CHAPTER XXXI.

THE year that had passed had seemed a very long one to John, but as the months came and went he had in a measure adjusted himself to the change in his fortunes and environment; and so as time went on the poignancy of his sorrow and regret diminished, as it does with all of us. Yet the sight of a gray-haired man still brought a pang to his heart, and there were times of yearning longing to recall every line of the face, every detail of the dress, the voice, the words, of the girl who had been so dear to him, and who had gone out of his life as irrevocably, it seemed to him, as if by death itself. It may be strange, but it is true that for a very long time it never occurred to him that he might communicate with her by mailing a letter to her New York address to be forwarded, and when the thought came to him the impulse to act upon it was very strong, but he did not do so. Perhaps he would have written had he been less in love with her, but also there was mingled with that sentiment something of bitterness which, though he could not quite explain or justify it, did exist. Then, too, he said to himself, "Of what avail would it be? Only to keep alive a longing for the impossible." No, he would forget it all. Men had died and worms had eaten them, but not for love. Many

men lived all their lives without it and got on very well too, he was aware. Perhaps some day, when he had become thoroughly affiliated and localized, he would wed a village maiden, and rear a Freeland County brood. Our friend, as may be seen, had a pretty healthy mind, and we need not sympathize with him to the disturbance of our own peace.

Books accumulated in the best bedroom. John's expenses were small, and there was very little temptation, or indeed opportunity, for spending. At the time of his taking possession of his quarters in David's house he had raised the question of his contribution to the household expenses, but Mr. Harum had declined to discuss the matter at all and referred him to Mrs. Bixbee, with whom he compromised on a weekly sum which appeared to him absurdly small, but which she protested she was ashamed to accept. After a while a small upright piano made its appearance, with Aunt Polly's approval.

"Why, of course," she said. "You needn't to hev ast me. I'd like to hev you anyway. I like music ever so much, an' so does David, though I guess it would floor him to try an' raise a tune. I used to sing quite a little when I was younger, an' I gen'ally help at church an' prayer meetin' now. Why, cert'nly. Why not? When would you play if it wa'n't in the evenin'? David sleeps over the wing. Do you hear him snore?"

"Hardly ever," replied John, smiling. "That is to say, not very much—just enough sometimes to know that he is asleep."

"Wa'al," she said decidedly, "if he's fur enough off so 't you can't hear *him*, I guess he

won't hear *you* much, an' he sure won't hear you after he gits to sleep."

So the piano came, and was a great comfort and resource. Indeed, before long it became the regular order of things for David and his sister to spend an hour or so on Sunday evenings listening to his music and their own as well—that is, the music of their choice—which latter was mostly to be found in "Carmina Sacra" and "Moody and Sankey"; and Aunt Polly's heart was glad indeed when she and John together made concord of sweet sounds in some familiar hymn tune, to the great edification of Mr. Harum, whose admiration was unbounded.

"Did I tell you," said David to Dick Larrabee, "what happened the last time me an' John went ridin' together?"

"Not's I remember on," replied Dick.

"Wa'al, we've rode together quite a consid'able," said Mr. Harum, "but I hadn't never said anythin' to him about takin' a turn at the lines. This day we'd got a piece out into the country an' I had the brown colts. I says to him, 'Ever do any drivin'?"

"'More or less,' he says.

"'Like to take the lines fer a spell?' I says.

"'Yes,' he says, lookin' kind o' pleased, 'if you ain't afraid to trust me with 'em,' he says.

"'Wa'al, I'll be here,' I says, an' handed 'em over. Wa'al, sir, I see jest by the way he took holt on 'em it wa'n't the fust time, an' we went along to where the road turns in through a piece of woods, an' the track is narrer, an' we run slap onto one o' them dum'd road-engines that had got wee-wawed putty near square across the

track. Now I tell ye," said Mr. Harum, "them hosses didn't like it fer a cent, an' tell the truth I didn't like it no better. We couldn't go ahead fer we couldn't git by the cussed thing, an' the hosses was 'par'ntly tryin' to git back under the buggy, an', scat my ——! if he didn't straighten 'em out an' back 'em 'round in that narrer road, an' hardly scraped a wheel. Yes, sir," declared Mr. Harum, "I couldn't 'a' done it slicker myself, an' I don't know nobody that could."

"Guess you must 'a' felt a little ticklish yourself," said Dick sympathetically, laughing as usual.

"Wa'al, you better believe," declared the other. "The' was 'bout half a minute when I'd have sold out mighty cheap, an' took a promise fer the money. He's welcome to drive any team in *my* barn," said David, feeling—in which view Mr. Larrabee shared—that encomium was pretty well exhausted in that assertion.

"I don't believe," said Mr. Harum after a moment, in which he and his companion reflected upon the gravity of his last declaration, "that the's any dum thing that feller can't do. The last thing 's a piany. He's got a little one that stands up on it's hind legs in his room, an' he c'n play it with both hands 'thout lookin' on. Yes, sir, we have reg'lar concerts at my house ev'ry Sunday night, admission free, an' childern half price, an'," said David, "you'd ought to hear him an' Polly sing, an'—he, he, he! you'd ought to *see* her singin'—tickleder 'n a little dog with a nosegay tied to his tail."