

Pink and White Tyranny - A Society Novel

Harriet Beecher Stowe

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PINK AND WHITE TYRANNY.

A Society Novel

BY

MRS. HARRIET BEECHER STOWE

1871.

AUTHOR OF "UNCLE TOM'S CABIN," "THE MINISTER'S WOOING," ETC.

"Come, then, the colors and the ground prepare;
Dip in the rainbow, trick her off in air;
Choose a firm cloud before it fall, and in it
Catch, ere she change, the Cynthia of this minute."

POPE.

PREFACE.

My Dear Reader,--This story is not to be a novel, as the world understands the word; and we tell you so beforehand, lest you be in ill-humor by not finding what you expected. For if you have been told that your dinner is to be salmon and green pease, and made up your mind to that bill of fare, and then, on coming to the table, find that it is beefsteak and tomatoes, you may be out of sorts; not because beefsteak and tomatoes are not respectable viands, but because they are not what you have made up your mind to enjoy.

Now, a novel, in our days, is a three-story affair,--a complicated, complex, multiform composition, requiring no end of scenery and dramatis personae, and plot and plan, together with trap-doors, pit-falls, wonderful escapes and thrilling dangers; and the scenes transport one all over the earth,--to England, Italy, Switzerland, Japan, and Kamtschatka. But this is a little commonplace history, all about one man and one woman, living straight along in one little prosaic town in New England. It is, moreover, a story with a moral; and for fear that you shouldn't find out exactly what the moral is, we shall adopt the plan of the painter who wrote under his pictures, "This is a bear," and "This is a turtle-dove." We shall tell you in the proper time succinctly just what the moral is, and send you off edified as if you had been hearing a sermon. So please to call this little sketch a parable, and wait for the exposition thereof.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER

- I. FALLING IN LOVE
- II. WHAT SHE THINKS OF IT
- III. THE SISTER
- IV. PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE
- V. WEDDING, AND WEDDING-TRIP
- VI. HONEY-MOON, AND AFTER
- VII. WILL SHE LIKE IT?
- VIII. SPINDLEWOOD
- IX. A CRISIS
- X. CHANGES
- XI. NEWPORT; OR, THE PARADISE OF NOTHING TO DO
- XII. HOME A LA POMPADOUR
- XIII. JOHN'S BIRTHDAY
- XIV. A GREAT MORAL CONFLICT
- XV. THE FOLLINGSBEES ARRIVE
- XVI. MRS. JOHN SEYMOUR'S PARTY, AND WHAT CAME OF IT
- XVII. AFTER THE BATTLE
- XVIII. A BRICK TURNS UP
- XIX. THE CASTLE OF INDOLENCE

XX. THE VAN ASTRACHANS
XXI. MRS. FOLLINGSBEE'S PARTY, AND WHAT CAME OF IT
XXII. THE SPIDER-WEB BROKEN
XXIII. COMMON-SENSE ARGUMENTS
XXIV. SENTIMENT _v_ SENSIBILITY
XXV. WEDDING BELLS
XXVI. MOTHERHOOD
XXVII. CHECKMATE
XXVIII. AFTER THE STORM
XXIX. THE NEW LILLIE

CHAPTER I.

FALLING IN LOVE.

[Illustration: LILLIE.]

"Who is that beautiful creature?" said John Seymour, as a light, sylph-like form tripped up the steps of the veranda of the hotel where he was lounging away his summer vacation.

"That! Why, don't you know, man? That is the celebrated, the divine Lillie Ellis, the most adroit 'fisher of men' that has been seen in our days."

"By George, but she's pretty, though!" said John, following with enchanted eyes the distant motions of the sylphide.

The vision that he saw was of a delicate little fairy form; a complexion of pearly white, with a cheek of the hue of a pink shell; a fair, sweet, infantine face surrounded by a fleecy radiance of soft golden hair. The vision appeared to float in some white gauzy robes; and, when she spoke or smiled, what an innocent, fresh, untouched, unspoiled look there was upon the face! John gazed, and thought of all sorts of poetical similes: of a "daisy just wet with morning dew;" of a "violet by a mossy stone;" in short, of all the things that poets have made and provided for the use of young gentlemen in the way of falling in love.

This John Seymour was about as good and honest a man as there is going in this world of ours. He was a generous, just, manly, religious young fellow. He was heir to a large, solid property; he was a well-read lawyer, established in a flourishing business; he was a man that all the world spoke well of, and had cause to speak well of. The only duty to society which John had left as yet unperformed was that of matrimony. Three and thirty years had passed; and, with every advantage for supporting a wife, with a charming home all ready for a mistress, John, as yet, had not proposed to be the defender and provider for any of the more helpless portion of creation. The cause of this was, in the first place, that John was very happy in the society of a sister, a little older than himself, who managed his house admirably, and was a charming companion to his leisure hours; and, in the second place, that he had a secret, bashful self-depreciation in regard to his power of pleasing women, which made him ill at ease in their society. Not that he did not mean to marry.

He certainly did. But the fair being that he was to marry was a distant ideal, a certain undefined and cloudlike creature; and, up to this time, he had been waiting to meet her, without taking any definite steps towards that end. To say the truth, John Seymour, like many other outwardly solid, sober-minded, respectable citizens, had deep within himself a little private bit of romance. He could not utter it, he never talked it; he would have blushed and stammered and stuttered wofully, and made a very poor figure, in trying to tell any one about it; but nevertheless it was there, a secluded chamber of imagery, and the future Mrs. John Seymour formed its principal ornament.

The wife that John had imaged, his dream-wife, was not at all like his sister; though he loved his sister heartily, and thought her one of the best and noblest women that could possibly be.

But his sister was all plain prose,--good, strong, earnest, respectable prose, it is true, but yet prose. He could read English history with her, talk accounts and business with her, discuss politics with her, and valued her opinions on all these topics as much as that of any man of his acquaintance. But, with the visionary Mrs. John Seymour aforesaid, he never seemed to himself to be either reading history or settling accounts, or talking politics; he was off with her in some sort of enchanted cloudland of happiness, where she was all to him, and he to her,--a sort of rapture of protective love on one side, and of confiding devotion on the other, quite inexpressible, and that John would not have talked of for the world.

So when he saw this distant vision of airy gauzes, of pearly whiteness, of sea-shell pink, of infantine smiles, and waving, golden curls, he stood up with a shy desire to approach the wonderful creature, and yet with a sort of embarrassed feeling of being very awkward and clumsy. He felt, somehow, as if he were a great, coarse behemoth; his arms seemed to him awkward appendages; his hands suddenly appeared to him rough, and his fingers swelled and stumpy. When he thought of asking an introduction, he felt himself growing very hot, and blushing to the roots of his hair.

"Want to be introduced to her, Seymour?" said Carryl Ethridge. "I'll trot you up. I know her."

"No, thank you," said John, stiffly. In his heart, he felt an absurd anger at Carryl for the easy, assured way in which he spoke of the sacred creature who seemed to him something too divine to be lightly talked of. And then he saw, Carryl marching up to her with his air of easy assurance. He saw the bewitching smile come over that fair, flowery face; he saw Carryl, with unabashed familiarity, take her fan out of her hand, look at it as if it were a mere common, earthly fan, toss it about, and pretend to fan himself with it.

"I didn't know he was such a puppy!" said John to himself, as he stood in a sort of angry bashfulness, envying the man that was so familiar with that loveliness.

[Illustration: "I didn't know he was such a puppy."]

Ah! John, John! You wouldn't, for the world, have told to man or woman what a fool you were at that moment.

"What a fool I am!" was his mental commentary: "just as if it was any thing to me." And he turned, and walked to the other end of the veranda.

"I think you've hooked another fish, Lillie," said Belle Trevors in the ear of the little divinity.

"Who...?"

"Why! that Seymour there, at the end of the veranda. He is looking at you, do you know? He is rich, very rich, and of an old family. Didn't you see how he started and looked after you when you came up on the veranda?"

"Oh! I saw plain enough," said the divinity, with one of her unconscious, baby-like smiles.

"What are you ladies talking?" said Carryl Ethridge.

"Oh, secrets!" said Belle Trevors. "You are very presuming, sir, to inquire."

"Mr. Ethridge," said Lillie Ellis, "don't you think it would be nice to promenade?"

This was said with such a pretty coolness, such a quiet composure, as showed Miss Lillie to be quite mistress of the situation; there was, of course, no sort of design in it.

Ethridge offered his arm at once; and the two sauntered to the end of the veranda, where John Seymour was standing.

The blood rushed in hot currents over him, and he could hear the beating of his heart: he felt somehow as if the hour of his fate was coming. He had a wild desire to retreat, and put it off. He looked over the end of the veranda, with some vague idea of leaping it; but alas! it was ten feet above ground, and a lover's leap would have only ticketed him as out of his head. There was nothing for it but to meet his destiny like a man.

Carryl came up with the lady on his arm; and as he stood there for a moment, in the coolest, most indifferent tone in the world, said, "Oh! by the by, Miss Ellis, let me present my friend Mr. Seymour."

[Illustration: "Let me present my friend, Mr. Seymour."]

The die was cast.

John's face burned like fire: he muttered something about "being happy to make Miss Ellis's acquaintance," looking all the time as if he would be glad to jump over the railing, or take wings and fly, to get rid of the happiness.

Miss Ellis was a belle by profession, and she understood her business perfectly. In nothing did she show herself master of her craft, more than in the adroitness with which she could soothe the bashful pangs of new votaries, and place them on an easy footing with her.

"Mr. Seymour," she said affably, "to tell the truth, I have been

desirous of the honor of your acquaintance, ever since I saw you in the breakfast-room this morning."

"I am sure I am very much flattered," said John, his heart beating thick and fast. "May I ask why you honor me with such a wish?"

"Well, to tell the truth, because you strikingly resemble a very dear friend of mine," said Miss Ellis, with her sweet, unconscious simplicity of manner.

"I am still more flattered," said John, with a quicker beating of the heart; "only I fear that you may find me an unpleasant contrast."

"Oh! I think not," said Lillie, with another smile: "we shall soon be good friends, too, I trust."

"I trust so certainly," said John, earnestly.

Belle Trevors now joined the party; and the four were soon chatting together on the best footing of acquaintance. John was delighted to feel himself already on easy terms with the fair vision.

"You have not been here long?" said Lillie to John.

"No, I have only just arrived."

"And you were never here before?"

"No, Miss Ellis, I am entirely new to the place."

"I am an old _habitué_ here," said Lillie, "and can recommend myself as authority on all points connected with it."

"Then," said John, "I hope you will take me under your tuition."

"Certainly, free of charge," she said, with another ravishing smile.

"You haven't seen the boiling spring yet?" she added.

"No, I haven't seen any thing yet."

"Well, then, if you'll give me your arm across the lawn, I'll show it to you."

All of this was done in the easiest, most matter-of-course manner in the world; and off they started, John in a flutter of flattered delight at the gracious acceptance accorded to him.

Ethridge and Belle Trevors looked after them with a nod of intelligence at each other.

"Hooked, by George!" said Ethridge.

"Well, it'll be a good thing for Lillie, won't it?"

"For her? Oh, yes, a capital thing _for her_!"

"Well, for _him_ too."

"Well, I don't know. John is a pretty nice fellow; a very nice fellow, besides being rich, and all that; and Lillie is somewhat shop-worn by this time. Let me see: she must be seven and twenty."

"Oh, yes, she's all that!" said Belle, with ingenuous ardor. "Why, she was in society while I was a schoolgirl! Yes, dear Lillie is certainly twenty-seven, if not more; but she keeps her freshness wonderfully."

"Well, she looks fresh enough, I suppose, to a good, honest, artless fellow like John Seymour, who knows as little of the world as a milkmaid. John is a great, innocent, country steer, fed on clover and dew; and as honest and ignorant of all sorts of naughty, wicked things as his mother or sister. He takes Lillie in a sacred simplicity quite refreshing; but to me Lillie is played out. I know her like a book. I know all her smiles and wiles, advices and devices; and her system of tactics is an old story with me. I shan't interrupt any of her little games. Let her have her little field all to herself: it's time she was married, to be sure."

Meanwhile, John was being charmingly ciceroned by Lillie, and scarcely knew whether he was in the body or out. All that he felt, and felt with a sort of wonder, was that he seemed to be acceptable and pleasing in the eyes of this little fairy, and that she was leading him into wonderland.

They went not only to the boiling spring, but up and down so many wild, woodland paths that had been cut for the adornment of the Carmel Springs, and so well pleased were both parties, that it was supper-time before they reappeared on the lawn; and, when they did appear, Lillie was leaning confidentially on John's arm, with a wreath of woodbine in her hair that he had arranged there, wondering all the while at his own wonderful boldness, and at the grace of the fair entertainer.

[Illustration: "Lillie was leaning confidentially on John's arm."]

The returning couple were seen from the windows of Mrs. Chit, who sat on the lookout for useful information; and who forthwith ran to the apartments of Mrs. Chat, and told her to look out at them.

Billy This, who was smoking his cigar on the veranda, immediately ran and called Harry That to look at them, and laid a bet at once that Lillie had "hooked" Seymour.

"She'll have him, by George, she will!"

"Oh, pshaw! she is always hooking fellows, but you see she don't get married," said matter-of-fact Harry. "It won't come to any thing, now, I'll bet. Everybody said she was engaged to Danforth, but it all ended in smoke."

Whether it would be an engagement, or would all end in smoke, was the talk of Carmel Springs for the next two weeks.

At the end of that time, the mind of Carmel Springs was relieved by the announcement that it was an engagement.

The important deciding announcement was first authentically made by Lillie to Belle Trevors, who had been invited into her room that night

for the purpose.

"Well, Belle, it's all over. He spoke out to-night."

"He offered himself?"

"Certainly."

"And you took him?"

"Of course I did: I should be a fool not to."

"Oh, so I think, decidedly!" said Belle, kissing her friend in a rapture. "You dear creature! how nice! it's splendid!"

Lillie took the embrace with her usual sweet composure, and turned to her looking-glass, and began taking down her hair for the night. It will be perceived that this young lady was not overcome with emotion, but in a perfectly collected state of mind.

"He's a little bald, and getting rather stout," she said reflectively, "but he'll do."

"I never saw a creature so dead in love as he is," said Belle.

A quiet smile passed over the soft, peach-blow cheeks as Lillie answered,--

"Oh, dear, yes! He perfectly worships the ground I tread on."

"Lil, you fortunate creature, you! Positively it's the best match that there has been about here this summer. He's rich, of an old, respectable family; and then he has good principles, you know, and all that," said Belle.

"I think he's nice myself," said Lillie, as she stood brushing out a golden tangle of curls. "Dear me!" she added, "how much better he is than that Danforth! Really, Danforth was a little too horrid: his teeth were dreadful. Do you know, I should have had something of a struggle to take him, though he was so terribly rich? Then Danforth had been horridly dissipated,--you don't know,--Maria Sanford told me such shocking things about him, and she knows they are true. Now, I don't think John has ever been dissipated."

[Illustration: "I think he's nice myself."]

"Oh, no!" said Belle. "I heard all about him. He joined the church when he was only twenty, and has been always spoken of as a perfect model. I only think you may find it a little slow, living in Springdale. He has a fine, large, old-fashioned house there, and his sister is a very nice woman; but they are a sort of respectable, retired set,--never go into fashionable company."

"Oh, I don't mind it!" said Lillie. "I shall have things my own way, I know. One isn't obliged to live in Springdale, nor with pokey old sisters, you know; and John will do just as I say, and live where I please."

She said this with her simple, soft air of perfect assurance, twisting

her shower of bright, golden curls; with her gentle, childlike face, and soft, beseeching, blue eyes, and dimpling little mouth, looking back on her, out of the mirror. By these the little queen had always ruled from her cradle, and should she not rule now? Was it any wonder that John was half out of his wits with joy at thought of possessing _her_? Simply and honestly, she thought not. He was to be congratulated; though it wasn't a bad thing for her, either.

"Belle," said Lillie, after an interval of reflection, "I won't be married in white satin,--that I'm resolved on. Now," she said, facing round with increasing earnestness, "there have been five weddings in our set, and all the girls have been married in just the same dress,--white satin and point lace, white satin and point lace, over and over, till I'm tired of it. _I'm_ determined I'll have something new."

"Well, I would, I'm sure," said Belle. "Say white tulle, for instance: you know you are so _petite_ and fairy-like."

"No: I shall write out to Madame La Roche, and tell her she must get up something wholly original. I shall send for my whole _trousseau_. Papa will be glad enough to come down, since he gets me off his hands, and no more fuss about bills, you know. Do you know, Belle, that creature is just wild about me: he'd like to ransack all the jewellers' shops in New York for me. He's going up to-morrow, just to choose the engagement ring. He says he can't trust to an order; that he must go and choose one worthy of me."

"Oh! it's plain enough that that game is all in your hands, as to him, Lillie; but, Lil, what will your Cousin Harry say to all this?"

"Well, of course he won't like it; but I can't help it if he don't. Harry ought to know that it's all nonsense for him and me to think of marrying. He does know it."

"To tell the truth, I always thought, Lil, you were more in love with Harry than anybody you ever knew."

Lillie laughed a little, and then the prettiest sweet-pea flush deepened the pink of her cheeks.

"To say the truth, Belle, I could have been, if he had been in circumstances to marry. But, you see, I am one of those to whom the luxuries are essential. I never could rub and scrub and work; in fact, I had rather not live at all than live poor; and Harry is poor, and he always will be poor. It's a pity, too, poor fellow, for he's nice. Well, he is off in India! I know he will be tragical and gloomy, and all that," she said; and then the soft child-face smiled to itself in the glass,--such a pretty little innocent smile!

All this while, John sat up with his heart beating very fast, writing all about his engagement to his sister, and, up to this point, his nearest, dearest, most confidential friend. It is almost too bad to copy the letter of a shy man who finds himself in love for the first time in his life; but we venture to make an extract:--

"It is not her beauty merely that drew me to her, though she is the most beautiful human being I ever saw: it is the exquisite feminine softness and delicacy of her character, that sympathetic pliability by

which she adapts herself to every varying feeling of the heart. You, my dear sister, are the noblest of women, and your place in my heart is still what it always was; but I feel that this dear little creature, while she fills a place no other has ever entered, will yet be a new bond to unite us. She will love us both; she will gradually come into all our ways and opinions, and be insensibly formed by us into a noble womanhood. Her extreme beauty, and the great admiration that has always followed her, have exposed her to many temptations, and caused most ungenerous things to be said of her.

"Hitherto she has lived only in the fashionable world; and her literary and domestic education, as she herself is sensible, has been somewhat neglected.

"But she longs to retire from all this; she is sick of fashionable folly, and will come to us to be all our own. Gradually the charming circle of cultivated families which form our society will elevate her taste, and form her mind.

"Love is woman's inspiration, and love will lead her to all that is noble and good. My dear sister, think not that any new ties are going to make you any less to me, or touch your place in my heart. I have already spoken of you to Lillie, and she longs to know you. You must be to her what you have always been to me,--guide, philosopher, and friend.

"I am sure I never felt better impulses, more humble, more thankful, more religious, than I do now. That the happiness of this soft, gentle, fragile creature is to be henceforth in my hands is to me a solemn and inspiring thought. What man is worthy of a refined, delicate woman? I feel my unworthiness of her every hour; but, so help me God, I shall try to be all to her that a husband should; and you, my sister, I know, will help me to make happy the future which she so confidently trusts to me.

"Believe me, dear sister, I never was so much your affectionate brother,

"John SEYMOUR.

"P.S.--I forgot to tell you that Lillie remarkably resembles the ivory miniature of our dear sainted mother. She was very much affected when I told her of it. I think naturally Lillie has very much such a character as our mother; though circumstances, in her case, have been unfavorable to the development of it."

Whether the charming vision was realized; whether the little sovereign now enthroned will be a just and clement one; what immunities and privileges she will allow to her slaves,--is yet to be seen in this story.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT SHE THINKS OF IT.

Springdale was one of those beautiful rural towns whose flourishing aspect is a striking exponent of the peculiarities of New-England life. The ride through it presents a refreshing picture of wide, cool, grassy streets, overhung with green arches of elm, with rows of large, handsome houses on either side, each standing back from the street in its own retired square of gardens, green turf, shady trees, and flowering shrubs. It was, so to speak, a little city of country-seats. It spoke of wealth, thrift, leisure, cultivation, quiet, thoughtful habits, and moral tastes.

Some of these mansions were of ancestral reputation, and had been in the family whose name they bore for generations back; a circumstance sometimes occurring even in New-England towns where neither law nor custom unites to perpetuate property in certain family lines.

The Seymour house was a well-known, respected mansion for generations back. Old Judge Seymour, the grandfather, was the lineal descendant of Parson Seymour; the pastor who first came with the little colony of Springdale, when it was founded as a church in the wilderness, amid all the dangers of wild beasts and Indians.

This present Seymour mansion was founded on the spot where the house of the first minister was built by the active hands of his parishioners; and, from generation to generation, order, piety, education, and high respectability had been the tradition of the place.

The reader will come in with us, on this bright June morning, through the grassy front yard, which has only the usual New-England fault of being too densely shaded. The house we enter has a wide, cool hall running through its centre and out into a back garden, now all aglow with every beauty of June. The broad alleys of the garden showed bright stores of all sorts of good old-fashioned flowers, well tended and kept. Clumps of stately hollyhocks and scarlet peonies; roses of every hue, purple, blush, gold-color, and white, were showering down their leaves on the grassy turf; honeysuckles climbed and clambered over arbors; and great, stately tufts of virgin-white lilies exalted their majestic heads in saintly magnificence. The garden was Miss Grace Seymour's delight and pride. Every root in it was fragrant with the invisible blossoms of memory,--memories of the mother who loved and planted and watched them before her, and the grandmother who had cared for them before that. The spirit of these charming old-fashioned gardens is the spirit of family love; and, if ever blessed souls from their better home feel drawn back to any thing on earth, we think it must be to their flower-garden.

Miss Grace had been up early, and now, with her garden hat on, and scissors in hand, was coming up the steps with her white apron full of roses, white lilies, meadow-sweets, and honeysuckle, for the parlor-vases, when the servant handed her a letter.

"From John," she said, "good fellow;" and then she laid it on the mantel-shelf of the parlor, while she busied herself in arranging her flowers.

[Illustration: "From John, good fellow."]

"I must get these into water, or they will wilt," she said.

The large parlor was like many that you and I have seen in a certain respectable class of houses,--wide, cool, shady, and with a mellow _old_ tone to every thing in its furniture and belongings. It was a parlor of the past, and not of to-day, yet exquisitely neat and well-kept. The Turkey carpet was faded: it had been part of the wedding furnishing of Grace's mother, years ago. The great, wide, motherly, chintz-covered sofa, which filled a recess commanding the window, was as different as possible from any smart modern article of the name. The heavy, claw-footed, mahogany chairs; the tall clock that ticked in one corner; the footstools and ottomans in faded embroidery,--all spoke of days past. So did the portraits on the wall. One was of a fair, rosy young girl, in a white gown, with powdered hair dressed high over a cushion. It was the portrait of Grace's mother. Another was that of a minister in gown and bands, with black-silk gloved hands holding up conspicuously a large Bible. This was the remote ancestor, the minister. Then there was the picture of John's father, placed lovingly where the eyes seemed always to be following the slight, white-robed figure of the young wife. The walls were papered with an old-fashioned paper of a peculiar pattern, bought in France seventy-five years before. The vases of India-china that adorned the mantels, the framed engravings of architecture and pictures in Rome, all were memorials of the taste of those long passed away. Yet the room had a fresh, sweet, sociable air. The roses and honeysuckles looked in at the windows; the table covered with books and magazines, and the familiar work-basket of Miss Grace, with its work, gave a sort of impression of modern family household life. It was a wide, open, hospitable, generous-minded room, that seemed to breathe a fragrance of invitation and general sociability; it was a room full of associations and memories, and its daily arrangement and ornamentation made one of the pleasant tasks of Miss Grace's life.

She spread down a newspaper on the large, square centre-table, and, emptying her apronful of flowers upon it, took her vases from the shelf, and with her scissors sat down to the task of clipping and arranging them.

Just then Letitia Ferguson came across the garden, and entered the back door after her, with a knot of choice roses in her hand, and a plate of seed-cakes covered with a hem-stitched napkin. The Fergusons and the Seymours occupied adjoining houses, and were on footing of the most perfect undress intimacy. They crossed each other's gardens, and came without knocking into each other's doors twenty times a day, _apropos_ to any bit of chit-chat that they might have, a question to ask, a passage in a book to show, a household receipt that they had been trying. Letitia was the most intimate and confidential friend of Grace. In fact, the whole Ferguson family seemed like another portion of the Seymour family. There were two daughters, of whom Letitia was the eldest. Then came the younger Rose, a nice, charming, well-informed, good girl, always cheerful and chatty, and with a decent share of ability at talking lively nonsense. The brothers of the family, like the young men of New-England country towns generally, were off in the world seeking their fortunes. Old Judge Ferguson was a gentleman of the old school,--formal, stately, polite, always complimentary to ladies, and with a pleasant little budget of old-gentlemanly hobbies and prejudices, which it afforded him the greatest pleasure to air in the society of his friends. Old Mrs. Ferguson was a pattern of motherliness, with her quaint, old-fashioned dress, her elaborate caps, her daily and minute inquiries after the health of all her acquaintances, and the tender pityingness of her

nature for every thing that lived and breathed in this world of sin and sorrow.

Letitia and Grace, as two older sisters of families, had a peculiar intimacy, and discussed every thing together, from the mode of clearing jelly up to the profoundest problems of science and morals. They were both charming, well-mannered, well-educated, well-read women, and trusted each other to the uttermost with every thought and feeling and purpose of their hearts.

As we have said, Letitia Ferguson came in at the back door without knocking, and, coming softly behind Miss Grace, laid down her bunch of roses among the flowers, and then set down her plate of seed-cakes.

Then she said, "I brought you some specimens of my Souvenir de Malmaison bush, and my first trial of your receipt."

"Oh, thanks!" said Miss Grace: "how charming those roses are! It was too bad to spoil your bush, though."

"No: it does it good to cut them; it will flower all the more. But try one of those cakes,--are they right?"

"Excellent! you have hit it exactly," said Grace; "exactly the right proportion of seeds. I was hurrying," she added, "to get these flowers in water, because a letter from John is waiting to be read."

"A letter! How nice!" said Miss Letitia, looking towards the shelf. "John is as faithful in writing as if he were your lover."

"He is the best lover a woman can have," said Grace, as she busily sorted and arranged the flowers. "For my part, I ask nothing better than John."

"Let me arrange for you, while you read your letter," said Letitia, taking the flowers from her friend's hands.

Miss Grace took down the letter from the mantelpiece, opened, and began to read it. Miss Letitia, meanwhile, watched her face, as we often carelessly watch the face of a person reading a letter.

Miss Grace was not technically handsome, but she had an interesting, kindly, sincere face; and her friend saw gradually a dark cloud rising over it, as one watches a shadow on a field.

When she had finished the letter, with a sudden movement she laid her head forward on the table among the flowers, and covered her face with her hands. She seemed not to remember that any one was present.

[Illustration: "She laid her head forward on the table."]

Letitia came up to her, and, laying her hand gently on hers, said, "What is it, dear?"

Miss Grace lifted her head, and said in a husky voice,--

"Nothing, only it is so sudden! John is engaged!"

"Engaged! to whom?"

"To Lillie Ellis."

"John engaged to Lillie Ellis?" said Miss Ferguson, in a tone of shocked astonishment.

"So he writes me. He is completely infatuated by her."

"How very sudden!" said Miss Letitia. "Who could have expected it? Lillie Ellis is so entirely out of the line of any of the women he has ever known."

"That's precisely what's the matter," said Miss Grace. "John knows nothing of any but good, noble women; and he thinks he sees all this in Lillie Ellis."

"There's nothing to her but her wonderful complexion," said Miss Ferguson, "and her pretty little coaxing ways; but she is the most utterly selfish, heartless little creature that ever breathed."

"Well, she is to be John's wife," said Miss Grace, sweeping the remainder of the flowers into her apron; "and so ends my life with John. I might have known it would come to this. I must make arrangements at once for another house and home. This house, so much, so dear to me, will be nothing to her; and yet she must be its mistress," she added, looking round on every thing in the room, and then bursting into tears.

Now, Miss Grace was not one of the crying sort, and so this emotion went to her friend's heart. Miss Letitia went up and put her arms round her.

"Come, Gracie," she said, "you must not take it so seriously. John is a noble, manly fellow. He loves you, and he will always be master of his own house."

"No, he won't,--no married man ever is," said Miss Grace, wiping her eyes, and sitting up very straight. "No man, that is a gentleman, is ever master in his own house. He has only such rights there as his wife chooses to give him; and this woman won't like me, I'm sure."

"Perhaps she will," said Letitia, in a faltering voice.

"No, she won't; because I have no faculty for lying, or playing the hypocrite in any way, and I shan't approve of her. These soft, slippery, pretty little fibbing women have always been my abomination."

"Oh, my dear Grace!" said Miss Ferguson, "do let us make the best of it."

"I did think," said Miss Grace, wiping her eyes, "that John had some sense. I wasn't such a fool, nor so selfish, as to want him always to live for me. I wanted him to marry; and if he had got engaged to your Rose, for instance ... O Letitia! I always did so hope that he and Rose would like each other."

"We can't choose for our brothers," said Miss Letitia, "and, hard as

it is, we must make up our minds to love those they bring to us. Who knows what good influences may do for poor Lillie Ellis? She never has had any yet. Her family are extremely common sort of people, without any culture or breeding, and only her wonderful beauty brought them into notice; and they have always used that as a sort of stock in trade."

"And John says, in this letter, that she reminds him of our mother," said Miss Grace; "and he thinks that naturally she was very much such a character. Just think of that, now!"

"He must be far gone," said Miss Ferguson; "but then, you see, she is distractingly pretty. She has just the most exquisitely pearly, pure, delicate, saint-like look, at times, that you ever saw; and then she knows exactly how she does look, and just how to use her looks; and John can't be blamed for believing in her. I, who know all about her, am sometimes taken in by her."

"Well," said Miss Grace, "Mrs. Lennox was at Newport last summer at the time that she was there, and she told me all about her. I think her an artful, unscrupulous, unprincipled woman, and her being made mistress of this house just breaks up our pleasant sociable life here. She has no literary tastes; she does not care for reading or study; she won't like our set here, and she will gradually drive them from the house. She won't like me, and she will want to alienate John from me,--so there is just the situation."

"You may read that letter," added Miss Grace, wiping her eyes, and tossing her brother's letter into Miss Letitia's lap. Miss Letitia took the letter and read it. "Good fellow!" she exclaimed warmly, "you see just what I say,--his heart is all with you."

"Oh, John's heart is all light enough!" said Miss Grace; "and I don't doubt his love. He's the best, noblest, most affectionate fellow in the world. I only think he reckons without his host, in thinking he can keep all our old relations unbroken, when he puts a new mistress into the house, and such a mistress."

"But if she really loves him"--

"Pshaw! she don't. That kind of woman can't love. They are like cats, that want to be stroked and caressed, and to be petted, and to lie soft and warm; and they will purr to any one that will pet them,--that's all. As for love that leads to any self-sacrifice, they don't begin to know any thing about it."

"Gracie dear," said Miss Ferguson, "this sort of thing will never do. If you meet your brother in this way, you will throw him off, and, maybe, make a fatal breach. Meet it like a good Christian, as you are. You know," she said gently, "where we have a right to carry our troubles, and of whom we should ask guidance."

"Oh, I do know, 'Titia!" said Miss Grace; "but I am letting myself be wicked just a little, you know, to relieve my mind. I ought to put myself to school to make the best of it; but it came on me so very suddenly. Yes," she added, "I am going to take a course of my Bible and Fenelon before I see John,--poor fellow."

"And try to have faith for her," said Miss Letitia.

"Well, I'll try to have faith," said Miss Grace; "but I do trust it will be some days before John comes down on me with his raptures,--men in love are such fools."

"But, dear me!" said Miss Letitia, as her head accidentally turned towards the window; "who is this riding up? Gracie, as sure as you live, it is John himself!"

"John himself!" repeated Miss Grace, becoming pale.

"Now do, dear, be careful," said Miss Letitia. "I'll just run out this back door and leave you alone;" and just as Miss Letitia's light heels were heard going down the back steps, John's heavy footsteps were coming up the front ones.

CHAPTER III.

THE SISTER.

Grace Seymour was a specimen of a class of whom we are happy to say New England possesses a great many.

She was a highly cultivated, intelligent, and refined woman, arrived at the full age of mature womanhood unmarried, and with no present thought or prospect of marriage. I presume all my readers, who are in a position to run over the society of our rural New-England towns, can recall to their minds hundreds of such. They are women too thoughtful, too conscientious, too delicate, to marry for any thing but a purely personal affection; and this affection, for various reasons, has not fallen in their way.

The tendency of life in these towns is to throw the young men of the place into distant fields of adventure and enterprise in the far Western and Southern States, leaving at their old homes a population in which the feminine element largely predominates. It is not, generally speaking, the most cultivated or the most attractive of the brethren who remain in the place where they were born. The ardent, the daring, the enterprising, are off to the ends of the earth; and the choice of the sisters who remain at home is, therefore, confined to a restricted list; and so it ends in these delightful rose-gardens of single women which abound in New England,--women who remain at home as housekeepers to aged parents, and charming persons in society; women over whose graces of conversation and manner the married men in their vicinity go off into raptures of eulogium, which generally end with, "Why hasn't that woman ever got married?"

It often happens to such women to expend on some brother that stock of hero-worship and devotion which it has not come in their way to give to a nearer friend. Alas! it is building on a sandy foundation; for, just as the union of hearts is complete, the chemical affinity which began in the cradle, and strengthens with every year of life, is dissolved by the introduction of that third element which makes of the brother a husband, while the new combination casts out the old,--sometimes with a disagreeable effervescence.

John and Grace Seymour were two only children of a very affectionate family; and they had grown up in the closest habits of intimacy. They had written to each other those long letters in which thoughtful people who live in retired situations delight; letters not of outward events, but of sentiments and opinions, the phases of the inner life. They had studied and pursued courses of reading together. They had together organized and carried on works of benevolence and charity.

The brother and sister had been left joint heirs of a large manufacturing property, employing hundreds of hands, in their vicinity; and the care and cultivation of these work-people, the education of their children, had been most conscientiously upon their minds. Half of every Sunday they devoted together to labors in the Sunday school of their manufacturing village; and the two worked so harmoniously together in the interests of their life, that Grace had never felt the want of any domestic ties or relations other than those that she had.

Our readers may perhaps, therefore, concede that, among the many claimants for their sympathy in this cross-grained world of ours, some few grains of it may properly be due to Grace.

Things are trials that try us: afflictions are what afflict us; and, under this showing, Grace was both tried and afflicted by the sudden engagement of her brother. When the whole groundwork on which one's daily life is built caves in, and falls into the cellar without one moment's warning, it is not in human nature to pick one's self up, and reconstruct and rearrange in a moment. So Grace thought, at any rate; but she made a hurried effort to dash back her tears, and gulp down a rising in her throat, anxious only not to be selfish, and not to disgust her brother in the outset with any personal egotism.

So she ran to the front door to meet him, and fell into his arms, trying so hard to seem congratulatory and affectionate that she broke out into sobbing.

"My dear Gracie," said John, embracing and kissing her with that gushing fervor with which newly engaged gentlemen are apt to deluge every creature whom they meet, "you've got my letter. Well, were not you astonished?"

"O John, it was so sudden!" was all poor Grace could say. "And you know, John, since mother died, you and I have been all in all to each other."

"And so we shall be, Gracie. Why, yes, of course we shall," he said, stroking her hair, and playing with her trembling, thin, white hands. "Why, this only makes me love you the more now; and you will love my little Lillie: fact is, you can't help it. We shall both of us be happier for having her here."

"Well, you know, John, I never saw her," said Grace, deprecatingly, "and so you can't wonder."

"Oh, yes, of course! Don't wonder in the least. It comes rather sudden,—and then you haven't seen her. Look, here is her photograph!" said John, producing one from the most orthodox innermost region, directly over his heart. "Look there! isn't it beautiful?"

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