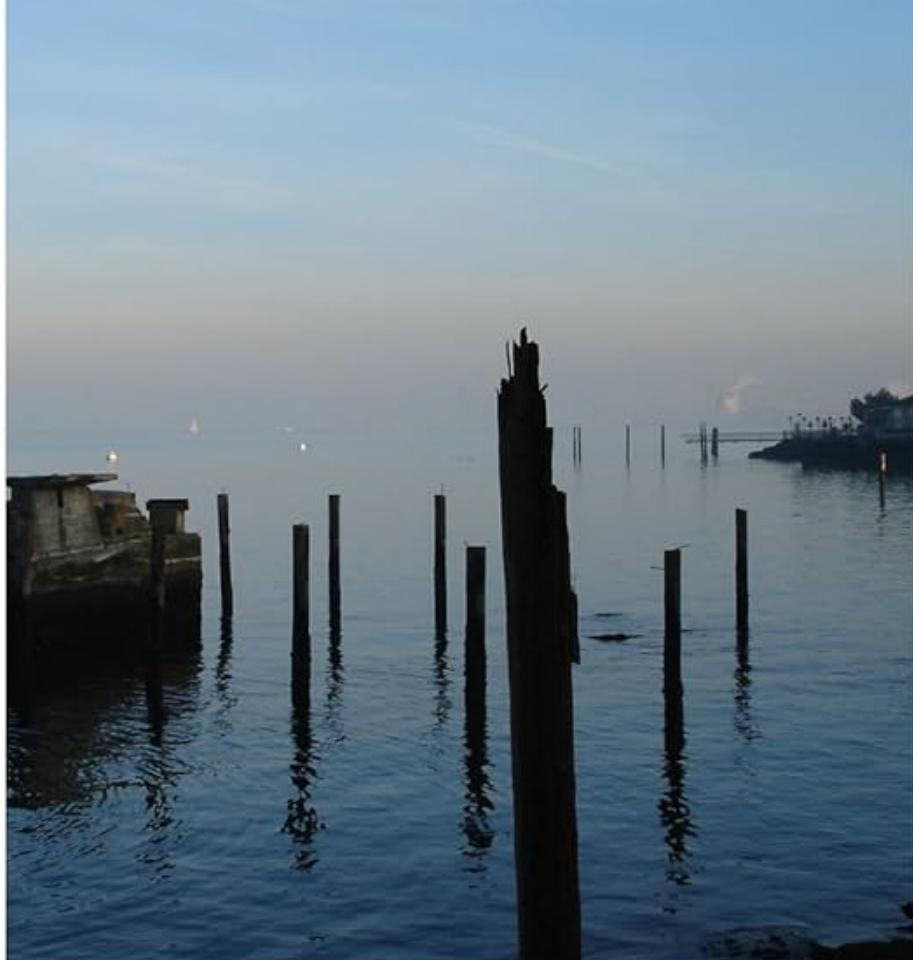




In Music's Thrall

Lilla Nease

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook ***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

Title: In Music's Thrall

Date of first publication: 1903

Author: Lilla Stewart Nease (1858-1948)

Date first posted: August 28, 2026

Date last updated: August 28, 2026

Faded Page eBook #20260853

This eBook was produced by: John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

In Music's Thrall



BY LILLA NEASE

"Go, little book,
The old and wise
Will view thee with suspicious eyes,
With stare and furtive frown;
But here and there
Some gentle maid
Will greet thee. Thou'lt not be afraid
Of bright eyes, blue or brown."

TORONTO
WILLIAM BRIGGS
MCMIII

Entered according to Act of the Parliament of Canada, in the year one thousand nine hundred and three, by WILLIAM BRIGGS, at the Department of Agriculture.

In Music's Thrall

CHAPTER I.

"PALLIDA MORS."

A country school-house lies before us in all its chill bareness, uninviting, unpretentious, and suggestive of all that is unattractive to the youthful learners and the most enthusiastic teachers. A stony waste, unproductive of tree or shrub, surrounds the building, except at one side, where a few weeds and some herbage struggle for existence. A half-finished fence skirts the west boundary—the uneven supports defying any appearance of beauty or symmetry; while the lack of trees in the front is supplied by one struggling hop vine, which, rearing its head, sinks down again unfruitful, abashed at its own daring.

A little creek, at times, runs babbling along beside the unsightly fence, as though nature had by this one gift tried to atone for neglect and thrift; but even this one attractive spot is for the greater part of the year dry and stony, rendering the scene even more void of charm and grace.

And to Marjorie Stewart, entering on her field of labor in the little village of Hillsview, this first glimpse was indeed disheartening, and the task before her—already a herculean one—became to her dainty poetic self even more distasteful than it had been; for, endowed with gifts that might have, under brighter aspects, made her a successful teacher, she lacked what was the essence of success—a heart thoroughly in love with the work before her. So this uncongenial task loomed before this brave little lass with all the stupendous terror of the Scylla cliffs, and no sailor ever dared the dread straits with more trust and heroism than Marjorie this new life which was so far apart from “ways of pleasantness” or even “paths of peace.” And Marjorie found that neither philosophical doctrines nor reflections could reconcile her to her new position, till a new vista in country life was by

chance spread out in its attractiveness, and the new life became a rare delight.

How the door of Fern Villa ever opened to receive her, first as guest, afterwards as dweller, Marjorie never could tell; and yet, perhaps, she never penetrated far enough into the hidden life of its invalid owner to find reason for the good fortune that had opened its arms to receive her. Just to dwell within its portals as the chosen friend of the dignified white-haired woman, who with so much confidence and affection had taken the lonely orphan to be her companion and confidante, Marjorie felt to be the acme of happiness. How patiently Mrs. Graham listened to her daily trials, seeking by every means that luxury and wealth could devise to render the rough road more inviting and less wearisome! Gladly would she have freed Marjorie from the thankless drudgery of her present position, but the independence of that little maid, coupled with an under-estimate of her ability to return by her companionship alone so great a debt, kept Marjorie at her daily duties.

So time went by while the thread of destiny was being spun, and Marjorie, climbing the "shining stairs of Love and Hope," little dreamed in what short time all would be changed, and, descending again to loneliness and work, she would in new scenes recall the vision of those happy halcyon hours.

The school had closed for the day. Her duties over, Marjorie passed along the country road homeward. The beautiful country lying before her suggestive of rest, the freedom from noisy pupils, the knowledge of work well performed, all conduced to a tranquillity of mind unprophectic of coming sorrow or alarm. Past the country station, where a few passengers waited the belated train, Marjorie went unattracted by passing objects, as eager to enjoy companionship as the dear friend who waited so patiently and eagerly for her return.

The anticipation made of Marjorie a new creature and lent a tender halo to the beautiful eyes and perfect face. Passing quickly along the walk bordered on each side by old-fashioned shrubs and flowers, she entered the door of the pleasant home. As she ascended the stairs and was about to enter her own room she stopped as she saw a woman, who appeared to occupy the position of housekeeper, or even a more confidential role, coming towards her.

"Oh, Katy; how is Mrs. Graham to-day?"

"Alas, Miss Marjorie, I fear she is worse! I am glad you have come. She seems weaker, and to-day those old restless fits which I have learned to

mistrust have made the time pass miserably. Do not look so sad; your music will soothe her as nothing else can. I can amuse her no more. It was a fortunate day when you came to Fern Villa, Miss Marjorie.”

“Dear Katy, Mrs. Graham cannot speak too highly of your help and comfort. We will, I am sure, see her strong and well again.”

Marjorie entered her own room and, quickly donning a pretty gown, refreshed and brightened, descended the stairs and, passing along a broad hall, entered a room at the end which from its situation gave a view of a pleasant lawn and spacious grounds. On all sides evidences of artistic taste with comfort combined met the eye. A low couch was drawn up to the open window, and the patient invalid watched Marjorie’s approach and welcomed her with a winning smile as, holding out her hand, she drew her down on a low chair beside her.

“The hours are long, sweetheart, waiting for your return. I shall rob that school of its enthusiastic teacher before long, I fear. I wish you were with me always, Marjorie.”

“I fear I am not enthusiastic—I fain would be,” replied the girl, “but if I would give up my work for anyone it would be for you, my truest friend.”

Marjorie soon had Mrs. Graham interested in the news of the little village, and by conversation sought to dispel a lurking sadness; and somewhat of her own buoyant temperament found an echo in the heart of her companion. Then Marjorie rose, and pushing aside the heavy draperies that concealed a smaller room at her side, soon in touching, pleading strains she soothed and thrilled the listener, and when more triumphant notes rising filled the room, if Marjorie’s dark grey eye took a deeper light and the pleading lips a more pathetic droop, it but betrayed a hidden sorrow—the longing, unsatisfied and uncontrolled, of a musician for her art.

Marjorie played on, forgetful of aught but her own enjoyment, till at last, as one awakening to present duties, remorseful for some forgotten task, she left the instrument and rejoined her friend.

Mrs. Graham was silent for a while, and Marjorie, understanding so well her moods, refrained from speech, waiting for her to break the spell of quietness.

“Dear Marjorie, how thoughtless of me! We have waited longer to-night; you must be almost famished. Ring for Katy; we will have tea served here. And you have not told me how school passed off to-day. Those little boys and girls—who are so interesting to me—have they disappointed you? And

then, dearest," and Mrs. Graham spoke hesitatingly, "you must listen to me. I have been thinking much, and I feel that to-night I must tell you a story which will either make you a truer friend, or turn you from a peevish, uncompanionable old lady."

"The last is among the impossibilities," laughed Marjorie.

The entrance of a servant, bearing a daintily arranged lunch, was an interruption, and when Katy appeared later to see if her mistress was comfortable, she looked her thanks to Marjorie and went away happy and contented.

When finally they were alone again, Mrs. Graham spoke.

"You played to-night, Marjorie, as one who once was dearer to me than aught on earth. You may have wondered often why I, called cold and distant, desired you so earnestly to enter my lonely home, but later you must have guessed what first drew me, and what spellbound me. Day by day you recall by music's power the face and form of my loved one—my only son! Little one, let me tell you without interruption a mother's story, a short one and a common one—the story of a mistake so deeply regretted and alas! too late to rectify—and it is with the desire that you, my more than daughter, will accept the trust imposed, that to-night I tell you the past so freely.

"Marjorie, I was proud of my boy—too proud of him; so noble and clever; a musician of more than ordinary talent. You will no doubt think it strange that I should have striven to turn my boy from the life of an artist when I now seek and find comfort in music. I would not encourage, would not even listen to, his chosen plans, tried to interest him in other work; and when he left college, all that money and influence could do was brought to bear to have him drop his musical studies and enter some other profession. My entreaties were vain, and bitterly I upbraided him for opposing my wishes. 'You love your music more than me,' I said; 'I never want to see you again till you yield obedience.'

"My boy left his home that night, and did not return, or if he ever did I know not. Blind and angry, after waiting awhile, I sold the home of his childhood, and destroying all trace of my movements, I left the old house forever.

"You will wonder why to-night I tell you this. I will explain. Dr. Manning was with me to-day and spoke plainly to me of my condition, and now I know that death may come suddenly, yes, at any moment. My own feelings tell me that I have not years enough left to undo the wrong, and, Marjorie, you must do for me the work I cannot. You must in return let me

give you what I denied my boy—a good musical education. I have arranged all with my lawyer, and have left sufficient to carry out my future plans for you if I die. The remainder, except a legacy to Katy, is willed to you; only you understand, dearest, it is in trust for my wanderer should he ever return. Katy willingly agreed to return to the village, her old home, to await his return. She will watch and wait if already there are not tidings there which will help her to find him. She has promised to help you, dear, so always keep her in knowledge of your address. I will leave a letter for him which he is to receive at your hands alone. Marjorie, wait ten years. If in that time you have no trace consider all your own; for I know that, if ever in your life you find him, all is safe in your hands. Marjorie, you will be rich—richer than ever in your daydreams or girlish fancies you imagined you would be. I know I am wise to trust you.”

Mrs. Graham lay exhausted.

Marjorie had listened quietly to the recital, and now, as she could find no words to express gratitude or promise, she bowed her head over the reclining figure, and in close embrace, like Ruth of old, shed tears that told of sympathy and sorrow.

“There are some good things on this earth,
That pass not away with the rest,
But of all good things on this earth
A faithful friend is the best.”

The evening shadows fell about them. As the silent figure, yielding to Marjorie’s caressing touch, and gradually quieting under the influence of responsive feeling, sank into a deep slumber, Marjorie sat still in the dusky shadows, sensible of an unreality in it all. The sounds of country life floated into the room. She noted all—the rattling of wheels upon the country road—the voices of happy children passing along the orchard fence—the cricket’s chirp, and, faint in the distance, the rough voice of the farmer, as he hastened the last work of the day by impatient commands to his little flock of helpers, leading the tired horses to water or driving the cows through the country lane—the whip-poor-will’s plaintive call, rarely heard, yet all the more welcome.

Still she sat, noting carelessly the contrast of scenes—without. Nature’s panorama of luxuriant foliage and darkly shadowed nooks; within, artificial luxury, ease and affluence. In after years Marjorie recalled the scene. The listlessness and apathy seemed but the subtle influence of some magnetic power, too strong to be controlled by her own feeble will.

As the quiet sleeper's heavy breathing passed away to quieter motion, Marjorie withdrew herself slowly from the detaining arm, and in the gathering darkness played melodies that filled the room with dreamy sweetness, gliding unconsciously from one song to another, till Mrs. Graham's favorite, "The Erl King"—ah! now she knew too well what it expressed to the mother-heart—came in entrancing strains, as heralding another messenger, grim and relentless, or rose in triumphant song, weird and thrilling, as, passing through the portals into another world, the weary sufferer entered life immortal.

A cry of terror rang with startling clearness through the silent house. The frightened inmates gathered with hushed voices around the couch of their dead mistress, and as Katy loosened the clasp of Marjorie's clinging embrace, and saw the look of unsatisfied longing on that patient face changed to a look of peace and ecstasy, she rejoiced that, free from suffering, her loved mistress had entered into rest.

Marjorie had entered upon her legacy.

CHAPTER II.

The golden June days were fast disappearing. The dying splendor of this month of sunshine and roses threw a bewitching glamor over the two idlers spending a sunny afternoon in Dr. Manning's pleasant garden. In the midst of enjoyment the memory of that one sad night was to Marjorie an ill-fitting prelude to these rare and perfect days; but to her faithful knight, the doctor's son, just home from college, the present was but a happy recollection of the past. For were not Marjorie and June synonymous? Indeed, for two years Marjorie had been so associated with his homecoming that the news of her departure was received by Jack with an air of positive injury.

"It's hard on a fellow, Marjorie, just home for his holidays, and here you are—best bonnet on, trunks strapped, and its 'Heigho! I'm off a-maying!'"

"Be correct, Jack. I'd scorn to call this my best bonnet," and Marjorie dangled a huge sun-shade by its ribbon band. "We don't go maying in June, and my trunks aren't even packed, and won't be if I waste this pleasant afternoon."

"All the same, Marjorie, you might have broken me in gently. Couldn't you stay a week or two longer and let the calamity fall by degrees? I might miss seeing you for one day, then two, and so on, and adapt myself to country life without you. I shall simply offer myself as a sacrifice to the god of sleep. May Somnus bring me dreams of happy bygone hours with Marjorie!"

Marjorie laughed gaily, and leaning back farther, in the shade of the huge elm, used the brim of her broad hat for a fan, as she rested after a busy morning spent in preparation for her coming journey.

How irresistibly dear the country seemed, now that all nature breathed a requiem and flower and foliage vied in entrancing beauty, while the perfume of the lilac hedge—great clusters of Persian beauties, with the delicate white blossoms—recalled the happy days, lost, but not forgotten.

But a short time had passed since Marjorie gazed for the last time on that loved form, and, yielding to Dr. Manning's request and his wife's earnest entreaties, had become an inmate of their happy home till she could form some definite plan for the future.

A visit from Mrs. Graham's lawyer had shown her that her benefactor's request could be easily complied with, even if her own love for music had not decided her to pursue the pleasant course now lying open before her. Such magnanimity! Her eyes filled with tears as the kind old lawyer congratulated her on her newly-acquired wealth, but, remembering Mrs. Graham's request, she considered nothing her own but what would give her a musical education. Ten years seemed a life-time to her, and, true to the task imposed, Marjorie never looked upon the fortune others believed to be hers but as belonging to him who would some day return to claim his own. When and in what manner the wanderer would return did not enter into her daily meditations. After parting with Katy, the last link in the old life outwardly disappeared, and Marjorie soon learned to accept the homage of seeming wealth with the complacency of rightful possession, and looked forward to the future with a "calm, clear joyance" hitherto restrained by the necessity for untiring exertion. The "jingle of the guinea" added the indescribable charm of independence to Marjorie's sweet disposition and gentle attractiveness, and to Jack Manning, stretched on the grass, noting the dainty grace of every movement, a fear came that the Marjorie of old was fast slipping away, if not already lost to him forever.

Perhaps Marjorie's assumption of indifference was not altogether a characteristic trait, but as she noted the ardent gaze and too tender solicitude of her companion, it seemed best to check what she feared would prove disastrous to their hitherto pleasant companionship. It was indeed with regret that she was leaving this pleasant country home to find among strangers new friends and foes, but other guests were coming, and not wishing to intrude too long in this pleasant household, she had decided to visit the city, and make arrangements for a continuance of lessons she had been loth to lose. Mrs. Manning had gained for her a temporary home with a sister in New York, and all plans had been arranged for the coming journey. To-morrow Marjorie would fearlessly enter a new life to make of her Spanish castle a pleasant reality.

As if to dispel Jack's evident ill-humor, Marjorie strove to interest him in his coming duties as host.

"And so your uncle and cousin will arrive next week? I would like to meet Erica, in whom you have interested me."

"Stay this week, Marjorie, and you will be repaid for the delay."

"I fear the Greeks," Marjorie laughingly replied; "but tell me about your coming guests. Has your uncle ever been here before?"

“Not since Erica was small. Father wished this to be her home after her mother’s death, and Uncle Keith brought her down, but she would not be separated from her father, and although mother thought we could have won her to remain and she would have been contented in time, Uncle Keith took her back, and since then they have been inseparable. She has had more nurses and teachers than any child in Christendom, and has grown up neither odd nor old-fashioned—not the sort of child you would expect from such a childhood. She is rather clever, this little cousin of mine, as simple and unaffected as you can imagine. She has some, perhaps much musical talent, and Uncle Keith has given her every advantage in that way that could be desired. I have often talked to her of you and your music, and I shouldn’t be surprised if she has coaxed uncle to bring her down solely to meet you.”

“All the more reason I should leave and not disappoint the little one. But your aunt? How long has Erica been under the care of nurse and governess?”

“Aunt Silvia died when Erica was a year old. She was my mother’s half-sister. I have heard mother tell how happy they were. Uncle Keith, cold and austere to others, was ever tender and thoughtful for wife and child. He was called away one day; for you must know he is a doctor, though he gave up active practice after aunt’s death. He was hardly gone when Aunt Silvia was taken alarmingly ill, and although they telegraphed, uncle could not be found. He had left the place he had started for and had given no information as to his whereabouts. However, they hoped Aunt Silvia would be better when he returned, which was in a few days, as expected. But he was too late—Aunt Silvia died before he came. His grief was terrible to behold; he blamed himself for leaving, and thought that he could have saved her. But everything had been done that money or skill could offer. For years Uncle Keith bore the mark of a great trouble, and although lately, as Erica is getting more companionable, he has relaxed somewhat from his gloominess and become more sociable, yet I believe he is void of any sentiment of affection except for his little daughter. And she repays all the care and affection lavished upon her, for she is a delightful little creature. I hoped you would have met her, for until you do you will carry an imperfect picture of Erica Graham.”

At the sound of that familiar name Marjorie started and a piteous look overshadowed the beautiful face.

Jack hastily added: “Dear Marjorie, that terrible shock must not darken your life. That name startled you. You will often hear it—it is common enough.”

Marjorie was about to speak when Jack's loquacity gave her the information she sought.

"I questioned Uncle Keith about relatives in this part of the world, and was satisfied even before asking that there was no relationship between him and your friend. In fact, he is of Scotch descent, his father dying when he was young—I imagine in Scotland—and an uncle educated him. However, to settle the possibility of any kinship, Uncle Keith came from Scotland but a short time before his marriage."

Marjorie rose quickly. The scene had lost its charm, and she felt stifled. An oppression she could not account for had marred the beauty of that lovely day, and a chilling dread oppressed her that the unknown future into which she was entering with such joyful expectancy would be bound to the past by sorrow's aching hand.

They wended their way to the house, and Marjorie, passing up the broad stairs, was again busy in the last preparations, and with the light-heartedness of youth soon forgot her fears.

In the evening she stole away to the grave of her benefactor, and in the dying light, clasping the last message to the lost son to her aching heart, she murmured: "My talisman against weakness, my inspiration leading to success. Even as thy love has supported me, thy memory will encourage and sustain me in adversity and suffering, if such be my lot."

In the morning sunshine Marjorie left. Mr. Manning, kissing the pale face of the doubly orphaned girl, found the sorrow of parting lightened by Marjorie's promise to visit them as often as her studies permitted.

"You will find my sister Marian a sympathetic and helpful friend, Marjorie. A friend, Miss Gordon, is living with her now. I have never met her. I hope you will find her a pleasant companion. Good-bye, Marjorie, good-bye."

Jack drove her to the station, and Marjorie was glad that the fast approaching train precluded any lengthy parting.

As Marjorie looked out of the window to nod a last farewell to Jack, standing disconsolately waiting for the train to move, she noticed a fair, graceful girl with curly locks, surrounding a pleasant piquant face, coming quickly down the platform, followed by a tall gentleman, whose dignified bearing could hardly keep pace with his merry companion. As she came nearer, this little maiden rushed forward and her joyous "Jack!" rang out above the din of trucks and shouts of train hands.

“Erica!” Marjorie murmured, and Keith Graham, following Jack’s parting salute, saw a sad face half-buried in a bunch of white lilacs, and carelessly turned away.

The huge black engine with roar and rush plunged forward as if ruthlessly rejoicing in the separation of loved ones; then quieted into steadier motion, as if, remorseful and repentant, it would atone for thoughtlessness and hard-heartedness with promises of speedy reunions.

And could the veil that concealed the cycle of the future have been removed, and the quiescent circle have moved other than in its allotted motion to reveal the secret of the Fates, how happily might all struggles have been ended and purposes have been accomplished! Ah! truly only the hearts that throb with pain and anguish can “interpret life and comprehend its dark enigma.”

CHAPTER III.

In the beautiful morning sunlight, the first morning after her arrival, Erica Graham walked rapidly along the country road, revelling in the stillness and solitude with a keen pleasure which gave buoyancy to every movement and brought a winning brightness to the sweet, fresh countenance of the little maid. To Erica the longest summer day was short, and heralding with delight her uncle's permission to roam at will in the early morning hours, she had challenged Jack for a stroll before breakfast.

Jack failing to put in an appearance, Erica, with perhaps a soupçon of relief from the necessity of companionship, chose the most unfrequented direction. The few laborers she passed at this early hour—for it was scarcely six o'clock—returned her friendly little nod, and many a backward glance was cast, as, innocent of the notice she was attracting, she stopped now and then as some object interested and drew her attention.

In some of the houses by the roadside the inmates had arisen even at this early hour to perform some of the day's routine duties, and these left their churning or busy house-work to gaze wonderingly at her. Erica, too, was not without her sex's curiosity, and she did not fail to notice their surprised look. She meant to know them all before long; for she was lost without her retinue of friends; and even as she accepted friendship, so she left in return the brightness and warmth of a kindly interest in others, and was indeed as sunshine to many a weary and darkened life.

Erica was not beautiful—the charm that won to her was not in perfect feature and faultless moulding—but the piquant face, with her saucy bright insouciant manner, won its way light-heartedly and informally into the hearts and lives of many, many friends.

How pretty the country appeared; she would never tire of its freedom and freshness. The fragrance of honey-suckle and the scent of the clover, the great red clusters of alsike and purple alfalfa, covering the fields in bewildering adornment, all added to her enjoyment of the walk, while the droning of the bee, now securing a bounteous harvest, and the song of birds were at times the only sounds to break the silence.

She was about to return, when, casting another glance over the enticing meadows, she beheld in the distance a church whose white spire was partly

hidden by intervening trees. She hesitated. By a straight path, cutting off the length of road, she could easily reach it, and the temptation was not dallied with. As she approached she was delighted to find that, unlike some country churches she had seen, this one was particularly pleasing to the eye—not blurred by the unsightliness of worn-off paint or decaying timbers. It stood apart from any building, in all its purity, a holy thing, “bathed in the living glory” of the blessed sunlight.

By its side was a little churchyard, fenced and trimmed with its prettily-arranged plots and pretty memorials, from the small stone marking the resting-place of the little child to the costly monument that so feebly expressed the love of the living for the dead.

Erica stood by the open door and with her usual fearlessness entered the sacred edifice, and was surprised to find a woman performing the duties of caretaker at this early hour. Apologizing for intruding, she was welcomed by the woman, who bade her enter to see the church if she wished. Then the old woman went on with her work, while Erica passed up the centre aisle feeling that she was rewarded for her long walk by the one view before her. The church was indeed pretty in its simplicity. The light tinting of walls and metallic ceiling spoke to her imaginative nature of what she loved best, God’s beneficent gift of sunlight, and, as she stood by the little pipe organ in the glow of the morning light, shining in clear translucent tints through the stained glass of the chancel window, bathing altar, desk and even Erica herself in the golden light, there came to her lips the words of the Psalmist, “In thy light we shall see light,” and surely the light covered her as with a garment.

“Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun,” she murmured, revelling in its effulgent glory. Then, attracted by the little organ standing invitingly open, she seated herself and the beautiful hymn, “Sun of my soul,” rang out on the morning air clear and sweet.

As she sang the old woman forgot her work. Nearer she drew till at Erica’s final “Amen” she stood beside her. An angel voice had touched a hidden chord, and the hard-working woman felt the influence of the heavenly melody. An ejaculation of pleasure, hardly breathed, drew Erica’s attention.

“Oh, I have kept you,” Erica said, with evident sorrow for her thoughtlessness.

“Oh, no; although I am through. It was heavenly. Are you a stranger? Will you come again?” she asked, as if loth to lose her stranger guest.

Erica smiled with her usual friendliness.

“Yes, I will come and sing to you. I am Dr. Manning’s niece, Erica Graham.”

“Then you are a relative of the Mrs. Graham Miss Marjorie lived with,” she asked.

“I have no relations in this part, but I have often heard of Miss Marjorie, though I have never met her. Do you always attend to the church at this early hour?” she asked, as she followed the old woman to the door.

“On hot days I do. The walk is easier in the cool morning, and I live a ways from the church.”

As their paths seemed to lie in the same direction Erica joined her and by questions soon won the old woman’s heart, and she became more talkative as she noted Erica’s marked interest.

“Yes, Miss Marjorie played beautifully. She did not sing, but we heard the words—just as you sang them this morning. But we didn’t think when Miss Marjorie took the village school that she’d ever be the rich lady she is. Mrs. Graham just doted on her, and no wonder, for she was, somehow or other, the loveliest creature you ever saw. Never saw her like. She would come to the church after school—that was before she lived with Mrs. Graham—and play and play till I’d think I was in heaven. Mrs. Graham was passing one day and I saw her stop, then come nearer, and, seated on the steps on the church porch, she waited till Marjorie came out. Well, if Mrs. Graham didn’t put her arms around Miss Marjorie’s neck and cry, I didn’t see straight. Well, soon after that Miss Marjorie went to live with Mrs. Graham, and then she went home every night. I expect Mrs. Graham wanted her music all to herself. Rich people always want everything. You heard how Mrs. Graham died and left her all her money?”

“I knew someone had left her a fortune, but never heard how it happened.”

“Yes, Mrs. Graham died—just slept away. Miss Marjorie took on dreadfully. Now she has gone to the city to learn more music, but say, we will miss her. She played the organ every Sunday. Will you be staying long? Perhaps you will play for us?”

“I would willingly if father and uncle are willing. Good-bye,” she said, as the old woman passed up a lane to her house.

Erica looked at her watch—just half-an-hour, she would be in time.

“Hello, Jack!” she called, as that young gentleman leaped a fence, and took long strides towards her. “Whom have you been visiting in that pretty retreat, and what excuse have you to offer for your delinquency? The next time I take a morning stroll with you it will be in the afternoon.”

“If your retroussé nose, freckles and red hair didn’t proclaim you Irish, your tongue would, Erica. The people I’ve been visiting there went away long ago.”

Erica laughed.

“It’s a pretty place. I mean to visit them too some day.”

“Say, Erica, do you see those two fences? Well, over them is our shortest cut home. I’m hungry; so are you. Don’t deny it—you have a famished look. Now, no one is looking. I’ll bet you a box of the best candies in our village store I can beat you in a race. One—two—three—off!”

Erica’s long limbs fairly flew. She skimmed the fences like a swallow, and as she reached the garden gate and walked demurely up the walk, she said to Jack, who looked down at her with a suspicious twinkle in his eye, “Tell it not in New York.”

They entered the pleasant morning-room, where, amid roses and delicate china, sunlight and silver, the other members of the family watched their approach.

“Why, Erica,” said Dr. Manning, as they seated themselves, “you are a regular sun-bird.”

“Yes, the fate of the daughter of Nisus threatens her,” said Dr. Graham.

“What is that, papa?”

“She was changed into a lark.”

“May the daughter of the Sun exercise her power and change Jack into a woodpecker. I found him emerging from the trees around a little cottage.”

“Next to seeing Marjorie is seeing her home. If you had waited five minutes for me this morning I would have shown you the cottage.”

“Well, next to seeing Marjorie’s abode is hearing her praises sung, and the same old lady tried to tack her benefactor on to our genealogical tree, but I objected. We have no relations in these parts, have we, papa?”

“Your papa disclaimed Marjorie’s friend long ago,” said Jack. “You remember my speaking about her to you, Uncle Keith?”

“Oh, yes, an old resident, I believe” —

“Not at all,” said Dr. Manning. “Jack must have been about two years old when she first came here. She lived a quiet, retired life; her friendship for Marjorie was the one bright spot in her otherwise solitary life of suffering. She was a patient of mine, a woman of clear intellect and gentle refinement.”

“And, papa, Marjorie’s music brought them together,” and Erica related the old woman’s story.

“Yes, she died as Marjorie played; quietly and imperceptibly she slipped away. Her death was as sudden as I expected. However, Marjorie has recovered from the shock, and I hope wealth will bring her happiness. From an obscure school-teacher to a wealthy heiress is a sudden leap, and I believe except a legacy to Katy, an old domestic, Mrs. Graham bequeathed everything to her.”

Katy! that old familiar name. Keith Graham had listened in grim suspense as the conversation became of weighty interest to him. Katy! his mother’s trusted, devoted servant,—his old nurse. Could it be that a few words had misled him years ago, when he might have found the lost and long-searched for loved one. So often the “*ignis fatuus*” had been pursued to bitter failure that mistakes had made him more guarded in his search, and he had surely misunderstood his nephew. Oh, God! he could have cried out in agony. A thousand questions rose to his lips, which, as if afraid of truth, he could not utter. The talk drifted to other subjects. He heeded not. Again private inquiry, a search, easier in its near possibility, was before him. And death! Oh, that this clue might be false, he now prayed as earnestly as he had prayed before for success. How the agony of those few moments came back in other years—his silent arguments for and against that devoted servant, the old nurse; then her dislike for music, her rarely affectionate nature, clinging to the society of this young girl—a mere country lass. He could only wait. He would soon know all.

The morning meal dragged on and at last ended, and, Erica leading, they all passed into the sunlight. All day long Keith Graham reasoned and suffered in silence. Dr. Manning with kind intentions devoted himself to entertaining this rare guest, so he was seldom alone. In the afternoon he accompanied him on some calls, hearing from rich and poor praise of Marjorie and regret over her departure.

So the day passed, and seated on the broad verandah, in her favorite low seat by her father’s side, Erica watched the decline of the sun, presaging

another day as golden and bright on the morrow. She told all the day's adventures—among them her visit to Fern Villa, dwelling enthusiastically on its pleasant surroundings and its exquisite arrangement of rooms. "I would love to live there in the summer, papa, and Jack says it is to be leased just as it is."

"So you and Jack have another excursion planned for the morrow. Well, I may visit the place when you are gone if Jack will trust me."

"Good-night, papa."

Long after the rest had been wooed by sleep, Keith Graham paced the garden walks, the faint odor of his cigar alone betraying the restless steps, and when worn out with the same unsatisfying arguments and repeated thoughts, he sought his room and sank into slumber, its uneasiness picturing too pathetically the irony of that "Good-night."

CHAPTER IV.

“Dissimulation is absolutely necessary, and yet it must stop short of falsehood: That middle point is the difficult one; there ability consists.”

This maxim of Chesterfield’s best defined Keith Graham’s position the next morning, as again the family met in the pleasant morning-room, full of plans for the day’s occupation. To his overwrought, excited imagination each one seemed unusually bright and animated, happy and light-hearted. Truly no diplomat tried to appear more pleasant when grave, never chose his words more carefully than Keith Graham as the merry conversation beguiled the morning hour.

Yet to gentle Aunt Edith, the half-hearted interest, the air of weariness, was not altogether a successful concealment; and when Dr. Manning challenged him to another round of visits, her kind interference, as she rallied her husband on his desire for company, protesting at the same time that he should not drag his visitors around from one patient to another, saved Keith from an actual refusal and gave him a promise of a morning free to visit Fern Villa and set at rest the doubts and fears that so ruthlessly oppressed him.

Jack and Erica had in view a proposed drive to the neighboring village, and while they waited for the pony-cart, Dr. Graham carelessly remarked:

“I may walk over to Fern Villa, Jack. I will pass my opinion on the beauty of the place when you return, and if I may explore the inside as well, can tell better if I can rest content with Erica airing her authority as mistress of this country-house.”

“Papa, it would be delightful. Imagine living so near Aunt Edith!”

“And Jack—don’t I count in the family compact?” interrupted that young man.

“Count? You are simply a calculating pencil. You multiply all the attractions. Jack can come as usual and mourn for Marjorie in that sweet spot, with me to console him.”

“If there is anything sweet around Erica will have it, I’ll be bound,” said Jack.

At last, after receiving Aunt Edith's commissions, and with many injunctions to return by dinner-time, Jack and Erica were off, and after many trifling delays Dr. Manning started on his morning round. Keith Graham, ironically meditating on the importance of little things, felt himself free at last, and with assumed carelessness lighted his cigar and strolled away, finding in the necessity for action a relief from the restlessness which oppressed him, and eager to escape from the troubled situation, fraught with so much sorrow and misery. Every step of the way was but an accompaniment to his sad, discordant thoughts. How often he had with bitter uncertainty pursued some slender thread of hope, frantically trusting that success would crown his efforts, only to be rewarded by disappointment and sorrow. And now the clue seemed stronger, the prospect of success more certain; yet he shrank with almost cowardly impulse from the disclosure which must "break the low beginnings of content." And even as he turned the key in the lock he suffered the dread of the unknown with far greater, far keener agony than the reality, however poignant, could inflict.

From room to room Keith Graham wandered in the silence of that haunted house—haunted indeed to him. An unseen presence moved beside him. The olden times, the days of youth, the mother-heart rose mystically from pictured nooks and ornamental treasures. He staggered among the mementos of the early days, knowing now the certainty with which his labor, his search, his pleasant dreams of happy days together were ended. All the pent-up emotion to be buried in the sweet realization of a mother's reconciliation burned and throbbed, as with a pathetic acceptance of the bitter reality he at last reached his mother's favorite room.

The room was shaded from the morning sun, the blinds were closed; but his eye, keen to note the evidences of a mother's work, took in the *tout ensemble*, and once again he stood among his boyhood's treasures. It was as if a word, a call, and the lost dweller was again with him, and as if seeking for her, whose presence alone could add the last touch to the perfectness of the reproduction, he passed into the adjoining room, and as of old seated himself before his old instrument, and touched, lovingly, caressingly, this true, tried friend of bygone golden days.

Years ago in his anguish Keith Graham had vowed never to touch again this fatal cause of all his loss and misery until he had found the one from whom he had been separated by its enthralling power, and faithfully had he kept his word. And now he could have laughed at the end of his probation. Had he not found her? Was not her presence here? He wondered if he were going mad, as he touched the keys and strains of long-forgotten melodies

filled the room. Still he played snatches of old pieces, old favorites, again some simple strain—till the whole place seemed “flooded with eddying song.” And as he played the present was forgotten, an aching void was filled by some unseen soothing power, some tightening chord in the throbbing brow relaxed, and as the tears coursed down his cheeks, he bowed his head over the quivering fingers, and knew that God had used this humble means and saved him.

Long he sat in that darkened room, quieted and subdued by nature’s relief, finding comfort in the thought that he had not been forgotten. Here was the evidence in his surroundings. Even if Erica had not wished it, he was now determined to possess the home rightfully his own—sacred to one who belonged to him more than any one on earth; and as this desire recalled the name of her who had usurped his place, a feeling of resentment arose that she should possess what he was denied. Why should her arms have held in the last loving embrace that form so dear to him? Why by her musical magnetic power should she win the love he would have died to repossess? It was well that in activity he could forget the terrible awakening. He must find Katy, and from her lips learn the story of her years of silence. He yearned for a sight of that one dear, familiar face. He was sure he would find her in her old home. The certainty gave an impetus that appeared almost joyousness, and as if to hasten the meeting, he rose quickly and, with a last lingering look at that attractive spot, he passed out of the desolate house and retraced his steps.

Keith Graham from dread uncertainty had passed to the knowledge of the truth in bitter agony, and a calm, quiescent feeling—always the accompaniment of the end, when Nature has reached its utmost limit of suffering and has spent its force—now held the mastery.

As Dr. Graham returned all outward sign of suffering passed away and was only visible later on in a kinder, gentler tone to his little daughter, and a more lavish display of affection, which Erica basked in as she did in the sunlight, happy and content. He had never breathed to his little daughter a word of this great sorrow. When she had grown old enough to be a confidante and companion he could not willingly lay open afresh the wounds that time had partially healed, by putting in words the history of the past, and even now he shrank from the grim task with a sad aversion. In time he would tell her all, but why now mar the happiness of that prospective home by any ghostly reminders of a sorrow he had borne so long and patiently?

So when Erica, on her return, inquired anxiously his opinion of Fern Villa, his favorable report and acquiescence in her chosen plans filled her with delight; and Dr. Manning, delighted, too, to have so pleasant a companion in such close proximity, readily lent his assistance in securing a quick lease of the place. He was certain that Marjorie would not sell the place; it was now her only home, and she might want to return, as she laughingly told them, “in ten years’ time.”

Jack protested against the loss of his stewardship, and said he must look for another job. But Erica said she feared his salary would be too large if Miss Stewart kept him for any length of time, and wondered what it would be now for the time he had served.

“So you enjoyed your drive, Erica?” said her father.

“Very much, indeed, papa. The village is beautifully situated—such a length of street, with all the little streets running down to the lake.”

“Why, I didn’t think Erica saw anything but candy-shops. One I love, two I love, three I love—I say, there were three you visited, weren’t there, Erica?”

“Only one that had what I wanted, and Jack didn’t stay in it long. It was a lovely restaurant, and Jack had to go out to see a man, and I think that very man went out of that very restaurant with him, and left me all alone with an ice-cream and two very sticky little boys looking at me through the door. Jack came back in the course of half-an-hour, and we went down to the lake, where the view was charming, shelving rocks and pebbly beach stretching for miles.

“Back we came, and Jack will likely have to go down to see that man again, so I may have another chance to see those sticky little boys and the pretty houses and grounds, which we missed, as Aunt Edith would not let us miss our dinner.”

“It doesn’t appear to me that you missed anything,” said Jack.

“I missed many creams and caramels on my way home. Have another, Jack?” and Erica passed over the box. “And so, papa, you think you must leave us to-morrow.”

“Only a few days—a week at the most—but I will not take you away now, Erica, and deprive Hillview of its organist. Remember, you’re on trial. Perhaps as mistress of Fern Villa you’ll have a permanent situation if you suit.”

“Will you see Aunt Marian when away, papa?”

“I do not expect to, so perhaps you had better write and tell her not to expect us this summer. You will be so important I cannot tear you away from your new duties. I hope I can secure a good housekeeper for you. But more of this later. We must not break the rules of this steady family, and you look tired enough for sleep, Erica.”

“To bed, to bed, says sleepy-head,” quoth Erica, as she passed Jack; “all the birds were in bed long ago.”

“I’m not a bird.”

“Yes, you are a swallow. Have the last one in the box, Jack.”

“No, I wouldn’t break your heart.”

“Mine has the strength of triple brass; *Illi robur et aes triplex*, Jack. Good-night!”

CHAPTER V.

A pretty, quaint New England village looks down from a slightly elevated situation on a line of railway running along the foot of the slope towards a great metropolis.

Many of the old inhabitants trace their descent from those brave men who in their little bark braved the terrors of an ocean voyage and built their first rude homes in that picturesque spot. As if to bear testimony to the fact, an old cemetery, whose odd epitaphs, moss-covered and worn, are scarcely decipherable, is an object of interest to the occasional visitor. Old names, familiar in the early history of that State, greet us in our daily social intercourse. The beaten gravelled walk—for neither plank nor cement mar the primitive loveliness—is daily traversed by many groups of laborers, for this is a busy manufacturing locality, and although mainly populated by factory hands, yet the beauty of the place has attracted many from the neighboring city. The beautiful residences of these latter, hedged in from the country walks, show a just appreciation of this charming country spot.

A little river with a significant Indian name runs winding in and out, darkly and slowly, and a pretty walk through a woodland area leads to an extension of the same village, which contains a public library and seminary.

It was late in the afternoon of a hot July day when a young woman crossed the street from a common, thickly covered with bushes, and entered a house nearly opposite. Laying her pail of luscious blueberries on a table she sank into a chair, exclaiming:

“Have I not done well, Auntie, after so many morning pickers? We will have berries and cream for tea. John is so fond of them. Could Hillview produce such beauties?”

“They do, indeed, look delicious, Mary. Huckleberries are rare in that locality. These are the first I have seen in years. I will berry for you some day. Many a time little Ted coaxed me to take him to that enticing spot, and how proud he was to fill his little pail and bring it home for his mother to see.”

“There, Aunt Katy, I know the place must have some association with the past to draw you to it. In time you will forget and will enjoy our simple

pleasures for the present pastime. Do not dwell too much on the past, dear, it makes you so unhappy.”

“I am too old, Mary, to break away from the past associations. My boy is my first thought in the morning and last at night. Sometimes I feel I will never live to see him. God grant me this one great blessing so that I can die in peace!”

“Don’t talk of dying, Auntie. I cannot lose you now. It is almost like having dear mother back again. Don’t worry; you will find the one you seek, I am sure. Well do I remember the last time he came. Mother and I were sitting in the porch and a tall gentleman came up the walk, leading a little girl by the hand. Well, I took her out in the garden while he and mother talked, and it was such a pleasure to amuse her. She was the sunniest little creature. I was sorry when they left.”

“But that was so long ago. Let me see, twelve years, Mary.”

“No, ten, Auntie. I was eleven then, and I am twenty-one now.”

“And he didn’t seem poor—or—or—”

“Poor! Why, Aunt Katy, he was a hero in my eyes—so grand and handsome—and the little girl looked as if her years had been spent in a bed of roses. Poor!”

“My Teddy married,” murmured Aunt Katy, and then, as if to prolong a theme so interesting, she continued: “Did he say anything about his wife?”

“Well, I did not hear any conversation. I spent all my time in the garden till I was called, but I do remember his asking mother to take his address in case he heard from you. Then mother died, and I never thought of the address, and it can’t be found now, and we never heard from you, and the visit seems like a dream. Perhaps he’s waiting.” Then, noticing a shade on her aunt’s face, she hastened to add—“But he will come again, of course. Why shouldn’t he? He is anxious to find you. It isn’t like John’s brother. Now he went away from home when John was a little boy, to see the world, and never came back nor wrote to the old folks, and they felt badly enough. Then a few years ago John got a line, and went to the address sent, and found his brother dying, and, oh! how badly he felt to know that never again he would see his dear father and mother. He was real well off, lived in a pleasant home with one daughter—a cold, haughty girl, John said. His brother left her in John’s care, and after the funeral poor John went for her, and she was gone, and to this day we have never heard a word about her. She must have laid her plans even before her father was buried, for she had

sold everything. Well, John made few inquiries, for it was evident she didn't want to see her people. Now, in your case, Auntie, your Teddy is anxious to see his people, and you will see him some day. But here I am talking and John wants an early tea, for we are going to town, and want you to go with us. Won't you, Auntie? We won't be late."

"No, child, not to-night. I will rest here in the quiet. Not that it is ever noisy, but alone in the evening I lose myself and feel myself in Hillsview with Marjorie playing, and my kind mistress so happy and well again."

"Well, Auntie, I won't leave you alone long, and you won't have much time for dreaming. I am sure the time will come when you will be as happy here as you were years ago. Only be patient and don't wear yourself out fretting and fretting."

So Mary hastened to get the evening meal, and Katy, watching the little woman, so free from care, almost envied her the plain, homely, uneventful life.

"Contented toil and hospitable care,
And kind connubial tenderness were there,
And piety, with wishes placed above,
And steady loyalty and faithful love."

Mary started in the evening for the city, and the last backward glance showed the old lady knitting in the fading light. Soon she knew that with folded hands and closed eyes she would be lost to all outward attractions, save as the country sounds recalled her old home and its surroundings.

The sun was just sinking; the faint call "Bob White" came from the river-shore. Katy sat still knitting in the dark shadows of the old porch—knitting in her hopes, her fancies, her fears, so soon to be unravelled. So busily was she occupied that she did not hear the click of the garden gate nor the step on the beaten walk. A shadow fell across her work. She raised her eyes and no sweeter music, no grander melody ever rang out on the resonant air than that glad cry,

"Teddy, my boy! my boy!"

Years of devotedness had their reward, suffering and sorrow were buried in that clinging embrace, as close to her heart the faithful nurse, the tireless watcher, held the form of her darling. No tears, no reproaches—only murmured thanks to God for this her prayer's answer.

"Teddy, my boy! my boy!"

It held next to the mother-love the love and devotion of one who had waited and watched the infant, the youth, almost to manhood. A truce to anxious thought and worry, a truce to suspense and fears—the conflict was ended, and deep from that fond heart there welled a song of triumph attuned to those pregnant words:

“Teddy, my boy! my boy!”

Dr. Graham gently disengaged the faithful arms and drawing her chair forward placed Katy in it, and sitting on the low porch steps said as of old:

“Now, nurse, tell me a story. Not the story the boy coaxed for in bygone days, but the newer story of this long-imposed silence.”

And Katy told him all; his mother’s anger when he did not return; the haughty spirit, chafing under the treatment; the bitter feelings actuating the first step; the aftermath of sorrow; the longings of all too late, and the final act when at last his mother had given up all hope and knew that she no more would see her boy.

“Oh, strange no more!
Surely all pleasant things have gone before,
Low buried, fathom deep, with thee no more!”

As she finished Keith Graham stroked the thin hand that so lovingly caressed his bowed head in fondness and pity, and for the first time in years could lay bare to another his secret thoughts and find relief in another’s sympathy. How quickly to her eager questioning he gave answer. How soon the tale was told. He had accepted, in the first tide of resentment, when he had felt himself misunderstood and harshly treated, an invitation from a college chum to join a party in a camping and hunting expedition. He had thought to return in a few weeks, but, lost in the enjoyment of the present hour, had with foolish indifference and perhaps wrong judgment of his mother’s feelings, kept up a silence which, alas! lasted longer than at his wildest moments he had ever conjectured. Then came his return when too late. Proud and blind, he accepted a situation as tutor to the nephew of one of his friends, and on a visit to Scotland spent some time in search of his father’s brother. This uncle, when found, a bachelor, and seemingly alone, formed an attachment which ended in his adoption, and through his wishes the dropping of his first name Theodore for the second Keith, by which his father had kept this older brother in remembrance. So that the old name Theodore Graham, or Katy’s “Teddy,” was lost in his medical studies, and “Dr. Keith Graham” was graduated to his uncle’s great delight.

He told Katy much of that lovely life in that stately home, and if the thought of his mother and home ever came to disturb his second college life, it was with a vague pleasure that his absence would be atoned for by her pride in his distinguished and brilliant career. He had never dreamed but that some time in the near future he would find her, feeling confident that at her age she would not break altogether the tie that bound her to the old home. Then came his uncle's sudden death, when he found himself heir to an immense fortune, and then, only then, came that longing for home that could be satisfied only by the sight of a mother's face, the warmth of a mother's welcome. He told of his meeting with Silvia Thorn on his return voyage, serving as a companion to a purse-proud, overbearing aunt. Her gentleness and evidently helpless position attracted him, and their marriage followed soon after the arrival in New York. Many things delayed his visit to his birth-place, and when at last he visited the old place it was with unspeakable anguish he could find no trace of mother or nurse or gain by indirect ways any news of their whereabouts.

Too proud for an exposure of family secrets, he had followed many clues—faint will-o'-the-wisp structures—and it was even on one of these searches that his gentle wife was taken from him and he was left alone with his little daughter, Erica.

And when he touched lightly on the events of the last few days, Katy ceased to question, and silent for a time they sat in the darkness, each heart singing a requiem to her who “had gone before, with Hope that flew beside,” and had entered into a more perfect peace.

From the distance the roar of the passing trains came at intervals to break the silence. Their twinkling lights, now lost and then emerging again, flashed in joyous motion through the night forward and back between the two cities. To-morrow he would be borne back, far away again from his native village, and a strong desire to have always with him this old and tried friend thrilled him. What greater payment for her patient devotion than to be always near him? Yes! he would make it possible.

“Katy, I have determined to purchase Fern Villa; or if that is impossible, to lease it. As soon as I can make arrangements I will send for you. Will you come?”

“Why buy it, Master Ted? It is yours now.”

Dr. Graham smiled.

“You would have me rob Miss Stewart? No, Katy, I have no desire to dispute her inheritance.”

“But, indeed, it is yours. Miss Marjorie never means to keep anything but what your mother willed and set apart for her music. Mrs. Graham left Miss Marjorie a certain amount, and the rest in trust for you. After ten years if you did not return she was to have all, but Miss Marjorie thinks that you will return.”

Katy so earnestly explained his mother’s wishes and Marjorie’s hope for his return, that she might keep her sacred promise, that Dr. Graham marvelled at his mother’s blind faith in this little country lass. Would she be so loyal? He doubted it. But give her time to enjoy the power of wealth, its many allurements, that glittering vista spread out before her, and Katy’s credulity would be tested. And as Katy went on to praise Marjorie, painting in glowing terms her beauty and gentleness, her untiring care of his lost one, her unselfishness, and her magnetic power by music’s influence to quiet the restless invalid; and last of all, told of her passionate love for music, her joy at the mere chance to continue her studies, he felt an interest in the little musician, and quickly grasped at what seemed a solution of all their difficulties.

“Katy,” he said, quietly, “listen to me. I am dead—yes, still dead to Miss Stewart. Ten years will pass quickly, and then all will be hers. In the meantime I will try to buy Fern Villa. If I fail, I will try to lease it for that length of time—and then if Miss Stewart is all you paint her, my wilful renunciation of the larger portion of my mother’s wealth will perhaps decide her at the end of those years to change her mind and sell the place. If not, I would retain some mementos of the past, if possible, and gladly give her all. Now, Katy, I see disapprobation in your countenance. But listen, I am wealthier than my mother could have made me had I returned in poverty. If Miss Stewart is as independent as you picture her she will accept nothing at my hands, and Katy, the memory of what was denied me makes me anxious to give this little country lass this small cup of happiness. If I thought I would deprive her of this chance for advancement I would leave you both in ignorance of my whereabouts—would again be a wanderer, if not from home, at least from you, dear, kind old nurse,” and Dr. Graham kissed the wrinkled face and knew he had won.

“But what will I write Miss Marjorie? She has sent her address and will write again.”

“I will help you. There will no blame rest on you. When Miss Stewart knows that I would not remain to receive whatever fortune is due me, and the suffering it would inflict on you, she will in the future forgive you. As for me, no matter. I fancy you will not be troubled much by correspondence

as time weakens the hope of my return? Now, Katy, to brighter topics. Will you come to Fern Villa? Erica is young and we will need you in your old position. We can get help for you in Hillsview.”

“Yes, I will go, Master Ted. You tempt me sorely. I can get the same good servants your mother had. They live in the village and would be only too glad to return. But Miss Erica, does she know?”

“That is my only trouble, but I think it is best to let Erica remain in ignorance, at least for a time. When she has become attached to you, then, dear nurse, I will let you tell her what a troublesome lad I was in days gone by, and your lips shall make my little girl acquainted with her father’s folly. It is best, I know, to let the past rest between us; it can concern no one now for benefit or injury. After to-day I am no longer ‘little Ted.’”

“What will Miss Marjorie think if I leave the place where I was to await tidings?”

“It is not strange that you should wish to accept a situation which promises a return to your old home. I will ask Mrs. Manning your address and write to you as though we had never met. You can leave your address here in case you are wanted. Now, nurse, no more objections or I will think you don’t care to endure the whims and fancies of the man as you did the tyranny of the wilful little lad.”

Katy’s smile of pleasure was her only answer, and Dr. Graham left her with promises of a happy meeting soon, which was to last and repay her for years of separation.

CHAPTER VI.

“Where now, Erica?”

“I am gone, Sir,
And anon, Sir,
I’ll be with you again,”

sang Erica, as she stepped off the verandah and paused beside the hammock in which Jack idly swung.

“I would rather entreat your company,” said Jack.

“Well, come with me, then; if you won’t, adieu! I’ll find my company at the morning train.”

“Why, Erica, we don’t expect Marjorie on the morning train. The five o’clock will be her only connection.”

“Marjorie! Marjorie! Who’s going to meet Marjorie? I’ll let you know that my ‘dearest pa,’ ‘my parent,’ comes on the morning train. Marjorie, indeed!” reiterated Erica with all the dignity of a Charity Pecksniff.

Jack sprang to his feet—

“Wait, Erica. I crave your pardon. That comes of being away yesterday. I understood it was to-morrow. Of course I am going with you. You see, Erica,” Jack continued, “we are all so delighted to have Marjorie come here to arrange business matters that it’s no wonder I got a little muddled. Two arrivals in one day! I’ll have to sluggardize at home between trains to be equal to the exertion.”

“You’ll be equal to the second exertion, no fear of that. I only hope you won’t linger on the way home, for I am dying to see your friend.”

“Won’t you go with me?”

“No, indeed! I always practise that good old adage, ‘Children should be heard, not seen,’ and I shall be an unknown quantity and not mar that meeting as an onlooker.”

“I wonder, Erica, if you could be hired to practise that adage in its correct form, and be seen, not heard, during Marjorie’s visit.”

“Couldn’t, indeed, Jack. It would be too great a loss to you. I realize what an inestimable blessing I am in bringing out your virtues, hiding your short-comings, etc. We are regular Pecksniffians in showing off each other to advantage—‘antidoting each other,’ as Dickens has it.”

“Well, then, Erica, it is farewell, farewell forever, to Marjorie!”

“Not at all, Jack. You are sure of my sympathetic help. Even now I am rejoicing with those who do rejoice.”

“Yes, if there’s any brightness you are in it, Erica. What a *carpe diem* existence is yours! Do you ever have a gloomy moment in your life?”

“Are you ever melancholy, Jack?”

“Yes, I bathe in it—literally wallow in it—feel myself the most injured creature, the most ill-used wretch, in the world—felt so a moment ago when you scorned my company. But there’s the train. Step lively or your ‘dearest pa’ will be lost on the crowded platform. Ah, there he is!”

Dr. Graham greeted his little daughter and Jack, and as they walked home Erica was not too happy to detect a something she could not altogether analyze in her father’s usual reserved and haughty manner. That was unchanged, but added to the old reserve was a certain undertone of joyousness, an accompaniment to some hidden happiness into which she had not entered. Rejoicing inwardly at this, she clung to his arm as if she would convey by her fond endearments a silent sympathy in all his pleasures.

The heat of the day precluded any desire for active employment, so the afternoon was spent in happy social intercourse as they gathered under the shade of the huge elm tree—Jack as usual occupying the hammock, Erica by her father’s side, and gentle Aunt Edith, happy in her husband’s freedom for one afternoon—all looking forward to Marjorie’s arrival.

Keith Graham, on hearing of Marjorie’s desire to meet the prospective purchaser of Fern Villa, knew not whether to be glad or sorry. There were certain conditions she would like complied with. He smiled and felt amused, and surely the situation offered scope for amusement. Yet, on the whole it was best to meet her; it would take away the feeling of a false position by acknowledging, in this business transaction, her greater claim.

“Well, Erica,” her father remarked, “you are content to give up your plans for the summer and dwell, a rustic maid, in this suburban spot?”

“Yes, father, I am really glad. I love to visit Aunt Marian, but I dread to think of the city heat, and, worse than all, Marie Gordon.”

“Marie of ancient lineage!” chimed Jack.

““There was Mary Beaton,
And Mary Seaton,
And Mary Carmichael and me.”

She’s the ‘me.’”

“For shame, Jack,” said his mother, “I always heard Marion speak very highly of Miss Gordon.”

“That’s the trouble, mother, she’s too ‘highly’—highly born and highly bred. She just dotes on her ancestors. It’s a regular ‘Downfall of Poland’ infliction to be in her company, those poor ‘departed spirits of the mighty dead’ are recalled so often to bear witness to her noble birth. From whom is she descended, Erica? Why don’t you quench her with ‘Graham of Claverhouse’ or some other poor fellow? I might quote a cardinal, but he’s not ancient enough.”

“Why, have you never met her, Aunt Edith?” questioned Erica.

“I have never visited Marian since her marriage, and when she was here Miss Gordon was visiting other friends. But Marian seemed pleased to have her with her, and found her invaluable.”

“Yes, she certainly is kind and thoughtful, and in auntie’s great sickness proved herself an untiring nurse. Miss Gordon is not dependent, for she has some property of her own, and I believe Aunt Marian told me she was an orphan. I think it is rare good luck to fall into such a home as ‘Glenarden.’”

“Well, Erica, you will have to make your proposed visit this winter, and by that time perhaps Miss Gordon will have profited by Miss Stewart’s companionship and become more natural,” said her father.

“She thinks she is natural now, but if that is being natural, defend me from ancestors,” exclaimed Erica.

“By the way, Uncle Keith, that recalls the natural way in which Erica assumed the role of organist last Sunday.”

“She conquered the little world of Hillsvew, anyway, Jack,” said his mother. “Erica’s singing supplied Marjorie’s place, and we will not feel her loss so much.”

“Really,” said Jack, “I hope she won’t find it her duty to fill up all the voids. She even invaded the Sunday-school and taught a class of innocents, or was taught by them, I don’t know which?”

“Papa, don’t listen to him. It is a delightful class, and the rector said I might take Miss Stewart’s place. And although I was a little afraid—”

“Afraid,” said Jack, “you fairly rushed into their arms and left me reading epitaphs for over an hour. There’ll be another one soon.”

“Here rests his head upon the lap of earth,
A youth to candy-eating and to tongue well known.”

“Jack, you never missed me. I saw you in a group of very excited-looking men, and I caught a word that showed you were buried in politics.”

“Yes,” said Aunt Edith, “it is a deplorable fault in country church-going that—”

“Reserve your lecture, Mater, I must rush for the train. Won’t you go, Erica?”

“No, thank you, I will take to the hammock till you come back. That will give me a good two hours. Stop at the office for the mail on your return. That will lengthen your trip and save me one.”

After Jack had gone Dr. Graham inquired about the former servant retinue at Fern Villa, and was delighted that Mrs. Manning approved of his plan to get back the old establishment and promised to get Katy’s address from Marjorie.

In silence they waited Marjorie’s arrival—all reading, except Erica, who made frequent trips between hammock and gate. With what mingling of feelings her arrival was heralded! Dr. and Mrs. Manning looked forward with delight and almost paternal affection, Erica with curiosity, and Keith Graham, now that amused indifference had given place to a business necessity, had a strong desire to see what manner of maid had so bewitched not only his mother, but even now held all the Manning family beneath her sway.

The time passed slowly, for the train was late, and when the whistle sounded Erica’s impatience increased till at last her watching was rewarded.

“Here is Jack!” cried Erica; and as he came nearer, added dolefully, “and alone.”

“What a February face, Jack,” said his mother; “she may have missed the train.”

“I don’t think so. Here’s a letter for father,” and Jack threw himself on the lawn, and with arms spread under his head awaited developments.

Dr. Manning handed an enclosed note to his wife, and as he read his letter briefly outlined the contents to the disappointed audience.

“Marjorie cannot come—so sorry to disappoint us. She has taken some pupils (wonder why she is teaching when there is no necessity). She wishes me to undertake the leasing of the property. She does not care to sell, but would lease, furnished. If I think it could be managed would like the two south rooms—Mrs. Graham’s—kept as unchanged as possible in arrangement of furniture, especially piano. That is all.”

Dr. Manning folded the letter. “It would be better for Marjorie if she would lose all sad memories by an annihilation of all that recalled them,” he said.

“Well,” remarked Erica, “I pity Miss Stewart if she teaches under Miss Gordon’s aristocratic nose. She will give her no peace.”

“But,” said Aunt Edith, looking up from her note, “Marjorie is not now with Marian. She says she thought it best not to intrude longer on their kindness, and is really delightfully situated with an old couple who have given her a nice suite of rooms, and she evidently is quite happy and contented. She will enter the Conservatory at the beginning of the term. Now she is practising some and studying. She wants to be remembered to you, Jack, and hopes to see you when you return to the city.”

Keith Graham listened. Loyal little country lass! Well he knew her reasons for teaching lay in the attempt to support herself so as not to touch the fortune she considered his. He wondered if he had better disclose all and share with her his mother’s wealth, if she would not keep all; but again he thought of the independent spirit with which he would have to cope, and knew that his arrangement with Katy was best.

“When you write, Edith,” he said, “tell her I will keep those rooms private for my own use. Not even Erica shall touch that piano. I will hold it sacred.”

Erica walked over to Jack.

“Come, let us go down to the house, Jack. I mourn with those that mourn.”

And a few weeks later Fern Villa was inhabited.

CHAPTER VII.

In a daintily-furnished room, whose tropical loveliness contrasted strangely with New York's dreary outside appearance, four women sat busily conversing on a pleasant morning in January. The apartment might have rivalled in its delicate colorings and rich adornments the beautiful salons of the Shalimar, that splendid palace beyond the lake. Rare flowers, making the air all perfume, nodded their heads, and graceful palms looked out from nooks and corners. Wealth and refined taste everywhere betokened the social position and life of the owner.

On a dark crimson cushioned seat a young woman sat in upright stateliness, a counterfeit of dignity detracting from what otherwise might have been a pleasing picture. Marie Gordon was comely, but not beautiful. A strikingly noticeable countenance was marred by a firm setness of mouth, whose expression could not be atoned for by a clear complexion and large dark eyes, nor by richness of apparel and becoming surroundings. Reclining on a couch near an open grate, a woman of perhaps forty years presented a marked contrast to this assumption of dignity by her gracefulness and quiet manner, which bore the impress of that true nobility which finds its fruit in kindly deeds and loving words. Ill-health had prevented Mrs. Lennox from entering to any extent into those social functions in which Miss Gordon delighted to air her little affectations and graces; yet when occasion demanded a necessary interest in the pleasures of city life, the favored guests found in the mistress of "Glenarden" a most charming and delightful hostess.

Beside the couch sat Aunt Edith. Enticed by Erica to leave the sanctity of her quiet country home to make this her first visit to New York, she had accompanied her niece on her annual trip. Dr. Graham had been their escort across the border, leaving them to finish their journey alone, and promising to rejoin them at the end of the week.

"Of course, Erica," said Marie, "I am not surprised at your penchant for Miss Stewart, as you have only met her twice and have carried a Hillview verdict with you. I often think it is a pity she had not remained in her native village, where she was so much appreciated and which she is never tired of extolling."

“‘*O terque, quaterque beati*,’ Marie. Have you forgotten your school-girl Latin that you should despise Marjorie for her loyalty to her native land—only unfortunately Hillsview is not her birth-place?”

“Then, whence sprang she? Some little country village, I presume.”

“You are right there, Marie, for Miss Stewart is a simple country maid. Papa accidentally learned something of her history and told it to me just as he had heard it. Her father was a wealthy farmer, and had, I believe, retired, when by an unlucky speculation he was ruined. Whether he ‘muttered and maddened and ever wann’d with despair’ I know not, but there was no ‘precipice’ in the case, for he died a good old natural death. So poor Marjorie, with no ‘hollow’ to hate, and, being a maid, no girl to rave about, simply had to buckle on her armor in the shape of a certificate and earn her living. She had the good sense to come to that little Canadian village, which, without boasting of ‘equal bonds between man and man,’ recognized her womanliness and accepted her into its society for her brains, and not for her apparel.”

“Really, Erica,” said Aunt Marian, coming between the two combatants for the twentieth time that week, “Marjorie has indeed found a friend in you. Marie cannot forgive her for forgetting the position her wealth entitled her to, and entering the ranks of the wage-earners; but do not think that we do not respect your friend.”

“We, too, were surprised,” said Aunt Edith, “to hear that she was teaching; but I am sure Marjorie judges what is best, and as she won our love as a teacher she will not lose it as such.”

“You will remain and attend the Conservatory, I hope, Erica,” said Aunt Marian.

“Yes, I can stay more contentedly since papa has ceased to be ‘goosey, goosey, gander’ of a wanderer and is happy at Fern Villa. It is pleasant to know he is so near Aunt Edith.”

“I think he does not need me much; Katy is such a devoted servant.”

“Yes, is it not amusing to see the almost affectionate attention papa receives? Although she is good to me, papa comes in for the greater share of her attention and watchfulness.”

“We will miss you much, Erica. Losing both you and Jack will make Hillsview dull.”

“And I missed Jack so much when he left in the fall. I will be glad to have his company again.”

A light tap, an opened door, and Erica ran to welcome her father, who, greeting all, with a passing apology for intruding, sank into an easy chair, and drawing Erica down beside him, bade her be quiet while he found out from the rest the enjoyments of the past week.

And Marie, smiling sweetly, with set vocabulary and stilted phrases, as if the unbending of the tongue might accompany an unbending of the body, measured off the teas and luncheons to which Mrs. Manning and she had been invited, hinting at the costumes and high social standing of the respective hostesses, till Erica, unable to keep quiet any longer, broke in with,

“And papa, I am to have my treat now.”

“What is that, Erica?”

“The annual recital at the Conservatory. All the girls are anxious to have me attend; but half the pleasure would be lost if you were not with me.”

“When is it?”

“To-night, papa; you are just in time.”

“Well, petite, I am ready for it.” Then, looking at his watch and addressing Mrs. Lennox, he added: “Now I will run down to the office and see Bob. I will return with him.”

Erica followed her father from the room.

“Papa,” she said, “I have met Marjorie.”

“Well?” interrogatively.

“To know her only adds a fresh charm to Fern Villa. I always felt that she belonged to us, papa. She is our Marjorie. I adopted her the moment I saw her. You will be her friend, won’t you, papa?”

“Is she in need of champions?” Dr. Graham said with a smile.

“Only as far as teaching and self-adornment are concerned. I will hold her ‘our Marjorie’ if all the Gordons in Christendom were in league against her.”

“Oh, Erica, the fair Marie and you are as antagonistic as ever. But, my dear, I have never been disappointed in your judgment, so I think you can count on your father as a firm ally. And Jack—”

“Oh, Jack, was *épris* long ago,” laughed Erica.

“When will I see your friend?”

“To-night, papa—at least she plays. It would not be a success without Marjorie. *Au revoir*.”

The afternoon passed quickly. Jack and Erica found themselves alone, for the sisters were together in Mrs. Lennox’s room and Marie was resting for the evening’s conquest.

“It is too bad, Jack. I spent six months arming for this conquest, recalling all my school-girl tactics, and here I am almost vanquished.”

“If the ‘me’ is too much for you I am too cowardly to enlist; but I can help you. I have been telling a chum of mine of the beautiful Marie, and he is anxious for an introduction, so I can promise you this evening, I hope, free from her society.”

The rustling of programmes, the murmur of happy voices, the fluttering of fans—all the mingled sounds suggestive of enjoyment which preluded the beginning of the recital, had ceased, and Erica, seated between her father and Jack, gave herself up to the ecstasy of a musical treat.

Looking over to where Marie sat beside her new acquaintance, Erica whispered to Jack:

“‘I sing of arms and the hero.’ He is a hero, indeed, Jack. Don’t you feel like a coward?”

“He’ll run away after the concert, Erica; mark my words.”

The recital commenced. Dr. Graham leaned back, pleased at Erica’s evident enjoyment, but at times oblivious of both performers and surroundings.

“Papa!” Erica drew his attention. “There you have lost her. It is so hard to get a full view of the performers. However, it doesn’t need distance to lend enchantment. This is Marjorie.”

Keith Graham was listening now to music; “the music that can touch beyond all else the soul that loves it much.” He listened as in a dream, and when his own favorite, known to Marjorie as his mother’s favorite, came like the ending of some sweet song,

“All was too much for him, too full of bliss;
The heart could nothing feel that felt not this.”

And, like the youth of Eastern lands, he too felt its softening influence and wondered not that his mother had been led captive by its entralling spell.

The programme was ended. Gathered in the adjoining rooms the teachers and pupils vied with one another in the entertainment of their guests. Jack and Erica were greeting old friends and meeting new. Mr. Lennox and Mrs. Manning sat quietly enjoying the beautiful scene—the glimmering sheen of silks and velvets, the flash of jewels and the brilliant lights. Dr. Graham was held captive by Marie, whose enthusiastic praise of all the performers was as usual utterly uninteresting. Erica’s hero had fled, to Jack’s evident amusement, who emphasized his departure by quoting to his cousin:

“‘Why do you run?’ the captain cried,
As Pat came hurrying by.
‘Och! sure,’ Miss Graham’s hero said,
‘Be gob, Oi cannot fly.’”

Keith Graham was bored—infinately bored—and the expression on his face convinced Erica, coming towards him, that his evening was not ending well. She came quickly forward, almost unseen, to her father’s side, and quietly introduced Miss Stewart.

And this was Marjorie! He looked down upon that flower face, into those glorious eyes, noted the tender smile of the perfect mouth, the proud poise of the head, and thought that earth held no fairer, lovelier creature.

And this was his mother’s friend! This beautiful girl who held herself so regally, looking out of those calm, steadfast eyes, a look of truth and innocence, unspoiled by this world’s praise or homage. He noted every detail of the simple costume—a filmy lacey gown of gray, almost heliotrope, a cluster of white lilacs at her breast, a spray of the same fragrant blossoms in her hand.

At last Keith Graham stood face to face with the girl whom he had denied the knowledge of his existence; and even as he bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction, his heart bowed a tribute to the honesty of this little maid, who, he feared, would never forgive his innocent deception.

Jack coming up to claim Erica, Dr. Graham, noting the pale countenance and wearied expression of Marjorie’s face, said,

"I am afraid, Miss Stewart, you are tiring yourself in your effort at entertainment. Let me find you a pleasant corner to rest in for awhile."

At the sound of his voice Marjorie started. The pale face became whiter and whiter, and Dr. Graham hastened to add:

"You are ill, Miss Stewart. Take this seat, and let me get you something."

Marjorie controlled herself with an effort, sat down and said quickly:

"It is nothing, really nothing; don't trouble. I must be weak indeed that a voice should affect me; but your voice seemed the echo of a lost friend's—one I loved so dearly. You must no doubt know whom I mean, the former owner of Fern Villa. I am full of strange fancies of late, for I thought I detected a resemblance in your daughter. I know you are not related, but who knows that the families did not branch from the same genealogical tree," and Marjorie laughed.

"I hope not, if it affects you so much. I thought I had a patient—the first in years."

As they talked of Fern Villa the moments sped quickly. Dr. Graham forgot Marie, who had vanished at Marjorie's approach, and was surprised when Mr. Lennox and Aunt Edith joined them, and departing guests warned them that the hour was late.

"Let me see you home, Marjorie," Jack said.

"Thank you, Jack, but Frau Kercher is a patient attendant, and I am afraid would not come again if I deserted her."

As they separated for the night Erica followed her father to the door of his room and said, as she bade him good-night, "Now you have met Marjorie, papa. Well?"

Dr. Graham kissed his little daughter and said, "I am willing to adopt her too, Erica—'Our Marjorie.'"

Erica went away delighted. Her delight would have changed to astonishment had she seen her father, a few moments later, draw from his pocket a spray of white lilacs.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Stop! stop! my wheel, too soon, too soon,
The noon will be the afternoon,
Too soon to-day be yesterday.”

The winter days flew by, bringing to each one their special message, their brightest gifts. Past recollections and hopeful promises for the future there were for the two sisters whom Time would soon part. Years of separation had but strengthened the bond of love, and now that Mrs. Manning must soon return to her old home, the past events, conned so often, were so blended with the present that their lives became even more an unbroken chain golden with sisterly affection.

And to Marie Graham, basking in the sunlight of Dr. Graham's presence and dwelling on his gracious notice and amused forbearance, the days brought visions of wealth and social distinction in a home in which she reigned the dignified mistress, with Keith Graham her companion through coming years.

To Jack and Erica work and play were the song they sung. Erica had commenced her studies at the Conservatory, and was, as she always proved, a painstaking and earnest student. Jack and she spent most of their time at Frau Kercher's cottage, and with Marjorie the hours passed quickly in that humble abode, which Dr. Graham laughingly designated the “Island of the Sirens.”

And to Dr. Graham broken resolutions were each day's reckoning. Still he lingered in New York, to Erica's great delight. To-morrow, ay, to-morrow! always that future time for departure, but with the ending of the day some little word, a clasp of hands, the fragrance of flowers, an old forgotten melody, and the resolve was broken; and to-morrow was to-day with the same joys, the same allurements.

And what message did the days bring to Marjorie? What happy hours for friendship's offerings and love's shy delight! How often had she listened to Erica singing her father's praise, and now that voice, recalling the happy past, the tender solicitude and unspoken language, which only lovers interpret, brought Marjorie her message, neither sung nor said, but sweeter far in its uncertainty and possible misinterpretation. Even as she yielded to

the charm of this new friendship, she feared her happiness might prove an interruption to the fixed purpose of the coming years, the fulfilment of the sacred promise she had given. And then as Keith Graham, remembering his false position and believing that this gentle maiden would resent his deception, sought by a forced reserve and his old dignified restraint to conceal and check words that strove for utterance, Marjorie reasoned that his kindness was but a natural attention to a friendless girl. The days of doubt and sadness brought a different message, and taught Marjorie to meet reserve with reserve and forget this one gleam of sunshine in her lonely life.

Was he not as kind to Miss Gordon, spending his days with her in that social circle to which she, by her own act, had barred the entrance? No, those “wayside springs” came not in the path of her life, and so Marjorie strove to break from the present and find comfort and firmness in the recollections of the past.

One afternoon Erica found herself alone with Marjorie. She had sung her latest song, listened to Marjorie’s praise, and had dropped on a low stool by Marjorie’s chair to spend a few moments longer before returning to “Glenarden.”

“So you do not intend to remain till summer, Erica?” Marjorie asked.

“I would go back to Hillview with papa to-morrow if he would consent. I do not care to give up my studies, but”—and her eyes flashed with indignation—“I do not care to run the risk of companionship corrupting me.”

“Why, Erica, it is not so bad as that,” and Marjorie laughed. “Surely you were not worsted in that last contest with Miss Gordon.”

“No, indeed, but it is too bad to worry Aunt Marian. Marie reserves all her sweetness for papa, and Aunt Marian is the only onlooker at the ‘Battle of the Clans.’ I myself am getting sick of it. Marie exhausted her vocabulary long ago and I get the same stale remarks about ‘blue blood’ and a ‘thousand years to grow,’ etc., till I think her only song should be ‘Oh! for a thousand tongues’ that she might at least treat us to some new quotations. It is a shame, Marjorie, the way she cramps her speech as well as her actions.”

Erica sat silent for awhile, and then with a look of sudden joy in her hitherto clouded visage, exclaimed:

“Marjorie, why couldn’t I live with you? How delightful it would be! I wonder I never thought of it before.”

Marjorie's face took a rosier tint as the possibility was forced upon her. And why not? she reflected. Why should she deny herself this pleasant companionship? What mattered it what Miss Gordon might say? For Marjorie had already felt her stinging innuendoes as to her musical sirenic influence as she noticed Dr. Graham's frequent calls.

"But, Erica, your father might not wish you to leave 'Glenarden.' And your aunt, too, what would she think?"

"I think it would be a relief. She is used to my wandering nature—paternal inheritance, I suppose. But how could it be managed? Would Frau Kercher object, and would I crowd?"

So they planned, happy in their arrangements; Marjorie full of doubts, but Erica of silent approval.

They would use the one large room as reception and music-room, and Marjorie would give up one of the two smaller ones leading from it, which she called her "den."

Frau Kercher was consulted, for Erica wanted no obstacle in the way of the successful accomplishment of her plans, and would be ready to answer all objections and secure approval.

"I be so glad! I be pleased to have both you!" was the good old German woman's hearty acceptance of Erica, and her comely face beamed a welcome so genial that Erica could have embraced her on the spot.

"What a delightful afternoon, Marjorie, and how much we have accomplished," and Erica hummed a merry air as she donned her hat.

"'It was a lover and a lass with a hey and a ho and a hey nonino.' It will be springtime in truth when we are together. Good-bye?"

When Dr. Graham called that evening Marjorie knew that Erica had won the day.

Long they talked, and Marjorie forgot her doubts and made this last evening so pleasant that Dr. Graham found it hard to leave this pleasant room and the dark-robed woman who charmed him by her smiles and brightness and still more magically drew him towards her by the tender, touching pathos and winning sweetness of manner, which he knew had without doubt been the charm that had opened to her his mother's heart. At last when he bent over the little hand, and the delicate odor of the fragrant blossoms clustered at her throat rose as if in mockery of his hopes, the longing came to clasp this sweet little woman to his heart and tell her the

strange, strange story. But a fear held him that even in the telling Marjorie would be lost to him forever, so he only said:

“Be careful, Miss Stewart; do not overwork yourself. I do not want my only patient as pale as her favorite flowers. Take good care of my little daughter—Marjorie.”

Marjorie’s cheeks took a faint tinge as her name fell—ah! too musically—for the first time from his lips, but she answered, quietly: “You may trust her to me, Dr. Graham. I will watch over her.”

For a time after Keith Graham’s departure Marjorie sat silent. It was as if some immeasurable joy had passed out of her life forever, and only the ghost of bygone hours remained. But Erica was coming to-morrow, and Jack would often be with them. How could she be lonely with such devoted friends? Yes, through Erica she would have the first news, and perhaps some message to cheer the intervening days. And Jack, dear, faithful Jack, whom she had treated coldly, almost unfriendly, how glad she was to know those wounds were healing and that Jack had realized at last that the old Marjorie was lost and the new Marjorie would always be a dear, kind friend.

And to Keith Graham the rooms at Fern Villa held now a greater charm. Every object was sacred to those two so dear to him, yet, as he believed, lost through his own folly.

CHAPTER IX.

The holy calm of the Lenten season was gone, and joyous springtime was fast circling into summer warmth and sunshine. Eager hearts, weary of biting sky and pallid fields, were greeting the gayer adorning of trees and shrubs and green meadows dotted with golden dandelions. Nature became a universal joy, and all delighted in its grand reviving gifts. Who could picture the happiness of those two inmates of Frau Kercher's little cottage? Erica's bright sunny temperament brought joy to all with whom she came in contact, and Marjorie's tender care and understanding of girl-nature won Erica's grateful recognition. To Marjorie Erica was a delightful picture, natural and light-hearted, fearless and noble, so that her growth truly answered Ruskin's grand interpretation of girl-training: She grows up as a flower does; she will decay in her sheath as the narcissus does, if you do not give her air enough; but you cannot fetter her, she must take her own fair form and way if she take any, and in mind as in body must always have

‘Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty.’

To the cottage Aunt Marian came often and was a welcome visitor, and Marie frequently accompanied her. Erica wondered at this extreme friendliness and attributed it to the relief at now having no rival in her aunt's affection; but to Marjorie the reason was easily apparent—a fear that she would be making *un faux pas* by losing Erica's good-will, and a desire to gather from the passing chat some news of Dr. Graham, which she could not glean from Mrs. Lennox's chance correspondence.

In all these meetings Marjorie's simple dignity and Aunt Marian's perfect *savoir vivre* filled Marie with bitter envy which sadly marred both beauty and repose and caused Erica strongly to doubt Marie's pretensions to good birth and education.

“Marjorie,” said Erica, one night, as they sat in the cheerful firelight, the nights being still cold enough to enjoy a cosy chat in its warmth and cheerfulness, “in a week or so I will have a birthday. I will be sixteen.”

“A happy time of your life, Erica, ‘where the brook and river meet.’ I really think some of its sweet, tender grace envelops you now as a garment.”

“That must be an ‘outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.’ However, it is going to envelop me in the pleasures of a fete in its honor, and Aunt Marian sends you an invitation to help eat the birthday cake. And do you know, Marjorie, I have a feeling in the air that papa may come to add to the pleasure of the occasion.”

“And I have an Apollo-like feeling that your predictions will not receive credence. But there is a pleasure in bright anticipations.

“’Tis better to have hoped and lost
Than never to have hoped at all.”

“You see, Marjorie, by the tone of his last letter I think he is pining for New York, as if any place could be lovelier than Fern Villa, especially at this time of the year. I wonder you could give it up, Marjorie.”

“It was Mrs. Graham’s wish for me to continue my studies, and I could not very well at Fern Villa,” Marjorie quietly answered.

“Well, I should be glad that you left it. I have explored every nook and cranny with the exception of papa’s rooms, and he only allows Katy access to them to keep them in order. Did I ever tell you about my picture and my loss, Marjorie? I was exploring as usual, and in the attic came across some old music and some books. Probably I should not have touched them, but the old songs bewitched me, and after glancing through the music, I opened some books—old novels and poems, with the fly-leaf torn out, giving no clue to ownership. Well, out of one of the books a small picture fell, and, Marjorie, it may amuse you to hear it, but I thought it resembled me—only it was the picture of a woman much older, about forty.”

“What did you do with it, Erica?”

“That is the funniest part. I brought it to show papa, and just then papa was taken quite ill and in the confusion the picture was lost, and to this day it has never been found.”

“Perhaps some of the servants found it.”

“No, for I rang for Katy, and it was lost in papa’s room. Katy says she saw no picture, only papa lying on the couch drew her attention. Well, it was a mystery which some day may be unravelled. But, see, our fire is going out, and I have kept you up long enough with my chatter. So good-night, my dear.”

Erica slept a troubled sleep that night, in which her father, Marjorie and the picture formed an endless confusion of faces and music and books. Next

morning she rose so listless and unrefreshed that Marjorie felt anxious and wished her to stay at home for the day; but Erica laughed at her fears and said she would be better after her day's exercise.

The anticipated birthday celebration drew near, to Erica's keen delight; but a few nights before it, Marjorie, coming home, found Erica huddled in an arm-chair shivering and complaining of thirst.

"Oh, Erica," said Marjorie, tremulously, "you are ill."

"I'm afraid I am, Marjorie," then in a voice half-laughing, half-crying, "now's your time to come out strong, Marjorie, or never."

And Mark Tapley never came out stronger than Marjorie. All that evening and night she hung over her little friend, doing all she could, with Frau Kercher's help, to relieve symptoms which in the morning caused serious alarm. Marjorie felt annoyed that she had listened to Frau Kercher's advice and not sent for a doctor immediately.

The doctor, when he came, did not lessen Marjorie's bitter misgivings, and to his inquiries as to any exposure Marjorie told of Erica's visit to a sick friend, mentioning name and locality.

"A bad case of fever there I have heard—the family isolated. I will have to treat you in the same manner, I am afraid. Do not admit anyone till you see me again. Is there anything I can do for you? You will want a nurse."

"No, no, doctor, not yet. I am strong, and Frau Kercher will help me. I could not rest away from Erica. Try me first, doctor, and see if I can please you."

"Well, I will try you, Miss Stewart. You seem the right stuff, if you'll excuse the expression."

"It will be best to let her aunt, Mrs. Lennox, know, doctor. I wish you would see to that and tell her not to worry."

"I will prevent her coming here at least. Follow my directions, Miss Stewart, and let Frau Kercher help you all you can. Keep up good courage. I will call this evening." And the doctor left Marjorie to come out more strongly than Erica ever imagined. With little rest and untiring strength her gentle touch and magnetic voice soothed the sick fancies of that poor fevered brain, and no nurse ever bore more courageously, or at times more hopelessly, the strain on mind and body.

On the first night of her sickness, Marjorie, to please Erica, had given her her birthday present, a slender chain bearing a small locket of exquisite

workmanship, which opened to disclose to view Marjorie's perfect face. Erica was delighted at its beauty and had fastened it round her neck, saying contentedly, "I will rest now." When they sought to remove it in her delirious moments she clung to it so strongly that they thought it best to let it remain. She still clung to the golden chain, murmuring incoherently, "Marjorie! Marjorie!" and when peaceful moments came to throbbing brow and burning limbs, she still held the locket in her hand as a token of Marjorie's presence and of rest.

Poor Marjorie! In hours of intense weariness and anxious watching she felt herself to blame that she had allowed Erica to expose herself to the dread contagion, and, separated from friends, her distorted imagination pictured their upbraidings till the fault seemed all her own. This then was the end of all the care and watchfulness she had so faithfully promised.

And poor Jack! Many messages came to the little cottage through the kind doctor; but none fraught with such suffering and heartachings as Jack's to Marjorie. He begged to come to stay, to render what help he could—only let him see Erica. What mattered the examinations so near at hand and promising such success? And Marjorie, who needed and longed for his cheering presence, refused even that comfort, but sent him all the cheerful, encouraging reports, and concealed the less hopeful symptoms.

At last came the night, the dark, dark night, when Dr. Allen said: "I will tell Mr. Lennox to send for Dr. Graham. There will be a change soon, and Dr. Graham will never forgive us if the worst should happen and he is not here. I hope for the best, though, Miss Stewart," he added, gazing on the sorrowful, heart-broken girl. "He will arrive to-morrow night in time."

"In time," oh, God! for what? Marjorie knelt by the bedside and prayed the merciful Father to give her the reward of nights of grim fighting, of wearied anxious watching; to give her the little friend again in health and strength—and not for herself alone, but for the lonely father, who even now was full of anxious sorrow and alarm. And as she rose the calm of a great peace filled her, the earnest of the answer.

"For common things glow with grace supernal,
And happiness goes hand in hand with care,
And faith becomes a knowledge, fixed, eternal,
To those who often seek the Bridge of Prayer."

CHAPTER X.

“When apple-trees in blossom are,
And cherries of a silken white,
The King-cups deck the meadows fair,
And daffodils in brooks delight;
When golden wall-flowers bloom around,
And purple violets scent the ground,
The lilac 'gins to show her bloom,
We then may say the May is come.”

Dr. Graham sat in his favorite room in Fern Villa enjoying from the open window the beautiful view before him—the orchards of budding fruit, the great hills of pink and white blossoms, the wealth of verdure, the blooming lilacs whose perfume recalled too vividly one little room, one face shining out like a star in tantalizing allurements.

Indeed Erica had prophesied truly, and if the undertaking of a journey southward was not already a certainty, her father was even now dallying with the temptation to visit New York again before Erica's return in June. And thoughts of Erica suggested her welcome letter and decided him to run down to the office and thence to Aunt Edith's to give her, as was his usual custom, news of both Erica and Marjorie.

With what a light in her dim old eyes Katy watched from her room her boy, and with what pride she followed his every movement. She had listened when he had added to her pleasure on his return from New York by telling her of his meeting with Marjorie, and expressing his warm appreciation of her musical abilities, and later, in many happy dreams, the dear old lady had built up her romance, imagining the time when all concealment would be ended and Marjorie would reign in her true place as mistress of Fern Villa.

Who could gaze on her Marjorie and not bow before the queenliness of the staunch little friend—her rare sweet Marjorie? and who could know her boy and not reverence the kingliness of that noble nature?

So, watching him with lovelit eyes, with true womanly curiosity she came closer to the window, peering out at the boy who was handing him a note and wondering why he was coming back. Then returning to her seat she was busily occupied with her work when she heard Dr. Graham's well-

known step approaching. He entered and quietly laid a paper in her lap, and Katy read:

“Come at once, Erica ill. Robt. Lennox.”

Katy could hardly repress the cry that rose to her lips, but with the strength that had for years concealed her own feelings while she encouraged others, she strove to make light of the terrible tidings.

“Marjorie was always so careful in sickness. She has thought it best to have your advice. Of course she would send for you at once.”

“I must start in an hour, Katy. See that I am prepared for a long absence. I will write you from New York.”

And Dr. Graham left the room as quietly as he had entered it.

So quickly had Katy got all in readiness for his journey, that in half-an-hour Dr. Graham came to her room to give her some directions ere he said good-bye and left her in charge. How eager he was to reach the station as one step gained in the journey that would seem to have no end!

Katy, at the last moment full of heartfelt pity as she noted the evident suppression of grief in the pale, set countenance, longed to comfort him, but knowing what “well-meant alms of breath” words would be, only said: “Send me word as soon as you can, Doctor.”

Katy had dropped her old “Master Ted” from necessity, and found such pleasure in her boy’s profession that the title fell from her lips with conscious pride. She added at the last moment:

“If you need help I wish you would send for Mary. She has had some experience as a trained nurse, and would not be too proud to help in any way. The kind woman with whom they board might need her, and she would go to please me. I will write to her doctor so she will be ready if you want her.” Thus suggesting the possibility of the beginning of a sickness, Katy innocently gave the best comfort she could, and Dr. Graham knew not why the simple words lifted some of the heavy weight of sorrow, and helped him to bear the long journey more patiently.

Only those who have felt the horrible distance lying between them and the sick one, the uncertain knowledge and the possible “too late,” can picture the agony of such a journey, the dragging of minutes into hours, the impossibility of shortening them by aught but the grim spectres of pursuit. Doctor Graham pictured in all its bareness the future without this dear, loving little Erica, and felt that he had never till now known the preciousness

of the gift of this dear light-hearted little daughter. As it was with Marjorie, so the one refuge in trouble was also his, and many silent prayers rose in the agony of that journey for the life of this little one, his only child.

“O day and night! O day and night!
I left them flying.
I fled by day and night as flies the nomad breeze,
Across the silent land, when light to dark was dying,
And onward like a spirit lost across the seas;
And on from sea and shore thro’ apple orchards blossoming,
Till all things melted in a moving haze;
And on with rush and wing, by tower and townlet glooming,
By wood and field, and hill, by verdant ways,
While dawn to mid-day drew,
And noon was lost in sunset blaze.”

And in the “sunset blaze” Dr. Graham reached New York, and as he stepped on the platform in the evening hour, Mr. Lennox came forward to meet him.

“How is she, Bob? Tell me all about it quickly.”

Mr. Lennox as they walked along briefly reviewed the case, dwelling strongly on Dr. Allen’s hope for recovery.

Dr. Graham listened to all and then said: “Why did not Miss Stewart send for me sooner? I feared as much.”

“Do not blame Miss Stewart. If Erica recovers we owe all under God’s kind providence to her. Dr. Allen says her endurance has been wonderful. She would have no hired nurse, and in all his experience the Doctor says he has never met her equal. She has been shut in, as you are aware, and everything has been left to Dr. Allen and Marian. I believe she suggested sending for you at first, but every day we waited made it harder, and we intended to write as soon as Erica was better. Lay all the blame on us, Keith. But I must leave you, as I cannot enter the house. Here is your car. Cheer up, old fellow; I am sure God will spare little Erica for many years to come. Tell her when she is well enough that Uncle Bob has her birthday present ready for her.”

With sadly altered feelings Dr. Graham now entered the old familiar room. The quietness and oppression was a strange contrast to the busy outside world he had just shut out. Yet the memory of those pleasant hours spent amid music and laughter made the present misery more tense and lasting.

Dr. Allen, awaiting this hour, was the first to see him, and left the bedside to greet him ere he entered the room, while Marjorie, seated beside the bed, her head buried in her arms, was regardless of movements and sounds around. A whispered word or two, a moment of preparation, and Dr. Graham gazed on the little pale figure, the ghost of his little Erica. Yet as he gazed, with the keenness of a physician's practised eye, he saw favorable symptoms, and with Dr. Allen recognized the signs of a strength not wholly exhausted.

Marjorie had been unmindful of his coming. She had heard voices—possibly Frau Kercher and Dr. Allen arranging some little detail or busy in some preparation for Dr. Graham's coming. Still and motionless she sat till at last a hand was laid on her bowed head and a voice whose musical tone she could not mistake fell on her ear. Oh! the bitterness of this meeting, so often before pictured, but alas, how differently! Had he not left Erica, his darling, in her charge, and now—

“Miss Stewart, please come with me. I want to speak to you.”

Marjorie raised her head and Keith Graham was startled at the change. The pathetic look filled him with pity. Poor little lass! He led her from the room, but, refusing the chair he offered her, she laid her hands on the back to steady herself and shook her head.

“Sit down, Miss Stewart; you should not be there, you are not fit.”

Marjorie shook her head. “I have failed,” she murmured, “utterly failed!”

“Miss Stewart, if God spares my darling I owe all to your untiring devotion. They should not have allowed you to undertake so much. Listen, my child. You must go to your room. You must rest, I am your doctor and order it. I will give you something, for you must rest.”

“I cannot! I want to know—the worst. I will take nothing.”

“Then try to rest without. Trust me, Marjorie; I will bring you good news, pray God, and soon.” As Marjorie still hesitated he added: “Can you not trust Erica to me? Come,” and he led her to the door.

Marjorie yielded.

“God bless you, Marjorie!” he said, and as she left him he closed the door quietly and went back to his watch.

Marjorie could not sleep, and it seemed hours of weary waiting and listening before she heard a gentle tap at the door. It needed not words, not even Keith Graham's joyous “Marjorie!” to convey the welcome message.

The crisis was passed, and on her birthday Erica woke to life and consciousness.

“She asked for you, but is even now asleep and breathing regularly. You must sleep a good long sleep now or I will have a patient, too. You are determined to put me in practice again. Take this now,” and Marjorie obediently drank the draught which she had at first refused.

As Marjorie turned to re-enter her room Dr. Graham took the little hand in his, and laid his cheek on the little fingers that had brought to his mother’s declining years such perpetual joy and had so lovingly ministered to the wants of his little girl.

It was late the next day when Marjorie awoke. At first she wondered at the gathering twilight, and then all came back—Keith Graham’s coming, Erica sleeping and conscious—and she hastened to the sick room, fearing she might have been needed. As she entered and bent over the quiet figure, Erica looked up with a wan smile and said,

“You look as if you had come out tremendously, Marjorie.”

CHAPTER XI.

“I built a bridge of fancies,
It reached from earth to heaven,
Yet scarcely ere completed,
Its slender chain was riven;
So many shadows crossed it,
In colors decked so bright,
No wonder that they broke it,
Although their weight was light.”

Very glad indeed were the inmates of that little cottage when, the lawful time having elapsed, and the necessary measures being complied with, the badge of imprisonment was removed and they were at liberty again to enjoy in out-door freedom the return of summer hours.

Erica welcomed with warmth her long-denied friends, and none more gladly than her faithful Jack. How anxiously that great stalwart fellow had waited for the summons. And when, moved by the sight of that little frail figure whose bright jollity had now something piteous in it, he hid his own feelings and waited so gently and tenderly on his little chum, Marjorie wondered if intimate friendship had not merged into a deeper feeling, and, woman-like, wove her romance as a joyous possibility.

But with freedom came other changes. Dr. Graham had gone back to his old quarters at “Glenarden,” and Marjorie’s resumption of teaching left Erica more to Frau Kercher’s companionship and attention. To Marjorie it was apparent that the dear old lady was not equal to the extra strain, and she wondered if she would have to part with Erica. Sorrowfully she looked forward to this separation and the evenings without the pleasant companionship of her little friend.

Aunt Marian was the first to suggest this change one day when Marie and she made their daily call, accompanied by Dr. Graham.

“You will soon be well enough, Erica, and I really think you had better come back to ‘Glenarden.’”

“What, and desert Marjorie!” Erica would not listen to the plan. “You know, Aunt Marian, I expect to visit you first—the very moment the doctor

says decamp! I am not going to be cheated out of my birthday,” and Erica fingered lovingly the little chain at her neck.

“I see you are the fortunate possessor of one present,” said Marie, imagining the locket to contain her father’s picture.

“I have had a natural curiosity to see the inside of that locket,” said her father, “but refrained from gazing on Jack’s beaming countenance.”

Erica laughed as she undid the chain and, opening the locket, passed it to her father, who gazed at it long and earnestly, then passed it to Mrs. Lennox and Marie.

“A beautiful face,” said Mrs. Lennox.

“But a common one—one we often meet with in country lanes,” said Marie.

Erica reached for the locket as if the touch of Marie’s fingers was a sacrilege, but her father intercepted it, and Erica let it remain in his hand.

“A more than beautiful face,” he said, “the face of a noble woman.”

Marie would have spoken, but Aunt Marian, rising, put an end to the conversation, as going to Erica she kissed the pale face and said, “It would do both you and Marjorie good to come home with me for awhile.”

Dr. Graham proposed to wait till Erica was strong enough to bear the change, and in the meantime, as Erica still strongly opposed the plan, he came to her rescue. Remembering Katy’s advice, and consulting Frau Kercher, he sent for Mary.

Poor Marjorie! she felt indeed that she was but a puppet in the hand of Fate when Mary arrived, and it seemed that the careful arrangement which Mrs. Graham had planned for the return of her son was fast crumbling to ruin, and the end would be so different from what she had hoped. She had been unwilling to have Katy leave her post as watcher in the native village, but, sympathizing with her evident desire to return to Fern Villa when so pleasant an opportunity was opened, she consented. But now to have Mary, the one in charge, desert, seemed to Marjorie the careless ignoring of the importance of the mission.

But when Katy wrote that John’s aunt, who was supplying Mary’s place, would keep their address and communicate if there were any tidings, Marjorie was more reconciled; and as Mary filled so grandly the gap, and was indeed the shadow of a great rock in that weary household, she became even content in this new arrangement of affairs.

Every day brought happy meetings, oh! so full of meaning to Marjorie. Joyously she looked forward to those delightful evenings when Dr. Graham lingered near while she played, or, when Jack and Erica took their evening walk, stayed with her; while the time passed all too quickly. The secret unconfessed was conveyed by love's language and she felt no more loneliness or doubt.

But when Dr. Graham, remembering all, relapsed into a moodiness which Marjorie interpreted as a regret for former gentler emotions, prompted by gratitude for her kindness to Erica, this proud nature spent when alone many hours in bitter self-upbraidings at her own weakness.

“O sweet illusions of the brain!
O sudden thrills of fire and frost!
The world is bright while ye remain,
And dark and dead when ye are lost.”

It was a cause for anxiety to Erica's friends that the little maid did not gain strength more rapidly, and it was suggested by Dr. Allen that a change would be beneficial. Many suggestions were offered, but Aunt Marian, who for years had held in view an ocean voyage, being anxious to test its efficacy in her own case, was delighted that now a party could be formed, and together they could spend the summer rambling amid new scenes and foreign lands. Many discussions were held, many plans adopted and rejected, and Marjorie felt regretful that such a proposal had been advanced. It seemed that it was concluded that she should be one of the party, and, considering her long absence from her duties, and the increased expenditure during Erica's sickness, she saw how impossible it would be for her to join them in the proposed pleasure-trip. She was silently in hopes that something would interfere with the much-talked of journey, but to her surprise Erica greeted her return one afternoon with,

“Marjorie, it is decided at last! If not to-morrow, then in a few weeks, we are to cross the ocean.”

Poor Marjorie! The hardest struggle was yet to come, and as she felt in all its terrible force the bitterness of the contest, she almost feared the result. It was impossible under the conditions imposed for Marjorie to undertake such a voyage, and all its joys and anticipations rose up to tempt her by their imaginings.

Erica continued: “Aunt Marian and Jack arranged the party. First, Aunt Marian is going because a change will be beneficial; Marie is going because it is the Old Country, and she dotes on all things ancient, you know; and

Jack is going because he is a full-fledged M.D., and uncle promised him a trip as a reward for his hard study. I am going—I should be last, but I am too excited for grammar or politeness—because the doctor has ordered an ocean voyage. Papa is going because I am, and Marjorie—you should have been first, dear—because, as papa says, ‘the party will be incomplete without Marjorie.’ I wish you could have seen Marie’s face then,” and Erica laughed at the remembrance.

Marjorie flushed.

“It is a pretty picture. I only wish I could bring up the rear—any place to be in it.”

“Now, Marjorie, Marie said you wouldn’t afford it, but papa said it would not exceed your rent-roll. Pardon me, Marjorie, if I seem impertinent, but the lessor of Fern Villa should be able to take a continental tour. Can’t I tempt you? Think of that Eden—not the American Eden of poor Martin Chuzzlewit, but the Eden of Europe, your longed-for Germany.”

“But I have plans with which this trip will interfere, Erica, and Germany can be left for another year at least. It will seem strange to have us all leave poor Frau Kercher; she will be disconsolate. Mary’s husband comes for her to-morrow, you will be gone soon, and I think, dearest, I will run down to Hillsvew and cheer Mrs. Manning in Jack’s absence.”

Long Erica strove to alter Marjorie’s decision, even threatening to remain home; and later in the evening, when Dr. Graham and Jack called, tried to get them to champion her, but all to no purpose. Dr. Graham, with a secret understanding of Marjorie’s position, bade Erica take her walk with Jack, and when they were gone no allusion was made to the party arrangement, the conversation trending on the places to be visited and the other details of the proposed trip.

Seeing Erica and Jack returning he said, as he rose to go, “Let me see; Mary leaves in a few days, I believe. Perhaps Erica had better come to ‘Glenarden’ to prepare for the coming journey, and Marjorie,” he added, “I have business that will call me away for a week or ten days. To please me, do not decide before I return.” Then as he bade her good-night he smiled as he said: “So many things happen in a week’s time, Marjorie. I will see you again before I go.”

That night Marjorie fought her battle. Bravely and unflinchingly she looked all in the face. She pictured the happiness of that companionship, the pleasure of the voyage, the acceptance of the position wealth would give her, the triumph over Marie, and then like a still small voice came the loving

charge, “in trust for my boy. I have laid my plans well. I can trust you,” and although Marjorie felt that all was slipping from her grasp and she groaned in bitter anguish, her resolve was taken.

In the agony of her renunciation came the loving promise:

“He holds me when the billows smite; I shall not fall.
If long ’tis light, if fierce ’tis short,
He tempers all.”

She decided to wait quietly till Dr. Graham left and then slip away to Hillview to Katy, and at the grave of her benefactor, as once before, she would regain strength. Here she would not, she could not, remain.

The next day Marjorie felt too ill to attend to her duties, and Erica petted and nursed her to her heart’s content; and whether her father had cautioned her, or Erica herself was overcome by Marjorie’s firm persistence, no mention of the trip marred Marjorie’s peaceful day. Then a few days later an event happened which drew all attention from the anticipated journey, and put off for a time all arrangements.

Marjorie, hearing one afternoon that Marie was coming, found an excuse, as she often did, to be absent on the occasion of her visit, and returning at a late hour found Erica almost in tears and Jack brimful of mirth, which he could hardly restrain.

“Farewell, a long farewell to all my greatness!” quoted Jack.

“How can you, Jack, rejoice in another’s downfall?” said Erica.

“I’m not rejoicing. I’m only preparing Marjorie for a shock. ‘The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power’—ancestors all gone, Marjorie!”

“Jack, for shame!”

“What is it, Erica? Mary has gone, has she?”

“Oh, it’s worse than that,” said Jack; “although if Erica had not wanted to show off John we might still have been the victims of a strong delusion. As it was she actually had John come in to give him her photograph.”

“You know, Marjorie, I planned to have him surprise Mary with it when he got home. He was always so glad to give her pleasure.”

“Well, I don’t think he even saw Erica,” said Jack, “for the moment his eyes lit on Marie, what do you think, Marjorie?”

“Oh, Marjorie!” said Erica, “he said: ‘Why, Jane, do I find you at last?’”

“Fancy, Marjorie!” said Jack, “Jane! plain Jane! Shades of her ancestors! He might have said ‘Jean,’ but Jane!” and Jack simulated a groan.

“Oh, Marjorie, don’t listen to him! It is such a horrible affair. Marie stared at him. I was afraid she would faint.”

“It was rich,” interposed Jack. “Erica thought John had made a mistake, and tried to help him by saying, ‘One is so often mistaken in faces,’ but John was not abashed. He quietly replied, ‘This is my niece, Mary Jane Gordon. I am not mistaken.’ ‘Mary Jane’—worse and worse! There is ‘Lady Jane Grey’ and ‘Jane Seymour,’ but ‘Mary Jane O’Rafferty’ is my only refuge. Can’t you find an ancient ‘Mary Jane’ to comfort us, Marjorie?”

“But how did it end?” asked Marjorie.

“End?” replied Jack. “Why, she lost her ancestral temper, and the words she spoke, as Sairey Gamp says, ‘Lambs could not forgive nor worms forget.’”

“And, oh, Marjorie, it is all true. She is John’s niece, left in his charge by a dying brother, and she ran away,” said Erica.

“Now, Marjorie,” said Jack, “I dare not face her alone, so you’ll have to give me a cup of tea, and I’ll go back with Uncle Keith in the evening; for he is coming to say good-bye.”

“Don’t make that an excuse, Jack, for you never intended to go home. You had a regular stay-where-I-am look when you took that easy chair this afternoon.”

“Now, Erica, I have suffered enough through you this afternoon. It was all your fault. You were too proud of John, and pride must have a fall; only it was Marie’s—I mean Mary Jane’s—fall instead of Erica’s.”

When Dr. Graham came that night they were seriously alarmed when they heard that Miss Gordon was not at “Glenarden.”

When a few days later a note came to Aunt Marian from Marie, troubling her to have her trunks packed and sent to a certain address, Mrs. Lennox, full of sorrow for her favorite, went to the place mentioned, but Marie had gone. And so Marie slipped out of their lives, only remembered as a passing greatness.

Dr. Graham bade Marjorie good-bye that night and took Erica back to “Glenarden” to comfort Aunt Marian, who pleaded for Erica’s company in her loneliness. And a day or two after Dr. Graham left, Marjorie sent a note to Erica bidding her good-bye, and started for Hillsvew, thinking that the

ocean would be between her and those loved ones when she returned. With infinite patience she took up again the thread of her lonely life, buoyed up in this hour of trial by sweet recollections and half-conjectured truths.

“But stay, I now remember,
’Twas a blinding storm of rain
Fell from my eyelids heavy,
Raising a mist of pain.

When next I gazed with longing,
In one short summer day,
All I had loved had vanished,
My bridge was swept away.”

How well Keith Graham understood the motives underlying this flight when on his return Erica handed him Marjorie’s note. This brave resistance of temptation moved him, and at the same time there came to him the truth, the knowledge of which he had always known, that he could not go and leave behind this loyal trusted maid. So, proposing to Erica a trip to Hillsvie before they started on their long voyage, she joyfully acceded, and a short time after Marjorie left New York Dr. Graham and Erica were en route for Hillsvie.

CHAPTER XII.

“How shall I come near her,
Teach me, wind of May,
You who toy with apple blooms,
Nor brush the down away.
How to win the answer—
For I am sure she knows—
Teach me, dew and sunshine,
How you ope the rose.”

With what delight Marjorie entered again the little village of Hillsvie, which but one short year ago she had left with so many happy anticipations. All nature breathed a welcome. Back again amid the rich foliage and rioting flowers, the spreading trees, the spacious lawns, the wayside fringed with briar roses, and fields dotted with marguerites; here Marjorie longed for and sought peace.

Aunt Edith was delighted to have Marjorie with her again, and opened her heart, even as her arms, to receive her; and Dr. Manning, watching this pale Marjorie, wondered what had changed this country lass whose winsomeness had now a touch of sadness. Jack rejoiced to have her, even for so short a time, his companion as of old, and now that he was to sail away for a long absence knew not whether to be glad or sorry that Marjorie had decided to remain—sorry to lose her brightness and pleasant company, and glad when he saw the unconcealed delight his mother betrayed in her society. Anyway, she would remain for a time after he had gone, and that would lighten the parting, and before she went back to New York they would be in part reconciled to his absence.

The year of city life, measured by joyous and sad events, had seemed a long one to Marjorie. It seemed but yesterday that she had trod the same paths, encountered the same hospitality. Jack, noticing her avoidance of Fern Villa, had refrained from bringing her to the spot that might recall the agony of that one sad night, and alone he had visited Katy, delighting her with accounts of Marjorie, Erica, and Dr. Graham. Katy had often seen Marjorie and had urged her to come back and visit her old home, at present almost deserted, but she shrank from the sight of the place, now sacred to another, until a little longer in quietness and seclusion she had forgotten, if such were

possible, her pain and loss, and could renew the old associations without fear.

At Fern Villa there would be much to recall the sweetness of that well-remembered voice, the winning tenderness of that one dark, handsome face, so she studiously avoided the place. But daily she visited the silent churchyard and laid her fragrant lilacs on the grave of the dear departed friend, and each time she came back strengthened in mind and heart, and thankful that God had watched over her and kept her true to her sacred charge.

One evening, a week after her return, Marjorie visited alone the quiet spot. Jack had walked beside her for a short distance, then left her to make a call on Katy, promising to rejoin her in a short time if she would wait for him, as it was still early in the evening. Jack's attention to the old and lonely woman filled Marjorie with regret that she had allowed her to wait so long and patiently for the promised visit, and decided her to surprise Jack and Katy by visiting Fern Villa. By a shorter route she would arrive, she hoped, before he left, and feeling that she could make her first visit more successful in Jack's presence, she walked quickly along the country road. How peaceful that old home looked among the thickly clustered trees! Her eyes lighted with pleasure as she neared the spot, and she wondered what had kept her so long from Katy and home. She would atone in the future for her neglect. How surprised they would be! She wondered if she would meet them on the broad verandah or in Katy's own pleasant room that she knew so well.

Entering the well-known grounds, Marjorie walked in the shady light of the clustering trees and rejoiced that unobserved she could approach the house. As she drew near an unexpected sound held her spellbound—the sound of music. She stood still a moment, listening, then, hastily, advancing, she entered the open door and passed into the old familiar hall. Again she paused and listened. Yes, sounds of music greeted her. It could not be Jack; she smiled at the thought. Perhaps it was a friend of Katy's and she had missed Jack. But louder, clearer—yes! from the old familiar room, so hallowed by the past—like an echo of the past came melodies sweet and exultant from the same old instrument she had loved and touched it seemed so long ago. A feeling of terror overcame her, an almost supernatural dread of what was to come chained her to the spot; but when again a familiar touching air broke the stillness, wooing her by its plaintive note, she grasped at the truth.

Yes, this was the answer to her prayers, the reward for faithful resistance of temptation. Thank God! She had fled to Hillview to welcome the lost one, to give him the letter she even now had with her, which she had brought from the grave of his mother to fulfil at last the sacred debt. Yes, he had come, the wanderer had returned. None but the lost one could ever enter those rooms and “bring forth harmony entrancing,” telling her that here at last he was at home. He had found Katy, had come to her, and as the thought grew stronger, in overwhelming ecstasy of gladness she hurried into the room and advanced towards the unconscious player, who, arrested by her presence, turned—and Marjorie stood face to face with Dr. Graham. She strove to utter his name, the room seemed to turn round, the overstrained nerves gave way, and Keith Graham caught the swaying figure as consciousness forsook her.

Laying her on the couch, Dr. Graham sought to bring back consciousness to the still figure, but so long she lay in this death-like trance that a fear thrilled him that as his mother had passed from earth soothed by heavenly strains, so this loved one had slipped silently into immortality.

“In sweet music is such art,
Killing care and grief of heart,
Fall asleep, or hearing die.”

At last his efforts were rewarded, and Marjorie opened her eyes, but before she could half realize what had happened, Dr. Graham’s voice recalled it all. The music, his presence—what did it mean? Keith Graham would have expressed regret for this strange welcome, but Marjorie’s look of distress, the pathetic appeal of the beautiful face, o’ermastered him, and he drew the slender form into his closer embrace and murmured words whose music was sweeter far than Marjorie in her happiest moments had ever imagined.

But Marjorie drew herself away from his embrace, and murmured, “Katy! where is Katy?”

“Marjorie, I sent Katy to you with a message. I thought I was alone, and the temptation to touch the old instrument was too great. It is not often now I yield to the old enthralment, but to-night, Marjorie, it gave me comfort and hope.”

Marjorie understood now. A flush came to the pale cheeks, an indignant light into the beautiful eyes.

“Then you are Mrs. Graham’s son?” she said, quickly.

“Yes, Marjorie, I am Theodore Graham.”

“Then, why was I deceived? Why was Katy so cruel as to mislead me?”

Marjorie rose. A feeling of rebellion, an angry, bitter feeling, overcame her, and she longed to get out of the room, to leave the house before Katy came. She tottered, and Keith Graham drawing a reclining chair near her, she sank into its depths, and as if to hide herself from the sight of all, covered her face with her hands.

Keith Graham, resting one hand on the back of her chair, looked down on the little black-robed lass, whose proud face told him too truly that he had not mistaken the independent, sensitive nature, and felt that his pleadings would be in vain, that he would never be forgiven.

“Marjorie,” he said, quietly, “listen to me. I sent Katy to-night to tell you, and, oh! my darling, before you judge me too harshly let me tell you all.”

He began with his arrival at Hillview, when he saw her first at the car window, her face buried in a bunch of her favorite blossoms. She knew now that all but Katy were ignorant of his relationship to Mrs. Graham, so they at least had not deceived her. He told her of the first clue to the identity of the dwellers at Fern Villa, his visit to the rooms; and as he continued Marjorie thought of the evening, one year ago, when she had listened to the mother’s story of her regret for the past. Her heart was moved with pity as she listened; the dreadful awakening to the truth in these very rooms thrilled her. And when he spoke of his desire to give up all to the one who had brightened his mother’s life, and who had won his notice by her love for his own favorite study, Marjorie felt that she had nothing to forgive.

Keith Graham did not spare himself. He had believed she would be faithless to her trust, but it mattered not, he thought. He had not meant to disclose his identity till the ten years had elapsed, and then she would have all.

“Dear Marjorie,” he said, “I know I have wronged you. Had I known you I would not have insulted you by so unjust an opinion; but it was natural to picture an innocent country girl, her head turned by a sudden access of wealth, yielding to the temptation of possession. But do not blame poor faithful Katy. The thought of losing me again alone won her consent. Often I tried to tell you, but weakened before the honest, open look of trust in your fearless gaze, and the thought of losing you was unbearable. Did you think, sweetheart, I could let the ocean separate us? I followed you here to confess all, and now I fear I am too late.”

Marjorie listened as if in a dream, and wondered at her own blindness. The voice, Erica's face, the lost picture, all came back in startling clearness, and as Dr. Graham finished she drew from her bosom his mother's letter, and handed it to him. He gazed with emotion at the old familiar inscription, and, breaking the seal, he unfolded the letter. It contained a note addressed to Marjorie, which he handed to her; then, moving to the window, he slowly read his mother's message.

And Marjorie read hers, tears blinding her eyes as she read. What the mother's feelings must have been, what her imaginings, her bitter agony of remorse, her fears for the future, when she penned this message to Marjorie, were a sealed book; but the pathetic appeal to the trusted friend for her influence and forbearance filled her with pity and sorrow that the mother was denied this blessed reunion.

"However he may come, however sinful or wild he may be, be kind and forgiving; for I am to blame, Marjorie."

And Marjorie thought of the contrast to the mother's picture as she beheld him—grand in intellect, in action, in kindness—her knight, her hero!

Keith Graham read his letter and stood for a while gazing out into the night, over the shadowy lawn, across the quiet garden. Seeing Katy coming, he approached Marjorie and said: "Katy is coming back, Marjorie. At least if you cannot forgive me, dear, let me tell her she is forgiven. Let me send her to you, dear."

But Marjorie arose and putting out her hands, lifted up her face and with her old bright, winning grace, said: "And tell her she is to have a new mistress."

As the meaning of her words dawned on him, Keith Graham dropped the little hands and in close embrace took to his heart forever his "loyal country lass."

* * * * *

Three weeks later the pre-arranged party stood on the deck of an ocean steamer outward bound.

Erica, watching with loving eyes her father and Marjorie, looked up at Jack and said: "Do you not pity me, Jack? A step-mother, and such a step-mother!"

And Jack, looking down on the saucy face, replied: “Erica, I have always stood by you in trouble. I’ll not shirk now. I’ll take her for a mother-in-law.”

FINIS.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *In Music's Thrall* by Lilla Stewart Nease]