

dark-eyed beauty closed the door. She carried me very cautiously, looking down wonderingly at me, and doubtless reading the name on my wrapper. Slowly she entered the room from whose window the firelight had shone. By the cheerful grate sat an elderly lady of, perhaps, forty-five, and at a table near the window the same Miss Merton I had seen at Mr. Harris'. As she sat sewing, the warm light falling on her face, I did not wonder Reginald Leigh loved her; I thought what a different man he would be if he could come home when his day's work was ended, and find such a woman waiting for him; he would not, could not, stay out until midnight damps were falling, or come home wretched and guilty as he had done that first night I watched him from my quiet corner.

"Mabel, Mabel, see here!" exclaimed my bearer as she entered the room, "a Christmas box for you, for 'Miss Mabel Merton with Santa Claus' best wishes." "Oh! Mabel, quick, look and see what it is!" and she placed me in Miss Merton's lap. With quick fingers Mabel untied the string and disclosed me to the view of her mother and sister (for such I supposed the other two ladies were).

"Oh! Mamma, Kate, a sewing-machine! just what I wanted so much; just look!"

"What a little darling!" exclaimed Kate, "I wonder who could have sent it to you."

For the first time the idea seemed to occur to Mabel, and she lifted her deep blue eyes to her sister's face wonderingly; then a thought seemed to strike her, and she bent over me to hide the quick color that mounted to her cheeks, and I felt her hand tremble as it rested on me. This did not escape Mrs. Merton, who had hitherto been a silent observer, and she turned away coldly as she said:

"I don't see who had the impudence to send you such an article; I consider it a perfect insult, and, for my part, would throw it into the street before I would condescend to use it."

"Oh! no, mamma, surely not. If I knew who had sent it, I might return it; but as it is I do not, cannot, think it wrong to use it, especially as I need it much."

"I should think not," said Kate, with a

toss of her head; "I would only be too glad to get it."

"Well, you must do as you please," returned her mother, "my opinion has seldom any weight with you; but I must confess I do wonder sometimes if either of you have any pride, it was always so different among any of my family."

"Perhaps they had more to keep up their pride with than we have," replied saucy Kate.

"But come, Mabel, do let us try your machine." The two girls were soon bending over me so closely, I could feel their soft breath, and Kate's curls brushed against me. One moment they were consulting the book of directions, the next, endeavoring to turn said directions to practical use. By the time twilight was creeping on, Mabel had almost mastered all difficulties, while Kate's decision was, she would leave it all to Mabel, "it was such a bother;" so off she went "to see about tea," she said, for she was bound to have something unusually nice, as it was Christmas.

Left alone with her mother, Mabel was very silent. She knew that to refer to her new possession would but provoke unpleasant remarks, and so she sat in the deepening gloom, passing her soft-little hand slowly over me, with a sort of gentle caress which was very sweet to feel. I was almost sure, as I felt her soft touch, that she did guess who was the donor of her Christmas gift, and that she loved me for the giver's sake.

By and by, Kate came knocking at the door, bearing a tray loaded with good things. The lamp light seemed dazzling after the dim grey light, and Mabel shaded her eyes with her hand, and heaved a little sigh, as if regretful of the stir and light that chased her dreams away. As I watched the three seated round the little round table, Mabel so sweet, so calm; Kate so joyous and bright; Mrs. Merton so lady-like, so dignified, I thought how happy they might be if only that mother was more gentle and loving, more genial and sympathizing.

Ah! the skeleton that is hid away in every family closet was here too, even