

After the family had gone to bed, Mary and Davy Cranston stole back into the living-room, and quietly blowing up the fire, put on fresh sticks. They sat down before it, nursing their knees. Nowadays there was a stronger bond than ever between Mary and Davy. In that disorganized household in the winter this was the only chance they had to talk together.

"What do you suppose he's doing to-night?" said Davy.

"Who knows?" said Mary. "A party of some kind, or the theatre."

"If father had let me go out with him," said Davy, "I could have written and told you everything he did."

"Father was right," said Mary. "He'll let you go when the time comes. But that sort of thing would only unsettle you. We're not society people."

"I don't see why you're not," said Davy stoutly.

"It's too complicated to explain," she said in a level voice. "Anyway, I wouldn't like it."

"Whatever Jack does is all right, isn't it?" demanded Davy.

"He was born to it," said Mary. "That makes the difference. Besides ——"

"Well?"

"I don't think he likes it either. But it's necessary for him just at present."

"I wish I could see him!" cried Davy.

Mary was silent.