

## Dividing the Family

351

"Then my mother would be sure to spoil her dreadfully, if there were no one at hand to keep a check on things; and that would be a pity, for she is such a nice little girl."

Nell made no reply to this, and the two walked in silence for perhaps a quarter of a mile. She was fighting for self-control, trying to appear calm and collected, but failing signally in the attempt.

Presently Dick spoke again, and now it was his voice which was hard and constrained.

"There is but one way out of it that I can see."

"Out of what?" she asked, turning her head to look at him, but as quickly turning it away again, and flushing hotly because of something she had seen in his eyes.

"This awkwardness of dividing the family. Gertrude wants half, and you want the other half. But of your half my mother wants Flossie; and Patsey for his own good must be in Victoria for the next six or seven years, which leaves you alone, unless you come too. Will you, Nell?"

Nell lifted up her feet, and put them down mechanically. Her thoughts were in such a wild tumult and confusion that she scarcely knew what she was doing.

Then a hand strong and firm took hers, and held it closely.

"I want you, Nell, more than anything else in the world; and if you won't consent to adopt me, why, I shall just pine away."

She laughed then, because pining away looked the most unlikely of all fates to overtake one in his vigorous health.

"You will come?" he persisted.