

and have walked here from the depot. But what is that?" he continued, as he entered the sitting-room, and saw the willow-basket standing near the door.

"Dick," and the Judge's voice dropped to a nervous whisper—"Dick, if you'll believe me, some infernal Maine woman has had a baby, and left it on our steps. She wrote first to know if I'd take it, but the letter was two weeks coming. I didn't get it until to-night, and, as I suppose she was tired of waiting, she brought it along right in the midst of that thunder-shower. She might have known I'd kick it into the street, just as I said I would—the trollop!"

"Oh, father!" exclaimed the more humane young man, "you surely didn't treat the innocent child so cruelly!"

"No, I didn't, though my will was good enough," answered the father. "Just think of the scandalous reports that are certain to follow. It will be just like that gossiping Widow Simms to get up some confounded yarn, and involve us both, the wretch! But I shan't keep it—I shall send it to the poor-house."

And, by way of adding emphasis to his words, he gave the basket a shove, which turned it bottom side up, and scattered over the floor sundry articles of baby-wear, which had before escaped his observation.

Among these was a tiny pair of red morocco shoes; for the "Maine woman," as he called her, had been thoughtful both for the present and future wants of her child.

"Look, father," says Richard, taking them up and holding them to the light. "They are just like those sister Mildred used to wear. You know mother saved them, because they were the first; and you have them still in your private drawer."

Richard had touched a tender chord, and it vibrated at once, bringing to his father memories of a little soft, fat foot, which had once been encased in a slipper much like the one Richard held in his hand. The pattering of that foot had ceased forever, and the soiled, worn shoe was now a sacred thing, even though the owner had grown up to beautiful womanhood ere her home was made desolate.

"Yes, Dick," he said, as he thought of all this. "It is like our dear Milly's, and what's a little mysterious, the baby is called Mildred, too. It was written on a bit of paper, and pinned upon the dress."

"Then you will keep her, won't you? and Beechwood will not be so lonely," returned Richard, continuing after a pause, "Where is she, this little lady? I am anxious to pay her my respects."

"Down with Rachel, just where she ought to be," said the Judge; and Richard rejoined,

"Down with all those negroes! Oh, father, how could you! Suppose it were your child would you want it there?"

"The deuce take it—'taint mine—there ain't a drop of Howell blood in its veins, the Lord knows, and, as for my laying awake, feeding sweetened milk to that Maine woman's brat, I won't do it, and that's the end of it. I won't, I say—but I knew 'twould be just like you to want me to keep it. You have the most unaccountable taste, and always had. There isn't another young man of your expectations, who would ever have cared for that—"

"Father," and Richard's hand was laid upon the Judge's arm. "Father, *Hetty is dead*, and we will let her rest, but if she had lived I would have called no other woman my wife."

"And the moment you had called her so, I would have disinherited you, root and branch," was the Judge's savage answer. "I would have seen you and her and your children starve before I would have raised my hand. The heir of Beechwood marry Hotty Kirby! Why, her father was a blacksmith and her mother a factory girl—do you hear?"

Richard made no reply, and, striking another light, he went to his chamber, where varied and bitter thoughts kept him wakeful until the September sun shone upon the wall and told him it was morning. In the yard below he heard the sound of Rachel's voice, and was reminded by it of the child left there the previous night. He would see it for himself, he said, and, making a hasty toilet, he walked leisurely down the well-worn path which led to the cottage door. The twelve were all awake, and, as he drew near, a novel sight presented itself to his view. In the rude pine cradle, the baby lay, while over it the elder Van Brunts were bending, engaged in a hot discussion as to which should have "the little white nigger for their own." At the approach of Richard their noisy clamour ceased, and they fell back respectfully as he drew near the cradle. Richard Howell was exceedingly fond of children, and more than one of Rachel's dusky group had he held upon his lap, hence it was, perhaps, that he parted so gently the silken rings of soft brown hair clustering around the baby's brow, smoothed the velvety cheek, and even kissed the parted lips. The touch awoke the child, who seemed intuitively to know that the face bending so near to its own was a friendly one, and, when Richard took it in his arms, it offered no resistance, but rather lovingly nestled its little head upon his shoulder, as he wrapped its blanket carefully about it, and started for the house.