

## A Lesson of Life.

(By Emma Huntingdon Nason, in 'Forward'.)

Evelyn was never positively unhappy until the 'summer girl' appeared in Norristown. As a child she had been content with her environment and the limited advantages of her humble lot, which were, however, quite equal to those of a majority of her mates. But when the large hotel was built at the beach, and the tide of summer visitors began to overflow into the surrounding country, the picturesque village of Norristown was not long left in its accustomed seclusion.

Merry parties in buckboards drove through the town. Pretty girls, in gay and fashionable costumes, sauntered through the quiet streets. Artists came to sketch the old mill, and to paint, in shades of pink, umber, and burnt sienna, the backs of the old buildings which stood reflected in the stream.

By and by some of these charming summer girls seemed to like Norristown much better than the harbor; and by their smiles and wiles and open purses they ingratiated themselves into the favor of old Madam Lowe, who had never dreamed of taking boarders, but who, when once prevailed upon to do so, continued every year to open her large, roomy old house and her equally spacious purse to the ever-increasing demand.

Madam Lowe's neighbors were not slow to follow her example; and even Evelyn's mother found it profitable to rent her one spare chamber.

At first Evelyn was pleased with the plan; but the feeling of discontent grew rapidly on closer contact with the girls whom she believed so much more highly favored than herself. Then there was all the extra work and drudgery; for Evelyn's mother could not afford servants. Madam Lowe, clad in her black silk gown and white lace handkerchief, and with her smooth, gray hair tucked up under a dainty cap, sat in the midst of her guests on the veranda of her old colonial mansion. Evelyn's mother, in a calico dress, cooked the dinners and served them herself, adding only a clean white apron to her ordinary kitchen costume. Evelyn washed the dishes, did the chamber work and kept the front part of the house in order; and cordially hated the whole business from beginning to end.

Mondays and Thursdays were washing days. How Evelyn dreaded this task in the hot, stuffy 'back kitchen!' As she stood at the wash bench, she could look out through the open door and see Miss Virginia Howard Livingstone swinging indolently in the hammock, apparently without an earthly care or trouble.

Evelyn liked to watch Miss Livingstone. She was a tall, handsome girl, with a clear complexion and luminous violet eyes. She always wore black and white, or simply white, while the other girls were decked in the most brilliant costumes imaginable. Moreover, as Evelyn was obliged to admit, Miss Livingstone was extremely interesting. She was only twenty-two; yet she had travelled abroad, and—wonder of wonders to Evelyn—she had actually written a book, a successful book which was having an immense sale this very summer. Every mail brought letters to Miss Livingstone, which she read to herself and laid aside, sometimes with a pleased smile and sometimes with a satisfied sigh.

As Evelyn watched Miss Livingstone on this particular summer day, the wretched-

ness of her own lot seemed too great to be borne. 'Here am I,' she thought bitterly, 'destined to be nobody and to do nothing all the days of my life. Why have I no education, no money, no talent, nor anything which is worth having? Why is she in the hammock while I am at the washtub?' Thereupon Evelyn tossed the napkin, which she had just wrung from the rinse water, into the clothes basket, with a spiteful movement, and ran out into the secluded backyard, where she threw herself on the grass and burst into tears.

'Evelyn! Evelyn!'

The young girl heard the call, but her heart had no response, even to the voice of the tired, patient, loving mother. Instead of replying, Evelyn sprang up and ran down the lane behind the house, crawled through the bars, and hurried along the path which led to a grove of fragrant pines.

But the restful silence of the grove, broken only by the murmur of the pine trees, failed to soothe Evelyn's perturbed spirits, and, after an uneasy half-hour, she returned unwillingly to her task.

As with flushed face and reluctant steps



'THERE STOOD THE BEAUTIFUL MISS LIVINGSTONE.'

she approached the door, she glanced within, and then stopped abruptly at the unexpected sight; for there, in her place, at the despised washtub, stood the beautiful Miss Livingstone. The talented young woman had tucked up her skirts, donned one of Evelyn's white aprons, and stood squeezing a towel out of the rinse water, with the most evident satisfaction.

'Oh, Evelyn; you've caught me!' she exclaimed. 'Why didn't you stay away a little longer! I wanted to get this tubful out on the line myself. But I've had such a good time! I have been envying you all the morning.'

'Envying me!' exclaimed Evelyn, in surprise.

'Why, yes, my dear girl. Don't you believe me?'

'I must confess,' replied Evelyn, with a touch of sarcasm in her tone, 'that I fail to

see why a girl in your position should envy an ignorant little drudge like me.'

'But I do, Evelyn,' said Miss Livingstone, with a tender smile, 'for you have something very precious, which I have not.'

'You have everything!' impetuously interrupted Evelyn. 'You have studied, and travelled abroad, and written a book—a famous book, and'—

'Evelyn,' said Miss Livingstone, 'let me tell you something. I would put my "famous book" right into your mother's kitchen fire this minute, and gladly change places with you, if I could have my own dear mother with me again, as you have yours.'

Evelyn looked at her in embarrassment.

'My own dear mother died three years ago,' said Miss Livingstone, 'and I have been very unhappy and lonely ever since. The travel and the book are nothing in comparison with'—

'Evelyn!'

Again the call came from the kitchen in the same faint, weary tones which had greeted Evelyn's ears before. Then the two girls heard a sudden sound as of some one falling. Speechless, they both ran into the kitchen, and there, apparently lifeless upon the floor, lay Evelyn's mother.

Evelyn screamed, turned white from nervous fright and began to wring her hands helplessly. Remorse seized her as she looked at her mother's unconscious figure upon the floor, and remembered how she had not heeded the tired voice that called her. The only idea of which she was capable kept repeating itself over and over in her brain.

'Oh, why didn't I come when she called me. Now, perhaps, I have killed her.'

Evelyn's mother had always been able to bear whatever burden came, and Evelyn had never known illness. But Miss Livingstone took charge of the fainting woman and gave commands to the distracted Evelyn as one accustomed to meet such emergencies.

'Don't scream, Evelyn; help me lift her to the couch!' she cried. 'Oh, Evelyn! don't faint yourself. Bring me some water—you must! Get it, quick!'

Wild with terror, and hardly knowing what she did, Evelyn obeyed Miss Livingstone's commands.

'Now run for the doctor, Evelyn. I will do everything that is possible until he comes.'

Overwhelmed with fear and anxiety, Evelyn ran down the street and speedily returned with the village doctor.

'It is, I trust, only a sudden attack of faintness, brought on by the heat or overwork,' said the physician.

'Oh, Mother! Mother!' moaned Evelyn, burying her face in her hands.

'Don't, Evelyn!' pleaded Miss Livingstone; 'she will revive soon.'

'Oh, let me die, too!' sobbed Evelyn, quite beside herself with grief. 'She called me twice. I heard her, but I wouldn't come! I ran away when I might have saved her. Oh, mother, mother!'

An hour later the doctor left his patient restored to consciousness; and, encouraged by his ministrations and hopeful words, Evelyn was enabled to assume the care of her mother.

'I will stay with you and help you. I have been through all this many times,' said Miss Livingstone.

'Oh, you don't know what a wicked, ungrateful girl I have been,' confessed Evelyn. 'I know what a happy girl you ought to be, and will be, dear, for you have still the most precious of all earthly gifts.'

It was Miss Virginia Livingstone who went out under the old pine tree, that night, and wept in the loneliness of her heart, while Evelyn sat at her mother's bedside, with a prayer of gratitude upon her lips.