

morning, though it was cold. Mother and I sat sewing in our usual places, and my youngest brother, or "Baby Willie," as we always called him, a beautiful child, fourteen months old, was playing about the floor, when Johnny ran in, his black eyes open to their widest extent.

"Mother, the Clair carriage has stopped right before our house, and a beautiful lady is getting out. I guess she's coming in;" and as he spoke there was a knock at the door.

The Clairs were wealthy people, living in the neighborhood, whose carriage often swept past our humble abode, but had never stopped there before.

What brought it to-day? My heart sank as I guessed the lady's errand. Poor as we were, one possession of ours that rich woman coveted.

One morning in the summer, as I was drawing Baby Willie in his carriage, Mrs Clair stopped me at her gate. She seemed greatly taken with the child; inquired his name and age, and lifting him from the carriage, held him in her arms. He was a fearless little fellow, and he laughed and frolicked, and hid his curly head in her bosom. She held him close to her heart, kissed him a great many times, and, when at last he grew restless in her embrace, she reluctantly gave him back to me; but there were tears in her eyes, and a hungry, longing look on her face. She lived in a great, splendid house on the hill; but she was childless, and the moment she entered our poor room I knew she came to beg away our baby.

And I was right. After a few commonplace expressions of sympathy, she coaxed Willie to come to her. He was pleased with the glitter of her ornaments and the rustle of her silk dress, and lifted his blue eyes to her face in baby wonderment. She stroked his curls with her jeweled hand, and turning to my mother, said:—

"Mrs Barton, will you give this child to me?"

My mother looked at her in amazement.

"Give my baby to you?" she said.

"Yes. I have been thinking, ever since I heard of your affliction, what you can do, left as you are with so many little mouths to feed. I shall be glad to help you, by relieving you of the burden of this child."

"I never looked upon my children as burdens," said my mother, her lip beginning to quiver.

"O, no, of course not," she replied. "You quite misunderstand me. I have no doubt you find it a pleasure to do for them to the extent of your ability; but—you will pardon me, Mrs. Barton, if I speak plainly—you are left, if I am rightly informed, in quite a destitute condition, with three children, all of them of a tender age, dependent upon you; that is with the little help this young girl can

give you. You found it hard enough to live before: how do you expect to support yourself and all this family alone? Now, let me tell you what I am willing to do. Give me this boy, the most helpless and dependent of all, and from this hour he shall be to me as my own child. He shall share every comfort and luxury our house affords. He shall have the best advantages for his education, and, if he lives to be of age, we will start him in any business or profession he may choose. I have my husband's word for this, and at our death he shall be well provided for. Indeed, I may say that we will make him our principal heir for we have no near relatives living, and he shall be to us in every respect as our own child. What more can you ask for the boy?"

All the time she was speaking, her hands softly touched the golden curls, and his baby eyes were fastened on her face.

My mother made no reply, and it was impossible to read the expression of her face.

"Surely" said the lady, a little impatiently, after waiting a moment for a reply, "if you love the boy, you cannot hesitate an instant. I should think it need not take you long to choose between the life I offer him and—" her keen eye swept our bare room with a look it needed no words to interpret.

Just here Baby Willie slid from his place on her lap, and went toddling across the room to his mother. She caught him in her arms, hid her face in his neck, and sobbed out, "O Willie! Willie!"

"Don't decide now, mother" I said. "Mrs Clair, give her time to think about it."

"Certainly," she said "if you wish it. Shall I call in the morning? And, Lizzie,—I think they said your name was Lizzie,—you appear like a good, practical, common-sense girl. Don't let any foolish sensibility interfere with your brother's prospects. I am sure I may trust you to give your influence towards a right decision."

She turned to my baby brother, as though she would have taken him in her arms again; but my mother held him fast. Then she trailed her silk dress through the doorway, and we heard her carriage drive away.

Mother went immediately to her room, taking Willie with her, and I was left to think over Mrs. Clair's proposal alone. With a heavy heart I acknowledged the truth of all she said. I knew she was abundantly able to do what she promised, and that, as her adopted son, my brother would receive every advantage that money and position could give him. What had we to offer in comparison to this? I thought of our poverty and humble station; the struggle we must make to live; the years of hardship and toil before us; and I felt the full force of the lady's appeal. But how could we give up Willie?

We said little about it. I felt it was a question my mother must decide alone; and I needed only to look in her face to know the