A BRAVE COWARD

·BY·

A. G. PLYMPTON

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A BRAVE COWARD.

PART I.

"THE question is," said the elf, "whether a thing can be good and bad at the same time."

The "elf" was the name by which Beatrix Belfast was often called, on account of the trickiness of her disposition, and a certain oddity in her appearance. Sometimes she was called Bee and sometimes Trix; but she discouraged the use of her baptismal name, saying it was too good for every-day, and she liked to keep it in the box with her best hat.

She had a small, pale face, with dark brows, and eyes so heavily lashed as to make one uncertain whether they were blue, gray, or black. Perhaps the color changed with her mood, — in which case it were well

to drop the question at once. There was nothing uncertain, however, about the color of her hair, which was quite black, — the dusky black that is never smooth, — and so thick that it shaded the face beneath, making it seem even smaller than its true size.

The moonlight streamed across the long piazza where the children sat, Harold swinging in the hammock under the vines, and Bee on a rug, with her knees drawn up to her chin, looking like a grotesque little heathen idol.

"The question is, whether a thing can be good and bad at the same time," she repeated.

"Of course not," said Harold, with a comfortable decision of tone. "Good is one thing, and bad is another; that 's all there is about it. What stupid things you do say, Trix; and yet I heard Dr. Waters tell grandpapa that you are the brightest child he ever saw. Don't see where it comes in, I 'm sure."

Bee sat silently thrusting her slim fingers through her hair, making it bushier than ever, — a sign with her of great perplexity. Finally she said: —

"Well, I think he made up his mind to

that the other day, when I was teaching him how to draw a dog. You should see the one he drew, with four loops for the legs, and as stiff as if it had been cut out of gingerbread. I should think any goose could have done better; even you, Harold, can draw a better one than that. And he makes a tree with two straight lines for a trunk (he means them for straight), and a lot of threes, turned every which way, for the foliage. What did grandpapa answer?"

"Oh, he said that you are not as bright as I am," said Harold, who was not to be led from a truthful statement of facts by any feeling of false modesty. "He said that you were only — oh, pshaw! I 've forgotten what he said; it was a stupid, grown-up word, anyhow."

"I love grown-up words," cried Bee; "they make foolish things sound so well. Was it *progressive?* — that 's a favorite word of grandpapa's."

"No; it was pre— something. I tell you I can't remember what; but I can tell you what it *meant.* It meant that, although you show off very well now, you 're going to fizzle out in the end."

"Oh, I *hope* I sha'n't fizzle out in the

end!" Bee spoke with fervor, hugging her knees closer, and gazing up to the stars. "When I grow up, I mean to do some great thing, that will make your eyes just jump out of your head; and grandpapa will beat his breast all day long, and say, 'Oh, why, why, *why* was I ever such a goose as to say my wonderful grandaughter, that I 'm so proud of now, was pre— something, and would fizzle out in the end!'"

"Pooh! how silly! I think I see grandpapa beating his breast all day! Now, Bee, as usual, you are edging away from the subject," said Harold, sternly.

"Well, then, I stick to it that a thing can be good and bad at the same time; and in one way 't was a good thing when I let the squirrel out. There 's rain, for instance: it 's bad if you are at a picnic, but very good if the flowers need watering, and you 're tired."

"Dodging *again.* What 's rain got to do with it? I never saw such a girl as you are for crawling out of things; you 'll never own that you 're in the wrong."

Bee laughed. She had an easy, gurgling little laugh, with a gleeful note, that was very exasperating in a culprit, and at this

time Bee was on trial for her sins. As a usual thing, the elf's tricks delighted Harold, who was not such a stern moralist as may appear from the foregoing conversation; but they were not often played upon himself. That morning, however, Bee had freed a squirrel that their cousin Francis had caught, and Harold meant to make a pet of.

"The rain was just an illustration, as grandpapa says," Bee went on. "What I did, you see, was bad for you, perhaps, but it was very good for the squirrel."

"You did n't care a straw for the squirrel," retorted Harold.

"I did, I did!" cried Bee, and then added, honestly, "I cared *most* for the fun of the thing; but it was just as good for the squirrel. Oh, Harold, did you hear *that?*"

Bee jumped up, clasped her hands over her breast, and looked wildly up into the sky.

"Yes, it was thunder;" answered Harold. "There 's going to be a shower, and I 'm glad of it, for a big scare will do you good."

"It 's going to be terrific." Bee always made some such prophecy on the approach of a shower, from an unreasoning, superstri-

tious feeling that the more she feared it the lighter it would be. A thunder-storm was one of the many things that terrified her; and now, as she watched the gradual darkening of the heavens, her teasing mood was succeeded by one of sober silence.

The brother and sister were as unlike as one child can be to another. Harold was a splendid young animal, blond and courageous; whereas his sister was a dark, airy-delicate little creature, of a nervous organization, and capable of an infinite variety of sensations such as had never entered into the boy's consciousness. Her mood changed at a breath; while Harold was of an even, unexcitable temper. His mind was slow, but clear and strong, and he could give a reason for his opinion that at least always satisfied himself; while poor Bee's head was filled with fantastic ideas, that, for all her gift of language, she could not make reasonable to any one. Harold's admirers always said that he was a delightfully natural boy, while Bee's best friends were obliged to admit that she was an odd child, that would not quite fit into any of the recognized types.

The children were orphans, and lived with

their grandfather, Colonel Stacy, a retired army officer, who had taken care of them since the death of their own father, who also had been in the army. With his whole heart Colonel Stacy loved the boy, from whose frank blue eyes the daughter he had lost seemed so often to look at him, and whose simple, fearless nature, akin to his own, he was able to understand; but Beatrix, with her incomprehensible moods, her odd, unchildlike speeches, and, above all, her great timidity, reminded him too unpleasantly of his son-in-law, for whom he had ever had a secret contempt. Captain Belfast had once, through the delicate nervousness of his organization, been guilty of an act of cowardice; it had been sequelled by a splendid career of sustained self-command, but the old colonel had never forgiven the offence.

Notwithstanding the seven years that had passed since their father's death, Beatrix remembered him perfectly; but, although he was a year the older of the two, Harold had but a dim mental picture of him, and even that he could not be sure was of memory's painting, rather than the impression left by Bee's frequent descriptions.

Bee was fond of talking of her father; but at such times she was careful to be out of ear-reach of her grandfather, who, although nothing to this effect had ever been told them, the children instinctively felt had disapproved of his son-in-law.

"I am sure he could not have liked him," Bee once said, "because he never speaks of him, and he so often talks to us about mamma. Don't you know, Harold, how sometimes he draws you on his knee to kiss you, and says, 'You are like your mother, boy'? and then he generally looks round at me, and cries out, 'You horrid little black thing, *you* are like your father! go away!'"

"Now, Bee, you know perfectly well he has never said anything of the kind," Harold, much horrified, had exclaimed.

"Not with his tongue; not with his tongue; but his eyes said so, and that's just the same," insisted the elf. "Pooh! I don't mind; I'd really rather look like papa than anybody. Don't you remember how handsome he was?"

"Well, not exactly. Was he as handsome as grandpapa?"

"Much handsomer. He had great soft-looking dark eyes, that were n't seeing

things all the time, like grandpapa's; and he had a smile that was like music, waking you up suddenly when you are most asleep, or some one coming and kissing you, when you feel that the world is too big,—like any pleasant thing that 's unexpected," Bee hastened to explain, with a certain appealing glance with which she always met the disapproval her flights of fancy occasioned. "And his voice was lovely, you know, and sounded after he had stopped speaking."

"What nonsense!" Harold broke in, having struggled in vain to restrain his disgust.

"I tell you it *did*, just as bells do!"

"Only in empty heads."

"When he looked at you," Bee went on, "you wished you were good and beautiful; when grandpapa looks at you, you only wish to please him."

"Well, it 's easy enough to please him," Harold put in.

"For *you*," said Bee, rather sadly; "but I could n't please him."

"Yes, you could, Trix, if you would only change about some few things; if you would only try to be braver; and if, for instance, you would not seem so sleepy the minute he comes into the room."

"Why, I can't help that. The minute grandpapa comes near me, I feel as if I was shutting up, like caterpillars when you touch 'em."

"And you say such silly things, — like that, now. He does n't like it."

Bee sat quiet for a long time, and meditated, perhaps, on this advice; for when she got up, it was with the remark that she supposed her grandfather might come to like her very much, if she would only leave off being Beatrix Belfast.

PART II.

THE clap of distant thunder that struck such terror into Bee's heart heralded an unusually heavy storm. The lightning grew sharper and sharper as the clouds extended over the soft summer sky, until neither moon nor stars were visible. All at once the rain came down in pelting drops, and the wind tore through the trees and slammed the doors and shutters. Long before this, however, Bee had fled into the house, and curling up on the sofa in the parlor, had buried her head in the cushions. Harold was now obliged to follow her, and stood by one of the long windows, making discouraging comments on the progress of the storm, apparently enjoying Bee's agony.

"I tell you, we are going to catch it this time," he said. "Hear that clap! Ah, it's coming nearer every moment."

"Oh, Harold, *dear* Harold, *don't* stand by the window!" implored Bee, in a muffled voice. "I'm sure you'll be struck."

"Why, I can't help that. The minute grandpapa comes near me, I feel as if I was shutting up, like caterpillars when you touch 'em."

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"If I 'm going to be struck, it won't make any difference whether I stand here, or am curled up like a loon on that sofa. You won't escape by shutting your eyes, either, Miss. Ow! was n't that a crack, though!"

"Oh, Harold," panted Bee, "you were right about the squirrel; I *did* let him out just to tease you. I 'm real sorry."

Harold grinned. "Thunder-showers have a first-rate effect upon your conscience, Miss Bee. There goes another crack!"

"It was I who cut the blossoms off the azalea, and tied daisies on it instead," confessed Bee. "I did n't think about grandpapa's caring, and I wanted to astonish Martin."

"Well, everybody knew right away it was you. Grandpapa was to send that azalea to the horticultural exhibition, and was cross, I can tell you."

Here another crash drowned Harold's voice, and in the ensuing silence, Bee burst out: —

"I shook pepper into the flowers cousin Frank sent to that young lady; he said she liked spicy flowers, and that 's what made me think of it. He has n't found it out yet, and I 'll tell him if you think I ought to."

"Oh, Bee, the La France roses? They were for Miss Sharon, and he 's spoony on her!" cried Harold, chuckling. "Well, you *are* a sinner."

"I know it," answered Bee, meekly. "I know I 'm weak and sinful. Would you tell him, or let him find out for himself?"

"What 's the use of making him uncomfortable; he can't do anything now to help it. [Who says boys have no consideration?] We 'll watch, and see if she cools off, and if she does, we 'll tell him. No use spoiling the fun now. What else have you been up to?"

"Oh, different things; but I don't remember anything in particular. Do you think the storm is coming nearer?"

"It can't come *much* nearer. Just hear! it 's right overhead now."

As Harold spoke, a mighty crash rent the air. The terror Bee had so long endured culminated in a piercing shriek, almost without her own will. It rang through the house, and brought her grandfather, who, with a company of gentlemen, was smoking in the library, hurrying into the room. He bent down anxiously over her, saying, —

"Are you hurt, child; are you hurt?"

Bee sat up; she was white to the lips, and she trembled. If Colonel Stacy had put his arm around her, he would have felt her heart thumping violently, but he only looked inquiringly at her.

"I 'm not *hurt*," said Bee, shivering.

"Then why did you scream? What was the matter?"

"I 'm afraid that I was afraid," Bee quavered.

"You 're a little coward," said the colonel. "When your mother was your age, a thunder-shower was her delight, and she would stand and watch it as Harold does. 'Pon my word, I 'm ashamed of you!"

He gave her a look of displeasure, then wheeled about, and went back to the library.

Bee was suffering too much with fright to be troubled at the time by her grandfather's disapproval. As the storm retreated, her spirits went up with the barometer, until she was in one of her most extravagantly mirthful moods. By bed-time she was completely tired out, and fell asleep as soon as Mary, the woman whose duty it was to wait upon the children, blew out the candle. The next morning she came downstairs

looking rather dull, and she told Harold and her cousin Francis, who were still at the breakfast table, that she had had a remarkable dream.

"I seemed to be seated," said Bee, "on the top of the chimney, and there was a storm coming. I could hear the thunder growling and growling, nearer and nearer to me, and I was dreadfully afraid. But I reflected that if I should scream there was no one to hear me, and that was rather consoling; and I reflected," she repeated, having a fondness for this word, "that, anyhow, Harold was n't about, to make everything seem worse. I thought that the thunder was n't common thunder, but it sounded like a frightful voice; and all the while it was scaring me so, it scolded me for being afraid, and it said: 'If you don't leave off being afraid, before I catch up to you, I shall blow you to smithereens!' *And the voice was grandpapa's voice.* The fact of it is," said Bee, impressively, "I 've been warned in a dream that grandpapa is going to send me away."

The idea had come as she spoke; but as it was unfolded to her brother and cousin, she perceived that they looked up at her quickly,

and then significantly at each other. In truth, before she had come downstairs, the colonel had actually, although in a very indefinite sort of way, said something about sending his granddaughter to an aunt that lived in a little village called Hilton, at the farthest part of the State. The elf had an uncanny trick of anticipating other people's intentions in regard to her, and there was a belief in the household that nothing could by any possibility be done that somehow or other she did not get wind of it.

That intercepted glance carried conviction to Bee's mind, and she jumped at a conclusion, and proceeded further.

"Yes, I 've been warned in a dream that grandpapa is thinking of sending me to Aunt Emily's, in Hilton; that 's smithereens, because it will break me all up. There 's no use in your trying to hide it from me."

"Well," confessed Harold, "he did say that perhaps it would be a good thing for you; but that 's a long way off from really meaning to send you."

"It 's not a safe idea for him to have in his head for a moment. Everything I do displeases him; and some time he 'll spring it on me that I 'm to go. Oh, Cousin Frank,

tell me what to do! I could n't be happy a single moment away from Harold; I should pine, I should pine to death!"

"If you think it 's because you displease him, that he will send you away, why not try *not* to displease him?" suggested Francis.

"He is displeased because I 'm a coward; but I can't help that, any more than Harold can help *not* being a coward."

Poor Bee relapsed into a mournful silence, playing with her knife and fork, and eating nothing. When Harold, having finished his breakfast, left the table, Bee followed him.

The children went into the garden, and sat down on a stone bench under a hawthorn-tree at the end of one of the walks.

The garden had been the pride of at least three generations of Stacys, who in turn had found pleasure in adding to its beauty. It had been planned after the old fashion upon which time has suggested no improvement. A high evergreen hedge enclosed it, cutting off all view of the surrounding grounds, except upon an entrance at both ends, one giving a pleasant glimpse of the orchard, and the other, which was nearer the house, looking out on the lawn and the old pines beyond.

It had narrow winding paths between high shrubbery or box-bordered beds, where the flowers grew in liberal profusion. Although carefully tended, it owed more to the gracious years than to the gardener. The shrubs required vigorous pruning to be kept within bounds, and the hawthorn-tree under which the children sat raised its white blossoms far above the arbor-vitæ hedge.

"If I only could get over being a coward," said Bee, having fidgeted about for some time in silence, "everything would come out right."

"I promise you that you 'll get over it, if you will do exactly as I tell you. I know the way to cure it."

"Go through a kind of a course, I suppose," said Beatrix. "Everybody has to go through a course, now, before they can do anything. What should I have to do?"

"Oh, I sha'n't tell you beforehand; but I 'll promise you it will be a cure. You will have to make a solemn promise, though, first, not to back out after once beginning."

"You mean I shall have to take the vows."

Beatrix here alluded to a ridiculous rite,

devised by herself, that was practised by the pair whenever they wished to make a promise especially binding. She was in a mood to enjoy the dramatic solemnity with which these occasions were invested, but wisely shrank from putting herself in the power of Harold.

"Let 's talk it over," he said blandly, "and I 'm sure you 'll see what a good thing it will be for you. To begin with, now, instead of improving, you are getting worse all the time, — more afraid and hoppy. A leaf can't stir but you hop. You don't use any reason, either, but go out of your way to speak to a murderous-looking tramp, and then scream at a bug. You 're afraid of dogs and thunder-showers."

"It 's true," admitted Bee, sadly.

"If you really were in danger, I don't know what you would do. If a burglar were to get in some night, for instance."

"I don't know as I should be so very afraid of a burglar," said Bee; "he would only be a man, after all."

"But he might crack your head open with a club."

"Why would he? I don't believe he would; there are no silver spoons in it."

"What 's the good of pretending, Trix? If you are not afraid of burglars, why did you come and wake me up the other night with that yarn about one making a queer noise under your window? You looked as if you were scared stiff."

"It was n't the burglar I was afraid of," answered Bee, eagerly; "it was the horrid little noise. I hate mysterious little noises at night!"

"Well, since you are so brave about burglars, we 'll leave them out of the question. I suppose you 'll own there are plenty of things you *are* afraid of?"

Bee nodded, and Harold added unkindly,—

"I sympathize entirely with grandpapa about you. I 'm ashamed of you."

"So do I. I sympathize with grandpapa about me, too," broke in Bee. "He has been such a brave soldier; and now, to have his descendants cowards, is very hard. I don't wonder he wants to get me out of sight. But, oh, Harold, it would be dreadfully cruel! You know we have never been away from each other, and I think a good deal of you."

"If you think so much of me, I should suppose you would do anything, so that we

could keep together. I only wish I was the one to do it, and you would see whether I care for *you*. *Your* affection is all talk, or you would let me cure you of this fault."

Poor Bee had no answer to Harold's logic; she looked wistfully at him, and hoped she was not going to cry. It seemed to her that the fiat had actually gone forth, her trunk already packed for Hilton, and she was really to be parted from that little blond monkey, who was now turning a neat somersault on the grassy border of the garden, — on which he had no business to set foot, — and who was father, mother, sister, and brother, all in one, to her.

The discussion ended in Bee's yielding to Harold's persistence, and before they went into the house again all arrangements were made.

PART III.

IT was not until night that the ceremony called *taking the vows* was ever observed, it being supposed that the darkness lent so much impressiveness to the scene. The place chosen was a large unfinished attic room, where the children were sure of no interruption. It was lighted by two pilfered candle-ends, placed on either side of a small stand covered with a white cloth and called an altar.

On the altar was placed a dish with a red liquid in it, always spoken of as the blood of a bullock, and eventually poured upon the floor as an oblation to the gods. The utter seriousness with which the performance was conducted, the solemn aspect of Bee as she made her vows, the business-like air of Harold the high priest, made a comedy worth witnessing. As a climax, the performers joined hands, and taking the polka step very slow, passed three times around the altar, after which they blew out

the candles, and skipped breathlessly down-stairs to the family circle.

That evening Harold, who was not a good scholar, had lessons to make up, and as Bee was too faithful to him to indulge in favorite sports which he must forego, she brought out her writing-materials, being occupied at that time in writing a story. Before Harold had hardly opened his books, Bee's busy brain was spinning its web of romance, and her slim fingers steadily moving back and forth over the paper, while the colonel looked at her curiously over his newspaper now and then, and Francis wasted jokes at her expense. She was happy in a world of her own creation, where disapproving grandfathers and teasing cousins were not.

At length Bee laid down her pen.

"Cousin Francis," she asked, "do you admire women with Roman noses?"

"Well, it depends upon how many each woman is supposed to have. As a rule, one Roman nose goes a long way with me."

"You mean you don't fancy them. Well, I 'm not sure that I do myself. There 's one good thing about a girl in a book, you can take off any one of her features the minute you get tired of it, and give her a

nicer one. I 'm writing the description of the heroine, and I want to make her very beautiful. I always have the heroine beautiful, because she has to be remarkable in some way, and a clever heroine puts you to so much trouble. You have to be clever too."

"I see, I see! But tell me, Trix, are you writing a novel with a purpose; or is it simply one of the delightful old-fashioned romances that please the sentimental heart of man in all ages?" Cousin Francis delighted in talking a little over Bee's head, but he seldom could make her confess to being puzzled.

"It 's a story of adventures," she answered, in a happy evasion. "The name of it is, 'The Wonderful Adventures of the Demon, the Dude, and the Darling.' "

"Very pretty, very pretty indeed," murmured the colonel's sister, sweet old Aunt Mary, who was deaf, and had just caught the last word.

"At first I thought of having it the *Deacon*, instead of the Demon," Bee went on, with great eagerness, "and I will now, if you think it 's better; for it goes just as well that way: 'The Wonderful Adventures of the *Deacon*, the Dude, and the Darling;' or 'The Wonderful Adventures of the *Demon*, the Dude, and the Darling.' "

"You don't consider them synonymous, I hope?"

Bee wrote synonymous in original orthography on a corner of her page; she had a passion for big words, and intended to consult the dictionary as to the meaning of this one, with a view to its future use.

"I consider that they both begin with a D," she said adroitly, "and that 's what I want; it makes a nice rippling kind of a title, when all the words begin with the same letter. I think the title ought to be a kind of a rub-a-dub-dub before the procession starts, so that everybody will come to the window and look out."

"Come," cried Cousin Francis, "let 's sample this story. Read the description of the heroine, Bee."

"You laughed at the last story I read to you," objected Bee, who had an inconvenient memory.

"Could n't have paid it a higher compliment. To amuse is the chief function of fiction."

"Well, then, you must know," explained Bee, "that the dude is trying to find some-

body in the world that 's elegant enough for him to marry. He has explored Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut," said Bee, without winking. "Go on, Harold."

"New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohi—o," drawled Harold.

"In short," interrupted Bee, impatient of detail, "he had scoured the United States, from Maine to Florida, and had at last, having put to sea, reached a beautiful little island that is n't down on the maps."

"Why not?" demanded Harold.

"Why not! Because the people that draw 'em have never found out about it, of course. Catch them leaving a blessed spot out that they might make a nuisance of to us children! You go on studying, and perhaps, some time, you 'll get wisdom. On this island the dude had fallen in with the darling, who was a princess in disguise, and who, therefore, although he was deep in love with her, he thought was not elegant enough to be his wife."

"I 'm afraid, after all, the plot is hackneyed," interrupted the critic, sadly.

Bee wrote hackneyed underneath synonymous, and proceeded.

"They met at the house of a peasant, where the dude stopped to inquire the way, and where a husking-party was going on. That 's the gist of the story, so far; but of course the dude has had lots of adventure all along. Now I 'm going to begin:—

"The dude counted off the pretty girls in the room, and found there were five blondes —a red-headed one—and ten brunettes; but neither of these compared for a moment with the darling, whose beauty was so dazzling that it made his eyes water —"

"Yes, like a hot potato. I know the sensation," struck in Cousin Francis. "Pretty girls often affect me the same way."

Bee scowled at the interruption, and went on:—

"'The one in the sky-blue satin beats the record,' said the dude, clapping his hands over his heart. ["Please excuse the language, but I 've drawn this character from life," said Bee, with a sharp look at Francis.] 'I will take her apart, and have some conversation with her.'"

"Take her apart! Merciful Heavens! how very rude of him!" interrupted Francis.

"Well, it does sound peculiar," Bee admitted, coloring, with a suspicion that she

had not used the correct phrase, "but I 'm sure I 've seen that expression in books."

"Try 'take her *aside*,'" suggested the other.

"'I will take her aside, and have some conversation with her,'" Bee corrected. "He looked admiringly at the darling, who was indeed a beautiful creature; her eyes were of midnight darkness, or of celestial blue."

"Well, I should think it made a difference. Perhaps, though, one was black and the other blue."

"You see I have n't decided, yet, whether she is to be light or dark," Bee explained; "when I do, I shall scratch off one of these expressions."

"I admire your method. Go on, my child, it 's capital."

"Her nose was classic and jaunty," Bee proceeded.

"Is it the same one that used to be Roman?" interrupted the critic.

Bee looked at him sharply, but he seemed serious, so she nodded and went on. "Her mouth was as red as a cherry, and her complexion like alabaster. The dude observed that she had beautiful arms and hands, and

her neck was as white as milk, and of faultless mould."

"I should n't admire a mouldy neck, myself," said Francis, "but there 's no accounting for taste;" and this time, his words being accompanied by an unmistakable grin, Bee remarked, stiffly, that she had wasted a good deal of time, and should now set to work.

PART IV.

HAROLD had a boy's love of power, which he exercised continually over his sister, much to her discomfort and his own injury; for a boy cannot begin too early to hold his ruder instincts in check if he is ever to grow into that highest ideal of manhood that combines tenderness with bravery. Sometimes, in certain moods, or if pressed too far, Bee rebelled, in which case she fought her battle valiantly, and really having a stronger will than Harold, usually came off victorious. Harold perceived, however, that although she might persevere and carry her point for the time, she was always delightfully docile afterward, and he could look forward to an enjoyable period of despotism. No doubt it was because she had recently passed through one of these disagreeable conflicts, as well as for the honor of her word, that Bee submitted to the tortures he devised as a means of curing her cowardice. It is but fair to

him to say that he little realized what she suffered in the process.

At his command she would stumble in the dark up the stairs to the garret and sit there shivering with fright, while the mice *chasséed* across the floor, and she listened to the little creaking noises of the night. He forced her to cross the pasture where the bull roamed, and each morning she tremblingly patted the head of the cross mastiff.

But although, in the hope of conquering that timidity of her nature that gave such offence to her grandfather and brother, she had compelled herself to do all this, she could not see that she was growing a bit braver. On the contrary, the tremor of her heart in the presence of danger, or what seemed like danger to her, was all the greater because of the weakness of her overstrained nerves, and the effort she must make to force herself into compliance with Harold's will was greater each day.

Once in the irritability of her nervous excitement she said to him, —

"If you felt one half as afraid to do a thing as I do, you would never have the grit to go through it," having hit upon a fact strong-nerved people often lose sight of.

Under this unhealthy excitement Bee soon began to lose her physical strength; she grew hollow-eyed and white, was listless and dull, except on rare occasions, when she would have spasms of unnatural exhilaration, ending in tears. It was observed by Francis that she even had lost her interest in the adventures of the three D's; after which discovery he called the colonel's attention to the fact that something was wrong with his granddaughter.

Colonel Stacy sent for Bee on the instant, and questioned her; but instead of the sensible, straightforward answers that would have pleased him, Bee would only say that she was tired, — tired of being Beatrix Belfast.

The colonel, no doubt thinking that this was no case for doctors, at once set about reconciling Bee to her own existence. His first prescription was a spirited little pony, called Lady Bell, which he said would soon shake her up into a better humor.

"Nothing tones one up sooner than riding," he said, as the family stood admiring the pony as they waited for Bee to put on her habit before taking her first ride.

When Bee appeared she looked pale and uncomfortable. She said the Lady Bell was a beauty, but her private thought was that she would enjoy her much more from the safe distance of terra firma than in the exciting uncertainty of a seat on her back.

As long as she could, she delayed mounting, but her grandfather was waiting to see her on the pony before starting for town, so that she soon felt obliged to conquer her reluctance and let Francis lift her into the saddle. No one imagined the heroism of that apparently simple act.

If any one suspected Bee's feeling, it was Harold; but he despised her fears, without being able to admire the effort she made to control them. No doubt he thought this experience would do her good. At all events, when he saw her really seated in the saddle, he yielded to a mischievous impulse to touch up the pony's legs. Now the Lady Bell, like her mistress, was of a highly nervous temperament, and that unexpected cut from Harold's switch started her into what seemed to Bee a perfectly frightful gallop.

As the pony took that first plunge, Bee screamed, then shut her eyes and gave her-

self up for lost. Instead of clinging to the horse she presently slipped out of the saddle, coming with a bump to the dear green earth, faint and dizzy, but unhurt. Before Colonel Stacy and Francis could reach her she picked herself up, and running toward them declared she would never again mount Lady Bell; and in this tame fashion ended her first ride.

The colonel showed his disappointment by ignoring his granddaughter, and presently forgot his chagrin in watching Master Harold, who, having overtaken the little mare, now came trotting home on her back.

"The boy shall have her," he said to Francis; "he will make a horseman."

"The elf will ride, too. You must give her time, sir, that 's all," cried Francis.

The kind tone and the reassuring pat on her cheek were too much for Bee, who now put the finishing touch on the colonel's displeasure by bursting into tears.

Finding the general air of disapproval too chilly for her spirits, Beatrix crept away.

That evening the colonel was to dine with Dr. Waters, of whom he had bought the mare for Bee. The doctor was a warm friend of the elf's, and before starting, as

he stood on the piazza waiting for the dog-cart to be brought round, the colonel asked her what word she would send him about the Lady Bell.

"Tell him she looks prettier anywhere than from a seat on her back, where you can see nothing of her but her ears," she answered, laughing, determined not to betray her mortification.

"I will give you ten dollars," said her grandfather, "if you will ride Lady Bell beside the dog-cart to the doctor's."

Bee looked at him wistfully. Had she dared ride she would need no bribe to please him; but she shook her head, saying earnestly:—

"I could n't do it, grandpapa, — not for a hundred dollars. I shall never dare to ride Lady Bell again."

"Offer me five, and see how quickly I 'll take you up," said Master Harold, smartly. He was standing on the step beside his sister, his hands in his pockets, and his handsome blond face flushed with the eagerness of his desire to possess Lady Bell.

The colonel guessed his thought and laughed.

"Yes, the pony is yours, you young

scamp," he said, with a light in his eyes, as he fondly tapped the round red cheek. "The Lady Bell won't go a-begging."

It was a beautiful soft summer night, with a new moon gleaming in the western sky and a south wind singing through the trees. The children were alone together; but Bee was cross, and Harold in a teasing mood, — a combination not apt to produce pleasant results.

The day had not been a happy one. Very early Bee declared that she had had enough of it and meant to go to bed; and no entreaties served to detain her. It was a wise instinct on her part; but Harold, who did not wish to be left alone, took her departure as a personal offence. Bee had been unusually disagreeable all day, he thought, without dwelling very long on the provocation he had given her. After the incident of her luckless ride on Lady Bell, when in her discomfiture she had retreated to her own room, he had followed her, and, quite unconscious of her indignation, called her to join him in a game of tennis. Bee had slammed down the window as an emphatic declaration of war, and his subsequent overtures of peace had been rejected.

Harold nursed his grievances until he thought of a scheme of revenge that promised much fun for himself. His plan was to climb up the trellis by Bee's window and give her a great fright. He amused himself by thinking how miserable she would be as she lay listening to the rustling of the leaves and the creaking of the trellis under his weight, and her greater horror when she would see a figure really climbing through the window.

But the moment Bee had laid her poor little head on the pillow she fell into a sweet, dreamless sleep, the pain of the day melting into nothingness. Usually a light sleeper, now the various sounds made by Harold failed of their cruel purpose, and she heard nothing until suddenly she was sharply aroused by a crash and the unmistakable voice of her brother crying, —

"Oh, Bee, Bee! it 's not a burglar; it is I, and I 've hurt myself!"

Bee jumped up, and running to the window saw Harold lying beneath it, his face turned upward and pale as death in the moonlight. She took in the situation at a glance, and hurrying downstairs, buttoning on her ulster as she went, soon leaned

anxiously over him. In falling from the trellis he must have met with some serious injury, for the slightest attempt to move caused great pain, and before Bee reached him he had fainted.

Harold's plan had failed, but after all Bee had her fright. In bewildered distress she recollected that there was not a man on the place; her grandfather would not return until late, and she remembered that Martin had gone to the village, where he would no doubt stay until it was time to go for the colonel. Francis also was away, and of the women she could only find old Phœbe in the kitchen.

Phœbe was a very stout old negress, and the task of lifting that great boy of twelve was almost beyond her strength. Each time she tried to move him he begged so piteously to be left alone that she finally gave up the attempt.

"De doctah ought ter be here right quick, Miss Bee," she said to the awestruck elf, "an' dar ain't nobody but you or me fur to fetch him, an' you be de spriest, honey."

"I 'll run every step of the way," said Bee; "but, oh, Phœbe, it 's a *long* way."

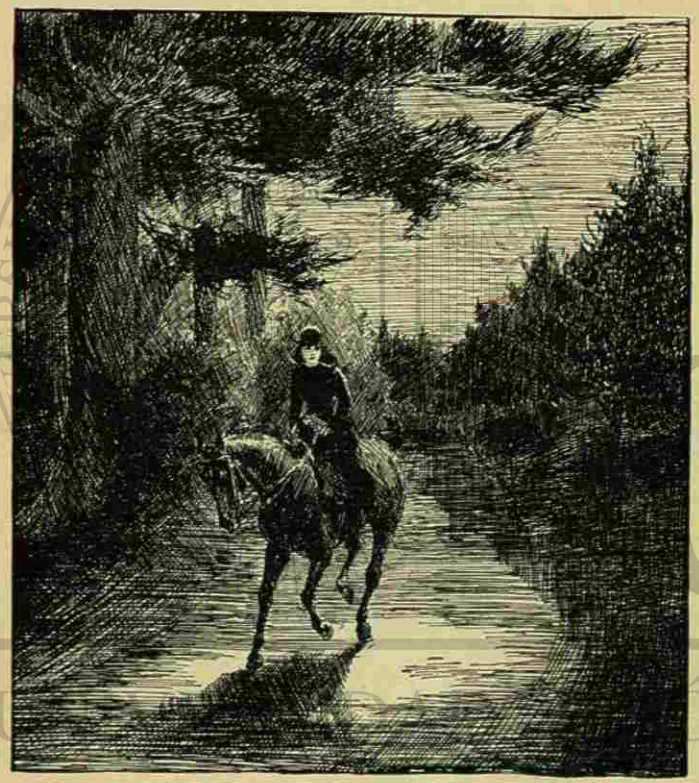
She started toward the house, then rushed back and pulled Phœbe toward the stable.

The words of her grandfather echoed in her brain and brought resolve with them.

"I will give you ten dollars if you will ride the Lady Bell to the doctor's," he had said; but now she meant to ride there for nothing.

Although too stout to ride, Phœbe knew well how to harness a horse, and before Bee could get into her habit, had the Lady Bell ready for her. In a moment more, trembling from head to foot, Bee was in the saddle, and Phœbe was listening to the thump of the pony's feet as he bore the trembling rider out into the night.

The moon was just slipping behind the hills; and the road, which lay through the woods, was almost lost in darkness. Moreover, as they flew on, the Lady Bell's feet spurning the ground, Bee experienced all the wild terror that had overcome her on the occasion of the first ride; but now her purpose was strong enough to make her cling to the mare. Happily, Lady Bell knew every step of the way, and kept the road without guidance. With Harold's moans still in her ear, Bee made no attempt to



"Lady Bell knew every step of the way."

check her speed, and so on and on flew Lady Bell, and on flew Bee.

The gentlemen were sitting with their cigars on the doctor's piazza, and the conversation had turned upon that personal courage that the colonel prized so highly; he had been contrasting the fine fearlessness of Harold with the timidity of Beatrix.

"I believe there can be no real bravery without fear," said the doctor, who had warmly defended poor Bee's character. "It 's the element of self-command that makes the brave deed praiseworthy; without that, it 's mere brute stupidity. I have seen little Beatrix show a self-control that 's worth a thousand times more than that insensibility which so often parades under fine names."

"Courage is a matter of physical health, I take it," said one of the other gentlemen; "depends upon the circulation. The girl, in this case, is delicate, while the boy has a fine constitution."

"Well, when it comes to constitution, it 's the weeds and not the finest flowers that have the advantage. Bee is a beautiful girl, Stacy; she has not that animal courage

you admire, but she has the nerve to meet emergencies."

It was an odd coincidence, that, just as the doctor stopped speaking, and as if in proof of his kind speech, Lady Bell came galloping in from the road, and the white, set face of Bee suddenly flashed upon them in the light of the lanterns.

It was a splendid triumph; but with the memory of Harold's suffering, Bee cared little for praise. Eagerly she urged them to make speed, and in an incredibly short time the little party set off.

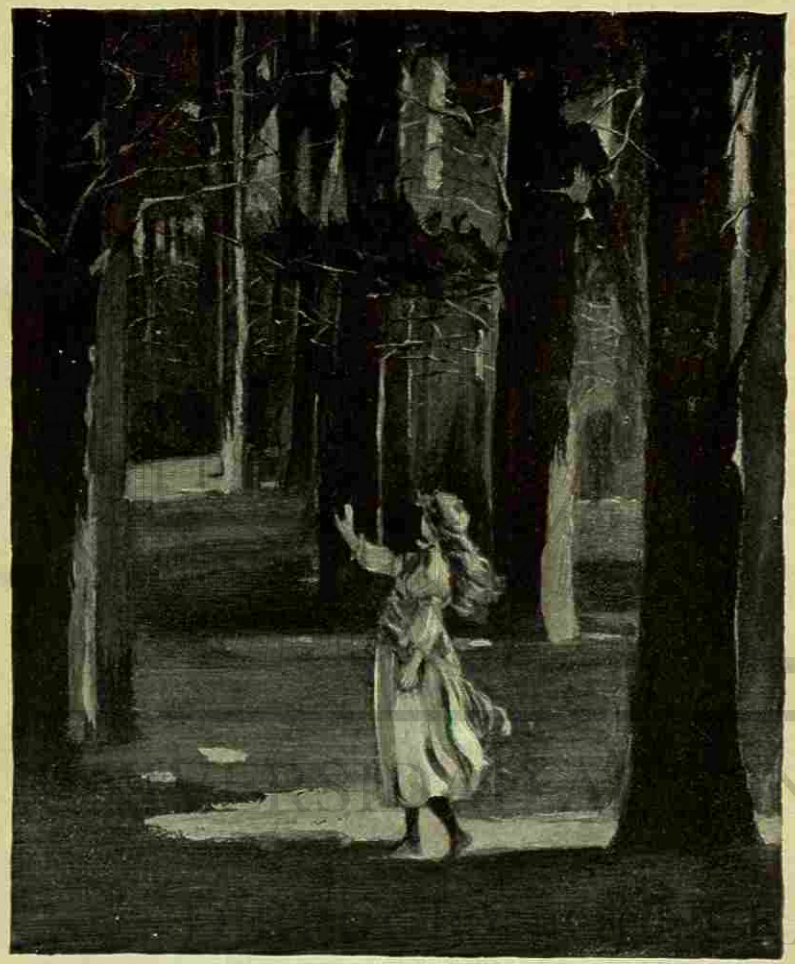
Bee went home in the doctor's buggy, with her head on her grandfather's shoulder. Once he said, —

"You were right, doctor, about our dear girl;" and Beatrix felt that he gave the love that so long had been withheld from her, with the kiss that followed these words.

On examination, it was found that in his fall Harold had injured his back, and a period of pain and confinement would be the result. This experience of suffering had a humanizing effect upon the little monkey, who learned from it to appreciate the beauty of love and kindness, at whose hands he must now ask so much.

To say that Bee overcame her timidity, would make a pleasant ending to this little tale; but the facts of her constitution forbid. We can say, however, that she is very dear to those she loves best, because of the loving heart that makes light of self-sacrifice; and they respect her for the effort she makes to conquer her fears, and her self-mastery in real emergencies.

THE GIRL WITHOUT A CONSCIENCE.



Into the silence of the wood a little girl came dancing. — PAGE 45.

THE GIRL WITHOUT A CONSCIENCE.

INTO the silence of the wood a little girl came dancing; she could not have seen more than twelve or thirteen years of life; but she was well grown, and her beauty was of that vivid type that impresses itself emphatically upon the beholder. Her dress was of coarse material, but on her left hand she wore a jewelled ring, which she held up to the sunlight, whenever it sifted through the branches of the pine tops. Once she kissed it so fervently that one might have reconciled its possession by the wearer of the coarse gown as the gift of some dear friend, instead of seeing in the act only a childish expression of keen delight in beauty. The same deep enjoyment, however, that she found in the sparkle of the gem, she received from the soft-colored loveliness of the grove, with the quivering

splendor of the sunshine and the delicious variety of its tones, softly pale or silvery, shot with amethyst or emerald, iridescent as doves' necks, lighter, darker, sliding from tone to tone in an enchanting harmony. Perhaps the solemnity of the solitude touched her spirit also; for presently her step was less buoyant, her air more subdued; and at length, with sudden seriousness, she sat down in one of the duskiest spots in the wood.

Immediately there seemed to arise before her a vague and indescribable form, — indescribable because language is inadequate to describe an object that bears no resemblance to anything the eye has seen.

The Indescribable sat down opposite the little girl, looked at her squarely, and said,

"I am the conscience of Marion Risney."

"Go away!" said the little girl, violently, "I won't hear you!"

"I am about to relate to you the story of a life. When it is told, I shall never seek you again. Listen!

"From my own recollection," began the voice, "I can tell you nothing of Marion's earliest childhood; but there are reasons for believing that she was not well born. I

have found a taint in her blood, — the taint of selfishness, vanity, and love of luxury; from which faults the ugly acts of her life have sprung. Many times she has sought to excuse them to me, on the plea of these faults being native to her, as the cruelty of the cat or the craftiness of the fox; but I have invariably answered: 'Unlike them, you have a clear perception of right and wrong, and you have a strong will. If you become vicious, it will be from choice.'

"It was when she was about three years old, that, in company with two other children, she was brought from a charitable institution to Reuben Risney's farm, for a week of country air.

"At this time Reuben was in comfortable circumstances, living in the joyous independence of those who draw the means of life direct from nature, on his farm, which he loved better than any other spot on earth. He had little education, but had learned a simple wisdom from the earnest experience of our common, every-day life, and he wore the serene beauty of great and tender souls.

"Marion was the youngest and puniest of the three children, and when the week had

passed, and she was to be removed to the institution, she clung to him like a poor kitten whose eyes have not yet opened. Then Reuben, putting his great protecting arm around her, declared he would keep her, and bring her up as a child of his own.

"I well remember a neighbor once saying to him that adopted childen are prone to turn out ungrateful.

" 'It 's the way with all young critters, to take what 's given 'em as a matter of coorse,' answered Reuben, drawing Marion up to him, and, with his great hand, tenderly pressing her little head against his breast. 'I ain't goin' to have her burdened with no notions about gratitude.'

"He had never had a child of his own, and he gave Marion the love he would have given his first-born. In caring for the little adopted one, the rose of mother joy blossomed in his wife's heart; thus they fully repaired the fault in her fortunes that had left her, a tender girl baby, without love and home.

"For the first few years of life, I let Marion severely alone, and I distinctly recall the first time I ever spoke to her; it was the second year after she had been

brought to the Risney farm, and hard times, because of the great drought of the preceding summer. She had been teasing for some foolish personal ornament; for even then the love of dress was strong in her. At first her father had refused, but finally consented to buy the trinket.

" 'I don't know how you are a-going to manage it, Reuben,' said the mother, smiling at Marion, who was dancing up and down, in her delight, like a big mote, in the broad sunshine that lay across the kitchen floor.

" 'Well,' said Reuben, 'I 've been thinkin' that I might jest as well give up a takin' the "Herald," since the minute I set down to it, I fall asleep. There 's a plenty of jest as good news in that pile o' papers up in the garret, as they put in now. I ain't a-goin' to renew my subscription this Janooary, an' I guess I can manage to give that ere fairy girl o' ours the gewgaw she has set her heart on.'

"Then it was I spoke.

" 'You could n't be so selfish as to take it?'

"She stopped dancing directly, and, sitting down on the old sofa, argued with me as if for her life. Her heart was young and

tender, and her will had not been weakened by repeated acts of self-indulgence; so, in the end, I conquered. She ran up to her father and said: —

"'Nice ole man' (this had been her first name for Reuben, who liked it), 'I don't want the trinket. I want you to have the newspaper.'

"'Mother! mother!' cried Reuben, 'do you hear that?'

"It is curious that it is those who constantly deny themselves, as a matter of course, who are most touched by generosity in others. He stood with his hands in his pockets, his head on one side, with his eyes looking tenderly down on Marion, and his voice trembled a little as he added, 'She is jest a-goin' to give up what she has set her heart on, for *me*.'

"That afternoon, when he came home from town, he brought Marion the trinket.

"The second time I spoke to her, it was upon an occasion when the mother would have denied herself for the child's pleasure. Marion obeyed me readily, but it seemed with the expectation that the affair would turn out as the foregoing; for when her sacrifice was accepted, she was disappointed and unhappy, and in the end her wish was gratified.

"When Reuben adopted this child, the Risney farm included eighty or more acres;

its boundary lines were the river and the road on the north and south respectively. A little romping brook led you along its eastern limit, and the farm of Nathan Jordan joined it on the west. The natives of Oglethorpe were plain, unsophisticated country people, who still held the primitive belief in the equality of American citizens; but the place was within fifteen miles of Boston, and soon Boston men began to build Queen Anne houses on the soft slopes of the Oglethorpe hills, and with their money, their manners of society, and their sumptuous living, established uncomfortable standards of comparison. The Jordan farm passed into the hands of a man named Coolidge, who, as his poorer neighbors said, 'farmed for fun.'

"The misfortunes of Marion's father began at this time. Drought spoiled his crops, disease carried off his cattle; and his cranberry meadow, on which he relied for a large part of his income, was ruined by the system of ditching on the adjacent land of Coolidge. Farming is a precipice on which, if one false step is made, it is difficult to recover one's footing. Reuben was forced to saddle himself with a mortgage on his

property, which is the usual opening act in the tragedy of the American farmer, destiny being indifferent as to whether or not her plots are hackneyed.

"Reuben and his wife bore their trials with perfect patience, and allowed no chilly depression to rob Marion's childhood of its rosy bloom. That she should be happy was the only return their love demanded. She grew strong and handsome, and had the gift of adapting herself so perfectly to those around her as to establish ties as strong as those of blood.

"Mr. Coolidge had no daughters, and he would gladly have brought up Marion as a sister to his son; but Reuben smiled derisively at any such proposition.

"'I 've sold you a good many parcels of my land, and I grant 't was an accommodation to me when you took a lien on the house; but I reckon I won't give up my girl,' he always said.

"Between the two homes Marion saw idleness and luxury on the one hand, and work and want on the other. In one she learned to appreciate the polite arts, and in the other, the unaffected beauty of simple virtue. To the Coolidges she owed those

advantages of education that she shared with Herbert; for his tutors relieved the tedium of teaching him by stimulating her talents into activity.

"Marion and Herbert Coolidge were constantly together. He was a year the older of the two, but she was stronger than he; and when he showed her the real arrogance of his nature, she convinced him of his mistake by the logic of brute force. When she grew older, she kept her dominion over him with her sharper wit, but the principle was the same.

"Perhaps it was natural that Marion should prefer the merry, easy life at the Queen Anne Villa to the plain, workaday world, as seen at the farmhouse. The luxurious surroundings pleased her taste, and the constant merrymaking, her love of pleasure. She liked the soft, well-bred manner of Herbert's mother, and the aristocratic elegance of Mr. Coolidge. But, more than any one on earth, she loved the old man who had first befriended her. Yes, she loved him, although she would sit silent while Herbert ridiculed his faults of speech or oddities of manner. (The Coolidges never would take seriously Marion's relationship to the old farmer.) She would sit silent, because she knew it would be impossible to teach Herbert Coolidge reverence for moral worth. But when she came home she would throw her arms around Reuben's neck, with the reflection that he was worth them all, and bitterly reproach herself that she was not more worthy his great love for her.

"Marion was a well-grown girl when her mother was struck by a mortal illness. For some time, although suffering intensely, she kept on with her work; and now Marion should have returned love for love, and care for care; but in her pliant selfishness she slipped too easily from duty into pleasure, and she abhorred the work of a house.

"One morning, when she was making ready for a day's pleasuring, her mother called her into the kitchen.

" 'I want to teach you to-day, dear, how to make pies as your father likes them,' her mother said. 'We had better not put it off any longer.'

"She had been more feeble than usual that morning, and her face was white and drawn, and her eyes wore a new expression,

that startled Marion. Yet she shook off the fear that the strange look begat, and made excuses to evade the odious task.

"I have never tired of punishing Marion for that act of selfishness. Many a time I have cut off the thread of her merriment with the sharp point of this recollection.

"The following night her mother died.

"This bereavement seemed to stir her father's love for her into even finer tenderness. Mrs. Handy, the neighbor who came in daily to help about the housework, used often to beg her to stay at home with him, and lighten, as she only could, his sense of loneliness.

"'It ain't no common feelin' he has for you, Marion,' she would say. 'It goes down deeper 'n his heart, clear to his very stummick, an' regerlates his appetite. The folks at Coolidge's think a sight of you, I dare say, but do you s'pose any o' *them* would refuse crisp fried pertaters an' bacon because you ain't by?'

"There are two days I can never forget. One is a day in spring: it was the month after Marion's mother had died, and the hours went sadly in Reuben Risney's household. The Coolidges were going abroad

for a year, carrying with them those gay pleasure-banners under which Marion had so merrily marched; and she sat moping by her bedroom window on that unforgettable morning. Again I seem to see the soft, melting greens of the lush verdure of May. There is an apple-tree close by the farm-house, whose blossoms filled the room with fragrance, and among whose branches two robins were chattering over the choice of a building spot. Presently the robins flew away, and Marion saw that her father and Mrs. Coolidge were advancing along the path; but she herself was shielded from them by the apple-tree. The voice of the lady fell distinctly on Marion's ear.

"'I don't understand why you should be shocked at my proposal, Mr. Risney. Marion is not of your flesh and blood, and there would be nothing unnatural in your giving her up to us. She is a magnificent little creature, and full of talent.'

"'Well, yes,' answered Reuben, slowly, 'I reckon she is.'

"Mrs. Coolidge was but a shallow worldling, but more than a match for this grandly true, but simple, child of nature. Her ready speech seemed to benumb his faculties, so

that he could never think of a reply to her arguments until relieved of her presence, when the true answer flashed upon him.

"'Of coorse, Mis Coolidge, I know what Marion is, an' what I am, an' that I ain't, an' never can be, equal to her,' he said in his humble, honest way.

"'Dear Mr. Risney, I never meant to draw comparisons,' murmured the other.

"'Did n't you? Well, I kinder thought you did. 'T is natchural that folks should.'

"'I merely meant that with such talent she should have advantages. You do your best by her, I know; but you cannot give her what we can. It hardly seems fair to withhold these advantages from her; and when she is older she may regret them, and blame you.'

"'If Marion wants to go to you, I 'll never say a word to hinder,' said Reuben. 'But, Mis Coolidge, I know that girl better 'n you can; I know what a lovin' heart she has. Ever since the day she came to me (I thank the Lord for it), awkward as I am, she has been to me a tender daughter. Let Marion choose between us.'

"'But she should not make the choice without a knowledge of what she is choosing. Let me take her abroad with Herbert, and she will see what she will renounce in remaining with you.'

"'Let 's set down, Mis Coolidge.' There was the sound of chairs being dragged along the porch, and the old man went on. 'I feel sorter tired, somehow. These warm spring days is tryin', ain't they?'

"A long silence followed, — so long that the robins were emboldened to return to the apple-tree, and Marion lost patience. At length Reuben asked, —

"'How much do you figger up the cost of taking a girl over there, and doing for her as you lay out to do for Marion?'

"'I really don't know,' answered Mrs. Coolidge; 'but of course I shall pay all her expenses.'

"'Your husband has offered me, more 'n once, three hundred dollars for that lot of mine down by the river, with the big oaks on it. I reckon now I 'll let him have it. Three hundred dollars, mebbe, won't pay for all you 'll give Marion, but 't will pay for the solid part of it. I don't want she should feel so beholden to you that 't will be a trouble to her when she comes to give you her answer.'

"'Oh, father! father! how can you be so *sure* of me!' moaned poor Marion.

"She left the window, and going to the farthest part of the room, buried her head in her hands for very shame. Her father's trust in her made her unworthiness look so great; for none knew, as well as she, how little she deserved the love that was ready to make any sacrifice for her happiness. But she did not mean to accept this sacrifice; she meant, oh, she meant to be good and true; she meant to stay and grieve with him for that sweet saint whom she had called mother. But with each resolve she stifled a sigh for the pleasures she would forego.

"When her father told her of the trip that had been planned for her, Marion declared that she would not go; but she let him see — perhaps it would not have been possible to deceive his loving watchfulness — that she was denying herself for his sake, and it ended in her sailing with the Coolidges.

"The year passed like a happy dream. Marion saw everything worth seeing in that old world of which she had read and studied. The Coolidges travelled like princes, and the children had money to buy

whatever pleased their childish fancy. Marion's trunk was loaded with the oddest collection ever passed through the custom house, but the indulgence of these friends knew no limit. The brightness of the year was only bedimmed by the thought of her home, — the old, tiresome farm on the Oglethorpe hills, and the decision she must make on her return there. At first, the idea that she would ever desert her father seemed too preposterous to be entertained for a moment; then the contrast between the life of Mr. Coolidge's daughter and the child of Reuben Risney hardened her heart toward the old man's need of her. She pitied herself, and wished that his great love was less, that he would not feel her loss; and presently the resolve to gratify her own wish crystallized into shape.

"Of this inward conflict poor Marion spoke to no one; but Mrs. Coolidge knew that every day, every pleasure, every pretty toy, weakened the tie between her and the old home.

"In speaking of Marion, people now said that she was wonderfully improved. I grant that she was well kept and handsome, and also that she had acquired some exter-

nal graces, but her heart had grown hard and selfish. Oh, yes, I know she had fitful impulses of generosity, and that there were moments when she still aspired to noble living; but her aspirations collapsed like windbags at the first pin-prick of a test. By the time the Coolidges took passage for America, her mind was wholly made up to desert her father.

"The second of those two days, so deeply fixed in my memory, is the one after Marion's return to Oglethorpe. The little party had arrived at the Coolidge Villa the night previous, and with bitter compunctions she was preparing herself for the dreaded interview with her father, when she would plunge the knife into his tender heart. She dressed herself in the old coarse gown that she had worn on the day when she had last taken leave of him, and which brought up with sickening reality the coarseness of her former surroundings.

"When dressed, she went into Mrs. Coolidge's room. The lady was yet in bed, but she had her jewel box beside her, and taking out a ring that Marion had always admired, slipped it on her finger, saying, —

"'It is yours, dear.'

"'Mine!' repeated Marion, 'and whether I come back to you or not?'

"'Whether you come back or not,' said her friend; but her eyes looked confidently into Marion's, which fell in shame.

"It was a lovely morning in June, but as Marion drove over the familiar old road, with the scent of the roses and the wild-grape bloom in her nostrils, she assured herself it was the most wretched of her life.

"Reuben's farm seemed to have grown old in the year she had been away. The buildings wore a neglected, patient air, such as we see in aged persons who have outlived all natural ties. There were no signs of the work that drives the farmer in the mouth of June, and wagons, ploughs, and farming-tools were collected together near the lilacs in the yard.

"Marion sent the carriage away, and running round to the kitchen door found Mrs. Handy, who welcomed her with the remark that she was not expected for two days yet.

"'It 's well you 've come, though,' she added severely. 'Your father needs you now if ever he does. Why, Marion, have n't you heard about his troubles?'

"'No,' answered Marion, sitting down in the nearest chair. 'What has happened?'

"'Well, you knew things were a-goin' badly with him before you went away; you knew, for instance, that he had a mortgage on the farm. Did n't know it? Well, he would be likely to keep anything from you that might be a worry. Why, Coolidge, he took that mortgage years ago, when you were a mite of a girl. I always thought he coveted this place. Time an' time again he tried to buy it, but Risney would n't sell, except in lots here an' there, as he got hard pressed for money. He had a good many expenses, but his own wants was simple enough. It seemed as if Coolidge had a spite on the poor old man, but I s'pose it warn't anythin' more 'n the natural feelin' a bird has when he shoves another bird off his rightful nest. Most of the old farmers now have been shoved off to Dacoty, or somewhere or other, and your father thought once of goin' too; but he said it warn't a fit place to bring up a girl, an' so he stayed. Well, once gettin' behind so, there *warn't* any way for him to make up again; so he kep' on slippin', slippin', slippin', till las'

month he came with a bump to the groun', an' Coolidge foreclosed.'

"'Where 's father now?' asked Marion, as the woman paused.

"'I guess he 's roun' the barn. He 's a goin' to auction off his things termorrow, an' calculated to get it over before you came.'

"Marion found her father sitting motionless, just inside the wide door of the barn; and the sight of Reuben Risney idle in the busy season of June, after that first sad impression of disaster, was like the black line drawn under a sentence for additional emphasis. He had altered much in the past year; his hair, which had been merely streaked with gray, was now quite white, and age, which had always seemed to creep so slowly after him, had jumped with a bound on his back.

"When he first saw Marion, he got up and made a pitiful movement, as if he would hide from her. Then he suddenly held out his arms, crying, —

"'Oh, my little girl, I 've been longin' for you!'

"She ran to him and laid her head over the heart she meant to stab, and cried

with pity for him, and still more pity for herself.

"'Don't cry, my lamb; don't!' he said at length, in a low, suffocated voice. 'I s'pose Mis Handy has been telling you. Lord, child! these things happen every day. We must be thankful 't warn't in mother's time, an' that you 've got good friends to look to. I hope I 'm grateful for that!'

"He began to tell her of that compact to which she had been a hidden witness, and she perceived that in his love for her he meant to take a part against himself.

"'You see, little girl,' he explained, 'I 'm goin' to work for my cousin, out in Indianny. He 's got a big farm there, an' there 's a little shanty on it, that I'm goin' to have to myself, which will be pleasanter than feelin' myself in Cousin Matildy's way. It ain't so small, neither, that there ain't room for you, if it should be that you would want to go with me. You ain't *oblecged* to go to the Coolidges. You must n't never think that.'

"He paused a moment, but Marion shivered, and said nothing; and in a lower voice he went on:—

"'It 's a rough place, I reckon, an' you 're tender, darlin'. [This was a delusion of Reuben's, Marion having grown into an unusually strong and healthy girl.] You would have nothin' to do but think of the pleasurin' that 's over. When I had that talk with Mis Coolidge, I never dreamed I 'd ever part with you; but you see, my lamb, it 's best to take up with her offer.'

"'Then you would n't blame me, father?'

"'Blame you! Why, Marion, you must never, never have such a thought as that! Since the day you put your little arms roun' my neck, an' begged to stay with your "nice ole man," you have never done anythin' to reproach yourself with. You have always been a lovin' an' dutiful child. You 've got a true, loyal heart, an' you 'll be a blessin' to them that cares for you.'

"'Oh, father, father, you shame me!' sobbed Marion.

"'Well, we won't talk any more about such uncheerful subjects,' said Reuben, patting her head, and rocking her back and forth, as one tries to comfort a little child who is hurt. 'Let 's enjoy ourselves while we can be together.'

"'When are you going to Indiana, father?'

"'Well, I was only waitin' till you got back. I 'll have to go very soon. I reckon I ought to go to-morrow; it 's just by Coolidge's favor, you see, I stay here; an' Hiram wants me now that the work is heaviest.'

"His determined cheerfulness made selfishness smooth and pleasant to Marion, who dried her tears, and filled the day with tender acts to burn into a deserted old man's memory.

"That night, when Marion went up into her own old room, I made a desperate endeavor to persuade her to take a daughter's part, and be loyal to her father in his trouble. Long I plead with her, although she begged me in agony to be silent. I made her heart ache with pity for that old man, alone in his little shanty in Indiana, and filled her with disgust at her own self-seeking; yet in the end her selfishness conquered, and in the morning she came downstairs fresh and rosy, her smooth young face giving no hint of the struggle.

"She and Reuben cooked and ate their breakfast together. Then, taking her in his

arms, he kissed and blessed her; and at length, as he had requested, when the auctioneer's old buggy drove into the yard, she slipped quietly away.

"Like one over whom an overwhelming wave has passed, Marion looked on the fair morning landscape; then, unburdened and free, danced down the slope of the hill.

"The shortest and pleasantest way to the Coolidges' house was through the pine wood that lay at the foot of the slope on which the farmhouse stood. On reaching it, Marion turned.

"There on the top of the hill, with his face uplifted and his arms stretched toward her, stood Reuben, — a pathetic image of a forsaken old man. It was quite plain that, unable to carry out his own programme, he had hurried to overtake her, eager for another look at the idol of his heart, and he had seen her go dancing away from him."

"Marion Risney, it is not too late," cried the Indescribable. "You can return."

The little girl had risen, but with arms thrust out, palms forward, as if to ward off some horrible fate.

"To live all my life in a shanty, on a

farm in Indiana? oh, I can't, I can't!" she murmured, and the voice cried:—

"Go, then, choose the base part! Be vile and faithless; stab the heart that loves you. Henceforth, be without love, without reverence, without conscience!"

But the little girl did not move; hot tears sprang to her eyes, attesting penitence and pity. For a moment she hesitated, then went bounding through the wood, her face set toward the farmhouse.

There was a hush in the forest, then a bird burst into a song of melodious sweetness, and the gentle June breeze swung the outstretched branches of the pines like arms in benediction.