

as kind—oh! a deal kinder than Uncle Joseph does. And he told me the names of some of the rarest flowers, and offered to lend me books out of the grand library. But Mrs. Perkins told Aunt Betsey that I am too idle and awkward for service. So now I don't know whether I am to be bound to Miss Miggs, the dressmaker, or sent to learn the artificial flower trade."

"It's most a pity, ain't it?" said Mrs. Barnes, looking sympathizingly at Elsie. And just then, as she surveyed the large dark eyes, the cheeks glowing scarlet under their stain of gypsy sunburn, the

lithe, graceful figure in its outgrown gown, the fancy suddenly crossed her mind that, under some circumstances, Elsie Linn might be almost handsome.

"You see, I have no one really belonging to me," said Elsie, sighing. "Even Uncle Joseph was only my mother's half-brother. And they don't know what to do with me."

"What would you like best to do?" said Mrs. Barnes, who was paring potatoes for the one o'clock dinner.

"I should like to be an authoress, and write books," said Elsie, with kindling eyes.

"Bless me, child!" said Mrs. Barnes, "what do you know about authoresses?"

"Nothing," confessed Elsie; "that's the trouble. Or I should like to paint pictures, and to be famous; or be queen of a country that was at war, and lead the soldiers to victory, mounted on a coal-black horse; or do something very great and grand, so that people might never forget my memory."

Mrs. Barnes first started and then sighed. Poor soul, there was perhaps a time when she, too, had her wild dreams and impossible imaginings.

"Such things don't happen nowadays, Elsie," said she. "Women have to scrub, and wash and sew in this country, not ride to battle or paint grand pictures. Better leave off thinking of such a fate."

"Yes," cried Elsie, with a start, as the clock struck twelve. "And Aunt Betsey will be wanting me to set the table. I must hurry home. How she will scold to be sure."

But to Elsie's infinite relief, when she reached home, Aunt Betsey met her with no frown.

"Come in quick, child," said she, "and change your frock. Mr. Raven is here."

"Oh!" cried Elsie, with a skip over

the door-step, "am I to be Mrs. Ferkin's maid?"

"We don't know," said Aunt Betsey mysteriously. "Time will show. Don't jump about, my child. Try to take short steps, and be a lady. And, oh, what a dreadful tear that is in your dress. Never mind now. Run quick and change it as soon as ever you can, and then come down to the best parlor."

But long before Elsie Linn's simple toilet was made, an awful fear took possession of her that Squire Raven had come to tell Uncle Joseph of the big bunch of hot-house grapes which she picked, *sub rosa*, last spring and gave to little Billy Sniffen, in the road, the last day she was at the Manor House.

"There were such lots of them," she argued with herself, "haaging there in the sunshine, all purple and fragrant, and Billy had just got over the scarlet fever—poor little mite!—and did long for them so. I knew it was wicked, but the temptation came over me so suddenly that I couldn't help it. And now if Mr. Raven has told Uncle Joseph, and Uncle Joseph is going to scold me—"

Elsie drew a deep inspiration of horror at this idea, but she must face her fate, and endure it as best she might. And in her best frock, which was scant and faded enough in all conscience, she descended with a heavy heart to the "best room."

"Bring her in! Bring her in!" said Uncle Joseph with a chuckle. "I never yet sold even a yearling calf without giving the purchaser a chance to look at his bargain—ha, ha, ha! And if you really want the child, Squire—"

Mr. Raven rose courteously and put a chair for Elsie as she entered, with drooping head and cheeks aflame.

"We are old friends," he said; "are we not?"

At the sound of his gentle, measured accents, the prickings of Elsie Linn's conscience became intolerable. She lifted her large startled eyes to Mr. Raven's face.

"I'm very sorry, sir," said she. "Please, I'll never do it any more."

"Do what?" said Uncle Joseph, staring.

"I am quite at a loss to understand you," said Mr. Raven courteously.

"The grapes, please," faltered Elsie, getting redder and more confused than ever. "I didn't pick 'em for myself; it was for little Billy Sniffen, and—"

"Never mind the grapes, Elsie," said