hope not, Amy," Mrs. Fairleigh said seriously; "I truly believe not. Certainly it would be very wrong to make distinctions in anything as important as that – anything that affects the whole neighborhood –"

Amy was listening attentively. "But why does it, so much more than other things? Like Willy Ed, for instance, that nobody seemed to mind?"

"But that was different," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "I know there must be lots of things we do that seem to need explaining; I don't believe we can always explain them even to ourselves; and when it comes to the darkies, it's really better not to try. They are just a problem we have to settle the best way we can every time it comes up. But the Camerons – well, in the first place they are only here for a little while –"

"That's what I said," Amy began again; "it's because they don't belong here that you feel about them that way; you don't want to consider them even as a problem; if you did, you couldn't help seeing how nice they are, and how gifted and interesting – you'd have to add those things up in their favor, even if there were others you didn't like. But this way you just scratch them off and act as if they weren't there!"

"Let's think it over," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "Let me think it over and maybe I can explain better. I expect it is more because this is such a little out-of-the-way place –"

"That's what Maury always says; but he's really prouder of that than anything. It's the last thing he would ever want to change," Amy said. "And I as good as know, without asking him, that he thinks exactly as you do about the Camerons."

Mrs. Fairleigh rather hoped she wouldn't ask him, but she saw less reason to hope it every time she saw them together. She was pretty sure Amy was only waiting for an opportunity, or what she would consider one, to take him fully into her confidence on the subject, and she wondered with some amusement just how he would handle it. Marriage, either as a divine ordinance or as a human convenience, was not considered in those days a matter for abstract discussion between young ladies and gentlemen, who were expected to be of one mind to start out with on a subject of such profound significance, and could hardly express divergent views even if they held them, for the lack of a suitable vocabulary. Mrs. Fairleigh could not imagine Maury being Biblical or even legal about the Camerons; and it turned out, when Amy's opportunity arrived, that he didn't have to be.

"There is something I want you to explain to me," she said, putting down the book she had been reading while Judge Fairleigh talked to Maury about affairs at the office. He had stopped now and gone into his study and Mrs. Fairleigh was still upstairs with the children.

"Are you sure I can?" Maury said. "Then won't you at least sit in a bigger chair while I do it? It will make us both feel more important."

Amy was sitting in the child's rocker she often selected to get a better light on her book under the shaded lamp. She did not hear his suggestion, or at all events she disregarded it; she stayed right where she was and embarked on her subject, for which it had never occurred to her she would need a special vocabulary, or even a great deal of the one she ordinarily employed, there being in her eyes nothing in the position of the Camerons with which

some degree of familiarity was not to be assumed. It was the attitude of Cherry Station, of Mrs. Fairleigh, and very likely of Maury too, that she found anomalous and peculiar. "And it still seems to me," she said, summing it up, "that murder is a lot worse for any community than the Camerons are."

Maury's thoughts as he listened were divided between the pleasure he always felt in watching her talk and the irritation he was apt to feel at what she said. "And besides," she was saying now, "isn't it true that artists – I don't mean only painters, but any kind of artists – can't always be like other people? Lots of times you have to overlook things. I read somewhere that it was like taking the flame and leaving the ashes. We knew Renée Vivien in Paris – John did; I only saw her once; she is *too* lovely, and so gifted, but the strangest girl in the world. Do you know her poems at all? You have to take the flame in them too, it seems to me, and leave the rest. John says it doesn't matter what the subject was to start with, after it has been made music. Listen to this:

Ah! gardant la main sur nos paupières closes,
Rappelons en vain la douceur qui nous fuit!
Déese à qui plâit la ruine des roses,
Prolonge la nuit!

Could anything be lovelier than that?" Amy asked him.

He had a momentary impulse to tell her that nothing at any rate could be lovelier than the way she said it – the untroubled clearness with which she repeated the troubled lines. But, after all, were they intended to

be given, or received, like that? Was innocence any more admirable than other things in the wrong place? He could not imagine handling such poetry from such a distance. Where was she, anyway? In what remote region of the intellect had her twenty-three years gone off and left her?

"That's beautiful, Miss Amy," he said, "and I dare say you are right about artists being in a class by themselves. But, you see, in a place like this we hardly ever have an artist – of any description, and certainly never enough to rig up a class for them. That's the cosmopolitan idea, the enlightened idea – to get things put into classes; to get them tabulated, so they can be easier to handle. You say, for instance, 'artists do so and so,' or 'murderers are –' whatever you think they are. But we can't seem to do that. In the first place, it would deprive them of all interest for us, to lump them together that way. The only way we can keep up our interest in what goes on in a place like this is by making things as individual as possible; handling everything that comes up as an individual case and even giving it an individual name wherever we can. That way we naturally run into inconsistency, which is what you mainly accuse us of, I believe, but we keep out of a lot of other things that might be worse in the long run. Why don't you just 'observe' us, while you are down here, as you would any other obsolescent civilization, and then when you go home you can write us up? Don't you ever write anything yourself, instead of reading everything everybody else has written and learning it by heart?"

"But then I would certainly have to understand you better than I do now," she said, not smiling as he expected her to do.

"Are you sure you don't mean classify us – make *us* easier to handle? That is always the analyst's great temptation; but in this case it would be a great mistake. Once put us in with places and people already tabulated, and what becomes of the one thing that would make you want to write about us in the first place – which is, I take it, our unique behavior? Think about it, Miss Amy," Maury said.

She seemed to be thinking, keeping the little rocker very still, her hands in her lap. "I was wondering how you go about making everybody's behavior seem a special case," she said. "Is it by putting yourself in their place, like the man who said 'there but for the grace of God –'? But then you should be able to make more allowance for the Camerons. Or maybe you can't even imagine being in love with someone you had no right to be in love with – someone who was already married, for instance. Maybe that would seem wicked to you under any circumstances." She was looking up at him with candid eyes, her face in the full light of the low lamp. "I was wondering if you have ever been in love at all," she said.

"Do I have to answer that?" His own face was in shadow, but he smiled.

Amy shook her head. "I was just thinking maybe if you found you couldn't help feeling something, no matter how wrong it was –"

"Behavior is what we are discussing, though," he said; "the point where feeling gets outside of us and begins to affect others – gets to be a social matter."

"I know," she said; "the community. I believe you think of that as something you owe more to than you do to your own conscience."

"I think of it as something that demands a great deal less," he said. He looked at her thoughtfully. "Do you know, Miss Amy, I believe I'll surprise you; I believe I'll quote something to *you* for a change; something about behavior, about conduct – which really *is* a social matter, you know. This thing was written almost exactly three hundred years ago, and in my opinion it's still the perfect formula for any society: "The general end' – it was Edmund Spenser writing to Sir Walter Raleigh, in case you don't remember – 'The general end is to fashion a gentle or noble person, in gentle and virtuous discipline.' Is that too feudal? I don't want to go back where you can't even follow me."

He could see, however, that she did. "And after all," he went on, "the real starting-point of human history is the community. Until a man gets himself some sort of a social life, he is nothing but a biological specimen; the only thing he can do by himself is to just perish; but any group of people with twenty-four hours a day to spend in helping, or even hindering, each other, is sure to work up something interesting. And the longer the same ones stay together and do the same things over, the more interesting they ought to be – to themselves, anyway. That's the advantage of having a 'continuing city'; a man gets to know it and it gets to know him, and that way they shape each other up into something like an original creation – a social entity they can each fall back on. It is stronger, naturally, than they could be alone; and it could be beautiful too, if they really tried to make it so. But if we keep on the way we are going, diffusing ourselves in every direction with all this rapid transportation –"

"Railroads?" Amy asked him. "Do you mind them too?"

"I mind what they can do if we let them. Just think a minute what it will be like if everybody stops working on what he has already, and improving it and understanding it, because it is so easy just to leave it and go after something else! That way eventually everything would get to be replaceable; we could even replace each other by moving fast enough, I suppose."

Amy shook her head. "Not real friends. But of course there are lovely people everywhere, and I should think you would like to know the ones in other places too, besides the ones at home. Even if you didn't like them, they might like you," she said, smiling. "In Boston, for instance."

"But that's just the point," he said. "In Boston they wouldn't know whether they liked me or not, because there I wouldn't be the same person."

This time Amy laughed. "I suppose you haven't any idea that you might be an improvement," she said.

"But why should I care about improving a man in Boston? It's the one here I want to work on. It's because I realize what a lot I've got to do on him that I don't want to let him out of my sight."

They both thought this was amusing. The conversation had somehow wandered off from where it started and neither of them tried to get it back; but when Maury rose to go, Amy was again serious. "I have decided," she told him, "to really try while I am down here to see if I can understand you better. You seem to me entirely different from anybody I have ever known before."

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"I am going to try to persuade Amy to stay on until after Christmas," Mrs. Fairleigh said. She was sewing, as usual, and did not look up to see how Maury took this statement, nor did she give him time to say. "I see no reason why she should have to hurry back to that frozen Cambridge right in the middle of winter, just on account of John. He is old enough to hang up his own stocking; he seems to have pretty thoroughly stopped believing in Santa Claus anyway. I am sure she likes being here and we all love to have her; I don't know what the children are going to do without her when she does go; nor Ben either; he talks to her by the hour." She paused, but only to thread her needle; she had not come to the place where she would expect an answer. "The only thing I am doubtful about is you, Maury. I don't know whether you will feel you can go on helping me entertain her the way you have been doing."

She waited this time; she even looked up from her work; but Maury was silent, so she went on: "You mustn't think I don't appreciate it; I do, and so does Amy – subconsciously. She really just takes it for granted, I

suppose, as a part of her intellectual life – the life that must go on, in her case. She would miss it terribly though; and another thing I want to say is that talking to you has been extremely good for her; I really believe she is trying for the first time in her life to fit her ideas – John's ideas – all the ideas in all the books – into some form of human experience. She asks me questions that it never would have occurred to her to ask when she first came, and lots of times I can recognize a reference to something she has heard you say. She is wonderfully intelligent, Maury, and she is just at the point where John's influence ought to be undermined by somebody; she has been building on his ideas long enough; she actually believes that if she can get enough of them together they are all she is ever going to need to live by. Which is not true; we both know that, don't we? But I would like to have you think she was worth helping for her own sake, and not just to please me, Maury –"

She looked up again and encountered a smile. "You know what I think," he said.

This was not encouraging. She bit her thread off and turned the little sleeve she was making right side out again; then she laid it down and picked up the other one. "I wonder if I do know," she said in a low voice. "Sometimes I am afraid I do."

Bending over her work as she was doing now, she showed more than at other times the changes the years were making in her beauty. Maury saw the little lines about her eyes, which he never saw when they were open, the added fullness in the contour of her cheek and chin; but the beauty was still there, still shining. He watched her quick fingers at their mysterious movements, making

again his absent-minded effort to follow the part of the little gold thimble in the swift fugue, until presently she put down her work and raised her eyes to his.

"I am going to tell you something I have been thinking lately," she said – "about you and me and Davie – about that time when we went into what people call the shadow of death. I believe it was not a shadow; it was a light; I believe it showed us something we cannot quite remember – you and I, at least – but that we cannot forget; something beyond the scenery of the world. We are like travelers coming back with a secret. That is a terrible bond between us, Maury, and what I am afraid of is that you will let it hold you, just when you ought to be free. I am afraid it was that experience – believing as you do that it came through you – holding yourself responsible for all the loss – I am afraid it is that, Maury, more than anything, that makes you go on feeling this way – that your life is not your own, that it is somehow forfeited. I cannot let you go on; I cannot take your life, my dear; I want it to be yours. It must be yours or it cannot be rounded and perfect as it was meant to be; it cannot even be life if it is not free."

"And homeless?" he said, making an effort to be light. "What if you are offering me the freedom of the desert? I shouldn't like that, you know. And what about all the things I wouldn't be able to take with me? Have you thought of them? Suppose I left them on your hands for you to take care of – troublesome things like memories, and dreams, that would have to be watered and kept alive, unless you just wanted to let them die; and everything I have ever had with wings, or a voice – suppose I left them to come around your window and cry

in the night –" He stopped. "Don't you think it would just be better to let me stay where I can take care of them myself?" he asked her, smiling.

She had kept her eyes on him while she listened, but now she took up her work again.

"Of course I'll help you entertain Miss Amy," he said. "I'll even do what I can to undermine John, as you call it; though a lot of his ideas strike me as being very superior, even at second hand. Where is she, by the way?" He pulled out his watch. "We'd have time to go for a walk before supper."

"She and Nellie have already gone for one," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "I heard them say they were going as far as the bridge. You might go and meet them – no, there they come now."

Maury watched them through the window as they cut across the lawn to the side door, swinging a basket between them; they had been gathering something. Nellie was conversing violently, Amy listening. They put the basket down on the porch and came in, rosy with the windy afternoon.

"It's getting colder and colder every minute," Nelli said. "We ran part of the way." She sat down on a stool at the corner of the hearth and stuck her stout little shoes into the fireplace, where Maury had begun heaping on more coal. "I bet Miss Amy doesn't think it's cold," he said.

"Let's feel her hands" – Mrs. Fairleigh took the one nearest to her and drew Amy down onto the arm of her chair. "As warm as toast!" she said, smiling up at her.

"Have you been reading, or just talking?" Amy asked them. "You looked so solemn when we came in."

"We were talking," Mrs. Fairleigh said, "and we *were* solemn. I was telling Maury about that dreadful idea you have of going home before Christmas. We were conspiring against it."

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Since Amy had begun taking walks to the bridge and back, she no longer lacked a companion. Nellie loved the bridge, which was an old-fashioned covered one, full of mysterious shadows at all times and, as soon as they entered it, of mysterious sound. In this tunnel Nellie's conversation echoed back at her as from a well, and thunder attended her footfalls when she ran. She made a point of galloping back and forth across it several times while Amy was walking once. The Loosahatchie River, visible between the boards, was an inconspicuous little yellow stream, with no reason for being there that anyone could see; and yet, as rivers have a way of doing, it constituted a boundary, not only for their walks; the land on the other side of it was different in character – lying lower, stretching into another distance, shining in another light. Seen from the hooded darkness of the bridge, the fields beyond were illuminated by contrast even when there was no sun; even in the late afternoon, which because of Nellie's school was their usual hour for walking. Some Saturday they planned to start earlier and cross over to the other side, where the road led on invitingly between the fields – a dirt road, springy and delightful in this season between dust and mud.

The only house they could see was a little log one with a sagging roof, hardly to be called a house at all,

at least with any reference to human habitation; so Amy thought, but found again, as she so often did in Nellie's company, that she was mistaken, "Aunt Mittie lives there," Nellie said. "Don't you see the smoke coming from the chimney?"

Amy had first to see the chimney, which was small and not easily distinguishable from other irregularities in the outline of the roof. There was indeed a little wisp of smoke ascending from it into the still air: a sign of life too faint, it seemed to her, to guarantee Aunt Mittie's existence. Could it hang by that tenuous blue thread? "Who is Aunt Mittie?" she asked.

For once Nellie was caught without an answer; she didn't know who Aunt Mittie was. "I mean what does she do?" Amy explained. "Who takes care of her? Is she old?"

"Older than anybody you ever saw in your life," Nellie said. "She's at least a hundred, and there doesn't anybody take care of her. She just lives there by herself. We can go to see her some time if you want to; Mamma sends her things. The most interesting thing about her is the parrot."

"The what? Do you mean a real parrot – a bird?" In the matter of natural history Amy had learned to be on her guard.

"Are there some other kinds?" Nellie inquired with interest. She went on to describe Aunt Mittie's, which was the only specimen she knew and which seemed to Amy to conform essentially to the prevailing idea. "His name is Dan," Nellie said. "He can talk when he wants to. Some of it you can understand, but a lot of it you

can't. The man who owned him died. That was when they had the yellow fever, you know."

"Who was the man?" Amy asked.

"He was a peddler – that goes around selling things. He had all kinds of little statues, animals and angels and things like that; made out of plaster and painted to look real. He carried them on a flat board on his head, and when he got the yellow fever and Aunt Mittie found him lying down there by the road in front of her house, the board was lying there with all the statues sitting up on it, and Dan was sitting right in the middle of them, without moving, so she thought he was a statue too, and it almost scared her to death when she saw he was alive. She's got the statues too; they are on her whatnot; you can see them when we go. I think Saturday would be a good day because then we can stay a long time. Sometimes you have to wait for Dan to get in a good humor for talking."

The interior of Aunt Mittie's house turned out to be as different as possible from anything Amy had prefigured. Coming into it out of the sunshine of a bright afternoon, it was difficult at first to distinguish anything, even Aunt Mittie herself, though she was tall and quite at variance with the troglodyte one might have imagined as the suitable inhabitant of such a dwelling. There was nothing primitive about Aunt Mittie; she was stately; and her dwelling, once the eyes became accustomed to its general dimness, revealed all the marks of civilization – of everybody's civilization for miles around. Piled in the corners and hanging on the walls of its one long room were the innumerable objects discarded from other people's rooms, of which she had been through her long

life the grateful recipient. Never, Amy was sure, unless in a museum, had so much been brought together in so small a space before. Her roving gaze was encountered by the steady glare of a bearded gentleman on the wall, life-size in crayon and elaborately framed; by the glint of a metal coffee-urn on the shelf above the fireplace where the vestal flame was burning; by other objects bright and dark, so surprising in themselves and so surprisingly out of place that the parrot, when she finally saw him, gleaming like an emerald on the back of a red plush rockinghair, seemed no more unlikely than he had a right to be.

"Mamma thought you would like sausage better than any other part of the pig because it's easier to eat," Nellie was saying. She had already done the honors, presenting Amy to Aunt Mittie, presenting, too, the basket her mother had sent, whose contents were now the subject of her conversation. "That's salmon in the can, and the cake is some left over from Bobbie's birthday. He was four this time. You would be surprised to see how much he has grown."

"I spec' I would," Aunt Mittie said, and added: "Sech a see as it is." She was calmly taking stock of the articles enumerated by Nellie; doing it with her hands even more than the dimness of the room seemed to warrant; and Amy, who was already casting about in her mind for the meaning of her last remark, came to the conclusion that Aunt Mittie must be nearly blind. She waited for her to turn her face toward the window, and saw that both her eyes were clouded over – by old age presumably, though Amy didn't think she looked a hundred, as she had been informed was the case. She was taller than the other

Negroes she had seen, and darker; Aunt Mittie was really black – especially with that white cloth pinned about her head. There was something rather awe-inspiring about her, Amy thought.

Not to Nellie though. "Dan looks like he's mad about something. Do you reckon it's us?" she inquired. "I wanted Miss Amy to hear him talk, but he won't do it if he's mad, will he? Do you suppose if we gave him a little piece of the cake –"

Aunt Mittie went over to the plush rocking-chair and extended a gaunt wrist to the parrot, which very deliberately stepped aboard of it, as if embarking for a journey. "I'll jus' walk him aroun' a little," she said. "You's g'wine to talk for 'em, ain't you, sugar?" Her voice was deep, and the parrot now began, even more subterraneously, to mutter his responses to her cajolements.

"I spec' he's 'bout ready now," she said after a turn or two among the rocks and reefs of her apartment, bringing up between the little window and the chairs where the visitors were sitting, so that the parrot, still on her arm, could have the benefit of whatever light her Nottingham lace curtain permitted to enter. "Tell the lady what yo' name is," she began.

"*Dan*-te *Dan*-te *Dan*-te," repeated the bird emphatically.

"Then it's Dante, and not Dan," Amy said. "Was he named that when he came?"

"That's all he ever call hisse'f," Aunt Mittie said. "I spec' he's 'bout tryin' to say Dan. Ax the lady don't she want to kiss you, sugar," she now suggested; whereupon the parrot surprisingly uttered a peal of inhuman laughter and began shrieking: "Kiss me, kiss me," in a swift

staccato that sent Nellie into giggles of delight. "Make him do it again, Aunt Mittie," she said when he desisted, "please make him!"

Aunt Mittie repeated the request, but this time it evoked no laughter from the parrot; not even, so to speak, a smile. With a plaintive intonation strange indeed from that forbidding beak, and looking Amy straight in the eye, he said: "*Da mi un bacio*."

"He is saying it in Italian!" Amy exclaimed. "It means: Give me a kiss. Maybe that's his language; did the man who owned him come from Italy?" she asked Aunt Mittie.

"He ain't never tole me whar he come from; he was plum sick the fus' time I ever seed him," she said. "I spec' he 'bout come from some place whar they talks funny like that. You might could understan' a lot of things this bird says." She stroked the parrot soothingly; his last utterance had left them with the impression that he was in need of consolation for something, and since he refused to utter anything further in any language, even when bribed by cake, the impression remained.

"Maybe after we get to be better acquainted – if you don't mind," Amy suggested politely as they were leaving. She was standing on the ground outside the cabin, looking up at Aunt Mittie, tall in the doorway, the dim room behind her. The parrot, which had now ascended to her shoulder, was staring out at the lighted world and muttering as if he still might say a word at parting. Aunt Mittie stared too; Amy wondered how much she could really see with those veiled eyes. Couldn't something be done even for very old people who were going blind?

"*A riveder le stelle*," the parrot said, so suddenly that she jumped, and Nellie, who had gone on ahead, turned and came back. "What did he say?" she demanded.

"He said 'to see the stars again,'" Amy told her. "It's in a poem."

Parrots were always doing things like that – being apropos about something; they were famous for it. Amy, who had known others of the species, knew there was at least nothing supernatural in what this particular bird had done. All the same, walking home with Nellie, she made up her mind she would take it for a sign.

Mrs. Fairleigh was delighted to take it that way too; but she pointed out the practical difficulties that lay in the way of making such a prediction come true. "Even if it turns out to be something curable – for instance, like cataract – she would have to be taken to the hospital for an examination before we could even know that much, and that would scare her to death to begin with; to say nothing of what would happen at the mere mention of an operation. You would never believe, Amy, how many of them, even the young ones, would rather die. Aunt Mittie isn't anywhere near a hundred; Nellie got that from Sadie and the others; but she's not young enough to be trying nervous shocks on."

"But couldn't you explain it to her?" Amy protested. "I can't help thinking anyone would want so much not to be blind."

Mrs. Fairleigh shook her head. "She would only be thinking how much she wanted not to be dead. She would forget all about her eyesight the minute you mentioned the hospital. But let's talk to the Judge about it; and we can at least go to see her and sort of feel her out on

the subject. And now of course you will have to stay until after Christmas. Working miracles these days takes time, and I want it to be your miracle."

"Let Miss Amy talk to her," Judge Fairleigh said when the subject came up the next morning at breakfast. "Aunt Mittie isn't going to refuse to do anything she says, now she has found out she and Dan talk the same language. I've always wondered about that poor man. Do you suppose he could have been an educated Italian?" he asked Amy.

"Maybe the parrot was educated before he got him," she suggested. "But you can't always tell about Italians – and Dante; they are not like us and Shakespeare. John always said it was amazing the way even their high-school boys could say whole pages of the *Divine Comedy.* They seem to get it out of the air, he said."

"Maybe their parrots do too. Did your brother interview many parrots?"

Amy laughed. "How old do you suppose he is? Can you tell by his legs or something, the way you can with a tree? They look a little like bark. His feathers come out new, I suppose."

"Can't you tell him the way you do a horse?" Nellie asked.

"Teeth, Nellie?" her mother said.

"Oh, I forgot." Nellie was embarrassed.

"But knowing his age wouldn't help us to know anything about the man who owned him, I suppose," Amy said. "Aren't they supposed to outlive several owners? They are a sort of living monument; and certainly Dan is a lot better than those little plaster figurines. Wouldn't you hate to be remembered by that cat – the one with the black spots?"

"I should think a cat was more commemorative than a parrot," Judge Fairleigh said. "The Sphinx, for instance."

"But this one isn't even lying down," Amy said. "It's sitting up straight with a sort of smirk on its face."

"I wonder if Aunt Mittie ever uses those things for hoodoos," Mrs. Fairleigh said, after the children had "run out to find Sadie."

"For what?" Amy asked her.

"For charms; to take off warts and things," Mrs. Fairleigh explained.

"Or put them on," Judge Fairleigh said. " 'Why did you melt your waxen man, Sister Helen?' I never thought of it before, Jennie, but I wouldn't be surprised if that bird hasn't done a lot to build up Aunt Mittie's reputation as a witch. She could make her clients believe almost anything with him for an oracle."

"There's an idea for us, Amy!" Mrs. Fairleigh exclaimed. "Why can't we use Dan to get Aunt Mittie to the hospital? Why can't you tell her he said for her to go? You know in a way he did – at least you did sort of get the idea from what he said about seeing the stars." Her face kindled with this inspiration; it did not lose its brightness even when Judge Fairleigh laughed. "Hush, Ben," she said; "I know exactly what you are thinking, but this is one time when we would be foolish not to snatch at any straw. And it's one time too when being so superstitious can be turned to their advantage, and not just to ours. And when you come right down to it, I'm superstitious myself about a parrot saying a thing like that, and so is Amy – only in her case we will just call it being poetic. That's what poetry should do – great poetry: show us that the impossible things are really possible. It's from the *Inferno*, isn't it, Amy?"

"Yes; the last line," Amy said.

Aunt Mittie had never been on the train, though she had occasionally seen it boarded by her more progressive friends when it stopped at Cherry Station, and had always lived where she could hear it pass. "It's jus' too big for me," was the reason she habitually assigned for declining to travel on it herself, and since it was as valid a reason now as it had ever been, Mrs. Fairleigh had no intention of trying to persuade her to go to the hospital by rail. "I'm going to take you in the barouche," she told her, "just whenever you make up your mind to go." She was meeting with no opposition to any of her suggestions, which somehow made it a great deal harder to advance in the process of trying Aunt Mittie out. "It's like arguing with a camel or something that just looks down at you and waits for you to stop," she told Amy; "and I still believe if you would tell her about Dan, as you could perfectly well do without any departure from the truth – just tell her what he said – she would at least quit being so inscrutable."

"But it's too much like promising something we are not sure about – something out of our power," Amy said.

"Well," Mrs. Fairleigh sighed, "in that case I suppose there's nothing for us to do but keep on offering her inducements. But you see it's exactly as I said: getting her eyesight back is no inducement whatever. It will be the ride in the barouche or something like that – if anything ever gets her there."

"Maybe we could tell her we will let Dan stay with us while she's gone," Amy suggested.

"Of course we can; I hadn't thought of that. I suppose there is no telling how much she may be worrying over

all her possessions. It ought to be a lesson to anybody not to let their belongings pile up on them that way – like one of those great crustaceans that can't move on account of its shell. I expect poor old Aunt Mittie has visions of all her friends coming in while she is away and helping themselves to whichever of those horrors they may have had their eye on all these years. We will have to promise her not to let that happen, at least."

"I wonder how long it's been since she really saw them," Amy said.

"And isn't it pitiful, and at the same time isn't it a commentary on human nature," Mrs. Fairleigh said, "to think they are what she would rather see, if she got her eyesight back, than to see the stars? It would be like that with every one of us, about something – some little thing that maybe nobody else would want to see at all."

Which of the inducements proved to be the irresistible one, they never knew, for Aunt Mittie remained inscrutable even after she consented to embark upon the proposed adventure. Amy, though she did not know her as well as Mrs. Fairleigh did, still felt that she knew her better than to believe the myth of her remoteness from the actuality that confronted her. She was sure Aunt Mittie's far-away attitude was not because she did not understand, but because deep down inside of her she understood better than anybody else. Maybe she was like a camel; maybe she had stored up somewhere the extra endurance it would take to carry her over this last lap of the way – her long way. She might not be able to talk about it any more than the camel could. Amy found she didn't want to talk about it either, the way the others did.

But they were all so good to her! Mrs. Fairleigh left everything, even with Christmas coming on, to go and stay at the hospital the day of the operation, and to go back again with special dishes for her when she was well enough to eat them; and on the day the bandage was removed, Nellie and Amy went too.

"What do I look like, Aunt Mittie?" Nellie asked her. "Do I look different?"

"No, honey," Aunt Mittie said without emotion; "you look jus' the same, only mo' so."

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With the New Year came wintry weather; ice and snow and the breath of expectation that attends them even in latitudes where there is little to expect. "What shall we do first?" Amy asked, joining the family at breakfast on the first white morning; she was tingling with her cold ablutions and her memories of winter sports. But at Cherry Station there were no winter sports; nothing could be improvised on short notice, and the notice was always short – at both ends. The children fed the birds on crumbs and made a snow man in the yard; the gentlemen compared the various readings of their thermometers, on their way to the office as usual; the ladies sat closer to the fire, admiring the flat white landscape through the window; and in the shortest possible time it was all over.

Amy had accepted Miss Rita Thornton's invitation to come over sometimes and read to her while she sewed – "Now that it's too cold for you to be out much," Miss Rita said. They both loved Dickens, and agreed that he was always at his best in bad weather, sitting by

the fire. There was always a lovely fire in Miss Rita's room upstairs, and she had begun right away to keep all her hand-sewing, her buttonholes and fine hemming, for these occasions.

It was a pleasure the like of which she had not expected ever to have again – whole novels read aloud to her while she worked. In the past she had had it often; in Amy's clear voice she heard sometimes accents that were not hers; for Miss Rita, now just herself, had once been one of many. She had learned to like her silent hours – to prefer them, even, to most people's conversation; but she did not prefer them to Dickens.

She and Amy hardly ever talked; they would both be too much interested; it would always be time for Amy to go home before either of them thought it was that late. It was a surprise, perhaps to both of them, when one day, right in the middle of *Bleak House*, Amy suddenly began a conversation about love. "Did you ever think," she said, "how many modern writers – Dickens and ever so many others, and practically all of the poets – seem to consider love as just an opportunity for self-sacrifice?"

Miss Rita looked at her over her glasses. She had not exactly thought about it, she said.

"Well, they do. They are always showing their lovers as strong enough to give up their love for something higher. I have been wondering how it would feel to have the man you were in love with renounce you for an ideal. John wrote an essay – it was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* – called 'Love in Modern Literature,' which shows the difference between the way Shakespeare wrote about it and the way we write about it now."

Miss Rita, who was sitting near the window hemming the neckband on one of Maury's shirts, hadn't thought about this difference; she waited for Amy to go on.

"John said that the modern ideal is to exalt love, rather than to accept it – to hang it in heaven like a star, was what he said. He said it was a conception that makes poets and heroes out of men."

"Did he say what it makes out of women?" Miss Rita asked.

Amy looked at her, too surprised to answer even if he had, which was not the case. That did not sound a bit like Miss Rita. It reminded her of something she had not thought of for some time now – not since they started reading Dickens. They had both been laughing so much lately, she could hardly have been expected to remember that one of them had a broken heart. But now she did remember; she recalled all the little hints and references she had pieced together while Miss Rita's romance was still hanging about her and making her interesting in a different way; she remembered the song Virginia had sung that evening, about "the roses of passion" – *His song.* Maybe he didn't mean just dying or growing old, but exalting his love – renouncing Miss Rita for an ideal.

Amy had left her chair by the window when she stopped reading, and come closer to the fire; she looked over now to where Miss Rita was still availing herself of the wintry daylight to finish Maury's linen-cambric shirt. It was a north window with no sunlight coming in; the best light to see by. Seeing Miss Rita by it, Amy felt that it was almost too revealing. Cut out in black and white against the clear pane, she had, without being either thin or angular, something of the quality of a diagram.

The room was like that too: tall furniture topped with marble slabs, the bed with its smooth white counterpane. Those might be the things poets and heroes were thinking about when they decided to hang their love in heaven like a star. She remembered something one of the poets had written:

He loses her who gains her,
Who watches day by day,
The dust of time that stains her,
The cares that leave her gray,
The flesh that still enchains her,
Whose grace has passed away.

"I never thought of it before," she told Miss Rita, "but I don't believe John even mentioned that side of it – whether women always want to be idealized like that; though naturally they couldn't help feeling it was a very great compliment. It would make a big change, wouldn't it, if it went too far? I mean in social conditions – in what Maury calls the community."

Miss Rita, at her nephew's name, had looked up briefly from his shirt, meeting Amy's thoughtful eyes. Now she went on hemming.

"I am going to ask him about it," Amy said. "I haven't the least idea how he feels about subjects like that – like love and self-sacrifice; he feels very strongly about the community, though."

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Maury had been increasingly occupied during the winter. Judge Fairleigh was turning more of the work in the

office over to him, and the work itself was growing. The laws of a place, however locally interpreted, are always sufficiently invoked to keep its lawyers busy. His writing too was taking on an importance for him that he had not anticipated and hardly knew how to meet. Just how far was he justified in listening to a voice that was becoming steadily more peremptory, demanding a degree of thought and energy that had no relation whatever to any prospect of compensation or return? Wasn't he in danger of falling into a personal indulgence not so different after all from some others to which he had considered himself inaccessible? Almost for the first time since he could remember, he felt a genuine regret that he knew so little about his family; that he was not in a position to estimate its weaknesses as well as its strength, or the likelihood of his own inheritance in either direction. He had never heard of any of his ancestors being dissipated; at least, none of them that he knew of had filled a drunkard's grave; but had there been scribblers among them? It seemed to him he remembered hearing about an uncle or somebody who wrote poetry; who had even published a book of it. He must ask Aunt Rita; though maybe he was not on her side. If there was one thing he could not stand in a man, it was homemade poetry. His own temptation, thank God, was only prose, and so far it was only his evenings that he gave to it.

He had not forgotten his promise to "help entertain Miss Amy"; he was not going to let his writing or anything else interfere with that. Weather permitting, he was always ready to take that protracted guest for "a drive or something." Something, under the circumstances, could only mean a walk, unless it just meant sitting where they

were and talking – which at Cherry Station was not the unheard-of form of entertainment it might have been in some other places. Amy had really begun to prefer it to more active amusements. Nellie was almost sure to go with them on their walks; or at any rate to want to go, and get called back, which was worse; and on the drives there was always the trouble of driving; she didn't want Maury to have to think about the horse while he was talking – now that she had really begun to understand him. It was wonderful how many things they found to talk about, under this improved condition; but somehow love and self-sacrifice continued not to be among them. The last time it had been the Civil War.

"John says it is one of the biggest failures history commemorates," she told him. "He says it gives him a vast respect for the ineffectual."

Maury smiled; he could always be counted on to get the point of things like that. "I'd like to talk to your brother some time, along that line," he said. "Not the Civil War; I don't mean that; I mean the idea of negative values. I believe they play a bigger part in our destiny than we give them credit for. A lot of our biggest successes are really just our failures to accomplish something else. And I suppose what we consider our necessities are mostly things we had to take instead of the ones we wanted and very likely didn't need at all. Progress seems to consist in always falling short of the mark in one way or another. It's really a very interesting idea. And when it comes to language – did you ever think, Miss Amy, how often we express a thing in terms of what it isn't? I am trying to write something on that subject now; it is fascinating."

Amy was sure it must be.

"And poetry of course – poetic images: sleep, shadow, death – all of them the absence of something; and yet what would the poets do without them, as your brother said about the roses? If poets go to heaven – some of them probably do – and find all the empty places in their souls filled up, what kind of poetry do you suppose they will write? I believe you know all the poetry there is; did you ever think how completely it belongs to earth?"

Amy said she had – or at least Shelley had, with his dome of many-colored glass, and other passages that she quoted. "But why do you keep saying I know everything, or have read everything? Even if it could be true – true of anybody, I mean – it would be somebody you didn't like."

"It would be somebody I might like very much to talk to," he said, smiling – "somebody I would find very instructive."

Amy thought this over, looking at him with her intent expression. "I wonder if you think I have lost much by reading the way I have, and being always with people who talked about books. I wonder just what difference that really makes. I suppose you think anybody by the time she is twenty-three should have lived more; I mean had more experience of her own."

"That's in line with my subject again," he said; "my negative values – my count of losses: 'The Negative Approach to Reality,' I think I shall call it. You have no idea, Miss Amy, how many problems you can solve with the minus sign."

"Do you mean real problems?"

"Aren't they all real until you solve them?"

"Not to you," she said; "at least, it seems to me the things that really affect your life are not problems to you at all. You never want to discuss them, even. You just settle them to suit yourself, or to suit the community, as you say; and of course the community has to be very small or you couldn't do that."

"And do I have to be small to want to do it?" he asked her.

She didn't seem to hear this. "I have been wondering since I have been down here – since I knew you – if the things that really count in our development – that make us turn out one way instead of another – aren't all of them smaller than I thought they were."

"Or maybe just closer," he suggested; "they are the ones we bump into, the ones that hurt, and naturally they make us change our course; but how much we change it is something we can't know until afterward – until we look back. The trouble with both of us, Miss Amy, is that we can't look back far enough. Ten years from now –" He stopped; he couldn't see her ten years from now; he couldn't see himself.

"Is that why you love so to talk to Mrs. Fairleigh?" she asked him. "I often think when I come in that I must be interrupting something important – something that you might not want to say to anybody else in the world."

She was looking at him with the earnest expression that made her seem so young, and since he could think of nothing to say at the moment, he got up and went over to the window, where there was nothing to see; only the dim trees and the dim sky. It was disconcerting to him when she made remarks like that. The faith and order of familiar things can be as rudely shaken by an innocent

statement as by an accusation; one feels called upon to take up weapons just the same, in defense of something one had never thought of as needing to be defended. He couldn't somehow imagine explaining to Amy anything that concerned him deeply. It was a curious thing that she could be intellectually so informed, so superior, really, to most of the minds with which he came in contact, as well as so unfailingly interested in all questions of the mind, and yet be so remote from life; from the primer, the alphabet, of experience.

He came back to his chair. "Where will you be ten years from now, do you suppose? You who have already been in so many places," he said.

"Do you expect to always stay here?" she asked him.

"That was what I thought I expected," he said, smiling. "But of course if you start me to measuring degrees of latitude, as your father's friend Mr. Emerson puts it – if you keep pointing out my restrictions – Did it ever occur to you that you may be doing the same kind of thing that other friend of your father's, Miss Frances Wright, tried to do down here – on a larger scale, of course? Converting one man from the error of his way is not as big an undertaking as converting a nation, but it still carries responsibility, you know; or do you know? Maybe a real reformer cannot afford to think of that."

This was meant to be amusing, but Amy did not look amused. "How long ago that seems – that day when we were there!" she said. "So much has happened since then."

He looked at her, surprised; this was not at all what he had expected her to say. "What, for instance?" he asked her.

"Maybe it only seems that way to me because I have been getting used to things," she said. "Sometimes you feel as if you were having experiences whether you are or not, and naturally that makes the time seem longer."

"So why should you count Egyptian years?" he said.

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Approaching reality from the negative side was not a new exercise for Maury. It had seemed to him for a long time now that he saw almost everything better from that side; for him it was the lighted side. How much his temperament had to do with this, or how much the circumstances of his life had to do with his temperament, it would have been difficult to determine. Certainly his youth had fallen upon a time of great restriction in almost everything that concerned him. Retrenchments, none of which had been foreseen by anyone before him, faced him at every turn. The minus sign of which he had spoken approvingly to Amy was more of a necessity than a convenience in casting up his accounts. Family, fortune – it was the cost of losing them that he had to reckon. Even love, which had asserted its claim so early, had presented itself as the supreme denial, with only the mystical and paradoxical hope of fulfillment that leads a man to lose his life in order to find it.

With this aspect of experience he had been long familiar, but in trying now for the first time to find expression for it in the paper he was writing, he was led into a field of negation that was new to him. He had naturally expected to express it in words, but now, quite literally, they failed him. He had made the discovery that, in its

relation to thought, all language had so little to affirm that it might be said to have abandoned the assertive side before him. This deficiency, instead of discouraging him as it had done many of those who had discovered it earlier, seemed to him another sign that the direction he had taken might lead eventually – for that part of him at least which he took to be his soul – to a certainty beyond the formulas of affirmation.

"But if you think so much about life, it makes you hesitate to live, Maury," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "These are not the years of contemplation – not your years; you are too near the beginning; those thoughts are for the end." She had been listening again; she had heard the paper through.

"Hesitate to live – in just what sense?" he asked her. "Do you mean adventure – do you want me to go west, young man?"

"No, not that; not necessarily –"

"Enterprise, then – making one of the big fortunes we are hearing about these days?"

He waited, but she only shook her head.

"Can't you understand," he said, "that what you really do mean is something not for me at all, either at the beginning or at the end? Not as something forgone or sacrificed; I don't mean that; but as just not existing? Don't you see how simple that makes it for everybody – so that we don't even have to talk about it any more?"

"But that is what is wrong," she said; "it is wrong for it to be so simple, Maury. It can only be like that because you were so young when you began to – to feel this way. That was too near the beginning too. Oh, my dear, I

know so well the thing I want to say – I know so much better than you –" She stopped.

"What do you know so much better? I believe you are mistaken, whatever it is," he said, trying as usual not to be serious; "but that doesn't keep me from wanting to hear about it."

"It's just about women, Maury; nothing about men at all. I'm not going to pretend to know about any of you, either old or young; not even a little boy like Bobbie; but why shouldn't I know what women are like?"

"You should," he said; "and I wish you would tell me what they are like, for certainly they are not the least bit like each other."

"Give me that," she said, reaching for the manuscript he now held rolled up in his hand. The bright color was in her cheeks; he could tell, as she began to unroll it – to look for the place she wanted – that for lightness the day was lost. "Here it is," she said. "Listen:

> 'The soul is credited with unceasing aspirations; they are said to be the sign, the voice, by which it makes its presence known. But it is a voice for which words are as impossible to find as for the echo of the ocean in a shell. Language fits it only negatively, if it fits at all. The names we give to these desires are not their names: we say immortal, or invulnerable, without knowing what they are or could be, our experience having taught us only their opposite; only death or wounds. Yet we feel a tremendous power in such words; they are a prayer: deliver us from evil; they say that, and it is all that they can say. The state that every man desires to enter excludes all forms of definition; he has no term or symbol by which to hold it, and yet he is convinced that it is there. Empty of every attribute his mind imagines, he still hopes from it complete fulfillment. His art, his philosophy, his love, are only precious to him as long as he believes that they will help him find it. He will lose the world for it because in his

heart he wishes to lose the world. He calls it ecstasy, and again has called it nothing but to be removed from everything that it is not'"

She laid the pages down and looked at him with shining eyes. "It is so beautiful it makes me want to cry," she said, "but that doesn't keep me from knowing you ought not to feel that way – not while you are young. They are not a young man's thoughts. All those things you mention – art and philosophy and love – have a positive value for youth; not a negative one. I can't bear for you to be 'removed' from beautiful things, Maury."

"I thought you were going to tell me about women," he reminded her. "It's the only chance I've ever had to learn some of the things I have always wanted to know – if you really do mean to tell me." He had retreated behind his old defenses.

She was not listening; she had taken up the manuscript again. "I didn't know I had said anything about them in that," he said.

"You have, though; they are what you are thinking of when you say that love is one of the things a man depends on to help him reach the state he is striving for; and you are mistaken; all the poets have said that, and every one of them has been mistaken. You have no idea how different women are from that, and how differently they go about doing what they want to do; and most of the time it is the exact opposite of what you think it is. They know instinctively that you are trying to reach a state of detachment – to get away, not from them exactly, but from everything; and if they let you, then what becomes of them?"

He could see she was too much in earnest for him to smile at this. He waited for her to go on.

"Not that there is very much danger of its happening," she said, "but they don't like to even think about it. Men are such dreamers, Maury; they mustn't be allowed to dream too much. Women are closer to the earth. I always wonder how they ever got the reputation of being ethereal creatures, because really they are just the opposite. They are 'bound up in earth's diurnal course' ever so much more than men are. You would never believe how much." She looked down again at the pages she was holding, then back at him. "But what you have said here is beautiful," she told him. "It seems to me like great poetry, though you have said it in prose."

Maury watched her reflectively for a while, then he said: "Was that one of the things you wanted to tell me about women – that they are closer to the earth than men are? I have heard you say that before – about yourself – and I am sure that it is true, though I might not have expressed it quite that way. What I want to ask you now is why you should imagine a man – any man – would have to be told a thing like that? What makes you think he could fail to be aware of it – more aware of it than you are yourself – your relation to the earth? – to all the sensible beauty that he knows; the morning and the evening, all the seasons of mercy –" He stopped. "If men are dreamers, as you say they are, why shouldn't they dream of that forever?"

She did not answer or look up, but kept her eyes on the manuscript in her lap.

"But is it always true," he began again in a different voice, "or true of all women? Doesn't their experience

have a lot to do with it, or their ages, or their stages – or isn't that another of the things you ought to be telling me?"

He smiled, though the top of her head was all he could see. "Or how about a very intellectual woman – how about Miss Amy? Don't you think she has about as little relation to the diurnal course of things as – well, as John would have?" He knew she would look up now, and she did.

"Why don't you say as Nellie would have?" she asked him. "I do think youth makes a great difference – and not having much experience – how could they help it? I don't know so much about the intellectual outlook; you so seldom meet a girl who has been consistently trained to look at things that way. But Amy has changed so, Maury, in these last weeks. Surely you have noticed it. It seems to me a man might do a little dreaming over the change in Amy." Everything was all right now; she was on firm ground. "And how much prettier she is! Ben was talking about it yesterday. In that green dress – he told her she looked like one of his young apple trees. Ben is a dreamer too, just like the rest of you."

Maury had taken his hat and the books under it from the table and was standing, looking down at her while she said these things, amused as he always was at the openness of her diplomacy. "Well," he said, "Christmas is over, and Aunt Mittie has her eyesight back, but there's still a lot of Dickens. Miss Amy will have to finish that now, won't she?"

"I wish she didn't have to go at all," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "I might as well tell you how I feel about it, for of course you know already. Never mind; one of these days maybe you won't laugh."

5

Sunday breakfast was late and leisurely in the houses at Cherry Station; no school, no office; time to read the Sunday paper, which had two sections instead of one, and to eat waffles instead of biscuits; time to sit and talk.

"I see where Miss Letty Ousley has her place advertised," Judge Fairleigh said from behind his section.

"Oh, Ben, how terrible! Does it say what for? Not taxes, I hope."

"It just says 'desirable farm property.' Her taxes were not in such bad shape the last time she talked to me about them. It's more likely to be the doctor."

"Poor Miss Letty! Think of her waiting all those years and then marrying a man like that! He must have a regular bad-luck streak. You remember, Amy, all those calamities she was telling us about the last time she was here – all those fires and things, down there in Mississippi where he came from; he even got himself kicked in the head by a mule. But we can't let her do it, Ben; that farm is the only thing she's got on earth; for of course

I don't count the doctor; he's a whole lot worse than nothing. You haven't ever seen him, have you, Amy?"

Amy hadn't, though she had seen Miss Letty several times. She didn't live at Cherry Station exactly; she drove over in a buggy from her farm – rather often, for she was very sociable, in spite of being very deaf. Nobody seemed to think it queer that she should still be called Miss Letty, after more than a year of matrimony, and Amy wondered if the episode might not have changed her as little in other ways as in name. For one thing, she had gone on living just where she had always lived, and whoever managed the farm, it was certainly not the doctor, for he was hardly ever there. That was one of the things Mrs. Fairleigh said she couldn't understand.

Miss Letty's deafness kept her visits from being an unmixed pleasure, except to the children, who didn't mind shouting and were probably doing it anyway when they would see her turn in at the gate and rush down to shout at her. She always reined in to a snail's pace, peering out with her short-sighted eyes for fear one of them or an attendant pet might stray under her slowly turning wheels. She came bearing gifts – of the most approved variety; something to eat, or something alive, like a kitten or a duck. She was herself supposed to bear a striking resemblance to the Little Red Hen, which was another reason for her popularity. Also, when she stayed long enough, she was sure to play and sing; and this, the way she did it, they considered wonderful, as indeed it was.

Mrs. Fairleigh, with her talent for listening, could hardly have failed to request these renditions, and Miss Letty was equally certain to comply. Amy always won-

dered how they sounded to her, under the modifying conditions of her affliction, as she sat there with her foot on the loud pedal, giving them ballad after ballad, in the toneless fortissimo of the deaf.

Nobody knew how old she was; it had been a great surprise to all her friends, however, when she married Dr. Denie, whom she had met at a church festival in another county, for they had assumed that she was at least too old for that. Amy, listening to the songs, wondered how they could have felt so sure; especially in the case of a coquettish air called – at any rate by Miss Letty – *The Captain with His Whiskers.* Her coy expression when she came to the refrain:

And the Captain with his whiskers
Took a sly glance at me –

should have been enough to make anybody suspect what Dr. Denie had proved; though he had only a mustache and it was not easy to imagine him taking sly glances. It was very generally conceded that whatever romance had gone into the arrangement had been of Miss Letty's own providing and that the doctor's contribution had been his interest in her acres.

"Though what he wanted with a farm remains a mystery," Mrs. Fairleigh told Amy – "or did until this morning. Maybe he has had the idea of selling it all along; certainly he doesn't know the first thing about farming. And what kind of a doctor he could have been, down there in Mississippi – something like a druggist, maybe, or a vet."

"Is he educated?" Amy asked.

"I don't believe he has talked enough to anybody since he's been here for them to find out," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "But he's really not bad-looking. He must be quite a lot younger than Miss Letty – ten years, wouldn't you say, Ben? What do you think we ought to do about it?"

Judge Fairleigh looked across at Amy with a smile. "What would you advise a man to do, Miss Amy, in a matter that is none of his business?"

"Well, anyway, it's enough my business for me to find out whether poor Miss Letty is having to do it against her will," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "We can drive over there tomorrow, Amy, and you can see the farm, and maybe even see the doctor – though I hardly ever have; he's always gone off on what Miss Letty calls his trips. There's something funny about him; the Judge knows that as well as I do, only he won't admit it; that's not his business, either." Mrs. Fairleigh, who was untying Binkie's bib, looked up, laughing. "Wouldn't you hate to be a man and have to be so upright all the time?"

They drove to Miss Letty's in the barouche. Uncle Nelson, who was Georgie's husband, had to be called out of the garden where he was planting the English peas – for he was also the gardener – and made to array himself in a hat and coat to do the driving – an office that might have been performed by the departed Willy Ed. Uncle Nelson could almost be said to regret that young assassin, on occasions like the present. He hated to be called, on a beautiful afternoon, to leave some long row he was planting and disguise himself as a coachman. He hardly ever got in a good humor, Mrs. Fairleigh complained, until they were on their way home.

But this time, perhaps because some rumor of the sale had reached him, he cheered up before they got to Miss Letty's, and even became rather conversational on the subject of the doctor, who was, he said, one of the curiousest white gen'lemen he had ever encountered.

"He look to me so much like Mr. Culpepper down in Sardis whar my brother lives, the fus' time I seed him I thought he was Mr. Culpepper, cep'n I know'd he couldn' be, 'cause Mr. Culpepper he wasn' out of jail yet. Leas'ways my brother hadn' said nothin' bout him bein' out."

"When was that, Uncle Nelson?" Mrs. Fairleigh inquired, with a glance at Amy.

"Hit was that time you sont me over to take Miss Letty the tomato plants, an' the doctor come out in the lot whar I was standin' at, an' I come mighty near sayin' howdy, Mr. Culpepper, 'cause I hadn' never seed the man what Miss Letty had done ma'ied, an' he sho' did look like him."

Mrs. Fairleigh, very expressive as to face, for Amy's benefit, behind Uncle Nelson's back, asked him if he knew why Mr. Culpepper had been put in

"My brother ain' never rightly said," he informed her. "He worked on his place one while, down there in Sardis; he's workin' for Mr. Gaston now; Mr. Culpepper he done lef after he got out."

"Does your brother know where he went?" Mrs. Fairleigh asked, giving Amy another look.

"He ain' never said. You ought to tell Miss Amy this here is the corner of Miss Letty's place," he reminded her.

Amy looked at Miss Letty's place and wondered, as she had done before when shown the "places" to which value was attached, why anyone should want them. The flat, dull fields, which stretched with no change in character as far as her eyes could follow them, seemed neither to promise nor to recall anything like fruition. They were as different as possible from the vineyards and the wheat-fields that she had always thought of as a farm; for these were cotton-fields, between the picking and the plowing, and seeing them without experience, one saw them without hope.

"She can't even imagine how different it will look two or three months from now, can she, Uncle Nelson?" Mrs. Fairleigh could supply both the missing elements.

Miss Letty's house, seen at a distance, borrowed considerable charm from the accident of standing between a windmill and a willow tree, but was less attractive as one came near enough not only to see it better but to see some other things that ought not to have been there, or at least not in the foreground: the chicken-coops under the front porch, for instance, or the barbed wire looped about the tottering poles that defined the precinct of the cow. But Miss Letty, who had seen them coming, was also in the foreground, with a welcome unclouded by any sense of deficiency or, apparently, of foreboding.

Even after she knew it was the advertisement that had brought them. It was the doctor's idea, she said. He thought there was no money in farming, any way you looked at it. What he wanted to do was to sell and maybe go on to Texas. The doctor didn't like to stay long in a place, she explained.

They listened while she told them this and a number of other unexpected things. She had produced a plate of ginger cake and two glasses of homemade wine, and while they partook of these refreshments she outlined the doctor's ideas about farming and his economic views in general, as if such acquaintance as she had with them, and with him, could only have inspired her with confidence.

"You would have loved to hear her, Ben; wouldn't he, Amy?" Mrs. Fairleigh said at dinner that evening. "She said all the things you would like for me to say about you. But at least they are not planning to go very soon. The doctor has something else in view for the summer, she said."

"Did she say what?" Judge Fairleigh inquired.

She shook her head. "Trips, I suppose. But do you know, Amy, while I was sitting there in that tinderbox of a house, I kept thinking about all those times she told us the doctor had been burnt out. I hope she has it insured for enough."

"Better hope she hasn't got it insured for too much," Judge Fairleigh said cryptically.

Mrs. Fairleigh looked at him. "Do you really mean that, Ben? Of course you don't; but it might fit in with that business of Mr. Culpepper. Maybe the doctor changes his name whenever he moves to a new place."

"You say you didn't see him this afternoon?"

She shook her head. "Miss Letty said she wasn't looking for him back before the end of next week. He's gone to take a look at Texas this time. Is there such a thing as a traveling doctor, that you ever heard of?"

"I'm afraid not," Judge Fairleigh said. "But I have heard of a traveling lawyer. I've got to go up to Jackson again in the morning. I thought I'd have Nelson drive me over and catch that early train that stops at Bolton. Want to get up and take a drive before breakfast, Miss Amy?"

Amy said she would like it better than anything.

It was a lovely morning, crystal-clear. They could see now how the days had lengthened, Judge Fairleigh said. "This is the time to notice the change. A few weeks ago we would have had to start in the dark to make that train."

"Doesn't it seem strange and unearthly to see the world without any shadows in it?" Amy said. She remembered Maury's idea about poetry in heaven; there were no contrasts in this even light.

The road was the one she and Mrs. Fairleigh had driven over the day before, and by the time they got to Miss Letty's place the eastern line of her uninteresting fields followed a band of rose. It was still too early for smoke to be coming from the kitchen chimney, but Amy could see as they approached that there was movement in the yard, where the hens were already scratching, and in the lot where the cow had begun to graze. And then she saw, moving too, in an odd sort of way between the back door and the barn, the figure of a man. "I thought you said he was in Texas," Judge Fairleigh said.

"What you reckon make him ac' funny like that?" Uncle Nelson, leaning forward from the driver's seat, was already slowing down; but Dr. Denie's movements, which had been taking him unevenly from one object to another in the yard as if he were trying to avoid the open spaces,

had ceased altogether at the sound of wheels, leaving him apparently stranded behind a push-cart with some empty boxes piled on it. “Better be getting on,” Judge Fairleigh said, pulling out his watch, and Uncle Nelson, obviously disappointed, got on.

Amy had been disappointed too, and when on the way back Uncle Nelson drew in again and said insinuatingly: “Reckon you ain’ got time for me to git out an’ see if he’s still thar behime the cart?” it was all she could do to follow Judge Fairleigh’s example and say in her turn: “I expect we ought to be going on home, Uncle Nelson.” Mrs. Fairleigh would not have done it. Amy was sure she would have stopped to investigate.

“What in the world would make a man behave like that in his own yard?” she asked her while they were eating breakfast, after she had recounted every detail of the occurrence and been asked that very question more than once herself. They could neither of them answer it; there was nothing they could do but wait. “Maybe the Judge can throw a little light on it when he gets back,” Mrs. Fairleigh suggested hopefully.

But by that time the light had been thrown from another quarter. When Judge Fairleigh got home for dinner the next day, everybody was in possession of the news that Miss Letty’s house had burned down, and he himself had a curious feeling that he had expected all the while he was gone to be told that on his return. “That scoundrel was out there fooling around with coal-oil cans and making his preparations when we saw him. He hadn’t gone to Texas any more than I had,” Judge Fairleigh said. “I dare say he’s on his way there now, though. Did she save any of her furniture?”

Some of it had been saved, Mrs. Fairleigh told him, and of course they were all so thankful the barn hadn't caught – in the middle of the night, that way. Things could always be worse, she supposed, but this time they were bad enough – "Because what in the world is she going to do, Ben?"

"The usual thing, I imagine: borrow the money and build herself another house," Judge Fairleigh said.

"And you aren't going to advise her to try to collect her insurance?"

He smiled at the note of pleading in her voice. "No; nor to try to collect her doctor either. The best thing she can do is to balance those two losses off against each other and call herself lucky in the end. Don't you agree with me, Miss Amy?"

"But isn't anybody going to do anything to Dr. Denie?" Amy asked. "And all that about his being Mr. Culpepper –"

"Yes, Ben; I do think you ought to look into that," Mrs. Fairleigh said.

Again Judge Fairleigh smiled. "Don't you suppose Mr. Culpepper may have sins enough of his own, without saddling him with Dr. Denie's? Lord, what a rough lot you must think we have down here, Miss Amy!"

"But it must be ever so much worse in Texas and Arkansas, where they all go," Amy said, with no idea of being humorous.

"I still don't think it was funny," she said, talking the situation over with Maury later in the evening. "It seems to me you ought at least to warn the people over there, so they can watch out for them. If you let them know what they are like, then they can sort of be on their guard."

"The trouble with that is we don't always know ourselves what they are like – or at least what they are like over there. Sadie seems to be getting wonderful reports of Willy Ed, by the highly reliable grapevine route: good job, good white folks; good himself, according to her. What more can they ask over there?"

Amy looked thoughtful. "I suppose," she said after a while, "that when you live an a very high level yourself – I mean when you are sure that what you think and feel is good, not only for you but for everybody – everybody within the range of your influence, naturally, – the community, or the social unit, I suppose you would call it –" She stopped, and Maury, who had an idea that he knew what she wanted to say, did not hurry her. "I have been thinking," she went on, "that it really does make a place seem nice and peaceful just to let people alone and not get all stirred up over their behavior – the way you do. And of course you can only do that when you are careful never to contribute anything yourself – to the social unit I mean – that isn't beautiful. I suppose your idea would be that if even a part of the people in a place were always noble and gentle, as Edmund Spenser said, it makes it possible to just overlook the others –"

"Brava, Miss Amy! You are progressing," Maury said.

"But I still think it has to be a small place," Amy said.

"Let it be a small place, then! Who wants to get outside the human scale, anyhow? Let's just be frankly feudal and be done with it."

"Cherry Station! That sounds feudal, doesn't it?" Amy said.

"Change it. Let's think up something nice and medieval; how about Joyous Guard? How about Thelema?"

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Mrs. Fairleigh hoped Maury was right about there being still a lot more of Dickens. The more Amy saw of Miss Rita and the kind of home she and Maury had there together, the better it would be for everybody. No girl could possibly keep from thinking how different it ought to be; if anything could stir her imagination, that certainly should. Those upstairs rooms – Mrs. Fairleigh had not been in them since that terrible time, but she knew what any room in Miss Rita's hands was bound to be; even beds and washstands couldn't make it look human. Not that anybody would want to live in the kind of scramble the children kept her own house in, with everything they owned left lying around in plain sight – except the things they had lost and were waiting for Sadie to sweep out from behind something when she cleaned up. Still, it was a home.

Her thoughts had run so much of late in this channel, whose numerous tributaries she had also been led to explore, that its advantages seemed too far-reaching to be overlooked by anybody. Certainly Miss Rita could not have overlooked them. She was more and more convinced, as the readings continued, that Miss Rita and Dickens too were on her side.

"Which one are you on now?" she asked Amy, who had come downstairs with her hat on. She had on the green dress too and looked very suggestive of the impending spring. Spring was never far behind at Cherry Station; on the contrary, it had a delightful way of being premature.

Amy told her it was *Martin Chuzelewit*, and sat down in one of the chairs that had been brought out on the

porch, so warm it was. Mrs. Fairleigh, sewing as always, was sitting in the other.

"You have simply got to stay for Virginia's wedding, Amy," she said. "She's planning to have it the first minute it's warm enough to have it in the garden, and at this rate it certainly won't be long. They have one of the prettiest gardens of anybody, and it's sure to be perfectly lovely." Virginia's wedding and the return of the Livingstons to the white cottage from which the Camerons had now departed were the two vernal events, other than vegetative, to which the neighborhood looked forward.

"Were you married in the spring?" Amy asked.

Mrs. Fairleigh nodded. "On May Day itself," she said. "Unlucky, everybody insisted, but everybody was wrong."

Amy looked at her. "You must have been the most beautiful bride that was ever in the world," she said, so earnestly that Mrs. Fairleigh flushed, though she laughed too, and shook her head. "Most brides are pretty," she said. "Some day when I have time, if you'll remind me, I'll show you my wedding dress. It has miles of handwork on it. I hope Nellie isn't going to be too big to wear it; nobody has time any more to take all those millions of little stitches."

Amy waited a little, then she asked: "Would you be very much disappointed if Nellie didn't get married?"

"Why yes, I suppose I would," Mrs. Fairleigh said after reflecting a moment. "To tell you the truth, I never thought of it before – of her not being a bride and wearing that dress."

"Is Miss Rita the only one of the people you know – your friends, I mean – who has never been married?"

"I don't believe I ever thought of that before, either," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "Yes, I really believe she is. Why?"

"I was wondering –" Amy began – "I mean I never realized before how important it must be – for a girl to get married. It seems to make so much more difference than I ever thought it did. I was wondering how she can always be sure – of course Nellie is too little now, but how can you be sure –?"

Mrs. Fairleigh listened. She did not say how she could be sure, and presently Amy went on: "Something might happen; she might fall in love with a man who didn't – Of course, if a girl is very beautiful, I suppose there could hardly ever be any danger of her falling in love with a man who didn't care anything about her; but the girls who are not beautiful seem to get married just as often – a great deal oftener really, because there are so many more of them; it seems to work out just the same. And that is what I don't understand – why it should. Is there something they are supposed to do themselves, or is it their fathers and mothers – the way it is in Europe?"

Mrs. Fairleigh, smiling frankly through this confusion, admitted that this had always been one of the great questions – "But only on the surface; as a matter of etiquette, you might say. Fundamentally I don't believe it changes very much, no matter where – or when. Of course, people used to employ magic – philters and potions and things like that." She began to laugh. "I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Aunt Mittie couldn't put us on to a few 'charms' right now – at least if we weren't white. And, do you know, I believe they have always worked – not because they had any actual power, but because they didn't need any; that is the side the power is on already.

A girl could hardly be expected to realize how little there really is for her to do. It is like –" She stopped; she was trying perhaps for the first time in her life to think what it could be like. "I will tell you," she said; "it is like having the waves obey you, not because you have learned about physics and gravity and all those things, but because you have lived on the moon!" She brought this out with evident satisfaction, and Amy, looking at her, tried to take it in.

"But I really believe," Mrs. Fairleigh went on, "the less a girl has herself on her mind in these cases, the better. If I were in her place I would so much rather be thinking about *him* – if he were worth all the trouble to begin with. Imagine having somebody to hang all the romance on, and all the poetry, so they aren't just floating in the air any longer – like the web the Lady of Shalott was weaving (you remember) before she looked out of her window and saw the 'helmet and the plume.'" She stopped to let Amy imagine it.

"Though when it comes to Nellie," she went on, "if she doesn't watch out she isn't going to have enough romance, or poetry either, to hang on anybody. I believe she is going to have a scientific mind. When I think of the way I used to be – the reams of poetry I knew by heart, even at her age! Nellie doesn't even know 'Twinkle, twinkle, little star'!"

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"Where's everybody?" Maury called into the house from the front door, which stood open. It was Saturday

afternoon, usually the noisiest one, and this time, for some reason, preternaturally still.

"In here!" Mrs. Fairleigh's voice came from the parlor. "The others have all gone to the woods to look for sassafras roots," she told him as he came in. "So now we know it's spring!" She looked up, laughing; from a book, this time, instead of a workbasket; she was apparently emphasizing the lull.

"I came to see if Miss Amy would like to drive out in the country with me," Maury said. "I've got to go and see Mitchell about the new fences he says we ought to have before we start planting. I want to persuade him we don't need them."

"I'm sure she would," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "Sit down; they'll be back in a little while. Aren't you surprised to see me acting like a lady of leisure? *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* is generally anything but new before I even get around to looking at the pictures; but this one came just at the right moment."

"Which means I have come just at the wrong one," Maury said, sitting down.

She laughed again, putting the open *Harper's* over her knee. "Don't you love those two little boys throwing flowers?" she said, looking down at the familiar design on the cover. "They have been doing it ever since I can remember – but, do you know, I never noticed before that there is a motto –"

She handed it to him. "It's in Greek; see if you can read it."

" 'You who hold the torch – hand it on to others' – or near enough," Maury said, after scrutinizing the minute inscription. "I never noticed it either. Who was it said,

about these things, that the more conspicuous they are, the less apt people are to read them? And on the other hand I dare say the more they read them, the less they think about their meaning. They are just the darlings of oblivion, any way you look at it."

"But their meaning – the idea in them – keeps coming back; at least if it's a good one; if it's worth making a motto of in the first place," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "I don't think oblivion really happens as much as people imagine; especially young people. Youth is always writing inscriptions. I used to press flowers in books when I was a girl. I believe we all go through an age of being regular Pharaohs about preserving things; especially our emotions; we would like to embalm every one of them."

"I thought youth was supposed to be fickle," Maury said.

She shook her head. "Older people learn that they don't have to cling to things that way, because they are almost sure to come back; not in the same form, necessarily, but you can't keep them in an unrifled tomb. They walk again; you'll see."

"When I am old like you?" he said, smiling.

"Long before, I hope. But of course it depends a great deal on – Wasn't there somebody in mythology who kept his head turned around looking back all the time, until it grew that way? I don't believe we were meant to be so terribly loyal to the past. If we feel that we have to be constant and unchanging, especially to something that happened when we were very young, that keeps us from being on what I call good terms with life – keeps us from trusting it to give us any thing over again –" She stopped. "I keep coming back to it, you see."

He looked at her thoughtfully for a while; then he said: "Would you call it being on good terms with life if I should tell you that I am so grateful for what I have had already that I would be willing to give life a receipt in full, now, this minute, for all the happiness it was ever supposed to owe me? You talk as if the way I feel about you were an obligation I had imposed on myself when I was too young to know better – some sort of an impossible loyalty that has to be fought for. It is really the opposite of that; it is something to fight with; a weapon against all the disloyalties – against the powers of evil. Surely you wouldn't want to take a thing like that away from me, at this late day, and leave me no better off than anybody else?" he said, smiling.

"Oh, my dear, my dear," she said.

"You are so reasonable, too," he went on. "There are so many things you never try to change. There's the weather, for instance, and the color of Binkie's hair; you used to say you hoped it would be like David's, but you gave up hoping some time back. Can't you do that way about me – about the color of my soul? Can't you just say once and for all: 'Not till the earth receive him will it lose this light, this reflection' –"

There was a movement in the hall that made them turn; Amy, with a white face, was standing in the doorway. Maury got up quickly, not with the idea of going anywhere, but from his habitual impression that in almost any situation that arose he was more helpful on his feet, and went toward her – since she seemed just then the one who needed help. But though she had looked for a moment surprisingly like a girl who was going to faint, at his approach she drew back into the hall, and

Mrs. Fairleigh, listening, realized that she was running upstairs.

"That's all right," she said. "I'll go up in a few minutes and explain –"

Maury sat down again. "What will you explain?" he asked her. "If you mean 'deny,' I'd rather you wouldn't do that. Why should you feel responsible to her – to anybody – for my conduct?"

"But a guest, Maury – we can't offend a guest and not even tell her –"

"That she is mistaken, when you know she isn't?"

"No; but just be sure that she isn't; that's what I want to do. Amy has a different outlook on some things from – I mean –"

He saw suddenly what she meant. He was silent, the color slowly darkening his face. "Will you let me talk to her?" he said presently.

"If *she* will let you," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "I really do think that would be the best. Suppose I go up right now and see? I will tell her that you have something – not to explain, but to say to her. If she will only listen to you –" She got up, looking quite absurdly relieved, Maury thought. He stood in the doorway watching her hurry up the stairs as if she were the bearer of good news. What did she really intend to say to Amy? He went back to his chair, wondering what he was going to say himself.

Mrs. Fairleigh did not go at once to Amy's room; she turned off into her own – to give her time to think. For herself, she did not need any; she knew already exactly what she wanted to say. She had to persuade Amy to go back downstairs and let Maury talk to her. He said

there was nothing to explain, but there was. It occurred to her as fortunate that they both knew all about Plato; he could start right there; Plato's *Apology* – not that, of course; she smiled at that – but certainly, with or without Plato, he should have no difficulty in putting things in the proper light, so she could not possibly misunderstand his position. Mrs. Fairleigh did not believe that hearing him talk about it could lower him in any girl's estimation; it might really be to the advantage of both of them if he and Amy had a personal matter to discuss for a change; even one as intensely personal as this. She went across the hall and tapped lightly on Amy's door. "May I come in?" she said.

Amy did not answer; instead, she opened the door with a promptness that was a little startling. In so far as Mrs. Fairleigh had a picture in her mind of how she was likely to be spending this interval in her room, she had seen her lying face-downward across the bed rather than anything else; but this Amy had evidently not been doing, nor even sitting in a chair; she had been packing. Her trunk stood open under the windows; her clothes were piled on the bed and hanging on the backs of chairs.

"Dear child!" Mrs. Fairleigh exclaimed. "What in the world are you doing?"

"I am going," Amy said, looking at her, intense and dry-eyed.

Mrs. Fairleigh pushed the nightgowns and petticoats aside and sat down on the bed. "Listen to me, Amy. I am not going to let you do such a preposterous thing. I want you to go downstairs like a good girl and talk to Maury. He sent me up here to ask you to come down.

He has some things to say to you that will make you realize – that will make you understand –"

"I don't want to see him," Amy said. "I don't want to hear anything. He has not told me the truth. He has made me think – you have both made me think –" She caught her breath uncomfortably and stopped.

"What have we made you think?" Mrs. Fairleigh asked her encouragingly. "Go on and tell me, Amy."

"Why did you go to so much trouble to make me believe you were better than anybody I had ever known before, and all the time you were only treating me as if I were a child – a blind stupid child!" She had been taking things out of her bureau drawer as she said this, and she now sat down with them on the nearest chair and burst into tears.

"You poor lamb!" Mrs. Fairleigh said, but she did not go nearer nor make an effort to touch her in any way; she sat quite still until Amy dried her eyes and got up again and went over to her trunk; then she said: "I am going to ask you to do something for me, Amy. I want you to stop your packing right here and put your things back where they belong until tomorrow. That isn't long, you know, but it is long enough for several things to happen, and the first one of them, I hope, is going to be a quiet, reasonable conversation between you and Maury. Then if things still look so bad to you that you feel you would rather go, I will not say another word. I will help you – we will all help you – to get off just as soon as possible; decently and in order, though; not as if you were running for your life, I am surprised at you, Amy" – she gathered strength as Amy visibly weakened – "jumping at conclusions this way." She got up. "I am

going down now and I shall expect you to come as soon as you can."

She spoke very much as she would have done to Nellie, and went out, closing the door behind her as she might have closed it on one of Nellie's tantrums; but she was far from feeling as matter-of-fact as that. She would have known, or could have guessed, what was passing in Nellie's mind; of Amy's, aside from the evidence it gave of having sustained a very genuine shock, she had made out very little. She was not even sure of just what it was that had shocked her. Supposing that her "different outlook" had led her to believe – well, no matter what it had led her to believe – people didn't take on that way over broken commandments, no matter who broke them. Amy was feeling desperately personal about what had happened; Mrs. Fairleigh could see that. But Maury wouldn't see it. It would never occur to him that it was the way Amy felt about him that made her take things like this. And even if it did occur to him, it wouldn't make the situation any easier for him to handle; it would really make it harder – especially since he had never done anything to encourage her. If Amy had begun to fall in love with him, it was certainly not his fault. Mrs. Fairleigh's conscience, not usually given to argument, began at this point to ask her whose fault it was. She did not go back to the parlor; she went out to the kitchen, leaving the doors open behind her so she could hear Amy come downstairs.

She did this very promptly; Maury was standing by the window, still undecided about what he ought to say, and, especially, say first, when she came in. "Mrs. Fairleigh

said you wanted to talk to me," she stated, sitting down in the chair Mrs. Fairleigh had occupied.

Maury did not sit down; he stood by the table, looking down at her, feeling somehow terribly sorry for her, and more remorseful than it seemed to him he had any occasion to feel. "I do, very much," he said, and paused. "First of all, I want to know whether you remember asking me once – it was that evening we were sitting here talking about what a man owed to himself, and what he owed to other people – and you asked me if I had ever been in love; or maybe you only said you wondered if I had; your idea seemed to be that if I had more first-hand experience in dealing with the subject, it would give me a better understanding of the particular case we were discussing. Do you remember?"

"Yes," she said.

"And I didn't answer, did I? I probably thought it was not your affair in the first place, though I hope I didn't say so. Anyway, I have answered now, haven't I? And I have just about made it your affair. I have set it before you about as conspicuously as possible, it seems to me."

She looked at him without speaking.

"Maybe you haven't had time to think about it yet," he said, "but when you do, I hope you will tell me – well, whatever you think I ought to be told. You don't have to hurry; there is nothing new in any of this for me; sometimes I think it's as old as I am."

Amy drew in her breath sharply. "I don't want to think about it; I haven't anything to tell you. You say you thought it was not my business, and it is not my business now. The only thing I want to know is why you have taken such a lot of trouble to fool me – to make

me think you were different – that you were better. I thought I was beginning to understand what you meant about self-discipline being the only important thing, and that if everybody just attended to his own behavior – cultivated his own garden – you remember what Voltaire says in *Candide* –"

"And you don't feel that way now?" he asked her, since she did not go on; but she was not listening.

"And then you said," she began again, "that your own conscience might approve of something that would be harmful for others, if you let it influence your conduct, because conduct was a social matter, was what you said. We were talking about the Camerons, you remember. And now I am wondering if you think conduct wouldn't matter, either, if nobody found out about it"

"But surely – !" he exclaimed, and stopped. He had not counted on the Camerons; he was not prepared to deal with the implied analogy.

"I know what you are going to say," Amy continued. "You are going to say that every case is different and has to be judged as if it were just itself; but even so, it seems to me better to be open and aboveboard than it is to hide things. Better for you and for others too, because they always feel so much worse when they do find out."

It was becoming apparent to Maury that his own words, carefully preserved in the clear amber of Amy's memory, had provided her with an argument that was likely to have him more and more at a disadvantage. The subject itself was so involved in restrictions, so obscured by the reticences its nature had imposed, that it was in effect less a subject than an evasion. He could not bring himself to speak to Amy of things he knew to be

already in her mind, even for the purpose of denying them. To mention innocence in this connection seemed more impossible than to allow her to believe in guilt. It had not indeed occurred to him to invoke Plato, who would probably have helped his cause much less than Mrs. Fairleigh supposed.

He had walked over to the window again and had been looking out, and not at Amy, when he realized, still without looking, that she had a handkerchief in her hand and was wiping her eyes with it. What did that imply? He had heard of idle tears, but except in the case of children, where they were certainly not idle – Binkie, and even Nellie, wept with a purpose – Maury had seen few tears of any kind in his life. His Aunt Rita's eyes were never wet, unless she had a cold, or washed her face, and Mrs. Fairleigh's – he could not bear to think of what he had seen there instead of tears. Having Amy sit there and cry affected him deeply. Of all the young things he had seen her do, this was the most touchingly young.

He looked still farther out of the window and waited until he felt sure she had given her final little sniffle and put the handkerchief away; then he said: "I am not going to try to explain things to you very much, Miss Amy. I believe when you have thought about them a little more, they may seem better than I could make you believe right now. And then of course I will not seem so bad. It would distress me terribly if I thought you would always hold the opinion of me that you have at present."

To his surprise, the handkerchief came out again, and this time the tears met with no effort at concealment. "I

can't bear to feel about you the way I do," she sobbed, "when I was just beginning to see –"

"Don't try to tell me," he said. "Wait awhile; wait till things look better; then maybe you will not have to tell me at all. We can just be back where we were – or almost back."

Still holding her handkerchief to her eyes, she shook her head, vehemently. "They never can," she said. "You don't realize how I was beginning to feel about life – how different everything was beginning to look –" She broke off again, and he waited in some bewilderment for her to continue. He seemed to have lost a link or two in the chain of her emotions; there was something a little baffling about them – about that sense of loss that had somehow got into the situation. What sort of ideal had she been hammering away on all this time? He got up and stood, hesitating, near her chair; he thought a little of stroking the bowed head that reminded him of Nellie's. She wouldn't like it, though; she had him down too low for anything like that. Where had she had him before this happened? "Perhaps I had better be going," he suggested, "and maybe come back tomorrow –" There was no answer, so he went.

"I don't believe I did a bit of good," he told Mrs. Fairleigh, who had frankly waylaid him in the hall and was walking with him to the gate. "I can't exactly make out what she has in her mind."

"Did she tell you whether she had given up her idea of going?"

"When? You don't mean right away?"

She nodded. This possibility was one he had evidently not been invited to consider. Mrs. Fairleigh could see

that he was considering it now, and finding it rather startling. “But you can’t let her do that, can you?” he said – “the way she is feeling now.”

“That is the trouble; if she were feeling any other way she wouldn’t want to go. We’ve got to think of something, Maury; between us we ought to be able to make her change her mind. I wonder –” she laughed, as she so often did when other things had failed – “I can’t help thinking your Aunt Rita may straighten her out.”

“Aunt Rita?” This was more startling still. “You don’t mean she would tell Aunt Rita?”

“She wouldn’t have to,” Mrs. Fairleigh said.

Amy had gone back upstairs, but there was still hope she would come down to dinner; then they could act as if nothing had happened – which was always Mrs. Fairleigh’s idea of the proper course to pursue whenever something had. Apparently it was not Amy’s, for the bell rang twice and still she did not appear.

“Amy has a headache, Ben; I don’t believe she is coming down to dinner. We’d better start without her.” Such was her casual excuse. It was not the only one she would be called upon to give, she was afraid, but it would do for a while anyway; another of her ideas was to make excuses last as long as they could.

“Can I take it up to her?” Nellie asked.

“Maybe after a while – if she doesn’t come. She may not want any; I’ll go up by and by and see,” her mother said.

“She wasn’t sick when we were looking for the sassafras roots.” Nellie was hard on excuses.

“Hand your plate, Nellie,” Mrs. Fairleigh said.

"We had more fun!" Nellie was handing her plate in a reminiscent manner. "The reason she came home was because we saw Maury go by in the buggy and she thought he might be coming to take her for a ride."

"Well, eat your dinner now," her father said.

It was a good deal later in the evening, after Amy had still not come down, nor eaten a bite, nor wanted to see a soul, and after the children had gone to bed, that Judge Fairleigh was at length made a party to the truth – or to that selected portion of the truth which Mrs. Fairleigh thought he ought to know – concerning Amy. "Of course I just assumed she had a headache," she explained. "I really have to guess at her feelings; if she would only be a little more explicit! I think the real truth of it, Ben, is that she has been idealizing Maury more than we realize, these last weeks. Haven't you noticed how she has almost stopped talking about John's ideas here lately, and really seems to be more interested in Maury's?"

Judge Fairleigh, it appeared, had not noticed. "And he has not been idealizing her – is that it? Then it seems to me you are the one to be upset, after the way you have been working to bring it about."

"Who told you I have" she asked him.

"Seems to me it was Binkie told me," he said seriously. "But you don't suppose there is anybody who doesn't know it, do you?"

"I am sure Amy has never even suspected such a thing," she said.

"I suppose not; she's very likely the only exception. And it doesn't seem quite fair, either. I've wondered sometimes if I oughtn't to tell her. Maybe it's just as well I didn't, since you say it isn't working out."

"But you do think it would be nice if it could, don't you, Ben? Whether I have been trying or not?"

"Well," he said, "since I'm not in a position to enter the race myself – Miss Amy's a charming girl, and I suppose sooner or later the inevitable hour has to strike for Maury, though he's doing mighty well in other directions just now. Given another ten or fifteen years of freedom from the domestic yoke, he might make a name for himself."

"I know, Ben; Maury is brilliant; but you don't want him to grow lopsided. A man has to be a well-rounded individual."

Judge Fairleigh smiled. "Yes, I suppose so; and yet the race is not always to the well-rounded, you know."

She laughed appreciatively. "And you must remember too," she said, "that Amy is not only charming, but intellectual. I feel perfectly sure she is by far the most intellectual girl Maury is ever likely to meet. So why would she slow him down, necessarily – in that race you are talking about?"

"That's the question," he said, "the age-old paradox: why should the half be more than the whole? But I have a question I want to ask you: why should such a useful adjunct to social life as an unmarried young man always have to be lured into matrimony? Hardly against his will, I suppose, but presumably against his intention. Why don't the ladies like to have a few of him around? He cuts a very graceful figure in society when you read about him. The ladies in books can always find a use for the dedicated bachelor – the young curé, or the *cavaliere servente*; but I believe in real life the only man a woman can put up with is one she can marry off."

"Still, Ben, you wouldn't want a son of yours, or Maury either, to be just a graceful figure; and certainly you wouldn't want him to be a priest. You know you would want him to be like yourself; richer, maybe, or more famous, but not really different."

"I still believe I could put up with him if he wasn't married, though," Judge Fairleigh said, "and I don't believe you could."

6

Just how different Amy's outlook was had remained a matter of conjecture to both Mrs. Fairleigh and Maury, but an important matter none the less. It would not have been easy for either of them to realize how little thought Amy herself had given to possibilities whose significance seemed to them impossible to overestimate. Her imagination had not been called into play to define the probable limits, past or present, of this secret love which had confronted her with the suddenness of a conflagration. It was the immediate vision that absorbed her; she had all she could do to grasp the fact that it was there before her, at that time and place, that it was secret and that it was love. She could feel, without having to think, that it was wrong, that it was a betrayal, because she felt betrayed and wronged. It was pain she had to deal with, and not precedent. She had been struck down by her outraged feelings as by a blow, and nothing Maury had said to her in their interview had touched even the surface of this reality. It was strange to her that he should speak of what had happened as if it were a subject for her to consider and make up her

mind about, when all she could see was the empty place where something had gone down.

Such was the tenor of her wakeful thoughts; less reasonable in many ways than the dreams that eventually replaced them; for, being young and not really having a headache, Amy slept a good deal more than she expected to.

"She looks just like she always did," Nellie reported after taking her breakfast up to her. She made the announcement merely as a rather disappointing fact; her mother, however, accepted it as a highly favorable omen. The restoration of the usual was always desirable in her eyes, and Amy, when she came downstairs, really did seem a good deal more usual than anyone seeing her the evening before might have been led to expect.

"I'm going over to finish *Martin Chuzzlewit*," was the only thing she said with a note of finality in it. She had on her hat.

"Lovely!" Mrs. Fairleigh exclaimed. "Here – take her these." They were early jonquils, the earliest anybody at Cherry Station ever had; Nellie had picked them that morning from the south side of the garden hedge. Mrs. Fairleigh took them out of their bowl and shook them and wrapped their stems in paper so they wouldn't drip on Amy's dress. It was the green dress, but Amy did not look the same; Nellie was mistaken about that. It was not only that she was paler – Change, so often spoken of as gradual, is always seen as sudden; to the perception it has a catastrophic quality, like the breaking of a wave. Little as Mrs. Fairleigh knew of what was going on in Amy's mind, mistaken as she might be in what she guessed, she could not doubt the evidence before her that Amy

had passed through a crisis of some kind. The mounting wave had broken; there was the outline of a different shore.

Miss Rita, she reflected, would be sure to see that something had happened. If only they would talk instead of reading! She had a sudden fancy as she put the flowers in Amy's arms that she was sending Miss Rita a token – a sign. You who hold the torch – She wouldn't see all of that; not in jonquils; but she would see something in Amy; something that needed help.

Yet there she went, young in the young sunshine, her arms full of gold. "Stay to lunch if she asks you," Mrs. Fairleigh called after her in her gayest tones. "We aren't having anything very good, and Miss Rita always does."

Amy had not noticed that she looked different, but she was afraid, when she began to read, that she sounded different and that Miss Rita would notice that. It was going to be difficult to tell Miss Rita that she was going away, and as the end of *Martin Chuzzlewit* approached, her mind was much more on that than on what she was reading. When she finished the book she would have to tell her, because then she would be sure to ask which one they should read next, and there wouldn't be time to read another one. Decently and in order, Mrs. Fairleigh had said. Next week would certainly be that; she would have to break it to Miss Rita that she was going away one day next week.

This time they were not upstairs; they were in the parlor, where Miss Rita had been arranging the jonquils in the white and gold china vase on the piano, closed now and squarely covered in maroon brocade with fringe. It was so warm they didn't need to light the fire; the

sun was streaming in the bay window, where they sat on the sofa, and Miss Rita was crocheting for a change. Except for Amy's voice the room was very still. Stillness is an easy thing to forget, there being almost nothing to remind one of it except some kind of noise, and the stillness that was possible in Miss Rita's parlor at that period has been already forgotten. A horse trotting by on the unpaved road outside the gate, or wheels, or footsteps, seemed almost nearer to silence than to sound; the clock on the mantelpiece – a square black clock with a round white face – always ticked below its breath, and the piano lived withdrawn from human touch.

Amy had noticed before today that the book with Miss Rita's songs in it had been put out of sight somewhere; probably in the bookcase where Maury had found it the evening of the party. She was thinking now, while she kept on reading, that she would like to look at it again – to read that song over. She had been wondering, since yesterday, if the roses of passion might not have been somebody else's roses, all the time Miss Rita was singing about them. She made up her mind that as soon as she finished *Martin Chuzzlewit*, before Miss Rita had a chance to ask her anything, she would ask a question of her own.

"Did you ever know anybody who fell in love with a man and then found out he was secretly in love with somebody else?" That was the question, and she tried to make it sound as casual as she could.

"Do you mean really, or in a book?" Miss Rita was casual in her turn.

"I mean really. I was wondering what she would do. If she would feel that she ought to go away as soon as she

could and try to forget – try to forget everything, or if it would be better to stay and try to get used to it – to knowing about it, I mean."

This time Miss Rita must have noticed something different in her voice, but except for one quick glance over the top of her spectacles she made no sign of haying noticed anything. "I believe it would depend on circumstances, wouldn't it? You said a secret love. Why would it be secret, for instance?"

"Because she – the lady he was in love with – was already married."

"I see," Miss Rita said. "And was she in love with him – or was it one of those one-sided affairs?"

"Ought that to make any difference – for the girl I am talking about?" Amy said. "Either way he would be lost to her, wouldn't he?"

"But not lost in the same way. If it was one of those one-sided cases, as I say, then he might be just wasting his time; he might be idealizing somebody that –" She stopped and Amy waited. "It's a funny thing about a man," she began again, "but if he ever begins that sort of thing, he never knows where to stop; he forgets all about the woman he started out with and begins making something for himself – a sort of graven image, I call it. And naturally the more he works on it and beautifies it, the better it suits him; and the upshot is he just gives up trying to find anybody else. And then of course, as you say, a girl who was in love with him would lose him; unless she did something about it herself."

"What do you mean?" Amy asked her. "What could she – what do you think she ought to do?"

"Well at least she ought not to go away and try to forget about him, as you said awhile ago. That is, if she really thought he was worth holding on to."

Amy sat very still, thinking. "I just don't know how she would go about it – about holding on to him – after she found out he never had belonged to her at all," she said.

"Well, anyhow, she doesn't have to go away," Miss Rita said with decision, and changed the subject to an improvement she proposed making in the number of stitches the pattern called for. "It's about crocheting just as it is about everything else: you have to use your own judgment. But I do want you to stay to lunch, Amy. I've got something to tell you afterward."

It turned out to be something not precisely like the case Amy had mentioned, but similar; real, too; not in a book – "But it won't hurt to tell it," Miss Rita said, "because they are all dead now – all but one, and she's an old woman. There was a girl –" She began at the beginning, after the manner of the Ancient Mariner: " 'There was a ship,' quoth he." And Amy, although like the wedding guest she could not choose but hear, knew in advance (just as he did) that she was in for tragedy. Happy stories may never begin that way: only the ill-fated voyages.

And in both cases, to start with, all the winds were favorable. The girl in question was what Miss Rita called a high-spirited girl; not beautiful – at least, most people didn't think so – but full of life. She loved to ride. People – those same ones no doubt – said she liked horses better than she did men. It was riding, more than anything, that first drew them together. That at least

one man had now entered the story, Miss Rita did not trouble to explain, but Amy understood immediately that the reference was not to a horse; and just what manner of man he was became at once apparent: well-born, handsome, even rich – to his undoing. They were out riding, he and the girl, when he told her. It was in the fall, Miss Rita said, and they had taken a path that led through the woods; they had stopped under some trees, and he told her that he wanted to marry her, but that he was not free. He was engaged to a girl in the town where he had been to college. She was very young, he explained; they had both been much too young; he was sure she would not want to hold him when she knew the truth. But her mother – about her mother he did not know.

In taking this view, it now appeared, he had shown himself, in addition to his other qualities, to be a good judge of human nature, or at any rate the nature of a mother in a college town, for she had held him to his word. They were riding in the woods again, Miss Rita said – he and the girl – when he told her this, and she had never forgotten how he looked, holding the branches back for her to pass, and how he looked at her. He would have to go back, he told her; he would have to keep his promise, and they would have to forget each other.

"And what did she do?" Amy asked.

"She acted like a fool," Miss Rita said. "She let him go."

"And then – did they forget?"

"Well," Miss Rita said, "– he is dead now, of course – but in a way I suppose they did. Only I don't believe forgetting is what young people think it is." Her crochet

needle had come to a stop; she was looking at Amy, but seeing something else. "It seems to me it's a lot like rain: it washes the color out, but it doesn't take anything away. That's really why I'm telling it all to you; because of what you said about going away and forgetting."

"But still she had to let him go, didn't she? What else was there she could do?"

"Whatever there was, she didn't do it," Miss Rita said. "I am only telling you what ought not to have happened. Maybe she didn't know what to do. Maybe she thought she was doing what was right. As I say, it's all a thing of the past now." She stooped to recapture the ball of thread that had slipped off her lap, and began to crochet again in recognition of the present. "Which book do you think we ought to read next?" she said, without looking up. "It's been I don't know how many years since I read *Little Dorrit*. Is that one of your favorites, or would you rather pick something funnier?"

Amy said she thought *Little Dorrit* was very funny in places, and that it was one of her favorites. She didn't say anything about their not having time to finish it.

The shadows of the still leafless trees were stretched across the road as she walked home in the slanting spring sunshine, thinking, thinking. Would she ever be able to stop? Last night was the strangest one she could remember, and she felt now as if tonight were going to be worse. Never before, even in the noisiest city, had she been afraid of not sleeping when night came. Even when her father died and she went around all day with her heart like a stone, she was always glad when it was time to go to bed, for then she could go to sleep and forget, or maybe dream about him as he used to be. This was

a different kind of trouble from anything she had ever experienced; it was something she had to keep turning over and over, wondering what she ought to do. – And to think of all the countless nights Miss Rita must have spent wondering what she ought to have done – after it was too late! Did she ever decide what it was? Amy tried to imagine her a girl on horseback. Surely no other change in the world could be compared to a change like that – not because of what it took away, but what it left instead. Time the thick. The robber years. But were they really that? She remembered what Miss Rita had said about forgetting – that it only faded the color out of things, but didn't take them away. Losing a thing outright seemed to be harder to do than she had ever thought it was. Maybe it could only be done by dying.

And that, at all events, Miss Rita had not done. Instead, she had lived to tell what ought not to have happened. Amy knew she didn't want anybody else to make the same mistake. "What would she say if she knew about Maury – or about me?" For the first time she asked herself that question, and immediately answered it. "She would say I ought not to go away either. And yet what can I do, even if I stay – even if I find out it is what she calls one-sided, and that he is just wasting his time? And it must be that –" For some reason Amy was suddenly sure that it must be that.

There was relief in this conviction. It restored to Maury something of his accustomed aspect, even if it did nothing toward restoring him to her. For her he was as lost as ever, she told herself. – But not as lost, she all at once remembered, as if she went away! This time the wave of wretchedness that swept over her at the thought

of going away took her entirely by surprise. She had not realized before that it would mean being where she could not see Maury nor hear him speak, nor watch, nor listen, nor even hope for him to come. He was not lost as long as she could do any of these things; she knew that now. She knew now what Miss Rita meant when she said that whatever else was right, that would be wrong. She knew it with the certainty of revelation, unsupported by experience, or even much assisted by imagination, since never before had she imagined love. She had imagined friendship, but all the books had failed to teach her, though she saw now that they had tried, how little friendship had to do with this other desperate, doomed thing their authors had in mind. She was appalled at her own ignorance. So far as she was concerned, it had all happened in vain – all the long history of love. She would have to go back and read it again – even the things she knew by heart – even Shakespeare – since she had never known what any of it meant; since she was seeing now for the first time why Ophelia lost her mind, and Dido stood upon the wild sea banks, and young Verona died.

She had not told Miss Rita she was going, but she would have to tell Mrs. Fairleigh she had decided not to go, or at least that she wanted very much to stay. Remembering the way she had behaved the day before, up there in her room, throwing things in her trunk, it seemed to her she could not be the girl who had done that. She felt older by twenty years than she was yesterday. But even so – would Mrs. Fairleigh still want her to be here – would Maury want her, knowing what she knew? No matter how one-sided it all was,

it was a secret he had kept from all the world till now. Perhaps he wouldn't even want her for a friend; with this consciousness between them. She would have to wait to find that out.

With Mrs. Fairleigh, waiting was not necessary, nor even possible. "But why in the world shouldn't I want you to stay? You know I do – we all do!" she exclaimed when the question arose, or might have arisen had she not met it with swift annihilation. "Nothing has changed, Amy. You will see that everything is just the same."

"I was afraid –" Amy began.

"I know; but you mustn't be afraid," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "Men, especially young men, are such poets, Amy. Have you ever stopped to think that they are what the poetry has had to come from – all the great echoing ocean of it? Women have written very little, first and last – it is the men. We have to remember that, and not be scared to death when we see what it does to them – to feel that way. It is very startling sometimes; words are dangerous-sounding things, used like that. Sometimes they make you think that you can never be the same again – but then you always are." She ended with the light laughter that was her usual apology for seriousness, and Amy looked at her, wondering.

"Nothing ever surprises you – does it?" she said. "You seem to be such friends with everything – with all the strangeness –"

"A lot of that just comes from being older," Mrs. Fairleigh said; "I am so much older than the rest of you – you and Maury, and of course the children. If it were not for the Judge being older than I am, I would feel like the mother of everybody."

And nothing was changed; Amy saw that this was true. Not once, as the days went by, was any word recalled or altered for her hearing, no glance exchanged too suddenly or withdrawn too late. It was all so simple; it was like seeing a ghost in daylight. Nothing had really happened, except to her – to whom so little had ever happened before. The tangled circumstances that made up the lives of other people had never seemed applicable to her own condition or surroundings. Even changing from a child into a woman had been more like a journey with a high scenic importance than an inner experience. Now she had reached that journey's end; she found herself involved with personal intensity in a drama of the emotions that she had made her own; the love she had discovered had become her love. All she asked – it seemed to her all she would ever ask – was just to stay where she could breathe this air.

She had stopped wondering how Maury felt about her staying, and nothing that had passed between them could have enabled her to guess. Whatever idea he may have had of explaining the situation he seemed to have given up.

But if he had indeed done this, Maury could have told her, it was not because he wanted the situation to go unexplained. It was just that he saw no way of giving an account, even to himself, of what he regarded as his permanent state of mind. There was hardly a question concerning it to which he could find an answer. If he had even been asked by what right, in a changing universe, he claimed it to be permanent, he could only have said, what is said for eternity in general, that since it had no beginning he saw no reason why it should have an

end. He didn't like to imagine saying things like this to Amy; he didn't think it would do any good; yet he had by no means stopped speculating about that different outlook of hers, which seemed more hopeful to him than it had done at first. It must have permitted her to form a milder judgment of his conduct than he feared; she had so evidently reconsidered her first hysterical condemnation and seemed disposed to accept him on much the same grounds as before. He might have said that in her treatment of him Amy had changed to all appearances less than in some other respects. Conversationally, for instance. She had never been what he would call particularly talkative: there had always been silences; but now there were more of them, and longer, and filled, he was sure, with different reflections. Instead of being so adequate – he had chosen that word for her in the beginning – she often seemed to him uncertain now; not only of her own ideas, but of ideas in general. And, strange to say, she didn't look quite so young any more; the gap between her and Nellie was certainly wider than it used to be. It was absurd to imagine that she looked taller than she did –

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On the Williamses' front porch, where the yellow jasmine had been in bloom for some time now, it was warm enough after dinner to sit out in the moonlight. Not content with that, Mrs. Fairleigh had, on the flimsiest of pretexts, sent Amy and Maury off together to walk in. "I want to show Mrs. Williams those photographs, Amy; you and Maury go back and get them for me." Amy had

on a white shawl with long fringe; walking off under the white moon, she did look taller. "– On the hall table," Mrs. Fairleigh called after them.

"Trying to drown him," Judge Fairleigh said. "What do you think of a woman who would do a thing like that?"

"I love the way she fixes her hair now," Mrs. Williams said. "Tied back on her neck, it used to make her look like a schoolgirl."

" 'For contemplation he and valor formed,' " Judge Fairleigh went on, musingly. "I'd like to ask Milton – I'm going to ask Norman here – how much contemplation he's ever been allowed to indulge in."

"He's doing it right now," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "He's been contemplating Jupiter – or is it Venus? – over there, ever since we came out."

"You see, Norman, she doesn't even know what the word means; no woman ever does; and yet the thing itself has a deadly fascination for them if they ever see anybody trying to practice it; it draws them like a magnet. Just let a man go off and light any kind of a little contemplative candle, and they come fluttering around it like Luna moths. It's a flame they would rather die in than keep away from."

"Propinquity, thy name is woman!" Mr. Williams said. "Remember how old Andrews used to get that off? I wouldn't worry, Ben. You came through all right."

"Came through what, I would like to know?" Mrs. Williams said. "If you mean walking in the moonlight with a girl –"

Mrs. Fairleigh laughed. "I know what he means. They are thinking about all the wonderful things they would

have done if it hadn't been for us. I like for them to feel that way; I think it's lovely. It gives them a tremendous advantage. It really gives them two lives instead of one – the one they have and the one they might have had. We only have one."

"But it's the one you know all about," Judge Fairleigh said – "that you can take to pieces and put together again – thanking no god for what no god has done."

"I wouldn't worry, Ben," Mr. Williams said again, going back to his planets. They had been more resplendent this spring, he told Mrs. Fairleigh, than he could remember ever having seen them.

"Hasn't it been wonderful for Miss Rita," Mrs. Williams said, going back to Amy, "having that child take to her that way? They must have read those old books more this winter than they ever expected to be read again. And talked; I dare say Miss Rita has told her things she has never breathed to the rest of us. Here they come now. They certainly got back fast enough to suit you, Ben."

"Binkie was awake," Amy said, giving Mrs. Fairleigh the photographs and sitting down on the steps at her feet.

"Did he want anything?" Mrs. Fairleigh asked, absently. She was already arranging the pictures for exhibition.

"He said he wanted the moon out of his face," Amy told her.

"Poor Binkie," Judge Fairleigh said.

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The spring at Cherry Station was turning out to be all that had been claimed for it, but in Boston too, from all reports, winter was no longer holding; not even as an excuse for staying away. Amy knew she couldn't stay for Virginia's wedding. John was beginning to wonder, she told Mrs. Fairleigh.

"Then we'll just have to make the most of the days we have left," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "And one thing we must be sure to do, though it can hardly be called making the most, is to go and tell Miss Letty good-by. It will please her so to think you have remembered her in her bereavement. Ben laughs when I call it that, but I wouldn't be surprised if she has shed more tears over losing that rapscallion of a doctor than anybody will ever know."

"Has she ever heard from him?" Amy asked.

Mrs. Fairleigh shook her head. "At least I don't suppose so. Nobody will ever know that either; Miss Letty has a lot of pride. I dare say she has never breathed his name, except in her prayers. What is his name, by the way? I declare I have clean forgotten it! I never heard her call him anything but Doctor. I wonder if she calls him that in her prayers," she said, laughing. "Isn't that dreadful of me? I'm worse than Ben. But if a thing is funny, it's just funny, and I don't suppose there is anything you can do about it."

"Has she started building on her new house yet?" Amy asked.

"Mercy, yes! Uncle Nelson said the studding was up last week when he went by there. I wouldn't be surprised if they have got the roof on by this time. Uncle Nelson says she is over there pretty nearly all the time, encouraging

the carpenters; and helping them too, I dare say. She is staying with the preacher and his wife, a little way up the road. You really do have to admire her, Amy – anybody as plucky as that – who doesn't even know when she's beaten, as they used to say about the Confederate soldiers."

Mrs. Fairleigh, who was as usual sewing, continued in silence for a while, with Amy looking on; then she said: "Did anybody ever tell you the beautiful thing your father said about us, in the war – that the only white feather he ever saw was a plume? My father told me that, and now I'm telling it to you, and you must tell your children. That's the way to really end a war. Words are a great power, Amy. Empty words – I never know what people mean by that; I don't believe there are any. Lies are powerful too; and promises, if they are not kept, can break our hearts like a sledge-hammer."

Amy listened. It seemed to her a lot of those words had been empty for her. Poor little Miss Letty knew what courage really meant – and hearts and sledge-hammers too.

They drove over before "quitting-time," so Miss Letty would be still at her house; and there they found her, in command of the field. There were two carpenters at work on that phoenix of new pine which had risen from the ashes and now stood flanked by the windmill and the willow as of old. "Sit right down on something," she called to them from what was going to be the kitchen, where she was holding a board for one of the carpenters. She was cheerful, even buoyant, and seemed to hear much better on account of the hammering. For the same reason she was perhaps even louder than she intended to be in

praise of the advantages of the new house as compared with the old one. It was smaller, for one thing; the other one had been really more than a woman by herself had any need of, Miss Letty said, looking them in the face with the eyes that reminded Nellie of the little red hen; and they, looking where and with what eyes they could, agreed with her; and nobody gave a backward glance to that brief interval when she had not been by herself. The bank had been most obliging, she told Mrs. Fairleigh, in the mater of notes and interest, and now, with a good cash crop – Amy could not follow the agricultural language very well, but off in the distance of a wide field she had already been following the slow transit of a darky and a mule across her field of vision. Was it possible that they were what Miss Letty was leaning her hopes on – those hopes of "paying out and starting over" to which she cheerfully recurred? It seemed mysterious to Amy. She remembered reading about the women's festivals in ancient Greece, in honor of the Earth-Goddess; and what it said in the Bible about the full corn in the ear. She reminded herself that this of course was cotton, but all the same she could see how much depended on it. Those words were not empty either.

Miss Letty told her, when they said good-by, that she would see great changes when she came again. "I am going to have some way to keep the chickens out of the yard. I want to have flowers down both sides of the walk, the way my mother did. Her front yard was a perfect mass of bloom. When do you think you will be coming back?"

Amy said she didn't know. It seemed to her she had been saying that a good deal lately, and this time she

hated it worse than ever because she had to say it so loud; she and Mrs. Fairleigh were already part of the way down the walk that was to be bordered with flowers.

"Well I'll be looking for you," Miss Letty called gaily, waving her hand and hurrying back to her carpenters.

"Somebody else I've got to say good-by to is Aunt Mittie," Amy said as they drove away.

"Well, that won't be bad," Mrs. Fairleigh said. "You and Maury can walk over together some time."

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Amy knew that when Mrs. Fairleigh said that, she was only thinking about the walk, but she herself, for some reason, immediately thought about the philters. Even on the way over, with Maury talking to her on all sorts of subjects, she kept remembering about Aunt Mittie's being a witch. It was funny, when she had never believed in witchcraft, and didn't believe in it now, that it should be so easy to believe in a witch – to imagine Aunt Mittie sitting by her big dark fireplace doing some kind of incantation with one of those little statues. She noticed as they crossed the bridge that the wisp of blue smoke was still rising from the tumbledown chimney. But the next minute she knew they wouldn't find her in the house working spells, because she saw her outside, hoeing in her garden. Everybody, these days, seemed to be more or less involved with agriculture.

Radishes and lettuce were both visible in Aunt Mittie's little patch when they got close enough to see; visible to her, too, Amy remembered gratefully. It would have been sad, on a day so full of sunshine, to think of her

gardening in the shadows. "I spec' I can 'bout bring you some of 'em, week after nex';" she told Amy.

Then of course Amy had to tell her that she would not be here week after next; that she was going away.

"Say you is? When is you comin' back?" Aunt Mittie inquired.

Amy said again she didn't know.

"What's the name of the place you lives at?"

"Boston," Amy told her.

"Boston, Boston –" Aunt Mitte tried it over. "Hit do soun' a long way off," she said.

"But there's a good road," Maury said. "There's a railroad."

"Is that what yous g'wine on?" she asked Amy.

Amy nodded. "And coming back on, too," Maury said. "Some of us will have to go after her if she waits too long."

"I spec' so," Aunt Mittie said pleasantly. She had put the hoe down, and Dan, who had been swinging from a piece of clothesline, now swung himself on to her shoulder. Amy looked at her, remembering again about the philters, and at Dan, who returned the look as if remembering something, but said no word in any language. All the oracles were dumb.

"Doesn't she remind you of a sibyl or something – standing there with that bird on her shoulder?" Amy said as they walked away. She had already turned back a time or two to wave good-by at the motionless figures who stood watching their departure, but making no answering sign. "I believe they look more mythical out of the house than they do in it."

Maury looked back too. "They do," he said. "It's too 'homelike' inside. She hasn't got a tripod nor a caldron among all those furnishings; nothing professional. But in this case it isn't Aunt Mittie who has been the sorceress; it's you. I should think it would make you very happy to think of it. Bringing light into darkness is about the best thing anybody can hope to accomplish, anywhere."

"But I didn't; you know that," Amy said. "The credit really belongs to Dr. Prescott."

"Well, at least let Dan have the credit of the suggestion. Maybe it makes him happy."

"It makes me happy too," Amy said. "And I have been thinking," she began again after they had walked awhile in silence, "about how impossible it is to shut out foreign influences – even from this quiet little place. There was Frances Wright, for instance, and that poor Italian who left the parrot here; and my father, and now me – not that I have influenced anything; but it is so strange, when you come to think of it, for me to be here at all."

"It is delightful – when you come to think of it" Maury said, smiling, but he could see that she was not listening.

"Do you remember," she asked him, "that time you were talking about people being different in different places? You said you wouldn't be the same man in Boston. Sometimes I think I am not the same person I was before I came here. – I don't mean to look at," she said quickly, as Maury turned to do it; "it's an internal change."

"And do you like it?" he asked her. "Is it one you approve of?"

"I don't know whether I do or not," she said; "I don't know how to tell."

"I should say there was only one test – only one that you can make yourself, at any rate: whether or not it makes you happier."

She knew the answer to this; it was what she had been working on; she knew the possibilities of happiness had been multiplied for her a thousandfold, and the possibilities of unhappiness as well. It was the extent of the perspective that had changed. From this flat little place she had been shown as from a mountain the glory of the world, but she could not say much about it, since it had not been offered to her on any terms.

"I know you don't approve of foreign influences," she said after a while. "I suppose they always did work against your communal society, didn't they?"

"I approve of you and Dan," Maury said.

Again she did not smile. "Still, leaving out the practical side, don't you think it is always interesting to compare places?" she asked him. "The difference between one place and another ought to be a good deal like the difference between one period and another – I mean in history – oughtn't it?"

"In a way I suppose it is," he said.

"And if you take contrasting periods – for instance, the way the Elizabethans glorified life, and then the way the religious ideal was all for throwing it away – even if you can't say which was the better, don't you think it is enlightening to have them both to look at?"

"Without conviction? What is known as the intellectual approach?"

"But doesn't it help us to understand people better – to understand life?"

"Do you know, Miss Amy," Maury said, looking at her reflectively, "I sometimes wonder if even a historian has the right to look at life that way – standing off from it with a map and a calendar. There is nothing comparative about life – as long as it is life; the Elizabethans certainly didn't live in relation to anything; they lived for the incomparable moment; that was the grace and the madness of it. Do you remember the story of the young sea captain about to be hanged for piracy, who asked for one minute more to live – not for repentance, as the priest was hoping, but to think about his ship? A thing like that has to stand by itself, doesn't it – at least until somebody else feels the same way?"

He was not looking at her; he had stooped to pick up a piece of glass that was lying in the middle of the road and send it off into the bushes; and this gave her the opportunity to look at him – to see him in the young sea captain's place – to wonder of what, of whom, he would be thinking. Amy, who approved of comparisons, had been left these days with only one figure to put on every page of history; she saw nothing any more without conviction; what was known as the intellectual approach no longer took her where she wanted to go.

It was not surprising that this unwonted exercise of her imagination should bring a new expression to her face, though it usually surprised Maury when he saw it there, as he did now. The outward and visible sign, he supposed, of the inward alteration of which she had been speaking.

"I wonder," he said as they walked along, "when you look back on us down here – on this little episode of your stay among us – how it is going to seem to you. If it

really is as strange for you to be here as you seem to think, then maybe we might take it as being something more than an accident – as being rather in the line of intention; it may be intended to contribute something to your experience that you would not have been apt to get hold of anywhere else. That's an interesting view to take, so suppose we just take it; and some day when you have been away long enough to form an impartial opinion – or a relative one, or a comparative one, whichever you would rather go by – I hope you will write to me and tell me how we have impressed you."

Amy did not say anything; she did not even look up; so he went on, more seriously than usual: "And here again, in making up your mind – in summing up the situation as you have seen it – there is only one test: will it make you happy or unhappy to think of us? When you imagine us blundering along in our narrow way, barely managing to keep something together – something so small that it would otherwise be lost – maybe it won't seem to you a contribution to anybody's happiness, even our own. Anyway, I hope you'll tell me; some day when you feel like it – if you ever do."

She gave no sign of feeling like it at present; she looked as if she might never speak again. "And another thing," Maury said, "I still want to know how you feel about one or two things directly concerning me that you have never given me a real opinion about. You are bound to feel something, or at least to think something, whether you want to or not. You told me, you remember, that you didn't want to think of me at all, in some of my aspects; but thoughts – especially of our friends, if you don't mind – are hard to kill, and even after we have

killed them they have a way of turning up again; and I should like to get your verdict one of these days." He was watching her as he spoke and was surprised to see how white she grew before she turned her face away. "Is it still so bad?" he said. "Then I can only hope that if it is ever better, you will at least tell me that."

"But then I will not be anybody here," she said with that catch in her breath he had noticed before. "I will be back where I was – on the outside again."

"A foreign voice – like Dan's?" he said, smiling at her. "All the same, I should like to hear about the stars."

He was touched and not a little puzzled by the amount of feeling that seemed still to be mixed up with her point of view – whatever it still was. Only a really vital readjustment of values could cause anyone such discomfort. She must have had too high an opinion of him before, he reflected, or she couldn't take anything he did as much to heart as this. He wished there were some way to clear the matter up a little; he didn't like the idea of her just being broad-minded about him; he wanted her to know the truth.

"And I wish you wouldn't talk that way, Miss Amy – about being on the outside – unless you are just doing it to hurt my feelings. Of course I have no way of knowing how much you have ever felt on the inside, but I would do almost anything rather than have you lose an inch of that position. Do you believe that?" He looked at her hopefully, but she seemed more stricken than ever, and since he could think of nothing else to say, it was rather a relief to see Nellie coming to meet them, on the mad run she considered suitable for such reunions. "I wanted to go," she said. "I almost got home in time. What did Dan say?"

"Nothing," Amy told her.

"Not a word? Didn't you tell him you were going?"

Amy nodded without speaking.

"But I told him she was coming back," Maury said. "Parrots won't ever say good-by; didn't you know that?"

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"But even if you don't know when you are coming back," Miss Rita said, "I am as certain as anything that you are going to do it. The way you fit in here with all of us is proof enough that we have some kind of claim on you. Maury was just saying yesterday – And by the way, Amy, how many of Dickens have we read? Five, isn't it?"

Amy counted them and it was five. "What was it he said?" she asked then, since it seemed to be the only way to find out.

"We were talking about how much I have enjoyed being read to," Miss Rita said, "and I told him it had made the winter go by like a dream, I'm sorry it's over."

"So am I; it's been a pleasure for me too – you know it has."

"That's just what he meant – that we were so congenial," Miss Rita said. "Maybe your brother could come with you the next time," she suggested. "It seems to me he and Maury ought to have a great deal in common."

Amy did not say anything, and Miss Rita presently continued: "Anyhow, I've been thinking that if you don't come back after a reasonable time – say by next summer – it would be a wonderful thing for Maury to take a trip. He really ought to travel some before he settles down;

in my day that was an outstanding part of every young man's education. He's always talking about not leaving me, but I can certainly leave him. I can go and spend the summer with Susie Becket. Do you suppose you and your brother might be in Europe somewhere by that time?"

Amy told her it depended on Harvard – on a lot of things. John had been asked to give some lectures in England –

"Well England is one country Maury certainly ought to see," Miss Rita broke in. "And as far as that goes, Susie Becket would like nothing better than for me to stay with her indefinitely. Maury is always making me the excuse for not doing what he doesn't want to do – or thinks he ought not to want to do – but you'll agree with me that he ought to want to visit England."

Amy was so slow about agreeing that Miss Rita glanced up to be sure she understood. She was finding her place in *Little Dorrit*; there seemed to be no doubt that she had understood.

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"Miss Rita has an idea that Maury ought to travel some before he settles down. How do you feel about it, Ben?" Mrs. Fairleigh said.

Judge Fairleigh laid aside his paper and removed his glasses and prepared to listen a little longer before feeling anything.

"She thinks he ought to spend next summer in seeing a little more of the world, and then come back and make up his mind whether he would rather practice law or

go on with his writing, in earnest. Of course I don't suppose she knows very much about how that would fit in with other things – the office, for instance – and I don't suppose her opinion would have very much weight anyhow –"

"Wouldn't that depend on what she put in the scales with it?" Judge Fairleigh suggested. "What part of the world, exactly, is she proposing that he see?"

"She seems to think he ought to go to Europe, if – well, if he can afford it, for one thing. And especially if Amy and John are already over there."

"In that case, with Europe and Miss Amy thrown in, I think her opinion might weigh a good deal," Judge Fairleigh said. "I don't suppose she has got around to asking Maury for his opinion yet; I'm surprised to have you asking mine – before the fact, to all appearances."

"I just thought it was interesting," she said, laughing. "But Miss Rita seems to be really in earnest about it, from what she said to Amy. She hasn't said anything to me, but I'm sure she feels just as I do about Maury giving up so many things before he has even tried them enough to know what they are worth. If he decided twenty years from now that he would rather lead a contemplative life, as you call it, than a normal one –"

"As you call it?" Judge Fairleigh suggested.

"Yes, I do. And as I was saying, I would be willing for him to be a hermit even, and live in a grotto, if I were sure he knew what he was missing –"

"Or sure that he hadn't missed it?"

"Don't be silly, Ben; you know perfectly well what I mean."

"You mean Europe and Miss Amy, don't you?"

She laughed again. “But all the same, if the question does come up, you won’t do anything to discourage the idea, will you? That’s really why I’m telling you in advance this way.”

“Well, it’s nice to know what is going on among the Parcæ,” Judge Fairleigh said, taking up his paper and putting his glasses back on.

Apparently the question was not going to come up before Amy’s departure, If Maury’s opinion of foreign travel had been asked by anybody, it was not in Mrs. Fairleigh’s hearing, and naturally she was not going to mention the subject. There were so many subjects she couldn’t mention. What would he do, she wondered, if she came right out and told him how Amy felt about him? Love begets love – people said that; she had read it lots of times; but if she were a girl she wouldn’t like to take the chance of showing a man she was in love with him – not first; and certainly she wasn’t going to take a chance with Amy. The best she could do was to show him that Amy admired him tremendously and valued his opinion more than anybody else’s – even John’s. And of course she would show him, up to the last minute, that Amy was the loveliest girl he was ever likely to meet, whether he stayed at home or got out and traveled.

“I don’t like to think of the way I am going to miss her, Maury,” she said, in pursuance of this plan. “I suppose there never could be a time when I wouldn’t be sorry to have her go.”

“I am sorry to have her go disapproving of me the way she does at present,” Maury said, with a seriousness that surprised her. She thought a little before she answered – trying not to hope too much.

"The reason you think that, I suppose, is because you can't help seeing how she has changed. But it isn't only toward you; it is toward pretty nearly everything; and in most cases I don't believe it is disapproval – certainly not in your case," she assured him. "You are really the one who has changed her, Maury; talking to you has made a big shake-up in her ideas; there is so much more *substance* to them."

"But if it's a substance she doesn't care for –"

"She will, though, when she gets used to it; just now it is still strange to her." Mrs. Fairleigh smiled reminiscently. "It would be funny if it were not so touching, the way she remembers everything she has heard you say, all winter long; she keeps trying to fit it all together – as a philosophy of life."

"Perhaps I should have been more careful of what I said." She glanced at him, but he was not smiling.

"You couldn't have fooled her, Maury; sooner or later she would have known the worst as well as the best about you. And I really do believe she has come out on your side in almost everything. She's a real convert; I'm not, you know."

"I know," he said.

"And Amy's one you can be proud of – provided she doesn't stay away too long."

"When is she coming back?" he asked, unconscious of the ritual; and without a smile she repeated the response: "She doesn't know."

"I thought Aunt Rita said –"

She shook her head. "I'm afraid she doesn't know either. As far as I can gather, she is going to England with John, to give some lectures. Oh, Maury, how I wish

I could go too! Old as I am, I would just love to leave everything and go!"

Old as she was. Even knowing as he did the lights and shadows of her face, he was astonished at its eager look of youth. He had not dreamed she felt that way; he was struck suddenly with the idea that perhaps he had spent very little time dreaming about how she felt in most things that concerned only herself.

"You look so surprised," she said. "Didn't you even think I wanted to go? I have never been anywhere!"

Not anywhere. Even in his imagination she had been always here, in this dull little place that she had made his life's enchantment. It was strange that he had never thought she might want to be somewhere else; though perhaps it was stranger for him to be thinking of it now. For some reason he was seeing her in a less familiar aspect; it was dawning on him that even with everything she had – himself included – she might want something more. He looked at her in silence, with new eyes.

It had already occurred to him, in the light of late events, that giving what he called his life to someone who didn't need it might be a clumsy thing to do; he saw now, from her side, how preposterous it was. Didn't she have lives enough already – to give her own to? With all those destinies to follow, from the Judge on down to Binkie – and following David still – what would she want with his soul's Odyssey?

"What is it, Maury?" she was reading his face a little anxiously. "Are you thinking about –"

"Only about you – for a change," he said.

She looked relieved. "Oh, that," she said. "Nobody ever does think about the narrow round, the common

task, not furnishing all I ought to ask, and of course as a rule it does. But right now I'm feeling what Sadie calls low in my mind –" She stopped. Then, with her light laughter: "Ben says I'm planning to miss Amy entirely too much."

Maury was watching her; he was making up his mind. "Would it make you feel any better," he said presently, "if you knew that I am planning to miss her too?"

"It might," she said, still laughing.

"... Somebody told me he is a writer," Mrs. Carter said; "– Maury Thornton. It seems to me I've seen something by him. What kind of books does he write?"

"Essays – poetry; that sort of thing," Mrs. Williams said. "A little too advanced for people to read very much – down here, at least. That may be why he decided to live in the North."

"He married a Northern girl, didn't he?"

"Yes. Such a nice girl: Amy Gilbert. She was visiting the Fairleighs; that was how he happened to meet her. Sweet – pretty, too."

"Don't they ever come back?"

"They did at first. But you know how it is – with children growing up and all their interests to be considered; and now with the place sold, I doubt if they come any more. You think we don't have changes in a quiet neighborhood like this, but we do."