preparing to depart. One of the young men she recognized from a photograph on Susan's bureau. He was, for the time being, Susan's. His name, although it does not matter much, was Morton Browne, and he would have been considerably astonished if he had guessed how much of his history Cynthia knew. It was Mr. Browne's habit to take Susan for a walk as often as propriety permitted, and on such occasions he generally brought along a good-natured classmate to take care of Jane. This, apparently, was one of the occasions. Mr. Browne was tall and dark and generally good-looking, while his friends were usually distinguished for their good nature. Mr. Browne stood between her and the door and looked at her rather fixedly. Then he said: —

"Excuse me."

A great many friendships, and even love affairs, have been inaugurated by just such an opening.

"Certainly," said Cynthia, and tried to pass out. But Mr. Browne had no intention of allowing her to do so if he could help it.

"I hope I am not intruding," he said politely.

"Oh, no," answered Cynthia, wondering how she could get by him.

"Were you waiting for Miss Merrill?"

"Oh, no," said Cynthia again.

The other young man turned his back and became absorbed in the picture of a lion getting ready to tear a lady to pieces. But Mr. Browne was of that mettle which is not easily baffled in such matters. He introduced himself, and desired to know whom he had the honor of addressing. Cynthia could not but enlighten him. Mr. Browne was greatly astonished, and showed it.

"So you are the mysterious young lady who has been staying here in the house this winter," he exclaimed, as though it were a marvellous thing. "I have heard Miss Merrill speak of you. She admires you very much. Is it true that you come from — Coniston?"

"Yes," she said.

"Let me see — where is Coniston?" inquired Mr. Browne.

"Do you know where Brampton is?" asked Cynthia. "Coniston is near Brampton."

"Brampton!" exclaimed Mr. Browne, "I have a classmate who comes from Brampton — Bob Worthington. You must know Bob, then."

Yes, Cynthia knew Mr. Worthington.

"His father's got a mint of money, they say. I've been told that old Worthington was the whole show up in those parts. Is that true?"

"Not quite," said Cynthia.

Not quite! Mr. Morton Browne eyed her in surprise, and from that moment she began to have decided possibilities. Just then Jane and Susan entered arrayed for the walk, but Mr. Browne showed himself in no hurry to depart: began to speak, indeed, in a deprecating way about the weather, appealed to his friend, Mr. King, if it didn't look remarkably like rain, or hail, or snow. Susan sat down, Jane sat down, Mr. Browne and his friend prepared to sit down when Cynthia moved toward the door.

"You're not going, Cynthia!" cried Susan, in a voice that may have had a little too much eagerness in it. "You must stay and help us entertain Mr. Browne." (Mr. King, apparently, was not to be entertained.) "We've tried so hard to make her come down when people called, Mr. Browne, but she never would."

Cynthia was not skilled in the art of making excuses. She hesitated for one, and was lost. So she sat down, as far from Mr. Browne as possible, next to Jane. In a few minutes Mr. Browne was seated beside her, and how he accomplished this manœuvre Cynthia could not have said, so skilfully and gradually was it done. For lack of a better subject he chose Mr. Robert Worthington. Related, for Cynthia's delectation, several of Bob's escapades in his freshman year: silly escapades enough, but very bold and daring and original they sounded to Cynthia, who listened (if Mr. Browne could have known it) with almost breathless interest, and forgot all about poor Susan talking to Mr. King. Did Mr. Worthington still while away his

evenings stealing barber poles and being chased around Cambridge by irate policemen? Mr. Browne laughed at the notion. O dear, no! seniors never descended to that. Had not Miss Wetherell heard the song wherein seniors were designated as grave and reverend? Yes, Miss Wetherell had heard the song. She did not say where, or how. Mr. Worthington, said his classmate, had become very serious-minded this year. Was captain of the base-ball team and already looking toward the study of law.

"Study law!" exclaimed Cynthia, "I thought he would go into his father's mills."

"Do you know Bob very well?" asked Mr. Browne.

She admitted that she did not.

"He's been away from Brampton a good deal, of course," said Mr. Browne, who seemed pleased by her admission. To do him justice, he would not undermine a classmate, although he had other rules of conduct which might eventu ally require a little straightening out. "Worthy's a first-rate fellow, a little quick-tempered, perhaps, and inclined to go his own way. He's got a good mind, and he's taken to using it lately. He has come pretty near being suspended once or twice."

Cynthia wanted to ask what "suspended" was. It sounded rather painful. But at this instant there was the rattle of a latch key at the door, and Mr. Merrill walked in.

"Well, well," he said, spying Cynthia, "so you have got Cynthia to come down and entertain the young men at last."

"Yes," said Susan, "we have got Cynthia to come down at last."

Susan did not go to Cynthia's room that night to chat, as usual, and Mr. Morton Browne's photograph was mysteriously removed from the prominent position it had occupied. If Susan had carried out a plan which she conceived in a moment of folly of placing that photograph on Cynthia's bureau, there would undoubtedly have been a quarrel. Cynthia's own feelings — seeing that Mr. Browne had not dazzled her — were not enviable.

But she held her peace, which indeed was all she could do, and the next time Mr. Browne called, though he took care to mention her name particularly at the door, she would not go down to entertain him: though Susan implored and Jane appealed, she would not go down. Mr. Browne called several times again, with the same result. Cynthia was inexorable — she would have none of him. Then Susan forgave her. There was no quarrel, indeed, but there was a reconciliation, which is the best part of a quarrel. There were tears, of Susan's shedding; there was a character-sketch of Mr. Browne, of Susan's drawing, and that gentleman flitted lightly out of Susan's life.

Some ten days subsequent to this reconciliation Ellen, the parlor maid, brought up a card to Cynthia's room. The card bore the name of Mr. Robert Worthington. Cynthia stared at it, and bent it in her fingers, while Ellen explained how the gentleman had begged that she might see him. To tell the truth, Cynthia had wondered more than once why he had not come before, and smiled when she thought of all the assurances of undying devotion she had heard in Washington. After all, she reflected, why should she not see him — once? He might give her news of Brampton and Coniston. Thus willingly deceiving herself, she told Ellen that she would go down: much to the girl's delight, for Cynthia was a favorite in the house.

As she entered the parlor Mr. Worthington was standing in the window. When he turned and saw her he started to come forward in his old impetuous way, and stopped and looked at her in surprise. She herself did not grasp the reason for this.

"Can it be possible," he said, "can it be possible that this is my friend from the country?" And he took her hand with the greatest formality, pressed it the least little bit, and released it. "How do you do, Miss Wetherell? Do you remember me?"

"How do you do — Bob," she answered, laughing in spite of herself at his banter. "You haven't changed, anyway."

"It was Mr. Worthington in Washington," said he.

"Now it is 'Bob' and 'Miss Wetherell.' Rank patronage! How did you do it, Cynthia?"

"You are like all men," said Cynthia, "you look at the clothes, and not the woman. They are not very fine clothes; but if they were much finer, they wouldn't change me."

"Then it must be Miss Sadler."

"Miss Sadler would willingly change me — if she could," said Cynthia, a little bitterly. "How did you find out I was at Miss Sadler's?"

"Morton Browne told me yesterday," said Bob. "I felt like punching his head."

"What did he tell you?" she asked with some concern.

"He said that you were here, visiting the Merrills, among other things, and said that you knew me."

The "other things" Mr. Browne had said were interesting, but flippant. He had seen Bob at a college club and declared that he had met a witch of a country girl at the Merrills. He couldn't make her out, because she had refused to see him every time he called again. He had also repeated Cynthia's remark about Bob's father not being quite the biggest man in his part of the country, and ventured the surmise that she was the daughter of a rival mill owner.

"Why didn't you let me know you were in Boston?" said Bob, reproachfully.

"Why should I?" asked Cynthia, and she could not resist adding, "Didn't you find it out when you went to Brampton — to see me?"

"Well," said he, getting fiery red, "the fact is — I didn't go to Brampton."

"I'm glad you were sensible enough to take my advice, though I suppose that didn't make any difference. But — from the way you spoke, I should have thought nothing could have kept you away."

"To tell you the truth," said Bob, "I'd promised to visit a fellow named Broke in my class, who lives in New York. And I couldn't get out of it. His sister, by the way, is in Miss Sadler's. I suppose you know her. But

if I'd thought you'd see me, I should have gone to Brampton, anyway. You were so down on me in Washington."

"It was very good of you to take the trouble to come to see me here. There must be a great many girls in Boston you have to visit."

He caught the little note of coolness in her voice. Cynthia was asking herself whether, if Mr. Browne had not seen fit to give a good report of her, he would have come at all. He would have come, certainly. It is to be hoped that Bob Worthington's attitude up to this time toward Cynthia has been sufficiently defined by his conversation and actions. There had been nothing serious about it. But there can be no question that Mr. Browne's openly expressed admiration had enhanced her value in his eyes.

"There's no girl in Boston that I care a rap for," he said.

"I'm relieved to hear it," said Cynthia, with feeling.

"Are you really?"

"Didn't you expect me to be, when you said it?"

He laughed uncomfortably.

"You've learned more than one thing since you've been in the city," he remarked, "I suppose there are a good many fellows who come here all the time."

"Yes, there are," she said demurely.

"Well," he remarked, "you've changed a lot in three months. I always thought that, if you had a chance, there'd be no telling where you'd end up."

"That doesn't sound very complimentary," said Cynthia. She had, indeed, changed. "In what terrible place do you think I'll end up?"

"I suppose you'll marry one of these Boston men."

"Oh," she laughed, "that wouldn't be so terrible, would it?"

"I believe you're engaged to one of 'em now," he remarked, looking very hard at her.

"If you believed that, I don't think you would say it," she answered.

"I can't make you out. You used to be so frank with

me, and now you're not at all so. Are you going to Coniston for the holidays?"

Her face fell at the question.

"Oh, Bob," she cried, surprising him utterly by a glimpse of the real Cynthia, "I wish I were — I wish I were! But I don't dare to."

"Don't dare to?"

"If I went, I should never come back — never. I should stay with Uncle Jethro. He's so lonesome up there, and I'm so lonesome down here, without him. And I promised him faithfully I'd stay a whole winter at school in Boston."

"Cynthia," said Bob, in a strange voice as he leaned toward her, "do you — do you care for him as much as all that?"

"Care for him?" she repeated.

"Care for — for Uncle Jethro?"

"Of course I care for him," she cried, her eyes flashing at the thought. "I love him better than anybody in the world. Certainly no one ever had better reason to care for a person. My father failed when he came to Coniston — he was not meant for business, and Uncle Jethro took care of him all his life, and paid his debts. And he has taken care of me and given me everything that a girl could wish. Very few people know what a fine character Uncle Jethro has," continued Cynthia, carried away as she was by the pent-up flood of feeling within her. "I know what he has done for others, and I should love him for that even if he never had done anything for me."

Bob was silent. He was, in the first place, utterly amazed at this outburst, revealing as it did a depth of passionate feeling in the girl which he had never suspected, and which thrilled him. It was unlike her, for she was usually so self-repressed; and, being unlike her, accentuated both sides of her character the more.

But what was he to say of the defence of Jethro Bass? Bob was not a young man who had pondered much over the problems of life, because these problems had hitherto never touched him. But now he began to perceive, dimly,

things that might become the elements of a tragedy, even as Mr. Merrill had perceived them some months before. Could a union endure between so delicate a creature as the girl before him and Jethro Bass? Could Cynthia ever go back to him again, and live with him happily, without seeing many things which before were hidden by reason of her youth and innocence?

Bob had not been nearly four years at college without learning something of the world; and it had not needed the lecture from his father, which he got upon leaving Washington, to inform him of Jethro's political practices. He had argued soundly with his father on that occasion, having the courage to ask Mr. Worthington in effect whether he did not sanction his underlings to use the same tools as Jethro used. Mr. Worthington was righteously angry, and declared that Jethro had inaugurated those practices in the state, and had to be fought with his own weapons. But Mr. Worthington had had the sense at that time not to mention Cynthia's name. He hoped and believed that that affair was not serious, and merely a boyish fancy — as indeed it was.

It remains to be said, however, that the lecture had not been without its effect upon Bob. Jethro Bass, after all, was — Jethro Bass. All his life Bob had heard him familiarly and jokingly spoken of as the boss of the state, and had listened to the tales, current in all the country towns, of how Jethro had outwitted this man or that. Some of them were not refined tales. Jethro Bass as the boss of the state — with the tolerance with which the public in general regard politics — was one thing. Bob was willing to call him "Uncle Jethro," admire his great strength and shrewdness, and declare that the men he had outwitted had richly deserved it. But Jethro Bass as the ward of Cynthia Wetherell was quite another thing.

It was not only that Cynthia had suddenly and inevitably become a lady. That would not have mattered, for such as she would have borne Coniston and the life of Coniston cheerfully. But Bob reflected, as he walked back to his rooms in the dark through the snow-laden

streets, that Cynthia, young though she might be, possessed principles from which no love would sway her a hair's breadth. How, indeed, was she to live with Jethro once her eyes were opened?

The thought made him angry, but returned to him persistently during the days that followed, — in the lecture room, in the gymnasium, in his own study, where he spent more time than formerly. By these tokens it will be perceived that Bob, too, had changed a little. And the sight of Cynthia in Mrs. Merrill's parlor had set him to thinking in a very different manner than the sight of her in Washington had affected him.

Bob had managed to shift the subject from Jethro, not without an effort, though he had done it in that merry, careless manner which was so characteristic of him. He had talked of many things, — his college life, his friends, — and laughed at her questions about his freshman escapades. But when at length, at twilight, he had risen to go, he had taken both her hands and looked down into her face with a very different expression than she had seen him wear before — a much more serious expression, which puzzled her. It was not the look of a lover, nor yet that of a man who imagines himself in love. With either of these her instinct would have told her how to deal. It was more the look of a friend, with much of the masculine spirit of protection in it.

"May I come to see you again?" he asked.

Gently she released her hands, and she did not answer at once. She went to the window, and stared across the sloping street at the grilled railing before the big house opposite, thinking. Her reason told her that he should not come, but her spirit rebelled against that reason. It was a pleasure to see him, so she freely admitted to herself. Why should she not have that pleasure? If the truth be told, she had argued it all out before, when she had wondered whether he would come. Mrs. Merrill, she thought, would not object to his coming. But — there was the question she had meant to ask him.

"Bob," she said, turning to him, "Bob, would your father want you to come?"

It was growing dark, and she could scarcely see his face. He hesitated, but he did not attempt to evade the question.

"No, he would not," he answered. And added, with a good deal of force and dignity: "I am of age, and can choose my own friends. I am my own master. If he knew you as I knew you, he would look at the matter in a different light."

Cynthia felt that this was not quite true. She smiled a little sadly.

"I am afraid you don't know me very well, Bob." He was about to protest, but she went on, bravely, "Is it because he has quarrelled with Uncle Jethro?"

"Yes," said Bob. She was making it terribly hard for him, sparing indeed neither herself nor him.

"If you come here to see me, it will cause a quarrel between you and your father. I — I cannot do that."

"There is nothing wrong in my seeing you," said Bob, stoutly; "if he cares to quarrel with me for that, I cannot help it. If the people I choose for my friends are good people, he has no right to an objection, even though he is my father."

Cynthia had never come so near real admiration for him as at that moment.

"No, Bob, you must not come," she said. "I will not have you quarrel with him on my account."

"Then I will quarrel with him on my own account," he had answered. "Good-by. You may expect me this day week."

He went into the hall to put on his overcoat. Cynthia stood still on the spot of the carpet where he had left her. He put his head in at the door.

"This day week," he said.

"Bob, you must not come," she answered. But the street door closed after him as he spoke.