

"I hope, Frederick," said Julia, "your patience will not be put to so severe a test as to wait two hours for your tea; but see! is not that the stage coming over the hill yonder?"

"Well, I declare I believe it is,—yes, I can see very plainly now; but if that whiskered fellow be brother Charles, he must be strangely altered."

Frederick and his sisters stood on the landing place to greet him as he alighted, and ushered him into the parlor where Julia Prescott stood ready to welcome him. She expressed her regret that his father and mother were absent—they were gone to visit a sick friend, but would doubtless return soon.

"How much you are changed, Julia," said Charles, seating himself beside her; "I can hardly realize that you are the same person I left only about a year ago; let me see, how old are you?"

"I was sixteen last month," she replied, blushing at the abruptness of his question.

"Indeed! how swiftly time passes—it seems but a very short time since we were children, and every year appears to pass more swiftly than the preceding one."

Mr. and Mrs. Willis just then entered the room, and cordial was the greeting between parents and son; he was their eldest, and Mrs. W.'s favorite child. They were soon seated around the tea-table, and a happier family could not have been found in the city. Mrs. Willis, as she gazed with all a mother's fondness on the broad, open brow and dark intellectual eye of her son, felt that she was indeed blest beyond the lot of mortals, and raised her heart to Heaven in silent gratitude for her happiness.

"Well, Charles," said Mr. Willis, addressing his son, "I suppose you have finished your school education now; have you fixed upon any plans for the future?"

"I have not decided upon any yet; I should wish to be guided by your and my mother's advice."

"You must follow your own inclinations; neither your mother nor I would wish to influence you, though I should rather you would study a profession than follow the mercantile business, as there is too much confinement in it, and though it sometimes proves lucrative, yet it is often the reverse, and just now would be a most unlucky time for commencing in trade, as some of our best houses are failing; and, besides," he added with a smile, "I would rather you should distinguish yourself by your mental qualifications; and I flatter myself you would do so, were you to enter the lists."

"Well! I will consider upon it, and make up my mind soon, as I cannot bear to live in idleness."

The subject was dropped for the present, and other topics introduced; many questions were to be asked and answered, and it was late before they separated for the night.

"Well! Charles," said Mrs. Willis, as they were sitting together a day or two after his return. "What do you think of my *protégée*?"

"Why! I think if she is as good as she is lovely, she must be almost an angel. How much she has improved since I was at home before, I did not think her very pretty then; but now she almost realizes my *belle ideale*!"

"Yes, she has changed," replied his mother, smiling at his enthusiasm; "but when you were last here, she was very timid and reserved, and much of that has worn away. Yes! she is good as she is fair, and never have I regretted the interest I took in her, when she was left a lonely orphan to the cold charities of a selfish world, and she is quite a help to me too; the little girls consider her as a sister, and I think they love her as well as it is possible for one sister to love another; she is of such a grateful affectionate disposition, virtuous principles and heartfelt piety, that it seems as if there would have been a blank in the family had we not taken her."

"Why, what a paragon of excellence you have been describing! I must really go and find this little image of perfection. I suppose I am her brother as much as Fred; am I not mother?"

"Certainly! my son—that is if she will acknowledge your claim."

Charles left the room, and his mother fell into a fit of musing; many visions of happiness flitted through her mind, (mothers build castles in the air sometimes as well as their children,) visions in which Charles and Julia bore a conspicuous part, and she was only made aware of the lapse of time by the entrance of the subjects of her cogitations; they appeared to be upon very good terms indeed. Charles paid Julia more marked attention than brothers are wont to pay their sisters, anticipating her slightest wish, and affording her a thousand little nameless attentions, which, to an interested observer, would have looked far more like those of a lover than a brother.

Weeks passed away, and the time was fast approaching when Charles was to return to B—, where he intended to pursue the study of law; he had chosen that profession, as he thought it best suited to his inclinations, and the natural turn of his mind. Julia felt a depression of spirits, as that period approached, which she could not account for; she was not aware that she felt more