A FATAL RESEMBLANCE

BY CHRISTIAN FABRE.

XXIV.—CONTINUED.

And to Ned, the affectionate hospitality of these people was delightful; it was so honest, so simple, so different from the regard shown to her in Rahandabed. Her own loving nature expanded under it, and she ate and drank of the simple but inviting repast prepared for her, and laughed and talked with perfect abandon.

Meg's relatives knew Ned's whole story, both from Meg's own frequent recitals, and from Dyke's letters, which, owing to his aunt's inability to read writing, they were obliged to read for her; and it was no slight subject of indignant wonder to them that Mr. Edgar should persist in concealing his relationship from his niece, as she was, if indeed she was not his daughter; but as it was his desire to do so, and Meg would not displease him, her relatives were equally careful to drop no word that might reveal her identity to their young visitor.

The next day, when Meg and she were alone, the men being at work, and the good woman of the house engaged in extra culinary operations for the benefit of the young guest, the latter took out her purse and poured its contents into Meg's lap.

"All for you, Meg," she said, her eyes sparkling with delight; they have been so good to me in Rahandabed that I have been enabled to save it."

But Meg could not speak; she was so touched by this proof of affectionate gratitude that a lump rose in her throat, and film came over her eyes; she could only throw her arms around Ned's neck and kiss her. And when she recovered herself, she put the money back into the little purse, and said through her tears:

"It's a proud and happy day for me to have you remember me so, but I can na take it, my darling; I have na need of it, being well provided for by the boys here, God bless them. They seem glad enough to have me with them, and were well pleased when Dyke's last letter came, saying that he couldn't go back to the mountain home yet, and that I'd have to stay here another while."

All Ned's persuasions could not induce her to accept the gift. She constantly replied:

"I have na need of it."

Then Ned begged Meg to keep the money in trust for her, but even at that the old woman demurred; at length to satisfy the young girl, who seemed so pained by all these refusals, she consented to keep half of it in that manner.

"Keep the other half yourself," she said, "for there's nae telling now that we're off from each other, Dyke and you and me, and you among strangers, what may chance that you'd need a bit of your savings"

And Ned was obliged to yield.

The good people provided for their young visitor such entertainment as was afforded by drives to places of interest in and about the city, and they were extremely sorry that her stay must be so limited; but she had said she would not remain longer than a week, and she felt it to be her duty to keep her word, even though she had Mrs. Doloran's permission to stay two months.

Fate decreed, however, that Ned should be unable to fulfil her promise, for, before the close of the week, she was confined to her bed with some sort of a fever. The physician, who was hurriedly summoned, could not tell at first whether it was the contagious illness raging in another part of the city, but for safety's sake he advised the family to send their patient to the hospital. They were indignant at the proposition, and he, seeing that, and being touched by their unselfish regard for one who, by some chance, he learned was no relative, induced them to appropriate a part of the house for her especial use, and to be content to have one person alone in attendance upon her. Of course that person was Meg, and never was patient nursed more tenderly, nor even skilfully; for the old woman in her youthful days had acquired a quantity of valuable knowledge regarding the sick, added to which she had strong common sense, and affection now made her quick and certain in the use of both.

One of her nephews suggested sending word to Dyke, lest the young lady should die, and he, thinking so much of her, would hardly forgive them for such neglect, but Meg shook her head, replying:

"There's na need of it; we'll bring her through with the help of the Lord, and what'd be the use of worrying that poor fellow, and bringing him from his business all the way up here. Na, na; her disease is a slow one, but she'll come round all right in a few weeks."

The disease was a slow one, consuming five weeks before the poor, weary, wasted patient could even sit up in the bed.

Then one of her first questions was, had any word been sent to Mrs. Doloran.

"Na, dear; we didn't know rightly the directions to send to, and you were too sick to tell us; but what's the differ? When you're well enough to go back, if she wants you she'll take you and welcome, and if she don't there's plenty of other places for the like of you; so don't be troubling yourself, but take your rest."

And truth to tell, Ned was glad to follow the advice; she was so weak and tired that it was an exertion for her even to think of Rahandabed.

How kind everybody was to her in the little household, and not one would hear of remuneration in any form; she used to lie awake sometimes in the night, wondering whether God gave all the heart and feeling to the people in humble circumstances; her experience of the rich had been so different from all this tender treatment. Eight weeks from the day of her arrival in Albany, she was ready to leave the historic city; she would have gone a week before, but every voice was raised in protest, and she felt obliged to yield to their combined and earnest entreaties.

She had not written to Rahandabed, being content to trust to what Meg had said about other places being obtainable; and so long as Mrs. Doloran had given her two months, it might be as well to explain matters in person as by letter.

She looked pale and emaciated, and her strength seemed very fragile, but she insisted that she was stronger than she appeared to be, and she allayed their fears by promising to write immediately, and in case Mrs. Doloran decided not to re-engage her, to return to them without delay.

Meg and one of her nephews accompanied her to the train, where the young man purchased her ticket and saw that she was comfortably seated. She looked so ill, owing to her pallor and emaciation, that, as she raised her veil to bid him good-by, many a pitying eye was directed to her, and he himself felt like purchasing another ticket and accompanying her all the way, but, when he intimated his desire, she protested so energetically that he was obliged to forego it.

And so she was whirled away with Meg's fond face looking up to her from the side of the track, where the old woman would insist upon standing, so as to get a last view of her darling.

Could Ned have forseen the circumstances under which she would next meet that fond old countenance, she would rather have journeyed to the most distant part of the earth, than go to Rahandabed.

XXV.

Not expecting to find at the C—station any of the Rahandabed carriages, Ned was about to engage one of the public conveyances in waiting, when some one behind her said, with a strong Scotch accent:

"Eh! Miss Edgar. This way." It was Donald Macgilivray, with his Scotch face all aglow from delighted surprise.

"They'll be glad enouch at the house to see you," he continued, "for Mrs. Doloran's gang daft wi' thinking you never meant to come back, and Mr. Ordotte's gang up to Albany looking for you; but he had no directions to find you. So I was thinking it'd be nae easy wark for him to get you. He's thought to be coming back on this train, and that's why I'm here to fetch him, but to my mind it'll be as good if I fetch you."

All this time he was leading the way to a handsome open carriage, and as Ned took her seat, feeling considerably relieved that she would not be sent away from Rahandabed, the man seemed struck with her changed appearance. She had thrown her veil back, so that her white, wasted face was folly seen.

"You've noo been sick?" he said, with an honest concern in his tones.

She replied with a brief affirmative, as as she leaned back with a sense of delightful rest among the cushions.

Donald attended to his horses, waited another moment to be sure that Ordotte had not arrived and was not loitering somewhere, and then drove off, turning speedily into the shaded fragrant roadway which led to Rahandabed. But he could not keep from communicating scraps of news to the young lady. Every few minutes he turned to tell her something of the doings at the house during her absence, and at length he imparted that which immediately aroused her indifferent attention.

"There's anither young lassie at the house wi' a name like your ain, an' a face the same as if you war twa beans on ane stalk. The company war all talking about it. She came wi' friends of Mrs. Doloran, an' they say she's verra weel to do in the matter o' the siller. Her father lives in Barrytown, but he's in England now."

Ned was surprised; that it was Edna she did not doubt, but it seemed so strange that she should come to Rahandabed. She was not displeased, however, for since their last parting she entertained only kindly feelings for her cousin, and she was also gratified to find that she would not be compelled to meet Mr. Edgar; with all her generosity, she could not divest herself of a certain fear and dislike of that gentleman.

Donald, instead of driving all the way up the main carriage-road, turned into another that led to a side entrance of the house.

"I war thinking you'd nae want to meet wi' Mrs. Doloran and the rest o' them, till you'd have a bite and a bit o' rest. They'd be fashin' ye wi' questions, an' ye noo weel able to answer them. So I drove ye here, instead of the front, that ye wouldn't meet wi' any of them. Ye can bide aweel in one of the rooms; an' I'll get some of the lassies to bring you a bite."

Ned was grateful for this thoughtful kindness. She felt so weak, and tired, and ill able to meet Mrs. Doloran just yet, and with a "thank you," the sincerity of which went to honest Donald's heart, she accepted his offer.

Macgilivray had hardly exaggerated when he said Mrs. Doloran had gone "daft" over Ned's protracted absence. Her captiousness, which had delighted in making poor Ned its victim, having now no especial butt, vented itself sometimes in most disagreeable freaks, often causing her to break into disgraceful fits of temper, during which any servant who had occasion to go to her presence, and who was luckless enough to manifest any awkwardness in the discharge of duty, was likely to have the most convenient object hurled at his or her head. Immediately after, however, the delinquent was sure to be presented with some valuable gift as a token of forgiveness; so the domestics scarcely objected to this vulgar mode of chastisement, since they knew that it meant in every instance an accession to their purse. The guests, however, were a little tired of ebullitions of temper, which were as likely to occur in the middle of a most enjoyable repast as at any other time, and though Mrs. Doloran's wealth and lavish hospitality covered all her sins, still, with a selfish desire for their own comfort, they devoutly wished for Ned's return, that the eccentric widow might go back to the old tenor of her ways.

So, when Ned quietly walked into the summer parlor, where Mrs. Doloran, in most peevish mood, sat with some of her guests, there was a general brightening of countenances and a chorus of glad exclamations. The widow, in her delight, rose so suddenly as to throw down her chair, and to throw it with such force that it fell against a tall, slight, heavy-faced young man who had been standing just behind her; the blow sent him to display his full length on the tapestried floor. Mrs. Doloran, however, did not pause to look behind her, nor was she deterred by the burst of "oh's" and "dear me's" which followed the young gentleman's ludicrous fall, accompanied by audible attempts, in the shape of sudden coughs, to suppress laughter.

She took her wonted strides to Ned, and having folded that young lady in a very undesirable embrace, brought her forward to the company, most of the members of which by this time had gained a semblance of composure, even to the fallen young man, who had picked himself up and retreated blushingly to a curtained embrasure.

Ned looked like the ghost of her former self, and now that Mrs. Doloran had time to notice that fact, she began at once:

"Have you been to the spirit land, Ned, or have those friends of yours done what Ordotte tells us they do in Ireland, sometimes—kept yourself and sent us your wraith?"

"I have been quite ill," was the gentle response.

But Mrs. Doloran was full of another subject, about which she was more anxious to inquire than to ask the particulars of Ned's illness, and with her wonted sudden transition to a different topic, she resumed:

"We have a young lady here of your name, Edna Edgar, and with the strangest resemblance to you, only that you are not as brilliant nor dashing She told us how you were schoolmates, and that it was by accident you came to have the same name and such a marked resemblance, for you were no relation. Now you tell us all about it, Ned."

"I can only tell you what you have already heard," was the reply, the speaker thinking at the same time how fortunate had been Donald's thoughtfulness in her regard, for Mrs. Doloran evidently did not dream of asking her "companion" if she needed refreshment or rest; possibly she thought it unnecessary, as it was almost time for the late dinner.

Disappointed in Ned's answer, she said, with some asperity:

"It is very improbable, such a statement as that; nature doesn't give such striking resemblances to people without a cause. Has it never struck you that you might be related to these Edgars in some way? How did they get to know you in the first place? Here, sit down, and tell us all about it," struck, perhaps, by the increasing pallor of Ned's countenance. The girl was glad to sink into a chair, and she answered as gently as she could, feeling, however, a little of her old indignation at such impertinent probing into her family history.

"Mr. Edgar knew my parents in England, being perhaps drawn the more to them because of the similarity of the name; when they died, he was prompted, both by his pity for my orphan condition and by the singular resemblance I bore to his own child, then also an infant, to take the interest in me which afterwards culminated in his sending me to school with his own daughter, and giving me a home previous to my coming here. Such are the facts, Mrs. Doloran, told to me by those whose veracity I know too well to doubt." The last words were spoken with a decision intended to silence Mrs. Doloran on any further questioning; but, if the self-willed widow could not pursue her inquiries, she could at least give vent to her thoughts on the subject.

"It's a remarkable case of coincidences," she continued, "and the most wonderful thing about it is the way you two girls just accept what has been told you. That Miss Edgar, who came while you were away, doesn't see anything strange in the coincidences any more than you do."

"Why should she?" broke in Ned with some impatience, "it is not the first case of curious resemblance between people who are no relation—even history records such things."

"Ugh!" said Mrs Doloran, shrugging her shoulders with an affection of disgust, "you are too practical; if you had a bit of romance in your soul you would make a clear case out of this. But I wish Miss Edgar would come; I want to compare her with you—not that the resemblance will be such a marked one, now you're so white, and sick-looking—and I wish Mascar was here, not that he's much good in this case, for he professes to believe implicitly just what you and Miss Edgar say about yourselves. There she is now—" happening to glance in the direction of the open window, just beyond which appeared Miss Edgar, on horseback, attended by Mr. Carnew, also mounted.

The whole company rushed to the veranda to see the dismounting, and Mrs. Doloran, pulling Ned along with her, followed in their wake.

How beautiful Edna looked; how magnificently she sat her horse, and with what charming grace she just touched the palm of Alan's hand, extended for her dainty foot, as she dismounted. He must have whispered some compliment, for her face and neck were dyed for an instant, and the confident way in which she took his arm to ascend to the veranda gave evidence that his attention pleased her.

Ned, as she saw it all, experienced a sudden and most unaccountable pang, whether of jealousy or envy of her cousin, or sudden love for handsome Alan Carnew, she could not tell, but she was most distressed that it should be so, and she was very angry with herself for her weakness.

Up the steps came Edna, looking like some beautiful picture—as with one hand, she held her whip and the train of her riding habit—and so full of bewitching animation, that it was little wonder Alan Carnew bent to her in the tender way he did. She caught sight of Ned's pale face over Mrs. Doloran's shoulder, and dropping Carnew's arm, she rushed to her with the prettiest grace imaginable.

"I am—" the sweetest of kisses on one cheek—"so glad,"—another sweet kiss on the other cheek—"to see you,"—a third sweet kiss on Ned's mouth—"you naughty dear; never to tell me in your last letter that you were going away for a while, and I took the trouble to write to you that I was coming here on a visit, which letter, of course, owing to your absence, you did not get. And when I got here, no one could tell me further of your journey, than it was to see some one in some part of Albany. O you darling! I have so much to tell you."

All of which gushing effusion looked very pretty, and very condescending to the company, for they remembered that Ned was only a hireling after all, beholden to Mr. Edgar's bounty for her education, and as a consequence of these things, to be regarded in the social scale very much below the heiress, Miss Edgar.

Upon Ned herself, this lavish outburst, although it was a little too lavish to accord with her shy, sensitive nature, had the effect of opening her heart all the more to Edna. That Edna was sincere she did not for a moment doubt, and Ned's generous soul always warmly responded to affection.

They looked very pretty together, being the same height and having the same graceful pliant figures, had Ned's form not lost its wonted curves by her recent illness. Mrs. Doloran was observing them very critically even to the secret amusement of the company, applying her eyeglasses which she wore on a chain, but never before had been known to use.

"When Ned gets back her color and her flesh," she said, looking over her glasses instead of through them, "there will not be much difference between them. I wish Mascar was here, to tell me what he would think now."

Alan Carnew, having waited until the first gush of Miss Edna's salutation was over, advanced to give his own greeting to Ned.

"Have you been ill?" he asked, struck as everybody else had been by her appearance, and putting into his tones so deep a concern, and into his magnificent eyes, as he looked down into her own, such an earnest solicitude, that she was thrilled through and through. Tones and look were in her dreams all that night.

Just as the summons to dinner sounded, Ordotte drove up to the house in one of the public conveyances, Macgilivray having taken it upon himself to imagine that, as Ordotte did not arrive from Albany when expected, it was most improbable that he should come from any other place, at least on that day, to give him (Donald) the trouble of harnessing up and taking the carriage again to the station. And Mrs. Doloran, who sometimes happened to see just what would be most desirable to pass without her observation, saw Ordotte driving up in the public and inelegant vehicle. Not even her delight at seeing him could make her impervious to the fact that he had arrived in such a manner, when her orders had been for Macgilivray to meet every train up or down, Ordotte having written that he might go to New York from Albany, but that in any case he would return that afternoon or the next. Nor could the gentleman's own assurance, that it made not the least difference, pacify her. She would rebuke the offender without delay; and while Ordotte went to his room to dress for dinner, she dispatched a summons to Macgilivray to come at once to the dining-room.

"You're in for it, Donald," said the servant who brought the message; "I heard her talking to Mr. Ordotte about your not taking the carriage for him."

Donald gave a dry laugh.

"Weel, weel! I was a match for me leddy before, when she wanted the coffee carried behind her, leek a gale in the wake of a ship—" putting forth a most inappropriate simile—"an' maybe I'll noo be found wantin' this time."

And quite unabashed he took his way to the resplendent dining room. The company were all seated, and the waiters were serving the first course when Donald entered. As the entrance to this summer dining-room—so situated that the windows on two sides of it looked out on a spacious veranda—was broadly open, he did not think it necessary to use any preliminary courtesy before entering, but took up immediately a position near the door, facing Mrs. Doloran who sat in state at the head of the table.

"Your favor, me leddy, and what would you leek to say to Donald?"

Mrs. Doloran suspended her gastronomic operations, and so did everybody else, for the appearance of the Scotchman in his stable dress, and the odor of the stable from his clothes, was exceedingly disagreeable to sensitive eyes and nostrils. Handkerchiefs were taken out quickly and applied. Alan Carnew flushed hotly, and looked disgusted enough to leave the table, but Miss Edgar, who sat next to him, with admirable tact sought to draw his attention from the threatened scene.

The lady of the house, however, was no respecter of persons, and since Donald was in her employment, it was her right to rebuke him when and where she would, regardless of the visionary or olfactory organs of her guests.

"You disobeyed my orders," she said in her most severe tones, and shaking at Donald with every word the head dress of gay-colored feathers that surmounted some lace drapery of equally gay colored hue. "I told you to meet with the carriage to-day the train from Albany and the train from New York, in order to drive Mr. Ordotte to Rahandabed."

"Right, me leddy; them war the orders you gev Donald. Alway wi' your leddyship's favor, ye said I war to meet the Albany train. I done so, an' fetched up Miss Edgar; on' wi' your leddyship's favor still, I war iver so weel minded to bide by your leddyship's instructions as to take out the beasties agen, but it war noo in me power."

With every word, Donald had advanced to Mrs. Doloran, the stable odor from his clothes causing a closer application of the scented handkerchiefs by those he passed, and—as the shrewd Scotchman intended it should do—now pouring full into Mrs. Doloran's face.

But the lady could endure that—she scorned even to apply her handkerchief, and she looked with a little contempt about the table on those who were making such conspicuous use of their gossamers.

"What do you mean?" she said, very severely still, and with a toss of her head that set her feathers into a ludicrous quiver.

"Why, you see, me leddy, old Mollie got a sudden colic, and her mate, brown Jim, war threatened wi' the spavin, an——"

"There were other horses on the place," interrupted Mrs. Doloran, angrily. "Rahandabed does not depend on the two you mention."

"Right, me leddy," answered the Scotchman, with the stolid earnestness of one before a court of justice, "that war so, but the other likely team war out wi' Mr. Breakbelly." The name was Brekbellew, but from the first, Donald had humorously twisted it into Breakbelly and as the owner of the luckless name was present at the table, and was the same whom Mrs. Doloran's chair had prostrated that afternoon, handkerchiefs had to be taken from noses and crammed into mouths to prevent a most impolite explosion of mirth. Even the unfortunate gentleman had a sort of ghastly smile upon his lips.

Mrs. Doloran could endure strongly unpleasant odors, but it was one of her whimsical hobbies to tolerate no language that bordered on the vulgar. She rose from her chair, and while her feathers kept time in most tragic vibration to every indignant word, she waived Donald away, and said:

"Go, vulgar man; go back to your own proper place."

"Ay," said Donald, turning right about, "an' why did ye summon me from me ain proper place?"

And he walked as soberly out as if he was not keenly conscious that he had given to the company, when they should be out of sight and hearing of Mrs. Doloran, an occasion for as hearty a laugh as ever had emanated from any (especially the masculine portion) of her guests.

XXVI.

Ordotte met Miss Ned Elgar—in search of whom to Albany, being sent by Mrs. Doloran, he had been nothing loth to go—with an expression of ludicrously affected surprise. He even assumed a ridiculous attitude, and said, with an imitation of absurd rant:

"My dear young lady! where have you been? I scoured nearly all the haunts of civilization in Albany without obtaining news of you, and as a last and desperate resource I thought of securing the services of a balloon that I might hover over chimney tops in order to spy you by some quiet hearthstone. But, as it was summer, my aerial flight would have been in vain—you would hardly have been found by a hearthstone."

At which nonsensical speech Ned laughed, as did everybody else, but she did not feel called upon to tell the precise locality of her sojourn in Albany, and so she was silent.

Ordotte resumed:

"Having failed so ignominiously to find you, I could not return immediately to Rahandabed. I visited New York first, to restore my courage."

From the manner in which he lowered his voice, there might seem to be some strange significance in his words, but if there was, it passed unnoticed.

Life now at Rahandabed was exceedingly pleasant, even for Ned, Mrs. Doloran's exactions being rendered lighter by Edna's good natured response to them, as if she would save the "companion," and by Carnew's frequent kindly interference, to spare Ned the mortifications which had marked her earlier stay in the house.

Whatever might be Edna's motive in being thus amiable, she carried that quality to such a degree that Ned's warmest affection was won for her, and she hailed the private tete-a-tetes which the two occasionally had, with an intense delight. Miss Edgar, with remarkable shrewdness, was careful to say nothing in those seeming confidences that could wound Ned's nice sense of truthfulness, nor shock any of her rigid ideas of propriety. The communications were very innocent, detailing only such facts as that, when her papa took her and Mrs. Stafford to New York the previous winter, she made so many pleasant acquaintances, and enjoyed the city life so much, that he, to please her, deferred his plan of opening the Barrytown house to company, and permitted her to remain in the metropolis, of course remaining with her and escorting her everywhere.

"Then," the sweet, confiding tones continued, "I induced papa to let me have Annie Mackay for my maid. You remember Annie, Ned; she was Dick's only sister, that handsome Dick whom papa could not bear, and who has gone away to be a painter or a writer or to embrace some of the lazy professions, as papa calls them; well, she came to me, and she was so gentle and so sweet that I quite loved her.

"Then papa got news from England—sudden news—about a brother of his that he had thought dead; it excited him very much. He decided to start in the next steamer for England, and wanted me to accompany him. Think of it; such a fatiguing voyage on so short a notice—it was out of the question. So he went without me. Immediately after, I received an invitation to visit some of my newly made friends who lived on Staten Island, and as Mrs. Stafford, whom papa insisted on retaining with us everywhere, was somewhat indisposed, I induced her to remain with her maid in the hotel, while I went to visit for a few weeks my Staten Island friends. Annie Mackay, my maid, accompanied me; that was in the beginning of last June, and she became so ill that I was obliged to limit my stay to a month. We rejoined Mrs. Stafford, and she, kind soul, was so concerned about the poor girl that at my suggestion she accompanied her home, and permitted me to accept the invitation of some friends to Rahandabed. So I only arrived here a few days before your own return from Albany. Papa has written that he will be home in a couple of months. Mrs. Doloran made me write in reply that he must come here, as she will not suffer me to leave her for some time, and I confess, Ned, that I enjoy it here very much."

TO BE CONTINUED.

JOEY'S "TOBACKER."

BY GERTRUDE NORTON.

The big road that led by the weather-beaten log house of Farmer Bugford was deep in dust, and the hot, grayish powder rose like little puffs of smoke as a miniature whirlwind danced playfully along the lane. The hollyhocks that grew in front of the house were gray with the dust; so were the lilacs and marigolds; so were the patches of rank smelling dog fennel that skirted the road, and the tall jimsons that stood in the corners of the fence were coated with the universal mantle of gray; their white and purple cups, defiled with it, hung faint and wilted, like inverted goblets, as the hot wind stirred their bending leaves. Even the clothes which Mrs. Bugford had hung on the line to dry were not free from it, and it lay thick on a small, shabby figure that came slowly up the winding lane—on the torn straw hat, on the patched and dilapidated garments, and on the little bundle tied up in a faded cotton handkerchief.

Mrs. Bugford, who had come on to the front porch to get a breath of fresh air, did not see the figure in the road. She only saw the dust on the clothes on the line, and the little cloud which the whirlwind swept into the yard. She was out of humor with everything in general, and with the ravaging dust in particular. It was unfortunate that the shabby, dust covered figure that came up the road should arrive at that time. But Joey Skinner was ignorant of all this, else he might have deferred his coming.

Joey was small for a boy of eight, and his timidity had been the subject of much remark by the inmates of the poorhouse, where he had lived for the past six months. Even the matron had not failed to observe this trait in Joey, especially when he had never ventured to ask for a second cup of milk—something so unusual that even a matron of a poor farm could not overlook it.

It was not surprising, then, that a boy of Joey's shrinking nature should feel reluctant to meet the stern faced Mrs. Bugford.

"I can't bear the idee of one of my blood kin bein' on charity," his aunt had said to the matron, "an' Solomon an' I have decided to take him; but, as you know, it's a big risk to run—this takin' of a child whose father was a no 'count, shiftless drunkard."

"Joey isn't so dreadfully bad," said the matron. "I can't say that he has given me any more trouble than the others. If he wasn't so timid I shouldn't have much fault to find with him, but he's so thin-skinned that it almost breaks his heart to be scolded."

"Oh, I'll soon bring him out of that!" declared Mrs Bugford. "He's bin sp'ilt, that's what's the matter with him. You can send him over as soon as he's good an' well of the measles—when there won't be any danger of givin' 'em to my own children."

The poor farm was half a mile from the Bugford home, and when the time came for Joey to go the matron went part of the way with him and pointed out the house on the hill. Then she stood watching the shabby little figure moving up the long slope. Her hard features softened as she watched him, and with a sudden impulse she hurried forward, caught him in her arms and pressed a kiss upon his thin cheek. Joey clung to her for a moment, trembling and startled at the unexpected caress. Perhaps it was some dim remembrance of his mother that caused the two big tears to wash the dust from his cheeks as he trudged on.

When almost opposite the Bugford farmhouse he stopped under the big hackberry that grew in the lane. His timidity caused him to shrink from the ordeal of presenting himself to his aunt. The hollyhocks hid the woman on the porch from view, and, throwing his bundle on the ground, he stood looking at the wooded hills of the Ozarks, that rose in terraces, gashed deeply here and there by rain-washed gullies—sanguinary stripes that looked like scars on the clayey landscape.

In the hackberry, overhead, a rain crow croaked dismally, and down along the worm fence a sedate little brown quail led her brood.

Joey stood watching them. They seemed the embodiment of happiness and freedom. He half wished that he might live in the fields and woods as they lived—that he might enjoy their wild, free life under the open sky.

He was startled by a sudden rush of wings. There was a quick flash of broad, speckled pinions, and then a great chicken hawk rose high in the air, carrying in its blood-stained talons the mother of the helpless brood. The little quails fled, panic stricken, to cover, their plaintive cries thrilling up from the dust laden weeds.

Joey was shocked by the incident. A sudden fear assailed him lest it might have been sent as a warning to him for his sinful wish a moment before. What if he had been the cause of their distress and bereavement? It hurt him to think about it. What would become of the little birds? Did birds have poor farms where motherless broods were sent? These thoughts came to his mind.

A sharp rasping voice came from the yard as the stout figure of Mrs Bugford came from behind the hollyhocks.

"Sakes alive! is that you, Joey Skinner?" she cried, gazing severely at the boy.

"Yes-sum!" responded Joey.

"What in the name of goodness are you doin', skulkin' along there—not runnin' away, I hope?" she said.

"I reckon he's come over ter stay," broke in Mr. Bugford, who had followed his wife to the gate. "I seed the matron as I drove past the poor farm yisterday, an' she sed she might send him over terday."

"Jist you keep still, Solomon!" interposed Mrs. Bugford sharply, as she led Joey to a seat on the porch. "You'd sp'il any child if you had your way. Now, Joey," turning to the boy, "you set right here till I git through with you. So you have come to live with your aunt, have you?"

"Yes sum," was the reply.

"You know, I 'spose," she went on impressively, "that you ort to be powerful glad that your aunt is goin' to let you live with her?"

"Yes—sum," said Joey doubtfully.

"That's right. It's a great sacrifice. Solomon an' me is meckin' to take you to raise—right among our own children, too, an' you the child of that shiftless drunkard, Jim Skinner."

Solomon cleared his throat and glanced at his wife.

"I reckon it ain't hardly fair ter be throwin' up the boy's dad ter him," he said meekly.

"Not another word, Solomon Bugford!" exclaimed his wife. "A pretty mess you'd meck of raisin' a child! The next thing you'll be takin' sides with the boy ag'in me. It would be just like you!"

Joey sat in terrified silence, fearing that the wrath of the woman might burst upon his head at any moment.

Solomon did not reply to his wife's sharp words of reproof, but thrust a piece of tobacco into his mouth and sat chewing in silence.

Mrs. Bugford took up the bundle that Joey had brought—a faded cotton handkerchief tied about a few poor articles of wearing apparel, in which were wrapped some old toys, a top and a big glass marble—and after assuring herself that it contained nothing else she carried it into the house.

When she returned she found that Joey had crept to his uncle's side. Solomon lifted his hand caressingly and pushed back the brown locks from the boy's pale forehead.

"Don't you meck a fool of yourself, Solomon Bugford!" snapped his wife. "If you are goin' to begin to sp'il the boy a'ready I'll send him right back to the poor farm. Come here, Joey!" she added. "Sakes alive! what has

the child got in his pocket?"
She thrust her hand in
pocket and drew forth a ball
an old barlow knife and—a la
of tobacco!
She sank down upon the b
a look upon her face that
tremble violently. Then sh
the piece of tobacco to view.
"Do you see this, Solom
fairly gasped.
"I reckon I do. What
infernal meschene?"
"None of your foolishness
Bugford; this ain't no tim
I found this piece of toback
child's pocket. Think of i
only eight! Almost a babe
in' tobacker! What did
about takin' Jim Skinner'
bring up? Like father,
It's jist one step from to
drinkin', an' one step from
the gallus. Joey Skinner,
got any of that stuff in you
"I—I dunno," stammer
trembling violently.
"You don't know?" g
aunt. "What did I ask yo
"Ast me if I had a
mouth."
"Any what?"
"Gallus!" sobbed Joey, b
to tears.
"No, I didn't. I said
Has the boy gone crazy?
got any tobacker in your m
"No—'m," sobbed Joey
"That will do. I don
talkin' back. Can you
that?"
"Yes-sum."
"Then come right away
dust washed off your face.
sight to be seen."
She led him through the
toward the kitchen, and s
placed the piece of tobacco
tel over the fireplace.
"I'm goin' to put it up
said, "an' if you offer to
skin you alive! Do
stand?"
"Yes-sum," blubbered
When the boy had been
made him sit on a bench
shed while she went out a
front porch.
"I do wonder what t
comin' to," she remarked,
very babes are usin' toba
readin' in a book the othe
destroys the nerves an' m
people that use it."
Solomon leaned over an
at a bumblebee that was
holyhock.
"I've chawed 'er a go
observed, "but I recko
hurt me a bit."
"Of course not; nothi
to hurt a born ijiut!"
wife. "I don't want yo
sich talk before the boy
the ruinashun of him."
Joey would have four
Bugford farm much ha
not stood in such dread o
his aunt. Once she caug
longingly at the piece
the mantel, and her wra
"If you ever dare
cried, "I'll switch you
forgit it as long as you l
It was nearly a week
had been at work pullin
the hogs. The evening
tensely sultry. It was
carried his last load to t
crept into the house.
garments were wet w
dew. His temples th
feeling of loneliness b
found himself alone
Something caused hi
the direction of the m
upon a chair and stoo
ingly at the piece of
there in the dim twili
through the western w
not hear his aunt's step
nor was he aware of h
she seized him and pu
sudden jerk from the c
He was too terrified
only uttered a little
terror. She pushed hi
and stood before hi
anger.
"You remember w
she said, "an' now
ketch it."
"I—never touched
Joey, shaking from he
"Not another word
I git a good peach tre
she hurried out at the
When she returned
Seized with a feeling
had fled from the h
yard and into the
blades struck him sl
as he ran, but he did
gathering darkness
him, and from the
sounds smote upon h
impelled him onward
He did not stop t
back of the field. T
the deep shadows of
the road, panting
listened, but could
pursuit. The nigh
with myriad sound
notes of the whippo
the dark woods; the
incessantly, mingli
rattle with the mon
the wind through
Above all these Jo
beating of his own h
thought of whither
he could never go
Of this he was sure
he could live out
woods as the birds
from the darkness
No, he could not sta
thought came to h
back to the poor fa
the matron, had be
a fashion, and—s
when he was leav
brance of it brough