Chapter 1

A narrow grave-yard in the heart of a bustling, indifferent city, seen from the windows of a gloomy-looking inn, is at no time an object of enlivening suggestion; and the spectacle is not at its best when the mouldy tombstones and funereal umbrage have received the ineffectual refreshment of a dull, moist snow-fall. If, while the air is thickened by this frosty drizzle, the calendar should happen to indicate that the blessed vernal season is already six weeks old, it will be admitted that no depressing influence is absent from the scene. This fact was keenly felt on a certain 12th of May, upwards of thirty years since, by a lady who stood looking out of one of the windows of the best hotel in the ancient city of Boston. She had stood there for half an hour—stood there, that is, at intervals; for from time to time she turned back into the room and measured its length with a restless step. In the chimney-place was a red-hot fire which emitted a small blue flame; and in front of the fire, at a table, sat a young man who was busily plying a pencil. He had a number of sheets of paper cut into small equal squares, and he was apparently covering them with pictorial designs—strange-looking figures. He worked rapidly and attentively, sometimes threw back his head and held out his drawing at arm's-length, and kept up a soft, gay-sounding humming and whistling. The lady brushed past him in her walk; her much-trimmed skirts were voluminous. She never dropped her eyes upon his work; she only turned them, occasionally, as she passed, to a mirror suspended above the toilet-table on the other side of the room. Here she paused a moment, gave a pinch to her waist with her two hands, or raised these members—they were very plump and pretty—to the multifold braids of her hair, with a movement half caressing, half corrective. An attentive observer might have fancied that during these periods of desultory self-inspection her face forgot its melancholy; but as soon as she neared the window again it began to proclaim that she was a very ill-pleased woman. And indeed, in what met her eyes there was little to be pleased with. The window-panes were battered by the sleet; the head-stones in the grave-yard beneath seemed to be holding themselves askance to keep it out of their faces. A

tall iron railing protected them from the street, and on the other side of the railing an assemblage of Bostonians were trampling about in the liquid snow. Many of them were looking up and down; they appeared to be waiting for something. From time to time a strange vehicle drew near to the place where they stood,—such a vehicle as the lady at the window, in spite of a considerable acquaintance with human inventions, had never seen before: a huge, low omnibus, painted in brilliant colors, and decorated apparently with jangling bells, attached to a species of groove in the pavement, through which it was dragged, with a great deal of rumbling, bouncing and scratching, by a couple of remarkably small horses. When it reached a certain point the people in front of the grave-yard, of whom much the greater number were women, carrying satchels and parcels, projected themselves upon it in a compact body—a movement suggesting the scramble for places in a life-boat at sea—and were engulfed in its large interior. Then the life-boat—or the life-car, as the lady at the window of the hotel vaguely designated it—went bumping and jingling away upon its invisible wheels, with the helmsman (the man at the wheel) guiding its course incongruously from the prow. This phenomenon was repeated every three minutes, and the supply of eagerly-moving women in cloaks, bearing reticules and bundles, renewed itself in the most liberal manner. On the other side of the grave-yard was a row of small red brick houses, showing a series of homely, domestic-looking backs; at the end opposite the hotel a tall wooden church-spire, painted white, rose high into the vagueness of the snow-flakes. The lady at the window looked at it for some time; for reasons of her own she thought it the ugliest thing she had ever seen. She hated it, she despised it; it threw her into a state of irritation that was quite out of proportion to any sensible motive. She had never known herself to care so much about church-spires.

She was not pretty; but even when it expressed perplexed irritation her face was most interesting and agreeable. Neither was she in her first youth; yet, though slender, with a great deal of extremely well-fashioned roundness of contour—a suggestion both of maturity and flexibility—she carried her three and thirty years as a light-wristed Hebe might have carried a brimming wine-cup. Her complexion was fatigued, as the French say; her mouth was large, her lips too full, her teeth uneven, her chin rather commonly modeled; she had a thick nose, and when she smiled—she was constantly smiling—the lines beside it rose too high, toward her eyes. But these eyes were charming: gray in color, brilliant, quickly glancing, gently resting, full of intelligence. Her forehead was

very low—it was her only handsome feature; and she had a great abundance of crisp dark hair, finely frizzled, which was always braided in a manner that suggested some Southern or Eastern, some remotely foreign, woman. She had a large collection of ear-rings, and wore them in alternation; and they seemed to give a point to her Oriental or exotic aspect. A compliment had once been paid her, which, being repeated to her, gave her greater pleasure than anything she had ever heard. "A pretty woman?" some one had said. "Why, her features are very bad." "I don't know about her features," a very discerning observer had answered; "but she carries her head like a pretty woman." You may imagine whether, after this, she carried her head less becomingly.

She turned away from the window at last, pressing her hands to her eyes. "It 's too horrible!" she exclaimed. "I shall go back—I shall go back!" And she flung herself into a chair before the fire.

"Wait a little, dear child," said the young man softly, sketching away at his little scraps of paper.

The lady put out her foot; it was very small, and there was an immense rosette on her slipper. She fixed her eyes for a while on this ornament, and then she looked at the glowing bed of anthracite coal in the grate. "Did you ever see anything so hideous as that fire?" she demanded. "Did you ever see anything so—so affreux as—as everything?" She spoke English with perfect purity; but she brought out this French epithet in a manner that indicated that she was accustomed to using French epithets.

"I think the fire is very pretty," said the young man, glancing at it a moment. "Those little blue tongues, dancing on top of the crimson embers, are extremely picturesque. They are like a fire in an alchemist's laboratory."

"You are too good-natured, my dear," his companion declared.

The young man held out one of his drawings, with his head on one side. His tongue was gently moving along his under-lip. "Good-natured—yes. Too good-natured—no."

"You are irritating," said the lady, looking at her slipper.

He began to retouch his sketch. "I think you mean simply that you are irritated."

"Ah, for that, yes!" said his companion, with a little bitter laugh. "It 's the darkest day of my life—and you know what that means."

"Wait till to-morrow," rejoined the young man.

"Yes, we have made a great mistake. If there is any doubt about it to-day, there certainly will be none to-morrow. Ce sera clair, au moins!"

The young man was silent a few moments, driving his pencil. Then at last, "There are no such things as mistakes," he affirmed.

"Very true—for those who are not clever enough to perceive them. Not to recognize one's mistakes—that would be happiness in life," the lady went on, still looking at her pretty foot.

"My dearest sister," said the young man, always intent upon his drawing, "it 's the first time you have told me I am not clever."

"Well, by your own theory I can't call it a mistake," answered his sister, pertinently enough.

The young man gave a clear, fresh laugh. "You, at least, are clever enough, dearest sister," he said.

"I was not so when I proposed this."

"Was it you who proposed it?" asked her brother.

She turned her head and gave him a little stare. "Do you desire the credit of it?"

"If you like, I will take the blame," he said, looking up with a smile.

"Yes," she rejoined in a moment, "you make no difference in these things. You have no sense of property."

The young man gave his joyous laugh again. "If that means I have no property, you are right!"

"Don't joke about your poverty," said his sister. "That is quite as vulgar as to boast about it."

"My poverty! I have just finished a drawing that will bring me fifty francs!"

"Voyons," said the lady, putting out her hand.

He added a touch or two, and then gave her his sketch. She looked at it, but she went on with her idea of a moment before. "If a woman were to ask you to marry her you would say, 'Certainly, my dear, with pleasure!' And you would marry her and be ridiculously happy. Then at the end of three months you would say to her, 'You know that blissful day when I begged you to be mine!'"

The young man had risen from the table, stretching his arms a little; he walked to the window. "That is a description of a charming nature," he said.

"Oh, yes, you have a charming nature; I regard that as our capital. If I had not been convinced of that I should never have taken the risk of bringing you to this dreadful country."

"This comical country, this delightful country!" exclaimed the young man, and he broke into the most animated laughter.

"Is it those women scrambling into the omnibus?" asked his companion. "What do you suppose is the attraction?"

"I suppose there is a very good-looking man inside," said the young man.

"In each of them? They come along in hundreds, and the men in this country don't seem at all handsome. As for the women—I have never seen so many at once since I left the convent."

"The women are very pretty," her brother declared, "and the whole affair is very amusing. I must make a sketch of it." And he came back to the table quickly, and picked up his utensils—a small sketching-board, a sheet of paper, and three or four crayons. He took his place at the window with these things, and stood there glancing out, plying his pencil with an air of easy skill. While he worked he wore a brilliant smile. Brilliant is indeed the word at this moment for his strongly-lighted face. He was eight and twenty years old; he had a short, slight, well-made figure. Though he bore a noticeable resemblance to his sister, he was a better favored person: fair-haired, clear-faced, witty-looking, with a delicate finish of feature and an expression at once urbane and not at all serious, a warm blue eye, an eyebrow finely drawn and excessively arched—an eyebrow which, if ladies wrote sonnets to those of their lovers, might have been made the subject of such a piece of verse—and a light moustache that flourished upwards as if blown that way by the breath of a constant smile. There was something in his physiognomy at once benevolent and picturesque. But, as I have hinted, it was not at all serious. The young man's face was, in this respect, singular; it was not at all serious, and yet it inspired the liveliest confidence.

"Be sure you put in plenty of snow," said his sister. "Bonte divine, what a climate!"

"I shall leave the sketch all white, and I shall put in the little figures in black," the young man answered, laughing. "And I shall call it—what is that line in Keats?—Mid-May's Eldest Child!"

"I don't remember," said the lady, "that mamma ever told me it was like this."

"Mamma never told you anything disagreeable. And it 's not like this—every day. You will see that to-morrow we shall have a splendid day."

"Qu'en savez-vous? To-morrow I shall go away."

"Where shall you go?"

"Anywhere away from here. Back to Silberstadt. I shall write to the Reigning Prince."

The young man turned a little and looked at her, with his crayon poised. "My dear Eugenia," he murmured, "were you so happy at sea?"

Eugenia got up; she still held in her hand the drawing her brother had given her. It was a bold, expressive sketch of a group of miserable people on the deck of a steamer, clinging together and clutching at each other, while the vessel lurched downward, at a terrific angle, into the hollow of a wave. It was extremely clever, and full of a sort of tragi-comical power. Eugenia dropped her eyes upon it and made a sad grimace. "How can you draw such odious scenes?" she asked. "I should like to throw it into the fire!" And she tossed the paper away. Her brother watched, quietly, to see where it went. It fluttered down to the floor, where he let it lie. She came toward the window, pinching in her waist. "Why don't you reproach me—abuse me?" she asked. "I think I should feel better then. Why don't you tell me that you hate me for bringing you here?"

"Because you would not believe it. I adore you, dear sister! I am delighted to be here, and I am charmed with the prospect."

"I don't know what had taken possession of me. I had lost my head," Eugenia went on.

The young man, on his side, went on plying his pencil. "It is evidently a most curious and interesting country. Here we are, and I mean to enjoy it."

His companion turned away with an impatient step, but presently came back. "High spirits are doubtless an excellent thing," she said; "but you give one too much of them, and I can't see that they have done you any good."

The young man stared, with lifted eyebrows, smiling; he tapped his handsome nose with his pencil. "They have made me happy!"

"That was the least they could do; they have made you nothing else. You have gone through life thanking fortune for such very small favors that she has never put herself to any trouble for you."

"She must have put herself to a little, I think, to present me with so admirable a sister."

"Be serious, Felix. You forget that I am your elder."

"With a sister, then, so elderly!" rejoined Felix, laughing. "I hoped we had left seriousness in Europe."

"I fancy you will find it here. Remember that you are nearly thirty years old, and that you are nothing but an obscure Bohemian—a penniless correspondent of an illustrated newspaper."

"Obscure as much as you please, but not so much of a Bohemian as you think. And not at all penniless! I have a hundred pounds in my

pocket. I have an engagement to make fifty sketches, and I mean to paint the portraits of all our cousins, and of all their cousins, at a hundred dollars a head."

"You are not ambitious," said Eugenia.

"You are, dear Baroness," the young man replied.

The Baroness was silent a moment, looking out at the sleet-darkened grave-yard and the bumping horse-cars. "Yes, I am ambitious," she said at last. "And my ambition has brought me to this dreadful place!" She glanced about her—the room had a certain vulgar nudity; the bed and the window were curtainless—and she gave a little passionate sigh. "Poor old ambition!" she exclaimed. Then she flung herself down upon a sofa which stood near against the wall, and covered her face with her hands.

Her brother went on with his drawing, rapidly and skillfully; after some moments he sat down beside her and showed her his sketch. "Now, don't you think that 's pretty good for an obscure Bohemian?" he asked. "I have knocked off another fifty francs."

Eugenia glanced at the little picture as he laid it on her lap. "Yes, it is very clever," she said. And in a moment she added, "Do you suppose our cousins do that?"

"Do what?"

"Get into those things, and look like that."

Felix meditated awhile. "I really can't say. It will be interesting to discover."

"Oh, the rich people can't!" said the Baroness.

"Are you very sure they are rich?" asked Felix, lightly.

His sister slowly turned in her place, looking at him. "Heavenly powers!" she murmured. "You have a way of bringing out things!"

"It will certainly be much pleasanter if they are rich," Felix declared.

"Do you suppose if I had not known they were rich I would ever have come?"

The young man met his sister's somewhat peremptory eye with his bright, contented glance. "Yes, it certainly will be pleasanter," he repeated.

"That is all I expect of them," said the Baroness. "I don't count upon their being clever or friendly—at first—or elegant or interesting. But I assure you I insist upon their being rich."

Felix leaned his head upon the back of the sofa and looked awhile at the oblong patch of sky to which the window served as frame. The snow was ceasing; it seemed to him that the sky had begun to brighten. "I

count upon their being rich," he said at last, "and powerful, and clever, and friendly, and elegant, and interesting, and generally delightful! Tu vas voir." And he bent forward and kissed his sister. "Look there!" he went on. "As a portent, even while I speak, the sky is turning the color of gold; the day is going to be splendid."

And indeed, within five minutes the weather had changed. The sun broke out through the snow-clouds and jumped into the Baroness's room. "Bonte divine," exclaimed this lady, "what a climate!"

"We will go out and see the world," said Felix.

And after a while they went out. The air had grown warm as well as brilliant; the sunshine had dried the pavements. They walked about the streets at hazard, looking at the people and the houses, the shops and the vehicles, the blazing blue sky and the muddy crossings, the hurrying men and the slow-strolling maidens, the fresh red bricks and the bright green trees, the extraordinary mixture of smartness and shabbiness. From one hour to another the day had grown vernal; even in the bustling streets there was an odor of earth and blossom. Felix was immensely entertained. He had called it a comical country, and he went about laughing at everything he saw. You would have said that American civilization expressed itself to his sense in a tissue of capital jokes. The jokes were certainly excellent, and the young man's merriment was joyous and genial. He possessed what is called the pictorial sense; and this first glimpse of democratic manners stirred the same sort of attention that he would have given to the movements of a lively young person with a bright complexion. Such attention would have been demonstrative and complimentary; and in the present case Felix might have passed for an undispirited young exile revisiting the haunts of his childhood. He kept looking at the violent blue of the sky, at the scintillating air, at the scattered and multiplied patches of color.

"Comme c'est bariole, eh?" he said to his sister in that foreign tongue which they both appeared to feel a mysterious prompting occasionally to use.

"Yes, it is bariole indeed," the Baroness answered. "I don't like the coloring; it hurts my eyes."

"It shows how extremes meet," the young man rejoined. "Instead of coming to the West we seem to have gone to the East. The way the sky touches the house-tops is just like Cairo; and the red and blue signboards patched over the face of everything remind one of Mahometan decorations."

"The young women are not Mahometan," said his companion. "They can't be said to hide their faces. I never saw anything so bold."

"Thank Heaven they don't hide their faces!" cried Felix. "Their faces are uncommonly pretty."

"Yes, their faces are often very pretty," said the Baroness, who was a very clever woman. She was too clever a woman not to be capable of a great deal of just and fine observation. She clung more closely than usual to her brother's arm; she was not exhilarated, as he was; she said very little, but she noted a great many things and made her reflections. She was a little excited; she felt that she had indeed come to a strange country, to make her fortune. Superficially, she was conscious of a good deal of irritation and displeasure; the Baroness was a very delicate and fastidious person. Of old, more than once, she had gone, for entertainment's sake and in brilliant company, to a fair in a provincial town. It seemed to her now that she was at an enormous fair—that the entertainment and the disagreements were very much the same. She found herself alternately smiling and shrinking; the show was very curious, but it was probable, from moment to moment, that one would be jostled. The Baroness had never seen so many people walking about before; she had never been so mixed up with people she did not know. But little by little she felt that this fair was a more serious undertaking. She went with her brother into a large public garden, which seemed very pretty, but where she was surprised at seeing no carriages. The afternoon was drawing to a close; the coarse, vivid grass and the slender tree-boles were gilded by the level sunbeams—gilded as with gold that was fresh from the mine. It was the hour at which ladies should come out for an airing and roll past a hedge of pedestrians, holding their parasols askance. Here, however, Eugenia observed no indications of this custom, the absence of which was more anomalous as there was a charming avenue of remarkably graceful, arching elms in the most convenient contiguity to a large, cheerful street, in which, evidently, among the more prosperous members of the bourgeoisie, a great deal of pedestrianism went forward. Our friends passed out into this well lighted promenade, and Felix noticed a great many more pretty girls and called his sister's attention to them. This latter measure, however, was superfluous; for the Baroness had inspected, narrowly, these charming young ladies.

"I feel an intimate conviction that our cousins are like that," said Felix.

The Baroness hoped so, but this is not what she said. "They are very pretty," she said, "but they are mere little girls. Where are the women—the women of thirty?"

"Of thirty-three, do you mean?" her brother was going to ask; for he understood often both what she said and what she did not say. But he only exclaimed upon the beauty of the sunset, while the Baroness, who had come to seek her fortune, reflected that it would certainly be well for her if the persons against whom she might need to measure herself should all be mere little girls. The sunset was superb; they stopped to look at it; Felix declared that he had never seen such a gorgeous mixture of colors. The Baroness also thought it splendid; and she was perhaps the more easily pleased from the fact that while she stood there she was conscious of much admiring observation on the part of various nice-looking people who passed that way, and to whom a distinguished, strikingly-dressed woman with a foreign air, exclaiming upon the beauties of nature on a Boston street corner in the French tongue, could not be an object of indifference. Eugenia's spirits rose. She surrendered herself to a certain tranquil gayety. If she had come to seek her fortune, it seemed to her that her fortune would be easy to find. There was a promise of it in the gorgeous purity of the western sky; there was an intimation in the mild, unimpertinent gaze of the passers of a certain natural facility in things.

"You will not go back to Silberstadt, eh?" asked Felix.

"Not to-morrow," said the Baroness.

"Nor write to the Reigning Prince?"

"I shall write to him that they evidently know nothing about him over here."

"He will not believe you," said the young man. "I advise you to let him alone."

Felix himself continued to be in high good humor. Brought up among ancient customs and in picturesque cities, he yet found plenty of local color in the little Puritan metropolis. That evening, after dinner, he told his sister that he should go forth early on the morrow to look up their cousins.

"You are very impatient," said Eugenia.

"What can be more natural," he asked, "after seeing all those pretty girls to-day? If one's cousins are of that pattern, the sooner one knows them the better."

"Perhaps they are not," said Eugenia. "We ought to have brought some letters—to some other people."

"The other people would not be our kinsfolk."

"Possibly they would be none the worse for that," the Baroness replied.

Her brother looked at her with his eyebrows lifted. "That was not what you said when you first proposed to me that we should come out here and fraternize with our relatives. You said that it was the prompting of natural affection; and when I suggested some reasons against it you declared that the voix du sang should go before everything."

"You remember all that?" asked the Baroness.

"Vividly! I was greatly moved by it."

She was walking up and down the room, as she had done in the morning; she stopped in her walk and looked at her brother. She apparently was going to say something, but she checked herself and resumed her walk. Then, in a few moments, she said something different, which had the effect of an explanation of the suppression of her earlier thought. "You will never be anything but a child, dear brother."

"One would suppose that you, madam," answered Felix, laughing, "were a thousand years old."

"I am—sometimes," said the Baroness.

"I will go, then, and announce to our cousins the arrival of a personage so extraordinary. They will immediately come and pay you their respects."

Eugenia paced the length of the room again, and then she stopped before her brother, laying her hand upon his arm. "They are not to come and see me," she said. "You are not to allow that. That is not the way I shall meet them first." And in answer to his interrogative glance she went on. "You will go and examine, and report. You will come back and tell me who they are and what they are; their number, gender, their respective ages—all about them. Be sure you observe everything; be ready to describe to me the locality, the accessories—how shall I say it?—the mise en scene. Then, at my own time, at my own hour, under circumstances of my own choosing, I will go to them. I will present myself—I will appear before them!" said the Baroness, this time phrasing her idea with a certain frankness.

"And what message am I to take to them?" asked Felix, who had a lively faith in the justness of his sister's arrangements.

She looked at him a moment—at his expression of agreeable veracity; and, with that justness that he admired, she replied, "Say what you please. Tell my story in the way that seems to you most—natural." And she bent her forehead for him to kiss.

Chapter 2

The next day was splendid, as Felix had prophesied; if the winter had suddenly leaped into spring, the spring had for the moment as quickly leaped into summer. This was an observation made by a young girl who came out of a large square house in the country, and strolled about in the spacious garden which separated it from a muddy road. The flowering shrubs and the neatly-disposed plants were basking in the abundant light and warmth; the transparent shade of the great elms—they were magnificent trees—seemed to thicken by the hour; and the intensely habitual stillness offered a submissive medium to the sound of a distant church-bell. The young girl listened to the church-bell; but she was not dressed for church. She was bare-headed; she wore a white muslin waist, with an embroidered border, and the skirt of her dress was of colored muslin. She was a young lady of some two or three and twenty years of age, and though a young person of her sex walking bare-headed in a garden, of a Sunday morning in spring-time, can, in the nature of things, never be a displeasing object, you would not have pronounced this innocent Sabbath-breaker especially pretty. She was tall and pale, thin and a little awkward; her hair was fair and perfectly straight; her eyes were dark, and they had the singularity of seeming at once dull and restless—differing herein, as you see, fatally from the ideal "fine eyes," which we always imagine to be both brilliant and tranquil. The doors and windows of the large square house were all wide open, to admit the purifying sunshine, which lay in generous patches upon the floor of a wide, high, covered piazza adjusted to two sides of the mansion—a piazza on which several straw-bottomed rocking-chairs and half a dozen of those small cylindrical stools in green and blue porcelain, which suggest an affiliation between the residents and the Eastern trade, were symmetrically disposed. It was an ancient house—ancient in the sense of being eighty years old; it was built of wood, painted a clean, clear, faded gray, and adorned along the front, at intervals, with flat wooden pilasters, painted white. These pilasters appeared to support a kind of classic pediment, which was decorated in the middle by a large triple

window in a boldly carved frame, and in each of its smaller angles by a glazed circular aperture. A large white door, furnished with a highly-polished brass knocker, presented itself to the rural-looking road, with which it was connected by a spacious pathway, paved with worn and cracked, but very clean, bricks. Behind it there were meadows and orchards, a barn and a pond; and facing it, a short distance along the road, on the opposite side, stood a smaller house, painted white, with external shutters painted green, a little garden on one hand and an orchard on the other. All this was shining in the morning air, through which the simple details of the picture addressed themselves to the eye as distinctly as the items of a "sum" in addition.

A second young lady presently came out of the house, across the piazza, descended into the garden and approached the young girl of whom I have spoken. This second young lady was also thin and pale; but she was older than the other; she was shorter; she had dark, smooth hair. Her eyes, unlike the other's, were quick and bright; but they were not at all restless. She wore a straw bonnet with white ribbons, and a long, red, India scarf, which, on the front of her dress, reached to her feet. In her hand she carried a little key.

"Gertrude," she said, "are you very sure you had better not go to church?"

Gertrude looked at her a moment, plucked a small sprig from a lilac-bush, smelled it and threw it away. "I am not very sure of anything!" she answered.

The other young lady looked straight past her, at the distant pond, which lay shining between the long banks of fir-trees. Then she said in a very soft voice, "This is the key of the dining-room closet. I think you had better have it, if any one should want anything."

"Who is there to want anything?" Gertrude demanded. "I shall be all alone in the house."

"Some one may come," said her companion.

"Do you mean Mr. Brand?"

"Yes, Gertrude. He may like a piece of cake."

"I don't like men that are always eating cake!" Gertrude declared, giving a pull at the lilac-bush.

Her companion glanced at her, and then looked down on the ground. "I think father expected you would come to church," she said. "What shall I say to him?"

"Say I have a bad headache."

"Would that be true?" asked the elder lady, looking straight at the pond again.

"No, Charlotte," said the younger one simply.

Charlotte transferred her quiet eyes to her companion's face. "I am afraid you are feeling restless."

"I am feeling as I always feel," Gertrude replied, in the same tone.

Charlotte turned away; but she stood there a moment. Presently she looked down at the front of her dress. "Does n't it seem to you, somehow, as if my scarf were too long?" she asked.

Gertrude walked half round her, looking at the scarf. "I don't think you wear it right," she said.

"How should I wear it, dear?"

"I don't know; differently from that. You should draw it differently over your shoulders, round your elbows; you should look differently behind."

"How should I look?" Charlotte inquired.

"I don't think I can tell you," said Gertrude, plucking out the scarf a little behind. "I could do it myself, but I don't think I can explain it."

Charlotte, by a movement of her elbows, corrected the laxity that had come from her companion's touch. "Well, some day you must do it for me. It does n't matter now. Indeed, I don't think it matters," she added, "how one looks behind."

"I should say it mattered more," said Gertrude. "Then you don't know who may be observing you. You are not on your guard. You can't try to look pretty."

Charlotte received this declaration with extreme gravity. "I don't think one should ever try to look pretty," she rejoined, earnestly.

Her companion was silent. Then she said, "Well, perhaps it 's not of much use."

Charlotte looked at her a little, and then kissed her. "I hope you will be better when we come back."

"My dear sister, I am very well!" said Gertrude.

Charlotte went down the large brick walk to the garden gate; her companion strolled slowly toward the house. At the gate Charlotte met a young man, who was coming in—a tall, fair young man, wearing a high hat and a pair of thread gloves. He was handsome, but rather too stout. He had a pleasant smile. "Oh, Mr. Brand!" exclaimed the young lady.

"I came to see whether your sister was not going to church," said the young man.

"She says she is not going; but I am very glad you have come. I think if you were to talk to her a little"… . And Charlotte lowered her voice. "It seems as if she were restless."

Mr. Brand smiled down on the young lady from his great height. "I shall be very glad to talk to her. For that I should be willing to absent myself from almost any occasion of worship, however attractive."

"Well, I suppose you know," said Charlotte, softly, as if positive acceptance of this proposition might be dangerous. "But I am afraid I shall be late."

"I hope you will have a pleasant sermon," said the young man.

"Oh, Mr. Gilman is always pleasant," Charlotte answered. And she went on her way.

Mr. Brand went into the garden, where Gertrude, hearing the gate close behind him, turned and looked at him. For a moment she watched him coming; then she turned away. But almost immediately she corrected this movement, and stood still, facing him. He took off his hat and wiped his forehead as he approached. Then he put on his hat again and held out his hand. His hat being removed, you would have perceived that his forehead was very large and smooth, and his hair abundant but rather colorless. His nose was too large, and his mouth and eyes were too small; but for all this he was, as I have said, a young man of striking appearance. The expression of his little clean-colored blue eyes was irresistibly gentle and serious; he looked, as the phrase is, as good as gold. The young girl, standing in the garden path, glanced, as he came up, at his thread gloves.

"I hoped you were going to church," he said. "I wanted to walk with you."

"I am very much obliged to you," Gertrude answered. "I am not going to church."

She had shaken hands with him; he held her hand a moment. "Have you any special reason for not going?"

"Yes, Mr. Brand," said the young girl.

"May I ask what it is?"

She looked at him smiling; and in her smile, as I have intimated, there was a certain dullness. But mingled with this dullness was something sweet and suggestive. "Because the sky is so blue!" she said.

He looked at the sky, which was magnificent, and then said, smiling too, "I have heard of young ladies staying at home for bad weather, but never for good. Your sister, whom I met at the gate, tells me you are depressed," he added.

"Depressed? I am never depressed."

"Oh, surely, sometimes," replied Mr. Brand, as if he thought this a regrettable account of one's self.

"I am never depressed," Gertrude repeated. "But I am sometimes wicked. When I am wicked I am in high spirits. I was wicked just now to my sister."

"What did you do to her?"

"I said things that puzzled her—on purpose."

"Why did you do that, Miss Gertrude?" asked the young man.

She began to smile again. "Because the sky is so blue!"

"You say things that puzzle me," Mr. Brand declared.

"I always know when I do it," proceeded Gertrude. "But people puzzle me more, I think. And they don't seem to know!"

"This is very interesting," Mr. Brand observed, smiling.

"You told me to tell you about my—my struggles," the young girl went on.

"Let us talk about them. I have so many things to say."

Gertrude turned away a moment; and then, turning back, "You had better go to church," she said.

"You know," the young man urged, "that I have always one thing to say."

Gertrude looked at him a moment. "Please don't say it now!"

"We are all alone," he continued, taking off his hat; "all alone in this beautiful Sunday stillness."

Gertrude looked around her, at the breaking buds, the shining distance, the blue sky to which she had referred as a pretext for her irregularities. "That 's the reason," she said, "why I don't want you to speak. Do me a favor; go to church."

"May I speak when I come back?" asked Mr. Brand.

"If you are still disposed," she answered.

"I don't know whether you are wicked," he said, "but you are certainly puzzling."

She had turned away; she raised her hands to her ears. He looked at her a moment, and then he slowly walked to church.

She wandered for a while about the garden, vaguely and without purpose. The church-bell had stopped ringing; the stillness was complete. This young lady relished highly, on occasions, the sense of being alone—the absence of the whole family and the emptiness of the house. To-day, apparently, the servants had also gone to church; there was never a figure at the open windows; behind the house there was no stout

negress in a red turban, lowering the bucket into the great shingle-hooded well. And the front door of the big, unguarded home stood open, with the trustfulness of the golden age; or what is more to the purpose, with that of New England's silvery prime. Gertrude slowly passed through it, and went from one of the empty rooms to the other—large, clear-colored rooms, with white wainscots, ornamented with thin-legged mahogany furniture, and, on the walls, with old-fashioned engravings, chiefly of scriptural subjects, hung very high. This agreeable sense of solitude, of having the house to herself, of which I have spoken, always excited Gertrude's imagination; she could not have told you why, and neither can her humble historian. It always seemed to her that she must do something particular—that she must honor the occasion; and while she roamed about, wondering what she could do, the occasion usually came to an end. To-day she wondered more than ever. At last she took down a book; there was no library in the house, but there were books in all the rooms. None of them were forbidden books, and Gertrude had not stopped at home for the sake of a chance to climb to the inaccessible shelves. She possessed herself of a very obvious volume—one of the series of the Arabian Nights—and she brought it out into the portico and sat down with it in her lap. There, for a quarter of an hour, she read the history of the loves of the Prince Camaralzaman and the Princess Badoura. At last, looking up, she beheld, as it seemed to her, the Prince Camaralzaman standing before her. A beautiful young man was making her a very low bow—a magnificent bow, such as she had never seen before. He appeared to have dropped from the clouds; he was wonderfully handsome; he smiled—smiled as if he were smiling on purpose. Extreme surprise, for a moment, kept Gertrude sitting still; then she rose, without even keeping her finger in her book. The young man, with his hat in his hand, still looked at her, smiling and smiling. It was very strange.

"Will you kindly tell me," said the mysterious visitor, at last, "whether I have the honor of speaking to Miss Went-worth?"

"My name is Gertrude Wentworth," murmured the young woman.

"Then—then—I have the honor—the pleasure—of being your cousin."

The young man had so much the character of an apparition that this announcement seemed to complete his unreality. "What cousin? Who are you?" said Gertrude.

He stepped back a few paces and looked up at the house; then glanced round him at the garden and the distant view. After this he burst out laughing. "I see it must seem to you very strange," he said. There was, after all, something substantial in his laughter. Gertrude looked at him