XV

When Gabriella awoke on that same morning after the storm, she too ascertained that her shutters could not be opened. But Gabriella did not go down into the kitchen for hot water to melt the ice from the bolts and hinges. She fled back across the cold matting to the high-posted big bed and cuddled down solitary into its warmth again, tucking the counterpane under her chin and looking out from the pillows with eyes as fresh as flowers. Flowers in truth Gabriella's eyes were — the closing and disclosing blossoms of a sweet nature. Somehow they made you think of earliest spring, of young leaves, of the flutings of birds deep within a glade sifted with golden light, fragrant with white fragrance. They had their other seasons: their summer hours of angry flash and swift downpour; their autumn days of still depths and soberness, and autumn nights of long, quiet rainfalls when no one knew.

One season they lacked: Gabriella's eyes had no winter.

Brave spirit! Had nature not inclined her to spring rather than autumn, had she not inherited joyousness and the temperamental gayety of the well-born, she must long ago have failed, broken down. Behind her were generations of fathers and mothers who had laughed heartily all their days. The simple gift of wholesome laughter, often the best as often the only remedy for so many discomforts and absurdities in life — this was perhaps to be accounted among her best psychological heirlooms.

Her first thought on awaking late this morning (for she too had been kept awake by the storm) was that there could be no school. And this was only Friday, with Saturday and Sunday to follow — three whole consecutive days of holiday! Gabriella's spirits invariably rose in a storm; her darkest days were her brightest. The weather that tried her soul was the weather which was disagreeable, but not disagree-

able enough to break up school. When she taught, she taught with all her powers and did it well; when not teaching, she hated it with every faculty and capacity of her being. And to discharge patiently and thoroughly a daily hated work — that takes noble blood.

Nothing in the household stirred below. The members of the family had remained up far into the night. As for the negroes, they understand how to get a certain profit for themselves out of all disturbances of the weather. Gabriella was glad of the chance to wait for the house-girl to come up and kindle her fire — grateful for the luxury of lying in bed on Friday morning, instead of getting up to a farmer's early breakfast, when sometimes there were candles on the table to reveal the localities of the food! How she hated those candles, flaring in her eyes so early! How she loved the mellow flicker of them at night, and how she hated them in the morning — those early-breakfast candles!

In high spirits, then, with the certainty

of a late breakfast and no school, she now lay on the pillows, looking across with sparkling eyes at last night's little gray ridge of ashes under the bars of her small grate. Those hearthstones! — when her bare soles accidentally touched one on winter mornings, Gabriella was of the opinion that they were the coldest bricks that ever came from a fiery furnace. There was one thing in the room still colder: the little cherrywood washstand away over on the other side of the big room between the windows, — placed there at the greatest possible distance from the fire! Sometimes when she peeped down into her wash-pitcher of mornings, the ice bulged up at her like a white cannon-ball that had gotten lodged on the way out. She jabbed at it with the handle of her tooth-brush; or, if her temper got the best of her (or the worst), with the poker. Often her last act at night was to dry her tooth-brush over the embers so that the hair in it would not be frozen in the morning.

Gabriella raised her head from the pil-

lows and peeped over at the counterpane covering her. It consisted of stripes of different colors, starting from a point at the middle of the structure and widening toward the four sides. Her feet were tucked away under a bank of plum color sprinkled with salt; up her back ran a sort of comet's tail of puddled green. Over her shoulder and descending toward her chin, flowed a broadening delta of well-beaten egg.

She was thankful for these colors. The favorite hue of the farmer's wife was lead. Those hearthstones — lead! The strip of oilcloth covering the washstand — lead! The closet in the wall containing her things — lead! The stair-steps outside — lead! The porches down below — lead! Gabriella sometimes wondered whether this woman might not have had lead-colored ancestors.

A pair of recalcitrant feet were now heard mounting the stair: the flowers on the pillow closed their petals. When the negro girl knelt down before the

grate, with her back to the bed and the soles of her shoes set up straight side by side like two gray bricks, the eyes were softly opened again. Gabriella had never seen a head like this negro girl's, that is, never until the autumn before last, when she had come out into this neighborhood of plain farming people to teach a district school. Whenever she was awake early enough to see this curiosity, she never failed to renew her study of it with unflagging zest. It was such a mysterious, careful arrangement of knots, and pine cones, and the strangest-looking little black sticks wrapped with white packing thread, and the whole system of coils seemingly connected with a central mental battery, or idea, or plan, within. She studied it now, as the fire was being kindled, and the kindler, with inflammatory blows of the poker on the bars of the grate, told her troubles over audibly to herself: "Set free, and still making fires of winter mornings; how was *that?* Where was any freedom in *that?* Her wages? Didn't she *work* for

her wages? Didn't she *earn* her wages? Then where did freedom come in?"

One must look low for high truth sometimes, as we gather necessary fruit on nethermost boughs and dig the dirt for treasure. The Anglo-Saxon girl lying in the bed and the young African girl kindling her fire — these two, the highest and the humblest types of womanhood in the American republic — were inseparably connected in that room that morning as children of the same Revolution. It had cost the war of the Union, to enable this African girl to cast away the cloth enveloping her head — that detested sign of her slavery — and to arrange her hair with ancestral taste, the true African beauty sense. As long as she had been a slave, she had been compelled by her Anglo-Saxon mistress to wear her head-handkerchief; as soon as she was set free, she, with all the women of her race in the South, tore the head-handkerchief indignantly off. In the same way, it cost the war of the Union to enable Gabriella to teach school. She had been

set free also, and the bandage removed from her liberties. The negress had been empowered to demand wages for her toil; the Anglo-Saxon girl had been empowered to accept without reproach the wages for hers.

Gabriella's memoirs might be writ large in four parts that would really be the history of the United States, just as a slender seam of gold can only be explained through the geology of the earth. But they can also be writ so small that each volume may be dropped, like certain minute-books of bygone fashions, into a waistcoat pocket, or even read, as through a magnifying glass, entire on a single page.

The first volume was the childhood book, covering the period from Gabriella's birth to the beginning of the Civil War, by which time she was fourteen years old: it was fairy tale. These earliest recollections went back to herself as a very tiny child living with her mother and grandmother in a big white house with

green window-shutters, in Lexington — so big that she knew only the two or three rooms in one ell. Her mother wore mourning for her father, and was always drawing her to her bosom and leaving tears on her face or lilylike hands. One day — she could not remember very well — but the house had been darkened and the servants never for a moment ceased amusing her — one day the house was all opened again and Gabriella could not find her mother; and her grandmother, everybody else, was kinder to her than ever. She did not think what kindness was then, but years afterward she learned perfectly.

Very slowly Gabriella's knowledge began to extend over the house and outside it. There were enormous, high-ceiled halls and parlors, and bedrooms and bedrooms and bedrooms. There were verandas front and back, so long that it took her breath away to run the length of one and return. Upstairs, front and back, verandas again, balustraded so that little girls could not forget themselves and fall off. The

pillars of these verandas at the rear of the house were connected by a network of wires, and trained up the pillars and branching over the wires were coiling twisting vines of wisteria as large as Gabriella's neck. This was the sunny southern side; and when the wisteria was blooming, Gabriella moved her establishment of playthings out behind those sunlit cascades of purple and green, musical sometimes with goldfinches.

The front of the house faced a yard of stately evergreens and great tubs of flowers, oleander, crepe myrtle, and pomegranate. Beyond the yard, a gravelled carriage drive wound out of sight behind cedars, catalpa, and forest trees, shadowing a turfy lawn. At the end of the lawn was the great entrance gate and the street of the town. Gabriella long knew this approach only by her drives with her grandmother. At the rear of the house was enough for her: a large yard, green grazing lots for the stable of horses, and best of all a high-fenced garden containing everything the heart could de-

sire: vegetables, and flowers; summer-houses, and arbors with seats; pumps of cold water, and hot-houses of plants and grapes, and fruit trees, and a swing, and gooseberry bushes — everything.

In one corner, the ground was too shaded by an old apple tree to be of use: they gave this to Gabriella for her garden. She had attached particularly to her person a little negress of about the same age — her Milly, the color of a ripe gourd. So when in spring the gardener began to make his garden, with her grandmother sometimes standing over him, directing, Gabriella, taking her little chair to the apple tree, — with some pretended needle-work and a real switch, — would set Milly to work making hers. Nothing that they put into the earth ever was heard of again, though they would sometimes make the same garden over every day for a week. So that more than once, forsaking seed, they pulled off the tops of green things near by, planted these, and so had a perfect garden in an hour.

Then Gabriella, seated under the apple tree, would order Milly to water the flowers from the pump; and taking her switch and calling Milly close, she would give her a sharp rap or two around the bare legs (for that was expected), and tell her that if she didn't stop being so trifling, she would sell her South to the plantations. Whereupon Milly, injured more in heart than legs, and dropping the watering-pot, would begin to bore her dirty fists into her eyes. Then Gabriella would say repentantly: —

"No, I won't, Milly! And you needn't work any more to-day. And you can have part of my garden if you want it."

Milly, smiling across the mud on her cheeks, would murmur: —

"You ain' goin' sell yo' Milly down South, is you, Miss Gabriella?"

"*I* won't. But I'm not so sure about grandmother, Milly. You know she *will* do it sometimes. Our cotton's got to be picked by *somebody*, and who's to do it but you lazy negroes?"

In those days the apple tree would be

blooming, and the petals would sift down on Gabriella. Looking up at the marriage bell of blossoms, and speaking in the language of her grandmother, she would say: —

"Milly, when I grow up and get married, I am going to be married out of doors in spring under an apple tree."

"I don' know whah *I* gwine be married," Milly would say with a hoarse, careless cackle. "I 'spec' in a brier-patch."

Gabriella's first discovery of what meanness human nature can exhibit was connected with this garden. So long as everything was sour and green, she could play there by the hour; but as soon as anything got ripe and delicious, the gate with the high latch was shut and she could never enter it unguarded. What tears she shed outside the fence as she peeped through! When they did take her in, they always held her by the hand.

"*Don't* hold my hand, Sam," pleadingly to the negro gardener. "It's so *hot!*"

"You fall down and hurt yourself."

"How absurd, Sam! The idea of my falling down when I am walking along slowly!"

"You get lost."

"How can you say anything so amusing as that, Sam! Did I ever get lost in here?"

"Snakes bite you."

"Why do you think they'd bite *me*, Sam? They have never been known to bite anybody else."

"You scratch yourself."

"How *can* I scratch myself, Sam, when I'm not doing anything?"

"Caterpillars crawl on you."

"They crawl on me when I'm not in the garden, Sam. So why do you harp on *that?*"

Slowly they walked on — past the temptations of Eden.

"Please, let me try just once, Sam!"

"Try what, Miss Gabriella?"

"To see whether the snakes will bite me."

"I couldn't!"

"Then take me to see the grapes," she would say wearily.

There they were, hanging under the glass: bunches of black and of purple Hamburgs, and of translucent Malagas, big enough to have been an armful!

"Just one, Sam, please."

"Make you sick."

"They never make me sick when I eat them in the house. They are good for me! One *couldn't* make me sick. I'm sick because you *don't* give it to me. Don't I *look* sick, Sam?"

The time came when Gabriella began to extend her knowledge to the country, as she drove out beside her grandmother in the balmy spring and early summer afternoons.

"What is that, grandmother?" she would say, pointing with her small forefinger to a field by the turnpike.

"That is corn."

"And what is that?"

"That is wheat."

"And what is that?"

"Oats, Gabriella."

"Oh, grandmother, what is *that?*"

"Tut, tut, child! Don't you know what that is? That's hemp. That is what bales all our cotton."

"Oh, grandmother, smell it!"

After this sometimes Gabriella would order the driver to turn off into some green lane about sunset and press on till they found a field by the way. As soon as they began to pass it, over into their faces would be wafted the clean, cooling, velvet-soft, balsam breath of the hemp. The carriage would stop, and Gabriella, standing up and facing the field, would fill her lungs again and again, smiling at her grandmother for approval. Then she would take her seat and say quietly:—

"Turn round, Tom, and drive back. I have smelt it enough."

These drives alone with her grandmother were for spring and early summer only. Full summer brought up from their plantations in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi, her uncles and the wives and

children of some of them. All the bedrooms in the big house were filled, and Gabriella was nearly lost in the multitude, she being the only child of the only daughter of her grandmother. And now what happy times there were. The silks, and satins, and laces! The plate, the gold, the cut glass! The dinners, the music, the laughter, the wines!

Later, some of her uncles' families might travel on with their servants to watering places farther north. But in September all were back again under the one broad Kentucky roof, stopping for the beautiful Lexington fair, then celebrated all over the land; and for the races — those days of the thoroughbred only; and until frost fall should make it safe to return to the swamps and bayous, loved by the yellow fever.

When all were departed, sometimes her grandmother, closing the house for the winter, would follow one of her sons to his plantation; thence later proceeding to New Orleans, at that time the most

brilliant of American capitals; and so Gabriella would see the Father of Waters, and the things that happened in the floating palaces of the Mississippi; see the social life of the ancient French and Spanish city.

All that could be most luxurious and splendid in Kentucky during those last deep, rich years of the old social order, was Gabriella's: the extravagance, the gayety, the pride, the lovely manners, the selfishness and cruelty in its terrible, unconscious, and narrow way, the false ideals, the aristocratic virtues. Then it was that, overspreading land and people, lay the full autumn of that sowing, which had moved silently on its way toward its fateful fruits for over fifty years. Everything was ripe, sweet, mellow, dropping, turning rotten.

O ye who have young children, if possible give them happy memories! Fill their earliest years with bright pictures! A great historian many centuries ago wrote it down that the first thing conquered in battle are the eyes: the soldier

flees from what he sees before him. But so often in the world's fight we are defeated by what we look back upon; we are whipped in the end by the things we saw in the beginning of life. The time arrived for Gabriella when the gorgeous fairy tale of her childhood was all that she had to sustain her: when it meant consolation, courage, fortitude, victory.

A war volume, black, fiery, furious, awful — this comprised the second part of her history: it contained the overthrow of half the American people, and the downfall of the child princess Gabriella. An idea — how negative, nerveless, it looks printed! A little group of four ideas — how should they have power of life and death over millions of human beings! But say that one is the idea of the right of self-government — much loved and fought for all round the earth by the Anglo-Saxon race. Say that a second is the idea that with his own property a man has a right to do as he pleases: another notion that has been warred over,

world without end. Let these two ideas run in the blood and passions of the Southern people. Say that a third idea is that of national greatness (the preservation of the Union), another idol of this nation-building race. Say that the fourth idea is that of evolving humanity, or, at least, that slave-holding societies must be made non-slave-holding — if not peaceably, then by force of arms. Let these two ideas be running in the blood and passions of the Northern people. Bring the first set of ideas and the second set together in a struggle for supremacy. By all mankind it is now known what the result was for the nation. What these ideas did for one little girl, living in Lexington, Kentucky, was part of that same sad, sublime history.

They ordered the grandmother across the lines, as a wealthy sympathizer and political agent of the Southern cause; they seized her house, confiscated it, used it as officers' headquarters: in the end they killed her with grief and care; they sent